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# Make Love, Not War?: The Role of the Chorus in Kokoschka's "Murderer Hope of Women"

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## **Abstract**

In the summer of 1909, two one-acts by the twenty-three-year-old painter Oskar Kokoschka premiered in Vienna in an outdoor theatre built in the garden adjacent to the art museum as part of the second Kunstschau exhibit. The two Kunstschauen (of 1908 and 1909) were organized by Gustav Klimt and his friends in order "to expose the Viennese public to the most shocking and revolutionary forces in contemporary art," and Kokoschka exhibited in both. The showing of Oskar Kokoschka's art and his plays cemented his reputation as the most prominent enfant terrible of his day. These exhibitions helped ensure that, by the time he moved to Berlin in 1910, his works would become some of the key contributions to the seminal expressionist journal *Der Sturm*, gaining Kokoschka a place in the canon of European expressionism.

## **Keywords**

European expressionism, Oskar Kokoschka, Contemporary art

## **Disciplines**

Contemporary Art | History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology | Performance Studies | Theatre and Performance Studies | Theatre History

## Make Love, Not War?: The Role of the Chorus in Kokoschka's "Murderer Hope of Women"

Susan Russell

In the summer of 1909, two one-acts by the twenty-three-year-old painter Oskar Kokoschka premiered in Vienna in an outdoor theatre built in the garden adjacent to the art museum as part of the second *Kunstschau* exhibit. The two *Kunstschau*en (of 1908 and 1909) were organized by Gustav Klimt and his friends in order "to expose the Viennese public to the most shocking and revolutionary forces in contemporary art,"<sup>1</sup> and Kokoschka exhibited in both. The showing of Oskar Kokoschka's art and his plays cemented his reputation as the most prominent enfant terrible of his day. These exhibitions helped ensure that, by the time he moved to Berlin in 1910, his works would become some of the key contributions to the seminal expressionist journal *Der Sturm*, gaining Kokoschka a place in the canon of European expressionism.<sup>2</sup>

One of the two plays, "Murderer Hope of Women" (*Morder Hoffnung der Frauen*; hereafter, MHW), has often been touted as either the very first expressionist play or the first prototype or forerunner of expressionism.<sup>3</sup> Many scholars regard this short dramatic piece as the first example of expressionism because of its focus on the emotional experience of the individual, the "disregard of an external logic in the development of the plot, which is solely determined by the psychological processes at work within the protagonists," and, especially, because of its exaggerated production style, creating stage pictures and soundscapes through the use of poetic language, extreme gestures, pipes, drums, and screams.<sup>4</sup> As art historian Rosa J. H. Berland suggests, "it was Kokoschka's intention to create an experience for the viewer that was visual and aural, providing access to new regions of reality, those of the life of the mind, emotion and dream."<sup>5</sup> Such techniques had not been explored onstage before; later, however, they came to be seen as some of the signature characteristics of expressionism.<sup>6</sup> Expressionism was the first movement to bring the performance of sexuality to the stage on a massive and radical scale—more than ever before. But most critics of Kokoschka's play use categories based on later expressionist plays and on a monolithic view of

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discourses about sexuality to label his play expressionist, specifically citing it as an example of the “battle of the sexes” (*Geschlechterkampf*).

Almost all Kokoschka scholarship, written by art historians, literary critics, biographers, and theatre researchers, focuses almost exclusively on the two main characters of the play: the Man and the Woman. Very few scholars consider the other twenty-odd figures onstage: the chorus. I will argue that an analysis of the role of the chorus may yield an alternative reading of the text that opens up possibilities of a different value system available to both men and women outside of the vicious circle of binary oppositions. This alternative reading is strongly influenced by the Swiss writer Johann Jakob Bachofen, particularly his book *Das Mutterrecht* (*Mother Right*, 1861). Kokoschka and some of his contemporaries admired Bachofen’s theories about civilization; in fact, Kokoschka himself claimed that Bachofen’s ideas contained “the key [to] the secret” of this puzzling little play.<sup>7</sup>

For the production, Kokoschka enlisted the help of some acting student friends of his, whom he dressed in rags and whose bodies and faces he painted to highlight nerve lines, muscles, and tendons.<sup>8</sup> Bad weather postponed the production several times, and, according to Kokoschka’s sensational account, the stormy atmosphere continued on opening night—on the ground as well as in the sky. Soldiers from an adjoining barracks, who witnessed the violent, erotic, and mysterious performance, accompanied by drumbeats, shrill piping, and catcalls from the audience, attempted to break into the scene, resulting in a riot that required the interference of the police. Reviews, however, mention no such brouhaha: one remarks on the “infectious hilarity” the performance inspired; another observes that the audience “greeted this drama, meant no doubt as a piece of fun, with sympathetic good humor.”<sup>9</sup>

The play consists of only a few pages of text, and might more accurately be called a “theatrical event”<sup>10</sup> or a “happening,” resembling contemporary performance art. Kokoschka described the performance as being “simply improvised,” based on key phrases handed to actors on slips of paper after he had given them a basic outline, “acting out the essentials of the play for them, complete with all the variations of pitch, rhythm, and expression.”<sup>11</sup> The setting is a tower with a large grille door. A man in blue armor with a bandaged head enters, followed by a group of savage-looking men (the chorus of male attendants). A woman in red appears, accompanied by her female attendants. We do not know exactly how many people were in the male and female choruses in the original production, though a photograph of a later production suggests about ten to twelve of each sex.<sup>12</sup> The Woman is fascinated by the Man, noting his obvious desire for her. Ignoring the warnings of her attendants, she converses with him. The Man orders one of his men to brand the Woman; in retaliation, the Woman wounds the Man with a knife. Then one of the male chorus members imprisons the Man in the

tower while the rest of the male chorus and the female chorus frolic together in the shadows, oblivious to their leaders' pain. The Woman orders the Man's cage door opened. The Man regains his strength; hers seems to drain at the same time. Eventually, as a rooster crows, he tears off his cage door, striding forth with the dawn as she collapses at his feet. The combined chorus of men and women run from him, screaming in horror, as he "kills them like mosquitoes and leaves red behind [stage directions]."<sup>13</sup>

Although the play was originally granted the designation of expressionist due to its form—telegraphic language, intense emotions, and violent, abstract imagery—most critics have related it *thematically* to later expressionist drama, specifically, the battle of the sexes, based on essentialist notions of masculinity and femininity. For many expressionist writers, this eternal "battle" signified the triumph of a higher spiritual essence (associated with men) over a lower, animal essence (associated with women). Contemporary scholars have pulled examples of this philosophy, usually from the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche and especially Otto Weiniger, to support this particular reading.<sup>14</sup> For example, biographer Henry Schvey's interpretation of the play is typical: "The Man, bearer of the spirit, is enslaved by the body, while the Woman who possesses him can only be redeemed by the spiritual powers contained within the man—which she herself is instrumental in suppressing."<sup>15</sup> Both Nietzsche and Weiniger wrote about conflict between the sexes in terms of binaries: Woman as a symbol of the flesh, instinct, bodily functions (including sex), and emotion, as opposed to Man, a symbol of the intellect, spirituality, self-control, and reason. Nietzsche believed that the relationship between the sexes was a violent struggle, and that women only achieved fulfillment through service to men, including childbearing. Weiniger disapproved even of motherhood: he argued that women had no soul, no moral sense, and no imagination and should not be allowed to drag men down to their level. Hence, he argued that sex should be abandoned altogether, even though this meant the end of the human race.

Practitioners of German expressionism (from roughly 1914 to 1921, when this form dominated the German stage) keenly admired both Nietzsche and Weiniger; expressionist writers in such prominent journals as *Die Aktion* and *Der Sturm* referenced them frequently in order to define the "ideal" or essential Man and Woman. They viewed men and women as polar opposites, relying on ancient tropes of the separation of mind and body, culture and nature, spirituality and sexuality, with all the latter terms associated with femininity and femaleness. The question of dominance and submission is also central to these expressionists' worldview. Some considered the sexual hour as the woman's triumph—the only place where she truly overpowers or castrates the male. Others considered sex a reassertion of male dominance. Still others combined these two views, suggesting

that women really yearn to be dominated and find satisfaction in masochism; hence, her own degradation and submission are her triumph.

These later expressionist ideas continue to dominate twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarly debate about MHW. For example, in her 2007 article, Monika Szczepniak uses MHW as an illustration of “men as women’s savior.”<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, expressionist journals published very few women contributors’ ideas in the debate over femininity and women’s nature. A notable exception was an article by Hedwig Dohm which appeared in 1913, when she was in her eighties. She wrote that “the seeming absolute value ‘nature’ is in fact a highly relative and historically conditioned notion,” adding: “O, I know, I know, I know by heart your mannish old beliefs: Woman Nature, Man Culture. She has instincts, he has logical reason. He God-seeker, She Man-Seeker. He head, she heart . . . . You’ve piled us so high with feelings it’s a wonder we haven’t [all] died [of heart attacks] by now.”<sup>17</sup> Most contemporary Kokoschka scholars continue to use these later tropes, arguing that the play is about the battle of the sexes: the Man dominates the Woman; his “murder” of her is her only hope for salvation. Some scholars argue this point unproblematically; others, including feminist scholars, criticize Kokoschka for this misogyny, despite his radical form. But I see this play as a nexus for conflicting discourses on sexuality and society, and argue that the discursive territory the play inhabits is perhaps richer than previous readings of the play have suggested. Based on a reading grounded in close textual analysis, especially of the role of the chorus, this discussion is intended to expand the possibilities for interpretation, revealing previously unexplored connections between Kokoschka and Bachofen that depend less on later expressionist tropes and more on imagining the embodied experience of the live performance.

Bachofen’s influence is contested in Kokoschka scholarship. Those scholars who have included Bachofen in their interpretation of MHW have used his work in several ways. For example, Carol Diethe, in her book *Aspects of Distorted Sexual Attitudes in German Expressionist Drama*, highlights the antifeminist strands in Bachofen, using him to back up her argument claiming Kokoschka’s misogyny. However, she does seem to contradict herself, as Claude Cernuschi points out in his very perceptive overview of the debate surrounding Bachofen’s influence on Kokoschka in this play. He argues that Diethe’s contention that Kokoschka’s study of Bachofen “indicates an intellectual attempt to distance himself from the patriarchal society in which he grew up” is contradictory.<sup>18</sup> How can Kokoschka be advocating Bachofen’s antipatriarchal stance and also “distancing himself” from “the patriarchal society in which he grew up”? In their article “‘Murderer Hope of Women,’ Expressionist Drama and Myth,” Peter Vergo and Yvonne Modlin also note a disconnect: to them, Bachofen’s assertion of “triumphal masculinity” does not seem to fit with the “pessimistic ending” of the play.<sup>19</sup> But they offer no explanation for this seeming contradiction. How can Kokoschka be influenced by

Bachofen, who found patriarchy to be the best form for society, when the ending of the play is so dire? While most scholars have neglected Bachofen in their work, others like Patrick Werkner in his book *Austrian Expressionism: The Formative Years*, argue that Kokoschka's claim that Bachofen influenced his play is "not substantiated by the sources."<sup>20</sup> An examination of the role of the chorus vis-à-vis Bachofen's theories may shed a different light on these discussions as well.

In *Mother Right*, Bachofen, reacting against what he considered the excessive scientism of his age, saw himself as a kind of philosopher seeking to discover the "spiritual history" of civilizations as revealed in their language, literature, architecture, and myths.<sup>21</sup> At the time, the sciences of archeology, anthropology, and ethnology were not very advanced, so his studies of ancient Greek and Roman civilizations were based solely on his readings of myths handed down in epic poems, dramas, songs, and engravings. He considered myth a kind of repository for collective memory and used his interpretations of specific myths to develop a systematic timeline of the stages of civilization. He regarded these stages as progressive steps in a cultural history that peaked in the period of Roman civil law. Bachofen based his concept of the first three stages of human civilization on the notion of "mother right," or gynocracy, versus "father right," or patriarchy, systems that MHW seems to echo.

According to Bachofen's schema, the first two stages of human civilization were female-dominated. The first, "hetaerism," consisted of nomadism, and sex without marriage, due to the lack of understanding of paternity. Because primitive minds were unaware of the role of the male in conception, all traced their heritage matrilineally. Bachofen believed that each successive stage came about due to the intolerability of the preceding stage; thus, the first stage became untenable because it led to the unabashed exploitation of women, no agriculture, and no state structure. Hence, according to Bachofen, women initiated the second phase: the mother right phase, or rule by women, consisting of monogamous marriage (limiting men's access to women), agriculture, and the establishment of settled communities. The goddess Demeter succeeded Aphrodite, who had ruled over the erotically untamed prior stage, and the focus of male/female relationships shifted from sex to procreation. But the male's inability to participate in the mother/child bond led to his assertion of ownership of women and children, and his insistence upon the superiority of the intellect (as opposed to the body, associated with the feminine), law, and order.<sup>22</sup> However, Bachofen still considered this third Grecian stage inferior to the final stage: the establishment of Roman civil law, firmly rooted in a truly male-dominated spiritual order. Bachofen as a Romanophile considered this step to be the most important one in the history of male/female relations.

In his play, Kokoschka may well have borrowed Bachofen's notion of the matriarchal Amazons and the eventual overthrow of the female (associated in the script with the moon) by the male (associated with the sun). But he does not share

Bachofen's optimistic preference for patriarchy. In MHW, the masculine principle ultimately dominates, as personified by the male leader. But the story of the two leaders, male and female, is not the whole story, though most critics ignore the chorus entirely. They focus instead on the two main characters as female and male "essences," moon versus sun, body versus spirit. MHW does echo Bachofen's narrative in the overthrow of the "female" by the "male" principle, but through the use of the chorus, Kokoschka also presents a vastly different conclusion about the eventual victory of the male principle.

When the male chorus first enters, they try desperately to stop the Man from proceeding. They complain to the female chorus about his cruelty and tell how he forced them to do evil deeds: "FIRST WARRIOR: He tortured animals to death by the pressure of his thighs. Birds that went before us, we had to blind, suffocate red fish in the sand." The women confide in the men as well, assuring them that they make a distinction in their minds between them and their leader, saying: "He [the Man] scares us, / You we loved before you came."<sup>23</sup>

Once the Man orders the Woman branded, the Woman retaliates by stabbing him with a knife. At this point, the female attendants join the male attendants in unabashed lovemaking. This section parallels Bachofen's initial matriarchal phase of sex without marriage. This period of joyful abandon, accompanied in the premiere by flutes and drums, follows a genuinely tender and sincere exchange between the male and female followers. Even when their leaders are suffering most, the followers do not wish to get involved in their tragic encounter; thus, they provide a counterdiscourse, offsetting the central conflict between the Man and the Woman. Because of these two choruses, who sometimes disagree with or are confused by their leaders, the Man and Woman cannot so easily be viewed as essences—as sole spokespersons for their respective genders.

After the Woman is branded, it is actually one of the men who imprisons the Man in the cage in the tower. The women shut the door, but it is one of the Man's followers—the Old Man—who locks him in, a detail mostly ignored in other interpretations. Thus, the male followers recognize how dangerous and harmful their leader is. Most critics comment extensively on the Woman's revenge on the Man, and consider her naturally aggressive, citing her order for his imprisonment and stabbing as proof of her irresistible impulse to inflict pain. However, these scholars fail to take into account that the Woman reacts in self-defense,<sup>24</sup> stabbing the man after he has had her branded, and that it is actually his own male follower who locks him in the tower. And when the Woman orders the Man's release from the tower, the male and female attendants disregard her, making excuses so they can stay together, "enjoying themselves in the shadows": "MEN AND WOMEN: We lost the key—we'll find it. Do you have it? Have you seen it?—We're not guilty. It's not our fault. We don't know you two.—What do we know about you! The quarrel is incomprehensible and lasts an eternity!"<sup>25</sup>



The graphic depiction of the attendants' sexual gratification (stage directions indicate they are "rolling and copulating" on the ground) is in stark contrast to the tragic, violent relationship between their two leaders. If one includes the words and actions of the chorus in her analysis, it is clear that the simple binary of "male vs. female" is not the whole story. Instead, the inclusion of the chorus provides a counter discourse that suggests an alternative value system, available to both men and women. The extreme melodrama of the Man and Woman played against what one critic called the chorus's "sexual orgy"<sup>26</sup> may explain, perhaps, the audience's response of laughter.

In later commentary on the play, seen below, Kokoschka comes down firmly on the side of what he perceived as life-affirming values, which, though traditionally associated with women, can be practiced by both genders. In his autobiography, he contrasts what he terms the "patriarchal relationship between citizen and society," associated with dominance and violence, with the matriarchal rule of earlier times, associated with his idol, the Czech pedagogue Jan Comenius:

Possibly in [early] Christian communities without formal organization, there survived ideas from the matriarchal age, spiritual currents directed against male supremacy and against authority, both secular and ecclesiastical. . . . Think of Comenius, who taught that sight was the first step to insight. Mothers teach their children this way, but never states their citizens. It is to this idea that all my roads lead; as for others, all roads lead to Rome [i.e., patriarchy, violence].<sup>27</sup>

Like Bachofen, Kokoschka believed women's experiences predisposed them toward the perpetuation of life. He wrote,

Only women and artists have respect for life, while that part of society which denies women not only the vote but the right to influence the destiny of society, and denies the artist the right to exist—that part commonly and superficially known as 'society' itself—has a vested interest in non-respect for life, and in the throttling of humanity; directly or indirectly, it has a vested interest in wars.<sup>28</sup>

Kokoschka wrote these words in 1936, after having fled Vienna for Czechoslovakia. He argues that being close to and nurturing life (a traditionally feminine characteristic) is evidenced in male and female artists, thus divorcing the "feminine" value from any one gender. One year earlier, in an essay titled "On Experience," Kokoschka recalled his intentions in writing MHW: "In my first

play, I struck a blow against the thoughtlessness of our male civilization with my fundamental notion that man is mortal and woman immortal, and that only the murderer tries to reverse this basic fact in the modern world.”<sup>29</sup> Granted, these last two quotes were articulated only after Kokoschka’s horrible experiences of being wounded in World War I and at a time when the rumblings of the next world war were in the air. Still, it is not unreasonable for Kokoschka to have expressed antiwar sentiments even as early as 1907, before he experienced its atrocities firsthand. Nonetheless, most scholars (referenced in endnote 14) interpret the Man’s triumphant exit at the end of MHW as symbolizing the victory of the spirit over the flesh rather than a commentary on the violence of patriarchal society, or a dystopic glimpse of the inhumanity to come.

As discussed earlier, those elements in the play like the words and actions of the chorus that refer to the individual’s role within society may hold the key to interpretation. If one focuses solely on the individual Man, he appears to be the victor in the end. He does eventually subordinate everyone else to his will. His power is supreme. But the leader, unlike his followers, begins the play wounded, signifying perhaps a painful and problematic relationship to the world around him. He is a wounded warrior; his lot is not to enjoy women (as his followers do), but to possess, dominate, and eventually murder them. Because the male and female followers comment upon the action, serving as a chorus, they may represent the voice of the people as in Greek drama, and invite audience identification. They do not understand their leaders’ strange and painful actions; they disassociate themselves from their leaders’ incomprehensible and eternal quarrel with one another, instead preferring the pleasure of each other’s company. In the very end, as a combined chorus, they flee the Man, rushing away from him toward the audience, screaming out a warning: “The devil! Control him, save yourselves! Save yourselves if you can—or all is lost!” Since the Woman has already died and the Man is pursuing all of them (male and female), whom are they addressing if not the audience? The Man is out of control; he destroys everything. Interpreting the play as a warning, a glimpse of the future if the violent tendencies of man/humanity are not controlled, seems to more adequately take into account the whole of the text, as well as Kokoschka’s comments and Bachofen’s influence on his writing.

The contrasting attitudes of Bachofen and Kokoschka toward the concept of patriarchal law and its implications begin to make more sense if considered in light of their respective sociopolitical situations. Bachofen lived in a time of great political and social upheaval in his native Switzerland. Amid emotional political debates, perhaps he longed for reason to prevail. Bachofen saw patriarchy as the ultimate achievement of spirituality, removed from what he perceived as the confused partiality of the physical: the triumph of reason over emotion. But in privileging patriarchy (in the form of Roman civil law), he takes note of the

strengths of previous (matrilineal) systems. Therefore, though Bachofen's schema is hierarchical, and, in his view, the form of society of his time was the best, we know from his writings that he also imagined this patriarchal state would retain the compassion and regard for life that were the worthiest characteristics of the preceding matriarchy.<sup>30</sup>

Kokoschka did not share Bachofen's admiration of patriarchy. He rejected the patriarchal society in which he had grown up. He, like other artists of his day, realized that what was most prized in fin-de-siècle Vienna were elaborate facades that thinly masked corrupt centers; military show disguised a weak governmental structure. Vienna's grandiose Ringstrasse had become, for artists such as Kokoschka, a symbol of the political, moral, and economic hypocrisy of his society.<sup>31</sup> The economic promise of rapid industrialization had resulted in massive unemployment and widespread poverty. Also, Kokoschka, unlike many of his contemporaries who at first greeted the war with enthusiasm, never appears to have considered the war a positive force that would clear the way for a new and better society. Although it took his traumatic experience of World War I to make a vocal pacifist of him, he claims that his decision to enlist was based on guilt that his brother and others more destitute than himself would be drafted while he got off scot-free. Thus, his play could be interpreted as a warning against the violence he dreaded was soon to come. Kokoschka's antifascist political engagement during World War II illustrates his commitment to peace. This play, then, could be interpreted as a strong cry for peace.

In his perceptive evaluation of Kokoschka's MHW, Peter Nicholls foregrounds what he sees as the paradox that lies at the heart of this play as well as other expressionist works. Nicholls argues that MHW seems to focus less on gender opposition per se than on the violent and contradictory struggle between Eros and Thanatos, love and death, the self-assertion and self-abandonment implicit in the sexual act (and, I would argue, in the dynamic of individuals living in community). Nicholls describes this struggle in psychoanalytic terms, as a "certain irredeemable negativity within sexuality itself" —and, I think, within all of life in community.<sup>32</sup> This tension is traditionally spoken of in terms of gender because one gender (female) has been associated with the physical, emotions, passivity, etc., while the other (male) has been associated traditionally with the intellect, activity, violence, etc. Therefore, by utilizing these stereotypes, one can tap into vast resonances of meaning based on centuries-old assumptions about men and women. This conundrum of individual versus community indeed warrants interpretive investigation; however, if Man is constantly cast as the Individual, and Woman as the symbol of Community (to use for sustenance but also to reject, in order to self-assert), there is no way out of the Oedipal narrative. We continue to perpetuate the same old stereotypes of men and women.

Perhaps Kokoschka's play poses a counternarrative to these traditions in his creation of the male and female choruses (a community of individuals) by staging: 1) active female and male desire, outside of the binary of stereotypical Man and Woman; and 2) the male chorus's rejection of the role of warrior and both choruses' fear and dread of the Man. The Nietzschean "Übermensch" who is left at the end of the play is not the expressionist "New Man" who appears in later dramas. As part of expressionist reform, the New Man emerged as a type of new human being: almost always male, pacifist, a Christ figure who sacrifices his own life for the sake of humanity. Such characters dominate later expressionist plays, and several critics have even viewed the Man in MHW as one of these figures, citing the cock crow at the end of the play as proof for such a reading. However, rather than sacrificing himself for humanity, the Man destroys everything in his wake, and his supposed victory is instead a wild, apocalyptic vision of hell on earth. Nicholls ultimately claims that MHW is more about sexuality than a critique of society, as I argue. However, he notes that there is a disconnect in scholarship that affirms the Man's spiritual victory over the Woman while at the same time describing the work as somehow outside spoken language, in the realm of images and sounds, in what Nicholls describes as pre-Oedipal. In such scholarship, he contends that the authors do not acknowledge that the content (the Man's supposed victory) clashes with form (arguing that the radical staging of the play transcends language, the realm of the patriarchy, in Lacanian terms). But he himself does not satisfactorily explain how the Man can win in terms of the plot and be overthrown in terms of the form. In other words, if the story affirms the superiority of the male but the form, associated with "the feminine," is such a radical break with previous works that it somehow exists outside of spoken language, then how are we to interpret such a contradiction?

A large number of later expressionist plays couple this novel style associated with "the feminine" (non-/preverbal, physical, emotional) with antifemale themes: spiritual man must become the savior of women by destroying them, lifting them up from the physical/animal realm. But unlike later expressionist dramas, Kokoschka's piece does not fit this description entirely. Therefore, MHW ought not be read as just one more egregious example of misogynist tropes, nor should Kokoschka be heralded as a misunderstood feminist author in need of reclamation. Rather, the play exists at the interstices of debates surrounding the meanings of these tropes and their relation to real men and women at a particular point in history. By reading the play through a lens appropriated from a later period and using it as the sole framework for reading the text, critics have unintentionally perpetuated the predominance of misogynist readings. This monologic criticism ignores the possibilities of counterdiscourses within the text and assumes the dominant gender ideology to be the sole perspective in the play. But, of course, as Eagleton and others have argued, rarely is the dominant ideology as monolithic as

it appears.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps a more detailed consideration of counterdiscourses in the text might open up fruitful possibilities of discussion of the text's critique of violent masculinity. In his article "Corporeal Topographies of the Image Zone," Rainer Rumold, for example, does acknowledge both sides of this complicated "story": he describes the play as "a battle of the sexes," but also argues that the final scene turns that notion upside down. He describes the last image of the play as follows: "The concluding scene goes beyond the traditional story line of a *battle of the sexes*. In a reversal, the male goes on a rampage, cutting down every man and everything around him (à la *Rambo* made in Vienna), a provocative staging of a radical indictment of the patriarchal code that threatens the very existence of its culture."<sup>34</sup> Through this final scene, Rumold argues, Kokoschka is demonstrating "an image-based language critique . . . a questioning of *the culture of the word*."<sup>35</sup>

If both the form and content were acknowledged as a site of ideological struggle, using the chorus as an example of a "third way" of being—the embodiment of peace between the sexes—then MHW could be grouped with other expressionist plays with pacifist themes, such as Georg Kaiser's *Burghers of Calais* and Walter Hasenclever's *Antigone*. At the very least, scholars might question their usage of later categories in evaluating early expressionist works and envision other readings beyond a simple battle of the sexes. Then perhaps one day this old quarrel may be deemed "incomprehensible" and other men and women, like the chorus, might shun the sun/moon binary in order to enjoy themselves in the liminal space of the shadows, making love, not war.

## Notes

1. Rosa J. H. Berland, "The Radical Work of Oskar Kokoschka and the Alternative Venues of *Die Kunstschau* of 1908–1909, Vienna, Austria," *Exhibiting Outside the Academy, Salon and Biennial, 1775–1999*, ed. Andrew Graciano (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015) 185.

2. 198.

3. As cited in Edith Hoffman, *Kokoschka: Life and Work* (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1947), the earliest such mention is in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry of 1929. This play pre-dates those Austrian and German expressionist plays that appeared on the stage between 1919 and 1923.

4. Patrick Werkner, *Austrian Expressionism: The Formative Years* (Palo Alto: Society for the Promotion of Science and Scholarship, 1993) 99.

5. Berland 197.

6. Günter Berghaus, *Avant-Garde Performance: Live Events and Electronic Technologies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 28.

7. Oskar Kokoschka, *My Life*, trans. David Britt (New York: MacMillan 1974) 27. Also see Johann Jakob Bachofen, *Myth, Religion and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J. J. Bachofen*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Princeton UP, 1967).

8. Kokoschka, *My Life* 28. Also Henry Schvey, *Oskar Kokoschka: The Painter as Playwright* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1982) 35.

9. The three principal newspaper reviews, from *Die Neue Freie Presse*, *Das Neues Wiener Journal*, and *Die Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung* are reproduced in extensor in Werner J. Schweiger, *Der Junge Kokoschka: Leben und Werk, 1904–1914* (Vienna: Brandstätter, 1983) 44–45, and quoted in Peter Vergo and Yvonne Modlin, "'Murderer Hope of Women,' Expressionist Drama and Myth," *Oskar Kokoschka 1886–1980*, ed. Richard Calvocoressi (London: Tate Gallery, 1986) 22.

10. Peter Nicholls, "Sexuality and Structure: Tensions in Early Expressionist Drama," *New Theatre Quarterly* 7.26 (1991): 160.

11. Kokoschka, *My Life* 29. There are four versions of the script. For detailed accounts of the different versions, see Horst Denkler, "Das Drama des Expressionismus in Zusammenhang mit den expressionistischen Programm und Theaterform," PhD diss., U of Munster, 1963, and Carol Dieth, *Aspects of Distorted Sexual Attitudes in German Expressionist Drama: With Particular Reference to Wedekind, Kokoschka, and Kaiser* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988) 130–35.

12. Berghaus 29.

13. All quotes taken from Oskar Kokoschka, "Murderer Hope of Women," trans. Michael Hamburger, *An Anthology of German Expressionist Drama*, ed. Walter Sokel (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963).

14. Scholars I would include in this group include Berland, Denkler, Dieth, Hoffman, and Schvey. Also Claude Cernuschi, "Pseudo-Science and Mythic Misogyny: Oskar Kokoschka's *Murderer Hope of Women*," *Art Bulletin* 81.1 (Mar. 1999): 126–48; Peter Davies, *Myth, Matriarchy and Modernity: Johann Jakob Bachofen in German Culture, 1860–1945*. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010); Donald E. Gordon, *Expressionism: Art and Idea* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1987); Kathrin Hoffmann-Curtius, "Frauenbilder Oskar Kokoschka," *Frauen, Bilder, Manner, Mythen*, ed. Ilsebill Bart et al. (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1987); Bettina Knapp, "Oskar Kokoschka's 'Murderer Hope of Womanhood': An Apocalyptic Experience," *Theatre Journal* 35.2 (May 1983): 179–94; J. M. Ritchie, *German Expressionist Drama* (Boston: Twayne, 1976); Richard Samuel, *Expressionism in German Life, Literature and the Theatre (1910–1924)* (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1939); Rainer Rumold, "Corporeal Topographies of the Image Zone: From Oskar Kokoschka's Murder of Metaphor to Georges Bataille's *acephale*," *Performative Body Spaces: Corporeal Topographies in Literature, Theatre, Dance, and the Visual Arts*, ed. Markus Hallensleben (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, Dec. 2010) 169; Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siecle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980); Monika Szczepaniak, "Der Mann als Erlöser? Geschlechterkampf und Hoffnungsdiskurs bei Oskar Kokoschka und Dea Loher," *Acta Germanica: Jahrbuch des Germanistenverbandes im Südlichen Afrika* 35 (2007): 103–12; and Frank Whitford, *Oskar Kokoschka: A Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986). One notable exception is Vergo and Modlin. See also Susan Russell and Sarah Bryant-Bertail's entry on Oskar Kokoschka in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography*, eds. Wolfgang Iffé and James Hardin (Charleston: Brucoli, Clark, Layman, and Gale, 1992).

15. Schvey 53.

16. Szczepaniak 103.

17. Qtd. in Barbara Wright, "'New Man,' Eternal Woman: Expressionist Responses to German Feminism," *German Quarterly* 60.4 (Fall 1987): 590–91.

18. Dieth 12, Cernuschi 16.

19. Vergo and Modlin 22.

20. Werkner 95.

21. Bachofen lviii. See also Peter Davies, *Myth, Matriarchy and Modernity* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010) 11–16.

22. This idea corresponds to the French theorists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's speculation that Freud's Oedipal conflict is really only a paranoid fantasy of Laius, who cannot be sure Oedipus is his own and who is jealous of the mother/child bond. Deleuze and Guattari, *The Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983).

23. See online version of illustrated play (in German), Digital Archival Project collection at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. <[http://www.moma.org/collection\\_ge/browse\\_results.php?object\\_id=26715](http://www.moma.org/collection_ge/browse_results.php?object_id=26715)> (Accessed 16 November 2015).

24. The scholars mentioned in this sentence can be referenced in endnote 14.

25. Last line in version I only.

26. This quote is from the influential critic Bernhard Diebold in a review in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. The three principal newspaper reviews (the *Neue Freie Presse*, the *Neues Wiener Journal* and the *Weiner Allgemeine Zeitung*) are reproduced in extensor in Werner J. Schweiger, *Der Junge Kokoschka, Leben und Werk 1904-1914* (Vienna, 1983) 44–45. Also quoted in Vergo and Modlin 22.

27. Kokoschka, *My Life* 53.

28. Cited in Vergo and Modlin 29.

29. 31.

30. This idea is one of the basic precepts of Bachofen's larger work. See *Myth, Religion and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J. J. Bachofen*.

31. Schorske, especially chapter 2: "The Ringstrasse, Its Critics and the Birth of Urban Modernism."

32. Nicholls 162.
33. Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991) 45.
34. Rumold 172, italics in original.
35. Rumold 175, italics in original.