

WOMEN AND THE SPIRITUAL CLASH WITH TERROR

by Erik Buys

Even before the terrorist shootings at Charlie Hebdo and later this year at other sites in Paris quality labeled Belgian magazines and newspapers reported on the socially precarious situation in certain areas of Brussels, especially in Molenbeek. I've translated parts of an article that appeared in *Knack* magazine concerning the issue. Next to this article I've translated parts of other articles as well (from *Knack* magazine and *De Standaard* newspaper). These appeared in the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo shootings. I will use some findings of these articles to answer a few questions on the nature of the conflict we're dealing with when we're talking about "homegrown terrorism".

FIRST QUESTION: IS IT A "CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS"?

FROM AN ARTICLE BY HAN RENARD:

[Rachid Zegzaoui](#) is a blogger of Moroccan descent living in Sint-Joost-ten-Node [another municipality of Brussels]. Rachid notices how many youngsters **turn their back on the society they grew up in**. "Second and third generation migrants no longer believe that a life of study, career and pension is fit for them and consider their parents losers. They accuse their parents of being slaves to the West and the infidels. So it is a generational conflict as well, **a revolt against their family**. Parents are dead worried but no longer understand their offspring. They don't know what their children are doing on the internet. In many Muslim families there is a complete sense of disunity. **Young people reject the society in which they grew up**. Religion guides their life, it is the meaning of their existence. But Islam as they understand it is not practiced here in Belgium." [...]

[Zequendi Khalil](#), editor in chief of *Le Maroxellois*, a magazine aimed at the Moroccan community, joins in. During one month and a half, Khalil listened to sermons with regard to the war in Syria in about twenty Mosques in Brussels. He concludes that imams warn their young audience against Jihad ideology and that imams sharply condemn ISIS terrorism. "However", he says, "from our inquiry we know that members for Jihad are recruited through **the internet** nowadays, while this used to happen on the streets or in the near of Mosques." **Imported imams from Morocco or Turkey in Brussels** don't understand the young, Khalil explains. They **don't speak their language, nor know their culture** and don't have any clue whatsoever about Facebook or WhatsApp. "Imams fail. And so young Muslims, looking for meaning, construct their own version of Islam aided by Jihadist websites."



We need positive role models, according to Khalil. Young Muslims who made it one way or the other should be put forward.

*Young Islamologist [Jessika Soors](#) works as an official against radicalization in Vilvoorde. [...] Although Jihadists justify their departure with the ideal of a holy war, many of them hardly knew anything about Islam and the Quran just before their sudden radicalization. **“They’re religiously illiterate in many cases”**, Soors says. [...] ISIS appeals to vulnerable young people who are looking for a sense of self-worth and an all-encompassing identity.” [...]*

Young people who are bored here or who feel rejected, become members of ISIS in a quest for adventure. [...] ISIS propaganda promises superstardom to those who feel lost in the West – all in the name of Allah.

MORE IN *Knack*, September 24, 2015, *Voor Allah én het avontuur* (p. 28-32), by Han Renard.

PERSONAL COMMENTS

ANSWER TO THE FIRST QUESTION: NO. It is a clash *within* civilizations and cultures, not between them. Radicalized young Muslims seem to reject western society (although things like ISIS propaganda films borrow their look from western action movies and video games), but they also turn their back on the culture of their family and the imported imams from Morocco and Turkey. **They create a new counter-culture which thrives on the internet. Their religion is mainly a consequence, not a cause of their violent tendencies. And the terror boys grow beards like hipsters (or was it the other way around?).**



SECOND QUESTION: IS IT A “CLASH BETWEEN THE SEXES”?

FROM AN ARTICLE BY HAN RENARD:

[Ahmed El Khanouss](#) (CDH) is a jurat in Molenbeek, an impoverished municipality of Brussels and home to many migrants. Most of them are of Moroccan descent. [...]

Khanouss notices how radicalization of youngsters expresses itself in two ways. “Some of them totally change their attitude. **All of a sudden they become very demanding towards the women in their family**, particularly with regard to their clothing, and they rebel against their parents. Others show no sign of radicalization until the day they leave. They wear brands and behave themselves like any western kid.” [...]

MORE IN *Knack*, September 24, 2015, *Voor Allah én het avontuur* (p. 28-32), by Han Renard.

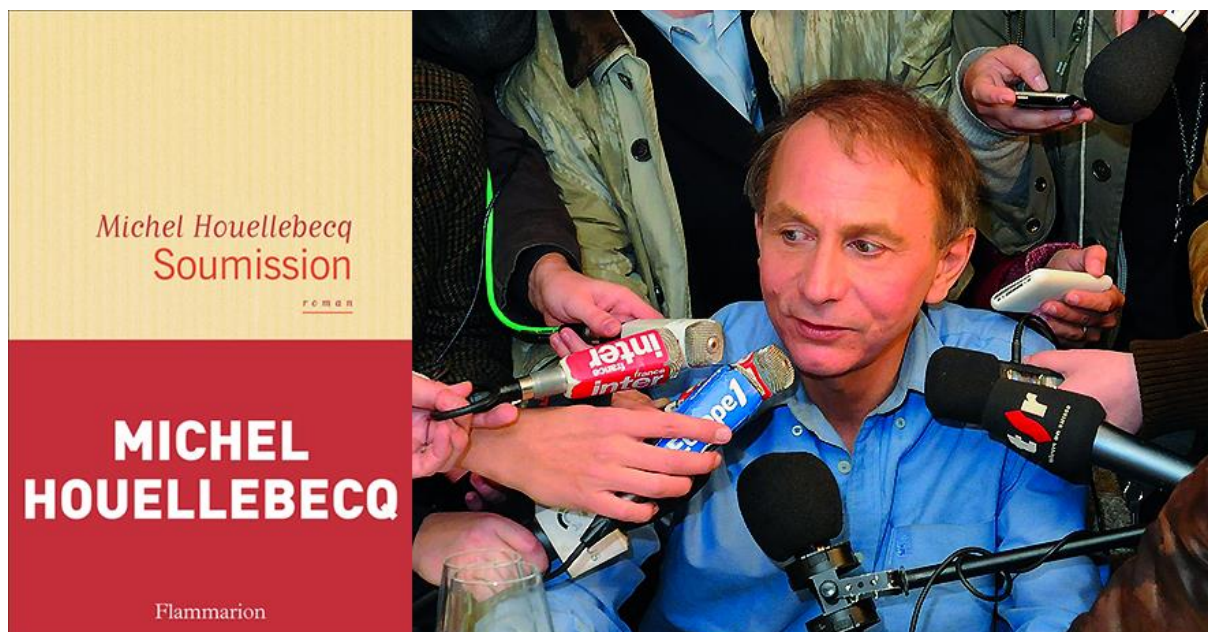
FROM AN ARTICLE BY TINNEKE BEECKMAN:

“Porn-watching losers”. That’s how London mayor Boris Johnson described the Jihadists psychological profile. He claims paraphrasing a confidential report from intelligence service MI5. **Jihadists don’t know how to approach women and feel rejected**. To compensate for their lack of self-esteem they go to war. They could have equally become members of a youth gang. Johnson’s subtle analysis doesn’t get you very far in understanding a phenomenon like extremism, but he does point to another current topic: the fact that a sense of identity goes hand in hand with sexuality. And also the fact that many people feel lost when temptations and romantic feelings are the ultimate measure.

Radicalized young people are not capable of dealing with that kind of freedom. **They look for a social framework with clearly established roles for men and women. They long for stable patterns. They loathe LGBT’s and women’s rights because they consider these to be disrupting**. They want to go back

to a clear definition of the masculine and the feminine. But the West has dismantled such definitions. It's because of this context that any kind of extremism becomes attractive: it offers a simple solution, a clarity which leaves no room for doubt.

Loneliness and sexuality are also major themes in [Michel Houellebecq's "Soumission" \(Submission\)](#), a novel displaying the advantages of a patriarchal society. The author considers the hypothesis that leftist parties in France form a coalition with an Islamic party led by Mohammed Ben Abbas. Ben Abbas thus becomes president of France in 2022. The paradox is that in the final round only rightwing conservative parties remain: Marine Le Pen (FN) is the opponent of Ben Abbas.



Houellebecq's talent consists in capturing the spirit of the age like some contemporary Balzac or de Maupassant. His novel is about the difficult heritage of a free, libertarian consumerist society brought by May 1968. Islam plays an important part in resisting this new society. It fills an ideological void. France so eagerly destroyed part of its own tradition that neither Catholicism nor the proud Republican morality offer an alternative. **Ben Abbas and his moderate Islam thus embody the possibility of a political conservatism, with more stable family relationships, law and order in the outskirts of the city and less unemployment: women stay at home.** No more disruptions, no more failing romantic love affairs. Religion even answers the riddles of the universe.

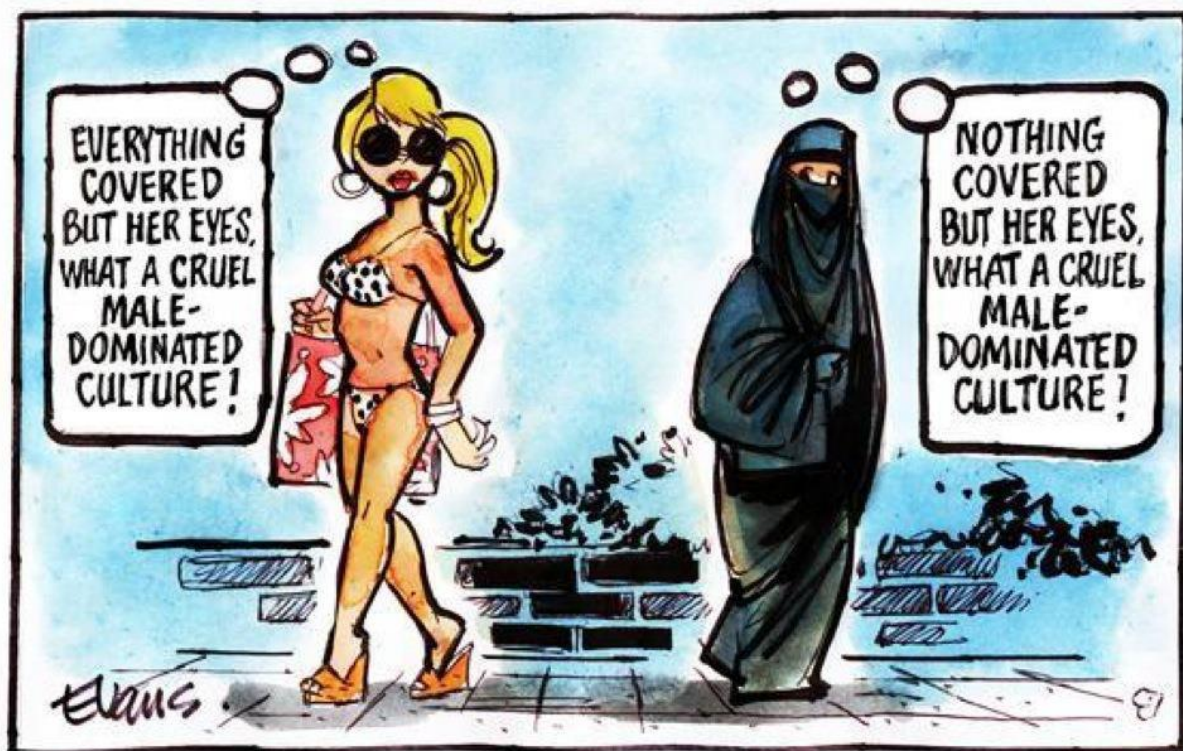
Houellebecq suggests that many men would be prepared to get rid of feminism. Many of them don't care about a postmodernist ideology that leaves every individual the possibility to define its own (sexual) identity. [...]

MORE IN *De Standaard*, February 2, 2015, *Over radicale jongeren en seks* (Column [Tinneke Beeckman](#)).

PERSONAL COMMENTS

ANSWER TO THE SECOND QUESTION: MAYBE. At least it seems part of it. Western society seems liberating for women but it has its own forms of sexism. **The question whether or not a certain image**

of women is oppressive depends on the motivations that guide women to uphold that image. If women conduct themselves in a certain way to gain social recognition or because of a fear of social rejection, they actually don't accept themselves and they will tend to look down on women who make other choices (forms of auto-aggression lead to forms of hetero-aggression).



More generally, from a patriarchal viewpoint, socially and sexually emancipated women (who make their own choices, in whatever direction – “chaste” or “not so chaste”) are often experienced as a threat. **René Girard helps us understand why women are depicted as troublemakers and how they, more specifically (sexually) emancipated women, become scapegoats, unjustly held responsible for all kinds of evil in the world.** The sexist reasoning often goes something like this. Emancipated women are no longer dependent on their husbands. This means that they can more easily divorce them. Divorces potentially trouble the mind of children and youngsters, who might lose the security of a “home”. Hence juvenile delinquency could increase as young people get together in gangs to create a sense of self-worth and identity. Thus the stability of society as a whole is threatened by women who refuse to remain faithful to the man they’re married off to. Moreover, sexually independent women can stir rivalry and violence between men, which once again destabilizes the internal cohesion of a community. Indeed, sex (eros) might lead to death (thanatos).

To avoid these potential troubles patriarchal societies have the tendency to suppress the freedom of women. This means women have to pay for the potential rivalry between men and the potential lack of responsibility of other members of the society. Instead of taking responsibility for their rivalrous and even violent desires and instead of taking control of them, patriarchal men blame women for their own behavior. And instead of taking more responsibility as a parent, patriarchal men also blame women if their offspring ends up on the wrong track... Peace and order in society, according to the

patriarchal system, can only be obtained by keeping women in check. In other words, women and their freedom are violently sacrificed in order to establish “peace and quiet”.



It is no surprise that emancipated women are targeted as “symbols” of a “decadent western society”. **Radicalized young Muslims** who grew up with the “great expectations” sold by the West’s consumerist society but who started resenting that very same society once they felt rejected, come to the same conclusions as some **old white conservative fundamentalist Christians**. Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson blamed “the gays and the lesbians and the feminists” for 9/11 ([click here for more on this](#)). Apart from pointing to the West’s hypocritical stance towards the suffering of Muslims in the world, young radicalized Muslims justify their terrorist actions by pointing to the so-called decadence of western society’s tolerance for “the gays and the lesbians and the feminists”. **Some fundamentalist Christians claim the West has to blame itself for the terrorist attacks it experiences, as some radicalized Muslims claim the West has to blame itself for the terrorist attacks it experiences. Once again, it is not “the Christian West” against “the Islamic East”, it is NOT A CLASH BETWEEN CIVILIZATIONS, but a clash within a globalizing consumerist world. Indeed, economic interests are often the key factors in international policymaking decisions, more than a concern for human rights – although the West always claims it defends “modern democracy”. This doesn’t mean that terrorists are justified in using this hypocrisy to violate human rights themselves, but the fact remains they do justify their actions in this way. Terrorists often don’t belong to “the poorest of the poor”, but also to relatively “wealthy” people who feel western society creates “injustices”. Of course a so-called “individualist” society is good for the economy (instead of selling one car to a family you sell three as a car dealer since Mum, Dad and Son or Daughter are all busy developing their very own “project” in life), but it also destabilizes “traditional” family relationships (Mum, Dad and Son or Daughter are doing “their own thing”). And more consumption might lead to more environmental issues. Hell, from the viewpoint of some twisted patriarchal minds, the emancipation of women and other individuals might even cause a catastrophic apocalyptic climate change!**

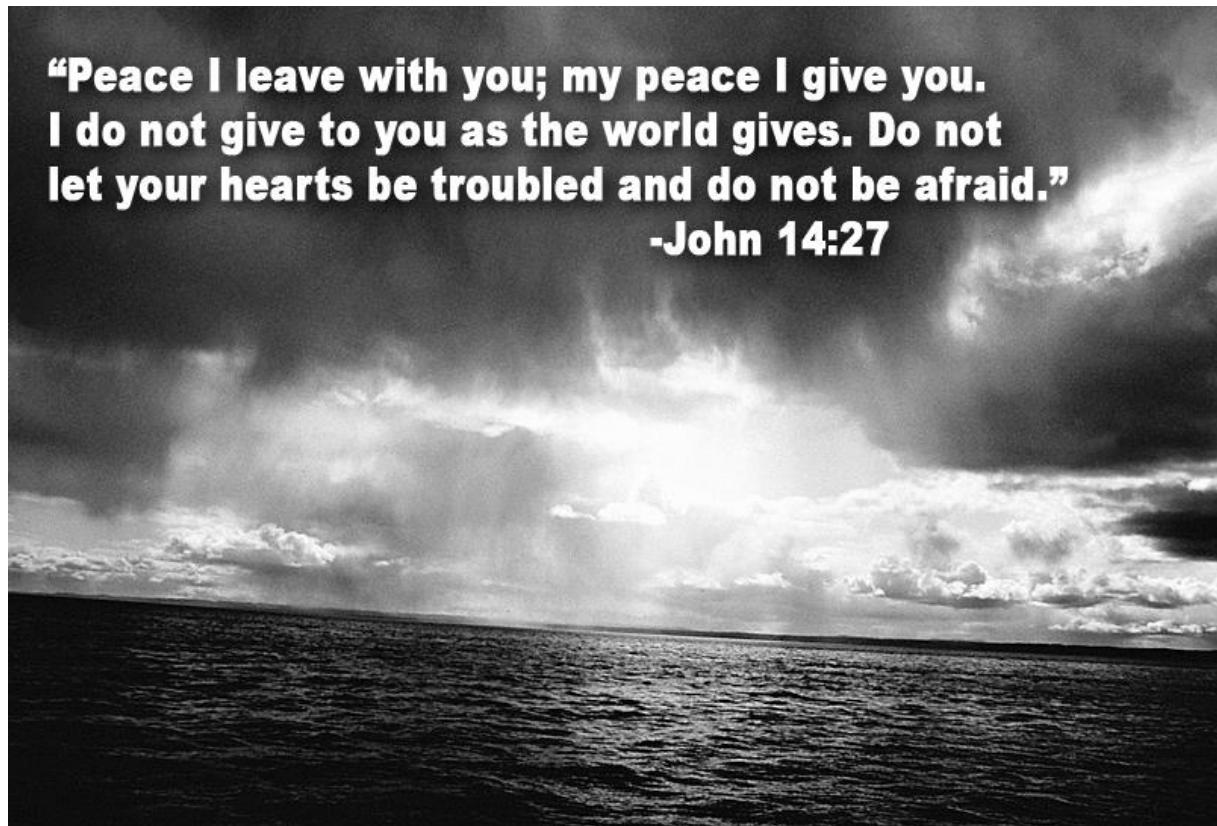
As for the Jesus Christ of the Gospels: he is a “destabilizer”. How about that, Pat Robertson? Throughout the Gospels it becomes clear that Jesus criticizes the universal tendency of human communities to structure themselves according to the identification of a common enemy or a common victim (be it an individual or a group). So on the one hand, concerning the group people are part of and that often manifests itself at the expense of a common enemy (for instance an adulteress who is about

to be stoned – see John 8:1-11), it is no surprise that Jesus sows discord. It is no coincidence that he claims (Matthew 10:34-36): *“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household.”* This intention of Jesus, to create conflict where there is a certain order, is actually and paradoxically a plea against violence. Family members who slavishly obey a *pater familias*, tribe members who harmoniously feel superior to other groups, criminal gangs who blindly pledge allegiance to the mob boss, cult members and fundamentalist believers who are prepared to fight for their leader and their God till death, anxious employees who sell their soul to keep their job in a sick working environment, (youthful) cliques who strengthen their internal cohesion by bullying someone, whole nations who bow to the demands of a populist dictator and execute so-called “traitors” – Jesus doesn’t like it one bit.



Opposed to the small and big forms of “peace” based on oppression and violence, of which the *Pax Romana* in the time of Jesus is an obvious case of course, Jesus challenges people to build peace differently. Family members who belong to a “home” where they can have debates with each other, members of enemy tribes who end age old feuds by questioning their own perception of “the other tribe”, former criminals who start to behave like “moles” to clear their violent Mafia gang, fundamentalists who – realizing what they do to those who supposedly don’t belong to “the chosen ones” – liberate themselves from religious indoctrination, employees who address a reign of terror at their workplace, individuals who criticize the bullying of their own clique, pacifists who dare to dissent with the violent rule of a dictatorship and unveil its enemy images as grotesque caricatures – Jesus likes it. *“Love your enemies”*, Jesus says. Everyone who no longer condemns the external enemy of his own particular group because of a stirred up feeling of superiority, generates internal discord: *“A person’s enemies will be those of his own household.”* It’s only logical.

In short, Jesus argues in favor of **non-violent conflict in order to end violent peace**. That's why he can say on the other hand, eventually (John 14:27): *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you."*



THIRD QUESTION: IS IT A "SPIRITUAL CLASH" WITHIN HUMAN NATURE?

FROM AN ARTICLE BY CHRIS DESTOOP:

*Ernst Kat, a convert, is active as an "Islamic psychologist" who treats lots of radicalized youngsters. [...] "Part of the Jihadists have serious mental issues", he says. "Many of them suffer from paranoia. They distrust others and they heavily engage in conspiracy theories. **They feel rejected by society and have developed hypersensitivity.** [...] Their problems can also cause an enormous depression. They remain motionless, feel banned and are at a dead end. When recruiters approach these psychologically vulnerable young people and offer them an orderly model like Jihad this can be very attractive. It can cause a rapid radicalization. But **most of them are not violent towards others. They become auto-aggressive.**"*

MORE IN *Knack*, January 14, 2015, *Het monster zit vanbinnen* (p. 36-37), by Chris Destoop.

FROM AN ARTICLE IN *DE STANDAARD*:

Since a couple of years Marion Van San has been conducting a research into families of young people who went to war in Syria, implying that she is closely connected to about ninety such families. [...]

Van San defends the idea that “the more young people are integrated, the more they are susceptible to radicalization”. Children and grandchildren of immigrants are born and raised here, and **they want to be accepted**. **“The consequence is that their social expectations are higher than those of others and that they are often more sensitive about (supposed and real) discrimination”**, Van San writes.

MORE IN *De Standaard*, February 2, 2015, *Radicalisering dreigt vooral bij geïntegreerde jongeren* (Politiek, p. 5).

PERSONAL COMMENTS

ANSWER TO THE THIRD QUESTION: YES. It is a clash within and between human beings who feel rejected by and reject each other. **Instead of discovering a Love that allows them to accept themselves even if they are rejected (or feel rejected) by their social environment, they develop forms of auto- and hetero-aggression to create a sense of “pride” and “social status”.** To put things **Biblically (and in the words of Bruce Springsteen), “Adam raised a Cain” (click to watch)**. John Steinbeck magnificently summarizes the universal meaning of the Cain and Abel story in his novel *East of Eden*.

Adam raised a Cain

from www.traditionalmusic.co.uk

In the summer that I was baptized my father held me to his side
As they put me to the water he said how on that day I cried
We were prisoners of love a love in chains
He was standin in the door I was standin in the rain
With the same hot blood burning in our veins
Adam raised a Cain

All of the old faces ask you why youre back
They fit you with position and the keys to your daddys Cadillac
In the darkness of your room your mother calls you by your true name
You remember the faces the places the names
You know its never over its relentless as the rain
Adam raised a Cain

In the Bible Cain slew Abel and East of Eden he was cast
Youre born into this life paying for the sins of somebody elses past
Daddy worked his whole life for nothing but the pain
Now he walks these empty rooms looking for something to blame
You inherit the sins you inherit the flames
Adam raised a Cain

Lost but not forgotten from the dark heart of a dream
Adam raised a Cain

All of us are like Cain, one way or the other, but young radicalized ISIS terrorists commit the sin of murder and show the lack of neighborly love in the most gruesome way. **As the Chinese butler Lee explains in Steinbeck’s novel in his comments on the meaning of the Cain and Abel story, the individual biography of many a young ISIS terrorist and the history of the world would have looked quite different without the feeling of rejection and with the acceptance of Love:**

*“I think this is the best-known story in the world because it is everybody’s story. I think it is the symbol story of the human soul. I’m feeling my way now – don’t jump on me if I’m not clear. **The greatest terror a child can have is that he is not loved, and rejection is the hell he fears. I think everyone in the world to a large or small extent has felt rejection. And with rejection comes anger, and with***

anger some kind of crime in revenge for the rejection, and with the crime guilt – and there is the story of mankind. I think that if rejection could be amputated, the human would not be what he is. Maybe there would be fewer crazy people. I am sure in myself there would not be many jails. It is all there – the start, the beginning. One child, refused the love he craves, kicks the cat and hides the secret guilt; and another steals so that money will make him loved; and a third conquers the world – and always the guilt and revenge and more guilt. The human is the only guilty animal. Now wait! Therefore I think this old and terrible story is important because it is a chart of the soul – the secret, rejected, guilty soul.”

