

Ideal Incubus

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In *Guiding Remarks for a Convention on Female Sexuality* Lacan refers to a creature, the “ideal incubus”, that he says “calls to a woman to be enwrapped in her fantasy”.¹ Accordingly, this ideal incubus is a “castrated lover” or a “dead man who comes from the locus of beyond the maternal semblable.”² In the argument for this year’s NLS conference, Patricia Bosquin-Caroz refers to this ideal incubus as attributed to the painful love of the feminine sexual position, immersed in the limitlessness of pain and ravage.³

In folklore, the incubus is a demon who seeks to have sexual intercourse with women in their sleep, responsible for causing them nightmares. The word incubus comes from *incubare* – to lie upon.⁴ This night-mère is the mother of the night; it lies down on the sleeper like a mother incubating her eggs or serving as an incubator for the foetus.

Lacan directs us to the fact that this ideal incubus keeps a woman away from her “real partner”⁵ -symptom, instead calling her to the dark gods of mortifying jouissance that has to do with the mother’s jouissance. In the daughter’s most primal jouissance, she is the object of her mother’s fantasy, her mother’s partner. The woman’s desire is the unconscious desire of the mother for a phallus as Lacan says in his *Guiding Remarks*.⁶ She desires an ideal incubus, a castrated man, one that keeps her in the status of “having” rather than “being”. When laying in her fantasies with this ideal incubus, woman does not lack, therefore does not desire. What she is, is enjoying, which can also be seen in the image *The Nightmare* by Henry Fuseli.

Lacan speaks of this ideal incubus under the term ‘feminine frigidity’.⁷ Frigidity is the feminine counterpart of man’s impotency as discussed by Freud in *On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love*. He argues that both the frigidity of the woman, and the impotency of the man, are caused by incestuous phantasies.

Shakespeare gives an interesting interpretation of his own to the *ideal incubus*. In Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, this incubating demon is referred to as “Queen Mab”, the fairies’ midwife:

This is the hag, when maids lie on their backs,
That presses them and learns them first to bear,

¹ Lacan, J., “Guiding Remarks for a Convention on Female Sexuality” *Écrits*, trans. B. Fink, New York/London: Norton, 2006, p. 617.

² *Ibid.*

³ Bosquin-Caroz, P., “Painful Loves: Presentation of the 2025 NLS Congress Theme”. Available at: <https://www.amp-nls.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/ENG.-PBC-Presentation-of-the-2025-NLS-Congress-Theme-FV.pdf>

⁴ Etymology Online, accessed October 12, 2024: <https://www.etymonline.com/word/incubus>

⁵ Bosquin-Caroz, P.. *Op cit.*

⁶ Lacan, J., “Guiding Remarks for a Convention on Female Sexuality”. *Op,cit.*

⁷ *Op.cit.*

Making them women of good carriage ⁸

In this description, Queen Mab is a midwife who at night teaches women how to carry their own child-phalluses, that is, the incubus that in some stories has sex with women in their sleep, is here a midwife preparing women to carry children. The incestuous act of a phallic incubating mother becomes one of preparation for motherhood.

The Shakespearean solution is also the Freudian solution for the woman's phallic jealousy, which keeps her away from the position of being. We know from Lacan that there can be other solutions as well. In any case, to move away from the incestuous love of her mother, the daughter will have to latch on to something other than this ideal incubus.

⁸ Shakespeare. W. *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* .I, IV, 593-595. Project Gutenberg, accessed February 21, 2025: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1513/1513-h/1513-h.htm>