Siblings

Juliet Mitchell

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Sex and Violence

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Preface

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are
endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another
in a spirit of brotherhood.
    Article 1, United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

Recent analysis has pointed to the absence of women in the
brotherhood of men, in particular in the ideal of fraternity which
characterizes the social contract of contemporary Western societies.
Brotherhood has been seen as one of the faces of patriarchy. My own
view is that, although it is an aspect of male dominance, it is import-
antly different – the assimilation of 'brotherhood' to patriarchy is an
illustration of the way all is subjugated to vertical understandings
at the cost of omitting the lateral. Indeed, I have come to think that
this 'verticalization' may be a major means whereby the ideologies
(including sexism) of the brotherhood are allowed to operate unseen.

I was first led to the importance of siblings through a study of
hysteria published as *Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria
and the Effects of Sibling Relations on the Human Condition* (2000a).
Since then, I have found that 'thinking siblings' leads to a seemingly
never-ending series of questions – material for yet further analysis.
I am naturally aware of the only child. Although this may change, I
believe so far in the world's history we all have or expect to have
a sister or brother and this is psychically and socially crucial; in a
complex way, peers replace siblings. Everyone always, of course, knew
about the importance of siblings but linking them to everybody's
actual or potential pathology, to the depths of our loves and lives,
hates and deaths, opens up a rich vein of enquiry.

The present book is something of a second way-station (*Mad Men
and Medusas* was the first) to which my clinical material as a psycho-
analyst has brought me, but out of which a large number of tracks

lead to various places in all the disciplines that study human society through observation, 'testing', fictional creation or any other means. My use of a range of sources, from anecdote to neuropsychiatry, via politics, gender studies, novels, films, anthropology . . . is not the result of a doctrinal commitment to interdisciplinarity, but simply because I believe we need to use anything available that helps us create a picture and make sense of the object under investigation. Thus, like the long and deep clinical exchanges which are at their base, the reflections and propositions developed here are 'up for grabs' – they can be confirmed, elaborated or repudiated – any response adds something in this field which asks us to look differently. The book is thus hopefully part of a dialogue.

In what was indeed a famous dialogue that became a heated debate in the 1920s, anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski argued that the permissions and prohibitions in relations between sisters and brothers may be more important than those between parents and children. Ernest Jones, a leading psychoanalyst, powerfully disagreed. Jones asserted the universal centrality of the totems and taboos on child–mother incest and child–father murder (the so-called Oedipus complex) for the construction of all human culture. The argument was not resolved but the general tendency in all the social sciences has been to greatly privilege over all else the vertical relationship of child-to-parent; since the 1920s in particular, that of the infant with its mother. How far may this emphasis be ethnocentric, how far may this be an analysis in the service of an ideological prescription that exists in ignorance of what everybody knows – the importance of siblings? Recently in a small village I know well in southern France, a friend discussing her young daughters with me commented, 'Of course they are much more important to each other in the long run than I am to them – after all, they'll know each other all their lives.'

Our ignoring of siblings is, paradoxically, part of our emphasis on childhood at the expense of adulthood as the formative part of human experience. This tendency, I believe, starts in the Western world's seventeenth century (Ariès 1962); thereafter it gathers momentum until its intensification in the nineteenth then the twentieth century. Yet those who study children are, of course, adults, with the effect that the vertical relationship of parent–child is replicated in the mode of enquiry. This is clearly true of psychoanalysis, which uses the 'transference' of a child's feelings for its parents to the person of the

The Princesses Sibylla, Emilia and Sidonia von Sachsen by Lucas Cranach the
Elder (1535), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

adult therapist as its central mode of investigation. Malinowski's
emphasis on brothers and sisters became understood as the importance
of the mother's brother – in other words, it was 'verticalized' onto
the problem of descent rather than the concerns of laterality.

According to Malinowski, among the Trobrianders eighty years
ago child–parent relations were affectionate, with little suggestion of
any sexualization either as infantile desire or as parental abuse. Brother
and sister relationships were forbidden territory:

> [A]bove all the children are left entirely to themselves in their love
> affairs. Not only is there no parental interference, but rarely, if ever,
> does it come about that a man or woman takes a perverse sexual
> interest in children . . . a person who played sexually with a child would
> be thought ridiculous and disgusting . . . From an early age . . . brothers
> and sisters of the same mothers must be separated from each other, in
> obedience to the strict taboo which enjoins that there shall be no
> intimate relations between them. (Malinowski 1927: 57)

The strenuous prohibitions on sibling love were internalized already by very small children but would themselves seem to have produced the psychic conditions so well described by psychoanalysis in relation to parents – the prohibition sets up repression which creates the desires as existing only unconsciously. At the same time, the affectionate ties to parents and the tabooed sister–brother relationship are socially endorsed by the formation of what Malinowski labels 'a republic of children'. The children form social groups (from any one of which a sister or a brother are excluded) but within which enquiry, sexual exploration, social organization, control of violent feelings through play – all without adult intervention – take place.

A number of thoughts arise from reading Malinowski's material. It confirms the suggestion in chapter 5 which separates sexuality from reproduction. Further, it raises the question as to why we put so much emphasis on biological parents. Jones vigorously contended that in recognizing a social rather than a biological father, the Trobrianders were living in a state of denial; Malinowski responded that the open sexual play of the children did not lead to reproduction so it was quite natural for Trobrianders not to connect sexuality and procreation unless a certain marital status and its conditions had been put in place – producing a social rather than biological meaning of fatherhood. This leads me to consider the fact that we take for granted the importance of biological fatherhood. Once again, I think we find that looking from the position of social siblinghood gives a different perspective on biological parenthood.

We do not need to get bogged down in a debate about social versus biological fathers – both arise in specific socio-historical conditions. I suggest that what is apparently a 'universal' emphasis on the exclusive importance of 'natural' paternity is in fact a marked feature of Western societies that are organized around 'liberty, equality and *fraternity*' – the so-called 'brotherhood of man'. Freud explicitly considered that the intellectual leap needed to accept the role of the biological father without the material evidence of parenting, as in motherhood, constituted the single greatest achievement of human ideational progress. However, it is not only the Trobrianders for whom this leap has been unnecessary. We need to look at the issue the other way around: when and why did the biological parent become so crucial for us? The history is an uneven one – for instance, the biological mother was not considered crucial for the poor

working-class child until the Second World War; likewise the upper-class mother – one of the first disagreements between the present Queen of England and her daughter-in-law Diana centred around the Queen's contention that William, Diana's young baby, should not accompany his mother on a trip to Australia.

One important moment for the so-called leap to conceptualizing the biological father as the abstract idea of the only possible father is the late seventeenth-century debates between them (chapter 9). It is not that the biological parent is the conscious point of the controversy between patriarchalists and contract theorists – rather that it is interesting to read this parent into the controversial concepts of the family. For the patriarchalists, notoriously Sir Robert Filmer, the father was the only parent of the family and therefore of society – one was a microcosm of the other. (Until the eighteenth century the mother was thought to be only a vehicle for the father's seed (Hufton 1995).) For the contract theorists my initial reading suggests that the new division of private and public depended on the notion of the biological parents being at the centre of the 'private'. Instead of 'nature' being the basis of society (the patriarchalists), the 'natural-biological' equals the private sphere within, but separate from, the polity. 'Nature' is one of those 'switch' words that mark the transition of a concept: natural is both the most basic relationship and at the same time what is illegitimate – belonging to a nature that has not been socialized. When Shakespeare has Gloucester compare his 'legitimate Edgar' with his bastard ('natural') son Edmund – 'the whor'son must be acknowledged' – it is as though he is pointing to the new emphasis on the place of biology within the law.

Not only Freud, but Engels, indeed 'everyone' since the rise of 'modern times' has argued that the all-importance of biological paternity explains the need to know the wife is the mother of the child. The supremacy of biological kinship may be a crucial ideological postulate of the social contract – it takes over from 'the state of nature' that previously explained and contained women as outside the polity. Within contract theory biological fatherhood and motherhood is the placing of nature within society – as an untouchable, no-go, rock-bottom unchangeable enclave. Thus not to recognize its importance is in Jones's arguments to rely on a delusory denial. From the viewpoint of the West, Jones is correct – but not from the viewpoint of a society that is concerned instead with the

biological contiguity of sisters and brothers and the social meaning of fatherhood.

It is almost as though social parenthood and biological siblinghood on the one hand, and social siblinghood and biological parenthood on the other, run in these coordinated pairs. If parenthood is constructed as biological in the thinking of societies largely based on the social fraternity of contract theory, the biological relationship of siblings is not constructed as a structural moment in the social organization – the creation of the all-important social brotherhood. This absence of a social significance for biological siblinghood may be why we have overlooked the extent and significance of sibling abuse (Cawson et al. 2000 and chapter 3), which would have been not only utterly appalling but highly visible to the Trobrianders.

Yet without deliberately intending it, we may have created structures of lateral peer group organizations that do recognize biological sibling taboos. We establish schools which by and large are age-specific enterprises so that rarely are siblings in the same class and hence the same peer group. Schools thus function somewhat as Malinowski's perception of the 'republic of Trobriand children'. However, there is the same major difference – we preserve once again our vertical structures through teachers standing *in loco parentis*.

So it seems that our concentration on the child since the seventeenth century has been exactly that – an adult focus on the child and the analytic modalities which see the child within the context of the adults on whom it depends or is made to depend. This surely is, in part at least, why siblings, even as children, have been missing from the picture – they can get on with it on their own but are not visible except in the presence of adults. Children in Western societies are thought to commit incest with each other because of insufficient parental care and control. It is as though our elevation of the social, political and economic story of the ideals of brotherhood depended on a diminution of the significance of blood sibling ties. A brother's murder of an adulterous sister in a Muslim family, or a brother's rape of a younger sibling in an impoverished lone mother household are seen as alike. In fact they are alike only in being outside the Western social contract. They are, however, different. The first belongs to a social order based on a blood relationship, whereas the second arises from the absence of a social place and understanding of such blood relationships within a Western system. The rise in childhood violence

and abusiveness can thus be seen as not only due to the loss of parental or other vertical authorization of care and control but also to the absence of a social place for biological siblinghood within a polity based on abstract ideals of social brotherhood. This does not of course condone the death of an adulterous sister in the example above: I have simply taken the instance of another social system to illustrate that Western shock at other practices demonstrates not just so-called 'othering' but more pertinently, the intrinsic repudiation of the socialization of blood siblinghood under the banner of Western 'liberty, equality and fraternity'. Relying on the socially bestowed authority of natural parents in the private sphere (and their replacements in the social sphere, as though those replacements were likewise natural) ensures the dominance of social brotherhood as an ideal while natural brotherhood can go on the rampage unnoticed (or deplored only as the absence of vertical authority) because it is given no social place.

Likewise, because of our preoccupation with vertical relationships we believe that it is parents and their substitutes who must restrict children's violence. We also argue that violence is primarily against the authority figure who has the power – the mother, father or teacher. Yet, of course, in schools, in South Sea island children's republics, boys fight each other and girls get their own back. I believe we have minimized or overlooked entirely the threat to our existence as small children that is posed by the new baby who stands in our place or the older sibling who was there before we existed. There follows from this an identification with the very trauma of this sense of non-existence that will be 'resolved' by power struggles: being psychically annihilated creates the conditions of a wish to destroy the one responsible for the apparent annihilation. This plays out as stronger against weaker; larger, smaller; boy, girl; paler, darker. In adult wars we defeat, kill and rape our peers. However, ironically, it is in societies based on the social contract of brotherhood that these activities are not laterally controlled. Our social imaginary can envisage only vertical authority. Our image of a South Sea island republic of children is *Lord of the Flies*: boys' interactive mayhem and murder.

Behind the social contract ideal of brotherhood dependent on the absence of lateral controls lies the tyrant brother. Looking laterally changes the analysis. No one in their right mind could have believed that the construction of a great empire would depend, or indeed be in

the slightest degree enhanced by the destruction of a disparate population labelled 'Jews' – why did so many people believe it could? Why does the playground bully get support for his redundant act of picking on a harmless victim? The victim does not represent a tyrant's hidden vulnerability as is usually understood, but rather some traumatic eradication of his very being which can only be restored by manic grandiosity: there is only room for me. Then the tyrant/bully's followers are 'empty of themselves' in a shared eradication of selves with the empty but grandiose tyrant/bully: a trauma is induced. In the manic excitement of the rhetoric of tyranny, individual identities and judgements vanish until all become as one. The 'original' moment, replicated endlessly if not resolved, is when the sibling or imagined sibling replaces one – when there is another in one's place. Bullied victims, madly, are imagined to be standing in the bully/tyrant's place. Others support the crazy vision because somewhere they too can call on this 'universal' trauma of displacement/replacement.

The desperate grandiosity of the tyrant self and visions of empire contain both the sexuality and violence that mask the self-love and the need to preserve it in its endangered moment. However, as children have found, only the proper social organization of siblings/peers can countermand the continued living out of the unresolved trauma of the tyrant/bully's endless moment of experienced annihilation – a sisterhood and brotherhood in which there is room for equality of dignity and rights. Looking at siblings is looking anew at sex and violence. Bringing in siblings changes the picture we are looking at.

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Siblings and Psychoanalysis:
an Overview

This is a strange time to be insisting on the importance of siblings. Globally, the rate of increase of the world's population is on the decline; in the West it is mostly below the point of replacement.[1] China, with over a fifth of the world's population, is trying to make its 'one child' family policy prevail – with considerable success in urban centres. Will there be any (or anyway, many) siblings in the future?

Yet this book argues that siblings are essential in any social structure and psychically in all social relationships, including those of parents and children. Internalized social relationships are the psyche's major elements. More particularly, the work here considers that siblings have, almost peculiarly, been left out of the picture. Our understanding of psychic and social relationships has foregrounded vertical interaction – lines of ascent and descent between ancestors, parents and children. During the larger part of the twentieth century the model has been between infant and mother; before that it was child and father. Now we learn that such concerns as parental (particularly step-paternal) sexual and violent abuse have hidden from us the extent of sibling outrages (Cawson et al. 2000). Why have we not considered that lateral relations in love and sexuality or in hate and war have needed a theoretical paradigm with which we might analyse, consider and seek to influence them? I am not sure of the answer to this question; I am sure we need such a paradigm shift from the near-exclusive dominance of vertical comprehension to the interaction of the horizontal and the vertical in our social and in our psychological understanding. Why should there be only one set

of relationships which provide for the structure of our mind, or why should one be dominant in all times and places? Even if there will be fewer full siblings in the world, there will still be lateral relationships – those relationships which take place on a horizontal axis starting with siblings, going on to peers and affinal kin. In polygynous societies, in social conditions with high rates of maternal mortality, or with divorce and remarriage or serial coupling, half-siblings will persist.

It can and has been argued (Winnicott 1958) that it is essential we work out the problems of future social interaction with siblings in our early childhood. If we fail to overcome our desire for sibling incest or for sibling murder, will versions of these be more insistently played out with later lateral relationships, with peers and so-called equals – in love and in war? Freud argued that in order to marry our wife we need to know in childhood that we cannot marry our mother (the Oedipus complex).[2] I suggest that at the very least we also need to know we cannot marry our sister if we are to be able to marry our sister's (not just our mother's) psychological successor. But do we in fact marry someone who resembles in some way our sister or brother? It has been suggested that the ideal situation for a successful hetero-sexual relationship involves a mixture of prohibited incestuous wishes from childhood for someone who is not too like the original infantile love-object and the contemporary adult desire for someone who is like oneself, but not too alike. We often hear it said that she's mar-ried her father (mother) – is it not, perhaps, that we have married a sibling? Similarly, the literature emphasizes the Oedipal desire to kill the father – do we predominantly kill fathers or brothers?

How can we assess the relative importance of our vertical love or hate for our parents and our lateral emotions for our siblings? In wars we fight side by side with our brothers – not our fathers: the resolution of fraternal love and hate would seem to underlie whom we may and may not kill. It was widely noted in the First World War that 'fraternal' loyalty was essential for success – and, as the poet Wilfred Owen described, the killed enemy is also a brother. What happens between siblings – full, half or step, or simply unborn but always expected because everyone fears to be dethroned in childhood – is a core experience of playmates and peers. What Lévi-Strauss calls the 'atom of kinship' (Lévi-Strauss 1963) has siblings as its centre-point; it is this atom which concerns me here. Psychoanalysis, with

its emphasis on the Oedipal and the vertical, has had an influence well beyond its own bounds. I wish to add the lateral axis to the psychoanalytic theoretical and clinical perspective. I am also interested in how this maps on to the theories of group behaviour and to social psychology more generally.

Recently I was talking to a group of clinical psychologists and psychotherapists about the place of siblings in their work. I told an anecdote and asked a question: 'The World Service of the BBC has reported that the southern Indian state of Kerala has announced an extensive expansion of child and baby-care services. Why might it have done this?' Comforting to the feminist in me, everyone in the audience answered that it would be to enable more mothers to join the workforce. This had been my own immediate assumption. In fact, it was so that, in a state with an extraordinarily high rate of literacy to maintain, girls could go to school. Apparently literacy rates had been falling because sisters had to stay at home to care for younger siblings. Once more I was struck by the ethnocentricity of our exclusion of siblings from a determinate place in social history and in the psychodynamics both of individuals and of social groups. Confirming this ethnocentricity, it comes as a shock to the Western imagination to learn of the extent of 'child-headed' households in AIDS-struck sub-Saharan Africa.

The proposition here is this: that an observation of the importance of siblings, and all the lateral relations that take their cue from them, must lead to a paradigm shift that challenges the unique importance of understanding through vertical paradigms. Mothers and fathers are, of course, immensely important, but social life does not only follow from a relationship with them as it is made to do in our Western theories. The baby is born into a world of peers as well as of parents. Does our thinking thus exceed the binary?

There is a second hypothesis, more tentative than the first, and this is that the dominance or near-exclusiveness of our vertical paradigm has arisen because human social and individual psychology has been understood from the side of the man. Looking at my own field of research, psychoanalysis, I have found a striking overlap between the concepts that explain femininity in the main body of the theory and concepts that we need if we are to incorporate siblings. Here, I will simply offer indicators. Sibling relations prioritize experiences such as the fear of annihilation, a fear associated with girls, in contrast

to the male fear of castration. They involve fear of the loss of love which is usually associated with girls; an excessive narcissism which needs to be confirmed by being the object, not subject, of love. Siblings and femininity have a similar overlooked destiny.

Psychoanalysis, like all grand theories, has followed the pattern of assuming an equation between the norm and the male. The paradoxical result is that the male psyche is taken for granted and invisible. The current feminist challenge to this ideology means that masculinity is emerging as an object of enquiry. An examination of siblings and sibling relationships will bring both genders into the analytical picture. The sibling, I believe, is the figure which underlies such nearly forgotten concepts as the ego-ideal – the older sibling is idealized as someone the subject would like to be, and sometimes this is a reversal of the hatred for a rival. It can be an underlying structure for homosexuality. Siblings help too with the postmodern concern with the problem of Enlightenment thinking in which sameness is equated with the masculine and difference with the feminine. Postmodern feminism has been concerned to demonstrate that a unity such as is suggested by something cohering as 'the same' is only achieved by ejecting what it doesn't want of itself as what is different from it. The masculine unity is achieved at the cost of expelling the feminine as other or different. Brothers cast out sisters or the feminine from their make-up.

For beneath the surface of this argument for the structuring importance of laterality, one can see the shift from modernism to postmodernism and from causal to correlative explanations. In the possible link to siblings of explanations of the sameness/difference axis of masculinity and femininity one sees then the role of feminism (and the increasing 'sameness' in the roles of women and men) as promoting laterality over verticality. Social changes underpin the shift. For instance inheritance depends on the vertical but it is said to be on the decline, with stickers on pensioners' cars in Florida reading 'We are spending your inheritance' indicating a trend. If, despite the feminization of poverty, women can be self-supporting through paid work, then the woman provides her own equivalent of what was once endowment. At this stage these thoughts are no more than speculative lines of enquiry that would seem to merit further investigation. They do, however, suggest a decline of the importance of descent and a rise of the importance of alliance.

Hysteria and siblings

The chapters of the book that follow emanate from a long study of hysteria predominantly from the viewpoint of psychoanalysis.[3] This study was also fuelled by a second-wave feminist interest in the hysteric as a proto-feminist (Clement 1987; Cixous 1981; Hunter 1983; Gallop 1982; and others), a woman whose hysteria was the only form of protest available under patriarchy (Showalter 1987, 1997). Rather than studying the feminists' hysteric, I have long been interested in male hysteria. The presence of male hysteria (along with an analysis of dreaming) enabled Freud to found psychoanalysis as a theory built on the observation of universally present unconscious processes which were largely brought into being by social obstacles to the expression of human sexuality. Most obviously, we have all taken on board that we must not commit incest – the hysteric in all of us wants to do just that, wants to do whatever is not allowed. The hysterical symptom such as hysterical blindness, fatigue, immobility or aspects of some eating disorders, once understood, reveals both the illicit sexual desire and the prohibition against it that the hysteric does not wish to recognize. Cross-culturally and historically, hysteria has been associated almost exclusively with women. Male hysteria (charted by Charcot in the latter half of the nineteenth century and analysed by Freud, who had studied with him) demonstrated that these processes did not belong to a specific population – not to 'degenerates' (as was commonly thought in the nineteenth century) nor to the sick nor to women. Through the awareness of male hysteria at the end of the nineteenth century it could be seen that the symptoms of hysteria were the writing large of ordinary and universal processes. The exaggerations of neuroses show us the psychopathologies of everybody's everyday life.

However, once the universality of unconscious processes was demonstrated, hysteria as a diagnosis shifted. It was no longer considered an illness the extremes of which throw into relief the normative; rather it came to be considered an aspect of a personality – and predominantly a feminine personality. Roughly 70 per cent of those suffering from 'Histrionic Personality Disorder' (according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual III) in the United States are women. Hysteria has become an aspect or expression of the feminine

personality. We constantly come full circle with the collapse of the hysteric into the woman and femininity into the hysterical.

While hysteria had receded as an illness diagnosis, it was still easy in my psychoanalytic clinical work to observe hysteria as something more than (or as well as) a personality disorder. Hysteria had long ceased to be a common diagnosis (Brenman 1985), but in social and political life continuance and prevalence of the (colloquial) term seemed justified. These two factors led me to look not only historically but also ethnographically. There seemed no doubt that hysteria was, and always had been, a universal potential – all of us can have hysterical symptoms or act hysterically or, if this performance becomes a way of life, or these symptoms persist, *be* hysterics. The question then became, why, if it was possible for men, was it everywhere and at all times associated with women?

The psychoanalytic explanation of what we might term the refeminization of hysteria after its initial recognition in men is in terms of the importance of the phase of the pre-Oedipal mother-attachment of girls. A 'law' emanating from the place of the father (Lacan 1982a, 1982b) abolishes the Oedipal desires of the child for the mother (Oedipus' love for his mother-wife, Jocasta). The law which threatens symbolic castration (the castration complex) prohibits phallic mother-love. The result differentiates the sexes – both are subject to the castration threat if the law is flouted, but the girl will never come to stand in the place of the father in relation to a mother substitute. Instead she must change her stance – she must become as though in the position of the mother and object of her father's love. The girl must relinquish her mother as object of her love and become instead like her. In an 'idealized' normative world, she then tries to win her father's love to replenish the narcissistic wound of being forever without the phallus which is what her mother, who lacks it, therefore desires. Flouting the law, the hysterical girl persists in both believing she has this phallus for her mother (a masculine stance, the phallic posture of the hysteric) and at the same time complaining she is without it (the feminine stance, the empty charm and constant complaint of the hysteric) and must receive it from her father.

This classic interpretation has received many new emphases and, indeed, additions. I was interested in the fact that if the propensity to hysteria was claimed as a 'universal' (or 'transversal' – omnipresent but in various forms), what features did its different manifestations

have in common? The hysteric is always both too much there and insufficiently present – moving between grandiosity and psychic collapse. How does this expression fit with the psychoanalytic interpretation? I suggest that the hysteric – male or female – dramatizes an assumed phallic position, and at the same time believes that he or she has had the penis taken away, which in its turn means he or she has nothing. So she appears simultaneously hugely potent and horribly 'empty'. She not only introjects phallic potency as though in her mind it were an actual penis, she also feels empty because in not having 'lost' anything, she has no inner representation of it. Despite appearing phallic, she oscillates between an 'empty' masculine position in relation to her mother and an empty feminine position in relation to her father; 'empty' because she has neither internalized the 'lost' mother nor accepted the 'lost' phallus. Her craving for both is compulsive and incessant. In both aspects of the situation she reveals that she has not understood a symbolic law – she believes (like many readers of psychoanalytic theories) that the phallus, present or absent, is an actual real penis. She thus endlessly seduces as though in this way she will get the real penis. What is also at stake in this is the question of narcissistic love (love for oneself) and so-called 'object love' (love for another). I shall return to this question as I believe it cannot be grasped without introducing sibling relations. In fact all these expressions of hysteria need the sibling to explain them. But another factor – the acknowledgement of male hysteria – also of itself calls into question the exclusively vertical, intergenerational explanation.

Male hysteria has seemed unlikely in a commonsensical way. The Western name for the condition is related to the Greek for womb, and many nineteenth-century doctors objected to male hysteria on exactly these grounds. However, this has no bearing on psychic life: men imagine they have wombs and that they do not have penises. The male hysteric believing in his power to conceive and carry and give birth is experiencing a delusion. There can therefore be a psychotic element in male hysteria which in turn entails it being considered as 'more serious'. But believing he has a womb or does not have a penis also puts the male hysteric in a feminine position – and that is mostly where he has found himself in the diagnosis. Male hysteria has been repudiated along with a repudiation of femininity. A strange equation emerges: male hysteria is feminine so that it is its maleness which is cancelled out; the femininity becomes the illness. In the

1920s, the British psychoanalyst Joan Riviere wrote a case history of a female patient whose femininity (or 'womanliness') was a masquerade (Riviere [1929]); some decades later, Jacques Lacan wrote that femininity itself was a masquerade (Lacan 1982a, 1982b). Masquerading is crucial to hysteria, but it is different if one is dressing up in femininity or if femininity itself is fancy dress.

The hysteric must dress up – feeling empty, he needs clothes to ensure his existence – but if he chooses femininity, while still remaining the subject of desire, this femininity will make use of the whole body as though the body were a phallus – the femininity itself will thus be phallic. If he chooses masculinity as the masquerade its phallic posturing will seem no less inauthentic for being paraded by a male. However, what is established in all these Oedipal accounts of hysteria is the importance of unconscious sexuality arising from the failure to fully repress incestuous Oedipal desires. This will raise a crucial question when we come to consider siblings. There is, nevertheless, a second strand in definitions of hysteria which I believe also indicates that we must implicate siblings. This is the importance of trauma. Since Charcot, trauma had been considered crucial in the aetiology of male hysteria; as understandings of hysteria always refeminize it, the traumatic element has been largely forgotten.

When Jean-Marie Charcot announced the prevalence of male hysteria in his huge public clinic, the Salpetrière, in Paris, he also added a new dimension to its aetiology. He claimed there was nothing effeminate about his male hysterics; they were responding with non-organic physical symptoms (hence hysterical symptoms) to some trauma – an accident at work or on the train, a fight on the street, and so on. In the First World War the similarity of the symptoms of male war victims who had no actual injuries and the symptoms of classical female hysterics confirmed this possibility. However, the relationship between trauma and hysteria has remained unresolved (Herman 1992) and is a subject in its own right. My intention here is different. In brief, I would contend that there is a difference between traumatic neurosis (as war hysteria came to be called) and hysteria, but that it is not a difference between the absence or presence of a trauma. Usually the distinction is made that the trauma of traumatic neurosis is actual and real and that of hysteria rather a fantasy of trauma. I put the situation differently. In both cases there is trauma. In traumatic neurosis the trauma is in the present, in hysteria it is in

the past. In hysteria this forgotten past trauma is constantly revived through re-enactment – one does make a drama of a crisis. Minor present-day obstacles to getting what one wants are treated as traumatic – but once upon a time, in the hysteric's early childhood, the result of such obstacles was in fact traumatic.

What is trauma? A residual definition is that it is a breaking through of protective boundaries in such a violent (either physical or mental) way that the experience cannot be processed: the mind or body or both are breached, leaving a wound or gap within. What is it which in time fills this gap that trauma opens up? Imitating the presence or object which has created the hole in the body or psyche is crucial. If, for instance, in fantasy, one murders the father and one then becomes like the dead father, it seems to act to fill the gap. Hysteria is definitionally mimetic, imitating a range of mental and bodily conditions. It thus, like a chameleon, takes on the colour of its surroundings, appearing for instance as eating disorders in the 'thin' culture of an obese rich world or as 'railway spine' when railways are new and frightening. Hysteria in this, once again, exaggerates the normal – the hysterical imitation is so accurate that there is no division between what is not there and what one has become to ensure it still is there.

These imitations however, though multifarious, are not random. They have a meaning derived from the person's experiences and history. What I want to look at in relation to siblings is not the individual but the general situation. In all times and places one of the most noted hysterical imitations is the imitation of death in its various guises (King 1993). Though it is known that in severe cases hysterics commit suicide, the general hysterical trend of pretending to be dead has only been understood as living out a wish. While psychoanalysis has highlighted the breaking through of tabooed sexuality in hysteria, it has done no more than occasionally observe the rendering of trauma into an imitation of death (Freud [1928]). Anxious to separate hysteria and traumatic neurosis, psychoanalysis has not integrated this dimension into its theoretical understanding. In trauma, subsequently imagined or enacted as death, the ego or 'I' or subject position is annihilated. Here too siblings help with an explanation.

One can bring the sexuality and the experience of trauma in hysteria together in the story of Oedipus. Before he marries his mother, Oedipus inadvertently slays his father. Prior to this adult act, Oedipus