

## In praise of cleavage, on some...

I became aware of what cleavage meant by none other than Gerard Phillippe in his swashbuckling role of *Fanfan la Tulip* (1952), a French romp somehow permitted for screening in communist Hungary, indeed during the strictest, puritanical Stalinist regime. Perhaps the French Communist Party had something to do with it or possibly the director was one of their members, or perhaps it just showed how decadent the West was. This was not something that occupied me at the time. Anything western was keenly sought after and none more than a bit of saucy French tease, a welcome relief from the deadly dull social-realism that was the norm. I was fourteen and could hardly wait for the dark of the auditorium to see, adore, pine for, be breathless at the sight of Gina Lollobrigida playing opposite Gerard Phillippe. She had the shape, the smile, the flirty eyes that boys of my age fantasized about under the bedcovers.



Now after this introduction I come to the episode in the film that has remained with me shaping my imagination about cleavage ever since. So, there was Gerard Phillippe, *Fanfan la Tulip*, standing on top of a haystack. Below, looking up coquettishly, was La Lola helping in some pointless agricultural activity. Her body-hugging dress came down from the round shoulders sweeping under the blouse that was cut just low enough to show off her wonderful bosom, the tops of her breasts coming together in a visage to

die for. I am almost there. Gina trying to rouse Gerard's attention asks, "*And what is the view up there?*" Came the unsubtle suggestive reply "*I see a valley between two wonderfully shaped hills*" (anyway that is how I remember it). To this La Lola gave a not too modest smile. This trite remark has defined cleavage for me ever since. Yes, but what better introduction to an imaginary display of female thighs joining up at eye level. No wonder the cleavage has been such a powerful symbol of female allure in paintings since the Renaissance. Of course the girls would have been all agog by Gerard's cheeky charm but that was for them, for me it was all about what Gina showed and what was not on view was beyond a schoolboy's dare.

For cleavage is all about revealing just some of the bosom making what remains hidden even more enticing, indeed revealing all would take away the mystery for then what more is to seek after. There is always a Darwinian explanation but that would be all too prosaic for the real question is what makes the heart beat faster. No doubt 'in the survival of the fittest' females who teased were more likely to be captured by the alpha males but who cares about explanations when the sight of Gina was sheer perfection. The physiology has to be just right. A bony chest with rows of ladder like ribs and arching collarbones even above ample endowment is no good. The softness of breasts in a cleavage has to continue without missing a beat up to the shoulders and the neck. There are innumerable paintings from the past where the cleavage seems to be carved out of hard stone. The breasts should barely touch, the Gerardian valley need to spread gently, flawlessly into view.

The Wikipedia entry for *Cleavage* shows as an example John Sargent's spectacular full-length portrait of *Virginie Amélie Avegno Gautreau* but the great expanse of bosom in the painting has the warmth and flatness of a porcelain dinner plate. There is more to cleavage than restrained display.

Sandor P Vaci, 2016.

