

Feminist Critiques of Sex and Love

THERE IS NO ONE POSITION on any issue that can be identified as *the* feminist position. Following are some examples of feminist approaches to ethics, science, and surrogate motherhood.

Iris Murdoch was a professor of ethics at Oxford. Instead of writing articles in philosophy journals carefully dissecting concepts, she wrote novels. She felt that ethics could be understood only in the context of the unfolding of stories. Annette Baier, a professor of ethics at the University of Pittsburgh, does not write novels. Yet her current articles are unique, stressing as they often do her emphasis on the sterility of moral theory and the need to know the backgrounds of philosophers writing on ethics.

Barbara McClintock was a Nobel Prize-winning geneticist. Unlike other scientists in her field, she spoke of the need to have a “feeling for the organism.” For example, corn, fruit flies, and guinea pigs should not be seen as mere objects for experimentation. To learn the most about them, one must feel for them and with them—or at least make the effort. This is not the vaunted objectivity one usually associates with science. Alison Jaggar writes that one cannot separate emotion from knowledge because science is full of emotion. We have just been lulled into not noticing it.

Some feminists believe that women have the right to bear children for others in any manner that they deem safe. Ruth Macklin, an ethicist at Albert Einstein University College of Medicine, (and some feminists) believe that a woman demeans herself when she asks to be let out of a surrogate mother contract because of emotional ties to the baby. On the other hand, some feminists argue that a surrogate mother ought to be allowed to break the surrogacy contract because of unexpected emotional ties. Not to allow this demeans and devalues women by undervaluing the importance of their real feelings as potential mothers. Carmel Shalev points out that not allowing surrogacy violates the freedom of women and thus demeans them (*Birth Power*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989). Janice Raymond has argued that surrogate mothering demeans women by reducing them to the status of property; it objectifies them (“In the Matter of Baby M: Rejudged,” *Reproductive and Genetic Engineering* 1, no. 2, pp. 175–181).

Is there a thread that runs through feminism? One such thread might be the search for a male-oriented bias in any already well-established discipline. After all, just about all our accepted disciplines have been created by and run by and for men. Why not expect that to make a difference? There need be no claim (but there very well might be) that a male-oriented approach is wrong, just that it is biased. Here is a clear example.

Ever since medicine used clinical trials (carefully controlled experiments) to establish the safety and efficacy of drug therapies, women have been excluded from being experimental subjects. The reason was twofold. One was that they might be pregnant or get pregnant and that drugs might harm the fetus. The other was that the physiology of a woman seemed so complex that it might confound the results. Is it any wonder, then, that virtually all drugs carry a warning that they may cause problems with pregnancy? Therefore, scientifically speaking, what is known about many drugs is just how they work on men. What this means is that when they are given to women, we are not really sure how they will work. Further, because of this, the evidence of drug efficacy and safety in women is anecdotal and thus untrustworthy. (The claim that anecdotes are untrustworthy might just be male dogma.)

A simpler example of male bias is Freud's never having discussed the importance of breast development in young girls. Another example of such male bias is pointed out by Carol Gilligan in her book *In A Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982). She says that in Piaget's account of moral judgment girls get four entries in the index and boys get none because to Piaget, "child" is *assumed* to be male. In the articles that follow, we will see feminists at work dissecting love and sexual behavior. This is the best way to get a feeling for feminism. They will argue that romantic love is a male invention; that to be free of male domination requires a special kind of existential liberation; that when properly understood, all intercourse is rape; that heterosexuality is just cultural happenstance; and that gender can be chosen. Two feminist novelists will then give their opinions on what makes perfect sex and why marriages are likely to be less than ideal from the standpoint of women.

In the chapter on sexual harassment and rape, we will also read the works of feminists. In all, we will see the gamut of feminists from those who are so very moderate in their views that many feminists do not consider them feminist at all (Roiphe on date rape) to those who seem quite extreme (Dworkin and Firestone).

ON ROMANTIC LOVE—A MALE INVENTION

To Firestone, romantic love is a male invention to oppress women. Without this kind of romantic love, she claims, our patriarchal culture would fall apart. Real romantic love, on the other hand, would be total mutual exchange. But this requires equality, something beyond our reach. Why is equality impossible to attain? Because men are in control of our culture and because of the way they are mothered. Add to this men's need to stay in control, and the result is men who cannot love the way that women would want them to love. No woman is valued for her real characteristics, as Plato would have required for true love. The result of mothering, according to Firestone, is that in order to love a woman, a man has to see that woman as better in an abstract way because men see particular women as inferior to men. To men, love is only ownership and control. Firestone asks, but only rhetorically, "Who needs it?"

Firestone depends a great deal on the psychological work of Theodore Reik. Does this strengthen or weaken her position? Perhaps other psychological theories would not support her views. Is Firestone committed, by using psychology as she does, to some sort of deterministic picture of human relationships? That is, even if she is right about the differences between how men and women "love," isn't it possible for men (and women) to change?

Are all loving relationships as Firestone characterizes them? In other words, if a man

and woman denied that their relation fitted Firestone's characterization, would this show that she was wrong, or just that the couple really did not understand their relationship?

from Love: A Feminist Critique

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A book on radical feminism that did not deal with love would be a political failure. For love, perhaps even more than childbearing, is the pivot of women's oppression today. I realize this has frightening implications: Do we want to get rid of love?

The panic felt at any threat to love is a good clue to its political significance. Another sign that love is central to any analysis of women or sex psychology is its omission from culture itself, its relegation to "personal life." (And whoever heard of logic in the bedroom?) Yes, it is portrayed in novels, even metaphysics, but in them it is described, or better, recreated, not analyzed. Love has never been *understood*, though it may have been fully *experienced*, and that experience communicated.

There is reason for this absence of analysis: *Women and Love are underpinnings. Examine them and you threaten the very structure of culture.*

The tired question "What were women doing while men created masterpieces?" deserves more than the obvious reply: Women were barred from culture, exploited in their role of mother. Or its reverse: Women had no need for paintings since they created children. Love is tied to culture in much deeper ways than that. Men were thinking, writing, and creating, because women were pouring their energy into those men; women are not creating culture because they are preoccupied with love.

That women live for love and men for work is a truism. Freud was the first to attempt to ground this dichotomy in the individual psyche: the male child, sexually rejected by the first person in his at-

ention, his mother, "sublimates" his "libido"—his reservoir of sexual (life) energies—into long-term projects, in the hope of gaining love in a more generalized form; thus he displaces his need for love into a need for recognition. This process does not occur as much in the female; most women never stop seeking direct warmth and approval.

There is also much truth in the clichés that "behind every man there is a woman," and that "women are the power behind [read: voltage in] the throne." (Male) culture was built on the love of women, and at their expense. Women provided the substance of those male masterpieces; and for millennia they have done the work, and suffered the costs, of one-way emotional relationships the benefits of which went to men and to the work of men. So if women are a parasitical class living off, and at the margins of, the male economy, the reverse too is true: *(Male) culture was (and is) parasitical, feeding on the emotional strength of women without reciprocity.*

Moreover, we tend to forget that this culture is not universal, but rather sectarian, presenting only half the spectrum. The very structure of culture itself, as we shall see, is saturated with the sexual polarity, as well as being in every degree run by, for, and in the interests of male society. But while the male half is termed all of culture, men have not forgotten there is a female "emotional" half: They live it on the sly. As the result of their battle to reject the female in themselves (the Oedipus Complex as we have explained it) they are unable to take love seriously as a cultural matter; but they can't do without it altogether. Love is the underbelly of (male) culture just as love is the weak spot of every man, bent on proving his virility in

that large male world of "travel and adventure." Women have always known how men need love, and how they deny this need. Perhaps this explains the peculiar contempt women so universally feel for men ("men are so dumb"), for they can see that men are posturing in the outside world.

I

How does this phenomenon "love" operate? Contrary to popular opinion, love is not altruistic. The initial attraction is based on curious admiration (more often today, envy and resentment) for the self-possession, the integrated unity, of the other and a wish to become part of this Self in some way (today, read: intrude or take over), to become important to that psychic balance. The self-containment of the other creates desire (read: a challenge); admiration (envy) of the other becomes a wish to incorporate (possess) its qualities. A clash of selves follows in which the individual attempts to fight off the growing hold over him of the other. Love is the final opening up to (or, surrender to the dominion of) the other. The lover demonstrates to the beloved how he himself would like to be treated. ("I tried so hard to make him fall in love with me that I fell in love with him myself.") Thus love is the height of selfishness: the self attempts to enrich itself through the absorption of another being. Love is being psychically wide-open to another. It is a situation of total emotional vulnerability. Therefore it must be not only the incorporation of the other, but an *exchange* of selves. Anything short of a mutual exchange will hurt one or the other party.

There is nothing inherently destructive about this process. A little healthy selfishness would be a refreshing change. Love between two equals would be an enrichment, each enlarging himself through the other: instead of being one, locked in the cell of himself with only his own experience and view, he could participate in the existence of another—an extra window on the world. This accounts for the bliss that successful lovers experience: Lovers are temporarily freed from the burden of isolation that every individual bears.

But bliss in love is seldom the case: For every successful contemporary love experience, for every short period of enrichment, there are ten destruc-

tive love experiences, post-love "downs" of much longer duration—often resulting in the destruction of the individual, or at least an emotional cynicism that makes it difficult or impossible ever to love again. Why should this be so, if it is not actually inherent in the love process itself?

Let's talk about love in its destructive guise—and why it gets that way, referring once more to the work of Theodore Reik. Reik's concrete observation brings him closer than many better minds to understanding the *process* of "falling in love," but he is off insofar as he confuses love as it exists in our present society with love itself. He notes that love is a reaction formation, a cycle of envy, hostility, and possessiveness: he sees that it is preceded by dissatisfaction with oneself, a yearning for something better, created by a discrepancy between the ego and the ego-ideal; that the bliss love produces is due to the resolution of this tension by the substitution, in place of one's own ego-ideal, of the other; and finally that love fades "because the other can't live up to your high ego-ideal any more than you could, and the judgment will be the harsher the higher are the claims on oneself." Thus in Reik's view love wears down just as it wound up: Dissatisfaction with oneself (whoever heard of falling in love the week one is leaving for Europe?) leads to astonishment at the other person's self-containment; to envy; to hostility; to possessive love; and back again through exactly the same process. This is the love process *today*. But why must it be this way?

Many, for example Denis de Rougemont in *Love in the Western World*, have tried to draw a distinction between romantic "falling in love" with its "false reciprocity which disguises a twin narcissism" (the Pagan Eros) and an unselfish love for the other person as that person really is (the Christian Agape). De Rougemont attributes the morbid passion of Tristan and Iseult (romantic love) to a vulgarization of specific mystical and religious currents in Western civilization.

I believe instead that *love is essentially a simple phenomenon—unless it has become complicated, corrupted, or obstructed by an unequal balance of power*. We have seen that love demands a mutual vulnerability or it turns destructive: the destructive effects of love occur only in a context of inequality. But if, as we have seen, (biological) in-

equality has always remained a constant, existing to varying degrees, then it is understandable that "romantic love" would develop. (It remains for us only to explain why it has steadily increased in Western countries since the medieval period, which we shall attempt to do in the following chapter.)

How does the sex class system based on the unequal power distribution of the biological family affect love between the sexes? In discussing Freudianism, we have gone into the psychic structuring of the individual within the family and how this organization of personality must be different for the male and the female because of their very different relationships to the mother. At present the insular interdependency of the mother/child relationship forces both male and female children into anxiety about losing the mother's love, on which they depend for physical survival. When later (Erich Fromm notwithstanding) the child learns that the mother's love is conditional, to be rewarded the child in return for approved behavior (that is, behavior in line with the mother's own values and personal ego gratification—for she is free to mold the child "creatively," however she happens to define that), the child's anxiety turns into desperation. This, coinciding with the sexual rejection of the male child by the mother, causes, as we have seen, a schizophrenia in the boy between the emotional and the physical, and in the girl, the mother's rejection, occurring for different reasons, produces an insecurity about her identity in general, creating a lifelong need for approval. (Later her lover replaces her father as a grantor of the necessary surrogate identity—she sees everything through his eyes.) Here originates the hunger for love that later sends both sexes searching in one person after the other for a state of ego security. But because of the early rejection, to the degree that it occurred, the male will be terrified of committing himself, of "opening up" and then being smashed. How this affects his sexuality we have seen: To the degree that a woman is like his mother, the incest taboo operates to restrain his total sexual/emotional commitment; for him to feel safely the kind of total response he first felt for his mother, which was rejected, he must degrade this woman so as to distinguish her from the mother. This behavior reproduced on a larger scale ex-

plains many cultural phenomena, including perhaps the ideal love-worship of chivalric times, the forerunner of modern romanticism.

Romantic idealization is partially responsible, at least on the part of men, for a peculiar characteristic of "falling" in love: the change takes place in the lover almost independently of the character of the love object. Occasionally the lover, though beside himself, sees with another rational part of his faculties that, objectively speaking, the one he loves isn't worth all this blind devotion; but he is helpless to act on this, "a slave to love." More often he fools himself entirely. But others can see what is happening ("How on earth he could love her is beyond me!"). This idealization occurs much less frequently on the part of women, as is borne out by Reik's clinical studies. A man must idealize one woman over the rest in order to justify his descent to a lower caste. Women have no such reason to idealize men—in fact, when one's life depends on one's ability to "psych" men out, such idealization may actually be dangerous—though a fear of male power in general may carry over into relationships with individual men, appearing to be the same phenomenon. But though women know to be inauthentic this male "falling in love," all women, in one way or another, require proof of it from men before they can allow themselves to love (genuinely, in their case) in return. For this idealization process acts to artificially equalize the two parties, a minimum precondition for the development of an uncorrupted love—we have seen that love requires a mutual vulnerability that is impossible to achieve in an unequal power situation. *Thus "falling in love" is no more than the process of alteration of male vision—through idealization, mystification, glorification—that renders void the woman's class inferiority.*

However, the woman knows that this idealization, which she works so hard to produce, is a lie, and that it is only a matter of time before he "sees through her." Her life is a hell, vacillating between an all-consuming need for male love and approval to raise her from her class subjection, to persistent feelings of inauthenticity when she does achieve his love. Thus her whole identity hangs in the balance of her love life. She is allowed to love herself only if a man finds her worthy of love.

But if we could eliminate the political context

of love between the sexes, would we not have some degree of idealization remaining in the love process itself? I think so. For the process occurs in the same manner whoever the love choice: the lover "opens up" to the other. Because of this fusion of egos, in which each sees and cares about the other as a new self, the beauty/character of the beloved, perhaps hidden to outsiders under layers of defenses, is revealed. "I wonder what she sees in him," then, means not only, "She is a fool, blinded with romanticism," but, "Her love has lent her x-ray vision. Perhaps we are missing something." (Note that this phrase is most commonly used about women. The equivalent phrase about *men's* slavery to love is more often something like, "She has him wrapped around her finger," she has him so "snowed" that he is the last one to see through her.) Increased sensitivity to the real, if hidden, values in the other, however, is not "blindness" or "idealization" but is, in fact, deeper vision. It is only the *false* idealization we have described above that is responsible for the destruction. Thus it is not the process of love itself that is at fault, but its *political*, i.e., unequal *power* context: the who, why, when and where of it is what makes it now such a holocaust.

II

But abstractions about love are only one more symptom of its diseased state. (As one female patient of Reik so astutely put it, "Men take love either too seriously or not seriously enough.") Let's look at it more concretely, as we now experience it in its corrupted form. Once again we shall quote from the Reikian Confessional. For if Reik's work has any value it is where he might least suspect, i.e., in his trivial feminine urge to "gossip." Here he is, justifying himself (one supposes his Super-ego is troubling him):

A has-been like myself must always be somewhere and working on something. Why should I not occupy myself with those small questions that are not often posed and yet perhaps can be answered? The "petites questions" have a legitimate place beside the great and fundamental problems of psychoanalysis.

It takes moral courage to write about certain things, as for example about a game that little girls

play in the intervals between classes. Is such a theme really worthy of a *serious* psychoanalyst who has passed his 77th year? (*Italics mine*)

And he reminds himself:

But in psychoanalysis there are no unimportant thoughts; there are only thoughts that pretend to be unimportant in order not to be told.

Thus he rationalizes what in fact may be the only valuable contribution of his work. Here are his patients of both sexes speaking for themselves about their love lives:

Women:

Later on he called me a sweet girl. . . . I didn't answer . . . what could I say? . . . but I knew I was not a sweet girl at all and that he sees me as someone I'm not.

No man can love a girl the way a girl loves a man. I can go a long time without sex, but not without love.

It's like H₂O instead of water.

I sometimes think that all men are sex-crazy and sex-starved. All they can think about when they are with a girl is going to bed with her.

Have I nothing to offer this man but this body?

I took off my dress and my bra and stretched myself out on his bed and waited. For an instant I thought of myself as an animal of sacrifice on the altar.

I don't understand the feelings of men. My husband has me. Why does he need other women? What have they got that I haven't got?

Believe me, if all wives whose husbands had affairs left them, we would only have divorced women in this country.

After my husband had quite a few affairs, I flirted with the fantasy of taking a lover. Why not? What's sauce for the gander is sauce for the goose. . . . But I was stupid as a goose: I didn't have it in me to have an extramarital affair.

I asked several people whether men also sometimes cry themselves to sleep. I don't believe it.

Men (for further illustration, see Screw):

It's not true that only the external appearance of a woman matters. The underwear is also important.

It's not difficult to make it with a girl. What's difficult is to make an end of it.

The girl asked me whether I cared for her mind. I was tempted to answer I cared more for her behind.

"Are you going already?" she said when she opened her eyes. It was a bedroom cliché whether I left after an hour or after two days.

Perhaps it's necessary to fool the woman and to pretend you love her. But why should I fool myself?

When she is sick, she turns me off. But when I'm sick she feels sorry for me and is more affectionate than usual.

It is not enough for my wife that I have to hear her talking all the time—blah, blah, blah. She also expects me to hear what she is saying.

Simone de Beauvoir said it: "The word love has by no means the same sense for both sexes, and this is one cause of the serious misunderstandings which divide them." Above I have illustrated some of the traditional differences between men and women in love that come up so frequently in parlor discussions of the "double standard," where it is generally agreed: That women are monogamous, better at loving, possessive, "clinging," more interested in (highly involved) "relationships" than in sex per se, and they confuse affection with sexual desire. That men are interested in nothing but a screw (Wham, bam, thank you Ma'am!), or else romanticize the woman ridiculously; that once sure of her, they become notorious philanderers, never satisfied; that they mistake sex for emotion. All this bears out what we have discussed—the difference in the psychosexual organizations of the two sexes, determined by the first relationship to the mother.

I draw three conclusions based on these differences:

- 1) That men can't love. (Male hormones? Women traditionally expect and accept an emotional invalidism in men that they would find intolerable in a woman.)
- 2) That women's "clinging" behavior is necessitated by their objective social situation.
- 3) That this situation has not changed significantly from what it ever was.

Men can't love. We have seen why it is that men have difficulty loving and that while men may love, they usually "fall in love"—with their own

projected image. Most often they are pounding down a woman's door one day, and thoroughly disillusioned with her the next; but it is rare for women to leave men, and then it is usually for more than ample reason.

It is dangerous to feel sorry for one's oppressor—women are especially prone to this failing—but I am tempted to do it in this case. Being unable to love is hell. This is the way it proceeds: as soon as the man feels any pressure from the other partner to commit himself, he panics and may react in one of several ways:

1) He may rush out and screw ten other women to prove that the first woman has no hold over him. If she accepts this, he may continue to see her on this basis. The other women verify his (false) freedom; periodic arguments about them keep his panic at bay. But the women are a paper tiger, for nothing very deep could be happening with them anyway; he is balancing them against each other so that none of them can get much of him. Many smart women, recognizing this to be only a safety valve on their man's anxiety, give him "a long leash." For the real issue under all the fights about other women is that the man is unable to commit himself.

2) He may consistently exhibit unpredictable behavior, standing her up frequently, being indefinite about the next date, telling her that "my work comes first," or offering a variety of other excuses. That is, though he senses her anxiety, he refuses to reassure her in any way, or even to recognize her anxiety as legitimate. For he *needs* her anxiety as a steady reminder that he is still free, that the door is not entirely closed.

3) When he *is* forced into (an uneasy) commitment, he makes her pay for it: by ogling other women in her presence, by comparing her unfavorably to past girlfriends or movie stars, by snide reminders in front of his friends that she is his "ball and chain," by calling her a "nag," a "bitch," "a shrew," or by suggesting that if he were only a bachelor he would be a lot better off. His ambivalence about women's "inferiority" comes out: by being committed to one, he has somehow made the hated female identification, which he now must repeatedly deny if he is to maintain his self-

respect in the (male) community. This steady derogation is not entirely put on: for in fact every other girl suddenly does look a lot better, he can't help feeling he has missed something—and, naturally, his woman is to blame. For he has never given up the search for the ideal; she has forced him to resign from it. Probably he will go to his grave feeling cheated, never realizing that there isn't much difference between one woman and the other, that it is the loving that *creates* the difference.

There are many variations of straining at the bit. Many men go from one casual thing to another, getting out every time it begins to get hot. And yet to live without love in the end proves intolerable to men just as it does to women. The question that remains for every normal male is, then, *how do I get someone to love me without her demanding an equal commitment in return?*

Women's "clinging" behavior is required by the objective social situation. The female response to such a situation of male hysteria at any prospect of mutual commitment was the development of subtle methods of manipulation, to force as much commitment as *could* be forced from men. Over the centuries strategies have been devised, tested, and passed on from mother to daughter in secret tête-à-têtes, passed around at "kaffeeklatsches" ("I never understand what it is women spend so much time talking about!"), or, in recent times, via the telephone. These are not trivial gossip sessions at all (as women prefer men to believe), but desperate strategies for survival. More real brilliance goes into one-hour coed telephone dialogue about men than into that same coed's four years of college study, or for that matter, than into most male political maneuvers. It is no wonder, then, that even the few women without "family obligations" always arrive exhausted at the starting line of any serious endeavor. It takes one's major energy for the best portion of one's creative years to "make a good catch," and a good part of the rest of one's life to "hold" that catch. ("To be in love can be a full-time job for a woman, like that of a profession for a man.") Women who choose to drop out of this race are choosing a life without love, something that, as we have seen, most men don't have the courage to do.

But unfortunately *The Manhunt* is character-

ized by an emotional urgency beyond this simple desire for return commitment. It is compounded by the very class reality that produced the male inability to love in the first place. In a male-run society that defines women as an inferior and parasitical class, a woman who does not achieve male approval in some form is doomed. To legitimate her existence, a woman must be *more* than woman, she must continually search for an out from her inferior definition;¹ and men are the only ones in a position to bestow on her this state of grace. But because the woman is rarely allowed to realize herself through activity in the larger (male) society—and when she is, she is seldom granted the recognition she deserves—it becomes easier to try for the recognition of one man than of many; and in fact this is exactly the choice most women make. Thus once more the phenomenon of love, good in itself, is corrupted by its class context: women must have love not only for healthy reasons but actually to validate their existence.

In addition, the continued *economic* dependence of women makes a situation of healthy love between equals impossible. Women today still live under a system of patronage: With few exceptions, they have the choice, not between either freedom or marriage, but between being either public or private property. Women who merge with a member of the ruling class can at least hope that some of his privilege will, so to speak, rub off. But women without men are in the same situation as orphans: they are a helpless sub-class lacking the protection of the powerful. This is the antithesis of freedom when they are still (negatively) defined by a class situation: for now they are in a situation of *magnified* vulnerability. To participate in one's subjection by choosing one's master often gives the illusion of free choice; but in reality a woman is never free to choose love without external motivations. For her at the present time, the two things, love and status, must remain inextricably intertwined.

Now assuming that a woman does not lose sight of these fundamental factors of her condition when she loves, she will never be able to love gratuitously, but only in exchange for security:

- 1) the emotional security which, we have seen, she is justified in demanding.

- 2) the emotional identity which she should be able to find through work and recognition, but which she is denied—thus forcing her to seek her definition through a man.
- 3) the economic class security that, in this society, is attached to her ability to “hook” a man.

Two of these three demands are invalid as conditions of “love,” but are imposed on it, weighing it down.

Thus, in their precarious political situation, women can't afford the luxury of spontaneous love. It is much too dangerous. The love and approval of men is all-important. To love thoughtlessly, before one has ensured return commitment, would endanger that approval. Here is Reik:

It finally became clear during psychoanalysis that the patient was afraid that if she should show a man she loved him, he would consider her inferior and leave her.

For once a woman plunges in emotionally, she will be helpless to play the necessary games: her love would come first, demanding expression. To pretend a coolness she does not feel, *then*, would be too painful, and further, it would be pointless: she would be cutting off her nose to spite her face, for freedom to love is what she was aiming for. But in order to guarantee such a commitment, she *must* restrain her emotions, she *must* play games. For, as we have seen, men do not commit themselves to mutual openness and vulnerability until they are forced to.

How does she then go about forcing this commitment from the male? One of her most potent weapons is sex—she can work him up to a state of physical torment with a variety of games: by denying his need, by teasing it, by giving and taking it back, by jealousy, and so forth. A woman under analysis wonders why:

There are few women who never ask themselves on certain occasions “How hard should I make it for a man?” I think no man is troubled with questions of this kind. He perhaps asks himself only, “When will she give in?”

Men are right when they complain that women lack discrimination, that they seldom love a man for his individual traits but rather for what he has to offer (his class), that they are calculating, that

they use sex to gain other ends, etc. For in fact women are in no position to love freely. If a woman is lucky enough to find “a decent guy” to love her and support her, she is doing well—and usually will be grateful enough to return his love. About the only discrimination women *are* able to exercise is the choice between the men who have chosen them, or a playing off of one male, one power, against the other. But *provoking* a man's interest, and *snaring* his commitment once he has expressed that interest, is not exactly self-determination.

Now what happens after she has finally hooked her man, after he has fallen in love with her and will do anything? She has a new set of problems. Now she can release the vise, open her net, and examine what she has caught. Usually she is disappointed. It is nothing she would have bothered with were *she* a man. It is usually way below her level. (Check this out sometime: Talk to a few of those mousy wives.) “He may be a poor thing, but at least I've got a man of my own” is usually more the way she feels. But at least now she can drop her act. For the first time it is safe to love—now she must try like hell to catch up to him emotionally, to really mean what she has pretended all along. Often she is troubled by worries that he will find her out. She feels like an impostor. She is haunted by fears that he doesn't love the “real” her—and usually she is right. (“She wanted to marry a man with whom she could be as bitchy as she really is.”)

This is just about when she discovers that love and marriage mean a different thing for a male than they do for her. Though men in general believe women in general to be inferior, every man has reserved a special place in his mind for the one woman he will elevate above the rest by virtue of association with himself. Until now the woman, out in the cold, begged for his approval, dying to clamber onto this clean well-lighted place. But once there, she realizes that she was elevated above other women not in recognition of her real value, but only because she matched nicely his store-bought pedestal. Probably he doesn't even know who she is (if indeed by this time she herself knows). He has let her in not because he genuinely loved her, but only because she played so well into his preconceived fantasies. Though she knew his

love to be false, since she herself engineered it, she can't help feeling contempt for him. But she is afraid, at first, to reveal her true self, for then perhaps even that false love would go. And finally she understands that for him, too, marriage had all kinds of motivations that had nothing to do with love. She was merely the one closest to his fantasy image: she has been named Most Versatile Actress for the multi-role of Alter Ego, Mother of My Children, Housekeeper, Cook, Companion, in *his* play. She has been bought to fill an empty space in his life; but her life is nothing.

So she has not saved herself from being like other women. She is lifted out of that class only because she now is an appendage of a member of the master class; and he cannot associate with her unless he raises her status. But she has not been freed, she has been promoted to "house-n[redacted]" she has been elevated only to be used in a different way. She feels cheated. She has gotten not love and recognition, but possession and control. This is when she is transformed from Blushing Bride to Bitch, a change that, no matter how universal and predictable, still leaves the individual husband perplexed. ("You're not the girl I married.")

The situation of women has not changed significantly from what it ever was. For the past fifty years women have been in a double bind about love: under the guise of a "sexual revolution," presumed to have occurred ("Oh, c'mon Baby, where have you *been*? Haven't you heard of the sexual revolution?"), women have been persuaded to shed their armor. The modern woman is in horror of being thought a bitch, where her grandmother expected that to happen as the natural course of things. Men, too, in her grandmother's time, expected that any self-respecting woman would keep *them* waiting, would play all the right games without shame: a woman who did not guard her own interests in this way was not respected. It was out in the open.

But the rhetoric of the sexual revolution, if it brought no improvements for women, proved to have great value for men. By convincing women that the usual female games and demands were despicable, unfair, prudish, old-fashioned, puritanical, and self-destructive, a new reservoir of avail-

able females was created to expand the tight supply of goods available for traditional sexual exploitation, disarming women of even the little protection they had so painfully acquired. Women today dare not make the old demands for fear of having a whole new vocabulary, designed just for this purpose, hurled at them: "fucked up," "ball-breaker," "cockteaser," "a real drag," "a bad trip,"—to be a "groovy chick" is the ideal.

Even now many women know what's up and avoid the trap, preferring to be called names rather than be cheated out of the little they can hope for from men (for it is still true that even the hippest want an "old lady" who is relatively unused). But more and more women are sucked into the trap, only to find out too late, and bitterly, that the traditional female games had a point; they are shocked to catch themselves at thirty complaining in a vocabulary dangerously close to the old I've-been-used-men-are-wolves-they're-all-bastards variety. Eventually they are forced to acknowledge the old-wives' truth: a fair and generous woman is (at best) respected, but seldom loved. Here is a description, still valid today, of the "emancipated" woman—in this case a Greenwich Village artist of the thirties—from *Mosquitoes*, an early Faulkner novel:

She had always had trouble with her men. . . . Sooner or later they always ran out on her. . . . Men she recognized as having potentialities all passed through a violent but temporary period of interest which ceased as abruptly as it began, without leaving even the lingering threads of mutually remembered incidence, like those brief thunderstorms of August that threaten and dissolve for no apparent reason without producing any rain.

At times she speculated with almost masculine detachment on the reason for this. She always tried to keep their relationships on the plane which the men themselves seemed to prefer—certainly no woman would, and few women could, demand less of their men than she did. She never made arbitrary demands on their time, never caused them to wait for her nor to see her home at inconvenient hours, never made them fetch and carry for her; she fed them and flattered herself that she was a good listener. And yet—She thought of the women she knew; how all of them

had at least one obviously entranced male; she thought of the women she had observed; how they seemed to acquire a man at will, and if he failed to stay acquired, how readily they replaced him.

Women of high ideals who believed emancipation possible, women who tried desperately to rid themselves of feminine "hangups," to cultivate what they believed to be the greater directness, honesty, and generosity of men, were badly fooled. They found that no one appreciated their intelligent conversation, their high aspirations, their great sacrifices to avoid developing the personalities of their mothers. For much as men were glad to enjoy their wit, their style, their sex, and their candlelight suppers, they always ended up marrying *The Bitch*, and then, to top it all off, came back to complain of what a horror she was. "Emancipated" women found out that the honesty, generosity, and camaraderie of men was a lie: men were all too glad to use them and then sell them out, in the name of *true* friendship. ("I respect and like you a great deal, but let's be reasonable. . . .") And then there are the men who take her out to discuss Simone de Beauvoir, leaving their wives at home with the diapers.) "Emancipated" women found out that men were far from "good guys" to be emulated; they found out that by imitating male sexual patterns (the roving eye, the search for the ideal, the emphasis on physical attraction, etc.), they were not only achieving liberation, they were falling into something much worse than what they had given up. They were *imitating*. And they had inoculated themselves with a sickness that had not even sprung from their own psyches. They found that their new "cool" was shallow and meaningless, that their emotions were drying up behind it, that they were aging and becoming decadent: they feared they were losing their ability to love. They had gained nothing by imitating men: shallowness and callowness, and they were not so good at it either, because somewhere inside it still went against the grain.

Thus women who had decided not to marry because they were wise enough to look around and see where it led found that it was marry or nothing. Men gave their commitment only for a price: share (shoulder) his life, stand on his pedestal, become his appendage, or else. Or else—be consigned forever to that limbo of "chicks" who mean

nothing or at least not what mother meant. Be the "other woman" the rest of one's life, used to provoke his wife, prove his virility and/or his independence, discussed by his friends as his latest "interesting" conquest. (For even if she had given up those terms and what they stood for, no male had.) Yes, love means an entirely different thing to men than to women: it means ownership and control; it means jealousy, where he never exhibited it before—when she might have wanted him to (who cares if she is broke or raped until she officially belongs to him: then he is a raging dynamo, a veritable cyclone, because his property, his ego extension have been threatened); it means a growing lack of interest, coupled with a roving eye. Who needs it?

Sadly, women do. Here are Reik's patients once more:

She sometimes has delusions of not being persecuted by men anymore. At those times of her non-persecution mania she is very depressed.

And:

All men are selfish, brutal and inconsiderate—and I wish I could find one.

We have seen that a woman needs love, first, for its natural enriching function, and second, for social and economic reasons which have nothing to do with love. To deny her need is to put herself in an extra-vulnerable spot socially and economically, as well as to destroy her emotional equilibrium, which, unlike most men's, is basically healthy. Are men worth that? Decidedly no. Most women feel that to do such tailspins for a man would be to add insult to injury. They go on as before, making the best of a bad situation. If it gets *too* bad, they head for a (male) shrink:

A young woman patient was once asked during a psychoanalytic consultation whether she preferred to see a man or woman psychoanalyst. Without the slightest hesitation she said, "A woman psychoanalyst because I am too eager for the approval of a man."

Note

1. Thus the peculiar situation that women never object to the insulting of women as a class, *as long as* they individually are excepted. The worst insult for a woman is that she is "just

like a woman," i.e., no better; the highest compliment that she has the brains, talent, dignity, or strength of a man. In fact, like every member of an oppressed class, she herself participates in the insulting of others like herself, hoping thereby to make it obvious that *she* as an individual is above their behavior. Thus

women as a class are set against each other ["Divide and Conquer"], the "other woman" believing that the wife is a "bitch" who "doesn't understand him," and the wife believing that the other woman is an "opportunist" who is "taking advantage" of him—while the culprit himself sneaks away free.

Our next author, Simone de Beauvoir, will give a much more philosophically extended account of how male-dominated culture has enforced inferiority on women.

ON LIBERATION—EXISTENTIAL ETHICS NEEDED

De Beauvoir points out that dualities such as man/woman lead to conflict and an ultimate winner. She asks, why should man have won? Why should women be seen as "the other"? Her answer: To facilitate winning and to stay the winner, men try to portray women as being inherently inferior. They point out that the inherency is either due to biology or to God's will. Involving religion is no surprise because religions as we know them have been invented by men and are for men. The appeal to biology, and science in general, is also one of vested self-interest by men. It is only to be expected that biology (biologists are men) shows that women are inferior. De Beauvoir points up the similarities between antifeminist views and racism and anti-Semitism. Of course, there were slave holders who valued their slaves and treated the good ones well. But what was it to be a good slave? It was to be submissive to another basically out of fear. It was to live as "the Other." To put someone in this position is unfair and immoral. De Beauvoir asks, "Should this continue?"

Naturally, just about all men hope that it will. The more unsure of himself, the more a man will appreciate the subjugation of women. Men are two-faced. In a situation where they feel comfortable with women, men stress the principle of abstract equality. But just let a woman be in a position to compete, then men begin to stress the differences between men and women. (How does this square with Firestone's idea that men can love only an abstract woman?) The differences are not just differences, they are points of inferiorities. De Beauvoir emphasizes the fact that men have insisted that women are unfit for the professions.

If there are any such inferiorities between men and women, de Beauvoir makes it plain that they are almost certainly due to social discrimination and not to inherent biological differences. This is another way of saying that the differences we see are due to nurture and not nature. De Beauvoir rejects the traditional arguments of both feminists and antifeminists. She wants a fresh start.

De Beauvoir suggests that some women are trustworthy when it comes to making the case for feminism. These trustworthy women are those who are freed from subjugation but still able to empathize with their roots as women—in a way that no man could. Such women realize that the best way to ensure true equality of the sexes is to establish social institutions which are just and fair. The mark of such institutions will be positions for women where growth and change are called for. This growth will not itself create happiness. Happiness, de Beauvoir points out, is often stagnation.

De Beauvoir calls for an existentialist ethics. This means a way of life that allows for total self-determination, which is the meaning of true freedom. One should reach out for new opportunities and make choices. In doing so, one has the possibility of making mistakes that are painful and wrenching. But without this, there is nothing. Doing this results in what she terms *transcendence*. Not doing this results in what she terms *immanence*. She

puts the question this way: There is a tension between happiness and liberty. She says, Choose liberty.

Naturally, this is not a possible choice if there is no free will. (There could be no true choice if there were no free will.) If women (and men) were nothing more than their biology acting according to strict laws, then liberty, as de Beauvoir defines it, would be impossible.

from The Second Sex

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

Legislators, priests, philosophers, writers, and scientists have striven to show that the subordinate position of woman is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth. The religions invented by men reflect this wish for domination. In the legends of Eve and Pandora men have taken up arms against women. They have made use of philosophy and theology, as the quotations from Aristotle and St. Thomas have shown. Since ancient times satirists and moralists have delighted in showing up the weaknesses of women. We are familiar with the savage indictments hurled against women throughout French literature. Montherlant, for example, follows the tradition of Jean de Meung, though with less gusto. This hostility may at times be well founded, often it is gratuitous; but in truth it more or less successfully conceals a desire for self-justification. As Montaigne says, "It is easier to accuse one sex than to excuse the other." Sometimes what is going on is clear enough. For instance, the Roman law limiting the rights of woman cited "the imbecility, the instability of the sex" just when the weakening of family ties seemed to threaten the interests of male heirs. And in the effort to keep the married woman under guardianship, appeal was made in the sixteenth century to the authority of St. Augustine, who declared that "woman is a creature neither decisive nor constant," at a time when the single woman was thought capable of managing her property. Montaigne understood clearly how arbitrary and unjust was woman's appointed lot: "Women are not in the wrong when they decline to accept the rules laid down for them,

since the men make these rules without consulting them. No wonder intrigue and strife abound." But he did not go so far as to champion their cause.

It was only later, in the eighteenth century, that genuinely democratic men began to view the matter objectively. Diderot, among others, strove to show that woman is, like man, a human being. Later John Stuart Mill came fervently to her defense. But these philosophers displayed unusual impartiality. In the nineteenth century the feminist quarrel became again a quarrel of partisans. One of the consequences of the industrial revolution was the entrance of women into productive labor, and it was just here that the claims of the feminists emerged from the realm of theory and acquired an economic basis, while their opponents became the more aggressive. Although landed property lost power to some extent, the bourgeoisie clung to the old morality that found the guarantee of private property in the solidity of the family. Woman was ordered back into the home the more harshly as her emancipation became a real menace. Even within the working class the men endeavored to restrain woman's liberation, because they began to see the women as dangerous competitors—the more so because they were accustomed to work for lower wages.¹

In proving woman's inferiority, the antifeminists then began to draw not only upon religion, philosophy, and theology, as before, but also upon science—biology, experimental psychology, etc. At most they were willing to grant "equality in difference" to the *other* sex. That profitable formula

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is most significant; it is precisely like the "equal but separate" formula of the Jim Crow laws aimed at the North American Negroes. As is well known, this so-called equalitarian segregation has resulted only in the most extreme discrimination. The similarity just noted is in no way due to chance, for whether it is a race, a caste, a class, or a sex that is reduced to a position of inferiority, the methods of justification are the same. "The eternal feminine" corresponds to "the black soul" and to "the Jewish character." True, the Jewish problem is on the whole very different from the other two—to the anti-Semite the Jew is not so much an inferior as he is an enemy for whom there is to be granted no place on earth, for whom annihilation is the fate desired. But there are deep similarities between the situation of woman and that of the Negro. Both are being emancipated today from a like paternalism, and the former master class wishes to "keep them in their place"—that is, the place chosen for them. In both cases the former masters lavish more or less sincere eulogies, either on the virtues of "the good Negro" with his dormant, childish, merry soul—the submissive Negro—or on the merits of the woman who is "truly feminine"—that is, frivolous, infantile, irresponsible—the submissive woman. In both cases the dominant class bases its argument on a state of affairs that it has itself created. As George Bernard Shaw puts it, in substance, "The American white relegates the black to the rank of shoeshine boy; and he concludes from this that the black is good for nothing but shining shoes." This vicious circle is met with in all analogous circumstances; when an individual (or a group of individuals) is kept in a situation of inferiority, the fact is that he is inferior. But the significance of the verb *to be* must be rightly understood here; it is in bad faith to give it a static value when it really has the dynamic Hegelian sense of "to have become." Yes, women on the whole are today inferior to men; that is, their situation affords them fewer possibilities. The question is: should that state of affairs continue?

Many men hope that it will continue; not all have given up the battle. The conservative bourgeoisie still see in the emancipation of women a menace to their morality and their interests. Some men dread feminine competition. Recently a male student wrote in the *Hebdo-Latin*: "Every woman

student who goes into medicine or law robs us of a job." He never questioned his rights in this world. And economic interests are not the only ones concerned. One of the benefits that oppression confers upon the oppressors is that the most humble among them is made to *feel* superior; thus, a "poor white" in the South can console himself with the thought that he is not a "dirty n[]"—and the more prosperous whites cleverly exploit this pride.

Similarly, the most mediocre of males feels himself a demigod as compared with women. It was much easier for M. de Montherlant to think himself a hero when he faced women (and women chosen for his purpose) than when he was obliged to act the man among men—something many women have done better than he, for that matter. And in September 1948, in one of his articles in the *Figaro littéraire*, Claude Mauriac—whose great originality is admired by all—could² write regarding woman: "We listen on a tone [*sic!*] of polite indifference . . . to the most brilliant among them, well knowing that her wit reflects more or less luminously ideas that come from *us*." Evidently the speaker referred to is not reflecting the ideas of Mauriac himself, for no one knows of his having any. It may be that she reflects ideas originating with men, but then, even among men there are those who have been known to appropriate ideas not their own; and one can well ask whether Claude Mauriac might not find more interesting a conversation reflecting Descartes, Marx, or Gide rather than himself. What is really remarkable is that by using the questionable *we* he identifies himself with St. Paul, Hegel, Lenin, and Nietzsche, and from the lofty eminence of their grandeur looks down disdainfully upon the bevy of women who make bold to converse with him on a footing of equality. In truth, I know of more than one woman who would refuse to suffer with patience Mauriac's "tone of polite indifference."

I have lingered on this example because the masculine attitude is here displayed with disarming ingenuousness. But men profit in many more subtle ways from the otherness, the alterity of woman. Here is miraculous balm for those afflicted with an inferiority complex, and indeed no one is more arrogant toward women, more aggressive or scornful, than the man who is anxious

about his virility. Those who are not fear-ridden in the presence of their fellow men are much more disposed to recognize a fellow creature in woman; but even to these the myth of Woman, the Other, is precious for many reasons.³ They cannot be blamed for not cheerfully relinquishing all the benefits they derive from the myth, for they realize what they would lose in relinquishing woman as they fancy her to be, while they fail to realize what they have to gain from the woman of tomorrow. Refusal to pose oneself as the Subject, unique and absolute, requires great self-denial. Furthermore, the vast majority of men make no such claim explicitly. They do not *postulate* woman as inferior, for today they are too thoroughly imbued with the ideal of democracy not to recognize all human beings as equals.

In the bosom of the family, woman seems in the eyes of childhood and youth to be clothed in the same social dignity as the adult males. Later on, the young man, desiring and loving, experiences the resistance, the independence of the woman desired and loved; in marriage, he respects woman as wife and mother, and in the concrete events of conjugal life she stands there before him as a free being. He can therefore feel that social subordination as between the sexes no longer exists and that on the whole, in spite of differences, woman is an equal. As, however, he observes some points of inferiority—the most important being unfitness for the professions—he attributes these to natural causes. When he is in a co-operative and benevolent relation with woman, his theme is the principle of abstract equality, and he does not base his attitude upon such inequality as may exist. But when he is in conflict with her, the situation is reversed: his theme will be the existing inequality, and he will even take it as justification for denying abstract equality.⁴

So it is that many men will affirm as if in good faith that women *are* the equals of man and that they have nothing to clamor for, while *at the same time* they will say that women can never be the equals of man and that their demands are in vain. It is, in point of fact, a difficult matter for man to realize the extreme importance of social discriminations which seem outwardly insignificant but which produce in woman moral and intellectual effects so profound that they appear to spring from

her original nature.⁵ The most sympathetic of men never fully comprehend woman's concrete situation. And there is no reason to put much trust in the men when they rush to the defense of privileges whose full extent they can hardly measure. We shall not, then, permit ourselves to be intimidated by the number and violence of the attacks launched against women, nor to be entrapped by the self-seeking eulogies bestowed on the "true woman," nor to profit by the enthusiasm for woman's destiny manifested by men who would not for the world have any part of it.

We should consider the arguments of the feminists with no less suspicion, however, for very often their controversial aim deprives them of all real value. If the "woman question" seems trivial, it is because masculine arrogance has made of it a "quarrel"; and when quarreling one no longer reasons well. People have tirelessly sought to prove that woman is superior, inferior, or equal to man. Some say that, having been created after Adam, she is evidently a secondary being; others say on the contrary that Adam was only a rough draft and that God succeeded in producing the human being in perfection when He created Eve. Woman's brain is smaller; yes, but it is relatively larger. Christ was made a man; yes, but perhaps for his greater humility. Each argument at once suggests its opposite, and both are often fallacious. If we are to gain understanding, we must get out of these ruts; we must discard the vague notions of superiority, inferiority, equality which have hitherto corrupted every discussion of the subject and start afresh.

Very well, but just how shall we pose the question? And, to begin with, who are we to propound it at all? Man is at once judge and party to the case; but so is woman. What we need is an angel—neither man nor woman—but where shall we find one? Still, the angel would be poorly qualified to speak, for an angel is ignorant of all the basic facts involved in the problem. With a hermaphrodite we should be no better off, for here the situation is most peculiar; the hermaphrodite is not really the combination of a whole man and a whole woman, but consists of parts of each and thus is neither. It looks to me as if there are, after all, certain women who are best qualified to elucidate the situation of woman. Let us not be misled by the sophism that because Epimenides was a Cretan he was neces-

sarily a liar; it is not a mysterious essence that compels men and women to act in good or in bad faith, it is their situation that inclines them more or less toward the search for truth. Many of today's women, fortunate in the restoration of all the privileges pertaining to the estate of the human being, can afford the luxury of impartiality—we even recognize its necessity. We are no longer like our partisan elders; by and large we have won the game. In recent debates on the status of women the United Nations has persistently maintained that the equality of the sexes is now becoming a reality, and already some of us have never had to sense in our femininity an inconvenience or an obstacle. Many problems appear to us to be more pressing than those which concern us in particular, and this detachment even allows us to hope that our attitude will be objective. Still, we know the feminine world more intimately than do the men because we have our roots in it, we grasp more immediately than do men what it means to a human being to be feminine; and we are more concerned with such knowledge. I have said that there are more pressing problems, but this does not prevent us from seeing some importance in asking how the fact of being women will affect our lives. What opportunities precisely have been given us and what withheld? What fate awaits our younger sisters, and what directions should they take? It is significant that books by women on women are in general animated in our day less by a wish to demand our rights than by an effort toward clarity and understanding. As we emerge from an era of excessive controversy, this book is offered as one attempt among others to confirm that statement.

But it is doubtless impossible to approach any human problem with a mind free from bias. The way in which questions are put, the points of view assumed, presuppose a relativity of interest; all characteristics imply values, and every objective description, so called, implies an ethical background. Rather than attempt to conceal principles more or less definitely implied, it is better to state them openly at the beginning. This will make it unnecessary to specify on every page in just what sense one uses such words as *superior*, *inferior*, *better*, *worse*, *progress*, *reaction*, and the like. If we survey some of the works on woman, we note that one of the points of view most frequently

adopted is that of the public good, the general interest; and one always means by this the benefit of society as one wishes it to be maintained or established. For our part, we hold that the only public good is that which assures the private good of the citizens; we shall pass judgment on institutions according to their effectiveness in giving concrete opportunities to individuals. But we do not confuse the idea of private interest with that of happiness, although that is another common point of view. Are not women of the harem more happy than women voters? Is not the housekeeper happier than the workingwoman? It is not too clear just what the word *happy* really means and still less what true values it may mask. There is no possibility of measuring the happiness of others, and it is always easy to describe as happy the situation in which one wishes to place them.

In particular those who are condemned to stagnation are often pronounced happy on the pretext that happiness consists in being at rest. This notion we reject, for our perspective is that of existentialist ethics. Every subject plays his part as such specifically through exploits or projects that serve as a mode of transcendence; he achieves liberty only through a continual reaching out toward other liberties. There is no justification for present existence other than its expansion into an indefinitely open future. Every time transcendence falls back into immanence, stagnation, there is a degradation of existence into the "*en-soi*"—the brutish life of subjection to given conditions—and of liberty into constraint and contingency. This downfall represents a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if it is inflicted upon him, it spells frustration and oppression. In both cases it is an absolute evil. Every individual concerned to justify his existence feels that his existence involves an undefined need to transcend himself, to engage in freely chosen projects.

Now, what peculiarly signalizes the situation of woman is that she—a free and autonomous being like all human creatures—nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other. They propose to stabilize her as object and to doom her to immanence since her transcendence is to be overshadowed and forever transcended by another ego (*conscience*) which is essential and sovereign. The drama of

woman lies in this conflict between the fundamental aspirations of every subject (ego)—who always regards the self as the essential—and the compulsions of a situation in which she is the inessential. How can a human being in woman's situation attain fulfillment? What roads are open to her? Which are blocked? How can independence be recovered in a state of dependency? What circumstances limit woman's liberty and how can they be overcome? These are the fundamental questions on which I would fain throw some light. This means that I am interested in the fortunes of the individual as defined not in terms of happiness but in terms of liberty.

Quite evidently this problem would be without significance if we were to believe that woman's destiny is inevitably determined by physiological, psychological, or economic forces. Hence I shall discuss first of all the light in which woman is viewed by biology, psychoanalysis, and historical materialism. Next I shall try to show exactly how the concept of the "truly feminine" has been fashioned—why woman has been defined as the Other—and what have been the consequences from man's point of view. Then from woman's point of view I

shall describe the world in which women must live; and thus we shall be able to envisage the difficulties in their way as, endeavoring to make their escape from the sphere hitherto assigned them, they aspire to full membership in the human race.

Notes

1. See Part II, pp. 115–17.

2. Or at least he thought he could.

3. A significant article on this theme by Michel Carrouges appeared in No. 292 of the *Cahiers du Sud*. He writes indignantly: "Would that there were no woman-myth at all but only a cohort of cooks, matrons, prostitutes, and bluestockings serving functions of pleasure or usefulness!" That is to say, in his view woman has no existence in and for herself; he thinks only of her *function* in the male world. Her reason for existence lies in man. But then, in fact, her poetic "function" as a myth might be more valued than any other. The real problem is precisely to find out why woman should be defined with relation to man.

4. For example, a man will say that he considers his wife in no wise degraded because she has no gainful occupation. The profession of housewife is just as lofty, and so on. But when the first quarrel comes, he will exclaim: "Why, you couldn't make your living without me!"

5. The specific purpose of Book II of this study is to describe this process.

Andrea Dworkin also makes a call for freedom. But for her, freedom means a totally new approach to sex and sexuality. Her philosophical view of sexual intercourse is one that de Beauvoir would almost certainly reject.

ON THE IMMORALITY OF INTERCOURSE

Dworkin would be classified as a radical feminist. To her, all intercourse is consorting with the enemy. A woman's vagina is unique biologically, psychologically, and philosophically. Men have nothing at all like it. The vagina represents a woman's personal space and personal identity.

The act of intercourse requires that this space be entered, penetrated, and occupied; as a result, privacy is impossible. Men, however, consider sexual penetration as appropriate and thus never see it as an intrinsic violation of privacy. In fact, a woman who remains celibate (for whatever reason) is thought to have repudiated sex—as if having sexual intercourse is the norm; as if the repudiation is deviant. It is as if someone decided to give up eating. What this comes down to is that for women to be used and abused are one in the same thing. It is no wonder, then, that women are seen as less than fully human.

Dworkin asks—playing on the occupation metaphor—how can an occupied people ever be free? What she is saying is that women cannot be free until they give up sexual intercourse. Of course, it is easy to claim that this is all overstated. Intercourse is private busi-

ness, not really so metaphysical, great fun, and part of growing up and having lovers. Dworkin dismisses these defenses with a rhetorical flourish when she says that they are slight of hand and meant to divert from the real issue: women's freedom and equality. She also counters these defenses with facts.

If we can believe *The Hite Report*, most women do not experience orgasm through sexual intercourse. Dworkin quotes Hite, who says that to own one's body, to be truly autonomous, is best shown by the ability to have an orgasm when one so desires. (This is what Robert Solomon would characterize as a liberal American myth about sex.) Part of the reason (many) women cannot achieve orgasm through sexual intercourse is that intercourse represents and expresses the domination of men over women as well as hostility and anger. In the chapter on sexual harassment and rape, we will be reminded that according to many researchers, rape is motivated precisely by these sorts of factors. Also, because of the dominance of men over women, many women use sex as a way to barter for some extra power. This demeans women, if only in some unconscious manner.

To those feminists who write of enlightened intercourse that would not express dominance, Dworkin replies that this is a dream. In real life, men will not relinquish either their power or their way of using women sexually. Again, appealing to the occupation metaphor, Dworkin interprets intercourse as men violating women, an enemy they hate and conquer symbolically through sexual intercourse. She suggests that romance, love, and pleasurable sex are stories told by women who desperately seek meaning for their experiences—in the way that many Holocaust survivors have sought to find meaning in their horrific experiences.

Dworkin closes with the following points. Biologically, women have nothing that is really like "heat" in animals. What this should be taken to mean is that women are never ready, that is, available, for intercourse. In other contexts, feminists rail against the idea that anatomy is destiny, yet when it comes to sex, it is so hard to reject the idea that just because there is a space into which a penis can fit, that is the way sex ought to be had.

from Intercourse

ANDREA DWORKIN

Women have wanted intercourse to work and have submitted—with regret or with enthusiasm, real or faked—even though or even when it does not. The reasons have often been foul, filled with the spiteful but carefully hidden malice of the powerless. Women have needed what can be gotten through intercourse: the economic and psychological survival; access to male power through access to the male who has it; having some hold—psychological, sexual, or economic—on the ones who act, who decide, who matter. There has been a deep,

consistent, yet of course muted objection to what Anaïs Nin has called "[t]he hunter, the rapist, the one for whom sexuality is a thrust, nothing more."³ Women have also wanted intercourse to work in this sense: women have wanted intercourse to be, for women, an experience of equality and passion, sensuality and intimacy. Women have a vision of love that includes men as human too; and women want the human in men, including in the act of intercourse. Even without the dignity of equal power, women have believed in the redeeming potential of

love. There has been—despite the cruelty of exploitation and forced sex—a consistent vision for women of a sexuality based on a harmony that is both sensual and possible. In the words of sex reformer Ellen Key:

She will no longer be captured like a fortress or hunted like a quarry; now will she like a placid lake await the stream that seeks its way to her embrace. A stream herself, she will go her own way to meet the other stream.⁴

A stream herself, she would move over the earth, sensual and equal; especially, she will go her own way.

Shere Hite has suggested an intercourse in which “thrusting would not be considered as necessary as it now is . . . [There might be] more a mutual lying together in pleasure, penis-in-vagina, vagina-covering-penis, with female orgasm providing much of the stimulation necessary for male orgasm.”⁵

These visions of a humane sensuality based in equality are in the aspirations of women; and even the nightmare of sexual inferiority does not seem to kill them. They are not searching analyses into the nature of intercourse; instead they are deep, humane dreams that repudiate the rapist as the final arbiter of reality. They are an underground resistance to both inferiority and brutality, visions that sustain life and further endurance.

They also do not amount to much in real life with real men. There is, instead, the cold fucking, duty-bound or promiscuous; the romantic obsession in which eventual abandonment turns the vagina into the wound Freud claimed it was; intimacy with men who dread women, coital dread—as Kafka wrote in his diary, “coitus as punishment for the happiness of being together.”⁶

Fear, too, has a special power to change experience and compromise any possibility of freedom. A stream does not know fear. A woman does. Especially women know fear of men and of forced intercourse. Consent in this world of fear is so passive that the woman consenting could be dead and sometimes is. “Yeah,” said one man who killed a woman so that he could fuck her after she was dead, “I sexually assaulted her after she was dead. I always see them girls laid out in the pictures with their eyes closed and I just had to do it. I dreamed about it for so long that I just had to do it.”⁷ A Ne-

braska appeals court did not think that the murder “was especially heinous, atrocious, cruel, or manifested exceptional depravity by ordinary standards of morality and intelligence,” and in particular they found “no evidence the acts were performed for the satisfaction of inflicting either mental or physical pain or that pain existed for any prolonged period of time.”⁸ Are you afraid now? How can fear and freedom coexist for women in intercourse?

The role of fear in destroying the integrity of men is easy to articulate, to understand, hard to overstate. Men are supposed to conquer fear in order to experience freedom. Men are humiliated by fear, not only in their masculinity but in their rights and freedoms. Men are diminished by fear; compromised irrevocably by it because freedom is diminished by it. “Fear had entered his life,” novelist Iris Murdoch wrote,

and would now be with him forever. How easy it was for the violent to win. Fear was irresistible, fear was king, he had never really known this before when he had lived free and without it. Even unreasoning fear could cripple a man forever. . . . How well he understood how dictators flourished. The little grain of fear in each life was enough to keep millions quiet.⁹

Hemingway, using harder prose, wrote the same in book after book. But women are supposed to treasure the little grain of fear—rub up against it—eroticize it, want it, get excited by it; and the fear could and does keep millions quiet: millions of women; being fucked and silent; upright and silent; waiting and silent; rolled over on and silent; pursued and silent; killed, fucked, and silent. The silence is taken to be appropriate. The fear is not perceived as compromising or destroying freedom. The dictators do flourish: fuck and flourish.

Out of fear and inequality, women hide, use disguises, trying to pass for indigenous peoples who have a right to be there, even though we cannot pass. Appropriating Octavio Paz’s description of the behavior of Mexicans in Los Angeles—which he might not like: “they feel ashamed of their origin . . . they act like persons who are wearing disguises, who are afraid of a stranger’s look because it could strip them and leave them stark naked.”¹⁰ Women hide, use disguises, because fear

has compromised freedom; and when a woman has intercourse—not hiding, dropping the disguise—she has no freedom because her very being has been contaminated by fear: a grain, a tidal wave, memory or anticipation.

The fear is fear of power and fear of pain: the child looks at the slit with a mirror and wonders how it can be, how will she be able to stand the pain. The culture romanticizes the rapist dimension of the first time: he will force his way in and hurt her. The event itself is supposed to be so distinct, so entirely unlike any other experience or category of sensation, that there is no conception that intercourse can be part of sex, including the first time, instead of sex itself. There is no slow opening up, no slow, gradual entry; no days and months of sensuality prior to entry and no nights and hours after entry. Those who learn to eroticize powerlessness will learn to eroticize the entry itself: the pushing in, the thrusting, the fact of entry with whatever force or urgency the act requires or the man enjoys. There is virtually no protest about entry as such from women; virtually no satire from men. A fairly formidable character in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, the wife, agrees to read pornography to her husband but she has one condition:

"I will read," she said. "But I don't want you to choose anything that has men inside women, quote-quote, or men entering women. 'I entered her.' 'He entered me.' We're not lobbies or elevators. 'I wanted him inside me,' as if he could crawl completely in, sign the register, sleep, eat, so forth. I don't care what these people do as long as they don't enter or get entered."

"Agreed."

"I entered her and began to thrust."

"I'm in total agreement," I said.

"Enter me, enter me, yes, yes."

"Silly usage, absolutely."

"Insert yourself, Rex, I want you inside me, entering hard, entering deep, yes, now, oh."¹¹

Her protests make him hard. The stupidity of the "he entered her" motif makes her laugh, not kindly. She hates it.

We are not, of course, supposed to be lobbies or elevators. Instead, we are supposed to be wombs, maternal ones; and the men are trying to get back

in away from all the noise and grief of being adult men with power and responsibility. The stakes for men are high, as Norman O. Brown makes clear in prose unusually understated for him:

Coitus successfully performed is incest, a return to the maternal womb; and the punishment appropriate to this crime, castration. What happens to the penis is coronation, followed by decapitation.¹²

This is high drama for a prosaic act of commonplace entry. Nothing is at risk for her, the entered; whereas he commits incest, is crowned king, and has his thing cut off. She might like to return to the maternal womb too—because life outside it is not easy for her either—but she has to be it, for husbands, lovers, adulterous neighbors, as well as her own children, boys especially. Women rarely dare, as we say, draw a line: certainly not at the point of entry into our own bodies, sometimes by those we barely know. Certainly they did not come from there, not originally, not from this womb belonging to this woman who is being fucked now. And so we have once again the generic meaning of intercourse—he has to climb back into some womb, maternal enough; he has to enter it and survive even coronation and decapitation. She is made for that; and what can it matter to him that in entering her, he is entering this one, real, unique individual.

And what is entry for her? Entry is the first acceptance in her body that she is generic, not individual; that she is one of a many that is antagonistic to the individual interpretation she might have of her own worth, purpose, or intention. Entered, she accepts her subservience to his psychological purpose if nothing else; she accepts being confused with his mother and his Aunt Mary and the little girl with whom he used to play "Doctor." Entered, she finds herself depersonalized into a function and worth less to him than he is worth to himself: because he broke through, pushed in, entered. Without him there, she is supposed to feel empty, though there is no vacuum there, not physiologically. Entered, she finds herself accused of regicide at the end. The king dead, the muscles of the vagina contract again, suggesting that this will never be easy, never be solved. Lovely Freud, of course, having discovered projection but always missing the point, wrote to Jung: "In private I have

always thought of Adonis as the penis; the woman's joy when the god she had thought dead rises again is too transparent!"¹³ Something, indeed, is too transparent; women's joy tends to be opaque.

Entered, she has mostly given something up: to Adonis, the king, the coronation, the decapitation for which she is then blamed; she has given up a dividing line between her and him. Entered, she then finds out what it is to be occupied: and sometimes the appropriate imagery is of evil and war, the great spreading evil of how soldiers enter and contaminate. In the words of Marguerite Duras, "evil is there, at the gates, against the skin."¹⁴ It spreads, like war, everywhere: "breaking in everywhere, stealing, imprisoning, always there, merged and mingled . . . a prey to the intoxicating passion of occupying that delightful territory, a child's body, the bodies of those less strong, of conquered peoples."¹⁵ She is describing an older brother she hates here ("I see wartime and the reign of my elder brother as one"¹⁶). She is not describing her lover, an older man fucking an adolescent girl. But it is from the sex that she takes the texture of wartime invasion and occupation, the visceral reality of occupation: evil up against the skin—at the point of entry, just touching the slit; then it breaks in and at the same time it surrounds everything, and those with power use the conquered who are weaker, inhabit them as territory.

Physically, the woman in intercourse is a space inhabited, a literal territory occupied literally: occupied even if there has been no resistance, no force; even if the occupied person said yes please, yes hurry, yes more. Having a line at the point of entry into your body that cannot be crossed is different from not having any such line; and being occupied in your body is different from not being occupied in your body. It is human to experience these differences whether or not one cares to bring the consequences of them into consciousness. Humans, including women, construct meaning. That means that when something happens to us, when we have experiences, we try to find in them some reason for them, some significance that they have to us or for us. Humans find meaning in poverty and tyranny and the atrocities of history; those who have suffered most still construct meaning; and those who know nothing take their ignorance as if it were a precious, rare clay and they too con-

struct meaning. In this way, humans assert that we have worth; what has happened to us matters; our time here on earth is not entirely filled with random events and spurious pain. On the contrary, we can understand some things if we try hard to learn empathy; we can seek freedom and honor and dignity; that we care about meaning gives us a human pride that has the fragility of a butterfly and the strength of tempered steel. The measure of women's oppression is that we do not take intercourse—entry, penetration, occupation—and ask or say what it means: to us as a dominated group or to us as a potentially free and self-determining people. Instead, intercourse is a loyalty test; and we are not supposed to tell the truth unless it compliments and upholds the dominant male ethos on sex. We know nothing, of course, about intercourse because we are women and women know nothing; or because what we know simply has no significance, entered into as we are. And men know everything—all of them—all the time—no matter how stupid or inexperienced or arrogant or ignorant they are. Anything men say on intercourse, any attitude they have, is valuable, knowledgeable, and deep, rooted in the cosmos and the forces of nature as it were: because they know; because fucking is knowing; because he knew her but she did not know him; because the God who does not exist framed not only sex but also knowledge that way. Women do not just lie about orgasm, faking it or saying it is not important: Women lie about life by not demanding to understand the meaning of entry, penetration, occupation, having boundaries crossed over, having lesser privacy: by avoiding the difficult, perhaps impossible (but how will we ever know?) questions of female freedom. We take oaths to truth all right, on the holy penis before entry. In so doing, we give up the most important dimension of what it means to be human: the search for the meaning of our real experience, including the sheer invention of that meaning—called creativity when men do it. If the questions make the holy penis unhappy, who could survive what the answers might do? Experience is chosen for us, then, imposed on us, especially in intercourse, *and so is its meaning*. We are allowed to have intercourse on the terms men determine, according to the rules men make. We do not have to have an orgasm; that terrible burden is on them.

We are supposed to comply whether we want to or not. *Want* is active, not passive or lethargic. Especially we are supposed to be loyal to the male meanings of intercourse, which are elaborate, dramatic, pulling in elements of both myth and tragedy: the king is dead! long live the king!—and the Emperor wears designer jeans. We have no freedom and no extravagance in the questions we can ask or the interpretations we can make. We must be loyal; and on what scale would we be able to reckon the cost of that? Male sexual discourse on the meaning of intercourse becomes our language. It is not a second language we speak, however, with perfect fluency even though it does not say what we mean or what we think we might know if only we could find the right word and enough privacy in which to articulate it even just in our own minds. We know only this one language of these folks who enter and occupy us: they keep telling us that we are different from them; yet we speak only their language and have none, or none that we remember, of our own; and we do not dare, it seems, invent one, even in signs and gestures. Our bodies speak their language. Our minds think in it. The men are inside us through and through. We hear something, a dim whisper, barely audible, somewhere at the back of the brain; there is some other word, and we think, some of us, sometimes, that once it belonged to us.

There are female-supremacist models for intercourse that try to make us the masters of this language that we speak that is not ours. They evade some fundamental questions about the act itself and acknowledge others. They have in common a glorious ambition to see women self-determining, vigorous and free lovers who are never demeaned or diminished by force or subordination, not in society, not in sex. The great advocate of the female-first model of intercourse in the nineteenth century was Victoria Woodhull. She understood that rape was slavery; not less than slavery in its insult to human integrity and human dignity. She acknowledged some of the fundamental questions of female freedom presented by intercourse in her imperious insistence that women had a *natural* right—a right that inhered in the nature of intercourse itself—to be entirely self-determining, the controlling and dominating partner, the one whose desire determined the event, the one who both initiates

and is the final authority on what the sex is and will be. Her thinking was not mean-spirited, some silly role reversal to make a moral point; nor was it a taste for tyranny hidden in what pretended to be a sexual ethic. She simply understood that women are unspeakably vulnerable in intercourse because of the nature of the act—entry, penetration, occupation; and she understood that in a society of male power, women were unspeakably exploited in intercourse. Society—men—had to agree to let the woman be the mind, the heart, the lover, the free spirit, the physical vitality behind the act. The commonplace abuses of forced entry, the devastating consequences of being powerless and occupied, suggested that the only condition under which women could experience sexual freedom in intercourse—real choice, real freedom, real happiness, real pleasure—was in having real and absolute control in each and every act of intercourse, which would be, each and every time, chosen by the woman. She would have the incontrovertible authority that would make intercourse possible:

To woman, by nature, belongs the right of sexual determination. When the instinct is aroused in her, then and then only should commerce follow. When woman rises from sexual slavery to sexual freedom, into the ownership and control of her sexual organs, and man is obliged to respect this freedom, then will this instinct become pure and holy; then will woman be raised from the iniquity and morbidity in which she now wallows for existence, and the intensity and glory of her creative functions be increased a hundred-fold . . .¹⁷

The consent standard is revealed as pallid, weak, stupid, second-class, by contrast with Woodhull's standard: that the woman should have authority and control over the act. The sexual humiliation of women through male ownership was understood by Woodhull to be a concrete reality, not a metaphor, not hyperbole: the man owned the woman's sexual organs. She had to own her sexual organs for intercourse to mean freedom for her. This is more concrete and more meaningful than a more contemporary vocabulary of "owning" one's own desire. Woodhull wanted the woman's desire to be the desire of significance; but she understood that ownership of the body was not an abstraction; it was concrete and it came first. The "iniquity and mor-

bidness" of intercourse under male dominance would end if women could exercise a materially real self-determination in sex. The woman having material control of her own sex organs and of each and every act of intercourse would not lead to a reverse dominance, the man subject to the woman, because of the nature of the act and the nature of the sex organs involved in the act: this is the sense in which Woodhull tried to face the fundamental questions raised by intercourse as an act with consequences, some perhaps intrinsic. The woman could not forcibly penetrate the man. The woman could not take him over as he took her over and occupy his body physically inside. His dominance over her expressed in the physical reality of intercourse had no real analogue in desire she might express for him in intercourse: she simply could not do to him what he could do to her. Woodhull's view was materialist, not psychological; she was the first publisher of the *Communist Manifesto* in the United States and the first woman stockbroker on Wall Street. She saw sex the way she saw money and power: in terms of concrete physical reality. Male notions of female power based on psychology or ideas would not have addressed for her the real issues of physical dominance and power in intercourse. The woman would not force or rape or physically own the man because she could not. Thus, giving the woman power over intercourse was giving her the power to be equal. Woodhull's vision was in fact deeply humane, oriented toward sexual pleasure in freedom. For women, she thought and proclaimed (at great cost to herself), freedom must be literal, physical, concrete self-determination beginning with absolute control of the sexual organs; this was a natural right that had been perverted by male dominance—and because of its perversion, sex was for women morbid and degrading. The only freedom imaginable in this act of intercourse was freedom based on an irrevocable and unbreachable female will given play in a body honestly her own. This was an eloquent answer to reading the meaning of intercourse the other way: by its nature, intercourse mandated that the woman must be lesser in power and in privacy. Instead, said Woodhull, the woman must be king. Her humanity required sexual sovereignty.

Male-dominant gender hierarchy, however, seems immune to reform by reasoned or visionary

argument or by changes in sexual styles, either personal or social. This may be because intercourse itself is immune to reform. In it, female is bottom, stigmatized. Intercourse remains a means or the means of physiologically making a woman inferior: communicating to her cell by cell her own inferior status, impressing it on her, burning it into her by shoving it into her, over and over, pushing and thrusting until she gives up and gives in—which is called *surrender* in the male lexicon. In the experience of intercourse, she loses the capacity for integrity because her body—the basis of privacy and freedom in the material world for all human beings—is entered and occupied; the boundaries of her physical body are—neutrally speaking—violated. What is taken from her in that act is not recoverable, and she spends her life—wanting, after all, to have something—pretending that pleasure is in being reduced through intercourse to insignificance. She will not have an orgasm—maybe because she has human pride and she resents captivity; but also she will not or cannot rebel—not enough for it to matter, to end male dominance over her. She learns to eroticize powerlessness and self-annihilation. The very boundaries of her own body become meaningless to her, and even worse, useless to her. The transgression of those boundaries comes to signify a sexually charged degradation into which she throws herself, having been told, convinced, that identity, for a female, is there—somewhere beyond privacy and self-respect.

It is not that there is no way out if, for instance, one were to establish or believe that intercourse itself determines women's lower status. New reproductive technologies have changed and will continue to change the nature of the world. Intercourse is not necessary to existence anymore. Existence does not depend on female compliance, nor on the violation of female boundaries, nor on lesser female privacy, nor on the physical occupation of the female body. But the hatred of women is a source of sexual pleasure for men in its own right. Intercourse appears to be the expression of that contempt in pure form, in the form of a sexed hierarchy; it requires no passion or heart because it is power without invention articulating the arrogance of those who do the fucking. Intercourse is the pure, sterile, formal expression of men's con-

tempt for women; but that contempt can turn gothic and express itself in many sexual and sadistic practices that eschew intercourse per se. Any violation of a woman's body can become sex for men; this is the essential truth of pornography. So freedom from intercourse, or a social structure that reflects the low value of intercourse in women's sexual pleasure, or intercourse becoming one sex act among many entered into by (hypothetical) equals as part of other, deeper, longer, perhaps more sensual lovemaking, or an end to women's inferior status because we need not be forced to reproduce (forced fucking frequently justified by some implicit biological necessity to reproduce): none of these are likely social developments because there is a hatred of women, unexplained, undiagnosed, mostly unacknowledged, that pervades sexual practice and sexual passion. Reproductive technologies are strengthening male dominance, invigorating it by providing new ways of policing women's reproductive capacities, bringing them under stricter male scrutiny and control; and the experimental development of these technologies has been sadistic, using human women as if they were sexual laboratory animals—rats, mice, rabbits, cats, with kinky uteri. For increasing numbers of men, bondage and torture of the female genitals (that were entered into and occupied in the good old days) may supplant intercourse as a sexual practice. The passion for hurting women is a sexual passion; and sexual hatred of women can be expressed without intercourse.

There has always been a peculiar irrationality to all the biological arguments that supposedly predetermine the inferior social status of women. Bulls mount cows and baboons do whatever; but human females do not have estrus or go into heat. The logical inference is not that we are *always* available for mounting but rather that we are never, strictly speaking, "available." Nor do animals have cultures; nor do they determine in so many things what they will do and how they will do them and what the meaning of their own behavior is. They do not decide what their lives will be. Only humans face the often complicated reality of having potential and having to make choices based on having potential. We are not driven by instinct, at least not much. We have possibilities, and we make up meanings as we go along. The mean-

ings we create or learn do not exist only in our heads, in ineffable ideas. Our meanings also exist in our bodies—what we are, what we do, what we physically feel, what we physically know; and there is no personal psychology that is separate from what the body has learned about life. Yet when we look at the human condition, including the condition of women, we act as if we are driven by biology or some metaphysically absolute dogma. We refuse to recognize our possibilities because we refuse to honor the potential humans have, including human women, to make choices. Men too make choices. When will they choose not to despise us?

Being female in this world is having been robbed of the potential for human choice by men who love to hate us. One does not make choices in freedom. Instead, one conforms in body type and behavior and values to become an object of male sexual desire, which requires an abandonment of a wide-ranging capacity for choice. Objectification may well be the most singly destructive aspect of gender hierarchy, especially as it exists in relation to intercourse. The surrender occurs before the act that is supposed to accomplish the surrender takes place. She has given in; why conquer her? The body is violated before the act occurs that is commonly taken to be violation. The privacy of the person is lessened before the privacy of the woman is invaded: she has remade herself so as to prepare the way for the invasion of privacy that her preparation makes possible. The significance of the human ceases to exist as the value of the object increases: an expensive ornament, for instance, she is incapable of human freedom—taking it, knowing it, wanting it, being it. Being an object—living in the realm of male objectification—is abject submission, an abdication of the freedom and integrity of the body, its privacy, its uniqueness, its worth in and of itself because it is the human body of a human being. Can intercourse exist without objectification? Would intercourse be a different phenomenon if it could, if it did? Would it be shorter or longer, happier or sadder; more complex, richer, denser, with a baroque beauty or simpler with an austere beauty; or bang bang bang? Would intercourse without objectification, if it could exist, be compatible with women's equality—even an expression of it—or would it still be stubbornly antagonistic to it?

Would intercourse cause orgasm in women if women were not objects for men before and during intercourse? Can intercourse exist without objectification and can objectification exist without female complicity in maintaining it as a perceived reality and a material reality too: can objectification exist without the woman herself turning herself into an object—becoming through effort and art a thing, less than human, so that he can be more than human, hard, sovereign, king? Can intercourse exist without the woman herself turning herself into a thing, which she must do because men cannot fuck equals and men must fuck: because one price of dominance is that one is impotent in the face of equality?

To become the object, she takes herself and transforms herself into a thing: all freedoms are diminished and she is caged, even in the cage docile, sometimes physically maimed, movement is limited: she physically becomes the thing he wants to fuck. It is especially in the acceptance of object status that her humanity is hurt: it is a metaphysical acceptance of lower status in sex and in society; an implicit acceptance of less freedom, less privacy, less integrity. In becoming an object so that he can objectify her so that he can fuck her, she begins a political collaboration with his dominance; and then when he enters her, he confirms for himself and for her what she is: that she is something, not someone; certainly not someone equal.

There is the initial complicity, the acts of self-mutilation, self-diminishing, self-reconstruction, until there is no self, only the diminished, mutilated reconstruction. It is all superficial and unimportant, except what it costs the human in her to do it: except for the fact that it is submissive, conforming, giving up an individuality that would withstand object status or defy it. Something happens inside; a human forgets freedom; a human learns obedience; a human, this time a woman, learns how to goose-step the female way. Wilhelm Reich, that most optimistic of sexual liberationists, the only male one to abhor rape *really*, thought that a girl needed not only “a free genital sexuality” but also “an undisturbed room, proper contraceptives, a friend who is capable of love, that is, not a National Socialist . . .”¹⁸ All remain hard for women to attain; but especially the lover who is not a National Socialist. So the act goes beyond complicity

to collaboration; but collaboration requires a preparing of the ground, an undermining of values and vision and dignity, a sense of alienation from the worth of other human beings—and this alienation is fundamental to females who are objectified because they do not experience themselves as human beings of worth except for their value on the market as objects. Knowing one’s own human value is fundamental to being able to respect others: females are remade into objects, not human in any sense related to freedom or justice—and so what can females recognize in other females that is a human bond toward freedom? Is there anything in us to love if we do not love each other as the objects we have become? Who can love someone who is less than human unless love itself is domination per se? Alienation from human freedom is deep and destructive; it destroys whatever it is in us as humans that is creative, that causes us to want to find meaning in experiences, even hard experiences; it destroys in us that which wants freedom whatever the hardship of attaining it. In women, these great human capacities and dimensions are destroyed or mutilated; and so we find ourselves bewildered—who or what are these so-called persons in human form but even that not quite, not exactly, who cannot remember or manifest the physical reality of freedom, who do not seem to want or to value the individual experience of freedom? Being an object for a man means being alienated from other women—those like her in status, in inferiority, in sexual function. Collaboration by women with men to keep women civilly and sexually inferior has been one of the hallmarks of female subordination; we are ashamed when Freud notices it, but it is true. That collaboration, fully manifested when a woman values her lover, the National Socialist, above any woman, anyone of her own kind or class or status, may have simple beginnings: the first act of complicity that destroys self-respect, the capacity for self-determination and freedom—readying the body for the fuck instead of for freedom. The men have an answer: intercourse is freedom. Maybe it is second-class freedom for second-class humans.

What does it mean to be the person who needs to have this done to her: who needs to be needed as an object; who needs to be entered; who needs to be occupied; who needs to be wanted more than

she needs integrity or freedom or equality? If objectification is necessary for intercourse to be possible, what does that mean for the person who needs to be fucked so that she can experience herself as female and who needs to be an object so that she can be fucked?

The brilliance of objectification as a strategy of dominance is that it gets the woman to take the initiative in her own degradation (having less freedom is degrading). The woman herself takes one kind of responsibility absolutely and thus commits herself to her own continuing inferiority: she polices her own body; she internalizes the demands of the dominant class and, in order to be fucked, she constructs her life around meeting those demands. It is the best system of colonialization on earth: she takes on the burden, the responsibility, of her own submission, her own objectification. In some systems in which turning the female into an object for sex requires actual terrorism and maiming—for instance, footbinding or removing the clitoris—the mother does it, having had it done to her by her mother. What men need done to women so that men can have intercourse with women is done to women so that men will have intercourse; no matter what the human cost; and it is a gross indignity to suggest that when her collaboration is complete—unselfconscious because there is no self and no consciousness left—she is free to have freedom in intercourse. When those who dominate you get you to take the initiative in your own human destruction, you have lost more than any oppressed people yet has ever gotten back. Whatever intercourse is, it is not freedom; and if it cannot exist without objectification, it never will be. Instead occupied women will be collaborators, more base in their collaboration than other collaborators have ever been: experiencing pleasure in their own inferiority; calling intercourse freedom. It is a tragedy beyond the power of language to convey when what has been imposed on women by force becomes a standard of freedom for women: and all the women say it is so.

If intercourse can be an expression of sexual equality, it will have to survive—on its own merits as it were, having a potential for human expression not yet recognized or realized—the destruction of male power over women; and rape and prostitution will have to be seen as the institutions

that most impede any experience of intercourse as freedom—chosen by full human beings with full human freedom. Rape and prostitution negate self-determination and choice for women; and anyone who wants intercourse to be freedom and to mean freedom had better find a way to get rid of them. Maybe life is tragic and the God who does not exist made women inferior so that men could fuck us; or maybe we can only know this much for certain—that when intercourse exists and is experienced under conditions of force, fear, or inequality, it destroys in women the will to political freedom; it destroys the love of freedom itself. We become female: occupied; collaborators against each other, especially against those among us who resist male domination—the lone, crazy resisters, the organized resistance. The pleasure of submission does not and cannot change the fact, the cost, the indignity, of inferiority.

Notes

3. Anaïs Nin, *In Favor of the Sensitive Man and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), p. 8.
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5. Hite, *Hite Report*, p. 141.
6. Franz Kafka, *Diaries 1910–1913*, ed. Max Brod, trans. Joseph Kresh (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), p. 296.
7. *State v. Hunt*, 220 Neb. 707, 709–10 (1985).
8. *State v. Hunt*, 220 Neb. at 725.
9. Iris Murdoch, *Henry and Cato* (New York: The Viking Press, 1977), p. 262.
10. Paz, *Labyrinth*, p. 13.
11. Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (New York: The Viking Press, 1985), p. 29.
12. Norman O. Brown, *Love's Body* (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 133.
13. Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung, *The Freud/Jung Letters: The Correspondence Between Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung*, ed. William McGuire, trans. Ralph Manheim and R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 265.
14. Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), p. 63.
15. Duras, *The Lover*, p. 63.
16. Duras, *The Lover*, p. 62.
17. Victoria Claflin Woodhull, *The Victoria Woodhull Reader*, ed. Madeleine B. Stern (Weston, Mass.: M&S Press, 1974), p. 40.
18. Wilhelm Reich, *The Sexual Revolution*, trans. Theodore P. Wolfe, ed. rev. (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970), p. 15.

There is a movement in applied ethics that stresses the use of narratives and story telling. Many ethicists claim (and have claimed for some time) that fiction is the best way to portray ethical quandaries and possible solutions. In keeping with this idea—and the fact that many feminists are proponents of this view—we present excerpts from two novels.

ON INTERCOURSE—PERFECT IF

A feminist writer has her budding feminist of a main character, Isadora Wing, tell us her fantasy of the best kind of sexual encounter. No words, no strings. Just sex and goodbye.

How would you feel about such an encounter? How many such encounters would any one person have before longing for some sort of stable sexual relation? Jong's character longs for a zipless fuck and makes a reasonable case for it. But is a zipless fuck the best kind of sex? In Chapter 2, we saw a number of answers to this question. Of those answers, which would be most persuasive to Isadora Wing?

from Fear of Flying

ERICA JONG

Five years of marriage had made me itchy for all those things: itchy for men, and itchy for solitude. Itchy for sex and itchy for the life of a recluse. I knew my itches were contradictory—and that made things even worse. I knew my itches were un-American—and that made things *still* worse. It is heresy in America to embrace any way of life except as half of a couple. Solitude is un-American. It may be condoned in a man—especially if he is a “glamorous bachelor” who “dates starlets” during a brief interval between marriages. But a woman is always presumed to be alone as a result of abandonment, not choice. And she is treated that way: as a pariah. There is simply no dignified way for a woman to live alone. Oh, she can get along financially perhaps (though not nearly as well as a man), but emotionally she is never left in peace. Her friends, her family, her fellow workers never let her forget that her husbandlessness, her childlessness—her *selfishness*, in short—is a reproach to the American way of life.

Even more to the point: the woman (unhappy though she knows her married friends to be) can never let *herself* alone. She lives as if she were

constantly on the brink of some great fulfillment. As if she were waiting for Prince Charming to take her away “from all this.” All what? The solitude of living inside her own soul? The certainty of being herself instead of half of something else?

My response to all this was not (not yet) to have an affair and not (not yet) to hit the open road, but to evolve my fantasy of the Zipless Fuck. The zipless fuck was more than a fuck. It was a platonic ideal. Zipless because when you came together zippers fell away like rose petals, underwear blew off in one breath like dandelion fluff. Tongues intertwined and turned liquid. Your whole soul flowed out through your tongue and into the mouth of your lover.

For the true, ultimate zipless A-1 fuck, it was necessary that you never get to know the man very well. I had noticed, for example, how all my infatuations dissolved as soon as I really became friends with a man, became sympathetic to his problems, listened to him *kvetch* about his wife, or ex-wives, his mother, his children. After that I would like him, perhaps even love him—but without passion. And it was passion that I wanted. I had

also learned that a sure way to exorcise an infatuation was to write about someone, to observe his tics and twitches, to anatomize his personality in type. After that he was an insect on a pin, a newspaper clipping laminated in plastic. I might enjoy his company, even admire him at moments, but he no longer had the power to make me wake up trembling in the middle of the night. I no longer dreamed about him. He had a face.

So another condition for the zipless fuck was brevity. And anonymity made it even better. . . .

Zipless, you see, *not* because European men have button-flies rather than zipper-flies, and not

because the participants are so devastatingly attractive, but because the incident has all the swift compression of a dream and is seemingly free of all remorse and guilt; because there is no talk of her late husband or of his fiancée; because there is no rationalizing; because there is no talk at *all*. The zipless fuck is absolutely pure. It is free of ulterior motives. There is no power game. The man is not "taking" and the woman is not "giving." No one is attempting to cuckold a husband or humiliate a wife. No one is trying to prove anything or get anything out of anyone. The zipless fuck is the purest thing there is.

ON MARRIAGE—PERFECT SELDOM IF EVER

In what might be a short story, French shows the crumbling of a romantic relation. It is broken down not so much by the institution of marriage but by the reality of what the man was like and how he inflicted his will on his wife—and how she allowed it.

In his book *Love: Emotion, Myth and Metaphor* (Doubleday Anchor, 1981), Robert Solomon used French's story as an example of what can go wrong with romantic love. He refers to her argument in the book as showing "the personal outrage and bitter disappointment of a million or more women, only some of whom would identify themselves as 'feminists' and few of whom would be able to articulate the precise mechanism by which they have been systematically shut out of power or what all of this has to do with love." Solomon goes on to defend the existence (and importance) of romantic love. His defense of romantic love is based on the notion that romantic roles are sex-neutral and presuppose equality. Indeed, he sees the switching of roles as central to maintaining a true romantic love relationship. Would Solomon's critique of French also stand against the arguments made by Firestone?

from The Women's Room

MARILYN FRENCH

14

Some dramatic sense, probably culled from reading plays, or female *Bildungsromane*, which always end with the heroine's marriage, makes me want to stop here, make a formal break, like the curtain going down. Marriage should mean a great change, a new life. But it was less a new beginning

for Mira than a continuation. Although the external events of her life changed, the internal ones remained much the same.

Oh, Mira was able to leave her parents' tense home, and to pick out little things—towels, throw rugs, some curtains—that would turn their furnished rooms into her own "home," and she enjoyed that. She and Norm had taken a small fur-

nished place near Coburg, where Norm was in medical school. She had left school, and with few regrets. She did not want to go back there again, to have to look at those faces again. She did most of her reading on her own anyway, she reasoned, and would learn as much out of school as in it. Norm would finish med school and his internship while she worked to support them, and once he was out, the future would be secure. They had worked it all out.

After a honeymoon spent in Norm's parents' New Hampshire cottage, they returned, he to the books and she to try to find a job. She was hindered in this because she could not drive; she asked Norm to teach her. He was reluctant. In the first place, he needed the car most days, in the second, she was not mechanically apt and would be a poor driver. He took her in his arms. "I couldn't bear to live if anything happened to you." Something nagged at her, but she was so encompassed by his love, so grateful for it, that she did not probe to find out what it was. Taking buses, and begging her mother to drive her around, she finally found a job as a clerk-typist for \$35 a week. They could live on that, but not well, and she decided to try to get a job in New York, commuting back and forth from New Jersey. Norm was horrified. The city! It was such a dangerous place. Commutation would eat up a third of what she earned. She would have to get up early and arrive home late. And then there would be the men . . .

Mira had never told Norm about the night at Kelley's, but he either had the same fears as she, or he had sensed that she had them, because the unspoken threat contained in the word was one he was to continue to use for the next years—indeed, until it was no longer necessary. If he had not, Mira might have learned to overcome her fears. Armed by the title of *Mrs.*, property of some man, she felt stronger in the world. They would be less likely to attack her if they knew some man had her under his protection.

She gave up the idea of the city, accepted the clerk-typist job; Norm got a part-time job, spending much of his time reading beforehand the texts he would be studying in the fall, and they settled into their life together.

She had enjoyed their honeymoon. It was incredible delight to be able to kiss and hold without

fear. Norm was using only condoms, but somehow being married made it less threatening. She was shy about revealing her body. So was Norm, for that matter. And the two of them giggled and delighted in their mutual shyness, their mutual pleasure. The only problem was, Mira did not reach orgasm.

After a month, she decided she was frigid. Norm said that was ridiculous, that she was only inexperienced. He had married friends and he knew that it would pass in time. She asked him, timidly, if it would be possible for him to hold back a little, that she felt she was on the verge, but then he would come, and lose all erectness. He said no healthy male could or should try to hold back. She asked, even more timidly, if they could try a second time. He said that would be unhealthy for him, and probably impossible. He was a medical student, and she believed him. She settled back to enjoy what she could, and waited for him to fall asleep to masturbate herself to orgasm. He always fell asleep quickly after sex.

So they went on. They entertained friends on occasion: she learned to cook. He always shared the laundry chores with her and took her grocery shopping on Friday nights, when she got paid. If she teased him enough, he would help her clean the apartment on Saturday. Sometimes she felt very grown up: when offering a drink to a guest, say, or when putting on makeup and jewelry before leaving to go out with her husband. But most of the time she felt like a child who had stumbled, bumbled into the wrong house. Her job was stultifyingly dull; the long bus rides with other gray, tired people made her feel grimy and poor. At night, Norm turned on the TV (the one large purchase they had made with wedding-gift money), and since there was only the kitchen and the bed-living room, she had no choice but to hear it. She tried to read, but her concentration was continually broken. The tube is demanding. Life felt hideously empty. But she told herself that was only because women are educated to think that marriage will be a sudden panacea to all emptiness, and although she'd fought off such notions, she had no doubt been infected by them. She told herself it was her own fault, that if she had wanted to do some real studying and intellectual work, she could. But, she argued, she was so tired after eight hours in an of-

face, two on buses, preparing dinner, washing dishes—a job Norm simply refused to touch. Besides, Norm always had TV on at night. Well, she argued back, it would be better when he started school; then he would have to study at night. Nevertheless, she was approaching her twentieth birthday: look, her other self said, what Keats had done by twenty. And finally her whole self would rise up and wipe it all out. Oh, don't bother me with it! I do the best I can!

Part of her knew that she was simply surviving in the only way she could. Dull day by dull day she paced through her responsibilities, moving toward some goal she could not discern. The word *freedom* had dropped from her vocabulary; the word *maturity* replaced it. And dimly she sensed that maturity was knowing how to survive. She was as lonely as ever; except sometimes at night, she and Norm, cuddled up together, would talk seriously. One night she was discussing what she wanted: to go back to school and eventually get a Ph.D. and teach. Norm was horrified. He mentioned the problems, financial difficulties, her exhaustion—she would have to do all that and still cook and clean, because when he went back to school he would no longer have time to help her. She argued that they should share. He reminded her that after all he was the one responsible for earning the living: he didn't insist, he wasn't peremptory, he didn't demand. He merely stated it and asked if that weren't so. Frowning and puzzled, reluctantly, she agreed. It was what she had wanted: Norm was responsible, not like Lanny. He would never leave her to go out and get drunk with the boys while she listened to a crying baby, down on her hands and knees scrubbing the kitchen floor. Medical school was difficult, demanding, he added. She could do that, she insisted: do what he said he couldn't, go to med school and still help out in the house. He pulled his big gun: there would be guys, they would give her a hard time, male professors insisting she screw her way to a degree. He was too obvious this time. She pondered. "Sometimes I think you'd like to lock me up in a convent, Norm, where only you could visit me."

"It's true. I would." He was serious.

She turned away from him, and he fell asleep. In three months, the protection she had sought had already become oppressive. It was what she

had wanted too, wasn't it? If she had been less wretched, she would have laughed.

15

Survival is an art. It requires the dulling of the mind and the senses, and a delicate attunement to waiting, without insisting on precision about just what it is you are waiting for. Vaguely, Mira thought of "The End" as Norm's finishing both med school and his internship, but that was so far off, and five years of the boredom she was living in seemed so unendurable that she preferred not to think at all.

Norm went back to school, and as she had expected, no longer watched TV. But she found that she could not concentrate even though it was off. She suspected the problem was not just tiredness; when she picked up a serious book, one that made her think, she thought. And that was unbearable, because to think involves thinking about one's own life. She read at night, read voluminously. It was like the beginning of her adolescence. She read junk: mystery novels, light social satirists like O'Hara and Marquand and Maugham. She could not handle anything more true.

She blamed Norm for nothing. She took care of him, worried about him, cooked what he liked, and asked nothing of him. It was not Norm she hated, but her life. But what other life could she have, being the way she was? Although Norm was often ill-tempered, he insisted that he loved her and was happy with her. It was the stupid school he hated, the stupid finicky professors. He was not doing well: he got through his first year with an undistinguished record. He blamed his low grades on his being upset about her. For she was pregnant.

It was in May that she missed her period. This made her nervous because she was regular, but also because, after her first disastrous attempts with a diaphragm, Norm had insisted that they continue in the old way. He did not like her fiddling for ten minutes in the bathroom when he was full of ardor. And she suspected that he wanted control of the situation himself. She worried about the risk with condoms, but sometimes, when they were very broke, Norm used nothing at all, and withdrew before orgasm. She felt that was risky; he assured her it was all right.

The way she gave herself over to him in this area seemed strange to her in later years. The fact was she hated using a diaphragm. She had come to dislike sex entirely, for he would get her aroused and leave her dissatisfied; now, when she masturbated, she wept. She realized, looking back, that she had given her life over to him just as she had perforce given her life over to her parents. She had simply transferred her childhood. And Norm, although he was seven years older than she, had been in the army during the war and had a few adventures, was not old enough to have a twenty-year-old child. Perhaps, in some dark hidden place in her mind, she had wanted a child: perhaps what she was waiting for, what she called maturity, involved having one and getting it over with. Perhaps.

At the time, it felt like disaster. How would they live? White and drawn, she went to a gynecologist. She came home with the news on an evening when Norm was studying for an important exam. She was worn out from work, the bus rides, the hour's wait in the doctor's office. She imagined as she walked the two blocks from the bus stop that maybe Norm would have cooked some dinner. But he was studying, eating cheese and crackers when she came in, and he was irritated with her for being out so late, although he knew where she had gone and why. As she entered the apartment, she looked across the room at him: he stared mutely back. For three weeks they had discussed little else: there was no need to speak.

Suddenly he threw the book he had been holding across the room.

"You've just ruined my life, do you realize that?"

She sat down on the edge of a rocking chair. "I just ruined *your* life?"

"I'll have to quit school now, how else are we going to live?" He lighted a cigarette with nervous intensity. "And how am I supposed to study for this exam when you come home with this? If I flunk it, I flunk out. Did you realize that?"

She sat back, half closing her eyes, detached. She wanted to point out to him the illogic of his last sentences. She wanted to point out to him the injustice of his attack. But the fact that he felt right in making it, felt that he had legitimate grounds to treat her like a naughty child, overwhelmed her. It

was a force against which she could not struggle, for his legitimacy was supported by the entire outside world, and she knew that. She tried. She leaned forward:

"Did I chase you around the bed? You said your way was safe. *You* said it, Mr. Medical Student!"

"It is!"

"Yeah. That's why I'm pregnant."

"It is, I tell you."

She looked at him. His face was nearly blue at the edges, his mouth a tight cruel accusing line.

Her voice faltered. "Are you saying you are not the father of this child? Are you suggesting it happened some other way?"

He glared at her with bitter hate. "How should I know? You tell me you never slept with anybody but me, but how can I tell? There sure was enough talk about you and Lanny. Everybody talked about you. You were free enough in those days, why should it be different now?"

She leaned back again. She had told Norm about her fear of sex, her fear of men, her timidity in a part of the world she did not understand. And he had listened sweetly, caressing her face, holding her close to him. She had thought he understood, thought it even more because he seemed, despite his stories about army adventures, to share it—her shyness and fear and timidity. She thought she had escaped, but all she had done was to let the enemy into her house, let him into her body, he was growing there now. He thought in the same way they did; he, like them, believed he had innate rights over her because he was male and she female; he, like them, believed in things they called virginity and purity, or corruption and whoredom, in women. But he was gentle and respectful; he was among the best of men. If he was like them, there was no hope. It was not worthwhile living in such a world. She leaned back farther and closed her eyes; she began to rock gently in the chair. She went into a quiet darkened place in her mind. There were many ways to die, she did not have to think about that now. All she had to do was find a way out, and she had done that. She would die, and all this would end. It would go away. She would never again have to feel what she was feeling now, which was just like what she had been feeling for years, except stronger. The rockets were exploding all over her body. Her heart ached no more than

her stomach or her brain. It was all exploding in fire and tears, and the tears were as hot and hurtful as the fires of rage. There was nothing to be said. He simply would not have understood. It went too deep, and it seemed that she was alone, that she was the only person who felt this way. It must be that, although she felt entirely right, she was wrong. It didn't matter. Nothing mattered.

After a long time, Norm approached her. He knelt down at the side of her chair. "Honey," he said sweetly. "Honey?"

She rocked.

He put his hand on her shoulder and she shuddered away from it.

"Get away from me," she said dully, her tongue cleaving to the roof of her mouth. "Just leave me alone."

He pulled a footstool over and sat close to her, putting his arms around her legs, laying his head in her lap. "Honey, I'm sorry. It's just that I don't know how I'll finish school. Maybe my folks will help us."

She knew it was true. She knew that he was just frightened, as frightened as she. But he felt he had a right to blame her. Upset as she had been when she heard the news, it had not occurred to her to blame him. She had seen it simply as a mess they

were in together. She put her hand on his head. It was not his fault. It was just that everything was poisoned. It didn't matter. She would die and be out of it. When she touched him, he began to cry. He *was* as frightened as she, more frightened maybe. He clutched her legs tighter, he sobbed, he apologized. He didn't mean it, he didn't know what had got into him, it was ridiculous childishness, he was sorry. He clutched and cried and she began to caress his head. He cheered up, he looked at her, he caressed her cheek, he joked, he wiped away the water that was running down her face, he laid his head against her breast. She wept fully in great jolting sobs and he held her against him in astonishment, not having known, saying, "I'm sorry, honey, oh, God, I'm sorry," thinking, she imagined, that she was weeping about his suspicion of her fidelity, not knowing, never to know, never to understand. Finally he smiled up at her as her sobs came less often and less strong, and asked her if she weren't hungry. She understood. She rose and made dinner. And in January, she had the baby, and a year and a half later, she had another. Norm's parents lent them money on a note: eight thousand dollars to be repaid when he went into practice. After that she got another diaphragm. But by then she was a different person.

Each of the feminists in this chapter has critiqued Western monogamous marriage as it now exists. One does not have to be a feminist, have the sexual longings of Erica Jong's heroine, or feel as trapped as Marilyn French's Mira to see that current marriages as many are now practiced could be improved. The next chapter deals with marriage. The articles critique, defend, and offer suggestions for changing traditional Western monogamous marriage.