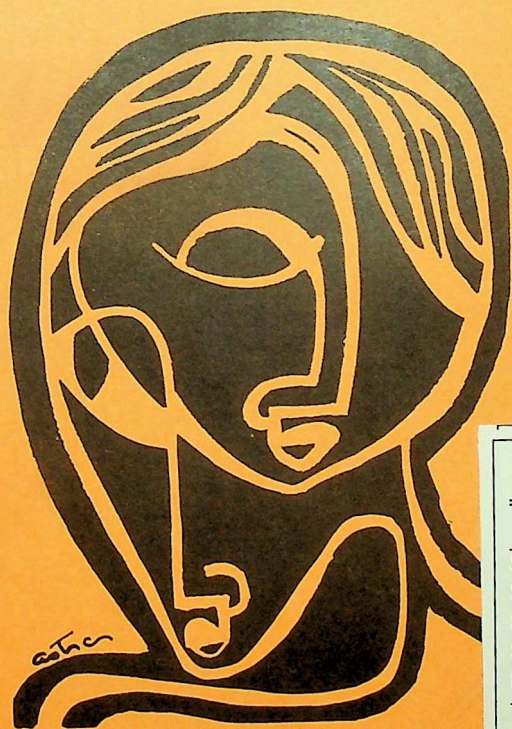


WOMEN'S LIBERATION REVIEW

No. 1

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Introduction

This issue of the Women's Liberation Review grew out of a workshop on Women and Literature at the Women's Liberation Conference in Manchester (March, 1972). Most of us were women writing in the isolation of our own homes who wanted to share our experiences, communicate our ideas. All of us were women who felt the need for our movement to generate its own body of literature in response to our situation. A Women's Literature Collective which would work together to create an anthology of women's writings seemed to answer both these needs.

The Collective has, like all others, changed - losing some members but, ultimately, growing stronger - in the long process of writing, rewriting, working out what should be included, assembling and producing this journal. We're proud of this first fruit of our labours - proud that we've been able to accomplish what we first set out to do. But we know that it's only a beginning: that, in order to grow with our movement, reflecting and stimulating that growth, The Women's Liberation Review needs the support, the criticisms and contributions from our sisters in all parts of the country.

We hope that it's only a beginning in another sense: that, knowing that a movement-wide forum exists for their writings, other women will be encouraged, as we have been, to begin expressing their ideas; that we can put women in touch with other women in their area who are interested in writing and working together; that so many new writers and new writings will emerge that it will be impossible for one journal, published no matter how regularly, to serve us all; and that, as a result, a multiplicity of women's journals will spring up across the country, stimulating an ever-growing number of women.

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The Act of Forgetting

This article describes how married women are defined as 'housewives' whatever their occupation and how their role demands a denial of self, a forgetting of who they might have been.

Society cannot define a woman in any other way than by her relationship to a man. The following quotations are vivid examples of this refusal to recognise women as people in their own right.

The Daily Mirror of 23rd May 72 carried the following full page front cover spread:

"WIVES MARCH ON THE IRA" with a large photograph of hundreds of women banded together. The caption read: "The angry wives of 'Free Derry' are on the march again."

They are not people, not even women, but wives.

From 'Nova', April 72.

"Mrs. Dora Saint is the wife of a history master at Newbury Grammar School, a former teacher herself, and a magistrate ... and author of the 'Miss Read' books."

In that order, you see.

From Reveille, Jan. 22nd 1972

"Widowhood. A state and situation like no other. The loss, all at once, of husband, love, protection, status and security."

A state of total non-being, in fact.

From 'Essays in Sociological Theory' by Talcott Parsons:

"The woman's fundamental status is that of her husband's wife, the mother of his

children"

Barclaycard advertisement:

"When you obtain a Barclaycard for your wife, your personal credit limit becomes jointly shared. She would receive a Barclaycard embossed with your name which she would sign and use in the normal way".
(Their emphasis)

From The Sunday Times Business News, May 28, 72.

"Among women in business are quite a few who work only because they have been forced to, because they have no man to live off."

T.V. Advertisement:

"There are two men in my life. To one I am a mother, to the other I'm a wife."

Note on an Inland Revenue Form:

"If you are a married woman living with your husband he should complete the form as if it were addressed to him."

From 'Woman's Role', Sunday Times, 26th March 72.

"In order to get a clear rating for the patient's level of social achievement, they had to exclude all women, as no adequate system of assigning socio-economic position to women could be discovered."

Sociological analysis must 'exclude all women' because women are excluded from society.

Journalists, sociologists, the Registrar General and market researchers (whom one would naively suppose to be above such quaint ideas) all refuse to assign any social class to

married women. They have no place in the Registrar General's class analysis and as all Government social surveys are based on that analysis, married women appear to be 'invalid' sociologically. Even when they are 'economically active' their occupational status is not recognised. A woman in the AB (£2,000 + p.a.) married to a man in Class C (clerical) still belongs to his social class, simply by virtue of being married to him. So much for the recognition of almost half the adult population.

The non-status of married women in this society is not an abstract sociological phenomenon. It is an experienced reality which finds its direct expression both in the term 'housewife' and in her being. The Registrar General again:

"The housewife is the person, other than a domestic servant, who is responsible for most of the household duties (or for supervising a domestic servant who carries out those duties.) She may be married or non-married and may or may not have a job in addition to her domestic duties."

H.M.S.O. Social Survey of Women's Employment, 1968.

Despite this definition and despite the mass of statistics issued by the Department, there are no figures for the number of housewives in Britain. But, as Ann Oakley pointed out in her article in New Society (13th Aug. 70), this definition of the housewife "includes most adult female members of the population". It also adds a new twist by defining the woman not in relation to a man ("married or non-married") but to the house. The meaning of the word 'housewife' now becomes explicit.

According to popular usage the housewife category covers all married women, not just those who work

full time in the home. Statements like "Housewives will have to pay more for their butter this year" are commonplace; so also are newspaper articles which begin, "Housewife, Mrs. John Smith ..." and only later in the article will it transpire that she does a full time job outside the home. It is apparent that all women, whatever their social class and outside occupation, become housewives on marriage. Judging from the media image of housewives, Mrs. Henry Ford and Mrs. Joe Bloggs have an awful lot in common. They are members of a sub-species of society who share the same (non) status, interests and needs. As housewives, their only concern is with the house, their husbands' and children's needs, what to cook for dinner that night and how to keep attractive. They can be referred to in the same breath because society's image of the housewife preserves the notion that all housewives are the same. There is no male equivalent for the term 'housewife' because, unlike women, men cannot be conveniently lumped together as a special breed, labelled accordingly and dismissed.

Evelyne Sullerot, in the introduction to her book 'Woman, Society & Change' poses the problem in this way:

"Who in the world would dare to write a book about man - simply as a representative of the male sex? The question would at once be asked "What man?"...The subject would necessarily become a treatment of contemporary society, with modern man compared to his recent or historical predecessor. But when woman is concerned, the subject loses its daring and becomes precise....This is due to a single reason, be it good or bad in itself, and that is that this half of humanity can be studied in relation to the other half, but this does not work the other way round."

But what has this to do with the housewife or with marriage? Just that we will never hear statements like "Will husbands have to pay more for their beer now?" and we will never read newspaper articles which begin "Housewife's husband, Mr. Jane Smith ..." or "Hairdresser's husband, Mr. Ann Brown ..."

It should be apparent, then, that the term 'housewife' is not the innocuous descriptive word it appears to be. It does not describe a person, it defines a situation. The whole woman is defined only in terms of her relation to someone and something else. This is how society sees her and how she sees herself. When Talcott Parsons states, "The woman's fundamental status is that of her husband's wife, the mother of his children" he is not being academic. He is holding up a mirror to women's actual experience of themselves.

"It is a terrible thing to see a man break down mentally and emotionally. But the rate of mental breakdown among women is still much higher than it is among men, and some of the pressures women are subjected to are surely very similar to those affecting the unemployed: the isolation, the sense of being utterly useless to the community at large, especially when children are grown up; dissatisfactions at talents wasted; boredom; a sense of restriction and envy of others who are independent and able to travel about; above all, the total and sometimes humiliating financial dependence on somebody else - just like being on the dole. Perhaps if out of work men come to realise and understand while they are at home what sort of lives their wives

have to lead

Letter to the Radio Times of 28th July 71 from Maire Davies, following a TV programme about unemployment.

Further on in her letter Maire Davies refers to unemployment as 'a social evil'; its effects on society are recognised and felt. It threatens stability and social order. Government Departments announce figures, editorials are written, men's dignity and self respect is lost and the country is going to the dogs. But what about women's dignity and self-respect? Maire Davies draws an exact parallel between the man on the dole and the housewife but whereas his situation is a public scandal, hers is a private problem. When society denies status to housewives it also denies them any social significance. As long as they continue to perform their function in the home, as consumers and as servants to men and children, their oppression and consequent degradation will not be acknowledged. If it were, it would be curtly dismissed as further proof of women's inferiority and of their inability to cope with the 'normal' demands of day to day living. So, far from being recognised as a 'social evil', the oppression of the housewife is elevated into an art form. Where the man on the dole is the subject for serious public debate, the woman at home is constantly insulted with propaganda telling her how happy and fulfilled she is. This assault on her senses probably does more to exacerbate her condition than anything else.

The housewife's happiness and fulfilment, according to this propaganda, depends, among other things, on the need for her to surrender her identity. The 1972 Family Doctor Booklet, "Getting Married" takes great pains to tell the woman how to achieve

this. Under the heading "True Togetherness" we find:

"Work at making your husband feel necessary in every aspect of your life together, and identify yourself as deeply as you can in all his interests. Even if you can't participate in his sport you can be there to cheer him on. Even if you perish the thought of his whippet or his stamp collection you can feed the creature cheerfully and put up with his bits of gummy paper about the place. Most important pay your husband the compliment of really listening to what he says."

Or, in other words, pretend to be someone you're not. Take every opportunity to compromise or abandon your real self in order to allow him to realise his identity. Drop what you're doing and thinking whenever he wants to talk, accommodate all his whims and above all identify yourself with him. There lies true happiness.

Under the heading, "He's Got to Come First", we find:

"He's going to be first in your life now .. The ideal aim is to turn as many of his interests as you can into your own interests and to keep on showing him in practical ways that you are interested in him."

But being a shadow is not enough. You must be "A Friend and Mother" as well:

"Don't compare him unfavourably with other, apparently more successful men. Don't want to be right so much that you insist on putting him in the wrong, especially in public. And anyway, could it sometimes be your fault?"

Oh, yes! Every Time! Or, in other words, protect and massage his ego at all times but especially

when it is at the expense of your own. He, of course, is at perfect liberty to contradict you in public because you have no ego and live only in the shadow of his.

The magazine "Woman", 15th Jan 72, carried an interview with the actress Mia Farrow which ended on the following familiar note:

"What does she want most? A happy home, contented family and the chance to prove she is an actress of quality. "My husband, my sons and my work", she ticked off her priorities with the quiet conviction of a woman who knows she has got them right."

What the magazine is doing is reassuring its millions of housewife readers that they've no reason to be envious. Fulfilment does not lie in challenging, productive or creative work - it lies in the home, in servicing others so that they can engage in such work. Mia Farrow's priorities are the same as her readers'. If her husband asked her to give up her work for his sake, she wouldn't hesitate. And neither would they because they can only come to a full realisation of themselves by abandoning their identities and absorbing their husbands'.

Constantly feeding his ego is part of this process and the books and magazines are full of advice on how to do this:

"Every man would like to be 'top dog' and, although he knows few achieve such status in his own working environment, he can go on hoping. And while he hopes, he insists on having top slot in one area of his life - his home. At home, in fact, you may take most of the major decisions but letting him believe he's in full charge is a very subtle part of your role as an understanding mate. Your position

is more difficult, naturally, if you earn more than he does at work. But there are practical solutions to the problem. However successful you are in the outside world, your aim should be to show by your attitude at home that he comes first and foremost in your life." "Woman" June 71.

The article goes on to tell, in admiring terms, of a woman who earned a lot more than her husband and describes the lengths to which she went to convince him that he was the breadwinner and that her income "was no more than an acceptable bonus to his." Disguise, compromise and manipulation are, however, not sufficient. Dishonesty is also vigorously encouraged:

"It would help to display some deliberate imperfections from time to time if you think he is under the impression that you are pulling the greater weight in the marriage."

Or, the commonest ploy of all:

"It's mostly a matter of making the effort to reassure him. For example, take time to prepare his favourite dish, or suggest you get a babysitter in so just the two of you can go out together one evening. Most of all, by still showing interest in his cares and worries, despite your involvement with the children, you can make him feel he's the most important person in the whole world - to you."

and:

"Even if he feels he wants to do something as drastic as emigrate, have the courage to take the plunge. A whole new world can open up for you too."

Oh yes? Or is he your whole world anyway, so it doesn't matter where you are.

The advice columns in these magazines are the show case for this ideology. (For anyone who

thinks they're a joke it is worth being reminded that 54 million letters are received yearly by the magazines, something like three letters for every adult woman in Britain, which ought to give some indication of the extent of unhappiness among women!) The advice given to the following letter on Evelyn Home's page sums up the wife's role:

"Colin and I got married seven months ago and to be honest, it seems like seven years. He wants me to stay on full time at work for at least another two years, but he doesn't stop to think that I get dead tired and could do with a bit of help. We live in a six roomed house and I do all the cooking, cleaning, washing and ironing while he sits watching me. He wonders why I fall asleep when we go out, but if I ask him to help he says "Just wait until this film ends" or "Hold on while I have a cigarette". I start work at 7.30 a.m. and am still on the go after 11 at night. He goes off to bed when he feels like it, and expects me to do the same, but how can I? He leaves his things all over the place and I sometimes think he's only doing it to get me mad."

No, she's not urged to kick him in the balls. He's O.K. It's her who needs to change. First, she's told how to rationalise the housework and then, would you believe, "Kiss him often, praise him when he co-operates, curb your own desire to keep everything looking new and suggest that you change to a part time job." and "Cheer up". The message, as always, is that the man's freedom must be left perfectly intact and that the woman must find new and ever more ingenious ways to deepen her oppression.

The magazine image of marriage presents society's version of the 'ideal woman'. Whether or not women's lives correspond to the ideal, its impact

on their view of themselves is considerable; it beckons to them all the time and tells them that if they're not satisfied, they must try harder to aspire to the ideal. But the more time she spends building her husband up, the less there is of her for him to knock down. The woman's identity is eroded commensurately with the growth of the man's. The ideal selfless woman is a woman without a self.

The woman builds her life on the assumption that her husband's job or career must take first consideration, even in cases where she has a satisfying job of her own. Mrs. Neal, a 'career woman', interviewed in the book, 'Dual Career Families' by Rhona and Robert Rappaport, says:

"The wife must put her husband's career first. If you marry a husband who is a geographer or an archeologist, you've just got to adjust yourself to the fact of living abroad if necessary and giving up one's own job."

As a civil servant, working in the same high capacity as her husband and earning the same amount of money, Mrs. Neal is theoretically in a position where she could question the assumption that the husband's occupation must always come first. Instead she upholds the social code because it is the only acceptable one. The act of putting the husband's job first is one of the determining features in the woman's attitude to him and to herself. By comparison to him, her own need for satisfaction at work is dismissed because her real satisfaction lies in her domestic role. Anything else is incidental. A state of affairs in which the roles were reversed, where men willingly uprooted themselves, leaving their work, their friends and their social life in order to trail after the woman because she found a better job in another town and where he would live in social isolation, would be unimaginable.

When a woman marries, she marries not only the man but his job, his interests, his friends, his fishing rod, car, tastes etc. etc. Much of a woman's identity is expressed in her choice of friends and in her relationships with her closest friends. In marriage, the man keeps the friends he had and the woman gradually drops hers, partly to make room in her life for his, but mostly because, for women, marriage involves a total rejection of one way of life for another. The same goes for her interests. Unlike the wife, the husband is not expected to make an effort to get on with his wife's friends and in practice doesn't do so, just as he is not required to adopt her interests. The process of losing touch with one's former self takes a variety of forms:

"I've lost track of my friends since I've been married. I've tended to take on more of his friends, in fact, to tell the truth, I hardly ever see mine." J.G. (ex secretary, beach photographer, married to a University Lecturer.)

"I've kept in touch with two friends I had before marriage. Oh yes, I do ring them occasionally." I.C. (ex clothing worker, married to a TV mechanic)

"I'm more friendly with his friends than he is with mine. You have to be." G.D. (ex historian, married to a TV producer)

"Our friends are couples and we all go out together. But he knows a lot more people than I do. People he goes for a drink with and people he goes to rugby matches with." A.P. (ex clothing worker, married to a decorator)

Even where the husband and wife keep their own friends and see them independently, the woman is still expected to cater to her husband's when he brings them home whereas he is at perfect liberty to go off when she brings hers home.

The same pattern is apparent where their interests are concerned:

"I used to walk a lot but he doesn't care for it so I don't do that so much now. I play the guitar. He's quite interested but not exactly enthusiastic." P.M. (ex teacher, married to an accountant.)

(Have you any special interests of your own?) "No I haven't". (Before you were married?) "I used to love to go dancing." A.P.

"I used to read a lot but now I find - and this again is very frustrating - but I never seem to have enough time - so I tend now, and it's probably become a habit, I tend now to sit and read newspapers." (Husbands interests?) He's got a vast amount of interests but they're all in some way connected to his job. (Do you take part in them?) Oh yes." J.G.

"I used to do a lot of sewing. It sounds daft but I don't have any time. If I sit down I just don't think of picking it up." A.T. (ex wages clerk, married to unemployed labourer)

"He does loads of things. He's in a pipe band and he's just started fishing and he's got his aquarium. (Do you take part in his interests?) I always go to the pipe parades. (Any of your own?) Well, you

could say I was a TV fanatic. (Any before you were married?) I used to like to go dancing. I used to go very regular like but you give that up when you get married don't you?" I.C.

This rejection of their own world, their friends and their activities is not only regarded as perfectly ordinary but desirable. It is the woman's public demonstration of her part of the marriage contract. She is nice to his friends, stands on the sidelines while he goes to pipe parades, cheers on his team, listens admiringly while he recounts his sporting adventures, cleans and cooks the fish he catches, takes an interest in his work and so on. In theory, she should be able to play the part required of her without it adversely affecting her private life. But it doesn't work that way. What begins as a deliberate technique, practised in the name of the marriage, becomes the basis for the rest of her behaviour and, ultimately, her identity.

In the process of rejecting their own world and adopting their husbands', women also absorb their husbands' opinions. Because she is trained to listen to him and to regard everything he feels and thinks as important and because she is already predisposed to lack faith in her own ideas (by virtue of her socialisation as a woman), she gradually adopts his views. She agrees with his opinions, echoes them in public, internalises them and finally brings them out as her own. She is allowed to supply modifications from time to time but she takes pains to ensure that he accommodates them as his own to the extent of encouraging him to think that he thought of them in the first place. He likes the Rolling Stones or Mantovani or whatever, and so does she; he decides to go vegetarian and it's what she always wanted to do; he wants four children and in the end so does she and so

on. The same process that is at work in personal tastes also operates in political affiliations. In political organisations, of all shades, there are vast numbers of women who, though subsequently committed and active, first joined because their husbands were members. Often this unanimity goes under the guise of the composite married couple/one person syndrome; that is, they appear to be two halves of one person with the same tastes, the same friends, the same interests and the same world view. Only it is his world view.

My own experience of this situation is relevant here. At the age of 21 I married a man who was older (by 6 years), cleverer and better educated than myself. Those facts, by themselves, set the stage for what followed. He was a painter and a drinker and I had no interest or liking for either. I nevertheless spent the greater part of my married life in art galleries and pubs. In addition I came to believe that modern art was the most important product of this society, that artists ought to be cherished instead of regarded as freaks, that all other pursuits were meaningless in comparison to artistic development and that my sole function in life was to serve his genius, ease his bad times, warm his bed, protect him from distractions (like housework) and cater to his every need. There was one period when he demanded silence in the morning at breakfast so that he could start his working day untroubled by 'trivia'. I remember thinking that this was perfectly understandable and I tried as far as I could to blend with the wallpaper so as not to disturb his equilibrium. It never occurred to me to think of my equilibrium.

I worked throughout our married life but it also never occurred to me that I should not do all the housework as well - shopping in my lunch hours, cooking as soon as I got home, spending my evenings in launderettes etc. I did what

millions of other women have to do. I uprooted myself from my work, friends, familiar comfortable flat and social life in order to follow him to a place where he could get work, a place where, given normal choices, I would never have dreamed of living in. His work there brought him in touch with other artists and these people became his friends and, in consequence, 'our' friends. Again, these were people whom I would never normally have sought out as friends. Being a woman without 'qualifications' the only work I could get was as a shop assistant which held little prospect for any interest or independent life of my own. I did a dull boring job during the day, went home to do even more dull boring jobs in the evening and spent what little leisure time that was left accompanying him on pub crawls and listening to him talking about art to his friends. But this was marriage and I ought to have been blissfully happy. It was only when I got out that I discovered that I'd lost all sense of personal autonomy, that I had no ideas that were not his, that I'd been ground down by continuous compromise and that I had absolutely no self confidence. I had been Mrs. Artist for so long that I had forgotten how to be myself.

The only difference between my experience of married life and the great majority of married women is in the details. The pattern it illustrates is universal and should be apparent to anyone who cares to look deeply enough. It is a strict regime of self-denial and it is practised 'willingly' in almost every marriage. It results in an opening up of horizons for men and a drastic reduction for women. The only productive contribution she can make comes not from herself but from a denial of herself. The areas in which she is allowed to find satisfaction are rigidly defined for her by her domestic supportive function and the years spent per-

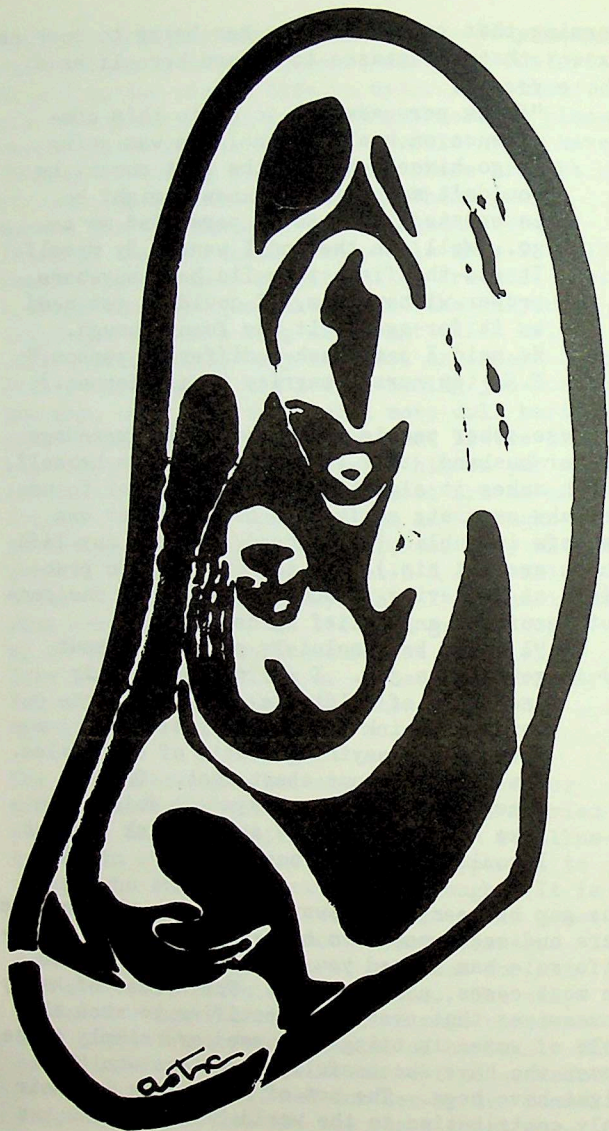
forming that role undermine her being to such an extent that she ceases to regard herself as a whole person.

"Frank persuaded me to go to this conference on health foods. He was going to go himself but at the last moment he couldn't make it. He knew I might be interested in it so he persuaded me to go. Well, in the end I went. By myself. It was the first time I'd been anywhere proper without him. I couldn't get used to it for ages. It was funny though. He said I came back a different person." F.E. (ex nurse, married to a salesman.)

Because other people treat her as an appendage to her husband, that is how she regards herself, which makes it almost impossible for her to undertake separate activities or voice her own beliefs in public (if, indeed, she has any left which are not his.) She is, in fact, so practised at believing in someone else that she cannot resurrect any belief in herself.

"I would be absolutely petrified about getting a job. I would feel totally incapable of holding a job down. Honestly, I think I'm unemployable. I haven't got anything that's of cash value. I'm quite serious about that. On the other hand, I see other people doing jobs - like the people in TV and I think "Christ I could run rings round them." G.D.

The gap between the known potential - who you once were and once wanted to be - and what your housewife role has turned you into, is enormous and, in most cases, unbridgeable. The hordes of happy housewives that every man testifies to when the role of women is being discussed are simply those women who have successfully forgotten who they might have been. The act of forgetting is their only contribution to the world.



Mother

She kept a tiny turtle on the
Dust curled floor in place of
Husband and then daughter,
Early gone at her insistence;
Covered all reflecting surfaces on walls,
Collected myriad reels of cotton,
Children's books,
And jars of olives.
She spoke to no one
And ceased writing the love poetry
She once did well.
Soon her delusions drew a neighbor's

attention
And the local doctor said what an interesting
case.

She was convinced an unknown person
Could peer through her clothing with a
machine

And she left notes all around the flat,
Half in shorthand,
Of her secret, sexy thoughts:
She had always been one for endless lists.
In every book she bought she wrote her name
and the date

For someone's future reference.
Only her hair which lay on her head
Like petals
Was unchanged.
In hospital,
A city in itself set in the country,
She had electric shock treatment
Which she loathed
Though she made fair progress and wrote
The most lucid letters of her life.

Visitors came on Sundays,
Bored and embarrassed,
Surprised at the ordinariness of the scene.
Five months later,
Cured and released,
Her prose again was excessive and childlike:
Till the next time.

©Astra

Mother and Daughter

She should have taken
A lover
When dad left
But the bohemian puritan in her
Said no.
Instead the daughter
Was kept as
Petted sister to her,
Mascot of the domicile,
Smothered,
Devoured,
Obliterated,
Eventually to flee into
Marriage
With a male duplicate
Of mum.

© Astra

Ultimate Goals

Both sexes have lost touch with their inner selves, replacing them with roles. To achieve a society of 'whole' people, our ultimate goal, it is essential that these lost selves be found and realized.

Neither the male culture nor the female culture is a model for a human society.

It is true that women have no recourse other than to rise up in a strong feminist movement to end male domination. We must have our own independent women's movement free from male interference and domination. But we should not lose sight of our ultimate goals. There is a danger that the women's movement will help destroy its own ends if the split between the female and male is made into a new feminist orthodoxy. The women's movement has to be free enough to explore and change the entire range of human relationships and it must be open enough to heal the split between the female and male and draw out the total human potential of every person. If we want to be free as female human beings, we must really be willing to end the split of the human personality that has cut men off from a part of themselves and which has caused untold suffering to women.

This is the closing paragraph of the postscript to the Fourth World Manifesto and it is this 'healing of the split between the female and male' that I want to explore in this paper. It seems to me that if we want to heal the split between women and men we must first heal the split between the

woman and man within ourselves. Potentially we are all whole human beings, the split into masculine and feminine is artificially created. Therefore we all have within us a woman and a man. The biological female has suppressed the man in her just as the biological male has suppressed the woman in him. We need to liberate these men and women within ourselves.

How did we become split? At some point in our history the early communistic matriarchies were overthrown, women were reduced to chattel status, and male supremacy was born. When a hierarchy is created certain characteristics, attitudes and behaviour are clearly attached to the positions of high or low status within it. It is essential if the hierarchy is to function smoothly that these high and low status characteristics are quite clearly understood and accepted by those who fill the requisite positions. Stability and continuity of the ruling group is even more enhanced if these characteristics are internalised by the occupants of the positions and therefore appear 'natural'. In order then for male supremacy to assert itself it was imperative that women accept their low status and degraded position within society as 'natural' and not as imposed upon them by men. The way of achieving this was to create a specific 'female' personality experienced by the woman as coming from within herself and not imposed upon her from the outside. The price that was paid in human terms for this was a deep schism in the human psyche. All characteristics were divided up, those which patriarchy considered of little value were labelled 'female', those it considered of greater value were labelled 'male'. And so the artificial construct of a separate and identifiable male and female personality was created for the sole purpose of maintaining a male supremacist society. This, in turn, provided the basis for the ruthless suppression of 'female' characteristics

both in the male and in society by the oppression of females. But the male has had to pay a price for his supremacy, (albeit not as high as the female), in terms of never being able to achieve wholeness or become fully human. In this system no-one escapes damage, no-one is allowed to become whole. We will all remain fragmented beings, betraying the reality of our human potential while these artificially created sex-roles govern our lives.

In our alienated society, to have lost touch with one's inner being and to efficiently enact the dictates of one's social role, is to be normal. But a normal personality is by no means a healthy personality.

To be neurotic means that the integration of a strong self has not been achieved successfully. To be normal certainly does not mean that it has. It means for the majority of well-adapted individuals that they have lost their own self at an early age and replaced it completely by a social self (role) offered to them by society. They have no neurotic conflicts because they themselves, and therefore, the discrepancy between their selves and the outside world has disappeared. (Fromm)

It is impossible in our 'split' society for anyone to be whole or really themselves, because society's sanctions will constantly batter those who try. As a consequence we spend most of our lives concealing our true identity. Jourard says that "throughout history we have chosen to conceal our authentic being behind various masks ... indeed, self concealment is regarded as the most natural state for grown men." He also sees self concealment as

the cause of "illness in its myriad forms", and the key to healthy authentic being as 'self disclosure'. By this he means honest disclosure of the 'real self', not merely disclosure of role behaviour or the false constructs of self which most of us use in our daily interactions. To disclose one's real self one must first discover one's real self. It seems to me that the first step along the road to self-realization is the acceptance that there is a real self which in most people is carefully hidden, and which needs to be discovered and expressed in order for it to grow. The discovery and disclosure of self is a dialectical process; as we disclose more of our 'self' so we discover more of our 'self'."...It is not until I am my real self and I act my real self that my real self is in a position to grow. One's self grows from the consequence of being." (Jourard) We can only be at various stages of attempting to know our selves and struggling to disclose our selves authentically in a world which would rather we did not. People will be at various stages, from those whose every living moment is a struggle towards authenticity to those who are so alienated that they feel there is nothing to struggle with. They have so totally lost touch with themselves they experience no struggle, no conflict, they imagine themselves to be totally disclosed and 'authentic' already. These people do not accept the basic premise that unless a person has worked consciously and often painfully at exploring and discovering their real self, they will automatically be alienated and shut off from their innermost core of being. In other words, to be alienated is to have developed normally. To be non-alienated means a conscious interference with 'normal' development.

To act out our social roles successfully we must repudiate our real selves and become impersonal, both in our relation to our selves and other

people. We function on a role basis, we have role relationships. A person can live out their entire life in this way, never being deeply involved at a personal level with another person, only experiencing himself and the other in terms of their roles. " ... A husband can be married to his wife for fifteen years and never come to know her. He knows her as 'the wife' ". (Jourard)

When we accept our role and lose touch with the vital core of ourselves we are sick. We are not in our bodies, we are not in our actions. We have dead eyes. We live out our lives performing the tasks associated with our role. There is nothing else, nothing new, nothing spontaneous, nothing meaningful. It is a sickness that doesn't show, it doesn't noticeably affect our bodies, it doesn't impair our capacity to function. It doesn't prevent us from acting out our role. We are just dead inside. " ... For an analyst it is a source of never-ending astonishment how comparatively well a person can function with the core of himself not participating." (Horney) We just carry on with what we have to do. And most of the time it seems like normality. It is the striving for health, the groping towards self-realization that seems unnatural, unreal somehow.

'The loss of self is despair.' But it is a despair that is silent. People go on living as if they were still in immediate contact with this alive center. Any other loss - that of a job, say, or a leg - arouses far more concern. (Horney)

When people have lost the sense of their own being, when they have lost touch with their 'inner core' which gives life meaning, they do not know what it is they have lost. They know that something is terribly wrong, yet they seem to be normal adjusted people so they cannot locate what it is. They

flock to analysts in droves. "Patients coming for consultation complain about headaches, sexual disturbances, inhibitions in work, or other symptoms ... they do not complain about having lost touch with the core of their psychic existence." (Horney) This is because in our sick role-playing society this inner core of self is never accorded recognition or legitimized. It is never acknowledged that such a thing exists so how can it be lost? "Self alienation is a sickness which is so widely shared that no-one recognizes it. Everywhere we see people who have sold their soul, or their real self ... in order to be a psychologist, a businessman, a nurse, a physician, a this or a that." (Jourard)

In fact the greater the acceptance of the role the greater the alienation from the self. Someone who has invested everything in successfully playing out their social role will experience any attempt to locate their 'real self' as a threat which must be countered and defeated. This is the particular threat that the women's movement poses both to women and to men. Women however, have always come off worse in the role-playing system because the role assigned to them has always been inferior and oppressed. Most men however experience the threat of tearing away the masculine role as the threat of total annihilation of themselves. The degree to which the man is alienated from himself will be the degree to which the women's movement is experienced as a threat. Karen Horney gives an example of this successful role-playing which I'm sure many women will recognize " ... the ambition-ridden person (male role) can display an astounding energy in order to attain eminence, power, and glamour, yet on the other hand have no time, interest, or energy for his personal life and his development as a human being. Actually it is not only a question of 'having no energies left' for his personal life and its growth. Even if he had

energies left he would unconsciously refuse to use them on behalf of his real self. To do so would run contrary to the intent of his self-hate, which is to keep his real self down." We act out our role and we protect ourselves from the pain of living in an alienated world. The price we pay is that our lives become merely a slow form of death. "(The unreal system) in a methodical way ... is literally killing the person off ... In the meantime, it usually does its job well. It keeps the Pain away, wrapping such a shield around the feeling self that nothing can be felt. Life is just a process of going through the motions until death - all with the feeling of gnawing desperation that time is running out and one has not yet begun to live." (Janov)

It is the task of our society to make us sick, that is to make us conform to a 'normal role' in a sick society. A number of theorists have written on this 'sickness' of self alienation but few of them have explicitly seen the causes in terms of the playing-out of social roles. This means they have continued to see the problem as a personal one, and not one specifically created by a male society to ensure that power should remain at all times in male hands. Even though the sickness of alienation strikes inevitably at men also, it is seen as preferable to sharing any of that power with women. The function of roles in society is to make people's behaviour predictable and therefore easily socially controllable. It puts all society's rules inside the person and it forces people into this internalized prison long before they ever have a chance to taste freedom or even imagine the possibility of it. "Social systems require their members to play certain roles. Unless the roles are adequately played, the social systems will not produce the results for which they have been organized." (Jourard, my emphasis) Our patriarchal society has been organized on the

basis of a hierarchical division between the sexes. The political class of men oppress and exploit the political class of women. Within the political class of men a few dominate and oppress the rest. It is for the benefit of these few that the patriarchal role-system is maintained, although all men derive direct or indirect political benefit from it. At no time is this system of benefit to women. This is why it is women who will bring it down. This is the political threat of the women's movement in questioning the basis of sex roles in our culture. Our refusal to go on playing social roles and a preparedness to expose the whole nature of social role playing is a political act. It threatens the very basis of our society. It exposes the aims of patriarchy. Our task is to build a whole new system. We have to dismantle the hierarchical power structure built up and maintained through social role-playing. And we have to start with ourselves. We have to put ourselves together again. We must become real. When we are real, then we are a real threat. A real threat to the status quo, because its structures and methods of control will no longer be able to contain us. We will have grown too big. When we have become our 'selves' we will demand to be our selves and we will create a society in which this is possible. We will no longer tolerate being forced into predetermined moulds. This will be the point of explosive conflict with those who will try to stop us. This will be the war between the old and the new. This is the Feminist Revolution - the revolution of consciousness.

To revolutionize our consciousness and free ourselves from alienation it is important to consider how society deforms us, robs us of our selves and forces us into its predetermined moulds. The most crucial of the social roles imposed upon us are

the sex-roles because they provide the original schism in the human psyche, the original split upon which all later alienation is built. It is when we have internalized our sex-role that we become predictable and stereotyped; it is then that we have our patriarchal society's rules and values inside of us. There is no need then for external coercion, we coerce ourselves and we experience it as 'natural' behaviour. Sex labelling begins the moment we are born when we are wrapped in a pink or blue blanket. From then onwards society will hammer home to us with ever-increasing force its definition of us and the behaviour it expects and demands from that definition. In fact, sex labelling is so strong that by the age of two years most children have learnt their own label. (Mussen) It may be that sex-role behaviour seems somehow 'natural' to most people (i.e. unlearned) because it is learnt so early on in life. If sexual identification is already established by the age of two years this would put it beyond memory, that is no one could ever remember a time when they were not aware of being either a girl or a boy. But sex-role behaviour is not 'natural', it is learnt through heavy social conditioning. Its purpose is to ensure that individuals can be easily controlled by society by placing society's rules inside them and in consequence an independent, questioning sense of self is never allowed to develop. No-one is ever allowed to define themselves, therefore no-one in this society can be self determining. The right to define oneself must be a basic premise of any really human society, and it is this right which is at the core of feminism.

Evidence to show roles to be the artificial social constructs they really are, with little or nothing to do with the inherent potential self of the individual, comes from studies of children whose gender was in doubt. It has been shown that girls

who were mistakenly thought to be boys and therefore brought up as boys showed all the characteristics and behaviour associated with boys long after their correct gender had been diagnosed and even after they had undergone 'surgical readjustment'. The same holds true for biologically male children who have been brought up as girls. A seventeen-year-old individual who had always regarded himself and been regarded by others as female was discovered to have 'undescended testes and predominantly male secondary sex characters' and an 'absence of uterus, tubes, ovaries, vagina or mammary tissues.' However, he had from early childhood 'assumed the feminine role'. " 'His' earliest memory concerned an episode representing himself in this role at the age of four in doll play. During adolescence, like normal girls, 'he' became interested in boys and dances, and later, in sewing, cooking and housework. Moreover, 'he' experienced typical feminine phantasies of being married and having a family." (Seward)

Another striking illustration of the way biological and anatomical differences between the sexes bear little relation to innate potential can be seen in the case of Frankie, who entered hospital as a five-year-old boy who was diagnosed as 'a genuine female whose clitoris had been previously mistaken for a small penis.' After the diagnosis had been made the nurses in the hospital were instructed to treat Frankie as a girl.

This didn't sound too difficult - until we tried it. Frankie simply didn't give the right cues. It is amazing how much your response to a child depends on that child's behaviour towards you. It was extremely difficult to keep from responding to Frankie's typically little boy behaviour in the same way that I responded to other boys in the ward. And to treat Frankie

as a girl was jarringly out of key ... Frankie became increasingly aware of the change in our attitude toward her. She seemed to realize that behaviour which had always before brought forth approval was no longer approved ... Her reaction was strong and violent. She became extremely belligerent and even less willing to accept crayons, color books, and games which she simply called "sissy" and threw on the floor. She talked constantly of the wagon she had been promised at Christmas ... (On her discharge) her mother had brought a dress and Frankie took one look and set up a howl ... (Finally she) went home in a pair of hospital coveralls. (Lindesmith & Strauss, my emphasis.)

Frankie put up a fight. She is fighting the fight that every woman in Women's Liberation is fighting - hers is not a special case it is just more dramatic. She wasn't going to gracefully accept that half her personality must be annihilated. She was the same person who had entered that hospital. She had not changed - it was her sex label that had changed. This is a classic example of the way in which society forces and moulds people's personalities into a deformed caricature of what they might have been. People who fight against this bludgeoning of their psyche are called 'sick'. But,

If the neurotic becomes well, he does not become normal in the sense of the conforming social self (role). He succeeds in realizing his self, which never had been completely lost and for the preservation of which he was struggling by his neurotic symptoms. (Fromm)

Women who for years have fought against the

oppressed female role have been 'treated' by psychiatrists to overcome their resistances and 'accept their femininity' i.e. oppression. But the resistance was the healthiest thing about them. They were being 'treated' to eliminate their health not their sickness. When this is the aim of psychotherapy, according to Fromm, it is merely helping the individual to "give up the fight for his self and conform to the cultural pattern peacefully and without the noise of a neurosis."

Although sex-typing begins at the moment of birth, it is in adolescence that society really gets tough over role playing. Prior to this it tolerated a certain amount of tom-boyishness in its girls, with more reluctance an amount of 'cissy-ness' in its boys, but by adolescence this tolerance disappears and is replaced with rigid demands for conformity to the sex roles and all that is embodied within them. This is what adults see as maturity, as 'growing up'. Deviance from or rebellion against this can produce the most vicious reactions in adults. The conflict at Kent State University in which four students were shot by National Guardsmen has been seen as a "confrontation between two radically different lifestyles." The tradition-bound citizens of Kent, Ohio, felt themselves immeasurably threatened by these men with long shaggy hair, these girls "who refused to wear bras", and their terror led them to do terrible things. Parents of many of the students expressed regret that the State Troopers did not shoot more students. When their own student sons and daughters pointed out that they themselves might have been shot, the parents assured them that they were fully aware of that and that they would have deserved it. At times of crisis, like that at Kent State, the nature of the repressive and brutal power structure of our society is laid bare."... In hundreds of cases young students caught a terrifying glimpse of what their parents

really thought. For a moment, the veil that properly exists between young and old was torn down and the former were shocked by what they saw." (Michener) Adults who themselves have been brutalized into submission, who have so totally had their inner core of self annihilated and replaced with the repressive rigid roles of society, are determined that no-one else shall escape. Their spirit is so broken that they not only accept their psychic crippling, they embrace it. Erikson puts it this way:

These new identifications (in adolescence) are no longer characterized by the playfulness of childhood and the experimental zest of youth; with dire urgency they force the young individual into choices and decisions which will, with increasing immediacy, lead to a more final self-definition, to irreversible role-pattern, and thus to commitments "for life".
(my emphasis)

He does not at any time question the desirability of this process. He does not, for instance, consider that the turmoil of adolescence might be the young person's last ditch stand against selling his soul, against betraying forever the reality and truth of his real self, in exchange for the approved, stereotyped role which society tells him is 'adult', the acquiescence and acceptance of the system which society tells him is 'maturity'.

The acceptance of the female role in adolescent girls (the repudiation of intellect, aggressiveness, activity in exchange for emotionality, submission and passivity etc.,) has been well documented in the literature of the women's movement. And in consequence it may often seem that the male adolescent is allowed to grow and freely develop his potential, but in fact the rules apply just

as strictly to his development - he is allowed only to develop as an oppressor. And in taking the development of the male role as an example I hope to illustrate the way in which the playing out of sex roles deprives us all of our authentic selves, even those whom it is supposed to benefit. Shulamith Firestone has described how the young boy before reaching adolescence tends to identify more with his mother. He perceives that they are both oppressed by the father who carries the real power. However, at adolescence he is called upon to make a switch in his identification and learn the role of the adult male, the role of the oppressor. "The male child, in order to save his own hide, has had to abandon and betray his mother and join ranks with her oppressor." The time has come when he must finally leave the warmth and intimacy of relationships with mothers or sisters and take on harsh, brutal attitudes towards them in order to become 'a man'. Philip Callow describes this transition vividly,

There was a feeling of rancour. If you spoke to your mates it had to be jeering, violent. Insults were spat out freely, as a matter of course, in a joyless kind of humour, and you retaliated in the same way, loud-mouthed, hard, or kept quiet. There was no freedom, nobody relaxed or spoke in confidence; none of that stuff to do with homes and girls, mothers, the female. The bitter taste was on our tongues, the iron hook dug in cruelly. We were men in a man's world. (my emphasis)

The oppressor must define himself by his distance from the oppressed and to do this successfully he needs to keep the distance between them great. He needs to assure himself there is nothing of the contemptible female in him, he reassures himself by constantly degrading her. "If anything female and young enough tripped by, the instinct was to

degrade it, drag it down." (Callow) She is no longer even accorded human status, she is now "it". And even while he is describing this, it is evident that it does not have to be this way. This is a role he is desperately learning, it is not inherent male behaviour. "It was a howling travesty of how we really were inside, under the masks, and there was no breaking the rigid pattern of behaviour laid down for us, as clear and fixed as the white lines of the gangways." (my emphasis) But he is wrong about this. There is a way of breaking "the rigid pattern of behaviour laid down." Men can refuse to accept this brutalization of their own psyche and their subsequent brutalizing treatment of women. They can refuse to accept the role, they can stand up against society and demand the right to define themselves, just as women are now doing. If real harmony is ever to be achieved between the sexes it is essential that men begin to do this. At the present time men define themselves in terms of the psychic distance between themselves and women, if they get really close and identify with women they are terrified they are losing their 'masculinity'. And indeed they are because 'masculinity' as defined by our society equals 'the oppressor role'. Any man who says he does not want to lose his 'masculinity' is saying he has no intention of giving up his oppressor role. His overriding interest is vested in maintaining his power relationships over women and not in struggling towards some viable non-oppressive relationship with them. Dana Densmore maintains that men who are genuinely interested in giving up the oppressor role will make this evident in their behaviour, "given encouragement, education and demonstration of how strongly we feel, they will declare themselves our allies ... they will show respect for us as persons and for our cause as appropriate and legitimate. In fact it turns out that men sort themselves out into allies and "enemies"." Women are on the move. We are

throwing off our oppressed roles and working together to build something new. If men want to be part of that 'something new' they must start work now on dismantling the 'oppressor role' both within themselves and within society. "There are men who do not appear to be vicious oppressors of women. Yet any man who is not working consciously to change the inequal relationship of men and women is opposing the interest of women." (Dunbar and Leghorn)

Men have been oppressing women for the past 5,000 years. They have also been wreaking havoc with our planet. Cut off from all their 'female' characteristics of tenderness, empathy and concern for others they are turning our world into a dehumanized, alienated nightmare. And even they (or some of them) are beginning to realize it. At the time of the My Lai massacre a symposium was held in the U.S.A. on 'The Legitimation of Evil'. It sought to consider how such social destructiveness can come about, and how the people who engage in it feel that they have special permission from society to carry out these acts. Many such incidents were considered - My Lai, Kent State, Hiroshima, Lynchings, Indian Massacres and the ever imminent threat of nuclear war. As they worked to discover the common links between these events a composite picture began to form. It is difficult to summarize a work of such complexity and importance but one of the major findings was the part played by the mechanism of dehumanization.

Dehumanization is a process by which we distance ourselves from our own experience and the subjective experience of others. It enables us to cope, but it does so at a terrible cost. "Dehumanization operates as a defence against such painful feelings as fear, inadequacy, compassion, revulsion, guilt and shame. As with other mental mechanisms of defence, its self protective distortions of

realistic perceptions occur, for the most part, outside of awareness." It means we do not feel the pain of others and we do not feel our own pain. It enables us to function but with a blunted sensitivity. It enables us to feel less and less, until we become smoothly operating unemotional automatons. Dehumanization is the process by which the individual comes to function so well "with the core of himself not participating." He has committed existential suicide, he has killed his 'real self', in order to exist in a world of automatons. And the irony of this is that dehumanization was used as a defence against the pain of living in an alienated world, but by the very adoption of this defence it ensures that alienation will continue. It therefore fulfils the very threat that it seeks to prevent. "These two forms of dehumanization (dehumanization of the self and dehumanization of others) are mutually reinforcing: reduction in the full-ness of one's feelings for other human beings, whatever the reason for this, impoverishes one's sense of self; any lessening of the humanness of one's self-image limits one's capacity for relating to others."

"Self-directed dehumanization empties the individual of human emotions and passions." It is easy to see how this dehumanization has become institutionalized in the male role with its emphasis on aggressiveness, ruthlessness and unemotionality. It can be seen in the soldier at My Lai who laughed every time he pulled the trigger. This might seem like an extreme example until one considers that when a study was undertaken asking people what they would do if they were ordered to line up people and kill them, only 27% of the men interviewed said they would refuse, while 74% of the women said they would refuse. (Opton)

This might appear to suggest that women are less dehumanized than men, but what it more accurately

reflects is the non-adoption of the aggressive 'male' role by women. Women have their own form of dehumanization which coincides more appropriately with their female role, the dehumanized victim. It was found that dehumanization against pain is at least as common a response of the victim as of the oppressor. "The victims in turn respond, subjectively, by resorting even more to self-protective dehumanization." Examples of this are given by the victim survivors of Hiroshima, who at first could find no words to convey the horror and then all feelings disappeared. Perhaps when women accept the 'object' female role they dehumanize themselves in order to protect themselves from feeling the unbearable pain that would result from perceiving their true position in society. "The.. sense of personal unimportance and relative helplessness socially and politically, on the part of so many people specifically inclines them to adopt dehumanization as a preferred defence against many kinds of painful, unacceptable, and unbearable feelings referable to their experiences, inclinations and behaviour." Dehumanization then is the method by which people come to insulate themselves from their own experiences and the experience of others. This mechanism is normally used as a defence against feelings of pain. In my view it is the same mechanism as Janov's 'unreal system' or Horney's 'inauthentic being' or the acting-out of rigid role structures. However, Sanford and Comstock take it further than these psychological theorists and see it as a social phenomenon, with social causes and social consequences. What they do not see in addition to this is its sexual/political dimension. It is not merely a social phenomenon it is a political necessity in order to keep the power remaining in male hands. We do not live in a value-free society, we live in a male supremacist society and the dehumanizing processes they describe are a necessity in the maintenance of that system. And while we go on

insulating ourselves from the pain of our situation the world is hurtling towards disaster. The authors of this study (Sanctions for Evil), claim that unless we can halt and then reverse this process of dehumanization the threat of a detached, impersonal slide into nuclear war grows ever greater. They claim that "the reversing of ... dehumanization emerges as the key to survival." They see this reversal in terms of 'rehumanizing society' through 'self-realization' and "the necessity of devising ways to increase opportunities for meaningful personal relationships and maximum social participation throughout the entire fabric of our society." From the quote given at the beginning of this paper it can be seen that this is also the 'ultimate goal' envisaged by the women's movement. It is my belief that the upsurge of feminism at this point in our history is no accident. I believe it is imperative for the survival of the race that the dehumanized aggression bred into the male role must be challenged and overcome. It is also imperative that we struggle to find new values and philosophies which enhance the 'humanness' of human beings in place of the dehumanizing patriarchal philosophies which are slowly killing us all. This is why the Feminist Revolution will succeed, because its evolutionary time has come. Those who cannot adapt to changing conditions cannot survive. Patriarchy with its rigidity and inflexibility has run its course. The time has come for the creativity and humanness of Feminism.

How are we to put ourselves together again? How are we to rehumanize our 'fractured consciousness'? How are we to heal the split between the female and the male within ourselves and within society? How are we to become 'whole people'?

Alienation from self, social role playing,



25/10

inauthentic being, dehumanization all mean "the tendency to treat oneself as an object, a tool to be manipulated ... when one treats oneself as a tool or as a thing, one treats others in the same way." Alienation is so prevalent in our society that it has reached epidemic proportions of which most people are totally unaware. A number of people, whose work I have referred to in this paper, have been concerned about the destructive effects of alienation both socially and individually. But what they have failed to see is the connection between alienation and the political structure of sex-roles within our patriarchal society. The original alienation takes place within the psyche when the child is forced to repudiate half its self and force the other half into the crippling confines of a social role. This is the original split between the 'female' and the 'male' - the original alienation. It is from this primary estrangement from our whole selves that all later inauthenticity springs and the subjugation of women takes place. It is only through going back to this original source that we can ever hope to discover and reclaim the lost parts of our selves.

It will be a difficult journey back. It means peeling off layer after layer of social role learning. It is frightening. As more and more is discarded there is the fear that when the final layer is removed it will reveal nothing. This is existential terror and it is this that makes us scurry back to the safety of roles, to the safety of what is known, and to deny our selves. It takes courage to go on - the "courage to be". It means groping back painfully through the jungle of oppression, whether we were given the role of oppressor or oppressed. There are no short cuts. For those who cannot face this journey there can be no liberation, there can be no real authenticity. We may change the outer

structure of our lives, we may gain apparent equality, but if we do not rehumanize society, if we do not become 'whole' we will have gained nothing, merely the right to be equally alienated.

Feminism is about creating whole people and building a society in which they can live and 'be'. We have to attack and change existing structures, we have to fight and eliminate sexism, but we also have to discover the antidote to alienation. We have to find a way to make people whole again, and we have to do it soon. We have to translate our rhetoric into competent methods of rehumanization that hopefully can be universally applied. We need to experiment and we need to learn from that experimentation and document it. But first of all we need to identify the problem. This is what I have tried to do in this paper. Identifying the problem is stage one. If there are enough of us who want to work to solve it, maybe we can move on to stage two.

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To G

What is there about me you lay claim to loving?
 My moods, my words, my acts, my face?
 What is it?
 Really I do not understand.

How curious you will not hear me.
 How curious you will not know me.
 I must be such a bore these days.
 How curious you seem in your unrelatedness.
 Curiouser and curiouser, said Alice.

If I had been shot in the jaw and both knees
 Would you notice me then?
 Would you really hear me
 Speak and cry and yell?

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Alone

Hear me
See me
Know me
Or leave me quite alone.
If you don't face
My hate,
My love,
You'll not
Recognize my
Caring.
And we will die
Unknown
To one another.

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Sisterhood

Why am I
Invisible,
Irrelevant,
Isolated,
Privatized?
Have I a choice:
Can I change?
Support me
So I may be a
Whole.
With you, my sisters,
I must be
More.

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Women and the Novel: A 19th Century Explosion

The three Brontes and Mrs Gaskell all published their first novels between 1847 and 1848. The next twenty year span was the Golden Age for women novelists. Between them, the three Brontes, Mrs Gaskell, and George Eliot published as many major novels as Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, and Meredith did between them. In the 'second division' women were producing most of the best-sellers: The Heir of Redcliffe (1853), Paul Ferroll (1855), and John Halifax, Gentleman (1856). It was the first time that the principal mode in literature (as the novel was in the middle of the nineteenth century) should be equally shared if not dominated by women - the first time in England at least. Why did it happen?

We must begin from an understanding of the position of women at the time, especially middle class women, since they formed the bulk of the novel writers (and readers). Their position was different from upper or lower class women, as a contemporary writer observed:

In the higher and lower ranks she emphatically shares the lot of man: - leading with him in the one a life of affluence and leisure, and bearing with him in the other a share of the labour characteristic of their common station. But, in the middle classes, though man in his estate approaches more nearly the lot of the labourer, woman would be an aristocrat, must needs spend her time in visiting and receiving visits, or in equally vain

makeshifts to kill the time. (1)

Middle class woman was an anomaly, her position as rigid as it was false. Isolated and stranded within the home, the lady was defined by the degree of her idleness and the worth of her person as an expensive and showy item of conspicuous consumption - Ruskin likened her to a 'sideboard ornament'. To her the positive function of work as self-definition and self-expression was denied, since she was defined negatively as someone who does not work. From the home which she was not allowed to leave she got and gave positive definition: women and the home provide the security and natural affections necessarily absent in the competitive materialist outside world.

Marriage was the ideal and only acceptable career for middle class women. From the cradle onwards they were socialized into this role, so that any desire to rebel would meet not only with the external opposition of the girl's family and of society, but also with the internal opposition of her own upbringing and cultivated sense of womanly duty. Very popular at the time were many books preaching about the 'duty' (a very Victorian word) of the 'Wives of England', the 'Daughters of England' and so on: the titles of these books show us how totally women were identified through their familial roles. The first commandment of this duty was the prohibition against any useful activity:

Gentlemen may employ their hours of business in almost any degrading occupation and, if they have but the means of supporting a regular establishment at home, may be gentlemen still; while, if a lady but touch any article no matter how delicate, in the way of trade, she loses caste, and ceases to be a lady. (2)

The middle of the nineteenth century, however, marked

an important time of change for women. The debate over the 'Woman Question', that was waged with such fierce emotion, centered upon the two main issues of education and employment for women. The feminists claimed that for the increasing numbers of single women the old feminine ideals of wifehood and motherhood were neither possible or desirable, and that these women had a right to independent self-expression and self-fulfillment. It is in this context that we should consider the phenomenon of the woman novelist of the nineteenth century: in the act of writing she was contravening the feminine ideal on precisely these two points of the feminist campaign - by being educated enough to think and independent enough to publish for money.

It was the late 1840's and early 1850's in particular which saw a burst of feminist writing and activity and important changes for the education and employment of women. The late '40's were also, of course, an important time for socialism, culminating with the 1848 revolutions in Europe and the Chartist movement in England. This conjunction of feminism and socialism coincided with the first wave of major novels by women, and shrewd opponents could see that these novels had very real connections with the radical movements of the time:

We do not hesitate to say that the tone of mind and thought which has overthrown authority and violated every code human and divine abroad, and fostered Chartism and rebellion at home, is the same which has also written Jane Eyre (3).

It seems to me that when we do make this connection we can understand the novels of these women better - especially their presentation of women. The fact that the conjunction of feminism and socialism in the late 40's witnessed the publication of so many good novels by women could perhaps be seen as

evidence for the Marxist supposition that a rising class produces good literature. It has never been decided if women form a class in the Marxist sense; they did however form a group which was absolutely distinct from its male counterpart in its cultural, economic, and behavioural patterns. Whether or not we want to regard women at this time as a rising class, we can still see these novels as the product of a situation which was very much alive to and in combat with the social problems of women and which, importantly, saw the personal problems of women as social problems.

Why did women turn to writing at this time and why did they choose the novel? Middle class women who wanted to produce anything except children laboured under great disadvantages; the types of employment that they first entered in any numbers were extensions of their roles within the home. The governess, nurse, and charity worker are mothers and sisters on a larger scale. Even so, the pioneering Florence Nightingale still had to face the disapproval of her mother: 'It was as if I had wanted to be a kitchen-maid'. Whatever women tried to do, the figure of the Angel in the House - to call her by the name of a famous contemporary poem - was always there, gently but firmly blocking the path. We can see her in the life of Angela Burdett-Coutts, a single woman who owned half of Coutts Bank and £50,000 a year. Completely apolitical in her benevolence, she saw her role as a gigantic extension of the traditional woman in the family. Her favourite saying was 'Life, whether man or beast, is sacred': as preserver of life she established homes for the poor, homes for children, and homes for horses. Nor, in her zeal for home-making, did she neglect the other facets of the ideal woman: as moral guide and peacemaker she established three colonial bishoprics; as the source of beauty and wisdom she patronized the arts and sciences.

Women writing novels, as they usually did, within their own families would not have to face the hostility and loss of status which leaving home nearly always involved. More generally and more importantly, I think there was (and probably still is) a special relation between women and the novel. In the nineteenth century they shared the same function of combatting utilitarian, materialist, and competitive values with the values of the feeling individual, the loving heart. This alternative offered by women and the novel was easily accomodated within the dominant system, and was in fact necessary to it as a sort of safety valve. Not radical or revolutionary per se, women and the novel could come to be so.

Of all the different kinds of novels produced in the nineteenth century - religious, historical, fashionable, sensational - beyond doubt the most important was the domestic. Again, there was a special relation between women and the domestic novel: they shared the same values and the same subject matter. The forte of the domestic novel - achieved partly through its length - was the portrayal of the intricacies of personal relationships and the subtle system of signals that constituted bourgeois social life. This was also the special sphere of women. Having no economic power or social independence, they were forced to gain their ends by manipulating the nexus of personal relationships in which they found themselves and were, thus, more conscious than men of these relationships and their significance. It is interesting here to note that Richardson, who was the first to put the problem of personal relationship at the centre of the novel, is said by Ian Watt to have had 'a deep personal identification with the opposite sex which went far beyond social preference or cultural rapport' (4).

This concern common to both women and the domestic

novel also shared a common location: that of the home and family. The 'three or four families' which Jane Austen said constituted the world of her novels were also what constituted most women's lives; unlike men, they had no alternative sphere. Furthermore, the structure of a woman's life, with marriage as its high point and focal interest, is also the structure of the average domestic novel.

Women have always been and still are the main consumers of the novel. In the nineteenth century it was, for them, more than a frivolous pastime (as was often suggested) since it offered what was often the only alternative to their world of the home. Women were used to living vicariously through their men and the novel offered another sort of vicarious experience which did not involve the mediation of men. Reading is an active experience, as Sartre recognizes when he calls it 'directed creation'. Therefore, the very act of reading - quite apart from what they read - could be for women, who were not supposed to act, in some ways subversive. Especially novel-reading, which involves the reader in a whole world which is different from his or her own and which requires the reader to make judgements and discriminations. The woman quickly hiding the slightly risqué novel - or indeed any novel - out of the sight of a father, brother, or husband is a frequent image in nineteenth century literature.

At the lowest level novel writing was seen as performing a function in common with other occupations for ladies which were coming to be accepted (though not without some outcry):

There are vast numbers of lady novelists, for much the same reason that there are vast numbers of sempstresses. Thousands of women have nothing to do, and yet are under the necessity of doing something.(5)

But it is clear that to most women novelists their writing had much more personal importance and significance. For writing offered unique possibilities to women: it offered them control. Outside the family middle class women were of only marginal significance since they could not work; within the family they were subordinate to the male head. But when they wrote they were subordinate to no one; and since they often wrote from within a family situation, writing was a subversive activity. It gave women a private life, an alternative mode of living, a world that they could order and control; it gave them power. In the persona of the author they could be - perhaps in the only area of their lives - authoritarian. This is obviously partly why women writers so often incurred the charge of masculinity.

Women recognized that their creative writing especially afforded them areas which would otherwise be closed: Mrs Gaskell maintained that she could hold a point of view in a book but not expound it in a preface to that book, because it 'would involve so much personal appearance, as it were before the public' (6) Mrs. Oliphant, herself a successful minor novelist, commented shrewdly on the passions exhibited by 'the young women in Shirley':

Young ladies like Miss Charlotte Bronte and Miss Ellen Nussey, her friend, would have died rather than give vent to such sentiments; but when one of them to whom that gift was given found that her pen had become a powerful instrument in her hand, the current of the restrained feelings burst all boundaries, and she poured forth the cry which nobody had suspected before. (7)

This use of creative writing to release and express perhaps unconscious drives is not confined to

Charlotte Bronte, and does, I think, help us to understand why writing was so important to women.

These factors all combine to give us reasons why women wrote fiction, and domestic realism in particular. Here I take realism quite simply to mean as life-like as possible. The world of the domestic novel is very similar to the writer's (and usually the reader's) own, with the crucial difference that the writer shapes and controls it. By approximating the fictional to the real the writer thereby compensates for her inability to order and structure the real. Women with a developed moral sensibility had yet another powerful motive, as George Eliot explained in her well-known statement about her brand of realism, in Chapter 17 of Adam Bede. Out of the only world a woman knows - the trivial domestic round - she must construct some kind of moral coherence; otherwise she would rebel or go mad. George Eliot must make real connections with this world:

There are few prophets in the world; few sublimely beautiful women; few heroes. I can't afford to give all my love and reverence to such rarities: I want a great deal of those feelings for my everyday fellow-men, especially for the few in the foreground of the great multitude, whose faces I know, whose hands I touch, for whom I have to make my way with kindly courtesy... It is more needful that I should have a fibre of sympathy connecting me with that vulgar citizen who weighs out my sugar in a vilely assorted cravat and waistcoat, than with the handsomest rascal in red scarf and green feathers.(8)

Because women were, by writing, overstepping many social and personal boundaries they had to face heavy opposition. Against them was the whole weight

of current ideology. Any advice from others was always negative: Southey crushed Charlotte Bronte's early efforts with homely wisdom rather than literary criticism:

Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation. To those duties you have not yet been called, and when you are will be less eager for celebrity. (9)

Most women did not begin to publish novels until they were in their mid-thirties after the period during which they might or might not marry and have children. All the contemporary critics operated a sex-bias against women's novels; Charlotte Bronte mentions with scorn the critic who 'praised (her) work if written by a man, and pronounced it "odious" if the work of a woman'(10). It was to avoid all this that the Brontes had begun their literary career as Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell, and Marian Evans as George Eliot. Even though their identities were soon guessed, the women had made their point: they forced into the open the question of critical discrimination. As G.H. Lewes, George Eliot's husband (they were not of course officially married, but it is difficult to describe their relation in any other way) said of Adam Bede:

It is quite clear that people would have sniffed at it if they had known the writer to be a woman but they can't now unsay their admiration. (11)

In being women and writers women necessarily experienced a conflict of roles; reconciling this conflict, which was both physical and psychological, could never be easy. Mrs. Gaskell was a

novelist who should have felt more pressure than most since she was always on demand as wife and mother. It is typical of the feminine psyche at this time that she could best express her sense of this conflict indirectly, when she was writing about Charlotte Bronte. In a very moving description she sympathises with Charlotte Bronte's problem to the extent of projecting her own feelings on to her:

Henceforward Charlotte Bronte's existence becomes divided into two parallel currents - her life as Currer Bell, the author; her life as Charlotte Bronte, the woman. There were separate duties belonging to each character - not opposing each other; not impossible, but difficult to be reconciled. When a man becomes an author it is probably merely a change of employment to him.... Another merchant or lawyer, or doctor, steps into his vacant place, and probably does as well as he. But no other can take up the quiet, regular duties of the daughter, the wife, or the mother as well as she whom God has appointed to fill that particular place: a woman's principal work in life is hardly left to her own choice; nor can she drop the domestic charges devolving on her as an individual, for the exercise of the most splendid talents that were ever bestowed. And yet she must not shrink from the extra responsibility implied by the very fact of her possessing such talents. She must not hide her gift in a napkin; it was meant for the use and service of others. (12)

It is not surprising that in their letters and journals we often find many of these intelligent women wishing that they had been endowed with no

gifts or brains to trouble them. The psychological battle also had a literal manifestation: women had to fight for the privacy necessary if they were to write. In addition to the demands made on them as wives, sisters and daughters, we find that few of these women had a private space of their own in which to write; and Virginia Woolf was not the first woman to recognize the importance of 'A Room of One's Own' - not just for writing, but in order to achieve any independence at all. Mrs. Gaskell wrote in the dining room, which had three doors leading out of it, and from which she supervised the household. Although she (in common with all of these women) never entertained for a moment the possibility of abandoning her conventional womanly commitments in order to fulfill better the work of authorship, she could not help noticing with wry dismay the effect of the interruptions on her work. 'If I had a library like yours', she wrote to a male friend in 1857,

all undisturbed for hours, how I would write! Mrs. Chapone's letters should be nothing to mine! I would outdo Rasselas in fiction. But you see everybody comes to me perpetually. Now in this hour since breakfast I have had to decide on the following variety of important questions. Boiled beef - how long to boil? What perennials will do in Manchester smoke, and what colours our garden wants? Length of skirt for a gown? Salary of a nursery governess and stipulations for a certain quantity of time to be left to herself... Settle 20 questions of dress for the girls (etc. etc.) ... and it's not half past ten yet.(13)

These problems and the hostility which faced the women novelists were far from defeating them, and seemed rather to act as stimuli. Their novels were

enriched by their experience as women and at the same time made tougher by their battle with prevalent conventions.

The influx of women novelists in the late '40's and early '50's was noticed at the time and commented on: 'This, which is the age of so many things - of enlightenment, of science, of progress - is quite as distinctly the age of female novelists' (14). Perceptive critics saw this to be a social phenomenon: 'The appearance of Woman in the field of literature is a significant fact. It is the correlate of her position in society' (15). Another critic observed the effect this was having on the novel, and on the presentation of the heroine. He was commenting on the

characteristic of current literature - the feminine influence that pervades it. Women are of much account in it, and women produce a large share of it. Of late indeed, the women have been having it all their own way in the realm of fiction ... Now all the important characters seem to be women ... It must be allowed that this feminine tendency in our literature is not all for good ... We might expect to feel within it (literature) an evident access of refinement. We find the very opposite. The first object of the novelist is to get personages in whom we may be interested; the next is to put them in action. But when women are the chief characters, how are you to put them in motion? The life of women cannot well be described as a life of action. When women are thus put forward to lead the action of a plot, they must be urged into a false position. To get vigorous action they are described as rushing into crime, and doing

masculine deeds. Thus they come forward in the worst light, and the novelist finds that to make an effect he has to give up his heroine to bigamy, to murder, to child-bearing by stealth in the Tyrol, and to all sorts of adventures that can only signify her fall... It is certainly curious that one of the earliest results of the increased feminine influence on our literature should be a display of what in women is most unfeminine.

(16)

In my view this critic, although he exaggerates, is absolutely right, except that I would want to applaud what he deplures. In their treatment of women, and the heroine in particular, we can see these women novelists working out and expressing their own problems. The traditional wishy-washy heroine who was unable and unwilling to act, who fainted and wept by turns and who had no kind of sexuality at all had few points of contact with their own experience, battles, and aspirations. And so they took hold of this figure and made her into something much more interesting. At the centre of many of their novels, and certainly their best novels, is the 'femme incomprise', the woman who cannot be accommodated within her environment and who is struggling to find meaning and importance in her life and personal relationships.

The arrival of this type of heroine on the literary scene (17) coincided with the first wave of women writers in the late '40's : this is the dual explosion that the title of this article refers to. Her arrival was seen at the time as explosive; the one book which was seen to precipitate this was Jane Eyre:

Suddenly there stole upon the scene, without either flourish of trumpets or

public proclamation, a little fierce incendiary, doomed to turn the world of fancy upside down. She stole upon the scene - pale, small, by no means beautiful - something of a vixen - a dangerous little person, inimical to the peace of society... Such was the impetuous little spirit which dashed into our well-ordered world, broke its boundaries, and defied its principles - and the most alarming revolution of modern times has followed the invasion of Jane Eyre. (18)

Jane Eyre is indeed a revolutionary book, and it is so because of the character of Jane herself: her defiance, her independence, her struggle for equality, and, above all, her positive sexuality, Mrs. Oliphant, the critic quoted above, disapproved, but she could see how these aspects of Jane which made her revolutionary also made her the vanguard representative and spokeswoman for the new generation of women:

Jane Eyre was the new generation nailing its colours to the mast. No one would understand that this furious love-making was but a wild declaration of the 'Rights of Women' in a new aspect. The old-fashioned deference and respect - the old-fashioned wooing - what were they but so many proofs of the inferior position of woman, to whom the man condescended with the gracious courtliness of his loftier elevation. (19)

This furious love-making aspect of Jane Eyre is worth looking at, for the central relation of the book, between Jane and Rochester, is even now both exciting and disturbing. Jane claims that what she wants is 'equality' and that is disturbing enough; but in fact what she really wants is

mastery - the key word in all the relationships in the book. Equality becomes a question of control, since unless Jane has control she knows that she will be controlled by someone else. Human relationships must be battles; Jane must be on her guard continually or her hard-won independence will be lost. Equality is not easy: it must mean conflicting interests, fierce antagonism. Jane is literally Rochester's servant (the governess of his ward) but in the course of the book she masters the master while remaining the servant. The first time she sees him she de-mans him: he falls off his horse and has to lean on her. From now on he is being led to the altar. That he can submit with pleasure shows how total Jane's mastery is:

I never met your likeness Jane: you please me, and you master me - you seem to submit, and I like the sense of pliancy you impart; and while I am twining the soft silken skein round my finger, it sends a thrill up my arm to my heart. I am influenced - conquered, and the influence is sweeter than I can express; and the conquest I undergo has a witchery beyond any triumph I can win. Why do you smile, Jane?

It is only too clear why Jane is smiling. Before Rochester can finally be Jane's he must, in order never to be a threat to her, be virtually castrated. At the end of the book he is mutilated, blind, and dependent upon others for help. Jane is by now financially independent, and, as she cuts up his food and looks after him, she has won the battle for mastery and can afford to agree to - and indeed to offer - marriage. She has won the traditional prize (the hero), but in a completely new and dynamic way.

Where Charlotte Bronte innovated, many women followed; her influence also extended beyond the

novel into the lives of her contemporary women readers, who found, for perhaps the first time, an imaginative and positive account of feminine problems and possibilities.

The next twenty years were to see many excellent novels by women which presented sympathetic and understanding portrayals of the 'femme incomprise'. It is this aspect which, for me, gives these women's novels their special distinction and importance. Even the minor women novelists are interesting, since many of them courageously began to explore and present new alternatives in their heroines. Perhaps they did fall too often into the trap of wish fulfillment - making their heroines ideal and successful versions of themselves - but this can often be quite endearing. Some of George Eliot's heroines (partial self-portraits) rank among the most perceptive and moving renderings of women and their problems ever written. In her handling of such characters as Maggie Tulliver and Dorothea Brooke, George Eliot is speaking for many of us now. To such portraits we can respond immediately and sympathetically. How to create meaning out of a life which appears to have no meaning; how to resist cramping pressures of others; how to deal honestly with people, especially with men; how to define and maintain one's integrity; how to live a useful and fulfilling life within a community - the problems of George Eliot's heroines are also our problems now. And she understood well that in her society the problems of women were going to be different from those of men. It is difficult to give illustrative quotations, since much depends on the particular circumstances of the characters and on the cumulative effect of continual analysis and reflection. But I would like to end with one passage from Middlemarch which demonstrates as well as any the quality of George Eliot's power and perception when dealing with the

problems of an intelligent and alive woman:

For a long while she (Dorothea) had been oppressed by the indefiniteness which hung in her mind, like a thick summer haze, over all her desire to make her life greatly effective. What could she do, what ought she to do? - she, hardly more than a budding woman, but yet with an active conscience and a great mental need, not to be satisfied by a girlish instruction comparable to the nibblings and judgements of a discursive mouse ... The intensity of her religious disposition, the coercion it exercised over her life, was but one aspect of a nature altogether ardent, theoretic, and intellectually consequent; and with such a nature, struggling in the bands of a narrow teaching, hemmed in by social life which seemed nothing but a labyrinth of petty courses, a walled-in maze of small paths that led no wither, the outcome was sure to strike others as at once exaggeration and inconsistency. (20)

FOOTNOTES

- 1 J.D. Milne: 'Industrial and Social Position of Women in the Middle and Lower Ranks' London 1857, p.23.
- 2 Sarah Stickney Ellis: 'The Women of England, Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits' London 1839
- 3 Review of Jane Eyre by Lady Eastlake in Quarterly Review, Vol. LXXXIV, December 1848, p. 174.

- 4 Ian Watt: 'The Rise of the Novel' London 1957, pp. 158-59
- 5 W.R. Greg: 'The False Morality of Lady Novelists' in Literary and Social Judgements London 1869
- 6 Letter to George Smith, 1857; quoted in Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, ed. Chapple and Pollard.
- 7 Mrs. Oliphant: 'The Sisters Bronte' in Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign London 1897, p. 23
- 8 George Eliot: Adam Bede London 1859, Signet Edition, pp. 177-78.
- 9 Mrs. Gaskell: The Life of Charlotte Bronte London 1857, Everyman Edition, p. 102.
- 10 Charlotte Bronte to W.S. Williams, August 16, 1849, The Brontes, Their Lives, Friendships, and Correspondence 4 vols, ed. Wise and Symington, Shakespeare Head 1932, Vol. 3 p.11.
- 11 Letter of June 30, 1859, Letters of George Eliot, Vol. 3 p. 106.
- 12 Mrs. Gaskell: op cit., p. 237-38
- 13 Letter to C.E. Norton in Letters, ed. Chapple and Pollard.
- 14 Mrs. Oliphant: 'Modern Novelists Great and Small' Blackwood's Magazine. May 1855, p.554.
- 15 G.H. Lewes: 'The Lady Novelists' Westminster Review, July 1852.
- 16 E.S. Dallas: The Gay Science, 2 Vols, London 1866, pp. 295-98.

- 17 There were, of course, precursors, notably Richardson's Clarissa.
- 18 'Modern Novelists Great and Small'.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 George Eliot: Middlemarch, London 1871 Penguin Edition, pp. 50-51.

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Russell

I fancied him for
 Years:
 He was the handsomest
 I ever knew.
 Neither brains nor warmth
 Were there and
 The only time he ever noticed me
 Was to trip me on the pavement
 And cause my sudden downfall.
 I told the teacher later and
 She scolded him.
 How funny.
 Once I wrote, "I love Russell Davis"
 And mother found the note.
 She would.
 Years later I heard
 He was gaoled for rape.

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To Sylvia Plath

this letter comes from february,
last, when I became, like you
ex patriate / ex matriate seems (suddenly)
more appropo:
after all - it's the ex-
perience of ex-
traction: out of
the womb.
even as to
the waters, the ocean depths of unconscious
being / the analogue holds
water to be
crossed, a flood of
memory, over

come. did you come
by sea? or by air? the sudden ex-
pulsion left me
unprepared. next time I will come
by sea. slowly.

like a woman.

ii

I understand your distances.
once, driven out in a pain
of words, I took solace
from the moon. she makes
no promises. gives space &
time to pull yrself
together. turn yrself
in
to her image: cool &
self-contained.

there is no other way
to bare the night
within.

iii

my poems hold
no images: stark
& naked they burn
lobster red/ash
dead
they freeze: icicles
sweet coolness (licks the tongue)
heart/felt

the point.

fire & ice. (fire & ice)
a dagger of ice might staunch
the flow. what a clean way
to die. not a drop
wasted. no one
might know till summer came
& tea roses roasted on my breast.

iiii

if I knew your body
when it was warm, it could have been
different.

I would not cut words as swords
to hold your distance, afraid
in my own sole self.
I would not twist words as cords
to bind your vision, afraid
of my own sole self:
of what we might see, together
of what we might feel, together

in the silence of the cold moon's eye.

Story

A surreal and mind-blowing story. It speaks directly of our mutilation and it speaks to and for all of us.

She was a good woman - pretty, happy, and very loving. She enjoyed her work - getting up early, bustling about with the kids, talking about school, games and Christmas. Christmas was a month away and the children were very excited. Anyhow, once the kids were off to school she started her work proper. She dusted, cleaned, washed and mended.

The best part of the day for her was cooking the evening meal. She loved the anticipation of the family coming home to her warm, snug kitchen and all of them together eating her meal that she had made for them. She liked to make it as much a part of her as she could. She liked to feel it was her daily creation for their flesh to grow on - that she herself had made their flesh by making their food.

Today however she was very worried. All the time she was doing the Hoovering and listening to Jimmy Young she worried. By the time she reached her mid-day snack she was still worrying. And even in the afternoon while she was polishing the windows, (a job she usually saved for "difficult days", because she enjoyed it so much), she still carried on thinking about her problem - what to cook tonight.

She had been all through Marguerite Patten's "Meat Cookery" twice and "The Encyclopedia of

Spanish Cookery" three times. Life was so hard. He didn't like garlic or peppers. Jo did not care for onions, cheese or cream, and Jane hated greens, cauliflower and fish. They weren't eating as well as they used to. Even their favourite meals were no longer greeted with the usual shouts of glee. And she was sure Jo had lost weight ... it was all so worrying ... what could she do?

As she listened to Terry Wogan's happy chatter she nibbled fretfully on a Golden Delicious, then a Snib's Peanut Cracker and was half-way through a Ginger Crunch before she realised what she was doing. Remembering her calorie controlled diet she put the remains of the biscuit in the cat's plate and walked into the kitchen.

She flicked through her cookery books, disconcerted. Suddenly she saw it. Laminated brains in milk sauce. The perfect answer! But where would they sell brains? She had never seen them in the butcher's. Then she realised - would she dare? What a perfect idea, why had she not thought of it before?

She went into the bathroom and looked around - a nail file, perfect! She leaned over the hand basin, so as not to stain the new polysaturated nyrostyrene tiles on the bathroom floor and stared into her husband's shaving mirror. She made a hole with the nail file just above her right ear. It would have been better at the back but it was very difficult to see, so she settled for just above the ear. She made the hole just large enough for her hand. At first she could not find them, but after some groping about she got them at last - down by her nasal passage. They were small but very loosely attached so they came out easily. She put them for the time being in the sink and patched the hole in her head with some elastoplasts. When she had combed her hair over

and lacquered it you could hardly tell.

That evening the family arrived home to a delicious smell. "Oh mum, mum, what a wonderful smell; we're starving!" They shed their clothes in the hall, put chocolate fingers on the window, tripped over the coffee table, upsetting the Christmas flowering geraniums, and arrived in the kitchen.

They were all silent as she took the steaming dish from the oven. For one awful moment she thought they might guess. They would never eat it if they knew where she had got it from; but they didn't notice how like her it looked. She served them a tiny portion each. They looked surprised. "That all?" they said. Next day she was sure Jane was a little tiny bit taller, and Jo's hair was so shiny...

In the morning she felt a little faint and had to rest during 'soft spot for mums', but by afternoon tea she was fine - she had decided to try kidney that night. It was more difficult this time, she wasn't quite sure where they were, but third time she got them. The elastoplasts didn't stick quite so well, so she put on her tightest rollon. The meal was devoured by all three of them in silence. She was so pleased... Next day they had rump steak, then spare rib, then liver.

The day they had the liver there was nearly a catastrophe. The rollon seemed to have stretched because it wasn't as tight as it used to be. Anyway it must have leaked because when he came home through the front door there was a small pool of blood just by the tufted coconut hair mat (53p. from Woolworths in the sale). He was pretty mad at coming home to such a mess and it took her a long time to calm him down. By the time he had had his braised liver he was in fine spirits, and agreed to forgive her, as long as

it never happened again.

Then they had marrow soup, belly meat, a good cut of shoulder, some stewed lung and then half a roast head. She was amazed they did not notice, but as long as she didn't make a mess they didn't seem to see. She was wonderfully pleased that they were so healthy; not a cold among them and Jane had grown a whole half inch. Even he seemed fuller somehow, the creases in his cheeks were gone and he had a puffy, smooth look like an American film star.

Her only worry now was that there seemed to be much more housework than there used to be and she found it difficult to get round. She had noticed some dust the other day on top of the Bush full colour transistor television (four channel), and realized that she had forgotten to dust that day. She could not believe it. It had never happened before.

Then they had neck, a cut of shin and some sausages made with blood and offal. The family was looking wonderful. They were all taller and fatter.

Christmas grew nearer. She was planning a real treat for Christmas, but it was a lot of work. Never had it been so hard for her to get through her work and prepare for Christmas. What was more, the family had started to notice. He was very worried about it. His socks were crumpled and twice that week he could not find a clean hanky. She could sense his anger and contempt for her lack of order but somehow she felt incapable of changing. Whatever she did things went wrong. Even if she carried on work in the evening he would moan at the noise and inconvenience for him, and go out slamming the door. The children sensed the change in her too,

and took advantage of it by playing up terribly.

She kept on working doggedly towards the high spot of her year, Christmas, and especially the dinner. Working against her always was a growing feeling of tiredness and giddiness - she could not explain, maybe she was just tired. She allowed herself the luxury of a morning in bed a few days before Christmas, but when she got up she felt no better, even perhaps a bit wobbly on her knees. She took three aspirin and a drink of Lucozade and got on with the mincemeat and forcemeats.

Christmas day dawned bright and clear. Strong loud voices reverberated through the house, proclaiming their youth and joy; presents, paper and string everywhere. Getting up slow and cold, selotape on my foot. What a long way to the bathroom. Phlegm in my throat, blood on my leg. Quick, bolt the door, good. First spit, what choking in my throat. Next, my leg. It's dribbled down to my foot. Where is the Tampax? Here. Rip - sod, the thread always breaks. In, go on, up. Now roll on - (sigh) long-line cross-your-heart bra. Elastic stockings. I feel better now, as if I were properly together now I have my clothes on.

She went to the bathroom and bolted the door. She must have dressed in there. She took long enough and was fully clothed when she came out.

"Hello."

Hello.

Downstairs - breakfast - wash up - clean table - brush floor - empty rubbish bin - adjust central heating.

Wonderful, I am alone at last. It's in the fridge. I left it there last night. It must be completely frozen now - looks so dark and red and completely hard.

take one heart
soak it
salt it
shake it
braise it
add finely chopped nut
grazed word
 $\frac{1}{2}$ baked book
2 pinches love and lump it
1 bay leaf

Bash the heart well, stuff it and rape it, roll it well around, mix it with essence of hate and sprinkle liberally with loneliness and isolation.

She served the heart. They ate it. She died that afternoon, after washing up, so they had to have a cold tea.

© Shirley Moreno

Credo

I shall not die until
I find I am a woman,
Until the curve of my existence
Can be plotted truthfully
And by me alone,
Until my orbit holds
Few frivolities and fewer angers
And restlessness stabs only sometimes.
I shall not die till
I can strain at being,
Expecting less yet more
Than heretofore.

© Astra

I Like You

I like you
warm and smiling
listening, talking, as if

you care

but I feel strange
about you -- knowing
& not knowing
sharing secrets as if we were
children, in a grown-old world, or

lovers.

& everybody strange & silent when I say
I like you

& you

silent -- I...
no woman's ever treated me
like you / I've never known
a woman
like you

I like you -- a lot.

© Sandi Stein

Genesis

"Since 1958, scientists have known that all mammalian embryos are female for the first six weeks of embryonic life, and that only after that do some develop male attributes. But no one has re-written Genesis as an Adam-out-of-Eve myth yet." Wilma Scott Heide, quoted Guardian, 29.4.70.

In the beginning was Chaos. Before time began, is only Lilith. She is the maker, the begetter of all things. When she desired to become other, was the Creation.

She tore herself apart to divide chaos, and in that void she conceived matter. She stared into the darkness, and there was light; her thought is a blazing fire. The stars and planets, and the dead worlds are her bones; the winds are her breath, and of her waters are the salt seas made. From her flesh she fashioned earth; her hair became grass and trees; flowers and fruit hang from their branches. And Lilith saw that it was good.

When it was done, she knew herself spent by that travail, and descended to renew her being in the earthly oceans. For the space of many generations she was cradled in the deep, and sloughed her weakness as a snake casts its skin; until at last Lilith arose and came out of the sea, and

walked on the dry land that she had made.

But the thing she had left in the water gathered itself together, and crawled behind her in the form of a serpent; after two and forty days it came out of the sea and mated with her. And Lilith was delivered of children, which are the birds and beasts, and fish that dwell in the water. But there was not one of all these that Lilith loved.

So after a time she withdrew into the desert, and brooded like a dove in the waste of dry rocks and sand. Unmated, she became swollen with child, and in pain brought forth an egg of stone; the serpent coiled around it for a year and a day; he breathed on it, and it split apart, and there came forth Man.

She nursed him at her breasts; she carried him out of the desert in her arms; like a child, he was without will and strength. This was the first creature that was dear to Lilith.

Then the serpent became jealous of Adam, because he had no part in the making of man, and because Lilith loved her child. So he said to Adam, "You are a God, why do you cling to her? She despises you for your weakness. Make a world, to show her your power." So Adam dipped his finger in river mud, and drew on the rocks. He drew beasts and trees and stars, but he could not draw man, because he had never seen his own kind.

Then he became angry, and prayed to Lilith, crying out, "Mother, why can I not

make life? I long for another, to be a companion for me." Lilith said, "Be content. I love you." Adam answered her, "I am tired of being your child. I want to be God." Lilith said, "Son, a god brings forth life in travail. You have not the strength." But Adam replied, "I am lonely. Make me Another."

Lilith wept.

Her tears fell on the earth, and from the dust there grew a woman, fair and delicate like flowers; but she turned away from the man. So Adam raged at Lilith, because Eve would not worship him.

Lilith said, "You do not understand what you ask. She is in my image, and virgin." But Adam continued to reproach her, saying "You gave her to me. Make her love me." Then at last Lilith grew angry, and said, "Since you give me no peace, I will take your peace away; she shall love you. Here is a sword, drive it into her body." And when Adam had done so, and drew it out, the sword dripped as with the sap of flowers.

Lilith said, "Now I shall go. You will not see me again, nor shall I answer when you call for me. You shall carry the sword till you die, and she will bear the wound. They shall be a burning grief to you, and a loss beyond consolation, for the one shall yearn for the other, all your lives long. Only when the sword is sheathed in her body, shall you both be eased; then shall you be as gods, two creatures become creators of others in your likeness. My son, my daughter."

Then Lilith went away, and the man and the woman looked at one another, and knew that they were naked.

* * *

Note: The later tradition, on which the biblical Book of Genesis is based, makes Lilith not the Mother Goddess, but Adam's first wife, created like him from dust, by a masculine God.

'Adam and Lilith never found peace together; for when he wished to lie with her, she took offence at the recumbent posture he demanded. "Why must I lie beneath you?" she asked. "I also was made from dust, and am therefore your equal.".....It is characteristic of civilizations where women are treated as chattels that they must adopt the recumbent posture during intercourse, which Lilith refused.'

Hebrew Myths, the Book of Genesis, by Robert Graves and Raphael Patai.

Other sources: The Golden Bough, by Sir James Frazer. The White Goddess, by Robert Graves.

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Lee Sanders Comer of Leeds Liberation Group is writing a book about the housewife, marriage and the family.

Astra, an American transplant, is a member of the Radical Feminists (non-separatists) and of the Finchley Womens Liberation Group.

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