

TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY EDITION



INTERCOURSE

ANDREA DWORKIN

FOREWORD BY ARIEL LEVY

INTERCOURSE

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The Twentieth Anniversary Edition

Andrea Dworkin



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For M. S.

All changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

W. B. YEATS
"Easter 1916"

True rebels, after all, are as rare as true lovers,
and, in both cases, to mistake a fever
for a passion can destroy one's life.

JAMES BALDWIN
No Name in the Street

He lost no time, got his belt undone,
said "I could go through you like butter."

EDNA O'BRIEN
Night

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FOREWORD

Like most writers, Andrea Dworkin thought her work was underappreciated in her lifetime. Like very few of them, she was right. Dworkin the persona—the mythical figure, the inverted sex symbol—eclipsed Dworkin the writer in the public imagination. There are many more people who have strong feelings about her than there are people who have actually read her work.

If this is the first book of hers you've encountered, brace yourself—she had a voice like no other. Perhaps the most prominent quality of Dworkin's writing is its ferocity: its relentless intellectual and ideological confidence, its refusal to collapse into what Dworkin called "the quintessential feminine pose." Though she bragged she used "language without its ever becoming decorative or pretty," there is elegance as well as aggression in Dworkin's sentences. She had a particular gift for conveying abstract concepts through acute, unusual metaphors. "It's not as if there's an empty patch that one can see and so one can say, 'There's my ignorance; it's about ten by ten and a dozen feet high and someday someone will fill in the empty patch,'" she wrote in her memoir, *Heartbreak*. (She was talking about male writers.) She could be lyrical in her descriptions;

Bessie Smith's voice "tramped through your three-dimensional body but gracefully, a spartan, bearlike ballet." And she could be very funny. Of a grade-school teacher who gave her trouble, Dworkin says, "I knew I'd get her someday and this is it: eat shit, bitch. No one said that sisterhood was easy."

But when most people think of Andrea Dworkin, they think of two things: overalls (her uniform) and the idea that all sex is rape. That was the notorious interpretation of *Intercourse* by many when it first came out in 1987, and as Dworkin put it in her preface nine years later, the book is "still being reviled in print by people who have never read it, reduced to slogans by journalists posing as critics or sages or deep thinkers, treated as if it were odious and hateful by every asshole who thinks that what will heal this violent world is more respect for dead white men." *Intercourse* is an inventive, combative, and wildly complicated piece of work, and to imagine that all there is between these covers is the assertion that all sex is rape is about as sophisticated as reducing Proust to a pile of madeleine crumbs.

But you don't have to be an asshole—or even a journalist—to take issue with some of what Dworkin said. Fury and drama characterize her rhetorical style, extremism her ideas, and *Intercourse* is perhaps her most radical work. "Am I saying I know more than men about fucking? Yes, I am," she tells us. And in a typical Dworkin flourish, she refuses to leave it at that; she gives her reader no room to soften her meaning through misinterpretation.

"Not just different: more and better," she writes, "deeper and wider, the way anyone used knows the user." There is not a doubt in her mind that she's right, and she consciously rejects a writing style that is placating or solicitous: she's not that kind of girl.

She begins with an exploration of several (very different) male writers' depictions of female sexuality. We are shown, gently at first, forcefully as her text builds momentum, how much of literature positions women as not fully human or as filthy. With characteristic swagger, Dworkin compares *Intercourse* to Dante's *Inferno*, its spiraling structure descending into ever deeper circles of hell. If Dworkin's own vision of sex and society is extreme, we soon remember that so too is the context within which she writes. "The normal fuck by the normal man is taken to be an act of invasion and ownership undertaken in a mode of predation: colonializing, forceful (manly) or nearly violent; the sexual act that by nature makes her his." There is the Bible to teach us this, of course, but then there is also Tolstoy, Freud, Mailer, and so on. From these texts Dworkin extracts the belief system we know—but sometimes like to forget—has governed gender relations in the West throughout the course of our history: that women are entities to be taken and possessed—walking, talking currency.

Dworkin asseverates an alternative, a way of representing and having sex that dissolves boundaries and offers not only intimacy but merged humanity . . . a kind of magic, fleeting selflessness. "There is no physical distance, no self-consciousness, nothing withdrawn or private or alienated, no existence outside physical touch. The skin collapses as a boundary—it has no meaning; time is gone—it too has no meaning; there is no outside." In these passages, Dworkin is a poet of erotic love, an incarnation that would shock those who have her figured as the embodiment of antisex. The profound passion she envisions does not even require an enduring emotional tie: "In fucking, the deepest emotions one has about life as a whole are expressed, even with a stranger, however random or impersonal

the encounter," she writes. There is room for escape, she suggests, even in the here and now, even in the country she refers to as Amerika (more on this later), from the erotics of power differential.

But if one finds this kind of sublime sexual release specifically in relinquishing control, what then? What does it mean to be aroused by dominance in the societal context Dworkin describes? And if it turns us on, do we care?

The way women have eroticized sexual possession is of great interest to Dworkin, of course. "The experience of sexual possession for women is real and literal," she writes, "without any magical or mystical dimension to it: getting fucked and being owned are inseparably the same; together, being one and the same, they are sex for women under male dominance as a social system." She may not have been saying all sex is rape, but clearly she was suggesting that most sex is something damn close when you live in a patriarchy . . . and where else are we to live? In this world, which is the only world that exists, "critiques of rape, pornography, and prostitution are 'sex-negative' without qualification or examination, perhaps because so many men use these ignoble routes of access and domination to get laid, and without them the number of fucks would so significantly decrease that men might nearly be chaste."

Really?

Do we believe that "most women are not distinct, private individuals to most men"? (Still?) Is voluntary intercourse instigated by female lust and desire something so uncommon? Are abuse and plunder the norm, mutual satisfaction the exception so rare it proves the rule?

Your answer to these questions—and to many others Dworkin poses in this book—will depend on the experience of

sex you've been lucky or unlucky enough to have. But the value of the questioning itself is substantial.

Dworkin's profound and unique legacy was to examine the meaning of the act most of us take to be fundamental to sex, fundamental to human existence. As she puts it, "what intercourse is for women and what it *does* to women's identity, privacy, self-respect, self-determination, and integrity are forbidden questions; and yet how can a radical or any woman who wants freedom not ask precisely these questions?" You may find in reading Dworkin's work that many of her questions have never even crossed your mind.

If you disagree with her answers, you may still find yourself indebted to her for helping you discover your own.

Dworkin's description of her own sexual history is often grim, and given the title of the book you are about to read—and the premise that the personal is political—we are right to consider this. Though she stated "I am not an exhibitionist. I don't show myself," in her book *Life and Death*, she also wrote "I have used everything I know—my life—to show what I believe must be shown so that it can be faced."

Dworkin was molested or raped at around age 9; the details, in her writing, and according to her closest friends, are murky, but something bad happened then. In 1965, when Dworkin was 18 and a freshman at Bennington College, she was arrested after participating in a march against the Vietnam War and was taken to the Women's House of Detention in Greenwich Village, where she was subjected to a nightmarish internal exam by prison doctors.

She bled for days afterward. Her family doctor looked at her injuries and cried.

Dworkin's response to this incident was her first act of purposeful bravery: she wrote scores of letters to newspapers detailing what had happened, and the story was reported in the *New York Times*, among other papers, which led to a government investigation of the prison. It was eventually torn down, and in its place today is the idyllic flower garden at the foot of the Jefferson Market clock tower on Sixth Avenue in Manhattan.

Like many members of the women's liberation movement, Dworkin started out as an antiwar activist and found her way to feminism when she became disillusioned with the men of the New Left. She wrote about the experience in *Mercy*, a book of "fiction" about a girl named Andrea, who, like Dworkin, was from Camden, New Jersey, and was molested at around 9, protested the war, and was jailed and sexually assaulted in a New York City prison. "I went to the peace office and instead of typing letters for the peace boys I wrote to newspapers saying I had been hurt and it was bad and not all right and because I didn't know sophisticated words I used the words I knew and they were very shocked to death; and the peace boys were in the office and I refused to type a letter for one of them because I was doing this and he read my letter out loud to everyone in the room over my shoulder and they all laughed at me, and I had spelled America with a 'k' because I knew I was in Kafka's world, not Jefferson's, and I knew Amerika was the real country I lived in." (In some of her books, Dworkin's writing echoes with the influence of the Beats. Allen Ginsberg was an early mentor who later became a nemesis of Dworkin's because she despised his sexual pursuit of underage boys.)

Because she wanted adventure and experience, and because she wanted to escape all the media attention following her battle

against the prison, and because her family—her mother in particular—was deeply ashamed that she had been jailed, Dworkin decided to leave Amerika for Europe when she was 19.

She took the Orient Express from London to Athens, which she described as a “sordid” trip, during which she gave all her money to a woman named Mildred who promised to pay her back when they arrived but didn’t.

Strangely, Dworkin “never held it against her,” despite the fact that this Mildred-induced pennilessness led Dworkin to start sleeping with men for money. She made it to Crete, where she created a temporary home for herself perched above the “gem-like surface” of the Aegean. The dazzling beauty and utter foreignness of Dworkin’s surroundings seemed to free her. In a place where one is literally a stranger, there can be an ecstatic sense of liberation from wondering why one has always felt so strange in what is supposed to be home.

Dworkin wrote constantly, producing a book of poems (called *Child*) and a novel (*Notes on Burning Boyfriend*, named after the pacifist Norman Morrison who had burned himself to death in protest of the Vietnam War), which she self-published on the island. She had a passionate romance with a Greek man; “we’re so much joined in the flesh that strangers feel the pain if we stop touching,” Dworkin wrote. But ultimately the allure and the money ran out, and Dworkin returned home to complete her studies.

After graduating with a degree in literature, Dworkin returned to Europe, this time to Amsterdam, because she was interested in the Dutch countercultural “Provo” movement. But her life took an awful and unexpected turn when she met and married a Dutchman, an anarchist, who beat the living shit out of her.

Years later, Dworkin's comrade Susan Brownmiller, the author of the radical feminist classic *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, spoke out against Hedda Nussbaum's complicity in the murder of her daughter, Lisa Steinberg. (Lisa was abused to death by her father, Nussbaum's husband, Joel Steinberg.) In response, Dworkin published a piece in the *Los Angeles Times* called "What Battery Really Is," in which she tried to explain her experience—Nussbaum's too, she asserted. "When I would come to after being beaten unconscious, the first feeling I would have was an overwhelming sorrow that I was alive. I would ask God please to let me die now. My breasts were burned with lit cigarettes. He beat my legs with a heavy wood beam so that I couldn't walk. I was present when he did immoral things to other people. I didn't help them. Judge me, Susan."

These experiences formed the basis of Dworkin's worldview. She wrote about them in her first published book, *Woman Hating*, which came out shortly after her return to the states in 1974. And in some way or other, these nightmarish pieces of her reality were picked over, deconstructed, and retold in everything she ever wrote. If you have never experienced such things, it can be difficult to relate to Dworkin. Sometimes, when you are reading her work, it can seem almost impossible to reconcile the world around you with the world on the page. Dworkin knew this. "Middle-class women, including middle-class feminists, cannot imagine such marginality," she wrote. "It's as if the story is too weird, too ugly, and too unsightly for an educated woman to believe."

Much of society is set up specifically to assist people in their process of ignoring the horrors of the world. Dworkin's agenda was the opposite.

Though she was herself middle class, educated, eligible for an easier life—there were other options open to her besides prostitution, for instance, when she was short of cash in Europe—Dworkin was drawn to the dark side in her writing and in her life. “The worst immorality,” she wrote, “is in living a trivial life because one is afraid to face any other kind of life—a despairing life or an anguished life or a twisted and difficult life.”

Of course for many people, there is little choice. For the women who had been battered or molested or raped who read her books or came to her lectures, Dworkin was a savior goddess, a knight in shining armor. Dworkin offered an unmitigated conception of the victim—a word, she said, that had a taint, but shouldn’t. (There was no such thing for Dworkin as a “prostitute,” for example, there were only “prostituted women.”) She would stand before her followers onstage, huge and hollering, an evangelical, untouchable preacher for the oppressed.

To borrow Gloria Steinem’s language, Dworkin became the feminist movement’s “Old Testament prophet: raging in the hills, telling the truth,” as she understood it to be. Robin Morgan, the woman who edited the women’s movement’s bible *Sisterhood Is Powerful* and coined feminist slogans like “porn is the theory, rape is the practice,” has compared Dworkin to Malcolm X. “People who—feminists, even—raised their eyebrows at her supposed extremism or her intransigence or her fire took secret glee from that,” Morgan told me in 2005, shortly after Dworkin’s death. “When Malcolm was killed, even some of the people in the black community who had said, ‘Well, he was always violent,’ they were devastated. Remember where Malcolm X came from? Malcolm had

been a pimp, Malcolm had been a hustler, Malcolm had been a drug addict. It's the militant voice, it's the voice that would dare say what nobody else was saying . . . and it can't help but say it because it is speaking out of such incredible personal pain."

There were other feminists who were as zealous in their conviction that pornography was "the undiluted essence of anti-female propaganda," as Susan Brownmiller once put it, but nobody else could elicit the same disgust and fascination from the public as Andrea Dworkin—they didn't have her overalls or her anger; they weren't as *big*. People didn't just disagree with Dworkin, they hated her. To her detractors, she was the horror of women's lib personified, the angriest woman in America.

With the possible exception of the Shakers, it is difficult to think of an American movement that has failed more spectacularly than antipornography feminism. In the late 1970s, when a prominent faction of the women's liberation movement—including Brownmiller, Dworkin, Steinem, Morgan, Audre Lorde, the writer Grace Paley, and the poet Adrienne Rich—turned their attention to fighting pornography, porn was still something marginalized, as opposed to what it is now: a source of inspiration for all of popular culture. (Consider Jenna Jameson, implants, almost any reality television show, Brazilian bikini waxes, thong underwear, and go from there.) In her recent book, *Women's Lives, Men's Laws*, Dworkin's friend and colleague Catharine MacKinnon put it like this: "The aggressors have won."

If the antiporn crusade was a losing battle, it was also a costly one: it divided, some would say destroyed, the women's

movement. The term “prosex feminist” was coined by women who wanted to distance themselves from the antiporn faction. Of course, all feminists thought they were being prosex and fighting for freedom, but when it comes to sex, freedom means different things to different people. Screaming fights became a regular element of feminist conferences in the 1980s, and perhaps the single most divisive issue was an ordinance crafted by Dworkin and MacKinnon.

In 1983, when MacKinnon was a professor of law at the University of Minnesota and Dworkin was teaching a course there on pornography at MacKinnon’s invitation, the two drafted a city ordinance positioning porn as a civil rights violation. Their legislation, which would allow people to sue pornographers for damages if they could show they had suffered harm from pornography’s making or use, was twice passed in Minneapolis but vetoed by the mayor. Dworkin and MacKinnon were subsequently summoned by the conservative mayor of Indianapolis, Indiana, and their legislation was signed into law in 1984 by a city council opposed to core feminist goals like legal abortion and the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. It was soon overturned by federal courts, but many feminists never forgave Dworkin and MacKinnon and antiporn feminists in general for getting in bed with the right wing.

Dworkin was accused of being a man-hater even by some members of her own movement. And she didn’t write or make speeches with an eye toward mitigating this perception. In a speech she gave in Bryant Park at a “Take Back the Night” march in 1979, she called romance “rape embellished with meaningful looks.” In *Heartbreak* she wrote, “men are shits and take pride in it.” But in fact the most significant

person in Dworkin's life was a man: her husband. John Stoltenberg remembers feeling "like we had walked off a cliff" when he first met Dworkin. As if the force of their connection had rendered the world weightless beneath his feet. He was 29 and she was 27, and they started talking out on the street in the West Village after they'd both walked out of a benefit for the War Resisters League because they thought the protest songs were sexist. They started spending most of their time together.

It was 1974. "There was a party at the apartment where I was staying," Stoltenberg told me. "She was there, and I think we were dancing, and then I think I passed out because I had had a lot to drink. And this could be a little bit of revisionism, but I remember coming to consciousness with a clarity that I couldn't imagine life without her." Thirty-one years later, almost to the day, he was forced to. Dworkin died of heart failure on April 9, 2005, at the age of 58 in her bed in the Washington, D.C., apartment they shared.

At the time of her death, Dworkin felt clearheaded enough to write for only a few hours a day, the toll of a lifetime of insomnia and all the pain medication she was taking for severe osteoarthritis, but she had just finished a proposal for a book of literary criticism. When I went to visit the apartment in early May, Stoltenberg had left untouched the yellow legal pad on which she'd been taking notes: "Use against Hemingway, Hitler and Bush," it said in red pen. Above her desk was a poster that read DEAD MEN DON'T RAPE.

John Stoltenberg says Dworkin's first book, *Woman Hating*, "saved my life." When he met Dworkin, Stoltenberg considered himself gay, and does to this day, although he preferred the word queer before it got trendy. (Stoltenberg

had sexual relationships with other men throughout the course of his life with Dworkin; monogamy was not part of their deal. After Dworkin's death, Stoltenberg fell in love with a man, who is now his domestic partner.) Dworkin's dissection of gender in *Woman Hating*, her assertion that "'man' and 'woman' are fictions, caricatures, cultural constructs . . . reductive, totalitarian, inappropriate to human becoming," was to Stoltenberg a revelation, and he quoted that passage in a book he published in 1989 called *Refusing to Be a Man*, which he dedicated to her.

Stoltenberg did his own riff on her theme, writing about a version of Earth where the inhabitants "find amazing and precious . . . that because everyone's genitals stem from the same embryonic tissue, the nerves inside all their genitals got wired very much alike, so these nerves of touch just go crazy upon contact in a way that resonates completely between them. 'My gosh,' they think, 'you must feel something in your genital tubercle that intensely resembles what I'm feeling in my genital tubercle.'" His ideal world is a place where people "have sex. They don't have a sex." Whereas here on this planet, "we are sorted into one category or another at birth based solely on a visual inspection of our groins, and the only question that's asked is whether there's enough elongated tissue around your urethra so you can pee standing up." In *Refusing to Be a Man*, instead of saying "boy," Stoltenberg sometimes refers to a little male as a "child-with-a-penis."

Stoltenberg was himself an antipornography activist for many years, and he used to facilitate "Pose Workshops" at colleges, in which male students were asked to assume the positions in which women are photographed for pornography—legs spread, pelvis raised, and so on. "I would try to

help people understand what was wrong with the language of sexual orientation: bisexual, homosexual,” he told me. “I said, ‘Think of yourself as being Jane sexual. Or Robbie sexual. It’s not about gender, it’s about a person.’” When he met Dworkin, it didn’t matter to Stoltenberg that he was gay or that she didn’t have enough elongated tissue around her urethra to pee standing up.

Many of Dworkin’s friends did not find out that she and Stoltenberg were legally married until they read her obituary in the newspapers. “We hated being called husband and wife,” Stoltenberg says. “When pressed, we would say ‘spouse.’ Spouse or life partner are words that we used.” Friends knew, of course, that the two had lived together for more than 30 years, but there are various reasons why Dworkin would not have wanted her marriage to a man to be public information. For one thing, there was the matter of her being a lesbian.

Dworkin spoke about this many times. At a rally for Lesbian Pride Week in Central Park in 1975—when she was already living with Stoltenberg—Dworkin said, “This love of women is the soil in which my life is rooted.” She went on to talk about “erotic passion and intimacy” among women, and a “wild, salty tenderness,” but this is harder to get your head around if you are familiar with her oeuvre. In her writings, there are too many smoldering descriptions of heterosexual sex to count, but the mentions of lesbianism are either bloodless—“There is pride in the nurturant love which is our common-ground”—or funny: “Q: There are a lot of rumors about your lesbianism. No one quite seems to know what you do with whom. A: Good” (as she wrote in a satiric piece called “Nervous Interview”). Catharine MacKinnon told me, “Lesbian is one of the

few words you've got to make a positive claim about identifying with women, to say I'm with women. It doesn't necessarily mean without men. Women are socially defined sexually as an inferior class. Lesbian is a sexual word; that's why it's stigmatized. In addition to her history and feelings, that's a lot of why Andrea identified by it, I think." Another of Dworkin's closest friends had a different take on the matter of Dworkin's sexuality: "In 30-plus years of knowing her, I've never heard of a single romance with a woman—not one."

Regardless of how and whether Dworkin practiced lesbianism, the fact remains that it was important to her to be identified as as lesbian. It's a label many people have difficulty claiming, yet to Dworkin it was a badge of rebellion against the patriarchy, a system she had warred against throughout her entire life. But has the institution of marriage not been a fundamental building block of that very system? Dworkin had questioned and probed and rejected every expression of male dominance she could think of, even intercourse, with remarkable creativity and devotion and yet she married—in secret. Why?

At a memorial for Dworkin held at the National Arts Club in New York City about a month after her death, Stoltenberg suggested to the hundred or so assembled friends and fans that the reason he and Dworkin wed was partly practical. If Dworkin had not been his legal wife, she would not have been covered by his health insurance, and the bills for the frequent surgeries and hospital stays that punctuated the end of her life would have left the couple in financial ruins. So Dworkin had real-world reasons for playing within the rules of the system, even if it was a system she'd always abhorred.

Ah, the real world . . . it'll get you every time. In the real world, many women would like to be regarded as sexually

attractive, even if we don't like the reasons why, say, uncomfortable shoes and laboriously blow-dried hair are considered desirable. We know it's a deranged system, and that our worth—including our self-worth—ought to be measured by the same standards as men's; that our intellects and talents ought to be more important than our asses. But this is the system. This is the real world. And to act otherwise is to incur consequences: if you are overweight and you wear overalls, you will be mocked. If you don't—or can't—get legally married and a health crisis strikes, you will face additional pain.

I like to think that getting married was as much a concession to romanticism as practicality for Dworkin. (By all accounts, her partnership with Stoltenberg was as successful as it was nontraditional: they were soul mates who stuck together for over three decades.) But as a general rule—and certainly on the page—Dworkin made very, very few concessions indeed. She didn't shy away from controversy or scorn or conflict. (“She courted it,” as Susan Brownmiller said to me. “She would hang herself on her own cross.”) She was a difficult woman and a difficult writer, as she proudly acknowledged. Because if you accept what she's saying, suddenly you have to question everything: the way you dress, the way you write, your favorite movies, your sense of humor, and yes, the way you fuck.

Good. If you want to feel better, watch a rerun of *Will and Grace*. (Dworkin did; she was watching it the night she died.) If you want to revel in the exquisite, problematic rituals of femininity, go to a museum . . . or a mall. But if you want to be morally and intellectually challenged, to be asked impossible questions, to see the mind of a revolutionary in action, read Dworkin.

There is very little I would presume to say on Andrea Dworkin's behalf, but I will posit the following: she wanted a new and different world, a world that would be unrecognizable in many ways. She wanted to end violence against women and sexual violence in general. But there was one thing she badly wanted that was—and is—entirely possible. She wanted what all writers want and what she actually deserved: to be read.

ARIEL LEVY

PREFACE

When I finished writing *Intercourse* one colleague advised me to add an introduction to explain what the book said. That way, readers would not be shocked, afraid, or angry, because the ideas would be familiar—prechewed, easier to digest; I would be protected from bad or malicious readings and purposeful distortions; and my eagerness to explain myself would show that I wanted people to like me and my book, the quintessential feminine pose. At least one knee would be visibly bent.

Other colleagues—probably more to the point—told me straight-out to publish it under a pseudonym. I would not; and *Intercourse* became—socially speaking—a Rorschach inkblot in which people saw their fantasy caricatures of me and what they presumed to know about me. First published in the United States in 1987—simultaneously with my novel *Ice and Fire*—*Intercourse* is still being reviled in print by people who have not read it, reduced to slogans by journalists posing as critics or sages or deep thinkers, treated as if it were odious and hateful by every asshole who thinks that what will heal this violent world is more respect for dead white men.

My colleagues, of course, had been right; but their advice offended me. I have never written for a cowardly or passive or

stupid reader, the precise characteristics of most reviewers—overeducated but functionally illiterate, members of a gang, a pack, who do their drive-by shootings in print and experience what they call “the street” at cocktail parties. “I heard it on the street,” they say, meaning a penthouse closer to heaven. It is no accident that most of the books published in the last few years about the decline and fall of Anglo-European culture because of the polluting effect of women of all races and some men of color—and there are a slew of such books—have been written by white-boy journalists. Abandoning the J-school ethic of “who, what, where, when, how” and the discipline of Hemingway’s lean, masculine prose, they now try to answer “why.” That decline and fall, they say, is because talentless, uppity women infest literature; or because militant feminists are an obstacle to the prorape, prodominance art of talented living or dead men; or because the multicultural reader—likely to be female and/or not white—values Alice Walker and Toni Morrison above Aristotle and the Marquis de Sade. Hallelujah, I say.

Intercourse is a book that moves through the sexed world of dominance and submission. It moves in descending circles, not in a straight line, and as in a vortex each spiral goes down deeper. Its formal model is Dante’s *Inferno*; its lyrical debt is to Rimbaud; the equality it envisions is rooted in the dreams of women, silent generations, pioneer voices, lone rebels, and masses who agitated, demanded, cried out, broke laws, and even begged. The begging was a substitute for retaliatory violence: doing bodily harm back to those who use or injure you. I want women to be done with begging.

The public censure of women as if we are rabid because we speak without apology about the world in which we live is a

strategy of threat that usually works. Men often react to women's words—speaking and writing—as if they were acts of violence; sometimes men react to women's words with violence. So we lower our voices. Women whisper. Women apologize. Women shut up. Women trivialize what we know. Women shrink. Women pull back. Most women have experienced enough dominance from men—control, violence, insult, contempt—that no threat seems empty.

Intercourse does not say, forgive me and love me. It does not say, I forgive you, I love you. For a woman writer to thrive (or, arguably, to survive) in these current hard times, forgiveness and love must be subtext. No. I say no.

Can a man read *Intercourse*? Can a man read a book written by a woman in which she uses language without its ever becoming decorative or pretty? Can a man read a book written by a woman in which she, the author, has a direct relationship to experience, ideas, literature, life, including fucking, without mediation—such that what she says and how she says it are not determined by boundaries men have set for her? Can a man read a woman's work if it does not say what he already knows? Can a man let in a challenge not just to his dominance but to his cognition? And, specifically, am I saying that I know more than men about fucking? Yes, I am. Not just different: more and better, deeper and wider, the way anyone used knows the user.

Intercourse does not narrate my experience to measure it against Norman Mailer's or D. H. Lawrence's. The first-person is embedded in the way the book is built. I use Tolstoy, Kobo Abe, James Baldwin, Tennessee Williams, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Flaubert not as authorities but as examples: I use them; I cut and slice into them in order to exhibit them; but the

authority behind the book—behind each and every choice—is mine. In formal terms, then, *Intercourse* is arrogant, cold, and remorseless. You, the reader, will not be looking at me, the girl; you will be looking at them. In *Intercourse* I created an intellectual and imaginative environment in which you can see them. The very fact that I usurp their place—make them my characters—lessens the unexamined authority that goes not with their art but with their gender. I love the literature these men created; but I will not live my life as if they are real and I am not. Nor will I tolerate the continuing assumption that they know more about women than we know about ourselves. And I do not believe that they know more about intercourse. Habits of deference can be broken, and it is up to writers to break them. Submission can be refused; and I refuse it.

Of course, men have read and do read *Intercourse*. Many like it and understand it. Some few have been thrilled by it—it suggests to them a new possibility of freedom, a new sexual ethic: and they do not want to be users. Some men respond to the radicalism of *Intercourse*: the ideas, the prose, the structure, the questions that both underlie and intentionally subvert meaning. But if one's sexual experience has always and without exception been based on dominance—not only overt acts but also metaphysical and ontological assumptions—how can one read this book? The end of male dominance would mean—in the understanding of such a man—the end of sex. If one has eroticized a differential in power that allows for force as a natural and inevitable part of intercourse, how could one understand that this book does not say that all men are rapists or that all intercourse is rape? Equality in the realm of sex is an antisexual idea if sex requires dominance in order to register as sensation. As sad as I am to say it, the limits of the old

Adam—and the material power he still has, especially in publishing and media—have set limits on the public discourse (by both men and women) about this book.

In general women get to say yea or nay to intercourse, which is taken to be a synonym for sex, *echt* sex. In this reductive brave new world, women like sex or we do not. We are loyal to sex or we are not. The range of emotions and ideas expressed by Tolstoy et al. is literally forbidden to contemporary women. Remorse, sadness, despair, alienation, obsession, fear, greed, hate—all of which men, especially male artists, express—are simple no votes for women. Compliance means yes; a simplistic rah-rah means yes; affirming the implicit right of men to get laid regardless of the consequences to women is a yes. Reacting against force or exploitation means no; affirming pornography and prostitution means yes. “I like it” is the standard for citizenship, and “I want it” pretty much exhausts the First Amendment’s meaning for women. Critical thought or deep feeling puts one into the Puritan camp, that hallucinated place of exile where women with complaints are dumped, after which we can be abandoned. Why—socially speaking—feed a woman you can’t fuck? Why fuck a woman who might ask a question let alone have a complex emotional life or a political idea? I refuse to tolerate this loyalty-oath approach to women and intercourse or women and sexuality or, more to the point, women and men. The pressure on women to say yes now extends to thirteen-year-old girls, who face a social gulag if they are not hot, accommodating, and loyal; increasingly they face violence from teenage boys who think that intercourse is ownership. The refusal to let women feel a whole range of feelings, express a whole range of ideas, address our own experience with an honesty that is not pleasing

to men, ask questions that discomfit and antagonize men in their dominance, has simply created a new generation of users and victims—children, boys and girls respectively. The girls are getting fucked but they are not getting free or equal. It is time to notice. They get fucked; they get hit; they get raped—by boyfriends in high school. *Intercourse* wants to change what is happening to those girls. *Intercourse* asks at least some of the right questions. *Intercourse* conveys the density, complexity, and political significance of the act of intercourse: what it means that men—and now boys—feel entitled to come into the privacy of a woman's body in a context of inequality. *Intercourse* does this outside the boundaries set by men for women. It crosses both substantive and formal boundaries in what it says and how it says it.

For me, the search for truth and change using words is the meaning of writing; the prose, the thinking, the journey is sensuous and demanding. I have always loved the writing that takes one down deep, no matter how strange or bitter or dirty the descent. As a writer, I love the experience of caring, of remembering, of learning more, of asking, of wanting to know and to see and to say. *Intercourse* is search and assertion, passion and fury; and its form—no less than its content—deserves critical scrutiny and respect.

ANDREA DWORKIN

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part one

INTERCOURSE IN
A MAN-MADE WORLD

Beyond a certain point there is no return.

This point has to be reached.

FRANZ KAFKA

REPULSION

IN 1905, AT THE AGE OF TWENTY-FIVE, WITH TWO SICK children, tired, alienated and unhappy in her marriage, Alma Mahler had an argument with her husband, Gustave, during which she told him that his smell repelled her. Her biographer speculates that it was the smell of cigars. In her diary she wrote: "He was a stranger to me, and much about him is still strange to me—and will, I believe, remain so forever . . . I wonder that we can continue to live together, knowing this. Is it duty? Children? Habit? No, I know that I do really love him and only him . . ."1

Soon after, the composer Hans Pfitzner, on a visit to the husband, became infatuated with the wife. They flirted, embraced. On a long afternoon walk, Alma confessed to Gustave. Angry, he left her, and she had to walk home alone. Dusk came, and a stranger followed her. Once home, she told Gustave that a stranger had followed her. He saw it as more proof of her disloyalty. They fought. She went to bed alone. Usually, when Gustave wanted intercourse, he waited until Alma was asleep, or pretended to be; then he would begin his lovemaking. On this night, he came to her knowing she was awake; told her she

should read *The Kreutzer Sonata*, a short novel by Tolstoy; fucked her; then left. She “lay awake, fearing the future, feeling that she was on the verge of losing her courage and her will to survive.”²

A few years earlier, in 1887, another great artist, Count Leo Tolstoy, had been inspired by another great work of art—“The Kreutzer Sonata” by Beethoven—to fuck his wife. His son and a music student played the sensual and wild sonata in a concert at his country estate. Tolstoy “listened with tears in his eyes; then, during the presto, unable to control himself, he rose and went to the window where, gazing at the starry sky, he stifled a sob.”³ That night, Sophie, the Countess Tolstoy, was impregnated with her thirteenth child. The Count was sixty, his wife sixteen years younger. She had known him since she was ten; she was eighteen, he thirty-four, when they married in September 1862.

Later, in Moscow, the Count heard “The Kreutzer Sonata” again, this time in the company of an actor and a painter. This time more restrained, he wanted each to create a work of art inspired by the sonata. Only he did. His story, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, is a powerful and distressing one. It combines an unfinished short story, “The Man Who Murdered His Wife,” with a story told to Tolstoy by the painter about a stranger he met on a train, who was distraught with marital troubles; but its basic text is the Tolstoy marriage. The story is autobiographical, as is much of Tolstoy’s fiction; and in *The Kreutzer Sonata* he uses the details of his sexual intercourse with Sophie, what the biographer Henri Troyat called “his periods of rut,”⁴ to show his feelings of deep repugnance for the wife he continues to fuck—and for the sex act itself. The repugnance is not only rooted in ongoing desire, but also in satiation, it too being real, a discrete

phenomenon, and aversive. The desire is not free-floating or abstract, in the way of French philosophy. There is a real woman, Sophie, on whose body, inside whom, it is expressed; and when he is done with her, he puts her aside with rude indifference or cold distaste.

The story is dense, passionate, artful, crazed with misogyny and insight; the real woman was diagnosed in 1910, the last year of the Count's life, as "paranoiac and hysterical, with predominance of the first."⁵ The story has an argument: for chastity, against sexual intercourse. The story has an analysis: of the nature of sexual intercourse and its relation to the equality of the sexes. The woman had an argument: her husband should love her as a human being, not only use her as an object when he wanted to fuck her. The woman had an analysis: her husband was selfish to a rare and horrifying degree, also a hypocrite; people were real to him only insofar as they affected him personally; she was real to him only when and because he wanted physical love; he became cold when he was sexually sated, and indifferent to her. The man—artist and husband, wanting to be a saint, on the path toward the renunciation of all power, all wealth, all violence—managed not to cut off his nose to spite his face. "A man," he wrote in a letter, "ought not to set himself the task of chastity, but only the approach towards chastity."⁶ And especially, he did not want to be caught. "And what if another baby came?" wrote the author of *The Kreutzer Sonata* a month after finishing it. "How ashamed I should be, especially in front of my children! They will compare the date [of conception] with that of publication."⁷ The first public reading of the story was in October 1889; by December 1890, Sophie was afraid that she was pregnant again (but she was spared a fourteenth pregnancy).

Sophie's view of the great man was not reverential. One day at tea he spoke of a vegetarian menu that he had read and liked: almonds and bread. In her diary Sophie wrote: "I expect the person who wrote the menu practises vegetarianism as much as the author of the *Kreutzer Sonata* practises chastity. [Thirty-seven words deleted by surviving family.]"⁸ Her irony is seldom appreciated by Tolstoy's biographers (Troyat being the distinguished exception). Most side with the pious Count and consider her vain, corrupt, selfish, the adversary of a saint. The author of *Tolstoy and Gandhi: Men of Peace*, for instance, blamed her for "a continual denial of Tolstoy's beliefs, and an irritable and sometimes hysterical ridicule," also "moral triviality" and "inconsistency and brute egotism."⁹ She would not have been surprised. "And his biographers," she wrote in 1895, "will tell of how he helped the labourers to carry buckets of water, but no one will ever know that he never gave his wife a rest and never—in all these thirty-two years—gave his child a drink of water or spent five minutes by his bedside to give me a chance to rest a little, to sleep, or to go out for a walk, or even just recover from all my labours."¹⁰

Her labors were considerable, hard and sad. She had thirteen pregnancies, thirteen children; six died of difficult, painful illnesses—for instance, meningitis and croup. She had puerperal fever at least once, other fevers, inflamed breasts. She transcribed all the Count's books and diaries, except for a brief period late in their marriage when he gave them to his grown daughters in order to exclude her (he had her start transcribing again with *The Kreutzer Sonata*). She educated their children. From 1883 on, she managed his estates, his money, his copyrights, fed and housed their children; she published his books, which sometimes included the necessity of pleading with the

state censor for permission to publish them (she pled with the Czar for permission to publish *The Kreutzer Sonata*). It was not until July 3, 1897, that she moved out of the marital bedroom, not wanting to have intercourse anymore, but Tolstoy continued to fuck her when he wanted and to ignore her the rest of the time. She hated “his coldness, his terrible coldness”¹¹—his indifference to her after intercourse, which changed only when he wanted intercourse again.

This coldness afflicts her marriage from its beginning until his death. After four months of marriage, she wants work like his “so that I could turn to it whenever he is cold to me. Such moments,” she writes, “are bound to come more and more frequently; but in reality it has been like this all the time.”¹²

“I have changed immensely . . . ,” she writes in 1865, “and Lyova’s coldness has stopped affecting me, for I know that I deserve it.”¹³

In 1867, “[e]verything seems so cold and unfriendly, and I feel I have lost all his love . . . ”¹⁴

In 1891, she fears that the time will come when he will no longer want her, “and then he will cast me out of his life—cynically, cruelly, and coldly.”¹⁵

After his death, she wrote that physical love never “meant an emotional game to me, but always something very much akin to suffering.”¹⁶ While he lived, she wanted, as she wrote in her 1891 diary, “warm, gentle affection” but instead endured “these outbursts of passion always followed by long periods of coldness.”¹⁷

For her, this coldness was the context in which intercourse took place. For him, intercourse was the context in which she existed; his heat, her existence; his coldness toward her experienced by him only as his real life, unambiguously chosen and

pursued. He fucked her until he was eighty-one, a year before his death. "The devil fell upon me" was how he described wanting Sophie when he was old, ". . . and I slept badly. It was so loathsome, as after a crime. And on that same day . . . still more powerfully possessed, I fell."¹⁸

Finally, in his last year, he really did not want her anymore. She was, now, "my ordeal."¹⁹ She should, he thought, be having a simple old age lived in harmony and beauty with her husband, "not interfering in his work or in his life."²⁰ Instead, not able to eat or sleep, crying uncontrollably, irritable, hostile, nervous, she was what "a selfish and pitiless man,"²¹ as she once described him, had left in the wake of his magnificent and great life as an artist and a saint. Now she was discarded, because he had finished with her; and she howled in an agony that passed for madness. After accusing her of only wanting to torment herself, he wrote that "one cannot help pitying her."²² But he never knew what pity was, not even that, such a small and condescending thing, not for her. Never, in art or in life, did he know her, except in the biblical sense. In *The Kreutzer Sonata*, the husband sees the wife with some empathy, as human, only after he has brutally murdered her: "I looked at the children and at her bruised and disfigured face, and for the first time I forgot myself, my rights, my pride, and for the first time saw a human being in her."²³ Art is merciful. Murder turns the woman one has fucked over a lifetime human. The ethos is not contemporary. Typically now, in books, in films, murder never risks an aftermath of compassion; there is no remorse. Instead, murder itself is the sex act or it is sexual climax. Tolstoy's murder, full of hate and horror at woman as such, full of sexual inevitability and the artist's passionate conviction that it is right and necessary, has fragility, recognition, remorse. It is a tragic

story, because the sex act makes the killing as fated as if the gods from Olympus had ordained it. The killer's recognition of the wife, finally, as human, makes one feel pity and pain. A human life has been taken, horribly; a human being has done it. For this one moment, even the reader's interior rage at the author's full-blooded misogyny is stilled in sorrow. In contemporary books and films, the murder of a woman is an end in itself. In this sad story, the murder of the woman signifies the impossibility of physical love in a way that means loss, not sadistic celebration.

Tolstoy's repulsion for woman as such is not modern either. Now, this repulsion is literal and linear: directed especially against her genitals, also her breasts, also her mouth newly perceived as a sex organ. It is a goose-stepping hatred of cunt. The woman has no human dimension, no human meaning. The repulsion requires no explanation, no rationalization. She has no internal life, no human resonance; she needs no human interpretation. Her flesh is hated; she is it without more. The hatred is by rote, with no human individuation, no highfalutin philosophy or pedestrian emotional ambivalence. The repulsion is self-evidently justified by the physical nature of the thing itself; the repulsion inheres in what the thing is. For the male, the repulsion is sexually intense, genitally focused, sexually solipsistic, without any critical or moral self-consciousness. Photograph what she is, painted pink; the camera delivers her up as a dead thing; the picture is of a corpse, embalmed. The contemporary novelist does it with words: paints the thing, fucks it, kills it.

Tolstoy, in this story, locates his repulsion not in the woman's body, not in her inherent nature, but in sexual intercourse, the nature of the act: what it means; the inequality of

the sexes intrinsic to it; its morbid consequences to the dignity and self-esteem of men. The analysis is androcentric in the extreme; but still, the story does suggest that the repulsion is not simply deserved by its victims. The repulsion, Tolstoy insists, requires scrutiny and, ultimately, disavowal; the sex act that causes it needs to be eliminated. The radical social change demanded by Tolstoy in this story—the end of intercourse—is a measured repudiation of gynocide: in order not to kill women, he said, we must stop fucking them. *The Kreutzer Sonata* was censored by the state because it *opposed* intercourse, especially in marriage.

The story begins with a heated argument on a train between a young woman, a feminist type, mannishly dressed, outspoken, rudely caricatured by the author as having faddish, silly opinions on love and marriage; and an old man who represents the Old Russia of peasant-wisdom that Tolstoy venerated.

The woman argues for love as the basis of marriage; and for love in marriage as the essence of women's emancipation: "It's only animals, you know, that can be paired off as their master likes; but human beings have their own inclination and attachments . . ." ²⁴ She wants feeling, love, a self-chosen passion, to be the basis for equality in a relationship, also the basis for the woman's humanity in marriage. The old man dismisses her reformer's zeal: "You should not talk like that, madam . . . animals are cattle, but human beings have a law given them." ²⁵ He does not mean just religious law, or the law of tradition, or the law of the state: he means the way patriarchy really works in its most orthodox mode. Men must make women afraid and compliant, including through beatings; women must be housebound and servile. The men, then, can attend orgies or engage in any other sexual activity. The old man is articulating the law

of male domination, with special emphasis on its traditional sexual double standard. The sexual double standard repudiates the modern assertions of the woman that women have a right to love actively and passionately in marriage, a human right; and also a human right to be loved. Obedience, not love, is the proper basis of marriage for a woman, according to the old man; and masculinity is measured by how well a man controls his wife in the house and his horse in the field. The woman argues for a passion that is mutual.

Then the killer/husband intervenes with hostile, mocking questions to the woman: what is this love? what is true love? what sanctifies marriage? how long does true love last? He sarcastically confronts the sexual innocence behind her modern pose. “Every man,” he tells her, “experiences what you call love for every pretty woman.”²⁶ He ridicules her belief that a husband and a wife can share a sensibility, principles, values:

“Spiritual affinity! Identity of ideals! . . . But in that case why go to bed together? (Excuse my coarseness!) Or do people go to bed together because of the identity of their ideals?” he said, bursting into a nervous laugh.²⁷

People marry, he says, for “nothing but copulation!”²⁸ Then, he thinks that he is recognized; a notorious man who killed his wife, has been on trial, has been acquitted. The woman and others move to a different car. The narrator, until now an unobtrusive “I,” stays on; and the killer/husband tells how and why he killed his wife. He is cynical, bitter, overwrought, unbalanced, extreme in his ideas; yet analytical, with a shrewd intelligence. He may be unhinged or not. Was he, when he killed his wife? Is he, because he killed his wife? His ideas are lucid, with

no sense of proportion. His antagonism to sexual intercourse is absolute. His social critique repudiates all the sexual commonplaces, the rites and rituals of socially normal sexuality, including the allowed sexual indulgences of unmarried men and the allowed adulteries of married men. His critique is not of superficial conventions or deeper hypocrisies. It is a radical critique of the elements of social life that maintain intercourse as a right, as a duty, or as pleasure, no matter what the cost of intercourse as such, no matter to whom. The violence in his marriage—the violence of feeling and the final act of killing—had for him an internal logic and inevitability, because intercourse distorts and ultimately destroys any potential human equality between men and women by turning women into objects and men into exploiters. He is a political dissident with a social analysis, not a personal psychology. He is tormented by the depravity of the sex act; but *depravity* has a political meaning rooted in a comprehension, almost unique in male literature, of the fundamental simplicity and destructiveness of sexual exploitation:

“the enslavement of woman lies simply in the fact that people desire, and think it good, to avail themselves of her as a tool of enjoyment. Well, and they liberate woman, give her all sorts of rights equal to man, but continue to regard her as an instrument of enjoyment, and so educate her in childhood and afterwards by public opinion. And there she is, still the same humiliated and depraved slave, and the man still a depraved slave-owner.

“They emancipate women in universities and in law courts, but continue to regard her as an object of enjoyment. Teach her, as she is taught among us, to regard herself as such, and she will always remain an inferior being.”²⁹

Depravity, debauchery, dissoluteness, all connote this exploitation of women, who remain inferior because of it, for pleasure.

In telling his story, the killer/husband sets out the preconditions for the murder of his wife, the social and sexual experiences that primed him to kill her. He describes himself as typical of his class: landed, gentry, university educated. Before marriage, he lived “like everybody else in our class”³⁰—meaning the men, the sex class within the social class (the women with whom he had sex were prostitutes and peasants). He had sex with women regularly, avoided making any commitments to any woman, and considered regular sex necessary to his physical health. This general pattern he characterizes as “living dissolutely,” “debauchery.”³¹ At the time, he thought he was moral because “I was not a seducer, had no unnatural tastes, and did not make that the chief purpose of my life as many of my associates did . . .”³² The debauchery, the dissoluteness, was not physical, not conduct; instead, “real debauchery lies precisely in freeing oneself from moral relations with a woman with whom you have physical intimacy.”³³ He valued the absence of any moral dimension to sex as freedom. This absence especially signified the inferiority of the woman, because relations with a human on the same level as oneself always have a moral dimension (which does not mean that one is morally good, only that one is morally accountable). Once he worried obsessively because he had not been able to pay a woman with whom he had had sex. He was finally at peace when he found her and paid her. The money repudiated the possibility of any human sameness between him and her; and this put him at ease. It put her in her place as his inferior—the proper closure to sex. It is this superiority, this contemptuous but absolutely normal

and unremarkable arrogance, that he now sees as the essence of sexual depravity, and also as a first step toward killing his wife. Having actually killed, he sees the sex he took for granted as murderous in its diminution of human life—how it made women's humanity invisible, meaningless; but the prerogatives of both sex and class made the exploitation as invisible as gravity, as certain.

Long before he had touched a woman, this depravity, this exploitation, was rooted in his mind, a form of torment. He was tormented by “woman, not some particular woman but woman as something to be desired, woman, every woman, woman's nudity . . .”³⁴ This impersonal something was at the heart of his desire: objectlike, not human and individual; not someone in particular but a body, perhaps a symbol, a configuration of flesh; something to have. The first time he had sex was “something special and pathetic,” “I felt sad, so sad that I wanted to cry.”³⁵ He describes the sex following that first experience as addiction, compares having sex with taking morphine or drinking; “To be a libertine is a physical condition like that of a morphinist, a drunkard, or a smoker,”³⁶ he says, particularly locating libertinism in how a man looks at a woman, examines her—the behavior most clearly indicating the deep, internal process of objectification. Because the man is compulsive, because he objectifies, because he exploits and is therefore depraved, relations with women as human beings—what he characterizes as “brotherly relations with a woman”³⁷—are impossible. The loss of innocence—the loss of virginity for a man already socialized to exploit—is a real and irreversible corruption of his capacity to love a woman as a human being. When he marries, he is unable to know or to love the woman as an individual. The depravity of being a calloused

exploiter is what he brings to the marriage bed and to the relationship as a whole.

The killer/husband, when engaged, showed his fiancée his diary (as Tolstoy did) with descriptions of women he had known, affairs he had had. He remembers ““her horror, despair, and confusion, when she learnt of it and understood it.””³⁸ On their honeymoon, he felt ““awkward, ashamed, repelled, sorry . . . ””³⁹ It is necessary for the husband to ““cultivate that vice in his wife in order to derive pleasure from it.””⁴⁰ The narrator argues that there is no vice, that sex is natural. The killer/husband maintains that it is unnatural, and contrasts it to eating, which is, he says, ““from the very beginning, enjoyable, easy, pleasant, and not shameful; but this is horrid, shameful, and painful.””⁴¹ Asked by the narrator how the human race would continue, the killer/husband says simply that the human race will cease—both religion and science say so and everyone knows that it is true. If the goal of mankind is universal peace, ““that the spears should be beaten into pruning-hooks,””⁴² then the end of intercourse would be an essential, utterly logical part of achieving that promised peace:

“Of all the passions the strongest, cruellest, and most stubborn is the sex-passion, physical love; and therefore if the passions are destroyed, including the strongest of them—physical love—the prophecies will be fulfilled, mankind will be brought into a unity, the aim of human existence will be attained, and there will be nothing further to live for.””⁴³

This universal peace, following on the beating of the spears into pruning hooks or plowshares, requires not just occasional chastity on the part of some, but a deep and committed

chastity on the part of all—this to achieve a reconciliation between men and women that physical love, with its strong, cruel passion, makes impossible. Repeatedly characterizing intercourse as swinish, Tolstoy's killer/husband tells how proud he was of "animal excesses," "these physical excesses, and without in the least considering either her spiritual or even her physical life."⁴⁴ We pretend, he says, that love is ideal, exalted, but nature made it shameful and disgusting; we only pretend that it is not. He feels repulsion for the act and for the relationship that it creates, these being two parts of a whole, consistently condemned because they are inextricably intertwined. The sex act and the relationship it constructs cannot be separated in his analysis or in his loathing. At first there were long periods of lovemaking, followed by periods of anger, quarrels. The fights were "only the consequence of the cessation of sensuality."⁴⁵ Their real relationship became "cold and hostile,"⁴⁶ but sensuality distorted their perception of it, because the hostility would soon be covered up by renewed periods of physical love. A cynicism begins to characterize their relationship. They would make love until "[a]morousness was exhausted by the satisfaction of sensuality and we were left confronting one another in our true relation . . . as two egotists quite alien to each other who wished to get as much pleasure as possible from each other."⁴⁷ The emotions engendered in him by intercourse, during the periods of it, became extreme: rage, hatred of her caused by the smallest movement or gesture—pouring the tea in a certain way or smacking her lips. He felt this grandiose rage and hatred in response to trivialities during the periods of physical lovemaking; and when those periods were over, he felt animosity, hostility, and coldness. As the marriage advanced in

years—this passage being in an early version of *The Kreutzer Sonata*—“[t]he periods of what we called love occurred as often as before, but were barer, coarser, and lacked any cover. But they did not last long and were immediately followed by periods of quite causeless anger springing up on most unintelligible grounds.”⁴⁸

In the early years of marriage, he appears to be saying, anger followed periods of physical lovemaking—they had fights inevitably in the aftermath of any such period. But then, as he describes it, the hostility between them got covered over by renewed periods of sensuality. The hostility, then, got interwoven into the times of sex and the sex act (which were already in his view depraved, because he was an exploiter), so that during periods of repeated intercourse, which may have lasted weeks or days, there was always rage and hatred on his part toward her—something quite different from the effortless exploitation he indulged in as an unmarried man. In the early part of the marriage, the anger was intrinsic to the sex act, because it was an inevitable consequence of being finished with it: satiation—not just the climax of one fuck, but being sated from immersion in periods of physical lovemaking—led inevitably to conflict. Later, the rage and hatred were intrinsic to the sex, because the sex had brought him to her and he had contempt for her. He viewed her with hostility all the time, including when he had sex with her. The alternating early experiences of sex followed by coldness, hostility, fighting, synthesized into a relationship in which he hated her all the time and fucked her sometimes.

For women, according to the killer/husband, virginity is the highest state, an ideal; and a fall from virginity is a fall into trivialization, into being used as a thing; one dresses up to be the

thing; one does not have a full humanity but must conform to the rituals and conventions of debasement as a sexual object. But this reduction of humanity into being an object for sex carries with it the power to dominate men because men want the object and the sex. The rage against women as a group is particularly located here: women manipulate men by manipulating men's sexual desire; these trivial, mediocre things (women) have real power over men through sex. Women know, and men do not want to know, "that the most exalted poetic love, as we call it, depends not on moral qualities but on physical nearness and on the *coiffure* . . ." ⁴⁹ The immorality of women is stressed: a woman would rather be convicted of any moral outrage—lying, cruelty, dissoluteness—in the presence of a man she wants than to be seen in an ugly dress. In this reduction from fully human (virgin) to sex object (one who exists to attract men), women achieve power over men, because women know "that we are continually lying about high sentiments, but really only want her body . . ." ⁵⁰ This dominance of men by women is experienced by the men as real—emotionally real, sexually real, psychologically real; it emerges as the reason for the wrath of the misogynist. The whole world suffers, says the killer/husband, from the domination of men by women. The narrator points out that all rights, all privileges, all laws, are on the side of men and favor men; but the killer/husband, using a pernicious analogy, sees that powerlessness generates revenge, and revenge is what women accomplish in the sensuality he experiences as their dominance, his powerlessness:

"on the one hand woman is reduced to the lowest stage of humiliation, while on the other hand she dominates. Just like the Jews: as they pay us back for their oppression by financial

domination, so it is with women. 'Ah, you want us to be traders only—all right, as traders we will dominate you!' say the Jews. 'Ah, you want us to be merely objects of sensuality—all right, as objects of sensuality we will enslave you.'"⁵¹

The woman appears to control sex. The man needs it. This causes his rage at her perceived power over him. The objective proof of this power is in the various industries that exist to provide ornamentation and consumer goods for women:

"Millions of people, generations of slaves, perish at hard labour in factories merely to satisfy woman's caprice. Women, like queens, keep nine-tenths of mankind in bondage to heavy labour. And all because they have been abased and deprived of equal rights with men. And they revenge themselves by acting on our sensuality . . ." "⁵²

This dynamic of revenge of the powerless through sensuality makes women dangerous to men: "dangerous," "illicit," "the peril," "the dangerous object."⁵³ Any woman who acts on a man's sensuality by provoking it—which she does just by being a sexual object in looks and behavior—makes him intoxicated, deranged, stupified; he wants to call a policeman and have her put away. She is this danger, has this power, dominates him, directly as a consequence of her inequality, the meaning of which is in her reduction to a sexual object.

Implicit in the killer/husband's emotionally charged analysis, with its rage and revulsion toward women for having such a strong, seemingly unalterable hold over his body and mind, is a recognition that equality is the antithesis of sensuality when the sensuality is intercourse per se. The woman must

be reduced to being this sexual object to be pleasing to men who will then, and only then, want to fuck her; once she is made inferior in this way, she is sensual to men and attracts them to her, and a man's desire for her—to use her—is experienced by him as her power over him. But equality does not have this danger of intoxication or derangement or obsession. Equality means physical wholeness, virginity—for the woman, equality requires not ever having been reduced to that object of sensuality in order to be used as a tool of men's desire and satiation in sex. What is lost for the woman when she becomes a sexual object, and when she is confirmed in that status by being fucked, is not recoverable. Just as the man is deprived, that is, an exploiter, so too the woman is deprived, that is, an object.

According to the killer/husband, the inferiority of women in society, including the civil inferiority of women, originates in intercourse, because in intercourse the woman is not, and cannot be, the equal of men. She “has not the right to use a man or abstain from him as she likes—is not allowed to choose a man at her pleasure instead of being chosen by him.”⁵⁴ His solution is not an equality of sexual access, because intercourse by its nature requires the woman's inferiority as a sexual object. Instead, men must not have the right to intercourse. Women will not revenge themselves on men through sensuality, acquiring “a terrible power over people,”⁵⁵ if men stop creating women's inequality because they want intercourse. Men need inequality in order to fuck; and equality means that men also need to be chaste.

Marriage through sexual attraction, that is, so-called love, is also an institution of inequality, because of what women must do to attract husbands: the woman is “a slave in a bazaar or

the bait in a trap.”⁵⁶ Because she is ““a means of enjoyment,”⁵⁷ she will always be used as such, and her inferiority will be created and maintained through that usage of her for enjoyment. No rights to hold government office or other public positions of civil or professional power will change her status as long as she is exploited in sex. The analogy the killer/husband makes is to slavery,* where the institution can be legally invalidated but people are kept and used as slaves anyway, being exploited because others profit from the exploitation. Slavery is in the exploitation itself, any kind of forced labor that is done because people who are stronger want it done, including forced sex labor by women simply in response to male desire: ““Therefore to get rid of slavery it is necessary that people should not wish to profit by the forced labour of others and should consider it a sin and a shame.”⁵⁸ As long as men desire women for intercourse, and women are used as sexual objects, regardless of laws and other public reforms women’s real status will be low, degraded.

For the man, this right to use a woman’s body, to exploit her in intercourse, has a nightmarish dimension originating in his absolute arrogance, his sense of total possession, which the woman, as an object, must not suborn or he will suffer—the recognition that finally her body is not his being an agony to him, causing him real and unbearable anguish:

“What was terrible, you know, was that I considered myself to have a complete right to her body as if it were my own, and yet at the same time I felt as if I could not control that body, that it was not mine and she could dispose of it not as I wished her to.”⁵⁹

*Serfdom in Czarist Russia.

This anguish ended only with killing her, because only in death was she incapable of defying him, defying and defeating his use of her body as if it were his own. Her death ended his pain, because death ended her rebellion against her object status and her assertion of will in this body that belonged to him. Death ended longings she had, including a desire for affection from, even intercourse with, another man. Death ended her desire, put her back in her place, not wanting, incontestably an object, because objects do not will and want and search and are not subjects in a human quest for love or affection or sex. His wife, in wanting another man, had her own quest for love, her own heart and will and desire, and so he killed her, because he could not stand it. Here is the heart of the contradiction, the internal tension at the center of this sexual system of value and cognition: alive, in rebellion, flesh he is near and inside of, she is not human; with her dead, more objectlike than human, his pain is ended and he recognizes her, for one moment, as human—perhaps because she is now someone he no longer needs to fuck.

But the killing, according to the killer/husband, was not one gross act of physical and violent rage. Instead, the killing was slow, over the long years of their marriage, a consequence of the sex he wanted from her. In the first month of their marriage she became pregnant; he kept fucking her during her pregnancy: “You think I am straying from my subject? Not at all! I am telling you *how* I killed my wife.”⁶⁰ There were continuous pregnancies, but he kept fucking her despite her suffering and despair: “so many children! The torments exhausted her!”⁶¹ She learned birth control and became young and energetic and vital again, but then she wanted someone else—she wanted love from someone not “befouled by jealousy and all kinds of anger.”⁶² But the husband kept fucking her anyway, no matter

what she wanted, no matter how angry he was. In one violent fight, he wanted to beat her, to kill her; he threw a heavy paperweight at her; she sobbed hysterically and ran from the room, but by morning “she grew quiet, and we made peace under the influence of the feeling we called love.”⁶³ All this sexual use of her was the killing. The physical act of killing—stabbing her with a dagger—is sexual too:

“. . . I felt, and remember, the momentary resistance of her corset and of something else, and then the plunging of the dagger into something soft. She seized the dagger with her hands, and cut them, but could not hold it back.”⁶⁴

The woman is physically real during this act of violence for the first time. She is never real in his other descriptions of her behavior, or her person, or his sexual intercourse with her. Then the dagger plunges into something soft and she resists, cutting her hands. When she is dead, bruised, disfigured, inert, a cadaver, he calls her human. The cost of the recognition is death.

In this story of killing, the killing begins when the man starts using the woman up; pillaging her physical resources of strength and sex. He is calloused to her well-being because her well-being is not compatible with his fucking—and it is the fucking he wants, not the woman as a person.

Tolstoy himself wanted to give up wealth and power—his estates, his monies from his books, eating meat, his position in society; he wanted to be simple, nonviolent, and poor. In this renunciation of power he included sexual intercourse in principle though not in practice. In *The Kreutzer Sonata* he knew, as artists often do, more than he was willing to act on in real life, especially about how women (and one woman in particular)

were part of the wealth he owned; and especially about how intercourse was implicitly violent, predicated as it was on exploitation and objectification. He wanted to beat spears into pruning hooks, this phallic imagery being as close as the nineteenth-century author could come to talking about explicit genital violence—the penis itself as a weapon in intercourse with a social inferior. In art, he articulates with almost prophetic brilliance the elements that combine to make and keep women inferior, all of them originating, in his view, in sexual intercourse, because sexual intercourse requires objectification and therefore is exploitation. In life, he blamed and hated Sophie, feeling antagonism and repulsion, because he wanted to fuck her and did fuck her. Satiation did not lead to calm or harmony; it simply produced a hostile indifference, a stylistic modification of actively expressed repulsion. More than any other form of privilege, intercourse kept Tolstoy rooted in earthly, arrogant obsession—not poor and simple at all; having the right to use another person for pleasure and exercising that right at will; certainly not nonviolent. He experienced the obsession as internal violence, violating him, not her. The intensity of wanting was violent—stubborn, cruel, as he called it. The intensity of the act was violent, including in later years sex that by modern standards was clearly forced. The distaste after satiation was hostile, a passive violence of antipathy and indifference. He hated intercourse because of what it did to him, how he felt wanting it, doing it, being done with it. He hated Sophie because he fucked Sophie. For Sophie, being used, being hated, being fucked, meant loving him as a wife was supposed to. To her diary only she confided that “the main thing is *not* to love,” because it is “so painful and humiliating,” and “all my pride is trampled in the mud.”⁶⁵

SKINLESS

SEXUAL INTERCOURSE IS NOT INTRINSICALLY BANAL, though pop-culture magazines like *Esquire* and *Cosmopolitan* would suggest that it is. It is intense, often desperate. The internal landscape is violent upheaval, a wild and ultimately cruel disregard of human individuality, a brazen, high-strung wanting that is absolute and imperishable, not attached to personality, no respecter of boundaries; ending not in sexual climax but in a human tragedy of failed relationships, vengeful bitterness in an aftermath of sexual heat, personality corroded by too much endurance of undesired, habitual intercourse, conflict, a wearing away of vitality in the numbness finally of habit or compulsion or the loneliness of separation. The experience of fucking changes people, so that they are often lost to each other and slowly they are lost to human hope. The pain of having been exposed, so naked, leads to hiding, self-protection, building barricades, emotional and physical alienation or violent retaliation against anyone who gets too close.

Sometimes, the skin comes off in sex. The people merge, skinless. The body loses its boundaries. We are each in these

separate bodies; and then, with someone and not with someone else, the skin dissolves altogether; and what touches is unspeakably, grotesquely visceral, not inside language or conceptualization, not inside time; raw, blood and fat and muscle and bone, unmediated by form or formal limits. There is no physical distance, no self-consciousness, nothing withdrawn or private or alienated, no existence outside physical touch. The skin collapses as a boundary—it has no meaning; time is gone—it too has no meaning; there is no outside. Instead, there is necessity, nothing else—being driven, physical immersion in each other but with no experience of “each other” as separate entities coming together. There is only touch, no boundaries; there is only the nameless experience of physical contact, which is life; there is no solace, except in this contact; without it, there is unbearable physical pain, absolute, not lessened by distraction, unreached by normalcy—nearly an amputation, the skin hacked off, slashed open; violent hurt. “My heart was open to you,” says a man obsessively in love in *The Face of Another* by Kobo Abe, “quite as if the front of it had been sliced away.”¹ This skinless sex is a fever, but *fever* is too small. It is obsession, but *obsession* is too psychological. It becomes life; and as such, it is a state of being, a metaphysical reality for those in it, for whom no one else exists. It ends when the skin comes back into being as a boundary.

The skin is a line of demarcation, a periphery, the fence, the form, the shape, the first clue to identity in a society (for instance, color in a racist society), and, in purely physical terms, the formal precondition for being human. It is a thin veil of matter separating the outside from the inside. It is what one sees and what one covers up; it shows and it conceals; it hides what is inside. The skin is separation, individ-

uality, the basis for corporeal privacy and also the point of contact for everything outside the self. It is a conductor of all feeling. Every time the skin is touched, one feels. All feeling passes through it, outside to inside. The skin is electric, hot, cold, opaque, translucent, youth, age, sensitive to every whisper of wind, chill, heat. The skin is our human mask; it is what one can touch of another person, what one sees, how one is seen. It is the formal limits of a body, a person, and the only bridge to human contact that is physical and direct. Especially, it is both identity and sex, what one is and what one feels in the realm of the sensual, being and passion, where the self meets the world—intercourse being, ultimately, the self in the act of meeting the world. The other person embodies not one's own privacy, but everything outside it: "To lose you would be symbolic of losing the world,"² says Abe's man in love.

"Naked came I from my mother's womb," says Job, "and naked shall I return" (Job 1:21). Naked, stripped down to the elemental human, fragile, exposed and delicate, in birth and in sex and in death, the human condition is minimally this nakedness; being human is also, as Leo Steinberg writes in his essay on the sexuality of Christ as portrayed in many paintings, "the condition of being both deathbound and sexed."³ Sex is the dim echo of that original nakedness, primal, before anything else that is also human; later, isolated in an identity, hidden by it, insensate because of it, one is a social human being ruled by conformity and convention, not naked. Intercourse recalls the first nakedness, innocent and basic, but the innocence itself is not recoverable; the nakedness is never again synonymous with being human. One's skin takes on a social function—even naked, one is not purely naked; social

identity becomes a new, tough, impermeable skin; one's nakedness is covered over by layers of social self and emotional pain, rituals and rules, habits of being that are antithetical to any pure experience of being. Questions of *what is human*, *what is being*, suggest questions of *what is naked*, *what is sexed*. Questions of metaphysics are questions of sex: especially because in intercourse two separate people physically fuse; break out of the prison of separateness and into the prison of physical need for another; experience the pain of being separate and then the pain of not being separate enough. Intercourse creates a need for society, for humans outside oneself; it pushes one toward others, who are in the world, separate, different. But that society interposes itself—by creating the necessity for identity, by making rules—between two humans, keeping them separate, even during intercourse. This tension is painful, lonely—apart or in sex, the sex being doomed by the necessity, the inevitability, of becoming separate, absolutely separate, again. The skin mediates between separation and fusion. “Assuming that man has a soul,” writes Abe in *The Woman in the Dunes*, “it must, in all likelihood, be housed in the skin”; the skin is “a soft, downlike bandage for the soul.”⁴ Abe asks what it means to be human in human skin, and what it means to love, past the boundaries of identity. In his work, sexual intercourse is a metaphor for the human condition, and it is also, as a literal, physical experience, at the heart of human life and meaning.

In *The Woman in the Dunes*, a man gets lost in sand dunes and is trapped with a woman in a deep hole in the dunes where she lives; he is kept prisoner there, to keep clearing away the sand (“The village keeps going because we never let up clearing away the sand . . . ”),⁵ to have sex with her; the sand rots

everything, including his skin; it is a pervasive physical reality, coarse, intensifying every physical feeling and movement, every moment of survival; he has sex with the woman that is different from the sex in civilization; he tries to escape, fights the sand, is brought back; the hole is the woman, being in it is like being in her; the sand is the burying, enveloping, suffocating, killing quality of sex with a woman, being surrounded by her; the sand on the skin, in the mouth, on her labia, brings the skin to life, to feeling, to intensity, to sex that is not alienated or abstract; in the end, the man chooses to stay in the hole in the dune with the woman.

In *The Face of Another*, a man has lost the skin on his face; the socially tame sex he has with his wife stops because she is repelled; he makes a mask, the face of another, and sleeps with her; he wants to know her, he wants sex beyond the constraints of his identity, but first his real face, then his mask, keep it from happening; his wife has sex with the mask, but it is not breakthrough or abandonment; in the end, she has known him all along—it is his selfishness, she says, that keeps him from getting outside his skin and near her; he insists it is the mask. To overcome the humiliation of having been known by her, fucked yet kept at a distance, he shoots her.

In Abe's *The Box Man*, a man gives up society and lives in a box; the box is his skin; he gives up the box finally to have sex with a woman; they are skinless together—he is skinless without his box, she is skinless naked; when she dresses, their love is over, which is unbearable, so he locks her in the building where they have been living and cuts off the electricity so that in the dark it will be as if she were naked. In the end, he has cut off all routes of escape and he sits in the dark waiting for her to find him.

What one feels on the skin is overwhelming, sensual, dramatic, extreme even when ordinary: "He was melting away like wax. His pores were gorged with perspiration."⁶ The feelings have carnal associations, meanings out of a psychic depth. The man trapped in the hole in the dunes wants to punish the woman who helped trap him there:

At the very thought his hair bristled and his skin felt scratchy like dry paper. "Skin" seemed to establish an association of ideas with the word "force." Suddenly she became a silhouette cut out from its background. A man of twenty is sexually aroused by a thought. A man of forty is sexually aroused on the surface of his skin. But for a man of thirty a woman who is only a silhouette is the most dangerous. He could embrace it as easily as embracing himself, couldn't he?⁷

He wants to force her, to hurt her; punishment evokes sexual feelings in him; skin is logically connected in his mind with force, because sex is what he feels when he feels the urge to hurt her. The different codes of arousal he describes are a gradual concretization of erotic need: thought to silhouette to getting aroused on the surface of the skin. Force is suggested by the skin, because both to him mean real touch; but as someone still conditioned by civilization to have abstract sexual impulses, he is drawn most by the silhouette, halfway between the fictive and the real. In his mind, he is nearly a shadow, as unreal to himself as she is to him; there is a shape but no substance; more than a thought, less than a person.

The skin suggests passion, force, or morbid fear. Or skin houses the soul; this is repeated in more than one Abe book.

Or skin is the mask that love strips away; in love, there is the pleasure of removing the mask, so that the lover is truly naked, beyond disguise, unable to hide. The skin is intimate, personal; those who know its meaning revere it, keeping it from casual violation by those who are indifferent to it:

The box with its resident gone was like a deserted house. The aging process had apparently been rapid, and the box had weathered to the color of withered grapes. But at a glance I was able to distinguish that it was the discarded skin of a box man. . . . I instinctively inserted myself into the space and concealed this sloughed-off skin from the gaze of those passing by.⁸

The skin, dead, is a human remain, with the soul gone, still fragile, what was human in it transformed; “[t]he corpse of the box became a butterfly (if a butterfly is too romantic, then a cicada will do, or a May fly), the cast-off skin of a chrysalis that has flown away.”⁹ The skin encases the living thing; the skin, peeled away, still signifies the life that was inside it.

The box man, whose naked human skin is under the box without light or care—think of the skin of the infant, buried alive—is tortured by the skin decomposing: “The itching of disintegrating skin is more difficult to stand than any visceral pain.”¹⁰ Torture where people are tarred or the situation of so-called dancing girls painted in gold who go mad because of the asphyxiation of the skin remind him of his own condition: imprisoned in human skin, unable to get rid of it, disintegrating. He wants “to strip off my own skin including the box the way one peels off the skin of a fig.”¹¹ And when he and the woman are together, in the heat of love with no barrier between them,

—A sultry wind is blowing between you and me now. A sensual, burning wind is blowing around us. . . . In the force of the wind and in the heat I seem to have lost my sense of time.

But in any case I realize too that the direction of the wind will probably change. Suddenly it will turn into a cool westerly wind. And then this hot wind will be stripped away from my skin like a mirage, and I shall not even be able to recollect it. Yes, the hot wind is too violent. Within itself is concealed the premonition of its end.¹²

The heat envelops them, outside time; and when love is gone, there will be no memory of it, no way of bringing it back through memory either, it will have the quality of a hallucination that has disappeared; a cool wind will come, the skin will be stripped of the heat—as if the heat would be forcibly torn from the skin—and once stripped of the heat, it will be stripped of memory; and this end, this cool wind and no memory and the heat being stripped from the skin, is implicit in the intensity and the violence of the experience; the end of passionate love is built into its very intensity.

Being enveloped, weighted down by something outside one that is overwhelmingly encompassing, is the experience of this sexual passion outside identity, the passion outside the control of the ego, which is the servant of routinized civilization. In *The Woman in the Dunes*, the captive is outraged by the indifference of the dunes and its people to his established identity: “Was it permissible to snare, exactly like a mouse or insect, a man who had his certificate of medical insurance, someone who had paid his taxes, who was employed, and whose family records were in order?”¹³ The animal quality of life, with humans living in the unmediated brutality of the real physical

world, not a physical world of human artifacts, is merciless, without compassion for these identities people construct in civilization. One lives or dies according to an impersonal, random fate: human fate is not temporized by mental events; there are the hard exigencies of physical survival, which do not bend in deference to individual human personalities. In passion too, the human does not have the benefit of personality. Instead, the wind or the sand or the heat beats down on the body, a metaphor for the vast feeling of necessity that encloses the body, making personality and individuality meaningless; the skin, the human periphery, melts or evaporates or hurts under the force of it. The sand in *The Woman in the Dunes* is life itself with its crushing disregard for personality or fairness or reason or the defenses built up against its unceasing and formless flow: life here is precisely identical with sexuality, also crushing, formless, shapeless, merciless. Sand, formlessness, “the antithesis of all form,”¹⁴ is played against, pushed against, made an antagonist of, skin, which is form; the crushing density of life, moving on past us and over us, burying us underneath it, is formless in its movement, but “[t]hings with form were empty when placed beside sand.”¹⁵ Form, barricaded, human form, skin, seems empty against the density of the endlessly moving, formless sand: which is life and its inevitable, massive, incomprehensible brutalities; which is sex, with the brutality of its omnipresent, incorrigible, massive demands. Carried by life and sex toward death, the human experience is one of being pushed until crushed: “No matter how sand flowed, it was still different from water. One could swim in water, but sand would enfold a man and crush him to death.”¹⁶

The sand, because it is relentless and inescapable, forces an abandonment of the abstract mental thinking and

self-involvement that pass for feeling, especially sexual feeling, in men in civilization. It forces the person to live wholly in the body, in the present, without mental evasion or self-preoccupied introspection or free-floating anxiety. At first, close to civilization and its ways, the man's sexuality is in looking: "A sand-covered woman was perhaps attractive to look at but hardly to touch."¹⁷ But the pure physicality of the sand slowly makes him concretize his own responses; the body is real in the sand; abstraction is useless. What he feels, he feels physically. The sand is so extreme, so intense, so much itself, so absolute, that it determines the quality and boundaries of his consciousness, which changes from being vaguely, dully mental to being acutely, if painfully, alive in physical labor, physical feeling, physical survival. This is not pleasant or nice; it cannot be judged from a comfortable mental distance as physical experience in civilization is in fact judged; there is no escape into equivocation or effete human arrogance:

And then his feet began to sink into the sand. Before he knew whether he was making progress or not, he was buried up to his knees and seemed to have lost all power of movement. Then he attempted frantically to scramble up on all fours. The burning sand scorched his palms. Sweat poured from his whole body. Sand and sweat blinded him. Soon he had cramps in his legs and was unable to move them at all.¹⁸

The sand causes physical response, even erection: "A little flow of sand, along with his trousers, slid over the base of his member and fell along his thighs. . . . Slowly, but surely, with a pumping like that of a water pipe in which the water has been turned off, his member began to fill again."¹⁹ The sand causes

tenderness, introduces physical intimacy, between him and the woman: “he joined the woman in helping to brush the sand from her body. She laughed in a husky voice. His hands became more and more insistent as they passed from her breasts under her arms and from there around her loins.”²⁰ Sand is carnal; his memory of it is carnal; he remembers “the sense of shame in scraping away, with a finger he had wet in his mouth, the sand like burnt rubber that had gathered on the dark lips of her vulva.”²¹ And then, there is the final triumph, the final superiority, of the sand and the woman, a physical triumph over him, achieved when he tries to rape her in front of the villagers who have promised to let him go if he lets them watch. She physically beats him and carries him inside, and he recognizes that there is an intrinsic rightness in her victory, his failure:

But the man, beaten and covered with sand, vaguely thought that everything, after all, had gone as it was written it should. The idea was in a corner of his consciousness, like a sodden undergarment, where only the beating of his heart was painfully clear. The woman’s arms, hot as fire, were under his armpits, and the odor of her body was a thorn piercing his nose. He abandoned himself to her hands as if he were a smooth, flat stone in a river bed. It seemed that what remained of him had turned into a liquid and melted into her body.²²

Sand is the element, the woman is the human being surviving in it; to him, they are dangerous, the hole, the trap; he is afraid of what it is to be sunk in them, without a consciousness in reserve to separate him and keep him afloat, above; they are life; and the woman is life’s logic and purpose—otherwise it has no

logic, no purpose. In this vision of sex, while the man is by contemporary standards emasculated by the failed rape, in fact rape is supposed to fail. Men are not supposed to accomplish it. They are supposed to give in, to capitulate, to surrender: to the sand—to life moving without regard for their specialness or individuality, their fiefdoms of personality and power; to the necessities of the woman's life in the dunes—work, sex, a home, the common goal of keeping the community from being destroyed by the sand. The sex is not cynical or contaminated by voyeurism; but it is only realizable in a world of dangerously unsentimental physicality. Touch, then, becomes what is distinctly, irreducibly human; the meaning of being human. This essential human need is met by an equal human capacity to touch, but that capacity is lost in a false physical world of man-made artifacts and a false psychological world of man-made abstractions. The superiority of the woman, like the superiority of the sand, is in her simplicity of means, her quiet and patient endurance, the unselfconsciousness of her touch, its ruthless simplicity. She is not abstract, not a silhouette. She lives in her body, not in his imagination.

In *The Face of Another*, the man is a normal man living in a normal world, except that he has lost the skin on his face; he has lost his physical identity and the sense of well-being and belonging that goes with it. He is stranded as absolutely as the man in the dunes, but he is stranded in the middle of his normal life. He wants touch, he wants love, he wants sex, so desperately; he thinks that he has lost his identity, because he has lost his face; but his wife, who knows him even in his mask, leaves him because he is selfish; no loss of physical identity helps him to transcend his essential obsession with himself; and so she remains unknown to him, someone untouched no

matter what he does to or with her when he makes love. Reputating him, she writes him:

You don't need me. What you really need is a mirror. Because any stranger is for you simply a mirror in which to reflect yourself. I don't ever again want to return to such a desert of mirrors.²³

Pushed by a deep, obsessive desire for sex with his wife, for her love—but also an increasing desire to watch her being unfaithful with the man he is pretending to be—he is unable to transcend the constraints of self-absorption. He gets closest to her when touch becomes a part of his imagination, a means of cognition when he is near her but not literally touching her:

Isn't it generally rare to imagine by a sense of touch? I did not conceive of you as a glass doll or as abstract word symbols, but had a tactile sense of your presence as I got within touching distance of you. The side of my body next to you was as sensitive as if it had been overexposed to the sun, and each one of my pores panted for breath like dogs sweltering in the heat.²⁴

She is far from being an object or an abstraction; she is nearly real. His reaction is physical, hot, on his skin; close to touch, closer than when he is actually touching her. When he makes love to her in the dark, touch is a form of greed: "I concentrated on capturing you in every way other than sight: legs, arms, palms, fingers, tongue, nose, ears . . . your breathing, sighing, the working of your joints, the flexing of your muscles, the secretions of your skin, the vibrations of your vocal cords, the groaning of your viscera."²⁵ Like a man making notches on

his bedpost, he uses touch to get as much as he can; his sense of sex is quantitative—each touch of her being capture, while he keeps count. Unable to get out of the bind of his identity, his self-involvement, his use of another as a mirror for himself, he is unable to touch her, even when he touches her, no matter how much he touches her: he can count the times he touches and list the parts he touches, but even inside her, on top of her, listening to “the groaning of your viscera,” he is not really touching her at all. He does not know who she is, and to know who she is, he would have to be able to forget who he is—both of him. Being naked is interior too, being stripped of ego and greed, to touch and be touched.

In Abe’s world, the ability to know through touch is not peripheral to human experience; it is essential to it. Touch is a central form of cognition, taking the place of intellect and logic. Nothing substitutes for it or equals it in importance. The box man says:

No curiosity can ultimately be satisfied unless one can check by touching with one’s hands. If one wants really to know another person, if one does not know him with one’s fingers, push him, punch him, bend him, tear at him, one can scarcely claim to know him completely. One wants to touch, to pass one’s hands all over him.²⁶

Touch is the meaning of being human. It is also, says Abe, the way of knowing what being human is, the way of knowing others, the world, anything outside the self, anyone else who is also human; touch is the basis of human knowledge, also of human community. The box man, who sees mostly legs because he lives in a box, is drawn by the legs of a woman. Legs,

he speculates, are “covers for the sexual organs,” attractive because “you’ve got to open the covers with your hands,” the charm of legs being “tactile rather than visual.”²⁷ Leaving his box to touch the woman, he puts one hand on her shoulder from behind; then, because she does not resist, he comes closer. He tells himself “emphatically as I do so that I must forever maintain this closeness.”²⁸ Distance is unbearable, the pain is unbearable, he loves in the deepest human way: “Compared to the you in my heart, the I in yours is insignificant.”²⁹ When he escapes the pain by touching her, he escapes from time: “time stops just by touching your skin lightly with my fingers, and eternity draws near.”³⁰ They touch all the time, even after they have physically separated from intercourse: for instance, he sits at her feet and touches her leg, passing his hand over it, as she peels potatoes. The garbage piles up in the building, but “when you’re touching skin with someone else it seems that your sense of smell undergoes a transformation.”³¹ Nothing matters, except being skinless, naked beyond nakedness, this sex that goes beyond intercourse even as it is a metaphor for intercourse. Nothing matters, except the need for touching each other that unites two people, physically fuses them and simultaneously isolates them together from any society outside themselves, any need or obligation outside their need for each other: “We could not imagine things as far as a half year in the future, when the room would be full of garbage. We continued touching one part or another of each other’s bodies the whole day long.”³² Passion, wanting to burn, races against love, which may stop. Not being the same, they create urgency and desperation. For the two people, touching each other naked, absolutely naked, and skinless, absolutely skinless, is life itself; and when the touching stops, when the

intercourse stops, when one person is no longer naked, it is as if the skin of the other had in fact been torn off.

Being naked takes on different values, according to the self-consciousness of the one who is naked; or according to the consciousness of the one who is looking at the nakedness. The men are tortured in their minds by the meaning of being naked, especially by the literal nakedness of women but also by their own nakedness: what it means to be seen and to be vulnerable. The nakedness of the women they look at, interpret, desire, associate with acts of violence they want to commit. The women are at ease being naked. The woman in the dunes, sleeping when the man is first there, has covered her face with a towel, but she is naked, except for the light layer of sand that eventually covers her body. He thinks that her nakedness is a sexual provocation, but then, struck by the physical reality of his environment—the sand—decides that “[h]is interpretation of the woman’s nakedness would seem to be too arbitrary.”³³ She might not want to seduce him; instead her nakedness might be an ordinary part of her ordinary life, “seeing that she had to sleep during the day and, what was more, in a bowl of burning sand.”³⁴ He too, he thinks, would choose to be naked if he could. The woman loved by the box man is naked “but she doesn’t seem to be at all. Being naked suits her too well.”³⁵ The wife of the man in the mask is placid, stolid, when naked; he imputes indecency and vileness to her, but being naked does not unnerve or expose her. To the men, a woman’s nakedness is “a nakedness beyond mere nudity.”³⁶

Being naked does unnerve the men: it is an ordeal; and being looked at is nearly a terror. The men seem to distract themselves from their own nakedness by looking at women in an abstracting or fetishizing way; the voyeurism, the displaced

excitement (displaced to the mind), puts the physical reality of their own nakedness into a dimension of numbed abstraction. The nakedness of the women experienced in the minds of the men is almost a diversion from the experience of being naked as such; naked and, as the box man says, “aware of my own ugliness. I am not so shameless as to expose my nakedness nonchalantly before others.”³⁷ Men’s bodies are ugly (“unsightly,” “the unsightliness of [generic man’s] naked body,” “ninety-nine percent of mankind is deformed”);³⁸ it is this ugliness of men that makes the box man think that

[t]he reason men somehow go on living, enduring the gaze of others, is that they bargain on the hallucinations and the inexactitude of human eyes.³⁹

For men, the meaning of a woman’s naked body is life itself. As an old box man says, “Her naked body should have been an absolute bargaining point for extending my life, for as long as I see her I will not commit suicide.”⁴⁰ Men’s nakedness is unbearable to them without the nakedness of a woman; men need women to survive their own nakedness, which is repellent to them, “terribly piteous.”⁴¹ The box man cuts off the electricity when the woman dresses because then “the effect of her clothes too will end. If she cannot be seen, that will be the same as her being naked.”⁴² Any means to have her naked is justified because having her naked is life. In the dark, “[s]he will again become gentle.”⁴³ He did not want to kill her—“to gouge out her eyes or anything like that”⁴⁴—so he made a prison rather than let her go, locked her in a barricaded building in the dark; and now he waits for her to find him. In the dark she will seem naked, if he looks but does not touch.

The men, civilized, in shells of identity and abstraction, are imprisoned in loneliness, unable to break out of their self-preoccupation. They look, but what they see can only be known through undefended touch, the person naked inside and out. The women are the escape route from mental self-absorption into reality: they are the world, connection, contact, touch, feeling, what is real, the physical, what is true outside the frenetic self-involvement of the men, the convulsions of their passionate self-regard. Wanting a woman to be naked with, wanting to be skinless with and through her, inside her with no boundaries, is “breaking down the barriers of sex and bursting through my own vileness.”⁴⁵ Failing means that the man is “left alone with my loneliness.”⁴⁶ The skinless fucking may be like “[t]he appetite of meat-eating animals . . . coarse, voracious,”⁴⁷ but wanting fucking without barriers and wanting preservation of self at the same time leaves men “*surfeited with loneliness*.”⁴⁸ The man tries in vain to hold love together: “holding the broken glass together, I barely preserved its form.”⁴⁹ He wants love, but on his terms. Unable to transcend ego, to be naked inside and out, or being left alone because passion is burnt out and “when it is burnt out it is over in an instant,”⁵⁰ the men use violence—capture, murder, violent revenge. Alienated because of their self-absorption, their thoughts of women are saturated with violence; they dream of violence when they think of the woman they want—spikes through her body, fangs in her neck, cannibalism (“First I shall woo the girl [*sic*] boldly, and if I am refused . . . I shall kill her and over a period of days I shall enjoy eating her corpse. . . . I shall literally put her in my mouth, chew on her, relish her with my tongue. I have already dreamed time and time again of eating her.”).⁵¹ Their dreams of her, rooted in their alienation

from her, are extravagantly sadistic, this mental violence characterizing their abstracted, self-involved sexual desire. They are also psychologically cruel, users of others, inflicting deep emotional pain, the cruelty being an inevitable part of their intense self-obsession. The wife of the man in the mask writes him that, as a result of his manipulations of her, she feels "as if I had been forced onto an operating table . . . and hacked up indiscriminately with a hundred different knives and scissors, even the uses of which were incomprehensible."⁵² The violence that the men dream and the violence that they do ensures that they are lonely forever. Only the man in the dunes is finally in a state resembling happiness, having been beaten up by the woman when he tried to rape her: having a chance now because he failed.

STIGMA

STIGMA COMES FROM THE LATIN FOR “MARK,” THE GREEK for “tattoo”; its archaic meaning is “a scar left by a hot iron,” a brand; its modern meaning is a “mark of shame or discredit” or “an identifying mark or characteristic.”¹ The plural, *stigmata*, commonly refers to marks or wounds like the ones on the crucified Christ, suggesting great punishment, great suffering, perhaps even great guilt.

Inside a person, sexual desire—or need or compulsion—is sometimes experienced as a stigma, as if it marks the person, as if it can be seen; a great aura emanating from inside; an interior play of light and shadow, vitality and death, wanting and being used up; an identifying mark that is indelible; a badge of desire or experience; a sign that differentiates the individual carrying it, both attracting and repelling others, in the end isolating the marked one, who is destroyed by the intensity and ultimate hopelessness of a sexual calling. The person, made for sex or needing it, devoted to it, marked by it, is a person incarnated restless and wild in the world and defined by fucking: fucking as vocation or compulsion or as an unfulfilled

desire not gratified by anything social or conventional or conforming. The stigma is not imposed from outside. Instead, it is part of the charge of the sexuality: an arrogant and aggressive pride (in the sense of hubris) that has a downfall built into it; a pride that leads by its nature—by virtue of its isolating extremity—to self-punishment and self-destruction, to a wearing down of mind and heart, both numb from the indignity of compulsion. In the electricity of the stigma there is a mixture of sexual shamelessness, personal guilt, and a defiance that is unprincipled, not socially meaningful in consequence or intention, determined only by need or desire. Isolation and intensity, panic, restlessness, despair, unbreachable loneliness even, propel the person; the price paid for the obsessed passion is an erosion of innocence: innocence being, in the end, only hope. The pleasure too is part of being marked; having a capacity for what Serafina delle Rose calls “the love which is glory.”² In *The Rose Tattoo* by Tennessee Williams, Serafina sees her husband’s rose tattoo, which is on his chest, on her own breast after fucking, and she knows that she is pregnant, “that in my body another rose was growing.”³ The rose, in Christian symbolism a sign of carnality, is the brand the husband’s lovemaking leaves on the women he fucks, who are obsessed with him, who live for the sex they have with him. His mistress gets a rose tattooed on her breast, in fevered commemoration of his touch. His wife has a vision of a rose tattoo on her breast, his rose tattoo, but the vision is not ethereal:

That night I woke up with a burning pain on me, here, on my left breast! A pain like a needle, quick, quick, hot little stitches. I turned on the light, I uncovered my breast!—On it I saw the rose tattoo of my husband.⁴

The meaning of the tattoo here is not that she is passively possessed; the brand is not intended only as a sign of sexual ownership. Instead, the stigma is mystically transferred to her by a magic that is both carnal and spiritual so that it signifies her essence, an active obsession, a passion that is both relentless and righteous, the whole meaning and praxis of her fierce character. In her memory she owns him through the sex they had, the sensuality and tenderness between them. As she says, deluded, to some women:

“Go on, you do it, you go on the streets and let them drop their sacks of dirty water on you!—I’m satisfied to remember the love of a man that was mine—*only mine!* Never touched by the hand of *nobody!* *Nobody* but *me!*—Just me!”⁵

Her memory is dense with sexual feeling, a corrugated passion of fulfillment and longing:

I count up the nights I held him all night in my arms, and I can tell you how many. Each night for twelve years. Four thousand—three hundred—and eighty. The number of nights I held him all night in my arms. Sometimes I didn’t sleep, just held him all night in my arms. And I am satisfied with it. . . . I *know* what love-making was . . . ⁶

The mark is on her, not just superficially, but put into her skin with burning needles, and it is also a vision with its mystical component, a sign that she is pregnant, a holy woman who knows a holy fuck; she is the carnal embodiment of a Holy Mother, her devotion to fucking being religious in quality: “To me the big bed was beautiful like a religion.”⁷ She keeps the big

bed of her marriage after the death of her husband, not changing it for a single bed as widows are supposed to do; it is another sign that marks her. The tattoo, which was on her breast only for a moment, is indelible in her experience, because the fucking was indelible in her experience, as a sensual obsession surviving her husband's death, creating a monstrous desire for the sex; that desire—a combination of insatiable longing and lived sensuality, a memory almost physical in its weight and texture—is symbolized by the rose tattoo. She isolates herself in her house for three years, not dressing, sewing to make a living, with the ashes of her dead husband in an urn, serving as part of a religious shrine (with the Madonna); and her mourning is a prolonged sex act, lovemaking that never reaches a climax but becomes more and more fevered, a sexual obsession that is a passion sustained into near madness.

Alma in *Summer and Smoke* finds the meaning of life in

[h]ow everything reaches up, how everything seems to be straining for something out of the reach of stone—or human—fingers . . . To me—well, that is the secret, the principle back of existence—the everlasting struggle and aspiration for more than our human limits have placed in our reach.⁸

Her name means “soul” in Spanish; her symbol is the stone angel named “Eternity” that is in the center of the public square. She is different from everyone around her, even as a child of ten having “a quality of extraordinary delicacy and tenderness or spirituality in her . . . She has a habit of holding her hands, one cupped under the other in a way similar to that of receiving the wafer at Holy Communion.”⁹ As an adult, her speech has an exaggerated elegance that sets her apart as someone who has

affectations; she has a nervous laugh, a premature spinsterishness. She is concerned with art and literature and higher things. Loud noises shock her. She is a hysteric who swallows air when she laughs or talks and has palpitations of the heart. John, the dissolute doctor whom she has loved since they were both children, diagnoses her as having “a *Doppelgänger* and the *Doppelgänger* is badly irritated.”¹⁰ The *Doppelgänger* is the sexuality hidden inside of her. She is marked by it, however deeply it is hidden. But she is also marked, stigmatized, by her purity, the intensity of her soul, her refusal to be diverted from it. Each is the same energy to different ends. “Under the surface,” John tells her, “you have a lot of excitement, a great deal more than any other woman I have met.”¹¹ She is not being disingenuous when she says that she wants more than the physical sex—pedestrian by the standard of her soul—that he is offering: “Some people bring just their bodies. But there are some people, there are some women, John—who can bring their hearts to it, also—who can bring their souls to it!”¹² He challenges her to show him the soul on a chart of human anatomy: “It shows what our insides are like, and maybe you can show me where the beautiful soul is located on the chart.”¹³ In the sad ending, he has come around to her way of thinking, as he puts it, “that something else is in there, an immaterial something—as thin as smoke . . .”¹⁴ But Alma has abandoned the ambitions of her soaring soul; she wants sex with him, an intense connection of physical passion. Denied by him, she ends up wandering late in the nights to the stone angel in the public square, taking little white pills and picking up traveling salesmen. Whether ethereal or promiscuous, she is an outsider because of the intensity and purity of her longing. She wanted absolute love—by definition, an uncompromising passion—

and this great ambition, so outside the bounds of human possibility, ends up being met by strangers and pills. The strangers and the pills provide the intensity of sensation, the absorption in feeling, that her soul craves. She wanted a passion larger than what she perceived as mere physical sex, a passion less commonplace (less vulgar); and though Williams frames her as a model of repression, suggesting by the formula of the play that sleeping with John would have done for her all along, in fact the character he created is too immense and original for that to be true, John too small and ordinary. She ends up lonely, wandering, desperate, not only because she misplaced the passions of the body in the soul but also because the passions of the soul dwarf the capacities of the body. So she has two addictions: men and pills. Ethereal or promiscuous, she is stigmatized by the awesome drive behind her desire, the restlessness of her soul on earth, the mercilessness of her passion, hardest on her, leaving her no peace. Chaste or promiscuous, she is sexual because she is pure and extreme, with a passion larger than her personality or her social role or any conflicts between them, with a passion larger than the possibilities in her life as a minister's daughter or, frankly, as a woman anywhere. Her desire is grandiose and amoral, beyond the timidity she practices and the conscious morality she knows. She is stigmatized by her capacity for passion, not unlike artistic genius, the great wildness of a soul forever discontent with existing forms and their meanings; but she, unlike the artist, has no adequate means of expression. She would have to be, perhaps, the stone angel transmuted to flesh and still be named "Eternity." In the last scene of the play, both she and the stone angel are in the public square. She, being flesh, needs and takes the man. The stigma, finally, is in that alone: the old-time

weakness of the flesh; needing and wanting alive like exposed nerve endings, desire being coldly demanding, not sloppy and sentimental. She is both vulnerable and calculating in need, a shadow haunting a public walk and a predator stalking it, picking up what she needs—inside the strange fragility of her human desire, someone genuinely as cold as a stone angel.

This stigma of sexuality is not sexual vigor or beauty or charisma or appetite or activity that makes one stand out; nor is it a capacity for passion that makes one different. This being marked by sexuality requires a cold capacity to use *and* a pitiful vulnerability that comes from having been used, or a pitiful vulnerability that comes from longing for something lost or unattainable—love or innocence or hope or possibility. It is often pathetic, not noble, because the consequences to a human life of sex desired and had are often pathetic, reducing the person to pathos. Being marked by sexuality means that experience has effects—that one is marked where one has been touched, and the mark stays; that one is not new, nor is one plastic and rubber, a blow-up doll for sex. The stigma is not a sign of being blessed, chosen, by and for sex because one is a sexual athlete or a sexual actor and therefore stands out, vigorous and beautiful, devoted to sex, impervious to its costs. Being marked means that the sex has costs, and that one has paid. It means having human insides, so that experience—all experience, including sexual experience—has a human resonance. The stigma is being set apart not by a vocation for sex alone, but also perhaps by a vocation for human consequences—loss, suffering, despair, madness.

In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Stanley Kowalski is a sexual animal, without self-consciousness, without introspection. The playwright describes Stanley:

Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes. Since earliest manhood the center of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependently, but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens. Branching out from this complete and satisfying center are all the auxiliary channels of his life, such as his heartiness with men, his appreciation of rough humor, his love of good drink and food and games, his car, his radio, everything that is his, that bears his emblem of the gaudy seed-bearer.¹⁵

He is the prototypical male animal, without remorse. Each act of sex or act of animal exhibition of virility is nature, not art; in the realm of the inevitable, brute force, an ego that functions as part of the body's appetites.

Having been beaten by him, his wife Stella waits for him, wanting him. She defends her willingness to accept the beating to her sister, Blanche Du Bois, who wants her to rebel: "But there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark—that sort of make everything else seem—unimportant."¹⁶ The wife, raised to be refined, wants the animal passion of her husband, not anything else that she has had or could be. All her past of sensibility and taste means nothing to her against the way her husband uses her in the dark. Blanche argues against the lowness of Stanley's character and calling and for aspirations of her own, closer to tenderness:

He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! There's even something—sub-human—something not quite to the stage of humanity yet! . . . Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by,

and there he is—Stanley Kowalski!—survivor of the stone age! Bearing the raw meat home from the kill in the jungle! And you—you here—*waiting* for him! Maybe he'll strike you or maybe grunt and kiss you! That is, if kisses have been discovered yet! Night falls and the other apes gather! There in front of the cave, all grunting like him, and swilling and gnawing and hulking! His poker night! . . . Maybe we are a long way from being made in God's image, but Stella!—my sister—there has been *some* progress since then! Such things as art—as poetry and music—such kinds of new light have come into the world since then! In some kinds of people some tenderer feelings have had some little beginning! That we have got to make *grow*! And *cling* to, and hold as our flag! In this dark march toward whatever it is we're approaching. . . . *Don't—don't hang back with the brutes!*¹⁷ [first two ellipses mine; third ellipsis Williams's]

While Williams persistently parodies the refinements of ladies, their yearnings for the ineffable, their pretensions of civilization and culture against the voraciousness of their sexual appetites, he is also on their side—on the side of art, a sensibility; and the question is, how does a person with a sensibility survive being driven by the excesses and demands of that very sensibility into sex? Stanley's animal sexuality leaves him virtually untouched by the meaning of any experience because he has no interior life, he is invulnerable to consequences, he has no memory past sensation. He is ordinary. Despite the radiant intensity of his sexuality, despite his wife's genteel refinement, despite the intensity of the sex between them, they are like everyone else. "When we first met," Stanley says to Stella, "me and you, you thought I was common. How right you was, baby. I was common as dirt. You

showed me the snapshot of the place with the columns. I pulled you down off them columns and how you loved it . . . And wasn't we happy together . . . ”¹⁸ They have a habitual life of fucking and violence that blends into the common neighborhood life around them. They are not marked by sex; they are not outsiders; despite what is intended to be the staggering sexual appeal of the actor who plays Stanley, they are not different. They conform perfectly to the patterns of the married people around them. The couple upstairs will have the same drama of battery and fucking in the course of the play; Stanley and Stella are a younger version, not different in quality or kind. Blanche is different. Blanche is marked, stigmatized, by her capacity to feel inside; by loneliness, vulnerability, despair; by her need for sex in conflict with her capacity for love; by her need for sex in conflict with what are the immediate needs of survival—passing as a real lady, not someone shopworn and used up, and marrying Mitch, Stanley's staid companion. Blanche is a displaced person, a refugee in a solitary migration, driven from where she was by the cacophony of men she had—and their voices follow her now, reaching Stanley, damning her as a whore; she is displaced by the desire that carried her to “[w]here I'm not wanted and where I'm ashamed to be.”¹⁹ Being stigmatized means being marked by an inner capacity for feeling; put against Stanley's animal sexuality, it emerges as a distinctly human capacity for suffering the internal human consequences of sex and love, especially loneliness and remorse. There is an indelible sorrow, perhaps a distinctly human incapacity to heal, because some kinds of pain do not lessen in the human heart:

Yes, I had many intimacies with strangers. After the death of Allan—intimacies with strangers was all I seemed able to fill

my empty heart with. . . . I think it was panic, just panic, that drove me from one to another, hunting for some protection—here and there, in the most—unlikely places . . . ²⁰ [first ellipsis Williams's; second ellipsis mine]

Blanche's desire had always set her apart, because she always wanted a lover with a sensibility the opposite of Stanley's, not traditionally masculine, animalistic, aggressive; she always wanted someone in whom "some tenderer feelings have had some little beginning!" She was always Stanley's enemy, the enemy of the ordinary, however unrepressed the ordinary was. And it was this opposition to the ordinary—to ordinary masculinity—that marked her: that was her sexual appetite, her capacity to love, the anguish at the heart of her desire. At sixteen she fell in love—"[a]ll at once and much, much too completely. It was like you suddenly turned a blinding light on something that had always been half in shadow, that's how it struck the world for me."²¹ The boy was gentle, nervous, beautiful, with "a softness and tenderness which wasn't like a man's, although he wasn't the least bit effeminate looking."²² He wrote poetry, and she loved him "unendurably."²³ One night she found him kissing an older man; that night he killed himself, because she told him she had seen the kissing and that he disgusted her. The opposite of death, says Blanche, is desire; desire for the soldiers camped near the family land, Belle Reve, while her mother was dying; desire for other men in the wake of Allan; desire for a seventeen-year-old boy when she was a teacher, resulting in her being fired; and now, holed up with Stella and Stanley, where the streetcar named Desire has taken her, trying to trap Mitch into marriage, desire even for the newspaper boy collecting for *The Evening Star*:

“Young man! Young, young, young man! Has anyone ever told you that you look like a young Prince out of the Arabian Nights? Well, you do, honey lamb! Come here. I want to kiss you, just once, softly and sweetly on your mouth! Now run along, now, quickly! It would be nice to keep you, but I’ve got to be good—and keep my hands off children.”²⁴ The death facing her now is the death of all her possibilities: the end of youth, already gone; no more hope and heart, both needed to pick up men; no chance of marriage except for Mitch; being “played out.”²⁵ Her job gone because she was found morally unfit, having had sex with the seventeen-year-old student; her land gone, eaten up by debts and the slow dying of her mother and funeral costs; her vagabond relationships with men in cheap hotels also at an end, because she is too worn, too despairing; she wants to marry Mitch—“because you seemed to be gentle—a cleft in the rock of the world that I could hide in!”²⁶ She has always wanted gentleness; now she needs gentle refuge; instead of clawing at the rock of the world, she needs to be hidden inside it, safe, not on her own, not having to barter herself away over and over, time without end. The marriage to Mitch depends on her maintaining the lie, the illusion, of gentility: of being a lady, not having ridden on that streetcar named Desire, being younger than she is, not used. “You’re not clean enough to bring into the house with my mother,”²⁷ Mitch tells her, when she confirms Stanley’s stories about her. Mitch humiliates and abandons her. She needed one man so as not to have to continue to navigate through many. Once the hope of trapping Mitch is gone, she is at the end of the line, nothing left her but embellished memories of a desperate sexual past and a fantasy future of self-worth and self-respect:

Physical beauty is passing. A transitory possession. But beauty of the mind and richness of the spirit and tenderness of the heart—and I have all of those things—aren't taken away, but grow! Increase with the years! How strange that I should be called a destitute woman! When I have all of these treasures locked in my heart.²⁸

With Stella in the hospital having their baby, Stanley rapes Blanche.

Stella cannot believe Blanche and keep living with Stanley, so Stella does not believe Blanche.

Not being believed breaks Blanche's already fragile hold on reality.

Stanley has Blanche taken away, institutionalized as mad, in the world of Tennessee Williams the worst consequence of sexual knowledge, the worst punishment, crueler than death.

Because Stanley has no interior life of feeling, he has no remorse; the rape is just another fuck for him. It takes a human consciousness, including a capacity for suffering, to distinguish between a rape and a fuck. With no interior life of human meaning and human remorse, any fuck is simply expressive and animalistic, whatever its consequences or circumstances. Blanche pays the price for having a human sexuality and a human consciousness. She has been raped; she knows it. There is nothing in the text of the play, despite the way it is sometimes staged, to suggest that she wanted it all along. In fact, there is a pronounced and emotionally vivid history of her wanting its opposite—a sexuality of tenderness and sensitivity. She is taken away, locked up, because she knows what happened to her. The madness that becomes the only refuge left on earth for her is not a merciful madness, one that will soften the harsh colors,

because she will be incarcerated, human trash in an institution for the broken and thrown away. She is punished for knowing the meaning of what Stanley did to her because her capacity to know and to feel is his enemy. The rape itself was a revenge on her for wanting more than an animal fuck delivered by an animal masculinity: for feeling more, wanting more, knowing more. For her, sex was part of a human quest for human solace, human kindness; she genuinely did not want to “*hang back with the brutes.*” Stanley, ordinary, unrepressed, was the natural enemy of sex with any dimension of human longing or human meaning, any wanting that was not just for the raw, cold, hard fuck, a sensual using without any edge of loneliness or discontent. Blanche is marked, finally, by madness, jailed; not for her sexuality but for his, because his sexuality requires the annihilation of her aspirations to tenderness. Her human integrity is broken, destroyed, because her sister prefers believing she is mad to facing the truth: a paradigm for women. Her sister’s complicity is the deathblow to her mind.

Having an interior life of wanting, needing, gives fucking human meaning in a human context. “All my life,” Williams wrote, “I have been haunted by the obsession that to desire a thing or to love a thing intensely is to place yourself in a vulnerable position, to be a possible, if not a probable, loser of what you most want.”²⁹ Without that inner fragility and fear, fucking is likely to become, as Williams wrote in a later play, “quick, and hard, and brutal . . . like the jabbing of a hypodermic needle . . .”³⁰ Being stigmatized by sex is being marked by its meaning in a human life of loneliness and imperfection, where some pain is indelible.

COMMUNION

IN AMERIKA, THERE IS THE NEARLY UNIVERSAL CONVICTION—
or so it appears—that sex (fucking) is good and that liking it is right: morally right; a sign of human health; nearly a standard for citizenship. Even those who believe in original sin and have a theology of hellfire and damnation express the Amerikan creed, an optimism that glows in the dark: sex is good, healthy, wholesome, pleasant, fun; we like it, we enjoy it, we want it, we are cheerful about it; it is as simple as we are, the citizens of this strange country with no memory and no mind.

The current argument on sex between the Right and the Left is not about the nature of fucking as such. It is strictly about whether or not this good thing is good outside marriage or between persons of the same gender (however they manage it). “In other words,” writes Marabel Morgan, interpreting Scripture no less, “sex is for the marriage relationship only, but within those bounds, anything goes. Sex is as clean and pure as eating cottage cheese.”¹ Marabel Morgan’s *The Total Woman* (a manual for wives who want to get their husbands to fuck them and maintain a cheerful attitude and a belief in God all at the

same time) spawned classes all over the United States, including in churches, to teach conservative, Christian women how to act out the so-called fantasies of their husbands with costumes and props. The Left prefers many partners to one; and *Hustler's* meat-grinder cover, in which a woman is fed into a meat grinder and comes out as ground beef, expresses its food preference. On both Right and Left, a citizen had best be prepared to affirm her loyalty to the act itself. Ambivalence or dissent impugns her credibility; a good attitude is requisite before she is allowed to speak—in magazines, on television, in political groups. The tone and general posture of the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders set the standard for a good attitude; not to have one is un-American and sick too. The social pressure to conform is fierce, ubiquitous, and self-righteous. Lost in the simple-minded prosex chauvinism of Right and Left is the real meaning of affirmation, or any consciousness of the complexity—the emotional tangledness—of a human life. “It is really quite impossible,” writes James Baldwin, “to be affirmative about anything which one refuses to question; one is doomed to remain inarticulate about anything which one hasn’t, by an act of imagination, made one’s own.”²² There is no imagination in fetishlike sexual conformity; and no questions are being asked in political discourse on sex about hope and sorrow, intimacy and anguish, communion and loss. Imagination is both aggressive and delicate, a mode of cognition unmatched in its ability to reveal the hidden meanings in reality now and the likely shape of tomorrow. Imagination is not a synonym for sexual fantasy, which is only—pathetically—a programmed tape loop repeating repeating in the narcoleptic mind. Imagination finds new meanings, new forms; complex and empathetic values and acts. The person

with imagination is pushed forward by it into a world of possibility and risk, a distinct world of meaning and choice; not into a nearly bare junkyard of symbols manipulated to evoke rote responses. The paring down of the vocabulary of human affect to fuck-related expletives suggests that one destroys the complexity of human response by destroying the language that communicates its existence. “Sex-negative” is the current secular *reductio ad absurdum* used to dismiss or discredit ideas, particularly political critiques, that might lead to detumescence. Critiques of rape, pornography, and prostitution are “sex-negative” without qualification or examination, perhaps because so many men use these ignoble routes of access and domination to get laid, and without them the number of fucks would so significantly decrease that men might nearly be chaste. There is an awful poverty here, in this time and place: of language, of words that express real states of being; of search, of questions; of meaning, of emotional empathy; of imagination. And so, we are inarticulate about sex, even though we talk about it all the time to say how much we like it—nearly as much, one might infer, as jogging. Nothing is one’s own, nothing, certainly not oneself, because the imagination is atrophied, like some limb, dead and hanging useless, and the dull repetition of programmed sexual fantasy has replaced it.

In the novel *Another Country* by James Baldwin, a talented, tormented, violent black musician named Rufus has committed suicide. He is tortured by the memory of a white woman he loved and destroyed. Nothing can assuage his self-hatred for what he has done to her; he knows what he has done and what it means to have done it. Those around him tell him not to know or encourage him to forget. But what he did to her—because she was a white Southern woman—is too close to

what this country does to him every day—because he is a black man; he cannot not know. Those at his funeral service are bitter, because they had great hope that the promise of his life would redeem something of the cost of theirs. They are sad and angry, inexpressibly so, because their brothers, fathers, sons, husbands, live on the verge of madness and suicide, self-destruction, as Rufus did; and like him, they die from the anguish of being alive. “If the world wasn’t so full of dead folks,” the preacher tells them, with a passion that tries to make sense of this death added to all the others, “maybe those of us that’s trying to live wouldn’t have to suffer so bad.” Being “dead folks,” in Baldwin’s world, is nothing so simple as being white. Being dead is being ignorant, refusing to know the truth, especially about oneself. Remaining ignorant about oneself through a life of inevitable experience is hard; it requires that one refuse to know anything about the world around one, especially who is dying there and why and when and how. White people especially do not want to know, and do not have to know to survive; but if they want to know, they have to find out; and to find out, they have to be willing to pay the price of knowing, which is the pain and responsibility of self-knowledge. Black people are unable to refuse to know, because their chances for survival depend on knowing every incidental sign of white will and white power; but knowing without power of one’s own to put one’s knowledge to use in the world with some dignity and honor is a curse, not a blessing, a burden of consciousness without any means of action adequate to enable one to bear it. Self-destruction is a great and morbid bitterness in which one destroys what one knows by destroying oneself; and the preacher, hating this self-destruction, finds an ethic that repudiates it: “The world’s already bitter enough, we got to try to

be better than the world.”⁴ Being “better than the world,” for the oppressed, is the nearly impossible prerequisite for compassion, the only means of staying whole as human beings; what the powerless must somehow manage to become, to remain, while carrying a knowledge of cruelty and indifference that kills with a momentum of its own.

Truth is harder to bear than ignorance, and so ignorance is valued more—also because the status quo depends on it; but love depends on self-knowledge, and self-knowledge depends on being able to bear the truth. For Baldwin, in his fiction and in his essays,* being human means that one pays for everything one knows and for everything that one refuses to know; that

you have to, in order to live, finally, make so many difficult and dangerous choices that the one thing you’re really trying to save is what you lose. And what you’re trying to save is your ability to touch another human being or be touched by that person.⁵

This ability to touch and be touched is at stake always, in every choice toward or away from knowing anything at all about the world or oneself; and this ability to touch or be touched is the simple ability to love, so hard to save because hope is so hard to save, especially when it must coexist with knowledge:

Yet, hope—the hope that we, human beings, can be better than we are—dies hard; perhaps one can no longer live if one allows

*The values in the fiction and the essays are very much the same—though the subject of the essays is not fucking—and I have quoted from both throughout using the essays to illuminate the world-view in the novels.

the hope to die. But it is also hard to see what one sees. One sees that most human beings are wretched, and, in one way or another, become wicked: because they are wretched.⁶

Inside an unjust, embittering social universe where there are moral possibilities, however imperiled, of self-esteem and empathy, fucking is the universal event, the point of connection, where love is possible if self-knowledge is real; it is also the place where the price paid, both for ignorance and truth, is devastating, and no lie lessens or covers up the devastation. In Baldwin's fiction, fucking is also a bridge from ignorance to truth—to the hardest truths about who one is and why. And crossing on that high and rotting and shaking bridge to identity, with whatever degree or quality of fear or courage, is the ordeal that makes empathy possible: not a false sympathy of abstract self-indulgence, a liberal condescension; but a way of seeing others for who they are by seeing what their own lives have cost them.

In fucking, one's insides are on the line; and the fragile and unique intimacy of going for broke makes communion possible, in human reach—not transcendental and otherworldly, but an experience in flesh of love. Those broken too much by the world's disdain can become for each other, as Eric and Yves do in *Another Country*, “the dwelling place that each had despaired of finding.”⁷ For Yves, a French street boy, the first time with Eric had been redemptive: “in some marvelous way, for Yves, this moment in this bed obliterated, cast into the sea of forgetfulness, all the sordid beds and squalid grappling which had led him here.”⁸ This forgetfulness is not ignorance; it is redemption, being wiped clean of hurt and despair by “the lover who would not betray him”⁹—not betray what he had learned

and what he had paid, what he had become out of that hard and lonely life, not betray his truth, which was his capacity to love, with the demand for lies. Yves's fear was the fear no self-knowledge could overcome:

There also appeared in his face a certain fear. It was this fear which Eric sometimes despaired of conquering, in Yves, or in himself. It was the fear of making a total commitment, a vow: it was the fear of being loved.¹⁰

Yves's fear, and Eric's too, is not neurotic or psychological, nor is it personal, rooted in family history. It is a fear based on the recognition of life's impermanence; fear of being known, being seen and known in all one's awful trouble and shabby dignity, having a witness to what one is and why, then to lose that astonishing grace. Life does not tolerate stasis; and there is no way of protecting love. In fucking, the deepest emotions one has about life as a whole are expressed, even with a stranger, however random or impersonal the encounter. Rage, hatred, bitterness, joy, tenderness, even mercy, all have their home in this passion, in this act; and to accept truly another person within those bounds requires that one must live with, if not conquer, the fear of being abandoned, thrown back alone:

On the day that Yves no longer needed him, Eric would drop back into chaos. He remembered that army of lonely men who had used him, who had wrestled with him, caressed him, submitted to him, in a darkness deeper than the darkest night.¹¹

There is no safety, no permanence, says Baldwin, even though it is our dearest illusion that we can make life stand still for us by

arranging permanent relationships, by pursuing comfort and status, by turning our backs on the world of pain all around us, by focusing all attention on one tiny spot—where we are—to keep it, as if by force of concentration, from changing. But human emotions force change. Human emotions are huge: turbulent and deep. One swims or one drowns, and there is little respite and no rest. Fucking is where, how, why, when, these emotions become accessible as both self-knowledge and truth.

For Eric, fucking is

a confession. One lies about the body but the body does not lie about itself; it cannot lie about the force which drives it. And Eric had discovered, inevitably, the truth about many men, who then wished to drive Eric and the truth together out of the world.¹²

In these many men, Eric saw “an anguish which he could scarcely believe was in the world.”¹³ One can bear the truth, however, if it carries one toward love. What is unbearable, what cannot be survived, is the long, merciless act of hating, what hating does to the one who hates. More than other contemporary writers, Baldwin understands the cost of hating: “Hatred, which could destroy so much, never failed to destroy the man who hated and this was an immutable law.”¹⁴ This moral absolute is the underpinning of his work, joined by one other immutable law, again a law of morality: “People pay for what they do, and, still more, for what they have allowed themselves to become. And they pay for it very simply: by the lives they lead.”¹⁵ This morality is unsentimental, harsh. It is also detached, a neutral, observed reality. And it is strangely innocent in its faith that there is justice. Baldwin’s use of fucking

to explicate this morality is astonishing in that it necessarily precludes any simplistic interpretation of fucking as good or bad, simple pleasure, simple sin. Cheap, propagandistic views of fucking—religious, political, or media originated—are repudiated by the presence of a whole human life with all its worth in the act and at stake; the meaning of this life and its passage is illuminated by the act; the intercourse itself essentially reveals who one is and has been, what one has lost or found, what one is willing to know, whether with cruelty or grace. This is a morality rooted in passion, in flesh, in a human intimacy in which anguish and possibility are each a part of the other and willful ignorance of the world is the basest sin. And in this morality, when fucking is hatred, when fucking is revenge, then fucking is hell: a destruction in violence and suffering of self-knowledge and self-esteem; the destruction of a human being, someone else perhaps, certainly oneself.

Rufus died that way, of hate, self-hate and the hate that had led inevitably to that self-hate, a hate expressed in sex, in fucking, first with Eric, then with Leona, both white Southerners; a hate that grew too when he sold himself to white men on the street for “the bleakly physical exchange,”¹⁶ the sex of having nothing. Eric had loved Rufus, but for Rufus Eric’s devotion had been an invitation to the slaughter, and sex the way of showing his contempt for Eric’s origins and masculinity. Rufus “despised him because he came from Alabama; perhaps he had allowed Eric to make love to him in order to despise him more completely.”¹⁷ The abuse of Eric’s inner dignity in sex was an assault on Eric’s right to exist in the world as himself at all; an assault on his identity, his sense of worth, not predetermined by his privileged white skin because his homosexuality exiled him from that circle of well-being and self-satisfaction. Rufus had

tried to destroy him through sexual contempt; he had “despised Eric’s manhood by treating him as a woman, by telling him how inferior he was to a woman, by treating him as nothing more than a hideous sexual deformity.”¹⁸ Eric ran away to Paris, from Rufus, from his sexual hostility and hate. Near his own death, Rufus, on the street and trading his ass for food, knowing he would rather kill than keep the bargain (“I don’t want no more hands on me, no more, no more, no more.”¹⁹), remembered Eric and saw his real life, his real condition, its humanity, the terms of its despair: “He glimpsed, for the first time, the extent, the nature, of Eric’s loneliness, and the danger in which this placed him; and wished he had been nicer to him.”²⁰ He remembered that Eric had loved him, then Leona had; and that he had done to Leona what he had done to Eric: “But Leona had not been a deformity. And he had used against her the very epithets he had used against Eric, and in the very same way, with the same roaring in his head and the same intolerable pressure in his chest.”²¹ With Leona, the sex had first been forced, at a party; they were strangers but she had gone there with him after hearing him play his saxophone with a band in a bar; and she stayed with him, determined to love him, convinced that her love could heal him of his hate; perhaps having found someone with whose suffering she identified. Her husband had battered her and then taken her child from her, convincing her family and a court that she was an unfit mother because she drank. Especially, Leona understood what it meant to feel worthless.

The sex that began in force had some tenderness, some hate:

And she carried him, as the sea will carry a boat: with a slow, rocking and rising and falling motion, barely suggestive of the

violence of the deep. . . . Her breath came with moaning and short cries, with words he couldn't understand, and in spite of himself he began moving faster and thrusting deeper. He wanted her to remember him the longest day she lived. . . . A moan and a curse tore through him while he beat her with all the strength he had and felt the venom shoot out of him, enough for a hundred black-white babies.²²

But once he knew she loved him, would stay with him, wanted his love back, he beat her, battered her, tortured and terrorized her, used her in the ways he thought would humiliate her most: "It was not love he felt during these acts of love: drained and shaking, utterly unsatisfied, he fled from the raped white woman into the bars."²³ The fuck existed only to humiliate and hurt her; his passion was hate, the violence was hate; she thought he was sick, hurt, needed help, would stop, would get better, thought badly of himself, would understand that she loved him, would love, not hate her, once he understood. She saw that he thought he was worthless; and she thought she could love him enough by showing him what he was worth to her—more than herself. Her family came north to get her away from the black man and could, because she was beaten and hurt and like an abused animal, cowering in fear and filth; and they had her committed to an asylum in the South, where she would stay locked up forever. It was this, her being committed to an eternity in a bare room because of what he had done to her, that he could not live with. He saw his hatred destroy her; and he learned that "[i]t's not possible to forget anybody you've destroyed."²⁴ Later, Eric asks Cass, a woman of deep empathy and insight, "Did she like to be beaten up? I mean—did something in her like it, did she like to be—debased?"²⁵

And the answer is no, no she did not; she loved him, and she wanted him to love her. Love is more complicated than a psychological cliché: “Well, maybe there’s something in everybody that likes to be debased, but I don’t think life’s that simple.”²⁶ Leona wanted love, not pain; her loyalty, her faith, could not conquer or heal hatred. There is no analysis of Leona’s life in the book, not what drove her or why, except that her humanity, her capacity to love, comes from what she has already suffered; her bravery in surviving her husband, her family, the loss of her child, leaving the South to try to make a new life, trying to love, a hard case, a black man whom she has been taught she should hate, but she never believed it. The man she loved was too far gone, and could not be pulled back, not by devotion or compassion, not by her endurance or her pleading. There is a value placed on suffering here, not a distinctly female suffering, in this case a suffering that goes up against hatred and can never win because hatred is stronger than anything else, and it kills. Baldwin’s view is that she loves, not as a masochist, which is a near synonym for female, but as a human being.

“I do not mean to be sentimental about suffering,” he writes in an essay, “. . . but people who cannot suffer can never grow up, can never discover who they are.”²⁷ This suffering, however, is not done in a protected environment or inside the delusions of the middle class. There is no foregone conclusion, no last-minute rescue, no great and inevitable triumph of good over evil. Survival is not guaranteed, or even likely. One loves, one suffers, one strives to use what one knows; but none of it stands up against enough hate. In his fiction, both men and women suffer as human beings, a tragic suffering with an inner dignity, the dignity of having been worth more than this cru-

elty, more than this trouble and pain. No one deserves brutality because of what they are, their condition of birth, including being born female; and the women in this book are not asking for it—instead they are risking as much as any man risks to live, to love. In the nonfiction, it is black men who suffer because of the social cruelty that they must every day confront, face down, live through:

That man who is forced each day to snatch his manhood, his identity, out of the fire of human cruelty that rages to destroy it knows, if he survives his effort, and even if he does not survive it, something about himself and human life that no school on earth—and, indeed, no church—can teach. He achieves his own authority, and that is unshakable.²⁸

Leona too has, in her love for Rufus, the conviction of someone who has been forced to snatch her human identity out of a fire of human cruelty; she will love, she will use what she knows from before, do right what she did wrong, love enough this time, be there for him and with him, endure him to help him endure himself; and she does not survive. The fire has already destroyed her lover.

“If one is continually surviving the worst that life can bring,” writes Baldwin, “one eventually ceases to be controlled by a fear of what life can bring; whatever it brings must be borne.”²⁹ This explains the bewildering resignation and self-destructive impassivity of those who are hurt, maimed in fact, by social cruelty and intimate brutality; they are sometimes immovable and have a suicidal patience with pain. It is in this framework of values that Baldwin asserts Leona’s choice as human per se, not inherently female or personally pathological.

In sex there is the suffering of those who can love, and the more terrifying despair of those who are loveless, empty, those who must “narcotize themselves before they can touch any human being at all.”³⁰ These are the people who are the masters in a social and sexual master-slave hierarchy, and what characterizes them is that they “no longer have any way of knowing that any loveless touch is a violation, whether one is touching a woman or a man.”³¹ In the United States, the cost of maintaining racism has been a loss of self-knowledge (and thus love) for those who refuse to know what they have because others suffer. What they have includes a sense of superiority that substitutes for a real identity. Maintaining racism has required an emotional numbness, a proud and fatal incapacity to feel, because that is the cost of purposely maintaining ignorance: one must block life out—the world around one and one’s own emotional possibilities. For that reason, in this country there is “an emotional poverty so bottomless, and a terror of human life, of human touch, so deep” that most Americans lack “the most elementary and crucial connections.”³² Missing especially is the connection between sex and the complexity of identity; a vital connection without which the fuck is an exercise in futility, going from nowhere to nowhere, no one fucking nothing. Even the youth seem “blighted,” “a parody of locomotion and manhood.”³³ Despair and violation (each no less terrible for being unconscious) and narcotized touch predominate; and the young appear “to be at home with, accustomed to, brutality and indifference, and to be terrified of human affection.”³⁴ This is the sexuality of those who risk nothing because they have nothing inside to risk. “Of rending and tearing there can never be any end,” thinks one character in *Another Country* about life in this country, “and God save the people for whom passion

becomes impersonal.”³⁵ Passion becomes impersonal when there is no person inside, no complex human being who is willing to know and to feel. It is not knowledge of someone else that makes passion personal; it is knowledge of oneself. Self-knowledge creates the potential for knowing a lover in sex.

Escaping identity, abandoning it—being absent from one’s own passion, one’s own history, the meaning of one’s own need—allows for “fever but no delight.”³⁶ In *Giovanni’s Room*, a young, white man named David is running away from himself, this time from Brooklyn to Paris. He is especially running away from the emotional necessity, which is his, of loving men. One night, as a teenager, he made love with his best friend, then abandoned him the next morning, not able to face the friendship after the tenderness and sensuality, the emotional resonance too, of the lovemaking: “We had our arms around each other. It was like holding in my hand some rare, exhausted, nearly doomed bird which I had miraculously happened to find.”³⁷ That night it had seemed to him “that a lifetime would not be long enough for me to act with Joey the act of love.”³⁸ But shame and fear, driving him toward ignorance, overcame sensuality and love.

In Paris, he is engaged to a woman; when he wants to marry, she has doubts and goes away to think. While she is away, he starts living with Giovanni, an Italian immigrant in France, a bartender in a gay bar. Giovanni deeply loves him, but David is determined not to love, not to be loved, not to acknowledge Giovanni as the measure of all love for him:

I was in a terrible confusion. Sometimes I thought, but this is your life. Stop fighting it. Stop fighting. Or I thought, but I am happy. And he loves me. I am safe. Sometimes, when he was

not near me, I thought, I will never let him touch me again. Then, when he touched me, I thought, it doesn't matter, it is only the body, it will soon be over. When it was over I lay in the dark and listened to his breathing and dreamed of the touch of hands, of Giovanni's hands, or anybody's hands, hands which would have the power to crush me and make me whole again.³⁹

He abandons Giovanni for the woman, who has decided to marry him; and slowly, he starts to hate her: "and when I entered her I began to feel that I would never get out alive."⁴⁰ Giovanni, in despair, mortally wounded by the desertion, its cruelty, its cowardice, starts a descent downward into a netherworld of trading in on sex; and commits a robbery and a murder. On the night before Giovanni's execution, David confronts himself, his great failure of courage and love: "I look at my sex, my troubling sex, and wonder how it can be redeemed . . ." ⁴¹

Shame, like hate, can kill love; make it dirty; but if one is brave, one will love and that will defeat shame. Shame, unlike hate, can be defeated. One older French homosexual, an exploiter at home in the underground world of gay bars and gay boys, has tried to tell David that he must love, or shame will triumph; the sex "will be dirty because you will be giving nothing, you will be despising your flesh and his. . . . You play it safe long enough . . . and you'll end up trapped in your own dirty body forever and forever and forever."⁴² The sex this man has is shameful, he himself says, "[b]ecause there is no affection . . . and no joy. It's like putting an electric plug in a dead socket. Touch, but no contact. All touch, but no contact and no light."⁴³ And Giovanni, tormented by David's inability to love, wants to escape from his inner life of

passion, from the commitment and the involvement and the pain; he wants “to escape . . . *je veux m’évader*—this dirty world, this dirty body. I never wish to make love again with anything more than the body.”⁴⁴ He is anguished because he loves; and using the body in fucking without love, with indifference and mere repetition, would mean escape from pain. For Giovanni, the fucking expresses who he is, has been, can be, what he wants and knows, his passion for his own life and his passion for David: passion is personal. David cannot love, refuses to be touched (changed, committed). And Giovanni accuses him:

“You have never loved anyone, I am sure you never will! . . . you are just like a little virgin, you walk around with your hands in front of you as though you had some precious metal, gold, silver, rubies, maybe *diamonds* down there between your legs! You will never give it to anybody, you will never let anybody *touch* it—man or woman.”⁴⁵

An inner chastity, an emotional rejection of the tangle of physical love that implicates (and therefore compromises) the whole person—not being touched, not being at risk, not being contaminated by what Giovanni calls “the stink of love”⁴⁶—is a way to avoid the kind of pain that Giovanni is in; and instead of pain, Giovanni too wants the numbness, the ignorance of self, that the coward in love has (however lonely it makes him); Giovanni wants to sleepwalk through life, habitual sex during which, because of which, the insides do not bleed; he wants not to suffer from a consciousness and depth of feeling that permeates his physical existence now, when he does love, his existence inside sex with sex inside him: the

way he loves, which is with and through the body and fucking. What he wants but cannot have—because he loves—is perhaps best described by Eric in *Another Country*:

And the encounter took place, at last, between two dreamers, neither of whom could wake the other, except for the bitterest and briefest of seconds. Then sleep descended again, the search continued, chaos came again.⁴⁷

But Giovanni never escapes his ability to feel; his identity. Being able to love, rooted in self-knowledge, only makes love possible, not inevitable; not happy; not reciprocal; never safe or certain or easy.

With the destruction of identity, fucking as love is destroyed, because, as Baldwin says, “to make love to you is not the same thing as taking you. Love is a journey two people have to make with each other.”⁴⁸ Those who are able to know themselves must then find “the grace” that enables them to conquer the fear of that knowledge, “[f]or the meaning of revelation is that what is revealed is true, and must be borne.”⁴⁹ With this grace, fucking can be communion, a sharing, mutual possession of an enormous mystery; it has the intensity and magnificence of violent feeling transformed into tenderness:

Everything in him, from his heights and depths, his mysterious, hidden source, came rushing together, like a great flood barely channeled in a narrow mountain stream. And it chilled him like that—like icy water; and roared in him like that, and with the menace of things scarcely understood, barely to be controlled; and he shook with the violence with which he

flowed towards Yves. It was this violence which made him gentle, for it frightened him.⁵⁰

The tenderness is the inner violence transformed by love and self-knowledge into complex and compassionate passion; and the passion is gentle in that it does not destroy.

Fucking as communion is larger than an individual personality; it is a radical experience of seeing and knowing, experiencing possibilities within one that had been hidden. Vivaldo, the white lover of Ida, Rufus's sister, has sex with Eric that brings him, finally, face-to-face with a truth he has denied, and this enables him to face his other failures of love and courage:

He felt that he had stepped off a precipice into an air which held him inexorably up, as the salt sea holds the swimmer: and seemed to see . . . into the bottom of his heart, that heart which contained all possibilities that he could name and yet others that he could not name. . . . He moaned and his thighs, like the thighs of a woman, loosened, he thrust upward as Eric thrust down.⁵¹

It is this first real experience of being loved—not doing it but being the beloved—that helps to enable him, later, to face Ida, who is being destroyed by his refusal to face hard truths, his inability to give the gift of himself because he does not dare know himself. In particular, this act of communion helped him to understand in precisely what way, and at what cost, he had abandoned Rufus: “I loved Rufus, I loved him, I didn’t want him to die. But when he was dead, I thought about

it, . . . and I wondered, I guess I still wonder, what would have happened if I'd taken him in my arms, if I'd held him, if I hadn't been—afraid. I was afraid that he wouldn't understand that it was—only love. Only love. But, oh, Lord, when he died, I thought that maybe I could have saved him if I'd just reached out that quarter of an inch between us on that bed, and held him."⁵² That quarter of an inch, in this vision, is the great expanse of fear and ignorance that must be crossed bravely and with integrity to human hope.

POSSESSION

INTERCOURSE IS COMMONLY WRITTEN ABOUT AND COM-
prehended as a form of possession or an act of possession in which, during which, because of which, a man inhabits a woman, physically covering her and overwhelming her and at the same time penetrating her; and this physical relation to her—over her and inside her—is his possession of her. He has her, or, when he is done, he has had her. By thrusting into her, he takes her over. His thrusting into her is taken to be her capitulation to him as a conqueror; it is a physical surrender of herself to him; he occupies and rules her, expresses his elemental dominance over her, by his possession of her in the fuck.

The act itself, without more, is the possession. There need not be a social relationship in which the woman is subordinate to the man, a chattel in spirit or deed, decorative or hardworking. There need not be an ongoing sexual relationship in which she is chronically, demonstrably, submissive or masochistic. The normal fuck by a normal man is taken to be an act of invasion and ownership undertaken in a mode of predation: colonializing, forceful (manly) or nearly violent; the sexual act that

by its nature makes her his. God made it so, or nature did, according to the faith of the explainer of events and values. Both conceptual systems—the theological and the biological—are loyal to the creed of male dominance and maintain that intercourse is the elemental (not socialized) expression of male and female, which in turn are the elemental (not socialized) essences of men and women. In *Ideal Marriage*, a sexological marriage manual of vast and ubiquitous influence before the epidemic breakout of so-called sexology as a profession, Theodore Van De Velde summarized what men and women who were married should know about sex:

What both man and woman, driven by obscure primitive urges, wish to feel in the sexual act, is the essential force of *maleness*, which expresses itself in a sort of violent and absolute *possession* of the woman. And so both of them can and do exult in a certain degree of male aggression and dominance—whether actual or apparent—which proclaims this essential force.¹

In other words, men possess women when men fuck women because both experience the man being male. This is the stunning logic of male supremacy. In this view, which is the predominant one, maleness is aggressive and violent; and so fucking, in which both the man and the woman experience *maleness*, essentially demands the disappearance of the woman as an individual; thus, in being fucked, she is possessed: ceases to exist as a discrete individual: is taken over.

Remarkably, it is not the man who is considered possessed in intercourse, even though he (his penis) is buried inside another human being; and his penis is surrounded by strong

muscles that contract like a fist shutting tight and release with a force that pushes hard on the tender thing, always so vulnerable no matter how hard. He is not possessed even though his penis is gone—disappeared inside someone else, enveloped, smothered, in the muscled lining of flesh that he never sees, only feels, gripping, releasing, gripping, tighter, harder, firmer, then pushing out: and *can he get out alive?* seems a fundamental anxiety that fuels male sexual compulsiveness and the whole discipline of depth psychology. The man is not possessed in fucking even though he is terrified of castration; even though he sometimes thinks—singly or collectively in a culture—that the vagina has teeth; but he goes inside anyway, out of compulsion, obsession: not obsessed with her, a particular woman; but with it, getting inside. He is not possessed even though he is terrified of never getting his cock back because she has it engulfed inside her, and it is small compared with the vagina around it pulling it in and pushing it out: clenching it, choking it, increasing the friction and the frisson as he tries to pull out. He is not possessed even though he rolls over dead and useless afterward, shrunk into oblivion: this does not make him hers by virtue of the nature of the act; he has not been taken and conquered by her, to whom he finally surrenders, beat, defeated in endurance and strength both. And for him, this small annihilation, this little powerlessness, is not eroticized as sexual possession of him by her, intrinsic to the act; proof of an elemental reality, an unchanging relation between male and female. He experiences coitus as death; and he is sad; but he is not possessed.

Men have admitted some form of sexual possession of themselves by women in the fuck when they can characterize the women as witches, evil and carnal, and when the fuck occurs in

their sleep at night. The witches have sex with men while they sleep; they use a man against his will, especially at night, when he is asleep and helpless. He ejaculates: proof that, by magic, a woman came to him in the night and did something to or with his penis. In Europe, women were persecuted as witches for nearly four hundred years, burned at the stake, perhaps as many as nine million of them—untold numbers accused of coming to men, having sex with them, causing them to ejaculate: at night, when the men slept. In these instances, then, the charge of witchcraft was a male charge of rape: the man claimed to be taken against his will, used in sex against his will; certainly without his consent and in a way violative of his male prerogatives in sex over women. In Europe during the Inquisition women were slaughtered for this rape of the male that took place in his own mind; for possessing him by making him fuck, twist, turn, tormented, in his sleep; for making him have sex or want it or experience it imprisoned in his own isolated body, sex that was not the issue of his will or predetermination. In many cultures and tribes, men can be similarly possessed; and the key to the possession—the dreams, the sex, the physical reality of desire, the obsession—is that the woman herself is magical and evil; through wickedness and magic she exerts illegitimate (therefore magical; therefore wicked; therefore originating in Satan) power over men.

For women, being sexually possessed by men is more pedestrian. Women have been chattels to men as wives, as prostitutes, as sexual and reproductive servants. Being owned and being fucked are or have been virtually synonymous experiences in the lives of women. He owns you; he fucks you. The fucking conveys the quality of the ownership: he owns you inside out. The fucking conveys the passion of his dominance: it

requires access to every hidden inch. He can own everything around you and everything on you and everything you are capable of doing as a worker or servant or ornament; but getting inside you and owning your insides is possession: deeper, more intimate, than any other kind of ownership. Intimate, raw, total, the experience of sexual possession for women is real and literal, without any magical or mystical dimension to it: getting fucked and being owned are inseparably the same; together, being one and the same, they are sex for women under male dominance as a social system. In the fuck, the man expresses the geography of his dominance: her sex, her insides are part of his domain as a male. He can possess her as an individual—be her lord and master—and thus be expressing a private right of ownership (the private right issuing from his gender); or he can possess her by fucking her impersonally and thus be expressing a collective right of ownership without masquerade or manners. Most women are not distinct, private individuals to most men; and so the fuck tends toward the class assertion of dominance. Women live inside this reality of being owned and being fucked: are sensate inside it; the body learning to respond to what male dominance offers as touch, as sex, as love. For women, being possessed is the sex that has to meet the need for love or tenderness or physical affection; therefore, it comes to mean, to show, the intensity of desire; and being erotically owned by a man who takes you and fucks you is a physically charged and meaningful affirmation of womanhood or femininity or being desired.

This reality of being owned and being fucked—as experience, a social, political, economic, and psychological unity—frames, limits, sets parameters for, what women feel and experience in sex. Being that person who is owned and fucked

means becoming someone who experiences sensuality in being possessed: in the touch of the possessor, in his fuck, however callous it is to the complexity or the subtlety of one's own humanity. Because a woman's capacity to feel sexual pleasure is developed within the narrow confines of male sexual dominance, internally there is no separate being—conceived, nurtured somewhere else, under different material circumstances—screaming to get out. There is only the flesh-and-blood reality of being a sensate being whose body experiences sexual intensity, sexual pleasure, and sexual identity in being possessed: in being owned and fucked. It is what one knows; and one's capacities to feel and to be are narrowed, sliced down, to fit the demands and dimensions of this sentient reality.

Therefore, women feel the fuck—when it works, when it overwhelms—as possession; and feel possession as deeply erotic; and value annihilation of the self in sex as proof of the man's desire or love, its awesome intensity. And therefore, being possessed is phenomenologically real for women; and sex itself is an experience of diminishing self-possession, an erosion of self. That loss of self is a physical reality, not just a psychic vampirism; and as a physical reality it is chilling and extreme, a literal erosion of the body's integrity and its ability to function and to survive. The physical rigors of sexual possession—of being possessed—overwhelm the body's vitality; and while at first the woman is fierce with the pride of possession—he wants her enough to empty her out—her insides are worn away over time, and she, possessed, becomes weak, depleted, usurped in all her physical and mental energies and capacities by the one who has physically taken her over; by the one who occupies her. This sexual possession is a sensual state of being that borders on antibeing until it ends in death. The

body dies, or the lover discards the body when it is used up, throws it away, an old, useless thing, emptied, like an empty bottle. The body is used up; and the will is raped.

In *Satan in Goray*, a novel by Isaac Bashevis Singer, possession is literal: a *dybbuk*, an evil spirit, enters the body; and the entry itself is coital and literal:

AND REB MORDECAI JOSEPH said to the spirit, Through what opening didst thou force thy way into the woman, and the *dybbuk* spoke and said Through *that same place*.²

In the end, the possessed woman dies, but the supernatural possession is a phenomenon on the far end of a continuum: an intensification, an extreme exaggeration, of the sexual possession the woman has already experienced at the hands of mortal men, leaders of the community; what they have done to her, how they have used her, their sexual possession of her, has worn her down, left her vulnerable to supernatural possession, itself a form of rape:

It was stifling and the Thing pressed her to him, leaned against her. The Thing was a male; he tried to force her legs apart with his bony knees. He spoke to her rapidly, hoarsely, breathing hard, imploring and demanding:

“Rechele! Quick! Let me! I want to defile you!”

“No, no!”

“Rechele, you are already defiled!”

He threw her down, and entered her.³

Rechele, in the course of her short life as a woman on earth, had belonged to her father, who owned her without fucking

her; her uncle, a ritual slaughterer who raised her and wanted her for his bride; a husband, Reb Itche Mates, who was impotent and fanatical and thought she was the demon Lilith; a lover, Reb Gedaliya, who took her from her husband and eventually, in a profane ceremony, forced her husband to divorce her, and, in a profane ceremony, married her; and the *dybbuk*, who took her from Reb Gedaliya. The religious community of Jews eventually exorcised the *dybbuk*: “The next instant the congregation beheld a flash of fire from *that same place* and it flew through the window burning a round hole in the pane.”⁴ Rechele soon dies.

This story of sexual possession takes place in Poland, in a city named Goray, “the town that lay in the midst of the hills at the end of the world.”⁵ In 1648 a butcher of the Jews, Bogdan Chmelnicki, executed vicious pogroms, mass slaughters; he and his followers “flayed men alive, murdered small children, violated women and afterward ripped open their bellies and sewed cats inside.”⁶ Jews ran away; were baptized; were sold into slavery. Goray was deserted. Still, the Jews studied holy texts, and the cabalists—the mystics of Judaism—studied the mystic texts. In them, they found a promised end to this persecution of the Jews, a time when the Messiah would come; and many concluded that “Chmelnicki’s massacres were the birth-pangs of the Messiah.”⁷ Magical thinking distorted the austere, literal religion of the Jews; laws were transgressed; false Messiahs abounded.

Rechele was born in Goray just before the massacre there. Her father took her to Lublin, and left the new infant with her uncle, a ritual slaughterer; and the holy slaughter of the animals is a wrenching counterpoint to the profane slaughter of the Jews. The environment is filled with the carnage of killed

animals, blood, feathers, knives, the smell of the killing; and sex begins for her here, with these sounds and smells of violence, in a hard bench-bed with a morbid old woman; the old woman “smelled of burned feathers and mice. Sometimes she would lift the child’s shift and run her dead hands over the girl’s hot body, cackling with impure delight: ‘Fire! Fire! The girl’s burning up!’”⁸

One night after the old woman has died, Rechele is left alone on Yom Kippur, the holiest night for Jews; Polish lords rape Jewish women on that night, and children die in fires. In terror, she collapses, “lying with her knees pulled to her chest, her eyes glazed and her teeth clenched.”⁹ She stopped speaking altogether, became chronically ill, and was paralyzed in one leg. She was never strong or normal again. But her uncle wanted to marry her because she was beautiful; so he tried to have her healed. He hired an old woman to wash her in urine to get rid of any evil spirits. He provided the best medical care, a Polish doctor who taught her Latin. He himself taught her Torah so that she could pass the hours. When her uncle soon died, she was sent back to Goray to live with her father, who traveled often and had no interest in her. Mostly she was alone: “For days on end she sat on a foot bench facing the hearth, reading the volumes she had brought from distant cities, and it was rumored that she was versed in the holy tongue.”¹⁰ It even became publicly known that she knew Latin. Matchmakers tried to get her married, but her father was indifferent to the idea, and she preferred reading to socializing. She was lame, but still “she aroused sinful thoughts in men.”¹¹

Goray had changed. Once a center for the old-fashioned scholars, pure and holy, then deserted after the massacre, now it was receptive to the many bounders who came preaching

deviations from Jewish law, justified by the imminence of the Messiah's arrival. For those who thought that Chmelnicki's pogroms were but an indication that the Messiah was on his way, no twist or turn of thought could prove illogical. There were two theories: one group became austere, did penances, and had no intercourse to prepare for the coming of the Messiah; another group noted that holy texts declared that the generation right at the time of the coming of the Messiah would be degenerate; and so they strove to break every law and commit every outrage, so as to hasten the coming of the Messiah:

They were secretly adulterous, ate the flesh of the pig and other unclean foods, and performed those labors expressly forbidden on the Sabbath as most to be avoided. . . . Other believers defiled the bathhouses, so that the women could not clean themselves properly, and their husbands had to lie with them in their unclean state.¹²

Throughout the city, sensuality and transgression were rampant. Men and women did ecstatic dancing together; women listened to men when they were not supposed to, for instance, reading presumably holy messages from distant sages. Men and women drank together; and the sexual meanings of cabalistic texts were publicly declaimed. Charms were used, magic amulets and ointments; men and women uncovered their heads and kissed and embraced, and the rules that created barriers between men and women were ignored or even flouted. Men even invaded, for fun, the bathing place of the women, raiding it: "Those who were large and slow-moving were so confused that they remained transfixed. Uncovered before the eyes of the men, they were publicly shamed. There was much

jesting and frivolity that evening.”¹³ Women who had stopped menstruating were told “to eat the foreskin of a circumcised infant”; and those who wanted to be loved “were told to have their men drink the water in which their breasts had been washed.”¹⁴ The false Messiah most honored was Sabbatai Zevi, and the Messiah’s wife, Sarah, was also honored, having “once been an inmate of a brothel in Rome.”¹⁵

Especially, the women were out of hand and out of line, increasingly deviant and lawless. One woman came to Goray preaching, spreading news of miracles and words of solace; she promised salvation:

Crowds of women followed her about, tirelessly asking question after question—and she replied in phrases from the holy tongue, like a man.¹⁶

Women were “in mannish boots, their heads covered with torn shawls . . . ”¹⁷ And Rechele, incarnating this deviation toward the masculine, had studied the holy tongue and Latin. In God’s legal universe, this does not occur. Freud outlined precisely the implicit orthodox Jewish view of gender when he wrote:

the appeased wish for a penis is destined to be converted into a wish for a baby and for a husband, who possesses a penis. It is strange, however, how often we find that the wish for masculinity has been retained in the unconscious and, from out of its state of repression, exercises a disturbing influence.¹⁸

Goray was disturbed; the women presumed in the direction of masculine privilege.

The hedonism was doctrinal, a cabalistic sexual-liberation creed in which each transgression led to new, more far-ranging sensual experiments: all licensed by the rabbi who shrewdly interpreted the will of the coming Messiah. The rabbi himself, the leader of the law, “explained to young matrons ways to enflame their husbands and whispered in their ears that . . . the commandment against adultery was void.”¹⁹ Following an ever expanding new doctrine of sensuality as divinely sanctioned, men were exchanging wives, and incest too was indulged in: every lust was fulfilled. The authority of religion, in the person of the rabbi, insisted on an ideological commitment to and justification for promiscuity and sensual indulgence; and behavior conformed to the demands of ideology, the ecstatic substitute for Leviticus. Male authority, religious authority, and civic authority all converged, indistinguishable, at the point of entry into a woman’s body; and it was in this context that Rechele was sexually possessed, first by mortal men, these very authorities, then by a *dybbuk*. And in this same context the religious community of the Jews was transformed into a social pornography of possession: a socially established imperative toward sensual derangement; religion sexualized so that it became the doctrinal imperative for the sexual possession of women—by men, by force—even to the point of annihilation and death. Each act of possession is a sensual derangement for the woman—physical, overpowering, consuming; and each act of possession illuminates the meaning of sex in which the woman is owned by the man, her body becoming his. The physical and spiritual impact of this sexual dominance is on the integrity of the woman. She is necessarily (because of the nature of the act) unable to withstand its assaultive intensity; she is overwhelmed by it, driven to physical

collapse and the abandonment of will. Each act of possession is sensual and singular; but possession also has a communal dimension to it, the community regulating, to a staggering degree, the social and sexual boundaries of possession—the meaning of the fuck, the degree of public complicity in maintaining each erotic relationship, what aspects of possession can and cannot be shown or acknowledged in the public realm, the role of the fuck in controlling women.

Reb Itche Mates, to whom Rechele is first married, is accepted by the citizens of Goray as someone wise and holy with great magical and mystical gifts; he engages in austere practices of penitence, including fasts and physical mortifications. In a letter from scholars in other communities, Goray is warned that Reb Itche Mates is a false prophet, one who is “forever sunk in melancholy, whose root is lust . . . ”²⁰ He is accused of using magic to cause the deaths of innocent and good people; and, in fact, a rabbi of the old school who opposes the new magical practices being taken up in Goray dies such a death. Reb Itche Mates is a con artist, the letter accuses; he entices woman after woman in town after town to marry him but then does not consummate the marriage; “his purpose is to make her unclean and to give her a bad name. . . . he will not divorce them, and lets them sit alone, grass widows, the tears on their cheeks, their bitter cries splitting heaven, with no recourse.”²¹

At Rechele’s betrothal feast, she “changed her mind and fell to weeping that she did not want Reb Itche Mates.”²² But she was made to capitulate: talked to, persuaded, bribed with gifts until she agreed to the marriage again. At the betrothal, after her consent is socially coerced, Rechele experiences physical possession; she is given to and belongs to Reb Itche Mates; he need not fuck her, or even touch her, for the meaning of possession to

be real for her as a woman. On Yom Kippur, alone at her uncle's, she responded to the terror of imminent rape by Polish lords with fits resembling physical possession; and now she experiences possession in response to force—forced to be female, subordinate, owned, her own free will expressed and then violated, resulting in a marriage repugnant to her. Male ownership of her is phenomenologically real, a physical reality of possession:

Before anyone could reach her, she had fallen and she lay choking with sobs. Her eyes glazed, her arms and legs contorted, foam ran from her twisted mouth. She shuddered, twisted, and a vapor rose from her as from a dying ember.²³

In having her will violated, in being owned, in being compelled through social force and money (having nothing herself), she experiences the sexuality of possession: force triggers the possession, just as terror did; force is the equivalent of the fuck in creating the reality of possession; responding to force sexualizes ownership, and force is the sex of it, sexual dominance without penile penetration. She has been taken. The force of male dominance is possession even when that force is a social coercion, the community forcing her to sexual subordination and an implicit sexual servitude.

From that time on, her body is not her own, even though Reb Itche Mates is impotent and does not fuck her. Each morning after her wedding, matrons from the community examine her and the bedding to find the blood of the first fuck: "Ashamed, Rechele hid under the bolster, but that did not bother them . . . And so they uncovered her, and examined her slip and bedclothes carefully, their faces reddening as they

piously went about their work.”²⁴ Her body, no longer hers, belongs to the community that upholds male dominance; and these women are agents of that community, that male dominance, not a subversive or sympathetic sisterhood; they are entitled to search every nook and cranny of her body to see that she is being possessed according to the rites and laws of male dominance: that she is being fucked. The community expresses its will on her body; it mandates the fuck. The sensuality of possession, then, is what she has inside that system of reality; and without it, she has nothing. Reb Itche Mates does not fuck her, but he does use her. At night, he read prayers, beat his breast, wept, confessed, then

warmed his frigid hands between her breasts and his bristly hairs pricked her, yet his teeth continued to chatter and his body shook so that the bed shook with it.²⁵

The demon Lilith, in the room with them, seen by him, looked like Rechele; and the vision of her, her presence for him, gave him pleasure: ““Long hair like yours. Naked. Concupiscent.””²⁶

Eventually, the community leaves Rechele to him, to do to her what he wants according to whim or taste. Not being fucked, she ceases to exist for the community. She becomes socially invisible. The community does not value ownership of a female without the fuck. The continuing reality of male potency is the interest of the community served by the sex act as possession. Not serving that interest, an adult woman has no social existence or importance. Abandoned by the penis, she is abandoned by her community, organized on earth to celebrate and perpetuate male power and potency as divine. She is abandoned by power, by God.

Rechele herself is broken down by the coldness and alienation of this ownership without the fuck, this impotence, a kind of callous foreplay of possession: ownership without ecstasy; loss of the self in an absence of male potency, like a burnt offering in a universe without God, a sacrifice in a vacuum; loss of the body in a sterile hideousness of male frigidity. Not being fucked, she ceases to exist; but not through erotic annihilation, not through the slow and glorious wearing away of her vitality and substance in fits and spasms and violent upheavals. Instead, abandoned, she is a shell, like an empty house, deserted because no one wants to live there, worthless.

Reb Gedaliya, known for his piety and learning, did not want to leave the house empty. His ethic was to use; his gift was to invent the doctrinal justifications for promiscuity. He urged the community to fuck, since “neglect of the principle of fruitfulness would delay their redemption.”²⁷ When the Messiah came, he suggested, fucking many strange women “might even be considered a religious duty; for each time a man and a woman unite they form a mystical combination and promote a union between the Holy One, blessed be He, and the Divine Presence.”²⁸ He conjured up demons, “deceived the townspeople and knew their wives and fathered bastards without number . . .”²⁹ Religious fervor and sexual fervor pervaded each other; and the rabbi’s “lust and license”³⁰ was legitimized, protected, shielded, by mystic interpretations of religious tradition. The ecstasy of religion and the ecstasy of sex were one passion. In this carnal epistemology, sex and knowledge were synonyms; and prophecy was the body possessed, as it would be in sex, by a knowledge beyond itself.

The seduction of Rechele was through mystic voices, an elaborate visitation, visions and sounds created by Reb Gedaliya;

and when Rechele went to confide in him, he greeted her “with outstretched arms”³¹ in God’s name. She is taken, possessed, surrounded; at first, “[a] bright red flow surrounded her; flames seemed to overwhelm the house . . . ”³² She answers the voices the way a man might, remembering as she does some biblical text that, as a woman, she should not know, and so she mimics it, as if a legitimate messenger of God would come to her, a woman; a delusion that shows implicitly the corruption of the visitation. Visited a whole night by the voice, left in a swoon, in the morning she rose and washed, as after a sex act, “rinsing her breasts and thighs as though performing a ritual.”³³ She runs to the synagogue in such a state of possession and ecstasy, to Reb Gedaliya, making the relationship between them a public one; and in a state of sexual and religious transport, an ecstasy, she interprets passages of the Bible. The sex act between them virtually takes place in public but it is rendered as religion:

Reb Gedaliya bent over Rechele, listening to the voice and trembling with fear; his body had to be supported by two strong men, for his legs had failed him, and he shook as with fever. Only when Rechele lay as though dead, did Reb Gedaliya gesture for a prayer shawl to cover her face. Then he bore her in his arms to the dais.³⁴

Then he carried her to an anteroom, and public celebration began, with men and women dancing, kissing, embracing, in various states of undress; and “the curtain of the Ark was hung on poles as a kind of canopy and borne aloft over the heads of Reb Gedaliya and Rechele.”³⁵ He took her to his house to live; and possessed her. She was a prophet, enshrined in a special

room painted white, dressed in white satin; an Ark and Torah were put in the room, and ten women were there with her as a minyan to pray, and women read from the Torah (all forbidden). Rechele was veiled. She stopped eating and ignored all physical needs. Her skin became translucent. Her body lit up in the dark. And at midnight each night the rabbi came in, uncovered her, woke her up, kissed her feet. He told her that “The Divine Parents are coupling face to face . . . This is the hour of union.”³⁶ Then he fucked her. She went in and out of comas.

In this possession, Rechele is honored by the community. Reb Gedaliya gives her an identity in which she can know things and talk and pray and in which she is respected as holy: only by belonging to a man can she have a social identity; and the full meaning of belonging to a man—for the community—is in the fuck without which she is socially erased. The cost to her is literally her mind, her body, and eventually her power to be conscious on the simple biological plane: she becomes comatose. Her social identity—contingent on being carnally possessed—is at the cost of her human existence—a paradigmatic contradiction for women under male dominance.

The degeneracy of her new husband is progressive; so that, for instance, he brings a prostitute into their home, engages in group sex and other debauchery, and aggressively commits acts of sacrilege. *Possessing* is ambitious, imperialistic, always extending its range; *being possessed* tends toward death—an end of self altogether, a sexuality in which the woman is in a state of exile from the human condition as such. There is nothing personal left to her, no personality, no individuality, no sovereignty over herself, no self. She is used as female, used up, but the using of her does not stop; and sex is a mortification of

her flesh. Comatose or not, *that same place*, the point of entry into her, is what she is reduced to in this cruel magic act of metaphysical decomposition. In a world of socially sanctioned sexual possession, the meaning of possession escalates to include being passed from man to man, or being dumped then used again; and each time a woman is possessed inside this social dynamic, she is pushed into a deeper level of coma, the aggregate effect of possession being to turn her into a thing of sex, "ravished . . . so many times that she was powerless to move."³⁷ Powerless, inert, with no voice of her own, more dead than living, she enters into a new realm, a new dimension of possession: an impersonally apprehended thing to be used, she becomes social pornography; an impersonally possessed female used as female with no remnant of a human life animating or informing the use of her in sex. She is used by men impersonally with no reference to her as human and no comprehension of her as an individual. As social pornography, she is a living corpse, existing for sexual use. When life is breathed into her by the *dybbuk*, the evil spirit that gets inside her, she becomes a sexual monster, a gross caricature of a putative female sexuality, pushed by the *dybbuk* to public display of herself as a violated and foul thing of sex.

The *dybbuk* is an outstanding emblem for this impersonal possession; an immortal rapist, forcing himself inside the woman. Rechele would sleep, and when she would wake up "her legs would ache from so much climbing about in the celestial sphere."³⁸ She could not eat or pray, her mouth was dry, her stomach distended, she was cold, she could not lift up her head: "Often her heart palpitated like a living creature; something contracted, coiled, and twisted like an imbedded snake in the recesses of her being."³⁹ Rechele's new lover was Satan;

and he tormented her, repeatedly raping her, injuring her, humiliating her:

Pulling the hairs singly from her head, he wound them about her throat; he pinched her in the hips and bit her breasts with his jagged teeth. When she yawned he spat down her throat; he poured water on her bedsheet and pretended she had wet her bed. He made her show him her private parts and drink slop.⁴⁰

Impregnated by Satan, she is abandoned by Reb Gedaliya; and she then experiences the total debasement of impersonal possession, in which the injury done to her is what gratifies the possessor. She is tortured, tormented; has abscesses on her thighs with worms in them; vomits reptiles. She is in bondage, her body a sadist's playground. The humiliation and torture of her is the sex. She has no voice of her own. The *dybbuk* speaks through her: using vile and obscene language. She has no physical strength of her own (having been nearly dead when possessed by mortal men). The *dybbuk* inside her gives her a supernatural strength but for only one purpose: to hurt herself. Lifting with ease a rock that three men could not move, "she smote her body with the stone from the top of her head to the tips of her toes time and again . . ." ⁴¹

Part of the sexual charge of impersonal possession for the possessor is to force her to exhibit herself in public; to destroy any privacy of the body. The *dybbuk* transforms Rechele into a public slut, a public shame, a public disgrace; he publishes her, as it were; turns her out; exhibits her, possessed and lewd, in public. In public, the *dybbuk* made Rechele uncover her body,

and she spread her legs to show her nakedness and to bring men into thoughts of transgression: And she passed water and befouled the holy place . . . Her left leg she twisted around her neck and the right she stuck out stiff as a board and her tongue rolled like a hanged man's . . . And many righteous women did testify that a stink issued from *that same place* . . . ⁴²

The public perception of this possession is that it is obscene. The community regards this exhibition of a woman's raw sexual derangement and debasement as filth; her genital display becomes a synonym for dirt. There is a social repudiation of this possession—an attempt, eventually successful, to exorcise the *dybbuk*—because the community, organized to maintain male dominance (and therefore to protect it even from its own worst excesses), cannot ultimately withstand the unmodified exposure of the real substance and final meaning of male dominance: the meaning of possession without the consolations of privacy, romance, or social regulation (law, marriage). The power of men over women—including the power of men to possess women in the fuck—is endangered by a social reality of impersonal possession. The potency of mortal men cannot compete with the potency of an immortal rapist, always the pornographic hero; nor can the potency of mortal men meet the challenge of female sexual provocation unregulated by their own rules and patterns of desire. For other women possessed more privately, possession tending toward coma, the devastation of being the public whore, of being used to the limits of sadistic greed, suggests—perhaps inevitably, if humans have any intrinsic dignity—the necessity of resistance; a resistance springs up to eroticizing possession.

The community asserts its right to insist on the fuck; and the community asserts its right to keep the ultimate meaning and consequence of possession secret; known to men, not to women—not publicly visible to women; known especially to the men who take particular pleasure in the real and final destruction of the possessed: this final destruction best done in secret, in hiding, in the great prisons and brothels of esoteric pornography; not in the public square, not in the synagogue. The community has rules; and the rules of the community protect male power. The fuck is legitimate sexual possession, effective in taking over the woman's insides; but the impersonally possessed and pornographized woman in public goes too far, especially in exposing to women the real cost of male dominance, the real meaning of possession, a destiny down the road. Rechele dies. Goray sets limits again, goes back to being holy and religious and law-abiding; so that those who do the fucking can maintain their social and sexual power; so that their potency will be sustained, not threatened, by the interfacing of public order and private reality. In a world of male power—penile power—fucking is the essential sexual experience of power and potency and possession; fucking by mortal men, regular guys. Alone together, a man fucks a woman; he possesses her; the act is an act of possession in and of itself; the man and the woman experience it as such. Neither appears to know that the community participates in the fuck, giving it its power as possession: shades cheering at the bedside, checking the sheets in the morning for blood. The sex act virtually stands in for the community; the man a good soldier, advancing his side over tricky terrain. Fucking is an exemplary sex act, an act of possession, intimate, private; the community's imperative to fuck and regulation of the fuck invisible in the fuck itself.

part two

THE FEMALE CONDITION

You mention the tribulations of women. I'm now in that milieu. You'll see that I've had to dive deep down into that sentimental well. If my book is good it will gently caress many a feminine wound; and many a one will smile as she recognizes herself.

I'll have known all your sorrows, poor dim souls, damp with pent-up melancholy, like your provincial back-yards, the walls of which are covered with fungus.

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

VIRGINITY

JOAN OF ARC, SOLDIER, MILITARY STRATEGIST, VIRGIN, was born in Domremy, a parish in the province of Lorraine, circa 1412 (perhaps on January 6). She was female, illiterate, a peasant. In Rouen in 1431, at the age of nineteen, she was tried and burned as a witch. By the time of her arrest (taken prisoner in a military action) and imprisonment in 1430, she had routed the English from much French territory and established the military and nationalistic momentum for their eventual expulsion from French soil; and she had gotten Charles VII crowned King of France, creating a head-of-state so that a nation might emerge around him. Her will, her vision, and her military acumen provided the impetus and groundwork for the emergence of a French nation-state, heretofore nonexistent; and she was, for better or worse, the first French nationalist, a military liberator of an occupied country that did not yet see itself as she clearly, militantly, saw it—as a political and cultural unity that must repel foreign domination. The English, using the machinery of the Inquisition, got her convicted and killed; the Catholic Church did the actual dirty work. But no invader

yet, including the Nazis, has killed what she created: France. At her trial,

Asked why she, sooner than another,

She answered: It pleased God so to do, by means of a simple maid to drive back the king's enemies.*

The Church, in ongoing if not particularly credible remorse, issued a series of apologies for burning her. In 1456, she was “rehabilitated” by papal decree—essentially the Church conceded that she had not been a witch. Charles needed her name cleared once he won, because of her prominence at his coronation;* the Church cooperated with him as it had with the English when it burned her. In 1869, the case for canonizing Joan was placed before the Vatican: a hiatus in reparation of over four hundred years. In 1903, Joan was designated as Venerable. In 1909 she was beatified. In 1920 she became Saint Joan. The Church that killed her may now identify her as a martyr; but for women inspired by her legend, she is a martial hero luminous with genius and courage, an emblem of possibility and potentiality consistently forbidden, obliterated, or denied by the rigid tyranny of sex-role imperatives or the outright humiliation of second-class citizenship. Women have many martyrs, many valiant pacifists, sung and unsung; few heroes who made war. We know how to die, also how not to kill; Joan inexplicably knew how to make war. At her trial, Joan insisted that she had

*Carrying her combat banner, Joan stood next to Charles at his coronation. Asked at her trial why her banner was given such prominence, she answered: “It had borne the pain, it was reason enough it should have the honor.” Warner, *Joan of Arc*, p. 166.

never killed on the battlefield, improbable since the combat was hand-to-hand; but she was known among her own men for standing against the commonplace practices of sadism on the battlefield. It is hard to believe that she did not kill; but whether she did or did not, she was an exemplary martial liberator—nearly unique in the iconography and history of the European female, that tamed and incomprehensibly peaceful creature. Joan's story is not female until the end, when she died, like nine million other women, in flames, condemned by the Inquisition for witchcraft, heresy, and sorcery. Precisely because she was a hero whose biography brazenly and without precedent violates the constraints of being female until the terrible suffering of her death, her story, valorous and tragic, is political, not magical; mythic because she existed, was real, not because her persona has been enlarged over the centuries. Her virginity was not an expression of some aspect of her femininity or her preciousness as a woman, despite the existence of a cultish worship of virginity as a feminine ideal. She was known as Joan the Maid or, simply, The Maid ("*La Pucelle*"). Her reputation, her declaration, preceded her, established her intention and her terms; not in the context of being a holy or ideal female but in the context of waging war. Her virginity was a self-conscious and militant repudiation of the common lot of the female with its intrinsic low status, which, then as now, appeared to have something to do with being fucked. Joan wanted to be virtuous in the old sense, before the Christians got hold of it: *virtuous* meant *brave, valiant*. She incarnated virtue in its original meaning: strength or manliness. Her virginity was an essential element of her virility, her autonomy, her rebellious and intransigent self-definition. Virginity was freedom from the real meaning of being female; it was not just another style of being female. Being female meant tiny

boundaries and degraded possibilities; social inferiority and sexual subordination; obedience to men; surrender to male force or violence; sexual accessibility to men or withdrawal from the world; and civil insignificance. Unlike the feminine virgins who accepted the social subordination while exempting themselves from the sex on which it was premised, Joan rejected the status and the sex as one thing—empirical synonyms: low civil status and being fucked as indistinguishable one from the other. She refused to be fucked and she refused civil insignificance: and it was one refusal; a rejection of the social meaning of being female in its entirety, no part of the feminine exempted and saved. Her virginity was a radical renunciation of a civil worthlessness rooted in real sexual practice. She refused to be female. As she put it at her trial, not nicely: “And as for womanly duties. She said there were enough other women to do them.”²

She was the third daughter of farmers Jacques Darc (or Tart or d’Arc) and Isabelle Romée (a surname often taken by those who had made a pilgrimage to Rome, according to Michelet). She had three brothers and several godmothers and godfathers. She learned her prayers and her faith from her mother: “Nobody taught me my belief, if not my mother.”³ She also learned and did female work: sewing, spinning, and housework. At her trial, she bragged about the excellence of her sewing and spinning: “for spinning and sewing let me alone against any woman in Rouen.”⁴ She also did plowing and harvesting and guarded animals in the fields. She was devout from childhood; went to church and to confession. Her father had dreamed that she would run away with soldiers and so her parents “kept me close and in great subjection . . . ”⁵ Her father

told her brothers that he would rather they drown her than let her run off with soldiers.

She was thirteen when she first heard voices; and it was then she “promised to keep my virginity for as long as it should please God . . . ”⁶ She heard the voice of St. Michael, saw him, saw angels, saw light: “I heard the voice on the right-hand side, towards the church; and rarely do I hear it without a brightness.”⁷ She heard this voice and the voices of two female saints who became her inspiration, several times a week. She was told to go to church, to practice good conduct, that she must leave home and go to France, and that she must not tell her father. She was told that she would free the city of Orléans from the English, and also told to whom she must go for equipment, men, and access to the king: “And me, I answered it that I was a poor girl who knew not how to ride or lead in war.”⁸

Her father tried to force her to marry, and at sixteen she publicly defied him. A man sued her for breach of promise, a promise to marry having the force of a binding contract in the Middle Ages. Joan defended herself in court against the charge and won.

It was in 1429, at the age of seventeen, that Joan made her escape from her father’s house and authority. Joan’s voice told her that she must find Robert de Baudricourt, who would take her to Charles. She left Domremy knowing it was for good, deceiving her parents. She went to an uncle and persuaded him to take her to Vaucouleurs, where she knew she would find de Baudricourt;

whereas never before had I seen him and by my voice I knew this Robert, for the voice told me that it was him. And I told

this same Robert that I must go into France. This Robert twice refused and repulsed me.⁹

She virtually laid siege to him twice, for prolonged periods of time; and eventually he sent her to the king escorted by men-at-arms. He gave her a sword, and the people of Vaucouleurs gave her money for a horse and equipment. She had arrived in Vaucouleurs wearing a red peasant dress made out of a coarse material; she left dressed like a man, never to dress of her own free will like a woman again. At her trial, tormented on the issue of her male dress, she would not capitulate. It was, she said,

but a small matter; and that she had not taken it by the advice of any living man; and that she did not take this dress nor do anything at all save by the command of Our Lord and the angels.¹⁰

According to the stories of the time, Joan entered the king's room, which was crowded with men dressed finer and looking more royal than the king; but Joan knew him and addressed him immediately as her sovereign: "she made bows and reverences which it is customary to make to kings, just as if she had been brought up at court all her life."¹¹ He then denied that he was king and pointed to another man: "To which she answered: 'It is you who are king, and no other; I know you well.'"¹² She then told the king that she would end the siege of Orleans and have him crowned at Rheims.

The king had her examined by clergy, theologians, and scholars as to her faith. She was physically examined by women to ascertain that she was, as she claimed, a virgin. It was a common belief that the devil could not make a pact with a virgin; and so virginity would put Joan on God's side, making it lawful

for Charles to accept her. Her interrogators were persuaded of her authenticity. Joan then asked Charles for the sword of St. Catherine of Fierbois, a patron saint of escaped criminals and prisoners of war; the sword was found where Joan said it would be, in a nearby shrine to St. Catherine, hidden behind the altar, covered with rust that disappeared when it was rubbed; on the sword there were five crosses and the names of Jesus and Mary. Joan received the sword and fought with it.

She dictated a letter to the English king and the Duke of Bedford, head of the occupying army in Orleans, demanding that the English leave: "and if you do not do so, you will remember it by reason of your great sufferings."¹³ On April 28, 1429, the march on Orleans, led by Joan the Maid, began. On April 29, Joan entered Orleans at the head of her army. On May 8, the English retreated. She then led and won a series of other victories over a period of months, securing for the French several villages and towns and driving the English back. Joan then persuaded Charles to go to Rheims to be crowned. Rheims was far away, through territory occupied by the English. Combat and famine nearly caused the men to turn back, but Joan persisted in her strategizing and persuasion; and the English abdicated yet more territory. Charles became King of France in Rheims. Joan continued to fight for the king in many campaigns, including an assault, which she led, on Paris: it failed. On May 23, 1430, at the age of eighteen, she was captured in Compiègne. Some say that French soldiers, jealous of her, blocked her escape. It was her courage, according to an enemy eyewitness, that led to her capture. The French were retreating and Joan,

passing the nature of women, took all the brunt, and took great pains to save her company, remaining behind as captain and

bravest of her troop. And there Fortune allowed that her glory at last come to an end and that she bear arms no longer; an archer, a rough man and a sour, full of spite because a woman of whom so much had been heard should have overthrown (broken the bones of) so many valiant men, dragged her to one side by her cloth-of-gold cloak and pulled her from her horse, throwing her flat on the ground; never could she find recourse or succor in her men, try though they might to remount her . . . ¹⁴

Her captors were not the English themselves, but their allies, the Burgundians, vassals of the Duke of Burgundy. It was the custom in those days to ransom prisoners, so Joan might have been freed had Charles paid a ransom. He never tried to free her. The King of England, on the other hand, did want her enough to pay for her. He demanded she be turned over to the English, but her captors did not comply, perhaps disquieted by her legend and her virginity. The English king then persuaded the Bishop of Beauvais, Pierre Cauchon, to try her for heresy. In a letter to Cauchon, who eventually prosecuted her, Henry VI articulated the charges against her in broad strokes:

It is sufficiently notorious and well-known that for some time past a woman calling herself Jeanne the Pucelle, leaving off the dress and clothing of the feminine sex, a thing contrary to divine law and abominable before God, and forbidden by all laws, wore clothing and armour such as is worn by men; has caused and occasioned cruel murders; and, so it is said, has seduced and abused simple people by giving them to understand that she was sent from God and had knowledge of His holy secrets . . . ¹⁵

The Maid, as a living emblem of resistance, was so dangerous to the English that they actually “had a woman burnt alive, simply for having spoken well of her.”¹⁶

Succumbing to the monumental pressure, which included the threat of an embargo, and then being well paid for capitulating, the Burgundians turned Joan over to the Inquisition in November 1430. Against the Church’s own rules, she was kept in a civil prison, guarded by English soldiers, male, who slept in her cell. She was kept in chains. There is some evidence that she was put in a special iron cage too small for her to stand in; and there is the word of a locksmith who said that he built an iron cage “in which she was *kept standing*, chained by her neck, her hands and her feet . . . ”¹⁷ [italics mine] According to the rules of the Inquisition, she had a right to be in a Church prison, guarded by women.

The Inquisitors, no doubt, felt justified. Imprisoned by the Burgundians for nearly seven months, Joan had tried to escape twice from two different prisons. In her second escape, she had jumped from a castle tower in which she was imprisoned. During her trial, the Inquisitors tried to make this second escape into a suicide attempt or to show that she was a witch because she expected to be able to fly. The Inquisitors tried to elicit a promise from her that she would not try to escape again; this she refused to give, saying it was her right to try to escape.

On January 9, 1431, the judges assembled to evaluate her and her case, a process that took over a month, during which Joan languished in jail. On February 21 Joan was brought into open court. She had no advocate at any point. Indeed, anyone who tried to help her in any way was threatened or punished. One of the clergy, allowing Joan to make the sign of the cross in a chapel on the way to her interrogation, was told: “Truant,

who maketh thee so bold to allow that excommunicated whore to approach the church without permission. I shall have thee put in a tower so that thou shalt see neither sun nor moon for a month if thou dost so again.”¹⁸ From March 10 through March 17, the sessions were conducted in the prison itself, in camera. All of this interrogation preceded the bringing of any charges. The Inquisitors examined an accused person to see what she was guilty of and then charged the person on the basis of what they found. The charges were then read to the accused, who could admit all, repent, and be punished—with life imprisonment or burning, depending on the crimes, but with the certainty that she had done the right thing and was still loved by Church and God; or the accused could be intransigent and deny (or try to explain) her behavior or beliefs as expressed in the charges, in which case she would be burned alive in the hope that she would repent before dying. Torture was frequently used to get a confession of guilt, since the confession helped to save the person’s soul and saving the heretic’s soul was the Church’s divine purpose in these proceedings.

The Church made seventy charges against Joan. They ranged from stealing a horse to sorcery. Being faced with these charges and answering them was called the “ordinary trial.” For Joan, this phase of her ordeal began on March 26. The sixty-sixth charge was a summing up of all the charges. Joan answered: “I am a good Christian. I will answer all these accusations before God.”¹⁹ She refused to answer the last charges, and the Inquisitors interpreted this silence as an admission of guilt. This part of the “ordinary trial” ended on March 31.

On April 2, the seventy charges were shortened to twelve: Pierre Cauchon got rid of the charges that could not be linked to her actual behavior and created an indictment that

was politically stronger, more defensible, not based on rumor or hyperbole.

On April 18, the “ordinary trial” continued in Joan’s cell, where she was admonished by the Inquisitors; told to reform and repent. On May 2, she was admonished in public, a formal proceeding that amounted to a public threat on her life:

In conclusion, she was abundantly and newly admonished to submit to the Church, under pain of being abandoned by the Church. And if the Church abandoned her, she would be in great danger both of body and soul; her soul in peril of everlasting fire, and her body in danger of the flames of this world . . .

To which she answered: You will not do as you say against me without suffering evil, both of body and soul.²⁰

On May 9, she was threatened with torture—she was brought into the torture chamber and shown the instruments of torture; and on May 12 the judges deliberated in private on whether or not she should be tortured. They decided that torture was not “expedient at the moment.”²¹ On May 19, Joan was condemned as a heretic by the University of Paris, its great scholars and theologians; and the twelve charges against her, now officially sanctioned by the University of Paris, were read to Joan on May 23. She was again admonished “to correct and amend your faults . . . ”²² Joan stood firm: “As for my words and deeds, I refer to what I said at my trial, and I will maintain them.”²³

On May 24, Joan was taken to a cemetery where a scaffold and tribune had been erected; and she was threatened with death if she did not submit to the earthly authority of the Church. Joan’s spoken answers to the Inquisitors were humbler

than they had ever been but not humble enough; so she was handed a paper with writing on it and told to put her mark on it (she could not read or write). She was told that she would be burned that day if she did not sign it. It was read to her; she signed. According to witnesses, the document she signed was short, perhaps six lines; the document published in the trial record was forty-seven lines.

Joan was sentenced to life imprisonment in women's clothes.

On May 27 or 28, she dressed in men's clothes. Questioned in her cell by the Inquisitors as to why, since this act of defiance would cost her her life,

She said, of her own will. And that nobody had forced her to do so. And that she preferred man's dress to woman's.²⁴

She said that she had recanted "only through fear of the fire"; that she "would rather do penance by dying, than bear any longer the agony of imprisonment"; and that she had never meant to "revoke anything."²⁵

On May 30, Joan the Maid was burned at the stake. Walking toward it, she asked if someone would not give her a cross. A soldier gave her two twigs, formed into a cross. Legend says that a white dove emerged from the fire at her death; that the word *Jesus* was legible in the flames; and the executioner insisted that he could not burn her heart, that "when the body was burnt in the flames and reduced to ashes her heart remained intact and full of blood."²⁶ The indestructible heart became, as Marina Warner says, "a new touchstone, of her integrity, her incorruptibility . . ."²⁷ The indestructible heart is likened to her body undestroyed by sex in life, her virginity, a

source of the elegance and strength of her heroism: "The pure vessel cannot, in the last analysis, be smashed; nothing can prevail against it."²⁸ Not a sentimentalist, Joan said at her trial

that those who wished to remove her from this world might well themselves go first.²⁹

And, indeed, they all have.

We have role models; Joan had voices. Her voices were always accompanied by a radiance, illumination, an expanse of light. She saw angels and was visited by saints. Her two special voices, guides and consolation, were St. Catherine of Alexandria and St. Margaret of Antioch. While many of the elaborations on their legends show the iconoclastic individuality of the two saints, the main outlines of their lives—the substance of their heroism—were virtually identical. Both were desired by powerful men (heads of state), turned them down, were tortured and decapitated. Both were in mortal combat with male power, were militant in their opposition to it, did not capitulate, and were killed for resisting. Both were virgins.

St. Catherine was the patron saint of unmarried girls and also of philosophers and students. She was famous for her erudition, one of the rare and great women of learning. Her father, a king, wanted her to be married but she kept turning down suitors. One night she dreamed that Mary, holding Jesus, asked her if she wanted to be his bride. She said yes, but Jesus turned her down because she was not a Christian. She got baptized; that night Jesus, surrounded by angels and saints, put a wedding ring on her hand. When the Emperor Maxentius ordered all the Christians in Alexandria killed, Catherine went to him to argue for her faith. The Emperor made her debate fifty

learned men, skilled orators; she won each debate and the fifty men were burned. The Emperor wanted Catherine for his mistress and promised that her image would be worshipped everywhere if only she would make a sacrifice to the gods. She refused, for Jesus and her faith. The Emperor threw her into prison and had her terribly tortured. The Catherine wheel, an instrument of torture, was invented for the purpose of eviscerating and killing her; but an angel destroyed the wheel. Catherine was killed by decapitation.

St. Margaret was the patron saint of peasants and women in childbirth, the latter not because she had children but because she was swallowed by the devil in the form of a dragon, and her purity and resistance were so great that he had to spew her up again whole and unhurt. Viewed as someone miraculously re-born uninjured, she became a symbol of hope in the life-and-death agony of childbirth. Margaret's father was a pagan priest, but she was secretly baptized. She tended animals in the fields. The governor, Olybrius, saw her, wanted her, and had her brought to him. She refused him and declared her faith. She was imprisoned, flogged, and terribly tortured. In prison she was swallowed by the dragon; and when she triumphed over the dragon, the devil confronted her again, this time in the form of a sympathetic man who told her that she had suffered too much:

But she seized his hair, hurled him to the ground, and placing her foot on his head, exclaimed:

“Tremble, great enemy. You now lie under the foot of a woman.”³⁰

She was burned, torches applied to various parts of her body, but she acted as if she felt no pain. She was killed by decapitation.

The legends of both saints were well known in Joan's time and environment, common stories for everyone, not arcane anecdotes for the educated. The narrative details were so familiar that an evil and stupid person was even referred to, in the common parlance, as an "Olybrius." Women were named after these saints and celebrated name days. These saints were figures of mass adoration in stories of adventure, romance, and heroism. There was an elaborate and epic imagery in the churches to communicate visually the drama and scale of their bravery and martyrdom. The artifacts and paintings in the churches told the stories of the saints and their heroism and suffering in dramatic, graphic pictures; a bold, articulate, mesmerizing iconography not rivaled for effect until the invention of the wide screen in cinema. St. Catherine was pictured with the wheel named after her, St. Margaret with a dragon, both with swords. They were shown with swords because they had been decapitated, but the abridgement of the narrative into a martial image conveyed militance, not just martyrdom. Each faced what amounted to a state-waged war against her person: the whole power of the state—military, physical, sadistic—arrayed against her will and her resistance and the limits of a body fragile because human. This goes beyond the timorous ambition of today: a woman fights off a rapist. Each of these women fought off a rapist who used the apparatus of the state—prison and torture—to destroy her as if she were an enemy nation. Each refused the male appropriation of her body for sex, the right to which is a basic premise of male domination; each refused a man in whom male power and state power were united, a prototype for male power over women; and each viewed the integrity of her physical body as synonymous with the purity of her faith, her purpose, her self-determination, her

honor. This was not a puerile virginity defined by fear or effeminacy. This was a rebel virginity harmonious with the deepest values of resistance to any political despotism.

Joan identified deeply with these women; indeed, her love for these saints is her richest adult experience of sisterhood or woman-identification. They were her main voices and radiances. They were sometimes tangible presences to her, so that she kissed and touched and held them:

Asked if she had ever kissed or embraced Saint Catherine or Saint Margaret,

She said she had embraced them both.

Asked whether they smelt pleasant,

She replied: "Assuredly they did so."

Asked whether in embracing them she felt warmth or anything else,

She said she could not embrace them without feeling and touching them.

Asked what part she embraced, whether the upper or lower,

She answered: "It is more fitting to embrace them above rather than below."³¹

In Joan's society, there was a widespread belief in the reality of such visitations. The Inquisitors were not asking: is she crazy? On the contrary, they were asking: was it the Devil? In asking about the smell of the saints, for instance, they were most probably looking for evidence of a sulphur smell associated with the devil. These saints were real to Joan; and had Joan not been a political outlaw—had Joan been a political ally of the Inquisition—they might have been both real and good to the Church, as later they became when she herself was sainted. In the years

of her victories, Catherine and Margaret told her what to do. In the years of her defeats and imprisonment, they were her consolation. Either they came to her literally, sent by God, as she said; or she had magnificently internalized them, surpassing them in ambition, in the reach of her challenge, in the complexity of her resistance, and in the original and resourceful strategies she created for putting herself beyond the reach of the male sexual desire that annihilated them. She learned from them the way a genius learns: she did not repeat them in form or in content; she invented new form, new content, a revolutionary resistance. Joan did not die because men desired her; but because she refused the status, including the outward trappings (female clothing), of one who could be so desired at all. Virginity was one dimension of her overall strategy, one aspect of her rebellion; and, interestingly, her refusal to have sex with a man was not a dogmatic or ideological one. As Marina Warner points out in her book on Joan, the name Joan called herself and by which she was widely known, *La Pucelle*, “denotes a time of passage, not a permanent condition.”³² Her own testimony at her trial seems to confirm this nuance:

Asked whether it had been revealed to her that if she lost her virginity she would lose her good fortune, and that her voices would come no more to her.

She said: That has not been revealed to me.

Asked whether she believes that if she were married the voices would come to her,

She answered: I do not know; and I wait upon Our Lord.³³

Had Joan simply learned a Church precept by rote or had she wanted to conform to a theological code of sexual purity, she

would have held virginity to be a sacred state of being, one that would ennoble her for the duration of her life, a passive state intrinsically holy and magical with God's blessings. In her society, virginity was "an ideal wreathed by the finest poetry and exalted in beautiful Latin hymns and conventual chants."³⁴ It was a common belief cited as fact by Church authorities with whom she came into contact that "God had revealed to virgins . . . that which He had kept hidden from men."³⁵ Instead for Joan—and Catherine and Margaret—virginity was an active element of a self-determined integrity, an existential independence, affirmed in choice and faith from minute to minute; not a retreat from life but an active engagement with it; dangerous and confrontational because it repudiated rather than endorsed male power over women. For all three women, virginity was "a passage, not a permanent condition," the precondition for a precocious, tragic passage to death. As rebellion, virginity amounted to a capital crime. No woman, however, had ever rebelled the way Joan of Arc, virgin, rebelled.

Because she found a way to bypass male desire, Joan's story illuminates and clarifies to what degree male desire determines a woman's possibilities in life: how far, how fast, where, when, and how she can move; by what means; what activities she can engage in; how circumscribed her physical freedom is; the total subjugation of her physical form and freedom to what men want from her.

Joan, unlike Catherine and Margaret, lived in a Christian world: all the soldiers, English, Burgundian, and French, were Christians. Virgins were supposed to be venerated by Christians; and certainly, Christian virgins were not supposed to be raped. More than law, ecclesiastic or secular, magic backed up the prohibition: God and all the angels and saints were on the

side of the virgin; and so, of course, was Mary with her great and sacred power. Maxentius and Olybrius did not have to reckon with the divine significance of virginity; but Christian soldiers did. And there was an aura of magic created by the gossip and legend around the persona of Joan herself, a deviant virgin in that she was a soldier and a deviant soldier in that she was a woman. Virgin and soldier: she was dangerous in both regards. A man who wanted to fuck her might be killed: whether by magic or in combat. She was not the usual easy pickings. The stories about her insisted on her vocation as a soldier but emphasized the lethal magic of her virginity. For instance, once she was saluted by a soldier who recognized her as *La Pucelle*. He bragged to a companion: "If I could only get hold of her for a night, by God, she wouldn't be a virgin much longer." Joan heard and answered: "You mock God and yet you shall soon die."³⁶ In less than an hour, the soldier drowned.

The soldier understood that Joan was genitally female and therefore socially arrogant in her chastity; he wanted to fuck her to bring her down, put her in her place, use her for what she was. His comprehension of her status was appropriately metaphysical. She is; therefore she is female, carnal, accessible. This is the underlying a priori reality of male supremacy; but it is overladen with ideology and a baroque psychology of male desire. Male desire is presented as a response to female beauty. It is dogmatically maintained, in the ideology, that men fuck women because the women attract, are sensual, are pretty, have some dimension of beauty or grace, however lowdown or elegant, that brings on desire. The ravaged junkie-prostitutes on our contemporary streets who quantitatively do the elephant's share of the fucking in this society or the toothless bawds of history who got fucked more than the elegant ladies by all

accounts are happily invisible in the ideological representations of how, why, when, and under what circumstances men fuck. The ideology allows for the fanciful development of a psychology of personal desire: the man is complex and interesting, lured as a unique individual by various manifestations of beauty in women. But as Lenny Bruce noted: "You put guys on a desert island and they'll do it to mud."³⁷ Men dignify themselves by insisting on a correspondence between fucking and beauty, but there is none (see Baudelaire); men fuck female in the metaphysical sense. Because male ideology has the authority of truth, male desire is taken as a real recognition of or measure of female beauty, even though male desire in reality is a sexual recognition of female as female, fucking the empirical proof that *she is*, therefore he can use her. According to the ideology, then, where there is no desire, there is no beauty. Thus, Bernard Shaw can write of Joan:

any book about Joan which begins by describing her as a beauty may be at once classified as a romance. Not one of Joan's comrades, in village, court, or camp, even when they were straining themselves to please the king by praising her, ever claimed that she was pretty. All the men who alluded to the matter declared most emphatically that she was unattractive to a degree that seemed to them miraculous, considering that she was in the bloom of youth, and neither ugly, awkward, deformed, nor unpleasant in her person.³⁸

But this is not what the men said. Joan lived in an all-male military society. She slept with her fellow soldiers, "all in the straw together."³⁹ Some said "that they had never felt desire for her, that is to say that sometimes they had the carnal desire for her

(*ils en avaient volonté charnel*), however never dared give way to it, and they believed that it was not possible to try it . . . ⁷⁴⁰ Sometimes they talked about sex among themselves and got excited, but when they saw her and she approached, "they could no longer talk of such things and abruptly ceased their carnal transports."⁷⁴¹ Questioned by one Gobert Thibault, the soldiers who slept with Joan said "that they had never felt carnal desire at the moment of seeing her."⁷⁴² And the Duke of Alençon said: "Sometimes in the army I lay down to sleep with Joan and the soldiers, all in the straw together (*à la paillade*), and sometimes I saw Joan prepare for the night and sometimes I looked at her breasts which were beautiful, and yet I never had carnal desire for her."⁷⁴³

Two themes are distinct: there was no carnal desire felt, even in the presence of a beauty female by definition—her beautiful bare breasts; or, there was a fear of failure, a conviction that "it was not possible to try it." This brings with it the sense that it was physically impossible to do it; her body was impregnable. Her physical presence caused a paralysis of desire or it caused fear, perhaps of impotence or castration or punishment—"it was not possible to *try* it." [italics mine] Living among men, sleeping "all in the straw together," seen bare-breasted, Joan accomplished an escape from the female condition more miraculous than any military victory: she had complete physical freedom, especially freedom of movement—on the earth, outside a domicile, among men. She had that freedom because men felt no desire for her or believed that "it was not possible to try it." She made an empirically successful escape from a metaphysical definition of female that is socially real, socially absolute, and intrinsically coercive. She did not have to run the gauntlet of male desire; and so she

was free, a rare and remarkable quality and kind of freedom—commonplace for men, virtually unattainable for women. She had contempt for the women who followed the soldiers as consorts or prostitutes. She expressed this contempt in outright physical aggression against the women—physically chasing them away from the soldiers and, on at least one occasion, drawing a sword on a woman who was, of course, unarmed. These women were object lessons, the living embodiments of what a fall from grace, from her exempt status, would mean, their lives bounded on every side by the constraining domination of sexed men. Joan chose the status of the men because freedom was with them; in choosing that status, that company, she was bound to despise the women. She also hated swearing, the discourse that most rubbed in her face the sheer stigma of being female—the stigma associated with the physiology of being a woman, the functions of being a woman, the common perceptions of what a woman is and what a woman is worth. The soldiers did not swear around her because her disapproval was so visceral, so intense, so absolute. These real and deep antipathies—toward loose women and dirty words—meant to the Christians who rehabilitated her that she had been pure and good in the moralistic sense; these were the most easily assimilable of her stratagems for escaping definition as a female. Her intractable male identification, expressed not in the usual female submission to the male but in an attempted coequal bonding with him, was central to her quest for freedom. Under patriarchy, men have freedom because they are men. To want freedom is to want not only what men have but also what men are. This is male identification as militance, not feminine submission; it is deviant, complex. One wants what men have—especially physical freedom (freedom of

movement, freedom from physical domination); and to have what men have one must be what men are. Joan's unselfconscious and unrepentant assumption of a male role (both martial and heroic) was the crime against male supremacy that cost her her life. She was killed for the freedom she took, the status she usurped, her defiance of the determinism of gender. By repudiating her female status, she repudiated a life of being held hostage by male sexual desire. She became an exile from gender with a male vocation and male clothes, the clothing especially an outrage and eventually a capital crime.

Essentially seen as a transvestite by scholars and artists who came after her and took her as a subject, Joan's defiance, her rebellion, is trivialized as a sexual kink, more style than substance, at most an interesting wrinkle in a psychosexual tragedy of a girl who wanted to be a boy and came to a bad end. Joan's instability, it is suggested, was so great that she committed suicide rather than wear women's clothes; she, the Inquisition's victim, becomes her own executioner. Romantics, especially the filmmakers, seem to see the male clothing as an esthetic choice, the beauty of her androgyny highlighted by the graceful boylike look. No woman can want freedom and have it dignified. The clothes made her life of high adventure and martial brilliance possible; she needed them, a sword, a horse, a banner, a king, a cause, all of which she got with an intransigence that is the mark of genius. The male clothing—the signifier and the enabler, signifying rebellion, enabling action—became the emblem of her distinct integrity for those who hated her.

Her male clothing was both symbolic and functional. It was appropriate clothing for her movement and praxis. It protected her bodily privacy even as it declared it. Her body was closed off and covered; between her legs was inaccessible. In armor,

which she wore as men did, she was doubly inaccessible, closed off: genitally private. The clothes characterized her virginity as militant: hostile to men who would want her for sex and hostile to female status altogether. The Inquisition did not honor Joan's virginity: it was barely mentioned at her trial, except by her. The Inquisition did not accept Joan's virginity as evidence of her love of God as it would indisputably accept virginity in feminine dress. Instead, her physical integrity emphasized by these clothes repelled these real Christian men—not soldiers but priests and judges in flowing robes, long dresses. Though Joan was examined while held captive by the Burgundians to see whether she was a virgin, the subject of virginity was avoided by the Inquisitors. A virgin could not make a pact with the devil; but Joan would be convicted as a witch. Her male clothing became the focus of their sexual obsession with her: ridding her of it became synonymous with breaking her literally and metaphorically; making her female-submissive. In her recantation, she was forced to accuse herself of wearing “[c]lothes dissolute, mis-shapen and indecent, against natural decency.”⁴⁴ Jean Massieu, who read her recantation aloud to her before she signed it, recalled that “it noted that in the future she would no longer carry arms nor wear man's clothes, nor shorn hair . . .”⁴⁵

Indeed, it is unlikely that Joan was physically a virgin because of the extreme athleticism of her soldiering. It is known that she never menstruated, probably for the same reason (Marina Warner suggests anorexia nervosa as the reason; Joan's physical strength and her willingness to wear heavy, bulky armor, in my opinion, make this impossible). The examination, manual and visual by women, would be unlikely to discern the presence or absence of the hymen. The women as-

certained that Joan was a virgin because they ascertained that she was who she said she was, Joan the Maid, sent by God to help her king, a soldier; clearly not a whore who ran with soldiers. The Inquisition ignored the whole issue of virginity anyway: the male clothes were her sexual crime; and the Inquisition always nailed a woman for her sexual crime. There was a place for Joan in the abstract theory of Church orthodoxy. St. Ambrose had written:

She who does not believe is a woman, and should be designated with the name of her sex, whereas she who believes progresses to perfect manhood, to the measure of the adulthood of Christ.⁴⁶

And St. Jerome, a writer on virginity as well as gender, promised that when a woman

wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be a woman and will be called a man.⁴⁷

But the Inquisitors were empiricists with keen sexual intuition. When women rebelled against the Church through sex, the Inquisition killed them for that. When this one woman rebelled through dress, the Inquisition killed her for that. Virginity could not buy her her life, because the issue was not ever—and is not now—to have sex or not to have sex; the issue was compliance with inferior status. The biological base of male supremacy appeared to be threatened by Joan's authenticity, the brilliance of what had to be a masquerade, a trick, the work of the devil; and that biological base, once threatened, had to be purified—it could not be subject to modification or reform or

exception. Joan's intransigence confirmed the Inquisition in its perception that the male clothes were central to the vitality of her persona and her resistance:

Asked whether her saying that she would take a woman's dress if they would let her go, was pleasing to God,

She answered that if they let her go in a woman's dress, she would at once put on man's dress and do as Our Lord commanded her. She has said this before. And she would not for anything take the oath that she would not take up arms or wear male dress to do Our Lord's will.⁴⁸

She would not give over her direct relationship with God to the priests; she would not give over her direct relationship with God's will to the Church; she would not give over her private conscience to Church policy or Church practice or Church politics. Bernard Shaw writes of her "unconscious Protestantism."⁴⁹ But her rebellion was simpler and deeper than Luther's because the rights she demanded—rights of privacy over her conscience and her relationship to God—were rooted in a right to physical privacy that was fundamental but had not yet been claimed by any woman, the right to physical privacy being essential to personal freedom and self-determination. No woman had this right absolutely. It was a contingent right, dependent at best on conforming to the male-determined meaning of being a virgin and simultaneously not running into a rapist: the pedestal was a cage; male sexual desire was still a gauntlet. This right of physical privacy was never articulated as a right, and for women it barely existed as a possibility: how did Joan even imagine it, let alone bring it into physical existence for herself for so long? Without a right to physical privacy,

there could be no private conscience, no personal relationship to God, no way of life that was self-chosen, self-actualized, self-sustained. Joan died for this right of physical privacy from which other rights could be derived, without which other rights were meaningless—and in this sense, she died for and in behalf of all women.

The male clothing signified this right both for her and for the Inquisitors. The Inquisitors wanted her stripped, violated, submissive; out of her male clothes, the equivalent of naked, fragile, accessible, female. She asked that if they found her guilty they allow her to wear a long dress and hood to her execution: “Asked why, since she has said that she wears man’s dress by God’s command, she asks a woman’s dress to wear in her last hours, She answered: ‘It suffices that it be long.’”⁵⁰ Anticipating the humiliation of public exposure, the vulnerability, the shame, she wants the privacy of a body clothed from head to toe. Female clothing or not, it was privacy she wanted.

Repeatedly, she asks the Inquisitors to let her hear Mass, and they try to get her to say that, in exchange, she will give up male clothes. She capitulates this far: “Make me a long dress, right down to the ground, without a train, and give it to me to go to Mass, and then when I come back I will put on the clothes I now have.”⁵¹ “Without a train” means without femininity—female ornamentation licensing invasion by look, by touch, in thought. She did not want the clothes of sex; she wanted clothing that was a barrier to invasion by look, by touch, in thought.

After her recantation, Joan was returned to her prison cell dressed female, and she was put back in chains. English soldiers, male, stayed in the cell day and night to guard her. Her virginity, if it had any meaning, was undoubtedly now seen as

“the key to her strength and power; if she were robbed of it, she would be disarmed, the spell would be broken, she would sink to the common level of women.”⁵² She no longer had the power of a witch, having recanted; and she was no longer a soldier, dressed female. Chained and female, the men were no longer afraid of her; and it was a rape, or an attempted rape, or a gang-rape, that caused her to resume male clothing and go to her death:

After she had renounced and abjured and resumed man’s clothing, I and several others were present when Joan excused herself for having again put on man’s clothes, saying and affirming publicly that the English had had much wrong and violence done to her in prison when she was dressed in woman’s clothes. And in fact I saw her tearful, her face covered with tears, disfigured and outraged . . . ⁵³

One writer said that she had been “beaten bloody,”⁵⁴ and her confessor “heard it from Joan’s own lips that a great English lord entered her prison and tried to take her by force. That was the cause, she said, of her resuming man’s clothes.”⁵⁵ The English lord, said Michelet, “had bravely attempted to rape a girl in chains; and when he did not succeed, he had showered her with blows.”⁵⁶ She described “warders who are always throwing themselves on me trying to violate me.”⁵⁷ And Pierre Cusquel, a mason, who had talked with Joan twice, claimed that

she had not worn and was not wearing this male attire excepting in order not to give herself to the soldiers with whom she was. Once, in the prison, I asked her why she was wearing this male attire and that was what she answered me.⁵⁸

She was attacked and beaten, at least once. It is inconceivable that she was not raped during the period she was in female clothing if the men, or a man, an English lord, determined that she would be raped. She was chained, no longer physically strong; no longer a witch, no longer a soldier; dressed female. They were armed. Any woman who can be badly beaten can be raped. She was not the great transvestite, unable to bear being out of male clothing for even a few days. She was a woman who was raped and beaten and did not care if she died—that indifference a consequence of rape, not transvestism. She put on male clothes again to protect her body, in shock, perhaps wanting to die but more likely not understanding the imminent danger of wearing them, not caring when told (and clearly, as has often been charged, set up by the soldiers or Inquisitors who left the male clothing in the cell for her). She never admitted to being raped—admitting to an attempt would be humiliation enough and reason enough to help her if her judges ever intended to—and being a virgin was still the only chance she had for mercy. Once raped, she was nothing, no one, so low, “the common level of women,” precisely what the Inquisition wanted. After her heroic escape from being female, she was made twice female: raped and burned. The Inquisition, sentencing her to death for putting on male clothes again, said: “time and again you have relapsed, as a dog that returns to its vomit, as We do state with great sorrow.”⁵⁹ She had heard her voices again too at that same time, St. Catherine and St. Margaret, both martyred for resisting rape. The Inquisition deemed the voices demonic and declared Joan “a heretic,” “an infected limb.”⁶⁰ She died fast, and when she was dead and her clothes had been burned away, “the fire was raked back, and her naked body shown to all the people and all the secrets that

could or should belong to a woman, to take away any doubts from people's minds . . . ”⁶¹ After death, then, she became female a third time: her naked body, including her genitals, shown to all the people. The fire was relit, and she was “soon burned, both flesh and bone reduced to ashes.”⁶²

Joan was burned in Rouen in 1431, in part because she heard voices and saw lights; the Inquisition repeatedly interrogated her on these phenomena and condemned her for them. A mere 412 years later, at the age of 22, three years older than Joan had been when she died, on his way home to Rouen, another person saw lights and heard voices:

Golden lights, blazing with indescribable intensity, began to flash before his left eye, and his whole brain seemed simultaneously to be bursting with a million multicoloured visions and scenes . . . ⁶³

The drama, the magnitude of the event, suggests a male ego at the center of the experience. There is nothing here so pedantic as learning how to get a sword or instructions on being pious, nor so demanding of discipline and responsibility as making war or crowning a king. Instead, there is sensation, feeling for its own sake, the intensity of a sublime, private ordeal. In Rouen, at his home, he experienced:

First the glow, the sounds; then terror, caused by the feeling of the ebbing away of his personality and the approach of annihilation; then the million thoughts, images, fantastic combinations of every kind crowding at once into his brain like blazing rockets in a flood of fireworks. He himself later described his

visions as “seminal losses from the pictorial faculty of the imagination,” or as combinations of “Saint Theresa, Hoffman, and Edgar Poe.”⁶⁴

He was not burned alive, although his father, a doctor, trying to treat him, did accidentally pour some hot water on his hand. Instead, he was put to bed, told to rest, not to get excited, not to consume coffee or wine or meat, not to smoke, and “to lead a perfectly quiet life . . . ”⁶⁵ He was allowed to leave the university where he was studying law, which he hated; to retire to his family’s country estate, which he rarely thereafter left; and to write, painstakingly, books. From his affluent repose, he wrote what a current paperback edition of his masterwork hails as “the greatest portrait ever written of a woman’s soul in revolt against conventional society.”⁶⁶ The book is not about Joan of Arc. It is, instead and on the contrary, about Emma Bovary, a petite bourgeois whose great act of rebellion is to commit adultery. With this woman, called “my little lady”⁶⁷ by her creator, the modern era begins: the era of the petite bourgeoisie seeking freedom. Female freedom is defined strictly in terms of committing forbidden sexual acts. Female heroism is in getting fucked and wanting it. Female equality means that one experiences real sexual passion—driven to it, not faking. There is an equation between appetite and freedom, especially promiscuity (as one form of appetite) and freedom. A romantic distinctly not in the traveling, lyric tradition of Shelley or Byron, indeed, a female romantic with lightness in the head and fragmented fantasies feverish on the brain, “she had a cult for Mary Stuart and enthusiastic veneration for illustrious or unhappy women . . . who stood out to her like comets in the dark immensity of heaven . . . ”⁶⁸ For Emma, Joan was such a comet, a figure of

fantasy, in the ether, not ever having lived on earth in the framework of real human possibility. Emma's mind, murky with religious and romantic fantasy, wanted "the rare ideal of pale lives, never attained by mediocre hearts."⁶⁹ In her sentimentality, "she loved the sick lamb, the sacred heart pierced with sharp arrows, or the poor Jesus sinking beneath the cross he carries";⁷⁰ and in her effete impotence, "[s]he tried, by way of mortification, to eat nothing a whole day. She puzzled her head to find some vow to fulfill."⁷¹ Alternately agitated and bored, having a mind filled with fantasies rather than ideas or possibilities, having no purpose or commitment, having no action, no vocation, only the boring chores and obligations of domesticity, too self-involved to find either passion or emotion in commonplace human relations, including motherhood, she is incapable—to use the language of Iris Murdoch—of moral or artistic excellence, defeated because she is immersed in personal fantasy, "the chief enemy of excellence," "the tissue of self-aggrandizing and consoling wishes and dreams which prevents one from seeing what is outside one."⁷² Murdoch illustrates the distinction between fantasy and seeing with this example:

Rilke said of Cezanne that he did not paint "I like it," he painted "There it is."⁷³

This, she concludes, "is not easy, and requires, in art or morals, a discipline."⁷⁴

Preoccupied with fantasy, Emma does not see or experience the world outside herself except as a deprivation of attention from her inner fog, and so she remains essentially untouched—by the husband who fucks her and by human possibility in the

wider world of real events. Virginity is redefined through her, given a modern meaning: a woman untouched is a woman who has not yet felt sexual desire enough to be made sick by it, experienced sexual passion enough to crave it, and broken rules in order to be carnal; a woman fucked by her husband but feeling nothing, or not enough, no lust, no romance, no brilliance of sensation, is still a woman untouched. This new virginity of body and soul survives marriage, and marriage itself generates new, incoherent fantasies of romantic or sexual grandeur: "Domestic mediocrity drove her to lewd fancies, marriage tenderness to adulterous desires."⁷⁵ There is no freedom, no heroism, no ambition, no equality, outside the domain of sex experienced as carnal passion and also as the breaking of a rule. Danger is in the extremity of feeling and the risk of flouting convention; and the danger verifies the authenticity of the event, hidden from history yet having the significance of a male act of freedom inside history. The large, brave world of Joan becomes the tiny, suffocating world of Emma: and in it we still live. The old virginity—with its real potential for freedom and self-determination—is transformed into the new virginity—listless, dissatisfied ennui until awakened by the adventure of male sexual domination: combat on the world's tiniest battlefield. It took Freud to call the refusal to fight on that little battlefield "repression" and to name the ambition to fight on the large one "penis envy." The cell door closed behind us, and the key turned in the lock.

The picture of Emma is of a woman unfulfilled: "she had at the corners of her mouth that immobile contraction that puckers the faces of old maids, and those of men whose ambition has failed."⁷⁶ Charles, her husband, had been happy after the wedding night, demonstrative, calling her endearing names:

“It was he who might rather have been taken for the virgin of the evening before, whilst the bride gave no sign that revealed anything.”⁷⁷ Emma tried to find the passions and satisfactions she had read about in books—the meaning of the words “*felicity, passion, rapture*”⁷⁸—but instead intercourse was “one habit among other habits, and, like a dessert, looked forward to after the monotony of dinner.”⁷⁹ But after her first adultery, “[n]ever had her eyes been so large, so black, of so profound a depth.”⁸⁰ She had entered a new world: “She was entering upon marvels where all would be passion, ecstasy, delirium.”⁸¹ She felt the sensation she had dreamed of: “The cloth of her habit caught against the velvet of his coat. She threw back her white neck, swelling with a sigh, and faltering, in tears, with a long shudder and hiding her face, she gave herself up to him.”⁸² She had lusted in her heart before, for Leon whom she would have later; but Rodolphe was the first lover, the first man who had made her feel passion. He enjoyed her, then gradually became indifferent to her. To keep his attention—to get the sensation, like a junkie needing dope—she became more and more submissive: “she redoubled in tenderness, and Rodolphe concealed his indifference less and less.”⁸³ She felt torn, partly regretting the affair because of the pain, partly wanting “to enjoy him the more.”⁸⁴ She felt “humiliation . . . turning to rancour, tempered by their voluptuous pleasures.”⁸⁵ She experienced sexual submission: “He subjugated her; she almost feared him.”⁸⁶ Rodolphe knew how to use her: “He made of her something supple and corrupt . . . her soul sank into this drunkenness . . .”⁸⁷ She begged him to love her, to want her, to use her, to let her stay: “He had so often heard these things said . . . Emma was like all his mistresses; and the charm of novelty, gradually falling away like a garment, laid bare the eter-

nal monotony of passion that has always the same forms and the same language.”⁸⁸ Bored, he leaves her. She becomes sick, retreats again into a world of fantasy, wants to die, to go to heaven, be a saint, until Leon returns to Rouen and they have an affair there. The affair is extravagant and she takes many risks, including using her household money to finance a hotel room and gifts for her lover. But he too eventually becomes bored with her: he “dozed to the sound of a love whose delicacies he no longer noted.”⁸⁹ And Emma “was as sick of him as he was weary with her. Emma found again in adultery all the platitudes of marriage.”⁹⁰ Still, she wanted the sex even more than she had before, the decadence of their mutual indifference increasing, as Rodolphe’s indifference had, her need:

Then, though she might feel humiliated at the baseness of such enjoyment, she clung to it from habit or from corruption, and each day she hungered [more] . . . ⁹¹

She is in debt, she has borrowed money, pawned and sold her possessions; she is threatened by creditors; she wants Leon to get her money and run away with her. Leon stands her up, abandoning her, and she is left in the middle of her own real life: her husband destitute because of the money she has taken from him and borrowed from others. She tries to borrow money from her old lover, Rodolphe, but he refuses her. And, in the end, she kills herself. She is not repressed. Instead, she is corrupt and impoverished and abandoned. She dies by her own hand, no fantasy left that is consoling. She has been fucked, she has wanted it, felt it, craved it, lost everything for it; and from it she has nothing, she is empty. The first lover costs her her virginity; that is gone once she can feel and desire and

pursue sex. The intercourse itself, the submission it engenders in her, the habit of being that it becomes, the need she has for the pleasure it gives her, changes her without giving her any capacity to see, to know, or to love. Fucking leads to the loss of illusion, especially the illusion that love, sex, and sensation are the same as freedom, as heroism. Emma's fantasies cannot stand up against the crushing reality of male sexual dominance: the fucking, the boredom, the abandonment. Emma's corruption is a descent into a sensuality that is greed. For her, for her lovers, pleasure is the exclusive goal of life and only pleasure is real or worthwhile. While still a virgin—married and fucked but still untouched in the carnal sense—Emma had only the impoverished inner life of fantasy. Then sensation consumed that inner life, meager as it was. She is left with nothing inside. Intercourse robs her of any privacy she has had, even privatized fantasy; and it robs her of all limits, social and ethical, in the real world. As Flaubert presents it, the corruption comes from the intercourse itself: what it means for her to want and to take sensation in sex with the sloppy self-indulgence of a drunk. This particular point is not about gender: it is not that her adultery has social consequences that are unfair because she is a woman. The men already embody the human consequences of this corruption. They are indifferent to human relations and incapable of empathy or understanding. The rest is gender. They have what Emma does not: each has an ego and lives in a wide world. Because they have the power that men have, they are able to take their pleasure where and when they find it, and each moves on when he is bored, no longer sufficiently amused. For her, each man is perhaps her only opportunity; she cannot make opportunities in her confined domesticity. To keep first the one, then the other, she will

go to any length; and the submission charges the sex with humiliation and the humiliation with sex. The boredom too is intrinsic to the sex. Inevitable and terrifying, the men become cruel in their indifference; and to have them she still submits. Having them means that sensation will prevail over her own blank, empty life. Her self-destruction, including her death, is the final reckoning for what she has become: not because she is an adulteress but because she has no integrity, she is nothing. The suicide is her recognition that she has hit bottom. The men, having the world, have a deeper bottom to hit.

Hitting bottom for Emma is classically female in form: the notary from whom she wants to borrow money will give it to her for sex. “I am to be pitied—not to be sold,”⁹² she tells him. Desperate for help, she finds Rodolphe, “not seeing that she was hastening to offer herself to that which a while ago had so angered her, not in the least conscious of her prostitution.”⁹³ Rock-bottom is having a social inferior want to buy her; and a social superior turn her down, for money and sex. Rock-bottom is the behavior of prostitution, with or without the self-knowledge. Rock-bottom is being vulnerable enough to have a moneylender make the demand with death the only alternative to meeting it. A colleague of her husband wants the gravestone to read *Sta viator* (“Rest, traveler”); but eventually he settles on *Amabilen conjugem calcas* (“Tread upon a loving wife”). Indeed, she had been restless, never loving. As a young married woman

she turned despairing eyes upon the solitude of her life, seeking afar off some white sail in the mists of the horizon. She did not know what this chance would be, what wind would bring it her, towards what shore it would drive her . . . ⁹⁴

Romance was her suicidal substitute for action; fantasy her suicidal substitute for a real world, a wide world. And intercourse was her suicidal substitute for freedom.

For her creator, Gustave Flaubert, intercourse had been “always secondary.”⁹⁵ He held back, in brothels picking the ugliest prostitute and fucking her without taking his cigar out of his mouth; and to Louise Colet, his lover, he explained:

At times I have wanted to give pleasure to a woman, but the idea of the strange spectacle I should present at the moment of doing so made me laugh so much that all my desire melted under the fire of an inner irony, which sang a hymn of mockery and derision within me.⁹⁶

The intercourse in his novel, however, did involve him. In a letter to Louise Colet, he wrote:

I am in full fornication, in the very midst of it: my lovers are sweating and gasping. This has been one of the rare days of my life passed completely in illusion, from beginning to end. . . . Now I have great pains in my knees, in my back, and in my head. I feel a like man who has been fucking too much (forgive the expression)—a kind of rapturous lassitude.⁹⁷

He did not commit suicide, nor was he burned. He was charged with obscenity on the publication of *Madame Bovary* and later acquitted. His own virginity—the literal kind—was lost when the young master, nearly fifteen, forced himself on one of his mother’s maids. He experienced disgust and disappointment. There is no known record of what she experienced. Writing touched him; not much else did. As he wrote

Louise Colet, who did not have the good sense to take it personally:

Brothels provide condoms as protection against catching the pox from infected vaginas. Let us always have a vast condom within us to protect the health of our soul amid the filth into which it is plunged.⁹⁸

His privacy—“a vast condom”—was created by his will and his wealth, premised on the *a priori* reality of his physical freedom as a man; his fantasies were elevated to art; his visions were treated with bed rest. Emma, he had written somewhere after Rodolphe but before Leon, “now knew the smallness of the passions that art exaggerated.”⁹⁹ So did he, choosing art over sex, “liberty in a world of fictions.”¹⁰⁰ He may have found distraction or the pleasures of male dominance in intercourse, but he found his freedom elsewhere.

For D. H. Lawrence, with whom we are doomed to be contemporaneous even though he was born in 1885, virginity was “her perfect tenderness in the body.”¹⁰¹ André Brink, who writes in behalf of freedom in South Africa, imagines that in losing this “perfect tenderness” a woman wants to be hurt, to bleed:

. . . I tried to imagine how you would hurt me and cause me to bleed. I wanted to bleed, mulberry blood for you, for my own sake too: to know what it meant to be a woman, to be transformed into a person by you . . . It wasn't even painful, with barely a show of blood.

“Is that all?” I asked.¹⁰²

Sophie Tolstoy, having been “transformed into a person” already, discovered another meaning in the word:

To-day I woke up for the first time with a sudden awareness of the beauty of nature; and my feeling was *virginal*—I mean, without associations, without the recollection of anyone *through* whom I might have loved the beautiful nature of this countryside in the past. Some time ago I worked out a whole theory of the *virginal* attitude to *religion, art, and nature*. *Religion* is pure and virginal when it is not connected with all those Fathers . . . but connects my heart with God alone.¹⁰³

Significantly, she found art virginal “when you love it for its own sake and without reference to the artist . . . ”¹⁰⁴ Experience unmediated by male ego or interpretation is her idea of virginity. In the male frame, virginity is a state of passive waiting or vulnerability; it precedes and is antithetical to wholeness, to a woman existing in a way that counts; she counts when the man, through sex, brings her to life. In the woman’s frame, virginity is a fuller experience of selfhood and identity. In the male frame, virginity is virtually synonymous with ignorance; in the woman’s frame, it is recovery of the capacity to know by direct experience of the world. Parodying the male frame, Italo Calvino wrote:

We country girls, however noble, have always led retired lives in remote castles and convents. Apart from religious ceremonies, triduums, novenas, gardening, vintaging, whippings, slavery, incest, fires, hangings, invasion, sacking, rape and pestilence, we have no experience. What can a poor nun know of the world?¹⁰⁵

We live in the male frame; pinned there. Virginity is ignorance; and knowledge is being transformed by knowledge of a man, not just penetrated, the literal event. Virginity is in not yet having been subsumed: one's being is still intact, penetrated or not.

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* was written in 1897. D. H. Lawrence was still in adolescence and the world unknowingly tottered between the Victorian Age and the advent of Lady Chatterley. *Dracula* was a bridge between the two eras, a mediocre book but a surpassingly great myth, a parable of lust and death that buried the Victorians and let us children of the night rise from their graves.

In *Dracula*, there are two virgins, Lucy and Mina. The young men who are their suitors may well be virgins too, but in human society men are rarely ontological virgins.

Lucy is the old-fashioned girl, surrounded by suitors, pretty, flirtatious, coy, ornamental; and Mina is the New Woman, a defender of women's equal capacities in partnership with men: she will learn to type (a man's job at the time, the typewriter considered heavy machinery) so that she can type her husband's notes and papers and be his equal partner in work. Her feminism is witty and cheeky. She writes in her diary:

Some of the "New Women" writers will some day start an idea that men and women should be allowed to see each other asleep before proposing or accepting. But I suppose the "New Woman" won't condescend in the future to accept; she will do the proposing herself. And a nice job she will make of it, too! There's some consolation in that.¹⁰⁶

Modern versions of the story, especially films, concentrate on Mina; but the book concentrates on Lucy. She is the prototypical female with no ambition other than marriage. She has no ambition, no substance, except that she is female in the best sense: compliant, ignorant, a virgin picking a husband. She has three marriage proposals, and all three men are in love with her: they are not looking for equal partners; they feel sexual desire for her. She feels sexual desire for Arthur, so she chooses him and rejects the others. Dracula the vampire has begun his seduction of her; but she stays physically a virgin in the conventional sense past her death. The place of sex is moved to the throat; and the meaning of sex is in draining her body of all its blood. Her virginity is a "perfect tenderness in the body," and the spilling of her blood is not a ritual of the first time but of every time. A literal virgin, and certainly ignorant, she knows nothing and wills nothing until after she herself appears to be dead and has become a sexual predator: then she has an appetite for blood, an appetite for life, never mediated or more than temporarily sated. In life, still human, her purity is suspect despite her virginity. Her choice of the suitor for whom she has sexual desire suggests already that she is not entirely good, despite the endless sighs of characters remarking on how good Lucy is. During her long affair with Dracula, when he comes and drinks her blood and she submits and is mesmerized and presumably feels ecstasy, her blood is replenished by those trying to save her life. Arthur is away; and so others give blood—her former suitors and Professor Van Helsing, the expert on vampires who is trying to outwit the vampire. When Arthur gives blood, he claims that the transfer of blood means that they are really married. The other men determine not to tell him that they too have been married to Lucy in the same way.

Arthur believed that “the transfusion of his blood to her veins had made her truly his bride.”¹⁰⁷ By this standard, Lucy had been had and had and had: by all the men and Dracula, who as part of the ritual of conversion had his victim drink his blood, thus becoming an eternal predator.

Once decapitated with a stake in her heart, no longer a vampire, Lucy was “as we had seen her in life, with her face of unequalled sweetness and purity.”¹⁰⁸ Her virginity is returned to her; and it is Arthur who has accomplished this: “It made me shudder to think of so mutilating the body of the woman whom I had loved. And yet the feeling was not so strong as I had expected.”¹⁰⁹

Lucy’s virginity brings her many accolades but no strength or power or protection. Over the great stretch of the book, her blood is slowly drained out of her body—and her dying is watched by the men as if it were prolonged foreplay—each degree of her paleness is an event—Dracula takes the blood from her and they put theirs into her—she is close to death but not yet dead—more beautiful when awake and then, as she advances toward what should be death, more beautiful when she sleeps and looks dead.

Mina is a physical virgin as the story opens, engaged to Jonathan, who is away on business, trapped actually in Dracula’s castle in Transylvania. Set upon by female vampires, left to them by Dracula, Jonathan escapes and ends up in a hospital suffering from violent brain fever. Mina leaves Lucy, who is already on the decline (Dracula has made his way from Transylvania to England in the meantime), and goes to Jonathan in the hospital, where they are married.

She is a partner, a wife in a posture of attempted equality; and that is the form of her continuing virginity—she is untouched

by sex in that she is not carnal, not greedy for sex or sensually submissive. Her integrity is intact. She has self-respect and compassion. She has learned typing and shorthand to participate in her husband's work; she memorizes the train schedules to help him, to expedite his way. She is active, always anticipating his needs but without servility; she regards herself as one who works with him; she wants to participate in a life of the mind and a life of work, not leisure. She has the status of a virgin because of her relative equality with her husband in marriage: she is not possessed, tamed, debased, brought down by sex; she is untouched. She proves, according to Van Helsing, an old-fashioned moralist, "that there are good women still left to make life happy—good women, whose lives and whose truths may make good lesson for the children that are to be."¹¹⁰ Van Helsing acknowledges "her great brain which is trained like a man's brain . . ." "¹¹¹ Yet, as the men try to find Dracula, they exclude Mina from their efforts. Hearing the story of Lucy's apparent death and real death, it is Mina who connects that train of events with Jonathan's experiences at Dracula's castle. Having provided this crucial information, she is then left out of all further discussions. She is socially defined as female by being segregated out of the search. This social definition of her as female isolates her from dialogue and knowledge; and it also makes her more physically vulnerable because she is physically alone. It genderizes her as marriage itself did not:

They all agreed that it was best that I should not be drawn further into this awful work, and I acquiesced. But to think that he keeps anything from me! And now I am crying like a silly fool, when I *know* it comes from my husband's great love and from the good, good wishes of those other strong men.¹¹²

She is second-class, is treated as second-class, recognizes it, and accepts it, all for the first time. Socially defined as female, she is vulnerable as a female.

The irony, of course, is delicious as Jonathan Harker gazes on his sleeping wife and congratulates himself on protecting her:

I came tiptoe into our own room, and found Mina asleep, breathing so softly that I had to put my ear down to hear it. She looks paler than usual. . . . I am truly thankful that she is to be left out of our future work, and even of our deliberations. It is too great a strain for a woman to bear.¹¹³

Looking paler than usual in this book advances the plot.

She has been made female and Dracula is already drinking her blood. Later he will taunt the men: “Your girls that you love are all mine already . . . ”¹¹⁴ He especially wants Mina because she is “their best-beloved one”; she will be his “bountiful wine-press for a while; and shall be later on my companion and my helper.”¹¹⁵ She, unlike Lucy, is able to be a partner: to Dracula as well as to Jonathan. It is an early rendering of feminist as sex object as long as the sex is predicated on the complete destruction of her integrity.

Dracula is a new narrative of intercourse and the phenomena associated with it: lust, seduction, penetration, possession, decadence and decay, death. With the creation of a new dimension of carnality for intercourse in literal cannibalism, virginity too takes on a new aspect. Being untouched by carnality now means any earthly existence in which sex is not predation and violence. Sex and slow murder become synonyms: a prescient heralding of the twentieth century three years before it began.

The sexual predator is murderous, a parasite that kills the host through sex, draining its body of blood; Dracula asleep “lay like a filthy leech, exhausted with his repletion.”¹¹⁶ The real sexuality—eternal, inescapable—is primitive and animal, killer-animal: “and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth.”¹¹⁷ The humans are passive, waiting, female. Even the approach of the vampire—in this instance, an anonymous female vampire setting upon Jonathan Harker when he is trapped in Dracula’s castle—is inexpressibly thrilling:

I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the super-sensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I closed my eyes in languorous ecstasy and waited—waited with beating heart.¹¹⁸

Mina’s first time with Dracula showed her reluctance, her only appearance of Victorianism—or is it resistance to rape? “I lay still and endured; that was all.”¹¹⁹ But soon after, with her husband asleep, Mina and Dracula couple right next to him:

With his [Dracula’s] left hand he held Mrs. Harker’s hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white night-dress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man’s bare chest which was shown by his torn-open dress.¹²⁰

The pull of Dracula’s sex is not possible to refuse; one becomes a carnivore; the sex is a permanent physiological and

spiritual transformation, through dying, then death, into eternal, absolute lust. The lust is bloodlust, sex as murder. Mina feels the pull, and she also fights back, knowing herself to be contaminated, “unclean.”¹²¹ Lucy, the compliant female, could never resist—not man, not beast. Her virginal beauty is her femininity in life; in apparent death, this beauty is intact. A worker in the funeral home comments that she ““makes a very beautiful corpse, sir. It’s quite a privilege to attend on her. It’s not too much to say that she will do credit to our establishment!”¹²² One former suitor notes that “[a]ll Lucy’s loveliness had come back to her in death . . . I could not believe my eyes that I was looking at a corpse.”¹²³ Buried, she begins her quest for blood, humans to feed on. She molests children. A newspaper reports on missing children who, when found, “have been slightly torn or wounded in the throat. The wounds seem such as might be made by a rat or a small dog . . . ”¹²⁴ The carnage of her sexuality transforms her; being sexed transforms her—“The sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness.”¹²⁵ Caught by the men at the throat of a child, feeding on it, it was Lucy—“but Lucy’s eyes unclean and full of hell-fire, instead of the pure, gentle orbs we knew.”¹²⁶ When they go to destroy her in her coffin they find her “like a nightmare of Lucy . . . the pointed teeth, the bloodstained, voluptuous mouth . . . the whole carnal and unspirited appearance, seeming like a devilish mockery of Lucy’s sweet purity.”¹²⁷ Her evil makes her horrible and her evil is sex: but all sex less cruel than this sex does not count as sensation or experience. Lucy’s virginity would not have changed with human marriage; even sexual submission or sensual greed on the human scale would not register as sex here. One is an innocent if sex is not murder.

In *Dracula*, vampirism is—to be pedestrian in the extreme—a metaphor for intercourse: the great appetite for using and being used; the annihilation of orgasm; the submission of the female to the great hunter; the driving obsessiveness of lust, which destroys both internal peace and any moral constraint; the commonplace victimization of the one taken; the great craving, never sated and cruelly impersonal. The act in blood is virtually a pun in metaphor on intercourse as the origin of life: reproduction; blood as nurture; the fetus feeding off the woman's blood in utero. And with the great wound, the vagina, moved to the throat, there is, like a shadow, the haunting resonance of the blood-soaked vagina, in menstruation, in childbirth; bleeding when a virgin and fucked. While alive the women are virgins in the long duration of the first fuck, the draining of their blood over time one long, lingering sex act of penetration and violation; after death, they are carnal, being truly sexed. The women are transformed into predators, great foul parasites; and short of that, they have not felt or known lust or had sex, been touched in a way that transforms being—they have not been fucked. As humans, they begin to learn sex in dying. And the men, the human suitors and husbands, cannot give the good fuck; instead, they are given a new kind of sex too, not the fuck but *watching*—watching the women die. And with the great wound, the vagina, moved to the throat, there is the harbinger of what has become a common practice of sexual assault now: throat rape, deep thrusting into the throat as if it were a female genital, a vagina, in the manner of the pornographic film *Deep Throat*. But *Dracula*, the book, the myth, goes beyond metaphor in its intuitive rendering of an oncoming century filled with sexual horror: the throat as a female genital; sex and death as synonyms; killing as a sex act; slow dying

as sensuality; men watching the slow dying, and the *watching* is sexual; mutilation of the female body as male heroism and adventure; callous, ruthless, predatory lust as the one-note meaning of sexual desire; intercourse itself needing blood, someone's, somewhere, to count as a sex act in a world excited by sadomasochism, bored by the dull thud thud of the literal fuck. The new virginity is emerging, a twentieth-century nightmare: no matter how much we have fucked, no matter with how many, no matter with what intensity or obsession or commitment or conviction (believing that sex is freedom) or passion or promiscuous abandon, no matter how often or where or when or how, we are virgins, innocents, knowing nothing, untouched, unless blood has been spilled—ours; not the blood of the first time; the blood of every time; this elegant bloodletting of sex a so-called freedom exercised in alienation, cruelty, and despair. Trivial and decadent; proud; foolish; liars; we are free.

OCCUPATION/COLLABORATION

Oh, God, who does not exist, you hate women, otherwise you'd have made them different. And Jesus, who snubbed your mother, you hate them more. Roaming around all that time with a bunch of men, fishing; and sermons-on-the-mount. Abandoning women. I thought of all the women who had it, and didn't even know when the big moment was, and others saying their rosary with the beads held over the side of the bed, and others saying, "Stop, stop, you dirty old dog," and others yelling desperately to be jacked right up to their middles, and it often leading to nothing, and them getting up out of bed and riding a poor door knob and kissing the wooden face of a door and urging with foul language, then crying, wiping the knob, and it all adding up to nothing either.

EDNA O'BRIEN

Girls in Their Married Bliss

THIS IS NIHILISM; OR THIS IS TRUTH. HE HAS TO PUSH in past boundaries. There is the outline of a body, distinct, separate, its integrity an illusion, a tragic deception, because unseen there is a slit between the legs, and he has to push into it. There is never a real privacy of the body that can coexist with intercourse: with being entered. The vagina itself is muscled and the muscles have to be pushed apart. The thrusting is persistent invasion. She is opened up, split down the center. She is occupied—physically, internally, in her privacy.

A human being has a body that is inviolate; and when it is violated, it is abused. A woman has a body that is penetrated in intercourse: permeable, its corporeal solidness a lie. The discourse of male truth—literature, science, philosophy, pornography—calls that penetration *violation*. This it does with some consistency and some confidence. *Violation* is a synonym for intercourse. At the same time, the penetration is taken to be a use, not an abuse; a normal use; it is appropriate to enter her, to push into (“violate”) the boundaries of her body. She is human, of course, but by a standard that does not include physical privacy. She is, in fact, human by a standard that precludes physical privacy, since to keep a man out altogether and for a lifetime is deviant in the extreme, a psychopathology, a repudiation of the way in which she is expected to manifest her humanity.

There is a deep recognition in culture and in experience that intercourse is both the normal use of a woman, her human potentiality affirmed by it, and a violative abuse, her privacy irredeemably compromised, her selfhood changed in a way that is irrevocable, unrecoverable. And it is recognized that the use and abuse are not distinct phenomena but somehow a synthesized reality: both are true at the same time as if they were one harmonious truth instead of mutually exclusive contradictions.

Intercourse in reality is a use and an abuse simultaneously, experienced and described as such, the act parlayed into the illuminated heights of religious duty and the dark recesses of morbid and dirty brutality. She, a human being, is supposed to have a privacy that is absolute; except that she, a woman, has a hole between her legs that men can, must, do enter. This hole, her hole, is synonymous with entry. A man has an anus that can be entered, but his anus is not synonymous with entry. A woman has an anus that can be entered, but her anus is not synonymous with entry. The slit between her legs, so simple, so hidden—frankly, so innocent—for instance, to the child who looks with a mirror to see if it *could* be true—is there an entrance to her body down there? and something big comes into it? (how?) and something as big as a baby comes out of it? (how?) and doesn't that hurt?—that slit that means entry into her—intercourse—appears to be the key to women's lower human status. By definition, as the God who does not exist made her, she is intended to have a lesser privacy, a lesser integrity of the body, a lesser sense of self, since her body can be physically occupied and in the occupation taken over. By definition, as the God who does not exist made her, this lesser privacy, this lesser integrity, this lesser self, establishes her lesser significance: not just in the world of social policy but in the world of bare, true, real existence. She is defined by how she is made, that hole, which is synonymous with entry; and intercourse, the act fundamental to existence, has consequences to her being that may be intrinsic, not socially imposed.

There is no analogue anywhere among subordinated groups of people to this experience of being made for intercourse: for penetration, entry, occupation. There is no analogue in occupied countries or in dominated races or in imprisoned dissidents or

in colonialized cultures or in the submission of children to adults or in the atrocities that have marked the twentieth century ranging from Auschwitz to the Gulag. There is nothing exactly the same, and this is not because the political invasion and significance of intercourse is banal up against these other hierarchies and brutalities. Intercourse is a particular reality for women as an inferior class; and it has in it, as part of it, violation of boundaries, taking over, occupation, destruction of privacy, all of which are construed to be normal and also fundamental to continuing human existence. There is nothing that happens to any other civilly inferior people that is the same in its meaning and in its effect even when those people are forced into sexual availability, heterosexual or homosexual; while subject people, for instance, may be forced to have intercourse with those who dominate them, the God who does not exist did not make human existence, broadly speaking, dependent on their compliance. The political meaning of intercourse for women is the fundamental question of feminism and freedom: can an occupied people—physically occupied inside, internally invaded—be free; can those with a metaphysically compromised privacy have self-determination; can those without a biologically based physical integrity have self-respect?

There are many explanations, of course, that try to be kind. Women are different but equal. Social policy is different from private sexual behavior. The staggering civil inequalities between men and women are simple, clear injustices unrelated to the natural, healthy act of intercourse. There is nothing implicit in intercourse that mandates male dominance in society. Each individual must be free to choose—and so we expand tolerance for those women who do not want to be fucked by men. Sex is between individuals, and social relations are between

classes, and so we preserve the privacy of the former while insisting on the equality of the latter. Women flourish as distinct, brilliant individuals of worth in the feminine condition, including in intercourse, and have distinct, valuable qualities. For men and women, fucking is freedom; and for men and women, fucking is the same, especially if the woman chooses both the man and the act. Intercourse is a private act engaged in by individuals and has no implicit social significance. Repression, as opposed to having intercourse, leads to authoritarian social policies, including those of male dominance. Intercourse does not have a metaphysical impact on women, although, of course, particular experiences with individual men might well have a psychological impact. Intercourse is not a political condition or event or circumstance because it is natural. Intercourse is not occupation or invasion or loss of privacy because it is natural. Intercourse does not violate the integrity of the body because it is natural. Intercourse is fun, not oppression. Intercourse is pleasure, not an expression or confirmation of a state of being that is either ontological or social. Intercourse is because the God who does not exist made it; he did it right, not wrong; and he does not hate women even if women hate him. Liberals refuse categorically to inquire into even a possibility that there is a relationship between intercourse per se and the low status of women. Conservatives use what appears to be God's work to justify a social and moral hierarchy in which women are lesser than men. Radicalism on the meaning of intercourse—its political meaning to women, its impact on our very being itself—is tragedy or suicide. "The revolutionary," writes Octavio Paz paraphrasing Ortega y Gasset, "is always a radical, that is, he [*sic*] is trying to correct the uses themselves rather than the mere abuses . . ." With intercourse, the use is already imbued

with the excitement, the derangement, of the abuse; and abuse is only recognized as such socially if the intercourse is performed so recklessly or so violently or so stupidly that the man himself has actually signed a confession through the manner in which he has committed the act. What intercourse *is* for women and what it *does* to women's identity, privacy, self-respect, self-determination, and integrity are forbidden questions; and yet how can a radical or any woman who wants freedom not ask precisely these questions? The quality of the sensation or the need for a man or the desire for love: these are not answers to questions of freedom; they are diversions into complicity and ignorance.

Some facts are known.

Most women do not experience orgasm from intercourse itself. When Shere Hite, in her groundbreaking study, asked women to report their own sexual experiences in detail and depth, she discovered that only three in ten women regularly experience orgasm from intercourse. The women's self-reports are not ideological. They want men, love, sex, intercourse; they want orgasm; but for most women, seven out of ten, intercourse does not *cause* orgasm. The women want, even strive for, orgasm from intercourse but are unable to achieve it. Hite, the strongest feminist and most honorable philosopher among sex researchers, emphasizes that women can and must take responsibility for authentic sexual pleasure: "the ability to orgasm when we want, to be in charge of our stimulation, represents owning our own bodies, being strong, free, and autonomous human beings."²

Intercourse occurs in a context of a power relation that is pervasive and incontrovertible. The context in which the act takes place, whatever the meaning of the act in and of itself, is

one in which men have social, economic, political, and physical power over women. Some men do not have all those kinds of power over all women; but all men have some kinds of power over all women; and most men have controlling power over what they call *their* women—the women they fuck. The power is predetermined by gender, by being male.

Intercourse as an act often expresses the power men have over women. Without being what the society recognizes as rape, it is what the society—when pushed to admit it—recognizes as dominance.

Intercourse often expresses hostility or anger as well as dominance.

Intercourse is frequently performed compulsively; and intercourse frequently requires as a precondition for male performance the objectification of the female partner. She has to look a certain way, be a certain type—even conform to preordained behaviors and scripts—for the man to want to have intercourse and also for the man to be able to have intercourse. The woman cannot exist before or during the act as a fully realized, existentially alive individual.

Despite all efforts to socialize women to want intercourse—e.g., women's magazines to pornography to *Dynasty*; incredible rewards and punishments to get women to conform and put out—women still want a more diffuse and tender sensuality that involves the whole body and a polymorphous tenderness.

There are efforts to reform the circumstances that surround intercourse, the circumstances that at least apparently contribute to its disreputable (in terms of rights and justice) legend and legacy. These reforms include: more deference to female sensuality prior to the act; less verbal assault as part of sexual expressiveness toward women; some lip service to female

initiation of sex and female choice during lovemaking; less romanticizing of rape, at least as an articulated social goal. Those who are political activists working toward the equality of women have other contextual reforms they want to make: economic equity; women elected to political office; strong, self-respecting role models for girls; emphasis on physical strength and self-defense, athletic excellence and endurance; rape laws that work; strategies for decreasing violence against women. These contextual reforms would then provide for the possibility that intercourse could be experienced in a world of social equality for the sexes. These reforms do not in any way address the question of whether intercourse itself can be an expression of sexual equality.

Life can be better for women—economic and political conditions improved—and at the same time the status of women can remain resistant, indeed impervious, to change: so far in history this is precisely the paradigm for social change as it relates to the condition of women. Reforms are made, important ones; but the status of women relative to men does not change. Women are still less significant, have less privacy, less integrity, less self-determination. This means that women have less freedom. Freedom is not an abstraction, nor is a little of it enough. A little more of it is not enough either. Having less, being less, impoverished in freedom and rights, women then inevitably have less self-respect: less self-respect than men have and less self-respect than any human being needs to live a brave and honest life. Intercourse as domination batters on that awful absence of self-respect. It expands to fill the near-vacuum. The uses of women, now, in intercourse—not the abuses to the extent that they can be separated out—are absolutely permeated by the reality of male power over women.

We are poorer than men in money and so we have to barter sex or sell it outright (which is why they keep us poorer in money). We are poorer than men in psychological well-being because for us self-esteem depends on the approval—frequently expressed through sexual desire—of those who have and exercise power over us. Male power may be arrogant or elegant; it can be churlish or refined: but we exist as persons to the extent that men in power recognize us. When they need some service or want some sensation, they recognize us somewhat, with a sliver of consciousness; and when it is over, we go back to ignominy, anonymous, generic womanhood. Because of their power over us, they are able to strike our hearts dead with contempt or condescension. We need their money; intercourse is frequently how we get it. We need their approval to be able to survive inside our own skins; intercourse is frequently how we get it. They force us to be compliant, turn us into parasites, then hate us for not letting go. Intercourse is frequently how we hold on: fuck me. How to separate the act of intercourse from the social reality of male power is not clear, especially because it is male power that constructs both the meaning and the current practice of intercourse as such. But it is clear that reforms do not change women's status relative to men, or have not yet. It is clear that reforms do not change the intractability of women's civil inferiority. Is intercourse itself then a basis of or a key to women's continuing social and sexual inequality? Intercourse may not cause women's orgasm or even have much of a correlation with it—indeed, we rarely find intercourse and orgasm in the same place at the same time—but intercourse and women's inequality are like Siamese twins, always in the same place at the same time pissing in the same pot.

Women have wanted intercourse to work and have submitted—with regret or with enthusiasm, real or faked—even though or even when it does not. The reasons have often been foul, filled with the spiteful but carefully hidden malice of the powerless. Women have needed what can be gotten through intercourse: the economic and psychological survival; access to male power through access to the male who has it; having some hold—psychological, sexual, or economic—on the ones who act, who decide, who matter. There has been a deep, consistent, yet of course muted objection to what Anaïs Nin has called “[t]he hunter, the rapist, the one for whom sexuality is a thrust, nothing more.”³ Women have also wanted intercourse to work in this sense: women have wanted intercourse to be, for women, an experience of equality and passion, sensuality and intimacy. Women have a vision of love that includes men as human too; and women want the human in men, including in the act of intercourse. Even without the dignity of equal power, women have believed in the redeeming potential of love. There has been—despite the cruelty of exploitation and forced sex—a consistent vision for women of a sexuality based on a harmony that is both sensual and possible. In the words of sex reformer Ellen Key:

She will no longer be captured like a fortress or hunted like a quarry; nor will she like a placid lake await the stream that seeks its way to her embrace. A stream herself, she will go her own way to meet the other stream.⁴

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

Shere Hite has suggested an intercourse in which “thrusting would not be considered as necessary as it now is . . .

[There might be] more a mutual lying together in pleasure, penis-in-vagina, vagina-covering-penis, with female orgasm providing much of the stimulation necessary for male orgasm.”⁵

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

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

Fear, too, has a special power to change experience and compromise any possibility of freedom. A stream does not know fear. A woman does. Especially women know fear of men and of forced intercourse. Consent in this world of fear is so passive that the woman consenting could be dead and sometimes is. “Yeah,” said one man who killed a woman so that he could fuck her after she was dead, “I sexually assaulted her after she was dead. I always see them girls laid out in the pictures with their eyes closed and I just had to do it. I dreamed about it for so long that I just had to do it.”⁷ A Nebraska appeals court did not think that the murder “was especially heinous, atrocious, cruel, or manifested exceptional depravity by ordinary standards of morality and intelligence,” and in particular they found “no evidence the acts were performed for the satisfaction of inflicting

either mental or physical pain or that pain existed for any prolonged period of time."⁸ Are you afraid now? How can fear and freedom coexist for women in intercourse?

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

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

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

Out of fear and inequality, women hide, use disguises, trying to pass for indigenous peoples who have a right to be there, even though we cannot pass. Appropriating Octavio Paz's description of the behavior of Mexicans in Los Angeles—which

he might not like: “they feel ashamed of their origin . . . they act like persons who are wearing disguises, who are afraid of a stranger’s look because it could strip them and leave them stark naked.”¹⁰ Women hide, use disguises, because fear has compromised freedom; and when a woman has intercourse—not hiding, dropping the disguise—she has no freedom because her very being has been contaminated by fear: a grain, a tidal wave, memory or anticipation.

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

“I will read,” she said. “But I don’t want you to choose anything that has men inside women, quote-quote, or men entering women. ‘I entered her.’ ‘He entered me.’ We’re not lobbies or elevators. ‘I wanted him inside me,’ as if he could crawl completely in, sign the register, sleep, eat, so forth.

I don't care what these people do as long as they don't enter or get entered."

"Agreed."

"I entered her and began to thrust."

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

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

"Silly usage, absolutely."

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

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

We are not, of course, supposed to be lobbies or elevators. Instead, we are supposed to be wombs, maternal ones; and the men are trying to get back in away from all the noise and grief of being adult men with power and responsibility. The stakes for men are high, as Norman O. Brown makes clear in prose unusually understated for him:

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

This is high drama for a prosaic act of commonplace entry. Nothing is at risk for her, the entered; whereas he commits incest, is crowned king, and has his thing cut off. She might like to return to the maternal womb too—because life outside it is not easy for her either—but she has to be it, for husbands, lovers, adulterous neighbors, as well as her own children, boys especially. Women rarely dare, as we say, draw a line: certainly

not at the point of entry into our own bodies, sometimes by those we barely know. Certainly they did not come from there, not originally, not from this womb belonging to this woman who is being fucked now. And so we have once again the generic meaning of intercourse—he has to climb back into some womb, maternal enough; he has to enter it and survive even coronation and decapitation. She is made for that; and what can it matter to him that in entering her, he is entering this one, real, unique individual.

And what is entry for her? Entry is the first acceptance in her body that she is generic, not individual; that she is one of a many that is antagonistic to the individual interpretation she might have of her own worth, purpose, or intention. Entered, she accepts her subservience to his psychological purpose if nothing else; she accepts being confused with his mother and his Aunt Mary and the little girl with whom he used to play “Doctor.” Entered, she finds herself depersonalized into a function and worth less to him than he is worth to himself: because he broke through, pushed in, entered. Without him there, she is supposed to feel empty, though there is no vacuum there, not physiologically. Entered, she finds herself accused of regicide at the end. The king dead, the muscles of the vagina contract again, suggesting that this will never be easy, never be solved. Lovely Freud, of course, having discovered projection but always missing the point, wrote to Jung: “In private I have always thought of Adonis as the penis; the woman’s joy when the god she had thought dead rises again is too transparent!”¹³ Something, indeed, is too transparent; women’s joy tends to be opaque.

Entered, she has mostly given something up: to Adonis, the king, the coronation, the decapitation for which she is then

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

Physically, the woman in intercourse is a space inhabited, a literal territory occupied literally: occupied even if there has been no resistance, no force; even if the occupied person said yes please, yes hurry, yes more. Having a line at the point of entry into your body that cannot be crossed is different from not having any such line; and being occupied in your body is different from not being occupied in your body. It is human to experience these differences whether or not one cares to bring the consequences of them into consciousness. Humans, including women, construct meaning. That means that when something happens to us, when we have experiences, we try to find in them some reason for them, some significance that they have to us or for us. Humans find meaning in poverty and

tyranny and the atrocities of history; those who have suffered most still construct meaning; and those who know nothing take their ignorance as if it were a precious, rare clay and they too construct meaning. In this way, humans assert that we have worth; what has happened to us matters; our time here on earth is not entirely filled with random events and spurious pain. On the contrary, we can understand some things if we try hard to learn empathy; we can seek freedom and honor and dignity; that we care about meaning gives us a human pride that has the fragility of a butterfly and the strength of tempered steel. The measure of women's oppression is that we do not take intercourse—entry, penetration, occupation—and ask or say what it means: to us as a dominated group or to us as a potentially free and self-determining people. Instead, intercourse is a loyalty test; and we are not supposed to tell the truth unless it compliments and upholds the dominant male ethos on sex. We know nothing, of course, about intercourse because we are women and women know nothing; or because what we know simply has no significance, entered into as we are. And men know everything—all of them—all the time—no matter how stupid or inexperienced or arrogant or ignorant they are. Anything men say on intercourse, any attitude they have, is valuable, knowledgeable, and deep, rooted in the cosmos and the forces of nature as it were: because they know; because fucking is knowing; because he knew her but she did not know him; because the God who does not exist framed not only sex but also knowledge that way. Women do not just lie about orgasm, faking it or saying it is not important. Women lie about life by not demanding to understand the meaning of entry, penetration, occupation, having boundaries crossed over, having lesser privacy: by avoiding the difficult, perhaps impossible (but how

will we ever know?) questions of female freedom. We take oaths to truth all right, on the holy penis before entry. In so doing, we give up the most important dimension of what it means to be human: the search for the meaning of our real experience, including the sheer invention of that meaning—called creativity when men do it. If the questions make the holy penis unhappy, who could survive what the answers might do? Experience is chosen for us, then, imposed on us, especially in intercourse, *and so is its meaning*. We are allowed to have intercourse on the terms men determine, according to the rules men make. We do not have to have an orgasm; that terrible burden is on them. We are supposed to comply whether we want to or not. *Want* is active, not passive or lethargic. Especially we are supposed to be loyal to the male meanings of intercourse, which are elaborate, dramatic, pulling in elements of both myth and tragedy: the king is dead! long live the king!—and the Emperor wears designer jeans. We have no freedom and no extravagance in the questions we can ask or the interpretations we can make. We must be loyal; and on what scale would we be able to reckon the cost of that? Male sexual discourse on the meaning of intercourse becomes our language. It is not a second language even though it is not our native language; it is the only language we speak, however, with perfect fluency even though it does not say what we mean or what we think we might know if only we could find the right word and enough privacy in which to articulate it even just in our own minds. We know only this one language of these folks who enter and occupy us: they keep telling us that we are different from them; yet we speak only their language and have none, or none that we remember, of our own; and we do not dare, it seems, invent one, even in signs and gestures. Our bodies

speak their language. Our minds think in it. The men are inside us through and through. We hear something, a dim whisper, barely audible, somewhere at the back of the brain; there is some other word, and we think, some of us, sometimes, that once it belonged to us.

There are female-supremacist models for intercourse that try to make us the masters of this language that we speak that is not ours. They evade some fundamental questions about the act itself and acknowledge others. They have in common a glorious ambition to see women self-determining, vigorous and free lovers who are never demeaned or diminished by force or subordination, not in society, not in sex. The great advocate of the female-first model of intercourse in the nineteenth century was Victoria Woodhull. She understood that rape was slavery; not less than slavery in its insult to human integrity and human dignity. She acknowledged some of the fundamental questions of female freedom presented by intercourse in her imperious insistence that women had a *natural* right—a right that inhered in the nature of intercourse itself—to be entirely self-determining, the controlling and dominating partner, the one whose desire determined the event, the one who both initiates and is the final authority on what the sex is and will be. Her thinking was not mean-spirited, some silly role reversal to make a moral point; nor was it a taste for tyranny hidden in what pretended to be a sexual ethic. She simply understood that women are unspeakably vulnerable in intercourse because of the nature of the act—entry, penetration, occupation; and she understood that in a society of male power, women were unspeakably exploited in intercourse. Society—men—had to agree to let the woman be the mind, the heart, the lover, the free spirit, the physical vitality behind the act. The commonplace

abuses of forced entry, the devastating consequences of being powerless and occupied, suggested that the only condition under which women could experience sexual freedom in intercourse—real choice, real freedom, real happiness, real pleasure—was in having real and absolute control in each and every act of intercourse, which would be, each and every time, chosen by the woman. She would have the incontrovertible authority that would make intercourse possible:

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

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

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

degrading. The only freedom imaginable in this act of intercourse was freedom based on an irrevocable and unbreachable female will given play in a body honestly her own. This was an eloquent answer to reading the meaning of intercourse the other way: by its nature, intercourse mandated that the woman must be lesser in power and in privacy. Instead, said Woodhull, the woman must be king. Her humanity required sexual sovereignty.

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

gression of those boundaries comes to signify a sexually charged degradation into which she throws herself, having been told, convinced, that identity, for a female, is there—somewhere beyond privacy and self-respect.

It is not that there is no way out if, for instance, one were to establish or believe that intercourse itself determines women's lower status. New reproductive technologies have changed and will continue to change the nature of the world. Intercourse is not necessary to existence anymore. Existence does not depend on female compliance, nor on the violation of female boundaries, nor on lesser female privacy, nor on the physical occupation of the female body. But the hatred of women is a source of sexual pleasure for men in its own right. Intercourse appears to be the expression of that contempt in pure form, in the form of a sexed hierarchy; it requires no passion or heart because it is power without invention articulating the arrogance of those who do the fucking. Intercourse is the pure, sterile, formal expression of men's contempt for women; but that contempt can turn gothic and express itself in many sexual and sadistic practices that eschew intercourse *per se*. Any violation of a woman's body can become sex for men; this is the essential truth of pornography. So freedom from intercourse, or a social structure that reflects the low value of intercourse in women's sexual pleasure, or intercourse becoming one sex act among many entered into by (hypothetical) equals as part of other, deeper, longer, perhaps more sensual lovemaking, or an end to women's inferior status because we need not be forced to reproduce (forced fucking frequently justified by some implicit biological necessity to reproduce): none of these are likely social developments because there is a hatred of women, unexplained, undiagnosed, mostly unacknowledged,

that pervades sexual practice and sexual passion. Reproductive technologies are strengthening male dominance, invigorating it by providing new ways of policing women's reproductive capacities, bringing them under stricter male scrutiny and control; and the experimental development of these technologies has been sadistic, using human women as if they were sexual laboratory animals—rats, mice, rabbits, cats, with kinky uteri. For increasing numbers of men, bondage and torture of the female genitals (that were entered into and occupied in the good old days) may supplant intercourse as a sexual practice. The passion for hurting women is a sexual passion; and sexual hatred of women can be expressed without intercourse.

There has always been a peculiar irrationality to all the biological arguments that supposedly predetermine the inferior social status of women. Bulls mount cows and baboons do whatever; but human females do not have estrus or go into heat. The logical inference is not that we are *always* available for mounting but rather that we are never, strictly speaking, "available." Nor do animals have cultures; nor do they determine in so many things what they will do and how they will do them and what the meaning of their own behavior is. They do not decide what their lives will be. Only humans face the often complicated reality of having potential and having to make choices based on having potential. We are not driven by instinct, at least not much. We have possibilities, and we make up meanings as we go along. The meanings we create or learn do not exist only in our heads, in ineffable ideas. Our meanings also exist in our bodies—what we are, what we do, what we physically feel, what we physically know; and there is no personal psychology that is separate from what the body has learned about life. Yet when we look at the human condition,

including the condition of women, we act as if we are driven by biology or some metaphysically absolute dogma. We refuse to recognize our possibilities because we refuse to honor the potential humans have, including human women, to make choices. Men too make choices. When will they choose not to despise us?

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

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

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

There is the initial complicity, the acts of self-mutilation, self-diminishing, self-reconstruction, until there is no self, only the diminished, mutilated reconstruction. It is all superficial and unimportant, except what it costs the human in her to do

it: except for the fact that it is submissive, conforming, giving up an individuality that would withstand object status or defy it. Something happens inside; a human forgets freedom; a human learns obedience; a human, this time a woman, learns how to goose-step the female way. Wilhelm Reich, that most optimistic of sexual liberationists, the only male one to abhor rape *really*, thought that a girl needed not only “a free genital sexuality” but also “an undisturbed room, proper contraceptives, a friend who is capable of love, that is, not a National Socialist . . . ”¹⁸ All remain hard for women to attain; but especially the lover who is not a National Socialist. So the act goes beyond complicity to collaboration; but collaboration requires a preparing of the ground, an undermining of values and vision and dignity, a sense of alienation from the worth of other human beings—and this alienation is fundamental to females who are objectified because they do not experience themselves as human beings of worth except for their value on the market as objects. Knowing one’s own human value is fundamental to being able to respect others: females are remade into objects, not human in any sense related to freedom or justice—and so what can females recognize in other females that is a human bond toward freedom? Is there anything in us to love if we do not love each other as the objects we have become? Who can love someone who is less than human unless love itself is domination per se? Alienation from human freedom is deep and destructive; it destroys whatever it is in us as humans that is creative, that causes us to want to find meaning in experiences, even hard experiences; it destroys in us that which wants freedom whatever the hardship of attaining it. In women, these great human capacities and dimensions are destroyed or mutilated; and so we find ourselves bewildered—who or what are these so-called persons

in human form but even that not quite, not exactly, who cannot remember or manifest the physical reality of freedom, who do not seem to want or to value the individual experience of freedom? Being an object for a man means being alienated from other women—those like her in status, in inferiority, in sexual function. Collaboration by women with men to keep women civilly and sexually inferior has been one of the hallmarks of female subordination; we are ashamed when Freud notices it, but it is true. That collaboration, fully manifested when a woman values her lover, the National Socialist, above any woman, any one of her own kind or class or status, may have simple beginnings: the first act of complicity that destroys self-respect, the capacity for self-determination and freedom—readying the body for the fuck instead of for freedom. The men have an answer: intercourse is freedom. Maybe it is second-class freedom for second-class humans.

What does it mean to be the person who needs to have this done to her: who needs to be needed as an object; who needs to be entered; who needs to be occupied; who needs to be wanted more than she needs integrity or freedom or equality? If objectification is necessary for intercourse to be possible, what does that mean for the person who needs to be fucked so that she can experience herself as female and who needs to be an object so that she can be fucked?

The brilliance of objectification as a strategy of dominance is that it gets the woman to take the initiative in her own degradation (having less freedom is degrading). The woman herself takes one kind of responsibility absolutely and thus commits herself to her own continuing inferiority: she polices her own body; she internalizes the demands of the dominant class and, in order to be fucked, she constructs her life around meeting

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

If intercourse can be an expression of sexual equality, it will have to survive—on its own merits as it were, having a potential for human expression not yet recognized or realized—the destruction of male power over women; and rape and prostitution will have to be seen as the institutions that most impede any experience of intercourse as freedom—chosen by full human beings with full human freedom. Rape and prostitution negate self-determination and choice for women; and anyone who

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

part three

POWER, STATUS, AND HATE

Is that a gun in your pocket
or are you just glad to see me?

MAE WEST

LAW

INTERCOURSE IS AN ACTIVITY HEAVILY REGULATED BY law: God's law in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, for instance; the secular state; religious tribunals; tribal codes, customs, and taboos. Communities of every description throughout time have had rules on intercourse that say with some specificity that people will fuck in this way and not in that way; with this person and not with that person; under this circumstance and not under that circumstance. The rules are not benign homilies on the good life, nor are they abstract standards. Those who break the rules can be punished with death or exile or prison. Society says with the authority of its police power how intercourse will and will not occur.

Any act so controlled by the state, proscribed and prescribed in detail, cannot be private in the ordinary sense. Privacy is essentially a sphere of freedom immune from regulation by the state. In that sense, intercourse has never occurred in private. The society and its police (including priests in religious states) have had too much to do with establishing the terms of the act itself: not just what people do and do not do; but also what peo-

ple know, how consciousness and self-consciousness are formed, how acts are valued and devalued, how both the license to do and the stigma against doing are then expressed in actual sexual behavior, dread, and longing. The society with police power behind it imposes both restrictions and obligations. It punishes forbidden behavior but it also punishes failures to comply with mandated behavior. Many laws about sex are laws demanding sexual compliance, especially from women. Compliance can occur behind closed doors, out of the public view; but it is not private at all—it is a social act in conformity with a social requirement; the compliance itself is a building block of the society as a whole. Breaking the law is widely construed to be antisocial; forbidden acts are said to hurt society as a whole; they are social, not private, from the point of view of the law. Intercourse has never been comprehended by law as a private act of personal freedom except in one limited sense: those who belong to men as chattel property or who are used by them as sexual objects (the modern equivalent of chattel property) can be encompassed in a man's privacy such that they disappear altogether inside it. The state can manage a sudden and sensitive respect for privacy when it functions as a prison cell for a woman or a child or a slave or any civilly inferior person. A woman, for instance, inside a man's privacy, will never be able to reach or invoke the law even if he is breaking it on her body. Privacy in sex means that a man has a right to shield himself from state scrutiny when sexually using civil inferiors.

Aside from the disingenuous use of so-called privacy as a means of protecting the active sexual dominance of men over others, intercourse is, in essence and in reality, social, not private.

Intercourse both presumes and requires a society of at least two persons before it can occur at all; and the state is con-

cerned about the nature of that society—how it is constructed, that it be hierarchical, that it be male-dominant. In each act of intercourse, a society is formed; and the distribution of power in that society is the state interest at stake. Who constitutes the society, what each does, the place of each in each act, the value of each, is what the state seeks to control. Gender is what the state seeks to control: who is the man here? which is the woman? how to keep the man on top, how to keep the man the man; how to render the woman inferior in fucking so that she cannot recover herself from the carnal experience of her own subjugation.

Intercourse is supposed to be natural and in it a man and a woman are supposed to show and do what each is by nature. Society justifies its civil subordination of women by virtue of what it articulates as the “natural” roles of men and women in intercourse; the “natural” subjugation of women to men in the act. God and nature are not enemies in this argument; divine law and sociobiologists, for instance, agree on the general rightness of male dominance. Nature, however, cannot be counted on. Women do not know how to be women exactly; men constantly fail to be men. The rules governing intercourse protect errant human beings from the failures of their own natures. “Natural” women and “natural” men do not, alas, on their own, always meet the mark. Nature and pleasure do not always coincide. Male dominance is not always so certain or so easy. Women not natural enough resent the presumption of natural inferiority. Law steps in where nature fails: virtually everywhere. Laws create nature—a male nature and a female nature and natural intercourse—by telling errant, unnatural human beings what to do and what not to do to protect and express their real nature—the real male, the real female, the

real hierarchy that nature or God created putting man on top. Society makes laws that say who will put what where when; and though folks keep getting it wrong, law helps nature out by punishing those who are not natural enough and want to put the wrong thing in the wrong place.

The small, intimate society created for intercourse, one time or many, the social unit that is the fuck in action, must be one that protects male dominance. Every man is vulnerable to rebellion, pain, metaphoric castration and real physical anguish, at the point of entry. There is a sudden democracy of vulnerability. *Vulnerable* means “capable of being wounded,” “defenseless against injury.”¹ The penis needs the protection of the law, of awe, of power. Rebellion here, in intercourse, is the death of a system of gender hierarchy premised on a sexual victory over the vagina. The triumphant fuck is virtually synonymous with masculinity. The legitimacy of a man’s civil dominance depends on the authenticity of his masculinity, which is articulated when he fucks. Masculinity itself means being as differentiated from women as it is possible to be; and so the laws regulating intercourse in general forbid those sex acts that break down gender barriers and license those sex acts and conditions that heighten gender polarity and antagonism. The laws that say who to fuck, when, how, and anatomically where keep the man differentiated in a way that seems absolute. Having power, one can break the law for pleasure; but the law itself is the mechanism for creating and maintaining power.

Laws create male dominance, and maintain it, as a social environment. Male dominance is the environment we know, in which we must live. It is our air, water, earth. Laws shape our perceptions and knowledge of what male dominance is, of how

it works, of what it means to us. Laws shape the experiences we have before we have them. Laws significantly predetermine how we will feel, will understand, what will happen to us in life. Laws establish for humans the terms of our symbiosis with male dominance: what it takes from us to sustain itself as an overall environmental system; what it gives to us to enable us to survive as individual organisms inside it. There is an ecology of male dominance: a complex, delicate, deliberate interaction between it—our rain forest, our desert, our sea—and us, the fragile organisms breathing in and out inside it because of necessity, not choice. On one level, laws are diagrams of that ecology. They show the whole pattern of relations between us, the organisms, and it, the environment. On another level, the more important one, laws are causal, not illustrative. They make us do certain things in certain ways. They keep some people on top and some people on the bottom. They punish those who do not comply. They force compliance in those who do not want to be punished. They produce fear. They create order. In this, their active meaning, laws are instrumental in organizing human energy, creativity, and potential into patterns of actual behavior, including sexual behavior. The purpose of laws on intercourse in a world of male dominance is to promote the power of men over women and to keep women sexually subjugated (accessible) to men. These laws—great and small—work. They work by creating gender itself. They say what a man is in intercourse, in rights, in obligations. They say what a woman is in intercourse, in rights, in obligations. They forbid confusion between male and female. They bifurcate rights, responsibilities, behaviors, so that men and women, in the same place at the same time, remain creatures distinct from each other, strangers, the woman less human than the man, with

less dignity and less freedom, with a lower civil status. The laws regulating intercourse are the laws most vital to making gender a social absolute that appears to have a metaphysical base, an inevitability rooted in existence itself. These same laws regulate—put a brake on—the kind of lust produced by male dominance, by having sexual rights over inferiors. They keep men from destroying through self-indulgence a sophisticated system of power that has lasted too long and ruined those who have rebelled against it. “In the city of the world,” wrote Augustine, “both the rulers themselves and the people they dominate are dominated by the lust for domination.”²²

According to Augustine, the great carnal sins “are hatched from the lust for power, from gratification of the eye, and from gratification of corrupt nature . . . ”²³ A former world-class sinner himself, astute, keenly aware of the intense carnal pleasures of lust and domination, he described the quality of lust produced by the passion for dominance:

Such lust does not merely invade the whole body and outward members; it takes such complete and passionate possession of the whole man, both physically and emotionally, that what results is the keenest of all pleasures on the level of sensation; and, at the crisis of excitement, it practically paralyzes all power of deliberate thought.⁴

Before the Fall, Augustine wrote, intercourse could take place “without the passion of lust.”²⁵ God had created male and female; each had an appropriate nature; there were natural, Edenic sex roles in the Garden: “a man and his wife could play their active and passive roles in the drama of conception without the lecherous promptings of lust, with perfect seren-

ity of soul and with no sense of disintegration between body and soul.”⁶ An honest sinner and an honest utopian, Augustine stresses the inner peace and human wholeness of an intercourse based on harmony, not lust; and he underscores the alienation and turmoil in intercourse based on the lust for dominance. *Nature*, however, is the same in Eden and outside it: a man and his wife; active and passive roles in intercourse; a natural intercourse, even in Eden, of the fucker and the fucked.

Nature in this usage means what God made, his will, his intention; the essence and meaning of creation; what a thing or being is in itself. God made, willed, intended, male and female, active and passive, in intercourse; male dominance without the kick. This is the nature God made. Male dominance has in fact had the cachet of being both natural and divine. Evolutionists, for instance, canned God but not the essential male and female he created and not intercourse as he intended it: male with female; active and passive. They found secular, science-saturated arguments to support the same arrangement of human reality. Even without a belief in God, nature is what God made the way he made it. Crimes against nature, then, have been crimes against God: direct hits on him. Crimes against nature violate *what beings are*; for instance, the crime of sodomy violates what men are, their intrinsic nature. As Augustine wrote:

Sins against nature, therefore, like the sin of Sodom, are abominable and deserve punishment wherever and whenever they are committed. If all nations committed them, all alike would be held guilty of the same charge in God’s law, for our Maker did not prescribe that we should use each other in this

way. In fact the relationship which we ought to have with God is itself violated when our nature, of which he is the Author, is desecrated by perverted lust.⁷

The laws regulating intercourse—prescribing how we must use each other (be used) as well as proscribing how we must not use each other—are supposed to protect the authentic natures of men and women. Men being fucked like women moves in an opposite direction; so there is a rule against men being fucked like women. The rules on intercourse are intended to keep people away from the slippery slope God appears to dislike the most: a lessening of differences between the sexes, the conflation of male and female natures into one human nature.

Sodomy, then, a notorious crime against nature, male nature, would appear to be a real threat to male dominance as organized and maintained in the Judeo-Christian system.* In the Old Testament it is prohibited as a capital crime: “Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind; it is abomination” (Leviticus 18:22). “And if a man lie with mankind, as with womankind, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them” (Leviticus 20:13). Adjacent verses also condemn in the same terms a man or a woman having intercourse with an animal, and that too is reckoned to be sodomy. Other capital crimes include adultery and various forms of incest. From the Old Testament to the end of the eighteenth century in Western Europe and the United

*See Dworkin, “Jews and Homosexuals,” pp. 107–146, *Right-wing Women* (Perigee Books, New York, 1983; The Women’s Press, London, 1983), for discussion of how in ancient Greece sodomy was condoned and used to express male dominance; also for a discussion on the particular vehemence of Christianity against the homosexual.

States, sodomy was criminal, with rare exception a capital crime. The language of Leviticus was lifted, for instance, by Connecticut in its criminal sodomy statute of 1642:

That if any man shall lie with mankind, as he lieth with womankind, both of them have committed abomination; they shall be put to death, except it shall appear that one of the parties was forced or under fifteen years of age . . . ⁸

Typically in secular law sodomy was characterized as “detestable,” “abominable,” “horrible,” “against nature,” and, in this superb effort, an 1837 North Carolina statute, “the abominable and detestable crime against nature, not [to] be named among Christians.”⁹ The key elements are simple, clear, consistent: against nature, abominable, detestable, lethal. In the nineteenth century, capital punishment was increasingly replaced by imprisonment, often for life, and hard labor as the penalties of choice. The first criminal sodomy statute to be repealed in the United States was repealed by the state of Illinois in 1962.

The concept of a crime against nature, male nature, was so powerful that it resonated beyond the law itself, God’s or man’s. In culture it came to mean that the person who did the act had the nature that was the crime. He was too feminine in a world of real, natural, unpolluted masculinity. Norman Mailer, for instance, combined the best of Leviticus and Proust when he wrote:

Yes, it is the irony of prison life that it is a world where everything is homosexual and yet nowhere is the condition of being a feminine male more despised. It is because one is used, one is a woman without the power to be female, one is fucked without a womb . . . ¹⁰

Proust too described the “feminine male” as one who craved masculinity in other men but was despised by them because of his femininity. In his “Cities of the Plain” in *Remembrance of Things Past*, Proust said that those who committed the crime of Sodom were men who were women inside; because they were women inside, they wanted, sought, needed, the male member. Ironically (see Mailer above), they are unable to get what they want because they want real men, masculine men, men with the right nature—the so-called deviant himself has an orthodox religious view of that nature, expressed in sexual desire. But any such real man despises the femininity that makes the feminine male want him. Because they cannot have the masculine men they want, the feminine men are forced to buy male prostitutes to enact the sex and the virility they want. They are lonely and in despair; they are

lovers who are almost precluded from the possibility of that love the hope of which gives them the strength to endure so many risks and so much loneliness, since they are enamoured of precisely the type of man who has nothing feminine about him, who is not an invert and consequently cannot love them in return; . . . ¹¹

The “irony” is tragic for Proust. The feminine men are “that race of beings . . . whose ideal is manly precisely because their temperament is feminine, and who in ordinary life resemble other men in appearance only; . . . ”¹² For Mailer, the dispossession of the men who want men is another occasion on which to extol the joys of impregnating women:

For whatever else is in the act, lust, cruelty, the desire to dominate, or whole delights of desire, the result can be no more

than a transaction—pleasurable, even all-encompassing, but a transaction—when no hint remains of the awe that a life in these circumstances can be conceived.¹³

It is, finally, the woman's potential to reproduce that distinguishes and affirms the real man: with the whole meaning of the fuck—gender—being resolved by its outcome in producing children. Sensual pleasure is not what distinguishes homosexual sodomy from heterosexual fucking: the woman bearing the child does—in religion, in Mailer.

The deep feeling or experience of being a separate race haunts Proust; having a nature that is itself unnatural; alien in existence, in being. The act of sodomy is not the crime against nature; the men themselves are the crime against nature. The law is internalized, a curse on what they *are*, a ubiquitous and inescapable social stigma:

A race upon which a curse is laid and which must live in falsehood and perjury because it knows that its desire, that which constitutes life's dearest pleasure, is held to be punishable, shameful, an inadmissible thing; . . .¹⁴

The men have become “abominable” and “detestable” and “against nature”; a separate race. This is because law creates nature. Nature is not, in this sense, trees or weeds or wind. It is gender: what men and women are; what a man is in intercourse, what a woman is in intercourse.

The sodomy laws have an affirmative side, rich in meaning and persuasive power. Do not fuck men as if they are women; it is an abomination. The imperative is communicated, in the blank spaces as it were, to fuck women as if women are women:

carnal chattel of men; proper objects for the lust of domination. The abomination is to do to men what is normally done to women in the fuck: the penetration; the possession; the contempt because she is less, lower in standing before the law or God; the right to use her, which is, inevitably, a right over her. Both Augustine and Mailer describe the lust of dominance in not dissimilar terms: an ecstasy, a frenzy, cruelty, all-encompassing, dominance in the fuck as a supreme and superb pleasure. Men are not supposed to have to endure being the victims of this lust; perhaps there is an implicit recognition that the subordination itself, the carnal experience of it, would change them, their so-called nature—create in them the incompleteness, the low self-esteem, so commonplace in women under male dominance.

The sodomy laws are important, perhaps essential, in maintaining for men a superiority of civil and sexual status over women. They protect men as a class from the violation of penetration; men's bodies have unbreachable boundaries. A capital crime for thousands of years in the Judeo-Christian tradition, viewed with loathing as an obscene violation of male nature, sodomy suggests a nightmare vision of one kind of sexual equality: men used by men as women are in sex to satisfy the lust for dominance expressed in the fuck. The power of the gender system with men on top depends on keeping men distinct from women precisely in this regard. In sodomy, men can be used as women are used; with real carnal pleasure for the one doing the fucking; and with real carnal pleasure for the one being fucked. The one being fucked also experiences the sensual reality of submission, violation, and being possessed.

The creation of gender (so-called nature) by law was systematic, sophisticated, supremely intelligent; behavior regulated to

produce social conditions of power and powerlessness experienced by the individuals inside the social system as the sexual natures inside them as individuals. There were the great, broad laws: prohibiting sodomy; prescribing fucking in marriage; directing the fuck to the vagina, not the mouth or the rectum of the woman because men have mouths and rectums too; legitimizing the fuck when it produces children; each turn of the screw so to speak heightening gender polarity and increasing male power over women, fucking itself the way of creating and maintaining that power. Fuck the woman in the vagina, not in the ass, because only *she* can be fucked in the vagina. Fuck to have children because only *she* can have children. Do not waste sperm in sex acts that are not procreative because the martial aims of gender are not advanced; pleasure does not necessarily enhance power. Every detail of gender specificity was attended to in the Old Testament, including cross-dressing: "A woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment; for whosoever doeth these things is an abomination unto the Lord thy God" (Deuteronomy 22:5). A woman had to be a virgin; or she could be killed: "But if this thing be true, that the tokens of virginity were not found in the damsel; then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die . . ." (Deuteronomy 22:20-21). The regime of fear was established through threat of death; and the regime of fear created sex roles, called nature. Laws mandating gender-specific dress as God's will, gender-specific virginity, vagina-specific fucking, the legitimacy of the fuck dependent on producing a child, shaped the nature of intercourse as well as the natures of men and women. Opposites were created; a hierarchy was created;

intercourse expressed both the opposition and the hierarchy. Intercourse became the "natural" expression of the different "natures" of men and women, each pushed away from having a common human nature by laws that prohibited any recognition of sameness; each pushed into a sexual antagonism created by the dominance and submission that was the only intimacy they shared.

There were also smaller laws, in different countries and cultures, created by interpretation; philosophers and scholars took dogma and embellished it; there were customs that operated with the force of law. Many of the smaller rules were designed to restrain men so that they would not be seduced by pleasure from the obligations of power. Maimonides, in his twelfth-century codification of sexual ethics according to Hebrew law, said that a man "should not cohabit except to maintain the health of his body and to preserve his race (literally: his seed) . . ." ¹⁵ Unmarried men were not supposed to hold their penises because they might then have carnal thoughts. Married men were allowed to hold their penises while urinating only. Men were not supposed to have intercourse by artificial light or during the day, except for the scholar who could "envelop himself in darkness by spreading his cloak over himself and then have intercourse."¹⁶ Men were not supposed to have intercourse with their wives while thinking of other women nor when drunk nor "in the midst of strife or hatred."¹⁷ There are some warnings against coercing the wife; and there are related passages advising the man to have intercourse in the middle of the night when his food is digested; he "should converse and jest a little . . . in order to put her at ease and he should then cohabit with modesty and not with impudence, and he should separate immediately."¹⁸ Maimonides thought that one purpose

of circumcision was “to limit sexual intercourse, and to weaken the organ of generation as far as possible, and thus cause man to be moderate.”¹⁹ Coercing the wife is frowned on because it is immoderate—like fucking right after eating.

The limitation and regulation of male lust have always been high on the religious agenda and an implicit part of religious law; but the so-called morality behind the constraints has been brilliantly pragmatic. Male dominance does best, after all, when men do not, generally speaking, fuck themselves to death by fucking whatever moves. Restraint is a key to power.

The immersion in lust without restraint appears to create a burden of distress, the desperate feeling of craving and addiction. Augustine, living with a mistress, “found by my own experience the difference between the restraint of the marriage alliance, contracted for the purpose of having children, and a bargain struck for lust . . .”²⁰ Using the woman as he wanted, when he wanted, he felt “sunk in death,”²¹ “wallowing in filth and scratching the itching sore of lust.”²² *The itching sore of lust* is an essential standard for determining obscenity in contemporary law; prurience, an element of obscenity, means “itch” in the context of lust. In male-constructed systems of law, men regulate male lust; *the itching sore of lust* is deemed by men antisocial, a burden because it must be indulged but can never be satisfied. Laws have tried, and still try, to protect men from the apparently demoralizing experience of being driven by the itching sore of lust beyond what they can either stand or satisfy. The feeling of being dragged down, compulsive, obsessed, is experienced as a form of degradation or a form of suffering. Restless and driven, the men who have unlimited carnal power find themselves the opposite of free even though they are on top. “Its deadly pleasures,” wrote

Augustine of lust, “were a chain that I dragged along with me, yet I was afraid to be freed from it . . . ”²³

In social terms, male dominance does best when men are not, in Augustine’s words, “more a slave of lust than a true lover of marriage . . . ”²⁴ Marriage is the legal ownership of women, the legal intercourse that is the foundation of male authority.

The principle that “the personal is political” belongs to patriarchal law itself, originating there in a virtual synthesis of intimacy and state policy, the private and the public, the penis and the rule of men. The regulation of men in intercourse is a prime example. It is not enough to have power as a birthright; power must be kept—over living human beings born to rebellion, arguably a human trait, certainly a human potential. The regulation of men in sex creates a seamless state of being, internal and external; experienced in the world as real and imposed on the body, experienced in the body as real and imposed on the world; in the body and in the world called “nature.” The restraint on men, operating inside and outside, is efficient, smart about power. Men were not supposed to fuck until they dropped; there would be fewer foot soldiers in the war and the psychological or existential burden of carnality is complex, difficult, tending toward a collapse of personality and self-control. And men had an affirmative obligation to use the fuck to create and maintain a social system of power over women, a social and political system in which the fuck, regulated and restrained, kept women compliant, a sexually subjugated class. Because of how laws organized male sexuality—the sexual practices and feelings of men—men experienced a physiologically real desire to subjugate women through sex; and to the extent that women were or could be formed by men to desire subjugation, the system itself was carried on the backs of

women in the doggie position. The legal fuck helped to create compliance by defining the woman's body as breachable, owned through the fuck. The legal fuck—what a man may and must do to a woman for the purpose of producing children—also kept men safe from the illegal fuck—the fuck that erased a crucial distinction between men and women. And if lust were lawless, not just an ecstatic expression of dominance over women but lawless with respect to gender itself, men would be subject to sexual violation the way women are; and male power could not survive either the indignity or the terror of that.

Men can, of course, break laws for the sake of pleasure. Maimonides suggests flogging as a punishment for men who have “intercourse within forbidden unions, whether by way of the sexual organs, or by way of lustful embracing or kissing, thus deriving pleasure from carnal proximity . . . ”²⁵ The punishment is both minor and unlikely, because power brings with it prerogatives that must be balanced against the prescriptions and proscriptions of the law. Men can break laws in ways that are foul and repellent, yet remain immune from punishment. For instance, “everyone agrees that he who has sexual intercourse with a deceased forbidden relative does not incur any punishment at all . . . ,”²⁶ Maimonides declared, in the twelfth-century version of “boys will be boys.” Men can break sexual laws with the above immunity; or men can break sexual laws with the secret but empirically real sanction of the male-dominant community that establishes social policy as long as that community is not outraged: that is, as long as another man's rights over a woman are not violated and as long as social policy in general is working effectively to protect gender polarity, male “nature” and female “nature.” Social outrage is power protecting itself; it is not morality. There is

always a tension between the law that protects male power—basic fundamentalism, religious or secular—and men’s wanting to break that law: exercise the privileges of power for the sake of pleasure. And so there are political parties and philosophies that are in social, civil, and religious conflict; men disagree about how much license men should have to break the laws that men make to protect male power.* How much license can men take without destroying the effectiveness of the laws that formally restrain them in order to protect their power as men? Can men violate the rules that keep gender intact without compromising male dominance: fatally wounding it? Which laws are fundamental, essential, to maintaining the authority of men over women? Which laws are fundamental, essential, to keeping male dominance the basis of how the society is organized, how rights are apportioned, how power is distributed? Which laws can be broken, abandoned, or even repealed, without imperiling male supremacy? Can sodomy, for instance, become a legal form of intercourse without irredeemably compromising male power over women, that power premised on men being entirely distinct from women in use, in function, in posture and position, in role, in “nature”? Or will the legalization of sodomy—making it a legal form of intercourse—mortally injure the class power of men by sanctioning a fuck in which men are treated like women; the

*The spread of religious fundamentalism throughout the world right now is men retrenching to undo the civil and social advances of women; to reestablish male power as a fundamental reality by reestablishing gender as an absolute. This requires rigorous tightening of restraints on male sexual behavior as well as intensifying civil and sexual controls on women.

boundaries of men's bodies no longer being, as a matter of social policy and divine right, inviolate?

The regulation of men by men in sex for the sake of upholding the power of men as a class is the least recognized, least scrutinized aspect of both male dominance and law as an institution of social control. The overt uses of law to keep women sexually subservient and civilly inferior to men are more familiar. But many sexual laws that mandate a low civil status for women actually serve, first and foremost, to uphold male supremacy by keeping peace among men; creating an internal cohesion in the ruling class. Women are property; adultery, rape, and some forms of incest hurt the rightful owners of the women by damaging the value of the goods or by violating the *man's* integrity through violating his legal and deeply felt personal right of private, exclusive sexual access. Following the rules lets men have sexual access to subjugated women while moderating male-male conflict over that access. Rights of ownership are delineated because inside the community of men itself relations are ordered precisely by the laws that regulate women as property. Men have a strong self-interest in having property rights over their own women respected; this gives men a strong self-interest in law over lawlessness. The law represents the best interests of men; lawlessness the threat of social disintegration—fierce intra-male conflict over women, for instance, or even the potential dominance of lawless women over men. The personal is political here too because the social rights of dominance over women become personal rights integrated into a man's identity. Ownership of women becomes synonymous with the power and integrity of the individual male, e.g., “The nakedness of thy father's wife thou shalt not uncover: it is thy father's nakedness” (Leviticus 18:8). Fuck her

and you fuck him; and ultimately the law exists to keep men from getting fucked by men.

The law creates the female; inferior by nature; a lower civil and sexual status inherent in what she is, how and why she was made; inferior in existence right from the beginning.

There are two stories of the creation of so-called mankind in Genesis. In the first: "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them" (Genesis 1:27). In the second, man is created first, singular and alone. He is dissatisfied and lonely. God parades all of creation before him but he cannot find a companion. Finally:

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the place with flesh instead thereof. And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from the man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man. And the man said: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." . . . and they shall be one flesh. (Genesis 2:21-24)

Affirmed by God as "one flesh" and claimed by a sinless but nonetheless arrogant man as "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh," she was his because she was of him; derived from him. Jurists for centuries thereafter recognized a man and his wife as one flesh: the man's.

The first story of creation is nearly an equality model. It did not resonate in Judeo-Christian systems of law; nowhere does it appear as a model for the systems of secular law that take the Bible as a source of civic or social morality. The second story makes woman clearly subservient to the man even in Paradise,

before sin or shame or the invention of death. She is inferior in her existence as such. She was created for him, to be his: bone of his bones, flesh of his flesh. She belonged to him in her flesh, which was his flesh. There is no closer, more intimate meaning of *belonging to*: made for him from him; bone of his bones, flesh of his flesh; and God affirms that they are “one flesh.”

Then the woman eats from the Tree of Knowledge, her inferior nature manifesting in the weakness that allows her to be seduced by a snake; she disobeys God and eats the apple; she seduces her husband into eating the apple. All the bone-of-my-bones business disappears, in a sense forever. She and he are “one flesh” in that he has sovereignty over her body; but they are different from then on, her bones not reminding one of his at all, her flesh so different from his that it might as well have been made out of some different material altogether. She never was much like him at all, it seems in retrospect, according to all the legal eagles, religious and secular, ever after until feminism.

God curses the woman:

Unto the woman He said: “I will greatly multiply thy pain and thy travail; in pain thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” (Genesis 3:16)

God curses the man too, saying that he will work and sweat and suffer and die; makes them clothes; and expels them from Eden.

Immediately on being expelled, “And the man knew Eve his wife; and she conceived and bore Cain . . . ” (Genesis 4:1). The *Jerusalem Bible* translation, in modern English, is more

direct: “The man had intercourse with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain” (Genesis 4:1).

Eve’s curse is in the pain of childbirth and in feeling desire for her husband; they are her punishments. The rule of the husband over the wife is in sexual intercourse itself; his sovereignty over her is in the fuck. The New Testament is less direct but not at all ambiguous in saying the same: “For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man” (I Corinthians 11:8–9). According to one Christian writer of the modern era, this means that the wife

willingly accepts the fact that man is the head of the woman and submits to her husband’s authority not grudgingly and in fear, but willingly, freely, and in joy.²⁷

In Christianity, attitude is everything; in Judaism, simple compliance is. In each faith, the man’s authority means that he has a right supported by law—divine law—to fuck his wife; her legal duty is to submit; and intercourse itself is a legally defined hierarchy in which the one who fucks has sovereignty over the one who submits. Human codes of law replicate the hierarchy in intercourse established by divine will; intercourse is the legally prescribed right of a man over his wife. In *The Total Woman*, Marabel Morgan, who never disappoints, provided her own unique biblical exegesis when she wrote: “God understood women. He knew they would probably use the prized possession of sex to manipulate men, and He warned against rationing it out.”²⁸ A Mrs. Ellis, in 1846, despite her Victorian upbringing, was more straightforward in language and also had a keener appreciation of sexual politics when she wrote:

In her intercourse with man, it is impossible but that woman should feel her own inferiority, and it is right that it should be so . . . she does not meet him on equal terms. Her part is to make sacrifices in order that his enjoyment may be enhanced. She does this with a willing spirit but she does it so often without grateful acknowledgment. Nor is man to be blamed for this.²⁹

Being grateful is the celebration of one's own inferiority; as Mrs. Ellis suggests, it is uncommon.

The metaphysical ground rules for male and female were set in Genesis, in the beginning. The implications have been comprehended deeply and honed into laws and practices. The implications go far beyond the letter of the law, especially beyond the specific small laws that regulate the when and how of intercourse. The implications honor the basic law, men's ownership of women through intercourse. As Maimonides explained:

Since a man's wife is permitted to him, he may act with her in any manner whatsoever. He may have intercourse with her whenever he so desires, and kiss any organ of her body he wishes, and he may have intercourse with her naturally or unnaturally, provided that he does not expend semen to no purpose.³⁰

All the tangle of rules that govern when a woman is accessible to her husband and in what ways—all the rules that make her off-limits some times of the month or prescribe sexual intercourse in the vagina or proscribe sexual intercourse in the mouth or in the rectum—all the rules are suspended when the man wants them to be because of his authority over his wife; except that his semen, the totem of his power as a man, must be

ejaculated into her vagina, her capacity to get pregnant redeeming him from the gender ambiguity of any sex act he might commit for his own pleasure. She has no right of refusal.

She is his; not flesh of his flesh at all in terms of rights or dignity of being but belonging to him in sex, his authority over her expressed in his sexual rights over her, which, in the end, are absolute. Inside this system of rights and obligations, forcing intercourse or any other sex act on a wife cannot be rape; the intercourse is legal and so the force used to effect it is legal too.

The sanctioning of rape in marriage by law is usually traced to the jurist Matthew Hale, chief justice in England in the seventeenth century. He wrote:

But the husband cannot be guilty of a rape committed by himself upon his lawful wife, for by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract the wife hath given up herself in this kind unto the husband which she cannot retract.³¹

The decision itself, however, suggests that by the seventeenth century in England there was a substantial challenge to the sexual rights of a husband over a wife. The husband's authority was rooted in biblical law and enhanced by secular laws that had for centuries defined the wife as chattel, forbade her to own her own property, and deprived her of all civil rights and liberties because of her sex. Contemporary feminists continue the challenge to male sexual sovereignty over women in marriage in efforts to criminalize rape in marriage. Traditional rape laws in modern society "usually define rape as *the forcible penetration of the body of a woman, not the wife of the perpetrator . . .*"³² Some states have made forced intercourse in marriage a crime. Some states require that the wife be phys-

ically and legally separated from the husband before forced intercourse will be recognized as rape. Some states have actually (by statute) extended the right of marital rape to cohabiting men or to so-called voluntary social companions. The legal fight here goes right to the heart of women's legal status and whether that status will change or not. Will the metaphysical laws of male dominance articulated in Genesis prevail; or will the state enforcement of those laws of gender and female inferiority be ended? Will intercourse remain the fundamental expression of male rule over women, a legal right protected by the state especially in marriage; or will this protected institution of male dominance—intercourse in marriage—be modified or reformed through changes in statutory laws; and what will the consequences of such reform be—for men, for women, for intercourse? Or will the rights of husbands over wives be legally extended to unmarried men over unmarried women so that intercourse functions as state-sanctioned domination not only in marriage but also outside it?

The right of a man to use his wife the way he wants has been the essential meaning of sexual privacy in law. The state, to quote one Florida legislator who opposed criminalizing rape in marriage, “has absolutely no business intervening into the sexual relationship between a husband and a wife.”³³ The state, of course, has created that relationship and has protected the husband's forced access to the wife; and it is the above conception of privacy—keeping the wife sexually subjugated to the husband as a matter of law (statutory, metaphysical, divine)—that cloaks the abuse of wives in a legitimacy and a secrecy that stop active, cogent, material interference. The down-to-earth meaning of this privacy was eloquently stated by Bob Wilson, a state senator from California, talking to women lobbyists in 1979:

“But if you can’t rape your wife,” the lawmaker asked, “who can you rape?”³⁴ The answer, of course, is: no one. Freud, writing about law and authority in *Totem and Taboo*, noted that “[t]ouching is the first step towards obtaining any sort of control over, or attempting to make use of, a person or object.”³⁵ Anyone whose legal status is that she exists to be touched, intimately, inside the boundaries of her own body, is controlled, made use of: a captive inside a legally constructed cage.

A man’s use of his wife follows the law, obeying it. He can also break the law by having illegal intercourse. The breaking of the law itself becomes an eroticized part of the sex: sex is intensified as a violation of boundaries when laws are violated. “If I had no consciousness of taboos,” wrote Kobo Abe in *The Face of Another*, in the persona of the man with the new face who wanted to fuck his wife as if he were a stranger, “it would be doubtful whether I could feel such shuddering fascination.”³⁶ Not only does the law, then, create gender, female inferiority, and an ecology of male power; it itself is the guideline, the signpost, for sex outside the law. It says where, how, when, in what ways to be lawless. Sex exists on both sides of the law but the law itself creates the sides. One side emphasizes the utility of sex for power; the other side emphasizes the utility of sex for pleasure. “It [is] quite impossible,” Abe writes, “to be aimlessly erotic about one’s wife.”³⁷ The right that one has to her is lawful, in the service of the state, no matter what one does to her. Raping her, with rare exception, is lawful. Brutalizing her is within the spirit of the law. To be outside the law, breaking the law, breaking so-called taboos, is a practice of pleasure or many pleasures that appears to be in opposition to legal intercourse. There is a false appearance of freedom from law when one is simply following the sexual topography the

law itself has created. The law says what is lawless with precision, in detail, drawing lines the lawless adhere to. In keeping men or masculinity supreme in value or in subordinating women through sex, legal or illegal, one does the law's real work. The law lets men work both sides of it and uses both the legal and the illegal fuck to create conditions of inferiority for women; conditions that not coincidentally keep women divided from one another. The illegal fuck, for instance, keeps the prostitute incarcerated in a ghetto hellhole of sexual subservience while the legal fuck keeps the wife used, controlled, sexually subservient, in the home. The legal and the illegal fuck create the legal and the illegal woman; but the law controls what is created, how, in what circumstances, under what conditions—the kind and quality of subordination each is subjected to; the inferior status of each; the role of intercourse in the subordination of each. Law creates lawlessness, and, in each sphere, intercourse is political dominance; power as power or power as pleasure.

DIRT/DEATH

INFERIORITY IS NOT BANAL OR INCIDENTAL EVEN WHEN IT happens to women. It is not a petty affliction like bad skin or circles under the eyes. It is not a superficial flaw in an otherwise perfect picture. It is not a minor irritation, nor is it a trivial inconvenience, an occasional aggravation, or a regrettable but (frankly) harmless lapse in manners. It is not a “point of view” that some people with soft skins find “offensive.” It is the deep and destructive devaluing of a person in life, a shredding of dignity and self-respect, an imposed exile from human worth and human recognition, the forced alienation of a person from even the possibility of wholeness or internal integrity. Inferiority puts rightful self-love beyond reach, a dream fragmented by insult into a perpetually recurring nightmare; inferiority creates a person broken and humiliated inside. The fragments—scattered pieces and sharp slivers of someone who can never be made whole—are then taken to be the standard of what is normal in her kind: women are like that. The insult that hurt her—inferiority as an assault, ongoing since birth—is seen as a consequence, not a cause, of her so-called nature, an inferior

nature. In English, a graceful language, she is even called a piece. It is likely to be her personal experience that she is insufficiently loved. Her subjectivity itself is second-class, her experiences and perceptions inferior in the world as she is inferior in the world. Her experience is recast into a psychologically pejorative judgment: she is never loved enough because she is needy, neurotic, the insufficiency of love she feels being in and of itself evidence of a deep-seated and natural dependency. Her personal experiences or perceptions are never credited as having a hard core of reality to them. She is, however, never loved enough. In truth; in point of fact; objectively: she is never loved enough. As Konrad Lorenz wrote: "I doubt if it is possible to feel real affection for anybody who is in every respect one's inferior."¹ There are so many dirty names for her that one rarely learns them all, even in one's native language. There are dirty names for every female part of her body and for every way of touching her. There are dirty words, dirty laughs, dirty noises, dirty jokes, dirty movies, and dirty things to do to her in the dark. Fucking her is the dirtiest, though it may not be as dirty as she herself is. Her genitals are dirty in the literal meaning: stink and blood and urine and mucous and slime. Her genitals are also dirty in the metaphoric sense: obscene. She is reviled as filthy, obscene, in religion, pornography, philosophy, and in most literature and art and psychology. Where she is not explicitly maligned she is magnificently condescended to, as in this diary entry by Somerset Maugham written when he was in medical school:

The Professor of Gynaecology: He began his course of lectures as follows: Gentlemen, woman is an animal that micturates once a day, defecates once a week, menstruates once a

month, parturiates once a year and copulates whenever she has the opportunity.

I thought it a prettily-balanced sentence.²

Were she loved sufficiently, or even enough, she could not be despised so much. Were she sexually loved, or even liked, she and what is done with or to her, in the dark or in the light, would not, could not, exist rooted in the realm of dirt, the contempt for her apparently absolute and irrevocable; horrible; immovable; help us, Lord; unjust. She is not just less; she and the sex she incarnates are a species of filth. God will not help, of course: "For a whore is a deep ditch; and a strange woman is a narrow pit" (Proverbs 23:27).

This dirt in which women are buried alive is not a matter of attitude; it is not in the eye of the beholder. There is a woman. She lives in a world, this world, in which power is real. Men have it, generally speaking; she does not because she is a woman. She is devalued not only in people's thoughts but in the way she is treated: by individuals because she is not their equal; by institutions of the society—law, religion, art, education. She is poorer than men in money and in rights; she is poorer in the freedoms she can actually exercise, including freedom of movement and freedom of speech. She must dress in ways that distinguish her on sight from those who have power. Her behavior must be categorically different from the behavior of those in power. She is segregated in the job market and often in social life, but sexual intimacy is forced on her—individuals rarely escape forced sex in a lifetime. The dirt she is buried alive in is real because the power that devalues her is real. The ways in which she is devalued are concrete, material, real: sexual, economic, physical, social. They happen to her:

not as a disembodied spirit but as a corporeal being, flesh and blood. Inferiority is done to her: it is real and she is real. Attitudes do not establish her lower status; institutions and practices do. Nice attitudes toward her as an individual, while perhaps a welcome respite, do not change her status. That status is established by a distribution of power that excludes her from both equality and self-determination because she is a woman. Because she is a woman, she is impoverished, poor in power, poor in worth. Being dirt, dirty, is one dimension of her worthlessness, the mark of a base inferiority. The devaluing of her is intense, committed, obsessed; organized spleen; emotional, often brutal and enraged. She is an object of hate: an impersonal, collective hate directed against her kind, including her as an individual but insensible to her individuality. Hated and inferior, she is dirt, dirty. Hate is not an attitude or an opinion; hate is a passion, the fuel of murder and terrorism. There is slow murder in which terror and assault are mixed: rape, battery, prostitution, incest. There is fast murder: sex-murder; killing her, then fucking her; serial murder or sadistic murder. Changes of attitude or opinion do not change systems of power fueled by hate.

The dirty words themselves are not a superficial phenomenon, their meaning changed easily by an effusion of liberal goodwill on the part of those who use them. Power, in this case power fueled by hate, also determines the meaning of language. The dirty words retain their obscene meaning because that is the low value put on what they name. There have been radical efforts to make malignant words take on an innocent or benign meaning. In *Paradise Now*, The Living Theatre, in scenarios invoking a revolutionary desire for a freedom outside the domain of humiliation or violence, chanted: "Fuck the Jews. Fuck

the Arabs. Fuck means peace. Fuck means peace.”³ Even with the consent of the flower-child generation to the revision of meaning, the meaning of *fuck* did not change. D. H. Lawrence tried to reinvent the use of so-called obscene words; he believed that the use of sexual euphemism created the dirty connotation of the more direct language: “If I use the taboo words, there is a reason. We shall never free the phallic reality from the ‘uplift’ taint till we give it its own phallic language, and use the obscene words.”⁴ *The phallic reality* he intended was ecstatic, not dirty, a sacrament of fucking, human worship of a pure masculinity and a pure femininity embodied in, respectively, the penis and the cunt (another word favored by Lawrence). Lawrence himself was forced to recognize “how strong is the will in ordinary, vulgar people, to do dirt on sex.”⁵ Even regular working men, whom he had idolized, “have a disgusting attitude toward sex, a disgusting contempt of it, a disgusting desire to insult it. If such fellows have intercourse with a woman, they triumphantly feel that they have done her dirt, and now she is lower, cheaper, more contemptible than she was before.”⁶ Dirty words stay dirty because they express a contempt for women, or for women and sex, often synonyms, that is real, embedded in hostile practices that devalue and hurt women; as Lord Byron wrote in a letter—“I rather look upon love altogether as a sort of hostile transaction.”⁷ Dirty words stay dirty because they express a hate for women as inferiors, that hate inextricably, it seems, part of sex—a hate for women’s genitals, a hate for women’s bodies, a hate for the insides of women touched in fucking. Dirty words stay dirty because they express a true dimension of women’s inferiority, a forced inferiority, the dirty words part of the ongoing force; the penis itself signifying power over women, that power expressed most

directly, most eloquently, in fucking women. Lawrence's *phallic reality* meant *power over*, and his "ordinary, vulgar people" had the same religion. Women stayed dirty because women stayed inferior. Lawrence wanted to reform an attitude and a vocabulary, but he wanted to keep the power relations between men and women the same. Worshipping "cunt" and hating women were not, in real life, exactly distinguishable anyway—as Freida, Lawrence's own wife, battered, might have testified had she not valued his life, as he did, more than her own. Change requires a change in power relations, a redistribution of power, an equality of worth that is socially true. The meaning of words that express derision of inferiors does not change until or unless the hate and power they signify change. Current dogma is to teach by rote that sex is "healthy" as if it existed outside social relations, as if it had no ties to anything mean or lowdown, to history, to power, to the dispossession of women from freedom. But for sex not to mean dirt—for sex not to *be* dirty—the status of women would have to change radically; there would have to be equality without equivocation or qualification, social equality for all women, not personal exemptions from insult for some women in some circumstances. The next question—a real one and a fascinating one—then is: with women not dirty, with sex not dirty, could men fuck? To what extent does intercourse depend on the inferiority of women? Racially degraded people—women and men—are also devalued as dirt: experienced as deep-down filthy; sexualized as dirty; desired as dirty for fucking and for genocide. Racist ideology spells out how the degraded race is filthy and intensely sexed, dirty and sensual, contaminating. *Dirty* provokes the sexual interest, the fuck itself, the sexual humiliation, the sexual exploitation, the sex-murder of the racially despised.

Inferiority—sex-based or race-based or both—seems to be the requisite context for fucking. James Baldwin reminds us:

When the loveless come to power, or when sexual despair comes to power, the sexuality of the object is either a threat or a fantasy. That most men will choose women to debase is not a matter of rejoicing either for the chosen women or anybody else; brutal truth, furthermore, forces the observation, particularly if one is a black man, that this choice is by no means certain. That men have an enormous need to debase other men—and only because they are *men*—is a truth which history forbids us to labor.⁸

The sexual abuse and humiliation of racially despised women blends into the commonplace abuses of women as such, inferior and dirty as women. When the acts of insult and injury are recognized as abuses, the reason is that the acts are seen to be assaults on the integrity of the racially despised men—attempts to unman them by taking their women. The abuses of women are not so much sexual crimes against the women in their own right as misappropriations of them, thefts filled with racist malice against the men to whom the women are supposed to belong. The sexualized hatred of racism appears to single out the man, focusing on him to destroy him, perhaps because to devalue a man as sexualized dirt at all is to unman him, feminize him by giving him something real in common with women. Unmanning the man is a primary goal of racism, the institutionalized rapism of the continuing assault on his manhood resembling nothing so much as prison rape, the only common form of man-on-man rape. As described in a study of Philadelphia prisons:

A primary goal of the sexual aggressor, it is clear, is the conquest and degradation of his victim. We repeatedly found that aggressors used such language as "Fight or fuck," "We're going to take your manhood," "You'll have to give up some face," and "We're gonna make a girl out of you." Some of the assaults were reminiscent of the custom in some ancient societies of castrating or bugging a defeated enemy.⁹

The rape is literal in forced sex acts, castration, and murder. For instance, Jewish men were castrated in medical experiments in the concentration camps; black men were castrated in terrorist attacks in the Deep South. There was secret forced sex and open murder. The rape is also metaphoric: stripped of dignity and selfhood, invaded, culturally defamed, civilly inferior, powerless to advance his own honor, pornographized as if gang-banged and left to die.

The racist program has unfailing ideological landmarks. The racially despised male is stigmatized as a sexual savage, a rapist by nature; as Hitler wrote,

With satanic joy in his face, the black-haired Jewish youth lurks in wait for the unsuspecting girl whom he defiles with his blood, thus stealing her from her people.¹⁰

The race that is despised is physically filthy; as Hitler wrote,

The cleanliness of this people, moral and otherwise, I must say, is a point in itself. By their very exterior you could tell that these were no lovers of water, and, to your distress, you often knew it with your eyes closed. Later I often grew sick to my stomach from the smell of these caftan-wearers.¹¹

The racially despised men pollute the superior race, lowering it, through miscegenation; as Hitler wrote,

And so he tries systematically to lower the racial level by a continuous poisoning of individuals.¹²

The influence of the racially inferior on the culture is pernicious, debasing; as Hitler wrote,

Was there any form of filth or profligacy, particularly in cultural life, without at least one Jew involved in it?

If you cut even cautiously into such an abscess, you found, like a maggot in a rotting body, often dazzled by the sudden light—a kike!¹³

The charges against blacks in the United States follow the same form: the men are rapists of white women; they are physically dirty, having a racially specific stink; they want to destroy the white race through miscegenation; they are a cultural blight, involved in every vice, in the Amerikan pathology genetically less intelligent, destroying language and public education.

In *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, Wilhelm Reich comprehended that “the Jew and the black man are not differentiated in the mind of the fascist.”¹⁴ The swastika itself, he maintained, represented clearly “two interlocked human figures,” on its side “a *sexual act* lying down,” upright “a sexual act in standing position”; therefore, “the swastika represents a basic living function.”¹⁵ This recognition and its emotional impact “does not account for the success of fascism’s mass propaganda, but it certainly contributes to it. . . . we can assume

that this symbol depicting two interlocked figures acts as a powerful stimulus on deep layers of the organism, a stimulus that proves to be that much more powerful, the more dissatisfied, the more burning with sexual desire, a person is."¹⁶ The sexual meaning of the swastika can be traced back to ancient Indo-European cultures, a fact used by contemporary sado-masochists when trying to dissociate their use of the swastika from its Nazi meaning even when the point of the sex they are having is to inflict pain on a Jew.

The humiliation rituals of racism are overtly sexual even when not genital. In the concentration camps, the disintegration of a human identity was accomplished by a harrowing assault on every aspect of the body's dignity; as Fania Fénelon wrote in *Playing for Time*: "I see us now, under the icy shower, arms pressed to our sides, then back in the room again, demoralized, shivering, tattooed, and hairless. It was odd, but that was the real humiliation: having no hair."¹⁷ The immersion in filth, including death by filth, an immersion in the scatological, an assault on any self-conception of human cleanliness and any possibility of being clean, was an integral part of the punishment for being inferior, for being filth:

Who could have dreamed up such a place as the latrine hut? It was an enormous hole dug out of the earth, about forty feet deep, surrounded by an irregular border of large stones, plank walls, and a roof. This enormous, funnel-shaped sewer was ringed with wooden bars. No sooner was the door open than, breaking ranks, the girls rushed forward to sit on these bars, buttocks exposed. Some, with dysentery, didn't make it and relieved themselves where they stood, under the blows and insults of the latrine blockowa.

. . . Perched in this roost about fifty girls were packed together like sick old hens, skeletal, shivering, clinging to their dung-stained bars. Those with long legs could touch the ground with the tips of their toes, but the others, the smaller ones like me, their legs dangling, had to grip the slippery round bar with both hands with all their might. To fall into the pit must have been a most terrible death.¹⁸

These concentration camps are emblematic of socially created conditions—artificial, vicious—in which racially degraded people are forced to live in racist societies of many descriptions: the Soweto shacks, urban ghettos in the United States, Palestinian refugee camps. The conditions imposed on the people are conditions of squalor; physical filth; a social reality embodying the degraded sexual reality of those devalued as dirt.

Racially degraded women are specially targeted for sexual abuse and exploitation. That targeting is often systematic, the underbelly of societies that say those women are racial dirt. They are found concentrated in brothels, on street corners, used in sex under slave conditions, prostituted on plantations or in concentration camps, prostituted in prison camps or under prison conditions, prostituted to sexually service military enclaves, transient soldiers or occupying armies. In some racist societies, sex with them is legally forbidden; this makes them especially appealing and at the same time invisible when they are sexually exploited in rape or prostitution. The dirt of race added to the dirt of sex makes them the most sexed creatures; they are, disproportionate to their numbers, forced, violated, bought and sold. They have no legal or social remedies. In the prisons of Argentina, for instance, Jacobo Timerman discovered that “between 1974 and 1978, the violation of girls

in clandestine prisons had a peculiar characteristic: Jewish girls were violated twice as often as non-Jewish girls.”¹⁹ The rapes, in common with many racially based rapes, were held to be innocuous, but the logic that led to this incomprehension was especially pernicious: “There are no gas chambers in Argentina, and this leaves many with a clear conscience”;²⁰ “I was never able to understand how the horrors of the Holocaust could diminish the significance of the violation of Jewish girls in clandestine Argentine prisons. I was never able to accept how recalling and recording the activity of the Holocaust industry could render it seemingly unnecessary to confront openly the publication of anti-Semitic literature in Argentina and the fact that such literature is studied in the military academies of Buenos Aires.”²¹ Racially motivated rape is considerably protected by the misogyny that finds the rape of women as such no atrocity at all. The violation of a whole people gives the most irrefutable evidence of what is otherwise hidden: the rape and the racism combined and inflicted on a woman. With a mass-murder atrocity, the rapes are drawn big in blood; the sadism in the rapes is unavoidable because the intention of the rapes—to destroy—is irrefutable; rape cannot be explained away by personality; it is not an individual event or tragedy; the woman did not bring it on herself as a distinct personality or as a metaphysical slut; the great justifications for raping and prostituting women are not credible even to those who blame women for rape and prostitution. The *racism* of the sexual assault is clear because a people is being attacked; the presence of men, massively, in the carnage as victims is the proof. Once the rapes are, for the most part, gender-specific and on a smaller scale, the misogynist, who embodies the normal mentality in a culture that accepts rape as normal for women, cannot see the

rapes at all; he is visually impaired—there is nothing big enough for him to see; he is hearing-impaired—there are not enough screams; he cannot hear. The women in the clandestine prisons, Jews or other racially degraded women in other places, are raped the way women are by men who rape the way men rape. The bad motives of the men—their *racist* motives—are a matter for moral indignation, yes; but there is no atrocity. Atrocity—and rape recognized as atrocity—is committed against a whole people, men too, unmanning the men, hurting them. Otherwise, rape does not count: not as torture; not as intolerable and unconscionable violation. The crimes against Timerman were crimes: keeping him in jail with special insults and special malice because he was a Jew; terrorizing his family because he was a Jew; punishing him extra and worse because he began to fight as a newspaper editor for *the disappeared* in Argentina and he was a Jew. The “girls” were “girls.” None of the “girls” who were raped has brought a book to international attention; not yet. The anti-Semitism against him mattered when it did matter—and that was a fight—because he was a man; he existed, despite anti-Semitism, recognizably as an individual. Women get raped anyway because they are women: all the same in that regard. The rape of a woman by a racist excited and incensed by her race is in the realm of ordinary sexual desire, the kind all men feel, part of a continuum of sexual desire in which hostility always plays some part; the hostility is usually seen as innocuous; even when identifiable as racism it is not distinct from normal kinds of sexual arousal. As Sartre wrote in *Anti-Semite and Jew*: “In Berlin I knew a Protestant in whom sexual desire took the form of indignation. The sight of women in bathing suits aroused him to fury; he willingly encouraged that fury and passed his time at swimming pools.

The anti-Semite is like that, and one of the elements of his hatred is a profound sexual attraction toward Jews.²² In the so-called voluntary situation of prostitution, Ida, a black woman in *Another Country*, knows that the white men come to Harlem “because they wanted to do something dirty and they knew that you knew how. All black people knew that. Only, the polite ones didn’t say dirty. They said real.”²³

Women have no remedy; men sometimes get revenge. Eldridge Cleaver mapped the territory in *Soul on Ice*: “I became a rapist. To refine my technique and *modus operandi*, I started out by practicing on black girls in the ghetto . . . and when I considered myself smooth enough, I crossed the tracks and sought out white prey. I did this consciously, deliberately, willfully, methodically . . . Rape was an insurrectionary act.”²⁴ Sometimes a more muted rebellion, less overtly violent, takes place in using white women as prostitutes; as Piri Thomas described in *Down These Mean Streets*, “We got on a high and I asked my newfound *amigo* if he knew a cathouse, a white cathouse. I wanted to break out against this two-tone South; I wanted to fuck a white woman in Texas.”²⁵ Violent or more superficially civil, the revenge was in fucking white women under the conditions most degrading, most debasing, to women: rape and prostitution. The white women, elevated by race in Texas, were in the white cathouse to fuck.

The obliteration of being racially devalued is described by the man without a face in Abe’s *The Face of Another*; seeing the Harlem riots on television he sees “thousands of men and women, like me without faces, gathering together.”²⁶ He identifies with Harlem blacks; and he also identifies with Koreans who in Japan are often discriminated against, viewed as a lower race. The Koreans, having different faces, are treated as if they

are faceless. Without consciously realizing it, he had come “to have a feeling of closeness with them” because they were “frequently the objects of prejudice.”²⁷ The *dispossession* of being faceless is likened to the radical devaluing of Koreans by the Japanese, longtime and hated imperialists in the Asian world. Inferiority is, in fact, dispossession: having no face is the perfect emblem for that dispossession because it is a dispossession from individuality, identity, and belonging. The sexualization of what is left once the face is taken away destroys any identity the inferior person might have stubbornly retained.

Justifying racial devaluation, keeping the racially devalued faceless, almost always involves the complicity of scientists—doctors, research scientists—who provide the biological facts on which distinctions of worth in race can be made. The body is sexualized and in the body one finds the sexual evidence of a hierarchy of worth. “The seminal odour of Orientals is stronger and more acrid than that of the ‘Caucasian’ West,” wrote Dr. Theodore Van De Velde in his scientific sex manual, *Ideal Marriage*. “The semen of the healthy youths of Western European races has a fresh, exhilarating smell; in the mature man it is more penetrating.”²⁸ The scientists with their biologically based facts on race and sex remove any legitimate sanctuary for a pride in self, in the equality of self, that might somehow, in ways not yet understood, survive a potent system of inferiority. One is taught inferiority by learned men; by rapists; by sadists; by torturers; by murderers. At the center of the pedagogy is the fuck.

Women qua women are the rightful victims of that pedagogy, the inevitable casualties of the fuck. *Macho* has made its way into common English—prideful masculinity, the essence of virility, action and strength rooted in the sex of a man. Frida

Kahlo, the great painter of primal female pain, used its female counterpart in language and in her paintings. According to her biographer:

Indeed, the painting presents stereotypes, the *macho* and the *chingada*, his victim. *Chingada*, literally the “screwed one,” is Mexico’s most familiar curse and a word used frequently by Frida.²⁹

Octavio Paz is then quoted to explicate the meaning beyond any possible ambiguity or sentimentality:

The verb [*chingar*, “to screw”] denotes violence, an emergence from oneself to penetrate another by force. . . . The verb is masculine, active, cruel: it stings, wounds, gashes, stains and it provokes a bitter, resentful satisfaction. The person who suffers this action is passive, inert and open, in contrast to the active, aggressive and closed person who inflicts it.³⁰

Kahlo, whose paintings are the most vivid renderings by any woman of the female screwed, gashed, wounded, precisely the *chingada*, was married to Diego Rivera, considered Mexico’s greatest modern painter. He painted socialist art, a brotherhood of dignity in work, a romance of the proletariat, epic murals of the working class. She painted what it was like being fucked by him; he himself said it,

If I loved a woman, the more I loved her, the more I wanted to hurt her. Frida was only the most obvious victim of this disgusting trait.³¹

She painted the suffering, enraged; she created an iconography of the *chingada* that was resistance, not pornography; knowing herself to be the screwed one, she made an art of passionate rebellion that shows the pain of inferiority delivered into your body—the violence of the contempt. Her rebellion, not in words, is less accessible than the capitulation of many female writers, exemplified by Marguerite Duras in *The Lover*, a novel about a female child and her adult lover, male, rich, cruel, told from the point of view of the child who loves it, who celebrates being the screwed one:

He becomes rough, desperate, he throws himself on me, devours my childish breasts, shouts insults. I close my eyes on the intense pleasure. . . . His hands are expert, marvelous, perfect. I'm very lucky, obviously, it's as if it were his profession, as if unwittingly he knew exactly what to do and what to say. He calls me a whore, a slut, he says I'm his only love, and that's what he ought to say, and what you do say when you just let things say themselves, when you let the body alone, to seek and find and take what it likes . . . ³²

Internalizing the devaluation of self fundamental in being the screwed one, the slut, the whore, celebrating it, not rebelling one bit, female complicity does not even have the dignity or the insight of world-class misogyny; for instance, Nietzsche writing to Strindberg, "I read your tragedy twice with deep emotion; it has astounded me beyond measure to find a work in which my own conception of love—with war as its means and the deathly hatred of the sexes as its fundamental law—is so magnificently expressed."³³ The ones who hate women outright know they are waging war; the complicitous women,

awed by the intensity of that war on top of and inside of their own bodies, celebrate being the screwed one. The misogynists are eloquent in condemning the rebels: "Emancipated women," wrote Strindberg, using this euphemism for feminists, "are like an army of whores and would-be whores—professional whores with abnormal inclinations . . ." ³⁴ The rebellion itself is the abnormal inclination pluralized by Strindberg's great hatred of rebel women. The complicitous women are flattered by the homage shouted during the fuck; flattered or not, the homage is inevitable, an essential and defining element in identity and sexuality for women, a compliment impossible to escape in a woman-hating society where women are sex and dirt in one human body; the screwed one; "passive, inert, and open . . ." In the more humane and sophisticated view of Graham Greene, certainly as compared with Nietzsche and Strindberg, sex with women, in an early novel, brought on "a terror of life, of going on soiling himself and repenting and soiling himself again. There was, he felt, no escape." ³⁵ Having had sex, the fictional antihero "longed with a ridiculous pathos for the mere physical purification of a bath." ³⁶ The woman, a kept woman though not by him, tells him: "'For a day we are disgusted and disappointed and disillusioned and feel dirty all over. But we are clean again in a very short time, clean enough to go back and soil ourselves all over again.'" ³⁷ The self-disgust, feeling dirty, is an outcome of sex often remarked on in literature; being clean means being chaste. The character feels himself to be trapped in "slime"; he has "wallowed"; he feels "dirtier." ³⁸

Slime is used as a metaphor for corruption, but its meaning is literal too, not specifically in Graham Greene though also in Graham Greene. The man is pulled down and in, the

woman's sensuality being, in the words of the Bible, a narrow pit, a deep ditch; "How can he be clean that is born of a woman?" (Job 4:4). *Pudendum* comes from the Latin *pudere*, "to be ashamed." In Jewish and Islamic tradition, the word for uterus means grave:

The phrase, "her grave is open," refers to the woman's body, and to the uterus in particular. According to an early Muslim tradition, Muhammad made the following statement to Ali: "A woman, when she gives birth, goes apart with the child. Her shame is open thus . . . "

The expression "grave" for uterus occurs in the Mishna and the Talmud. When a child is being born, the "grave opens," that is to say, the womb of the mother opens. The "grave" begins to open when the woman is placed on the birth stool, or when blood begins to issue from her body . . . ³⁹

Inescapably, a woman's body incarnates shame, her genitals especially signifying dirt and death: whether referred to in a *Playboy* party joke as "gash"⁴⁰ or expounded on by Freud:

Probably no male human being is spared the fright of castration at the sight of a female genital. Why some people become homosexual as a consequence of that impression, while others fend it off by creating a fetish, and the great majority surmount it, we are frankly not able to explain.⁴¹

Just seeing those genitals turns a man gay or makes him rub up against rubber for a lifetime; to "surmount it," this great fear caused by these monstrous female genitals, means to mount her successfully, unintimidated by the wound, her

castration, the blood, the slime, the filth. "Oh yes," wrote Freud to Jung, "I forgot to say that menstrual blood must be counted as excrement."⁴²

Women are also wittily rebuked for having filthy genitals. Restif de la Bretonne, who was famous in the eighteenth century for sophisticated literary pornography, not overtly sadistic but astonishingly condescending, wrote in one of his fictions (a priest giving advice to a new courtesan):

"And, most important of all, you must observe frequent ablutions in the torrid zone of your anatomy! A woman, like the rooms of houses in the city of Amsterdam—which are washed three or four times a day—must observe the most careful hygiene in these parts."⁴³

Amsterdam being frigid, not torrid, he has mixed his metaphors: or not.

Sexologist C. A. Tripp, recently in vogue, finds a material basis for the pervasive and longstanding conviction that women are genitally dirty: "fishlike vaginal odors."⁴⁴ Because of this stink, the belief that women are unclean "has invaded one religion after the other in the form of charges of defilement."⁴⁵ Van De Velde before him found that "extremely disgusting results occur when, owing to neglect of personal cleanliness where it is most needed, the natural local secretion becomes mixed with the products of urination, menstruation, and even with excrement!"⁴⁶

For Yeats, ". . . Love has pitched his mansion/In the house of excrement";⁴⁷ and Strindberg, his opposite in virtually every way, too gynophobic to say what he meant, put the filth on the other end—"I could, I suppose, get girls, but where sex

is concerned I am an aristocrat. I demand that they use soap and a toothbrush. If I fuck once I shall have to pay the slut a hundredfold. And I don't want to sow my seed in bad soil . . . ”⁴⁸ *Vagina dentata* is vivid in Strindberg's displacement to the mouth.

The filth of women is a central conceit in culture: taken to be a fact; noted, remarked on, explicated, analyzed, poetized, pornographized, satirized: genital filth, menstrual filth, excremental filth, filth down there, between the legs, in the hole, the wound oozing blood and slime, dirt and smell; the dirt inherent in the genitals or in her bad character—wash, slut, wash. She is dirt and what she touches is dirt because she contaminates, makes unclean; her dirt is a contagious dirt, defiling whatever she touches. As Matilda Joslyn Gage wrote in the nineteenth century: “Everything connected with woman was held to be unclean. It is stated that Agathro desired the Sophist Herodes to get ready for him the next morning a vessel full of pure milk, that is to say which had not been milked by the hand of a woman. But he perceived as soon as it was offered to him that it was not such as he desired, protesting that the scent of her hands who had milked it offended his nostrils.”⁴⁹ This is a contaminating smell, it spreads like a disease, epidemic; women, sexual lepers, the penis that should be there rotted away by the disease of being woman; a smelly, dirty gash, diseased, contagious. Men go there for sex, for love, believing it is a place of filth; finding it dirty and liking it dirty, wanting it dirty and needing it dirty. The dirt, the smell, bring on sex for the man, even if he has to force it on the woman. In *The War of the End of the World*, a novel about a fundamentalist revolution in the backlands of Brazil, Mario Vargas Llosa describes a rape:

He smells the odor of her, and the thought dimly crosses his mind: "It's the smell of a woman." His temples pound. With an effort he raises one arm, puts it around Jurema's shoulders. He lets go of the revolver that he is still holding and his fingers awkwardly smooth her ruffled hair. . . . She begins struggling now to free herself from Gall's grasp, but he will not let her go . . . Jurema lashes out at him with both fists, scratches his face . . . kicks at him . . . ⁵⁰

The rapist, a political man of the idealist left, recognizes the rape as oppression, himself as the oppressor. He is deeply disturbed by having raped: "It was that sudden, incomprehensible, irrepressible impulse that had made him rape Jurema after ten years of not touching a woman that was troubling his sleep"; the ten years of chastity the result of a vow made with a political comrade who "could take his pleasure with a woman only by inflicting punishment on her . . . make love only when he saw a battered, bruised body."⁵¹ The friend used prostitutes whom he brutalized. To stop the brutality, they made a pact that neither would touch a woman again, an oath of political brotherhood around sex, comprehended as oppression of the poor. Now he himself had committed a violent rape, provoked by the smell of a woman, not the perfume of a lady but the flesh smell of a woman. Her smell triggered the violence, foreshadowed the sex, announced the genitals hidden from view, created for him the urgent necessity of penetration. In the ten years he had not needed sex. Now he recognizes that he needed rape; the oppressor needs to commit the oppression—not tepid consensual sex but violent sex. The smell of the woman is direct

contact with her inferiority, her dirt in relation to his worth; as the oppressor, he expresses his need for her inferiority through rape.

One endearing aspect of male supremacy is that while men are persistently traumatized by the filth of women, the wounded and dirty genitals, the dirty menstrual blood that “must be counted as excrement,” women are supposed to have a good attitude: accepting, even rejoicing in, these vile anatomical inevitabilities that are herself. As Bruno Bettelheim wrote, typical of those who will make women accept these physical devaluations of self:

The ambivalence of the girl’s feelings about her sex organs and about the lack of a penis has been repeatedly pointed out. Hope that a penis may be acquired in and through menstruation is an example of the positive aspect of this ambivalence. Many emotionally disturbed girls express its negative side by considering the penis horrible and ugly.⁵²

It is fair to say that men are not ambivalent about “her sex organs.” There is, therefore, for them no “negative side”; they do not consider the penis “horrible and ugly”; they are not “emotionally disturbed,” no. The men are prick-proud, having no gash-envy, no filth-envy; a lust for immersion in dirt, but no envy, no mental illness, no maladjustment that particularly sticks out. Women who are so emotionally disturbed that they have a political analysis of the ways in which the penis is used, ways often horrible and ugly, are not beaten back into line by the psychiatrists but by the pornographers, as in this elegant rejoinder from *Playboy*:

For the past decade, the penis has been getting a lot of bad press. One feminist wrote derisively: "We can stimulate ourselves or be stimulated by other women as well as men can stimulate us, because that unique male offering, the phallus, is of peripheral importance, or may even be irrelevant to our sexual satisfaction." Well, sit on my face, bitch.⁵³

A man, despite the trauma and difficulty, immerses himself—for love, for sex, for children—in this mixture of secretion, urine, blood, and shit; he does it not just for himself but also for her—out of the most desperate sexual love, e.g., Swinburne: "He would have given his life for leave to touch her, his soul for a chance of dying crushed down under her feet . . . Deeply he desired to die by her, if that could be; and more deeply, if this could be, to destroy her";⁵⁴ or because she needs it, e.g., Van De Velde: "It is significant that the clitoris, in common with the rest of the female genital apparatus, only attains its full development and dimensions with regular and constant sexual intercourse."⁵⁵ The styles of love and health change but never their imperatives: submit; do it. The dirty women are supposed to keep doing it; and the brave men, attracted to the filth, will keep going in, risking castration and death or risking the simple paralysis of masculinity that can result from just seeing the mutilated genitals that are the woman. He has pride in his penis to pull him through; his semen is "the strength of the body and its life, and the light in the eyes,"⁵⁶ according to Maimonides. He can use semen to make her dirty but it ennobles him (being the source of life, cf. Aeschylus to Mailer). "You may be holding back," the Playboy Advisor says, "because you subconsciously think that coming in a woman's mouth is somehow dirty or wrong. (You are absolutely right. That's

what makes it so much fun.)”⁵⁷ In some pornography and in some sex murders, semen is spread all over the woman’s face, a man or men ejaculate all over her body; in literary pornography, to ejaculate is to *pollute* the woman. Women’s magazines sometimes recommend spreading semen on the face to enhance the complexion, pushing women to submit to a practice from pornography without any knowledge of its source or meaning. Getting women to accept semen and eroticize it in some regard—by swallowing it or spreading it on oneself—while having it remain violatory of the woman for the man in sex is the game plan; accomplished now through pornography and the collusion of woman-hating women’s magazines and in the old days, not so long ago, accomplished through the sexual manual advice of a medical doctor; Van De Velde wrote that “the odour of semen is exciting and stimulating to women, and unpleasant, even nauseating, to men.”⁵⁸ This gives semen its double-edged meaning and an intrinsic heterosexual power and significance. The possibilities of excitement for the woman and a simultaneous violation of the woman by the man are then explicated in a framework that appears on the surface to be moralistic: “For a woman (in coitus) the odour of the beloved man’s semen is delightful and excites her anew; but that of an unloved mate fills her with loathing.”⁵⁹ Even in the time of *Ideal Marriage*, there were many unloved mates; the loathing she was filled with was literal—the loathing in the form of semen driven into her to dirty her or make her more dirty or make her dirty by him.

Freud connected the penis itself with feces but not in a way that made the penis dirty, only evocative of an infantile sexual stage of development: “a person’s love of his own penis . . . is not without an element of anal erotism.”⁶⁰ The penis, as a hard,

sticklike thing, evokes the hard, sticklike fecal mass in the rectum; and, according to Freud, feces, baby, and penis are related in subconscious sexual meaning. It is true that etymologically baby and penis are related; the word *penis* comes from the Old English for *fetus*. Freud insisted on an important subconscious connection between these two phenomena and the turd in the rectum for this reason: "The relationship between the penis and the passage lined with mucous membrane which it fills and excites already has its prototype in the pregenital, anal-sadistic phase. The faecal mass . . . represents as it were the first penis, and the stimulated mucous membrane of the rectum represents that of the vagina."⁶¹ In other words, the mucous membrane that the man touches in intercourse with his penis, the vagina, is dirty like the rectum. The penis evokes the turd in the rectum because the man has the experience of touching a membrane just like the rectal wall. The relationship of the penis to the actual turd is evocative and symbolic, distant. The rectum and the vagina are analogous in present time. The vagina of the woman is not phenomenologically distinct from the mucous membrane of the rectum.

For humans, the descent into the excremental is a descent into sadism and death. For women, being excremental is the dimension of inferiority that legitimates and makes appropriate sadistic sexual acts that pass as simple sex, a cruelty in sex, the brutal domination through sexual subjugation of a worthless, essentially scatological thing. The sadism is part of the act of intercourse or an adjunct to it; it is a cruelty of disregard and also a brutality of behavior. The descent into death is held to be synonymous with penile descent into the woman, which ends eventually and inevitably in detumescence. Buried in dirt, the penis strikes, then dies. *Vagina* comes from the Latin meaning

scabbard or sheath. The penetration is implicitly conceptualized as a cutting into, a sadistic, slicing entry, through dirt into dirt: the penis is buried, fucks, and dies. "Death is genitalized as a return to the womb,"⁶² writes Norman O. Brown, always in celebration of the act. Coitus takes place in "a womb-cave," "the grave."⁶³ Fornication, he reminds us, comes from the word *fornix*, an underground arched vault: as if it, the *fornix*, were literally underground, buried. Actually in ancient Rome prostitutes did business under the arched vaults throughout the city—arched bridges over primitive sewers; and fornication meant intercourse with the dirty women in dirty, hidden, secret places under the bridges that sheltered sewers. In the world of psychology, the ecstatic world of Brown or the more tragic, even morbid, world of Freud, the death connected with sex is held to be the death of the penis, trapped in the castrating cave, the vagina. But in the world of real life—and in the subtextual worlds of Brown and Freud and nearly everyone else—men use the penis to deliver death to women who are, literally, in their genitals, dirt to the men. The women are raped as adults or as children; prostituted; fucked, then murdered; murdered, then fucked. These violent degradations are not rare; they are so commonplace that the victims cannot be remembered from one day to the next, so commonplace that the victims remain nameless in a mass of ordinary names from ordinary places. In the normal world of everyday, regular culture, women are dirty: brilliantly articulate men on street corners say so with unmatched eloquence. In the normal but hidden world of everyday, regular sexual exploitation of women as inferiors, the dirty women are sadistically abused because sex itself is used sadistically; intercourse becomes a form of explicit sadism against women. In the heinous, abnormal world of prison and

concentration camps, dirt, death, and sadism go wild, there being no limits on what men do to women; yet the elements of sadism, so extreme, so incomprehensible we insist with bland and committed innocence, are not really unrecognizable. They mimic with stunning cogency the norms of disparagement and cruelty that constitute fucking male-to-female. The intensely cruel and ugly acts are not genuinely alien from ordinary practices and meanings. In Treblinka, one sadistic man, twenty years old, “slashed open the bellies of the women vertically with a huge sword,” this while they were living; after the women, disemboweled, were pulled out of the gas chambers, prisoners were forced “to mount them and simulate the act of love.”⁶⁴ *Vagina* means sheath. Penetration was never meant to be kind. In pornography, scissors, razors, knives, and daggers are poised at the entrance to the vagina, cuts evident on the delicate skin of the pubic area, often shaved; or a sword penetrates the vagina, the woman smiles and smears the blood from her penetrated vagina all over her own body—eroticized dirt, eroticized sadism, eroticized death—not in a concentration camp but sold in a supermarket as mass entertainment, the evisceration happily simulated; or in a snuff film, real; or in a sex-murder, real, the vagina not infrequently mutilated with a knife. Zola made clear in *La Bête Humaine* that one wanted to slice a woman open with scissors “not because she was resisting him, oh no, it was for the enjoyment of it, because he wanted to . . .”⁶⁵ In painting after painting, speaking for the *chingada*, the screwed one, Frida Kahlo paints the woman vividly wounded, dripping blood; in one, *A Few Small Nips*, painted in 1935, a naked woman (except for one sock and one shoe) is on a bed, gashed all over; she is alive, wide-eyed, her body animated in curves and subtle, living contortion; a man

stands upright next to the bed, he is fully dressed, even wearing a hat, and he holds a knife in his hand; he is aloof, indifferent, blank; and the blood in blotches and smears is all over her body and spreads out over walls and over the floor in spots and smears even past the boundaries of the canvas to the frame. Kahlo shows the unspeakable pain of being *alive* and female, penetrated like this.

Sadism and death, under male supremacy, converge at the vagina: to open the woman up, go inside her, penis or knife. The poor little penis kills before it dies.

Some classy men say that sex is connected to the *awareness* of death; they mean to suggest that sex takes place inside a context of human consciousness of the inevitability of death; that man fucks with the certain, tragic knowledge of death: knowledge, intellection, and sensibility all connoted by the awareness itself. They mean penile sex, human death. Vargas Llosa's rapist with a political conscience wonders:

Would his penis get hard at the supreme moment, as was said to happen to men who drowned or were beheaded? That belief straight out of a horror show concealed some torturous truth, some mysterious affinity between sex and the awareness of death. If such a thing did not exist, what had happened early this morning and what had happened a little while ago would not have occurred. . . . Yes, it had been sniffing death close at hand that had made him fall upon this woman and take her with his stiff penis, twice in the same day. "A strange relationship based on fear and semen and nothing else," he thought.⁶⁶

Despite the high aspirations for "awareness of death," "torturous truth," and "mysterious affinity," he smelled her and

raped her: twice now. He sniffed and raped, more doglike than human.

Georges Bataille, a philosopher of the erotic and therefore a classy guy, likens what he calls “eroticism”—classy sex—to dissolution or death: “The passive, female side is essentially the one that is dissolved as a separate entity.”⁶⁷ The whole essence of this classy sex “is assenting to life up to the point of death.”⁶⁸

There have been two kinds of rebellion against this conflation of sex and death, this convergence of sadism and sex on the woman’s body. In the realm of philosophy and politics, feminists have rebelled, often in a humane language that seeks to rescue sex and love from what Danish feminist Suzanne Brøgger called “the traditional sadomasochistic humiliation ritual”; “only in death have European lovers ever been able to unite in any satisfactory manner . . . This is truly the damnation of the flesh!”⁶⁹ In the realm of real life, under conditions of atrocity or despair, some women have refused to surrender to the callous sex-and-death motifs of behavior and belief that saturate so-called civilization. As Primo Levi described in *Survival in Auschwitz*:

All took leave from life in the manner which most suited them. Some praying, some deliberately drunk, others lustfully intoxicated for the last time. But the mothers stayed up to prepare the food for the journey with tender care, and washed their children and packed the luggage; and at dawn the barbed wire was full of children’s washing hung out in the wind to dry. Nor did they forget the diapers, the toys, the cushions and the hundred other small things which mothers remember and which children always need. Would you not do the same? If you and

your child were going to be killed tomorrow, would you not give him to eat today?⁷⁰

Would you not do the same, philosophers of sex and death, Freud, Vargas Llosa, Bataille? Swinburne, Yeats? Nietzsche, Strindberg, Diego Rivera, Eldridge Cleaver, Sartre, Baldwin, Timerman, Reich, Byron, Lawrence, Bettelheim too, forgive me, would you not do the same? Have you ever done the same? "We could not stand women speaking the truth," wrote Joseph Conrad in a novel. "We could not bear it. It would cause infinite misery and bring about the most awful disturbances in this rather mediocre, but still idealistic fool's paradise in which each of us lives his own little life—the unit in the great sum of existence. And they know it. They are merciful."⁷¹ Who would not do the same? "Here and now," wrote Bataille, "I must emphasize that the female partner in eroticism was seen as the victim, the male as the sacrificer, both during the consummation losing themselves in the continuity established by the first destructive act."⁷² He must emphasize. The imperative is to emphasize, not to do the same; to do the opposite, not to do the same; to have sex, which means creating a victim—not to do the same.

Humans wound genitals in religious rites or for social or sexual reasons, for instance, the great tradition of male supremacy expressed in the scarification of the female body. Adult male circumcision and subincision are frequently ordeals of manhood, tests of endurance undergone during ceremonies that usher in manhood in its most social and significant meaning: the marked phallus signifies the high status of the adult male. Infant males are circumcised, for instance, in Jewish ritual, and as a common hygienic practice in the West.

There is female circumcision—clitoridectomy; and more egregious genital mutilation—labial fusion and infibulation. Male and female genital mutilation are not analogous practices. For the male, the mark signifies a higher civil status; for the female, the mutilated genitals mean civil insignificance and sexual colonialization. In the Freudian West, the female genitals per se are reckoned to be a wound, castrated, mutilated in themselves, as God made them; the woman is born genitally mutilated.

In Hebrew tradition, male circumcision denotes a special bond between man and God; as described by Thomas Mann in *Joseph and His Brothers*:

It was the marriage commanded and appointed by God between man and the deity, performed upon that part of the flesh which seemed to form the focus of his being, and upon which every physical vow was taken. Many a man bore the name of God on his organ of generation, or wrote it there before he possessed a woman. The bond of faith with God was sexual in its nature, and thus, contracted with a jealous creator and lord, insistent upon sole possession, it inflicted upon the human male a kind of civilizing weakening into the female. . . . in other words, a female significance.⁷³

In this interpretation, circumcision made the man to God as the woman was to the man, incomplete, a little butchered. In Christianity, there is an incarnated god with a penis; according to Leo Steinberg in his book on depictions of Christ's sexuality in paintings, the god with the male penis emphasizes the fragility of the human condition, the vulnerability of being human: "The sexual member exhibited by the Christ Child, so

far from asserting aggressive virility, concedes instead God's assumption of human weakness; it is an affirmation not of superior prowess but of condescension to kinship, a sign of the Creator's self-abasement to his creature's condition"; Christ's circumcised penis "is offered to immolation."⁷⁴ In the contemporary Western world, male circumcision is routinely done for so-called hygienic reasons. The genital is wounded, mutilated, so that it will stay clean as it immerses itself obsessively in dirt.

Female circumcision, which originated, as did male circumcision, in ancient Egypt, is now widely practiced in parts of Africa; but it has been used in modern Amerika, for instance, to "treat" delinquent girls, the excision of the clitoris held to take away sexual drive and behavioral nonconformity. The circumcision of females, unlike the circumcision of males, destroys a capacity for sexual response; and infibulation, whatever its origins, constitutes a sadistic practice of mutilation on a civilly inferior class. "So extensive is the infibulation operation—the clitoris is excised and the surrounding tissue scarified so that the fusion of the labia will occur during the healing," writes Sarah Hrdy, "that approximately 9 percent of girls operated on under semimodern conditions (with some anesthesia) suffer hemorrhage or shock. Infibulated women are partially cut open at marriage, and must be fully opened at childbirth—after which they are sewn up again."⁷⁵

The literal wounding of the genitals, including the circumcision of male infants, suggests human, not divine, fury: a hatred of the self in sex passed on as a patriarchal legacy; a human practice expressing for the male a self-hatred and toward the female a genocidal loathing. The wounding is literal; yet it is also psychologically true—in sex, the act itself is often wounding—scarring, hurting, a jagged edge of pain and grief.

Certainly this is true often for women; as the first-person narrator says in Joan Didion's novel *A Book of Common Prayer*,

I recall once telling Charlotte about a village on the Orinoco where the female children were ritually cut on the inner thigh by their first sexual partners, the point being to scar the female with the male's totem. Charlotte saw nothing extraordinary in this. "I mean that's pretty much what happens everywhere, isn't it," she said. "Somebody cuts you? Where it doesn't show?"⁷⁶

Surely if humans, far and wide, wound the genitals, we hate them; we hate where they take us, what we do with them. This is not an equal hate—male and female; but a hate of male over female, the male so angered by the penis and what—he thinks, feels, knows—it makes him do—penetrate the vagina, dirt, death—that he inflicts retribution on it: wounding it when he has the power, the civil power, not to; to prohibit any such wounding. In intercourse he is, in the words of Marguerite Yourcenar's Hadrian, "[n]ailed to the beloved body like a slave to a cross."⁷⁷ He wounds the genitals responsible: his own and hers.

The men as a body politic have power over women and decide how women will suffer: which sadistic acts against the bodies of women will be construed to be normal. In the United States, incest is increasingly the sadism of choice, the intercourse itself wounding the female child and socializing her to her female status—early; perhaps a sexual response to the political rebellion of adult women; a tyranny to destroy the potential for rebellion. "I felt like I was being ripped up the middle of my legs all the way to my throat," one incest victim said. "I was sure that if I opened my eyes and looked down, I would be in

two parts on the bed.”⁷⁸ This too is genital mutilation—with the penis doing the cutting. Perhaps incestuous rape is becoming a central paradigm for intercourse in our time. Women are supposed to be small and childlike, in looks, in rights; child prostitution keeps increasing in mass and in legitimacy, the children sexually used by a long chain of men—fathers, uncles, grandfathers, brothers, pimps, pornographers, and the good citizens who are the consumers; and men, who are, after all, just family, are supposed to slice us up the middle, leaving us in parts on the bed.

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