

1971

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The Presence of 1971

The Raging Affair!

Walter Millett

&

Henry Miller

BY ANY MAJOR LITERARY PERSPECTIVE, the land of Millett is a barren and mediocre terrain, its flora reminiscent of a Ph.D. tract, its roads a narrow argument, and its horizon low. Still, there is a story they tell

1472  
THE PRISONER OF SEX

of Kate Millett when the winds blow and lamps gutter with a last stirring of the flame. Then, as the skirts of witches go whipping around the wick, they tell how Kate went up to discuss the thesis at her college and a learned professor took issue with her declaration that the wife of the hero Rojack in a work called *An American Dream* had practiced sodomy with husband and lovers.

"No, no," cried the professor. "I know the author, I know him well, I have discussed the scene with him more than once and it is not sodomy she practices, but analingus. It is for that she is killed, since it is a vastly more deranging offense in the mind's eye!"

It is said that Kate turned pale and showed cold sweat upon her skin. But she was not a future leader of millions for nothing, her argument depended on sodomy, and the art of argument was to ignore forever what did not fit; her work appeared with this good passage:

... Here is where one must depend on the forceful role of sodomy in the book, she admits that she has been enjoying this very activity with her new lovers. Now sodomy is a specialty in which our hero takes personal pride. Though he boasts to her face that his mistresses far excel her in this activity, the notion that his wife is committing sodomous adultery is evidently too severe a trial on his patience

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1473

## THE ADVOCATE

... he promptly retaliates by strangling the upstart. As Mrs. Rojack is one of those Celtic sporting women, it is not easy work . . .

Well, it could be said for Kate that she was nothing if not a pug-nosed wit, and that was good, since in literary matters she had not much else. Her lack of fidelity to the material she read was going to be equaled only by her authority in characterizing it — analingus was yes as sodomy — and the yaws of her distortion were nicely hidden by the smudge pots of her indignation. So her land was a foul and dreary place to cross, a stingy country whose treacherous inhabitants (were they the very verbs and phrases of her book?) jeered at difficulties which were often the heart of the matter, the food served at every inn was a can of ideological lard, a grit and granite of thesis-factories turned out aggregates of concept-jargon on every ridge, stacks of such clauses fed the sky with smoke, and musical instruments full of the spirit of nonviolence emitted the sound of flaws and blats. Bile and bubbles of intellectual flatulence coursed in the river, and the bloody ground steamed with the limbs of every amputated quote. Everywhere were signs that men were guilty and women must win.

What then has happened to our promise of a varied

1474

### THE PRISONER OF SEX

terrain of mountains and jungles, of explorations into the work of novelists known for their preoccupation with the needs of men? Has it disappeared altogether, or is it that any trek across this bog of flatland, swamp, and grinding sands of prose is no more than a skitter across a rhetorical skin, a steamy literary webbing whose underneath, once upturned, reveals another world, a circus of subterranean attractions which can be viewed only by digging up each quotation buried in her book? For each corpse was so crudely assassinated, then so unceremoniously dumped, that the poor fellows are now as martyrs beneath the sod, and every shroud is become a phosphorescence of literary lights, a landscape of metaphorical temples. Yet if we are able to find such a literary world, when entrance requires no less than the resurrection of the corpses in her graves, what is to be said of her method? Can she be an honor student in some occult school of thuggee (now open to the ladies via the pressures of Women's Liberation)? It is possible. For Kate is the perfect gun. It is as if she does not know why she kills, just senses that here the job is ready to be done, and there the job must be done. It is almost as if some higher tyrant has fingered the quotes, has said, "They are getting too close to a little divine sense here — bury 'em deep in shit, Kate-baby."

*Kate Millett's tool is a*

~~Kate baby nods, goes out. A sawed-off shotgun is~~

her tool. What a blast at Henry Miller:

*As all Americans know, the commercial world is a battlefield. When executives are "fucked" by the company, they can retaliate by "fucking" their secretaries. Miller's is "part-nigger" and "so damned pleased to have someone fuck her without blushing," that she can be shared out to the boss's pal Curley. She commits suicide eventually, but in business, "it's fuck or be fucked," Miller observes, providing some splendid insight into the many meanings we attach to the word.*

"It's fuck or be fucked," writes Millett, quoting Miller. Except it is not Miller she is quoting — even if she gives him words and puts them in quotation marks. Did an editor discover a discrepancy? There is a footnote: "This is the sense of the passage." But it is not the sense. Miller writes: "We were a merry crew, united in our desire to fuck the company at all costs. And while fucking the company we fucked everything in sight that we could get hold of . . ." <sup>1</sup> — a merry observation, not a bitter one. But Kate's version works more effectively to slip a reader the assumption that Miller is a racist who jeers at his secretary's death: "She commits suicide eventually, but in business, 'it's fuck or be fucked,' Miller observes," although now we know this has not been his observation. In fact, the

## THE PRISONER OF SEX

suicide isn't even mentioned at that point in *Tropic of Capricorn* — it's mentioned twenty-eight pages later in an opposite context where Miller, discovering that the secretary is about to be fired because one of his superiors doesn't want a Negro in the company, comes to her defense, describes her indeed to his superiors as "extremely intelligent and extremely capable." To himself, he thinks, "when she was angry she was magnificent . . ." Miller has begun to fall in love with her. But we may as well enjoy the passage.

*I told her quietly that if she were fired I would quit too. She pretended not to believe it at first. I said I meant it, that I didn't care what happened. She seemed to be unduly impressed; she took me by the two hands and she held them very gently, the tears rolling down her cheeks.*

*That was the beginning of things. I think it was the very next day that I slipped her a note saying that I was crazy about her. She read the note sitting opposite me and when she was through she looked me square in the eye and said she didn't believe it. But we went to dinner again that night and we had more to drink and we danced and while we were dancing she pressed herself against me lasciviously. It was just the time, as luck would have it, that my wife was getting ready to have another abortion. I was telling Valeska about it as we danced. On the way home she suddenly said — "Why don't you let me lend you a hundred dollars?" The next night I brought her home to dinner and I let her hand the wife the hundred dollars.*

## THE ADVOCATE

*I was amazed how well the two of them got along. Before the evening was over it was agreed upon that Valeska would come to the house the day of the abortion and take care of the kid. The day came and I gave Valeska the afternoon off. About an hour after she had left I suddenly decided that I would take the afternoon off also. I started toward the burlesque on Fourteenth Street. When I was about a block from the theater I suddenly changed my mind. It was just the thought that if anything happened — if the wife were to kick off — I wouldn't feel so damned good having spent the afternoon at the burlesque. I walked around a bit, in and out of the penny arcades, and then I started homeward.*

*It's strange how things turn out. Trying to amuse the kid I suddenly remembered a trick my grandfather had shown me when I was a child. You take the dominoes and you make tall battleships out of them; then you gently pull the tablecloth on which the battleships are floating until they come to the edge of the table when suddenly you give a brisk tug and they fall onto the floor. We tried it over and over again, the three of us, until the kid got so sleepy that she toddled off to the next room and fell asleep. The dominoes were lying all over the floor and the tablecloth was on the floor too. Suddenly Valeska was leaning against the table, her tongue halfway down my throat, my hand between her legs. As I laid her back on the table she twined her legs around me. I could feel one of the dominoes under my feet — part of the fleet that we had destroyed a dozen times or more.*

At this point, Miller goes off into a reverie about his grandfather and his boyhood (which is his way of pro-

## THE PRISONER OF SEX

tracting the act). A nostalgic reverie follows with memories of photographs in boyhood books, Teddy Roosevelt, San Juan Hill, the *Maine*, Admiral Dewey, Schley and Sampson. Then he writes:

*. . . We had hardly finished when the bell rang and it was my wife coming home from the slaughterhouse. I was still buttoning my fly as I went through the hall to open the gate. She was as white as flour. She looked as though she'd never be able to go through another one. We put her to bed and then we gathered up the dominoes and put the tablecloth back on the table.*

Well, he has certainly fucked her, and fucked her while his wife is having an abortion, and left us with an image of a white man making love to a black woman while thinking of San Juan Hill, and one hundred twenty-one pages later he has not so much loaned her as lost her to his friend Curley, but the sense we have been given by Millett of a boss using his black secretary shamelessly, and jeering at her suicide, is warped. "She was so damned pleased to have someone fuck her without blushing," is in context the bitter and painful remark of a man who felt some love for a woman who when alive "was picked clean too, by the human worms who have no respect for anything which has a different tint, a different odor."

That last note is, of course, vintage. Only a comic liberal would speak today of respect for people with different tints, but *Tropic of Capricorn* came out in 1939 and is about the Twenties when it was still radical to believe whites and blacks could make love together, the work of Miller is in fact a Baedeker to the remarkable sexuality of the Twenties, and one would expect in a book called *Sexual Politics*, which contains a part titled "The Sexual Revolution, First Phase: 1830-1930," that much would be made of the Twenties, and the work of Miller in relation to it. But "Sexual Revolution, First Phase: 1830-1930," while it includes nothing less than a brief history of feminism plus a view of nineteenth-century attitudes toward women in the work of the Brontës, Mill, Ruskin, Meredith, Hardy, Wilde, and Engels, is egregiously mis-titled, since there is nothing in it from 1900 to 1930, nothing of the First World War and the Twenties, nothing of Fitzgerald, Aleister Crowley, and Caresse Crosby, nothing of Prohibition, surrealism, Daisy Buchanan, Brett Ashley, Hollywood, jazz, or the Charleston, not a word from 1920 to 1930, a decade conceivably as interesting in the emancipation of women as any other ten years since the decline of Rome. But such an inclusion might have called for another hundred pages, which conceivably Millett didn't

*THE PRISONER OF SEX*

have in her head. The Twenties are a thicket for any thesis-monger with an ax. That may be why Millett never once looks at Miller as some wandering troubadour of the Twenties who carried the sexual revolution through the cities of the New World and the Old, no, Miller has been labeled a "counterrevolutionary sexual politician," he belongs to that tidy part of her thesis which will neatly see 1930 to 1960 as a time of sexual counterrevolution. She would hardly be ready, plans drawn, subdivisions staked and sold, to put up with the thundering horror that Miller is an archetype of the man of the Twenties, is indeed the true sexual revolutionary if we are willing to grant that any equivalent figure of the Renaissance would by that measure also be a revolutionary, since no revolution ever picks up momentum without a profound change in the established consciousness of the time. Just as the Renaissance was a period in which men dared, as perhaps never before in history, to allow themselves to pursue the line of their thought and embark on exploration with the idea that such activities were good and valid in themselves and so did not have to be initiated with external blessing or forced to scurry under the shadow of inviolable taboo, but rather the world was a theater, and nature a laboratory open to the adventurer with an inquiring mind — so the Twenties were a species of

## THE ADVOCATE

sexual renaissance where man emerged from the long medieval night of Victorian sex with its perversions, hypocrisies, and brothel dispensations, and set out to explore not the world, but himself, not man of Victorian reason with his buried sexual pocket, but man as himself, Henry Miller, with his brain and his balls in the intimate and continuing dialogue of his daily life, which meant that one followed the line of one's sexual impulse without a backward look at what was moral, responsible, or remotely desirable for society, that one set out to feed one's cock (as man from the Renaissance had set out to feed his brain) and since the effort was pioneer in the very real way that no literary man with the power to shift consciousness had ever given that much attention before to the vagaries and outright contradictions of a stiff prick without a modicum of conscience, no one had ever dared to assume that such a life might be as happy and amusing as the next, that the paganism of a big-city fucker had its own balance, and such a man could therefore wage an all-out war to storm the mysteries with his phallus as a searchlight because all sexual experience was valid if one looked at it clearly and no fuck was in vain, well, it was a sexual renaissance sure enough, and it depended on a rigorous even a delighted honesty in portraying the detail of one's faults, in writing without shit, which

*THE PRISONER OF SEX*

is to say writing with the closest examination of one's own. Miller was a true American spirit. He knew that in a nation of transplants and weeds the best was always next to the worst, and right after shit comes Shinola. It was all equal to him because he understood that it is never equal — in the midst of heaven a hole, and out of the slimy coruscated ridiculous comes a pearl; he is a demon at writing about bad fucks with all the gusto he gives to good ones, no fuck is in vain — the air may prove most transcendent at the edge of the vomit, or if not, then the nausea it produces can give birth to an otherwise undiscovered project as the mind clears out of its vertigo. So he dives into the sordid, portrays men and women as they have hardly been painted before, a girl having her period in the middle of an orgy, cock, balls, knees, thighs, cunt, and belly in a basting of blood, then soap and towels, a round of good-byes — a phrase or two later he is off on the beginning of a ten-page description of how he makes love to his wife which goes through many a mood, he will go right down to the depths, no cellar has maggots or rats big enough to frighten him, he can even write about the whipped-out flayed heel-ground end of his own desire, about fucking when too exhausted to fuck, and come up with a major metaphor. Let it be introduced by Kate Millett:

## THE ADVOCATE

*One memorable example of sex as a war of attrition waged upon economic grounds is the fifteen-franc whore whom Miller and his friend Van Norden hire in the Paris night and from whom, despite their own utter lack of appetite and her exhaustion from hunger, it is still necessary to extort the price.*

Let us see what Millett is talking about. She seems to have price confused with product. Here is Miller.

*And then she commences a hard luck story, about the hospital and the back rent and the baby in the country. But she doesn't overdo it. She knows that our ears are stopped; but the misery is there inside her, like a stone, and there's no room for any other thoughts. She isn't trying to make an appeal to our sympathies — she's just shifting this big weight inside her from one place to another. I rather like her. I hope to Christ she hasn't got a disease.*

*In the room she goes about her preparations mechanically. "There isn't a crust of bread about by any chance?" she inquires, as she squats over the bidet. Van Norden laughs at this. "Here, take a drink," he says, shoving a bottle at her. She doesn't want anything to drink; her stomach's already on the bum, she complains.*

*"That's just a line with her," says Van Norden. "Don't let her work on your sympathies. Just the same, I wish she'd talk about something else. How the hell can you get up any passion when you've got a starving cunt on your hands?"*<sup>2</sup>

Up to this point, Kate's description has been a reasonable summary. Now she goes on with:

## THE PRISONER OF SEX

*As sex, or rather "cunt," is not only merchandise but a monetary specie, Miller's adventures read like so many victories for sharp practice, carry the excitement of a full ledger, and operate on the flat premise that quantity is quality.*

"How the hell can you get up any passion when you have a starving cunt on your hands?" We are installed on the heights of chivalry. Can any author ever recover from this point? But Miller is following the logic where it leads — out of the deepest dungeons will the logic of cock lead him to the towers of metaphor.

*Precisely! We haven't any passion either of us. And as for her, one might as well expect her to produce a diamond necklace as to show a spark of passion. But there's the fifteen francs and something has to be done about it. It's like a state of war: the moment the condition is precipitated nobody thinks about anything but peace, about getting it over with. And yet nobody has the courage to lay down his arms, to say, "I'm fed up with it . . . I'm through." No, there's fifteen francs somewhere, which nobody gives a damn about any more and which nobody is going to get in the end anyhow, but the fifteen francs is like the primal cause of things and rather than listen to one's own voice, rather than walk out on the primal cause, one surrenders to the situation, one goes on butchering and butchering and the more cowardly one feels the more heroically does he behave . . .*

*It's exactly like a state of war — I can't get it out of my*

## THE ADVOCATE

*head. The way she works over me, to blow a spark of passion into me, makes me think what a damned poor soldier I'd be if I was ever silly enough to be trapped like this and dragged to the front. I know for my part that I'd surrender everything, honor included, in order to get out of the mess. I haven't any stomach for it, and that's all there is to it. But she's got her mind set on the fifteen francs and if I don't want to fight about it she's going to make me fight. But you can't put fight into a man's guts if he hasn't any fight in him.*

Victories for sharp practice? Excitement of a full ledger?

*Van Norden seems to have a more normal attitude about it. He doesn't care a rap about the fifteen francs either now; it's the situation itself which intrigues him. It seems to call for a show of mettle — his manhood is involved. The fifteen francs are lost, whether we succeed or not. There's something more involved — not just manhood perhaps, but will. It's like a man in the trenches again: he doesn't know any more why he should go on living, because if he escapes now he'll only be caught later, but he goes on just the same, and even though he has the soul of a cockroach and has admitted as much to himself, give him a gun or a knife or even just his bare nails, and he'll go on slaughtering and slaughtering, he'd slaughter a million men rather than stop and ask himself why.*

*As I watch Van Norden tackle her, it seems to me that I'm looking at a machine whose cogs have slipped. Left to themselves, they could go on this way forever, grinding and slipping, without ever anything happening. Until a*

## THE PRISONER OF SEX

hand shuts the motor off. The sight of them coupled like a pair of goats without the least spark of passion, grinding and grinding away for no reason except the fifteen francs, washes away every bit of feeling I have except the inhuman one of satisfying my curiosity. The girl is lying on the edge of the bed and Van Norden is bent over her like a satyr with his two feet solidly planted on the floor. I am sitting on a chair behind him, watching their movements with a cool, scientific detachment; it doesn't matter to me if it should last forever. It's like watching one of those crazy machines which throw the newspaper out, millions and billions and trillions of them with their meaningless headlines. The machine seems more sensible, crazy as it is, and more fascinating to watch, than the human beings and the events which produced it. My interest in Van Norden and the girl is nil; if I could sit like this and watch every single performance going on at this minute all over the world my interest would be even less than nil. I wouldn't be able to differentiate between this phenomenon and the rain falling or a volcano erupting. As long as that spark of passion is missing there is no human significance in the performance. The machine is better to watch. And these two are like a machine which has slipped its cogs. It needs the touch of a human hand to set it right. It needs a mechanic.

I get down on my knees behind Van Norden and I examine the machine more attentively. The girl throws her head on one side and gives me a despairing look. "It's no use," she says. "It's impossible." Upon which Van Norden sets to work with renewed energy, just like an old billy goat. He's such an obstinate cuss that he'll break his horns rather than give up. And he's getting sore now because I'm tickling him in the rump.

## THE ADVOCATE

"For God's sake, Joe, give it up! You'll kill the poor girl."

"Leave me alone," he grunts. "I almost got it in that time."

But it is just this last fillip of male humor, that fat tone of the farmer working his bull into the calf, the pride of men able to get their hands in the short hair which enrages Millett most, blinds her with such anger that she misses the point Miller will make in another few lines — the quintessential point that lust when it fails is a machine.

*You can get over a cunt and work away like a billy goat until eternity; you can go to the trenches and be blown to bits; nothing will create that spark of passion if there isn't the intervention of a human hand. Somebody has to put his hand into the machine and let it be wrenched off if the cogs are to mesh again. Somebody has to do this without hope of reward, without concern over the fifteen francs . . .*

But again, what sort of victory is this for sharp practice? The only sharp practice is in her assessment of the passage. Literary lawyers cannot do criticism, they can only write briefs, and Kate holds court in the land of Millett. Poor Henry. He has spent his literary life exploring the watershed of sex from that uncharted side which goes by the name of lust and it is an epic work for any man; over the centuries, most of the

*THE PRISONER OF SEX*

poets of the world have spent their years on the other side; they wrote of love. But lust is a world of bewildering dimensions, for it is that power to take over the ability to create and convert it to a force. Curious force. Lust exhibits all the attributes of junk. It dominates the mind and other habits, it appropriates loyalties, generalizes character, leaches character out, rides on the fuel of almost any emotional gas — whether hatred, affection, curiosity, even the pressures of boredom — yet it is never definable because it can alter to love or be as suddenly sealed from love, indeed the more intense lust becomes, the more it is indefinable, the line of the ridge between lust and love is where the light is first luminous, then blinding, and the ground remains unknown. Henry, a hairy prospector, red eye full of lust, has wandered these ridge lines for the years of his literary life, getting to know the mosquitoes by name down in every swamp and calling to the ozones of the highest lust on many a cloud-covered precipice. While cunts are merely watering places for that lust, boscage, fodder, they are also, no matter how despised — it is the private little knowledge of lust — that indispensable step closer to the beyond, so old Priapus the ram admits, “perhaps a cunt, smelly though it may be, is one of the prime symbols for the connection between all things.”

He has slipped the clue across. Here is a motive to the lust that drives a man to scour his balls and his back until he is ready to die from the cannonading he has given his organs, the deaths through which he has dragged some futures of his soul, it is a clue which all but says that somewhere in the insane passions of all men is a huge desire to drive forward into the seat of creation, grab some part of that creation in the hands, sink the cock to the hilt, sink it into as many hilts as will hold it; for man is alienated from the nature which brought him forth, he is not like woman in possession of an inner space which gives her link to the future, so he must drive to possess it, he must if necessary come close to blowing his head off that he may possess it. "Perhaps a cunt, smelly though it may be, is one of the prime symbols for the connection between all things."

Of course Kate will put it in somewhat less commendatory fashion:

*In the case of the two actual women . . . who appear in Miller's world amidst its thousand floozie caricatures, personality and sexual behavior is so completely unrelated that, in the sexual episodes where they appear, any other names might have been conveniently substituted. For the purpose of every bout is the same: a demonstration of the hero's self-conscious detachment before the manifestations of a lower order of life. During an epic encounter with*

## THE PRISONER OF SEX

*Mara, the only woman he ever loved, Miller is as clinical as he was toward Ida; Mara just as grotesque:*

"And on this bright and slippery gadget Mara twisted like an eel. She wasn't any longer a woman in heat, she wasn't even a woman; she was just a mass of indefinable contours wriggling and squirming like a piece of fresh bait seen upside down through a convex mirror in a rough sea.

"I had long ceased to be interested in her contortions; except for the part of me that was in her I was cool as a cucumber and remote as the Dog Star . . .

"Towards dawn, Eastern Standard Time, I saw by the frozen condensed-milk expression about the jaw that it was happening. Her face went through all the metamorphoses of early uterine life, only in reverse. With the last dying spark it collapsed like a punctured bag, the eyes and nostrils smoking like toasted acorns in a slightly wrinkled lake of pale skin."

Mouthpiece for a corporate body of ideas, Kate has neglected to state that it is another of Miller's descriptions of the worst of fucks, of a marathon of lust-fuck in which he is fixed, which he loathes. It is, precisely, not typical of the act with Mara, but then here is what he wrote just before the passage she quotes:

*When I returned to resume the ordeal my cock felt as if it were made of old rubber bands. I had absolutely no more feeling at that end; it was like pushing a piece of stiff suet down a drain-pipe. What's more, there wasn't another*

## THE ADVOCATE

*charge left in the battery; if anything was to happen now it would be in the nature of gall and leathery worms or a drop of pus in a solution of thin pot cheese. What surprised me was that it continued to stand up like a hammer; it had lost all the appearance of a sexual implement; it looked disgustingly like a cheap gadget from the five and ten cent store, like a bright-colored piece of fishing tackle minus the bait. And on this bright and slippery gadget Mara twisted like an eel.<sup>3</sup>*

It is curious that she will find these extraordinary descriptions of the horrors of near-dead ice-cold bang-it-out fucking to be odious, as if she is the Battling Annie of some new prudery, yet Kate is still the clarion call for that single permissive sexual standard where a man's asshole is the democratic taxpaying equivalent of any vagina. Of course, it is denigration of woman she protests, the reduction of woman to object, to meat for the cock, woman as a creature who can tune the prick and allow man to adjust his selfish antenna toward the connection of all things, it is the lack of Miller's regard for woman as a person which she claims to abhor, yet in another part of the land of Millett, on page 117 of *Sexual Politics*, Kate is all but invoking praise for Masters and Johnson because they "prove that the female sexual cycle is capable of multiple orgasms in quick succession, each of which is analogous to the detumescence, tumescence, ejaculation, and loss

*THE PRISONER OF SEX*

of erection in the male. With proper stimulation, a woman is capable of multiple orgasms in quick succession," she repeats, hardly able to contain herself, and goes on to sing of the clitoris as "the organ specific to sexuality in the human female," yes, the red-hot button of lust gets its good marks here, even as she approves by implication of the methods used to make the Masters and Johnson study, yes, those vibrators and plastic dildoes are honorable adjuncts of sexo-scientific endeavor as opposed to the foul woman-hating billy-goat bulb of old Henry. What a scum of hypocrisy on the surface of her thought, bold sexual revolutionary who will not grant that such a revolution if it comes will have more to do with unmanageable metamorphoses between love and lust than some civilized version of girls-may-hold-hands-in-the-suburbs. It is the horror of lust, and yet its justification, that wild as a blind maniac it still drives toward the creation, it witnesses such profound significations as, "Her face went through all the metamorphoses of early uterine life, only in reverse." And the clue again is upon us of that moment of transcendence when the soul stands in the vault of the act and the coming is its mirror. Yes, even fifty clitoral comes in white-hot vibrating laboratory lust is a mirror (if only of the outer galaxies of nausea) but it is not

## THE ADVOCATE

love but lust, good old scientific lust, pure as the lust in the first fierce fart of the satyr.

How Kate hates old Henry for this: that he dares to be an energetic scientist but is without a smock, that he does his lab work out of the lab, and yet is so scientific that his amours are as case histories. "Personality and sexual behavior is so completely unrelated that . . . any other names might have been conveniently substituted." How she bangs away at him! "Miller is a compendium of American sexual neuroses," says lab assistant Kate; Miller articulates "the disgust, the contempt, the hostility, the violence, and the sense of filth with which our . . . masculine sensibility surrounds sexuality." "Sheer fantasy . . . exploitative character . . . juvenile egotism . . . brutalized adolescence . . . anxiety and contempt . . . masturbatory revery . . . utter impersonality . . . cruelty and contempt . . . humiliating and degrading . . . sadistic will . . . gratified egotism . . . total abstraction . . . arrested adolescence . . . cultural homosexuality . . . compulsive heterosexual activity . . . authoritarian arrangements . . . absolute license . . . truly obscene ruthlessness . . . virulent sexism . . . a childish fantasy of power . . ." Conceive of these items of abuse, alive as nerves. They twitch in

*THE PRISONER OF SEX*

every paragraph for twenty pages. What an apostle for nonviolence is the lady.

Yet the irony is that a case can be brought against Miller. He is so completely an Old Master at his best (he is, in fact, the only Old Master we have) that the failure of the later works to surpass the early ones is a loss everywhere, to Miller, to literature, to us, to all of us. For he captured something in the sexuality of men as it had never been seen before, precisely that it was man's sense of awe before woman, his dread of her position one step closer to eternity (for in that step were her powers) which made men detest women, revile them, humiliate them, defecate symbolically upon them, do everything to reduce them so one might dare to enter them and take pleasure of them. "His shit don't smell like ice cream either," says a private of a general in a novel, and it is the cry of an enlisted man whose ego needs equality to breathe. So do men look to destroy every quality in a woman which will give her the powers of a male, for she is in their eyes already armed with the power that she brought them forth, and that is a power beyond measure — the earliest etchings of memory go back to that woman between whose legs they were conceived, nurtured, and near strangled in the hours of birth. And if women were also born of woman, that could only compound

the awe, for out of that process by which they had come in, so would something of the same come out of them; they were installed in the boxes-within-boxes of the universe, and man was only a box, all detached. So it is not unnatural that men, perhaps a majority of men, go through the years of their sex with women in some compound detachment of lust which will enable them to be as fierce as any female awash in the great ocean of the fuck, for as it can appear to the man, great forces beyond his measure seem to be calling to the woman then.

That was what Miller saw, and it is what he brought back to us: that there were mysteries in trying to explain the extraordinary fascination of an act we can abuse, debase, inundate, and drool upon, yet the act repeats an interest — it draws us toward obsession, as if it is the mirror of how we approach God through our imperfections, *Hot*, full of the shittiest lust. In all of his faceless characterless pullulating broads, in all those cunts which undulate with the movements of eels, in all those clearly described broths of soup and grease and marrow and wine which are all he will give us of them — their cunts are always closer than their faces — in all the indignities of position, the humiliation of situation, and the endless revelations of women as pure artifacts of farce, asses all up in the air, still he

## THE PRISONER OF SEX

screams his barbaric yawp of utter adoration for the power and the glory and the grandeur of the female in the universe, and it is his genius to show us that this power can survive any context or any abuse.

Let us relax a moment on the moralisms of Millett.

*They are not only pushovers, they are puppets. Speaking boy to boy about another "fuck," Miller remarks, "I moved her around like one of those legless toys which illustrate the principle of gravity." Total victory is gratuitous insult; the pleasure of humiliating the sexual object appears to be far more intoxicating than sex itself. Miller's protégé, Curley, is an expert at inflicting this sort of punishment, in this instance, on a woman whom both men regard as criminally overambitious, disgracefully unaware she is only cunt:*

"He took pleasure in degrading her. I could scarcely blame him for it, she was such a prim, priggish bitch in her street clothes. You'd swear she didn't own a cunt the way she carried herself in the street. Naturally, when he got her alone, he made her pay for her highfalutin' ways. He went at it cold-bloodedly. 'Fish it out!' he'd say, opening his fly a little. 'Fish it out with your tongue!' . . . once she got the taste of it in her mouth, you could do anything with her. Sometimes he'd stand her on her hands and push her around the room that way, like a wheelbarrow. Or else he'd do it dog fashion, and while she groaned and squirmed he'd nonchalantly light a cigarette and blow the smoke between her legs. Once he played her a dirty trick doing it that way. He had worked her

up to such a state that she was beside herself. Anyway, after he had almost polished the ass off her with his back-scuttling he pulled out for a second, as though to cool his cock off . . . and shoved a big long carrot up her twat."

The last sentence was supposed to read: "He pulled out for a second, as though to cool his cock off, and then very slowly and gently he shoved a big long carrot up her twat." Millett obviously had not wished to weaken her indictment by qualifying the force of the shove — that was where she once again lost Miller. His work dances on the line of his dialectic. But Millett hates every evidence of the dialectic. She has a mind like a flatiron, which is to say a totally masculine mind. A hard-hat has more curves in his head. Look how the hideousness of the description as Millett has excerpted it is given other nuances by what immediately follows.

*. . . Very slowly and gently he shoved a big long carrot up her twat. "That, Miss Abercrombie," he said, "is a sort of Doppelgänger to my regular cock," and with that he unhitches himself and yanks up his pants. Cousin Abercrombie was so bewildered by it all that she let out a tremendous fart and out tumbled the carrot. At least, that's how Curley related it to me. He was an outrageous liar, to be sure, and there may not be a grain of truth in the yarn, but there's no denying that he had a flair for such tricks.*

## THE PRISONER OF SEX

*As for Miss Abercrombie and her high-tone Narragansett ways, well, with a cunt like that one can always imagine the worst.*

A page later, the dialectic has whipped him clear over to a description of the "best fuck" he ever had, and here the statement of the case is pure Henry, for the girl "was a deaf-mute who had lost her memory, and with the loss of memory she had lost her frigidaire, her curling irons, her tweezers and handbag. She was even more naked than a fish . . . and she was even slipperier. . . . It was dubious at times whether I was in her or she in me." He is in heaven. A cornucopia of encomiums inundate us. Never has he stated his case better.

*She just stood there quietly and as I slid my hand up her legs she moved one foot a little to open her crotch a bit more. I don't think I ever put my hand into such a juicy crotch in all my life. It was like paste running down her legs, and if there had been any billboards handy I could have plastered up a dozen or more. After a few moments, just as naturally as a cow lowering its head to graze, she bent over and put it in her mouth. I had my whole four fingers inside her, whipping it up to a froth. Her mouth was stuffed full and the juice pouring down her legs. Not a word out of us, as I say. Just a couple of quiet maniacs working away in the dark like gravediggers. It was a fucking Paradise and I knew it, and I was ready and willing to fuck my brains away if necessary. She was probably the*

## THE ADVOCATE

best fuck I ever had. She never once opened her trap — not that night, nor the next night, nor any night. She'd steal down like that in the dark, soon as she smelled me there alone, and plaster her cunt all over me. It was an enormous cunt, too, when I think back on it. A dark, subterranean labyrinth fitted up with divans and cosy corners and rubber teeth and syringas and soft nestles and eider-down and mulberry leaves. I used to nose in like the solitary worm and bury myself in a little cranny where it was absolutely silent, and so soft and restful that I lay like a dolphin on the oyster banks. A slight twitch and I'd be in the Pullman reading a newspaper or else up an impasse where there were mossy round cobblestones and little wicker gates which opened and shut automatically. Sometimes it was like riding the shoot-the-shoots, a steep plunge and then a spray of tingling sea crabs, the bulrushes swaying feverishly and the gills of tiny fishes lapping against me like harmonica stops. In the immense black grotto there was a silk-and-soap organ playing a predaceous black music. When she pitched herself high, when she turned the juice on full, it made a violaceous purple, a deep mulberry stain like twilight, a ventriloqual twilight such as dwarfs and cretins enjoy when they menstruate. It made me think of cannibals chewing flowers, of Bantus running amuck, of wild unicorns rutting in rhododendron beds. . . . It was one cunt out of a million, a regular Pearl of the Antilles. . . . In the broad Pacific of sex she lay, a gleaming silver reef surrounded with human anemones, human starfish, human madrepores.<sup>4</sup>

But Henry won't be allowed to rest for long. Squirt-bomb at the ready, Millett is laying for him. Some-

## THE PRISONER OF SEX

thing in the fling of the imagination is odious as a water bug to her.

*Throughout the description one not only observes a vulgar opportunistic use of Lawrence's hocus pocus about blanking out in the mind in order to attain "blood consciousness," but one also intuits how both versions of the idea are haunted by a pathological fear of having to deal with another and complete human personality. . . . One is made very aware here that in the author's scheme the male is represented not only by his telepathic instrument, but by mind, whereas the perfect female is a floating metonymy, pure cunt, completely unsullied by human mentality.*

But why is Kate now so prim? Doesn't the single permissive sexual standard offer depersonalization via the wallop-and-suck of the orgy? Kate is reminiscent of one of those nice-nellie scourges who used to tyrannize the back pages of the *New York Times Book Review*, yes, it is as if Miller deprives her of the right to have a mind by so splendiferous a description of the cunt, yes, just as any hard-working intellectual in the 1950's was livid at the intimation that some blacks might have more genital orientation than Freud had prescribed for the human lot, so is Millett now properly incensed. Stretched with every adrenaline of overkill, her mind next to rigid with fear that women might have some secret but fundamental accommodation to

## THE ADVOCATE

Miller's lust that brings them into just such absurd positions, she is therefore always missing the point of her case, she is always pushing into that enforced domain of equality where the sexes, she would declaim, "are inherently in everything alike, save reproductive systems, secondary sexual characteristics, orgasmic capacity and genetic and morphological structure. Perhaps the only thing they can uniquely exchange is semen and transudate." Good laboratory assistant Kate. She is a technologist who drains all the swamps only to discover that the ecological balance has been savaged. She is also one of those minds, totalitarian to the core, which go over to hysteria, abuse (and liquidation at the end of the road) whenever they are forced to build their mind on anything more than a single premise. The real case against Miller is not that he is all wrong, and cocks and cunts are no more than biological details on human beings so that we are even unable to distinguish semen from transudate when suffering from a cold, no, the real case is that Miller is right, yet Ibsen's Nora is also right when she says, "I have another duty, just as sacred. . . . My duty to myself. . . . I believe that before everything else I'm a human being — just as much as you are . . . or at any rate, I shall try to become one." What have we not lost in his novels that there will be never a character

*THE PRISONER OF SEX*

like Nora to stand against his men? For it is our modern experience that men filled with every appreciation of sex and women's rights encounter women with an equal appreciation, and the war still continues with what new permutations only a novelist can begin to explore since the novelist is the only philosopher who works with emotions which are at the very edge of the word system, and so is out beyond the scientists, doctors, psychologists, even — if he is good enough — the best of his contemporaries who work at philosophy itself. If it is easy to mock him when, like Miller, he comes close to stumbling off the end of the word system, we know his best and wildest ideas will become the ones most quickly attacked by literary technologists like Millett since such ideas lend themselves to confetti-making in ideological mincers. Miller, a hero twice, to take up writing late and to take it up by writing books he could think no one would ever publish, a writer with the individuality of a giant, was still so lacerated by the loneliness of his midnight concepts that his later works often thin out into subtle parodies of the earlier ones, and he finally hooks his moon-anchor onto what has become for us the same old literary fields of flesh and cunt. The knowledge of our age is different. Those fields are an endless treasure to him, but we have the problem of our contemporary love,

## THE ADVOCATE

and so can only tip our hat, we are looking for an accommodation of the sexes, whereas he calls out for an antagonism — “the eternal battle with woman sharpens our resistance, develops our strength, enlarges the scope of our cultural achievements.” Yes, he cries out to us, “the loss of sex polarity is part and parcel of the larger disintegration, the reflex of the soul’s death and coincident with the disappearance of great men, great causes, great wars.” The ram wandering the ridges has come back as a prophet, and the tablets are in his hands. “Put woman back in her rightful place.”

But the men moving silently in all retreat pass the prophet by. It is too late to know if he is right or wrong. The women have breached an enormous hole in the line, and the question is only how far back the men must go before they are ready to establish a front. Confusion is at the crossroads. Will D. H. Lawrence have to be surrendered as well?

1504

(Prisoner of Sex pp 134-160)

1971

## MILLETT ENCOUNTERS

~~THE PRISONER OF SEX~~ D. H. LAWRENCE

~~and women became more and more alike that gave him a species of aesthetic nausea as subtle and complete as the sense of displacement which comes upon one in an airplane when it is learned that the sweet and gentle soul in the next seat is the product of surgical necessities which have extended his life.~~

Why at this point did he think with admiration of Kate Millett? Why then of sturdy Millett next to such an invalid and such an aversion ~~if~~ not for her political genius in perceiving that any technologizing of the sexes into twin-unit living teams complete with detachable subunits (kids) might yet have to contend with the work of D. H. Lawrence. Not, of course, for any love of children. it would not be until his last book that one of Lawrence's romances would end with the heroine pregnant, tranquil, and fulfilled, no, Lawrence's love affairs were more likely to come in like winds off Wuthering Heights — but never had a male novelist written more intimately about women — heart, contradiction, and soul; never had a novelist loved them more, been so comfortable in the tides of their sentiment, and so ready to see them murdered. His work held, on the consequence, huge fascination for women. Since by the end he was also the sacramental poet of a sacramental act, for he believed nothing human had such significance as the tender majes-

## THE ADVOCATE

ties of a man and woman fucking with love, he was also the most appalling subversive to the single permissive sexual standard: the orgy, homosexuality, and the inevitable promiscuity attached to a sexual search repelled him, and might yet repel many of the young as they become bored with the similarity of the sexes.

Indeed, which case-hardened guerrilla of Women's Liberation might not shed a private tear at the following passage:

*"And if you're in Scotland and I'm in the Midlands, and I can't put my arms round you, and wrap my legs round you, yet I've got something of you. My soul softly flaps in the little pentecost flame with you, like the peace of fucking. We fucked a flame into being. Even the flowers are fucked into being between the sun and the earth. But it's a delicate thing, and takes patience and the long pause.*

*"So I love chastity now, because it is the peace that comes of fucking. I love being chaste now. I love it as snowdrops love the snow. I love this chastity, which is the pause of peace of our fucking, between us now like a snow-drop of forked white fire. And when the real spring comes, when the drawing together comes, then we can fuck the little flame brilliant and yellow . . ." <sup>10</sup>*

Yes, which stout partisan of <sup>Femal/p</sup> ~~the~~ Liberation would read such words and not go soft for the memory of some bitter bridge of love they had burned behind. Lawrence was dangerous. So delicate and indestructi-

## THE PRISONER OF SEX

ble an enemy to the cause of Liberation that to expunge him one would have to look for Millett herself. If she is more careful with Lawrence than with Miller, acting less like some literary Molotov, if her disrespect for quotation is in this place more guarded, if she even functions as a critic and so gives us a clue to the meaning of Lawrence's life and work, she has become twice adroit at hiding the real evidence. So she rises from abuse to those night-school legal briefs — it is crucial to her case that Lawrence be the “counterrevolutionary sexual politician” she terms him, but since women love his work, and remember it, she is obliged to bring in the evidence more or less fairly, and only distort it by small moves, brief elisions in the quotation, the suppression of passing contradictions, in short bring in all the evidence on one side of the case and harangue the jury but a little further. Since she has a great deal of evidence, only a careful defense can overthrow her case. For Lawrence can be hung as a counterrevolutionary sexual politician out of his own words and speeches. There is a plethora of evidence — in his worst books. And in all his books there are unmistakable tendencies toward the absolute domination of women by men, mystical worship of the male will, detestation of democracy. There is a stretch in the middle of his work, out in such unread tracts as *Aaron's*

## THE ADVOCATE

Rod and Kangaroo, when the uneasy feeling arrives that perhaps it was just as well Lawrence died when he did, for he could have been the literary adviser to Oswald Mosley about the time Hitler came in, one can even ingest a comprehension of the appeal of fascism to Pound and Wyndham Lewis, for the death of nature lived already in the air of the contract between corporate democracy and technology, and ~~who was then to know that the marriage of fascism and technology would be even worse, would accelerate that death.~~ Still, such fear for the end of Lawrence is superficial. He was perhaps a great writer, certainly flawed, and abominably pedestrian in his language when the ducts of experience burned dry, he was unendurably didactic then, he was a pill, and at his worst, a humorless nag; he is pathetic in all those places he suggests that men should follow the will of a stronger man, a purer man, a man conceivably not unlike himself, for one senses in his petulance and in the spoiled airs of his impatient disdain at what he could not intellectually dominate that he was a momma's boy, spoiled rotten, and could not have commanded two infantrymen to follow him, yet he was still a great writer, for he contained a cauldron of boiling opposites — he was on the one hand a Hitler in a teapot, on the other he was the blessed breast of tender love, he knew what it was to love a

## THE PRISONER OF SEX

woman from her hair to her toes, he lived with all the sensibility of a female burning with tender love — and these incompatibles, enough to break a less extraordinary man, were squared in their difficulty by the fact that he had intellectual ambition sufficient to desire the overthrow of European civilization, his themes were nothing if not immense — in *The Plumed Serpent* he would even look to the founding of a new religion based on the virtues of the phallus and the submission of women to the wisdom of that principle. But he was also the son of a miner, he came from hard practical small-minded people, stock descended conceivably from the Druids, but how many centuries had hammered the reductive wisdom of pounds and pennies into the genes? So a part of Lawrence was like a little tobacconist from the English Midlands who would sniff the smoke of his wildest ideas — notions, we may be certain, which ran completely off the end of anybody's word system — and hack out an irritable cough at the intimate intricate knobby knotty contradictions of his ideas when they were embodied in people. For if we can feel how consumed he was by the dictatorial pressure to ram his sentiments into each idiot throat, he never forgets that he is writing novels, and so his ideas cannot simply triumph, they have to be tried and heated and forged, and finally be beaten

## THE ADVOCATE

into shapelessness against the anvil of his profound British skepticism which would not buy his ideas, not outright, for even his own characters seem to wear out in them. Kate Leslie, the heroine of *The Plumed Serpent*, a proud sophisticated Irish lady, falls in love with one of the Mexican leaders of a new party, a new faith, a new ritual, gives herself to the new religion, believes in her submission — but not entirely! At the end she is still attached to the ambivalence of the European mind. Lilly, the hero of *Aaron's Rod*, finally preaches "deep fathomless submission to the heroic soul in a greater man" and the greater man is Lilly, but he is a slim small somewhat ridiculous figure, a bigger man for example strikes him in front of his wife and he is reduced to regaining his breath without showing he is hurt, he is a small hard-shelled nut of contradictions, much like Lawrence himself, but the grandeur of the ideas sound ridiculous in the little cracked shell. Of course, Lawrence was not only trying to sell dictatorial theorems, he was also trying to rid himself of them. We can see by the literary line of his life that he moves from the adoration of his mother in *Sons and Lovers* and from close to literal adoration of the womb in *The Rainbow* to worship of the phallus and the male will in his later books. In fact, Millett can be quoted to good effect, for her criti-

## THE PRISONER OF SEX

cism is here close to objective, which is to say not totally at odds with the defense:

Aaron's Rod, Kangaroo, and The Plumed Serpent are rather neglected novels, and perhaps justly so. They are unquestionably strident, and unpleasant for a number of reasons, principally a rasping protofascist tone, an increasing fondness of force, a personal arrogance, and innumerable racial, class, and religious bigotries. In these novels one sees how terribly Lawrence strained after triumph in the "man's world" of formal politics, war, priestcraft, art and finance. Thinking of Lady Chatterley or the early novels, readers often equate Lawrence with the personal life which generally concerns the novelist, the relations of men and women—for whether he played a woman's man or a man's man, Lawrence was generally doing so before an audience of women, who found it difficult to associate him with the public life of male authority. After Women in Love, having solved, or failed to solve, the problem of mastering the female, Lawrence became more ambitious. Yet he never failed to take his sexual politics with him, and with an astonishing consistency of motive, made it the foundation of all his other social and political beliefs.

It is fair analysis as far as it goes, but it fails to underline the heroism of his achievement, which is that he was able finally to leave off his quest for power in the male world and go back to what he started with, go back after every bitterness and frustration to his first knowledge that the physical love of men and women,

## THE ADVOCATE

insofar as it was untainted by civilization, was the salvation of us all, there was no other. And in fact he had never ceased believing that, he had merely lost hope it could be achieved.

Millett's critical misdemeanor is to conceal the pilgrimage, hide the life, cover over that emotional odyssey which took him from adoration of the woman to outright lust for her murder, then took him back to worship her beauty, even her procreative beauty. Millett avoids the sympathy this might arouse in her female readers (which dead lover is more to be cherished after all than the one who returned at the end?), yes, avoids such huge potential sympathy by two simple critical stratagems; she writes about his last book first, which enables her to end her very long chapter on Lawrence with an analysis of his story, "The Woman Who Rode Away." Since it may be the most savage of his stories and concludes with the ritual sacrifice of a white woman by natives, Millett can close on Lawrence with the comment, "Probably it is the perversion of sexuality into slaughter, indeed, the story's very travesty and denial of sexuality, which accounts for its monstrous, even demented air." Not every female reader will remind herself that Lawrence, having purged his blood of murder, would now go on to write *Lady Chatterley*. But then Millett is not interested in

## THE PRISONER OF SEX

the dialectic by which writers deliver their themes to themselves; she is more interested in hiding the process, and so her second way of concealing how much Lawrence has still to tell us about men and women is simply to distort the complexity of his brain into snarling maxims, take him at his worst and make him even worse, take him at his best and bring pinkish shears to his context. Like a true species of literary Mafia, Millett works always for points and the shading of points. If she can't steal a full point, she'll cop a half.

Examples abound, but it is necessary to quote Lawrence in some fullness, a defense of his works rests naturally on presenting him in uninterrupted lines, which indeed will be no hardship to read. Besides, the clearest exposure of the malignant literary habits of the prosecutor is to quote her first and thereby give everyone an opportunity to see how little she shows, how much she ignores, in her desire to steal the verdict.

*"You lie there," he orders. She accedes with a "queer obedience" — Lawrence never uses the word female in the novel without prefacing it with the adjectives "weird" or "queer": this is presumably done to persuade the reader that woman is a dim prehistoric creature operating out of primeval impulse. Mellors concedes one kiss on the navel and then gets to business:*

## THE ADVOCATE

"And he had to come into her at once, to enter the peace on earth of that soft quiescent body. It was the moment of pure peace for him, the entry into the body of a woman. She lay still, in a kind of sleep, always in a kind of sleep. The activity, the orgasm was all his, all his; she could strive for herself no more."

This is the passage from which she has drawn her quotation:

*"You lie there," he said softly, and he shut the door, so that it was dark, quite dark.*

*With a queer obedience, she lay down on the blanket. Then she felt the soft, groping, helplessly desirous hand touching her body, feeling for her face. The hand stroked her face softly, softly, with infinite soothing and assurance, and at last there was the soft touch of a kiss on her cheek.*

*She lay quite still, in a sort of sleep, in a sort of dream. Then she quivered as she felt his hand groping softly, yet with queer thwarted clumsiness among her clothing. Yet the hand knew, too, how to unclothe her where it wanted. He drew down the thin silk sheath, slowly, carefully, right down and over her feet. Then with a quiver of exquisite pleasure he touched the warm soft body, and touched her navel for a moment in a kiss. And he had to come into her at once, to enter the peace on earth of her soft, quiescent body. It was the moment of pure peace for him, the entry into the body of a woman.*

*She lay still, in a kind of sleep, always in a kind of sleep. The activity, the orgasm was his, all his; she could strive for herself no more. Even the tightness of his arms*

## THE PRISONER OF SEX

*round her, even the intense movement of his body, and the springing seed in her, was a kind of sleep, from which she did not begin to rouse till he had finished and lay softly panting against her breast.*

It is a modest example, but then it is a modest act and Constance Chatterley is exhausted with the deaths of the world she is carrying within — since they will make other kinds of love later, the prosecutor will have cause enough to be further enraged, but the example can show how the tone of Lawrence's prose is poisoned by the acids of inappropriate comment. "Mellors concedes one kiss on the navel and then gets to business." Indeed! Take off your business suit, Comrade Millett.

But it is hardly the time for a recess. We will want to look at another exhibit. The quoted lines up for indictment are from *Women in Love*:

*Having begun by informing Ursula he will not love her, as he is interested in going beyond love to "something much more impersonal and harder," he goes on to state his terms: "I've seen plenty of women, I'm sick of seeing them. I want a woman I don't see . . . I don't want your good looks, and I don't want your womanly feelings, and I don't want your thoughts nor opinions nor your ideas." The "new" relationship, while posing as an affirmation of the primal unconscious sexual being, to adopt Lawrence's jargon, is in effect a denial of personality in the woman.*

## THE ADVOCATE

Or is it a denial of personality in Lawrence? Witness how our literary commissar will void the strength of Lawrence's style by cutting off our acquaintance with the marrow of his sensibility, the air of his senses. For Lawrence is always alert to the quiet ringing of the ether, the quick retreat of a mood, the awe of the thought about to be said, then left unsaid, then said after all. But his remarks cannot be chopped out of their setting. A bruised apple at the foot of a tree is another reality from a bruised apple in the frigidaire.

*There was silence for some moments.*

"No," he said. "It isn't that. Only — if we are going to make a relationship, even of friendship, there must be something final and irrevocable about it."

*There was a clang of mistrust and almost anger in his voice. She did not answer. Her heart was too much contracted. She could not have spoken.*

*Seeing she was not going to reply, he continued, almost bitterly, giving himself away:*

"I can't say it is love I have to offer — and it isn't love I want. It is something much more impersonal and harder — and rarer."

*There was a silence, out of which she said:*

"You mean you don't love me?"

*She suffered furiously, saying that.*

"Yes, if you like to put it like that. Though perhaps that isn't true. I don't know. At any rate, I don't feel the emotion of love for you — no, and I don't want to. Because it gives out in the last issues . . ."

## THE PRISONER OF SEX

How different is all this from "going beyond love to 'something much more impersonal and harder,'" how much in fact we have the feeling they are in love.

*"If there is no love, what is there?" she cried, almost jeering.*

*"Something," he said, looking at her, battling with his soul, with all his might.*

*"What?"*

*He was silent for a long time, unable to be in communication with her while she was in this state of opposition.*

*"There is," he said, in a voice of pure abstraction, "a final me which is stark and impersonal and beyond responsibility. So there is a final you, and it is there I would want to meet you — not in the emotional, loving plane — but there beyond, where there is no speech and no terms of agreement. There we are two stark, unknown beings, two utterly strange creatures, I would want to approach you, and you me. And there could be no obligation, because there is no standard for action there, because no understanding has been reaped from that plane. It is quite inhuman — so there can be no calling to book, in any form whatsoever — because one is outside the pale of all that is accepted, and nothing known applies. One can only follow the impulse, taking that which lies in front, and responsible for nothing, asking for nothing, giving nothing, only each taking according to the primal desire."*

*Ursula listened to this speech, her mind dumb and almost senseless, what he said was so unexpected and so untoward.*

*"It is just purely selfish," she said.*

*"If it is pure, yes. But it isn't selfish at all. Because I*

## THE ADVOCATE

*don't know what I want of you. I deliver myself over to the unknown, in coming to you, I am without reserves or defenses, stripped entirely, into the unknown. Only there needs the pledge between us, that we will both cast off everything, cast off ourselves even, and cease to be, so that that which is perfectly ourselves can take place in us."*

As we shall soon see, Lawrence will go further than this, he will come to believe that a woman must submit — a most blood-enriching submission, bet on it — yet in that book where such submission takes place, in *The Plumed Serpent* where Kate Leslie has her most profound sex with a man who insists on remaining a stranger and an Indian, the moral emerges that he wants her by the end, wants Kate Leslie just so deeply as she desires him. Lawrence's point, which he refines over and over, is that the deepest messages of sex cannot be heard by taking a stance on the side of the bank, announcing one is in love, and then proceeding to fish in the waters of love with a breadbasket full of ego. No, he is saying again and again, people can win at love only when they are ready to lose everything they bring to it of ego, position, or identity — love is more stern than war — and men and women can survive only if they reach the depths of their own sex down within themselves. They have to deliver themselves "over to the unknown." No more existential

## THE PRISONER OF SEX

statement of love exists, for it is a way of saying we do not know how the love will turn out. What message more odious to the technologist? So Millett will accuse him endlessly of patriarchal male-dominated sex. But the domination of men over women was only a way station on the line of Lawrence's ideas — what he started to say early and ended saying late was that sex could heal, sex was the only nostrum which could heal, all other medicines were part of the lung-scarring smoke of factories and healed nothing, were poison, but sex could heal only when one was without "reserves or defenses." And so men and women received what they deserved of one another. Since Women's Lib has presented itself with the clear difficulty of giving modern woman a full hard efficient ego, Lawrence's ideas could not be more directly in the way. Still, it is painful to think that, quickly as men are losing any sense of fair play, women — if Millett can model for her sex — are utterly without it. Maybe Millett is not so much Molotov as Vishinsky. What a foul exhibit must now be displayed!

*Passive as she is, Connie fares better than the heroine of The Plumed Serpent, from whom Lawrentian man, Don Cipriano, deliberately withdraws as she nears orgasm, in a calculated and sadistic denial of her pleasure:*

## THE ADVOCATE

"By a swift dark instinct, Cipriano drew away from this in her. When, in their love, it came back on her, the seething electric female ecstasy, which knows such spasms of delirium, he recoiled from her. . . . By a dark and powerful instinct he drew away from her as soon as this desire rose again in her, for the white ecstasy of frictional satisfaction, the throes of Aphrodite of the foam. She could see that to him, it was repulsive. He just removed himself, dark and unchangeable, away from her."

The passage restored will be of interest to any jury looking for further evidence on the virtues or deterrents of the clitoral come:

*She realised, almost with wonder, the death in her of the Aphrodite of the foam: the seething, frictional, ecstatic Aphrodite. By a swift dark instinct, Cipriano drew away from this in her. When, in their love, it came back on her, the seething electric female ecstasy, which knows such spasms of delirium, he recoiled from her. It was what she used to call her "satisfaction." She had loved Joachim for this, that again, and again, and again he could give her this orgiastic "satisfaction," in spasms that made her cry aloud.*

*But Cipriano would not. By a dark and powerful instinct he drew away from her as soon as this desire rose again in her, for the white ecstasy of frictional satisfaction, the throes of Aphrodite of the foam. She could see that to him, it was repulsive. He just removed himself, dark and unchangeable, away from her.*

## THE PRISONER OF SEX

*And she, as she lay, would realise the worthlessness of this foam-effervescence, its strange externality to her. It seemed to come upon her from without, not from within. And succeeding the first moment of disappointment, when this sort of "satisfaction" was denied her, came the knowledge that she did not really want it, that it was really nauseous to her.*

*And he, in his dark, hot silence, would bring her back to the new, soft, heavy, hot flow, when she was like a fountain gushing noiseless and with urgent softness from the volcanic deeps. Then she was open to him soft and hot, yet gushing with a noiseless soft power. And there was no such thing as conscious "satisfaction." What happened was dark and untellable. So different from the friction which flares out in circles of phosphorescent ecstasy, to the last wild spasm which utters the involuntary cry, like a death-cry, the final love-cry. This she had known, and known to the end, with Joachim. And now this too was removed from her. What she had with Cipriano was curiously beyond her knowing: so deep and hot and flowing, as it were subterranean. She had to yield before it. She could not grip it into one final spasm of white ecstasy which was like sheer knowing.*

*And as it was in the love-act, so it was with him. She could not know him. When she tried to know him, something went slack in her, and she had to leave off. She had to let be. She had to leave him, dark and hot and potent, along with the things that are, but are not known. The presence. And the stranger. This he was always to her.*

*Yes, sex was the presence of grace and the introduction of the stranger into oneself. That was the only*

## THE ADVOCATE

medicine for the lividities of the will. So Lawrence would preach, but he was a man in torture. If Millett had wished to get around Lawrence in the easiest way for the advance of the Liberation, she would have done better to have built a monument to him, and a bridge over his work, rather than making the mean calculation she could bury him by meretricious quotation. For Lawrence is an inspiration, but few can do more than respect him on the fly (the way a Soviet official might duck into an Orthodox church to smell the incense). The world has been technologized and technologized twice again in the forty years since his death, the citizens are technologized as well. Who will go looking for the "new, soft, heavy, hot flow," or the "urgent softness from the volcanic deeps" when the air of cities smells of lava, and the mood of the streets is like the bowels turned inside out? What he was asking for had been too hard for him, it is more than hard for us; his life was, yes, a torture, and we draw back in fear, for we would not know how to try to burn by such a light.

Yet, he was a man more beautiful perhaps than we can guess, and it is worth the attempt to try to perceive the logic of his life, for he illumines the passion to be masculine as no other writer, he reminds us of the beauty of desiring to be a man, for he was not much of

## THE PRISONER OF SEX

a man himself, a son despised by his father, beloved of his mother, a boy and young man and prematurely aging writer with the soul of a beautiful woman. It is not only that no other man writes so well about women, but indeed is there a woman who can? Useless for Millett to answer that here is a case of one man commending another man for his ability to understand women — what a vain and pompous assumption, she will hasten to jeer, but such words will be the ground meat of a dull cow. The confidence is that some of Lawrence's passages have a ring — perhaps it is an echo of that great bell which may toll whenever the literary miracle occurs and a writer sets down words to resonate with that sense of peace and proportion it is tempting to call truth. Yet whoever believes that such a leap is not possible across the gap, that a man cannot write of a woman's soul, or a white man of a black man, does not believe in literature itself. So, yes, Lawrence understood women as they had never been understood before, understood them with all the tortured fever of a man who had the soul of a beautiful, imperious, and passionate woman, yet he was locked into the body of a middling male physique, not physically strong, of reasonable good looks, a pleasant to somewhat seedy-looking man, no stud. What a nightmare to balance that soul! to take the man in himself, locked

## THE ADVOCATE

from youth into every need for profound female companionship, a man almost wholly oriented toward the company of women, and attempt to go out into the world of men, indeed even dominate the world of men so that he might find balance. For his mind was possessed of that intolerable masculine pressure to command which develops in sons outrageously beloved by their mothers — to be the equal of a woman at twelve or six or any early age which reaches equilibrium between the will of the son and the will of the mother, strong love to strong love, is all but to guarantee the making of a future tyrant, for the sense of where to find one's inner health has been generated by the early years of that equilibrium — its substitute will not be easy to create in maturity. What can then be large enough to serve as proper balance to a man who was equal to a strong woman in emotional confidence at the age of eight? Hitlers develop out of such balance derived from imbalance, and great generals and great novelists (for what is a novelist but a general who sends his troops across fields of paper?).

So we must conceive then of Lawrence arrogant with mother love and therefore possessed of a mind which did not believe any man on earth had a mind more important than his own. What a responsibility then to bring his message to the world, unique mes-

*THE PRISONER OF SEX*

sage which might yet save the world! We must conceive of that ego equal already to the will of a strong woman while he was still a child — what long steps had it taken since within the skull! He needed an extraordinary woman for a mate, and he had the luck to find his Frieda. She was an aristocrat and he was a miner's son, she was large and beautiful, she was passionate, and he stole her away from her husband and children — they could set out together to win the world and educate it into ways to live, do that, do all of that out of the exuberance of finding one another.

But she was a strong woman, she was individual, she loved him but she did not worship him. She was independent. If he had been a stronger man, he could perhaps have enjoyed such personal force, but he had become a man by an act of will, he was bone and blood of the classic family stuff out of which homosexuals are made, he had lifted himself out of his natural destiny which was probably to have the sexual life of a woman, had diverted the virility of his brain down into some indispensable minimum of phallic force — no wonder he worshiped the phallus, he above all men knew what an achievement was its rise from the root, its assertion to stand proud on a delicate base. His mother had adored him. Since his first sense of himself

## THE ADVOCATE

as a male had been in the tender air of her total concern — now, and always, his strength would depend upon just such outsize admiration. Dominance over women was not tyranny to him but equality, for dominance was the indispensable elevator which would raise his phallus to that height from which it might seek transcendence. And sexual transcendence, some ecstasy where he could lose his ego for a moment, and his sense of self and his will, was life to him — he could not live without sexual transcendence. If he had had an outrageously unequal development — all fury to be a man and all the senses of a woman — there was a direct price to pay: he was not healthy. His lungs were poor, and he lived with the knowledge that he would likely have an early death. Each time he failed to reach a woman, each time he failed particularly to reach his own woman, he was dying a little. It is hopeless to read his books and try to understand the quirky changeable fury-ridden relationships of his men and women without comprehending that Lawrence saw every serious love affair as fundamental do-or-die: he knew he literally died a little more each time he missed transcendence in the act. It was why he saw lust as hopeless. Lust was meaningless fucking and that was the privilege of the healthy. He was ill, and his wife

## THE PRISONER OF SEX

was literally killing him each time she failed to worship his most proud and delicate cock. Which may be why he invariably wrote on the edge of cliché — we speak in simples as experience approaches the enormous, and Lawrence lived with the monumental gloom that his death was already in him, and sex — some transcendental variety of sex — was his only hope, and his wife was too robust to recognize such tragic facts.

By the time of writing *Women in Love*, his view of women would not be far from the sinister. One of the two heroines would succeed in driving her man to his death. His rage against the will of women turns immense, and his bile explodes on the human race, or is it the majority of the races? — these are the years when he will have a character in *Aaron's Rod*, Lilly, his mouthpiece, say:

*I can't do with folk who teem by the billion, like the Chinese and Japs and Orientals altogether. Only vermin teem by the billion. Higher types breed slower. I would have loved the Aztecs and the Red Indians. I know they hold the element in life which I am looking for — they had living pride. Not like the flea-bitten Asiatics. Even niggers are better than Asiatics, though they are wallowers. The American races — and the South Sea Islanders — the Marquesans, the Maori blood. That was true blood. It wasn't frightened. All the rest are craven . . .*

## THE ADVOCATE

It is the spleen of a man whose organs are rotting in parts and so, owner of a world-ego, he will see the world rotting in parts.

These are the years when he flirts with homosexuality, but is secretly, we may assume, obsessed with it. For he is still in need of that restorative sex he can no longer find, and since his psyche was originally shaped to be homosexual, homosexuality could yet be his peace. Except it could not, not likely, for his mind could hardly give up the lust to dominate. Homosexuality becomes a double irony — he must now seek to dominate men physically more powerful than himself. The paradoxes of this position result in the book *Aaron's Rod* which is about a male love affair (which never quite takes place) between a big man and a little man. The little man does the housework, plays nursemaid to the big man when he is ill, and ends by dominating him, enough to offer the last speech in the book.

*All men say, they want a leader. Then let them in their souls submit to some greater soul than theirs . . . You, Aaron, you too have the need to submit. You, too, have the need livingly to yield to a more heroic soul, to give yourself. You know you have [but] . . . perhaps you'd rather die than yield. And so, die you must. It is your affair.*

## THE PRISONER OF SEX

He has separated the theme from himself and reversed the roles, but he will die rather than yield, even though earlier in the book he was ready to demonstrate that platonic homosexuality saves. It is the clear suggestion that Aaron recovers only because Lilly anoints his naked body, lays on hands after doctors and medicines had failed.

*Quickly he uncovered the blond lower body of his patient, and began to rub the abdomen with oil, using a slow, rhythmic, circulating motion, a sort of massage. For a long time he rubbed finely and steadily, then went over the whole of the lower body, mindless, as if in a sort of incantation. He rubbed every speck of the man's lower body — the abdomen, the buttocks, the thighs and knees, down to his feet, rubbed it all warm and glowing with camphorated oil, every bit of it, chafing the toes swiftly, till he was almost exhausted. Then Aaron was covered up again, and Lilly sat down in fatigue to look at his patient.*

*He saw a change. The spark had come back into the sick eyes, and the faint trace of a smile, faintly luminous, into the face. Aaron was regaining himself. But Lilly said nothing. He watched his patient fall into a proper sleep.*

Another of his heroes, Birkin, weeps in strangled tones before the coffin of Gerald. It is an earlier period in Lawrence's years of homosexual temptation; the pain is sharper, the passion is stronger. "He should have loved me," he said. "I offered him." And his wife

is repelled, "recoiled aghast from him as he sat . . . making a strange, horrible sound of tears." They are the sickly sounds of a man who feels ready to die in some part of himself because the other man would never yield.

But homosexuality would have been the abdication of Lawrence as a philosopher-king. Conceive how he must have struggled against it! In all those middle years he moves slowly from the man who is sickened because the other did not yield, to the man who will die because he, himself, will not yield. But he is bitter, and with a rage which could burn half the world. It is burning his lungs.

Then it is too late. He is into his last years. He is into the five last years of his dying. He has been a victim of love, and will die for lack of the full depth of a woman's love for him — what a near to infinite love he had needed. So he has never gotten to that place where he could deliver himself to the unknown, be "without reserves or defenses . . . cast off everything . . . and cease to be, so that that which is perfectly ourselves can take place in us," no, he was never able to go that far. By the time he began *Lady Chatterley*, he must have known the fight was done; he had never been able to break out of the trap of his lungs, nor out of the cage of his fashioning. He had burned

## THE PRISONER OF SEX

too many holes in too many organs trying to reach into more manhood than the course of his nerves could carry, he was done; but he was a lover, he wrote *Lady Chatterley*, he forgave, he wrote his way a little further toward death, and sang of the wonders of creation and the glory of men and women in the rut and lovely of a loving fuck.

*"When a woman gets absolutely possessed by her own will, her own will set against everything, then it's fearful, and she should be shot at last."*

*"And shouldn't men be shot at last, if they get possessed by their own will?"*

*"Ay! — the same!"*

The remark is muttered, the gamekeeper rushes on immediately to talk of other matters, but it has been made, Lawrence has closed the circle, the man and the woman are joined, separate and joined.