7

THE CULTURE OF ROMANCE

So far we have not distinguished "romance" from love. For there are no two kinds of love, one healthy (dull) and one not (painful) ("My dear, what you need is a mature love relationship. Get over this romantic nonsense."), but only less-than-love or daily agony. When love takes place in a power context, everyone's "love life" must be affected. Because power and love don't make it together.

So when we talk about romantic love we mean love corrupted by its power context—the sex class system—into a diseased form of love that then in turn reinforces this sex class system. We have seen that the psychological dependence of women upon men is created by continuing real economic and social oppression. However, in the modern world the economic and social bases of the oppression are no longer *alone* enough to maintain it. So the apparatus of romanticism is hauled in. (Looks like we'll have to help her out, Boys!)

Romanticism develops in proportion to the liberation of women from their biology. As civilization advances and the biological bases of sex class crumble, male supremacy must shore itself up with artificial institutions, or exaggerations of previous institutions, e.g., where previously the family had a loose, permeable form, it now tightens and rigidifies into the patriarchal nuclear family. Or, where formerly women had been held openly in contempt,

now they are elevated to states of mock worship.* Romanticism is a cultural tool of male power to keep women from knowing their condition. It is especially needed—and therefore strongest—in Western countries with the highest rate of industrialization. Today, with technology enabling women to break out of their roles for good—it was a near miss in the early twentieth century—romanticism is at an all-time high.

How does romanticism work as a cultural tool to reinforce sex class? Let us examine its components, refined over centuries, and the modern methods of its diffusion—cultural techniques so sophisticated and penetrating that even men are damaged by them.

1) *Eroticism.* A prime component of romanticism is eroticism. All animal needs (the affection of a kitten that has never seen heat) for love and warmth are channeled into genital sex: people must never touch others of the same sex, and may touch those of the opposite sex only when preparing for a genital sexual encounter ("a pass"). Isolation from others makes people starved for physical affection; and if the only kind they can get is genital sex, that's soon all they crave. In this state of hypersensitivity the least sensual stimulus produces an exaggerated effect, enough to inspire everything from schools of master painting to rock and roll. Thus *eroticism is the concentration of sexuality—often into highly-charged objects ("Chantilly Lace")—signifying the displacement of other social/affection needs onto sex.* To be plain old needy-for-affection makes one a "drip," to need a kiss is embarrassing, unless it is an erotic kiss; only "sex" is O.K., in fact it proves one's mettle. Virility and sexual performance become confused with social worth.†

* Gallantry has been commonly defined as "excessive attention to women without serious purpose," but the purpose is very serious: through a false flattery, to keep women from awareness of their lower-class condition.

† But as every woman has discovered, a man who seems to be pressuring for sex is often greatly relieved to be excused from the literal performance: His ego has been made dependent on his

Constant erotic stimulation of male sexuality coupled with its forbidden release through most normal channels are designed to encourage men to look at women as only things whose resistance to entrance must be overcome. For notice that this eroticism operates in only one direction. Women are the only "love" objects in our society, so much so that women regard *themselves* as erotic.* This functions to preserve direct sex pleasure for the male, reinforcing female dependence: women can be fulfilled sexually only by vicarious identification with the man who enjoys them. Thus eroticism preserves the sex class system.

The only exception to this concentration of all emotional needs into erotic relationships is the (sometimes) affection within the family. But here, too, unless they are *his* children, a man can no more express affection for children than he can for women. Thus his affection for the young is also a trap to saddle him into the marriage structure, reinforcing the patriarchal system.

2) *The Sex Privatization of Women.* Eroticism is only the topmost layer of the romanticism that reinforces female inferiority. As with any lower class, group awareness must be deadened to keep them from rebelling. In this case, because the distinguishing characteristic of women's exploitation as a class is sexual, a special means must be found to make them unaware that they are considered all alike sexually ("cunts"). Perhaps when a man marries he chooses from this undistinguishable lot with care, for as we have seen, he holds a special high place in his mental reserve for "The One," by virtue of her close association

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continuously proving himself through sexual conquest; but all he may have really wanted was the excuse to indulge in affection without the loss of manly self-respect. That men are more restrained than are women about exhibiting emotion is because, in addition to the results of the Oedipus Complex, to express tenderness to a woman is to acknowledge her equality. Unless, of course, one tempers one's tenderness—takes it back—with some evidence of domination.

* Homosexuals are so ridiculed because in viewing the male as sex object they go doubly against the norm: even women don't read Pretty Boy magazines.

with himself; but in general he can't tell the difference between chicks (Blondes, Brunettes, Redheads).* And he likes it that way. ("A wiggle in your walk, a giggle in your talk, THAT'S WHAT I LIKE!") When a man believes all women are alike, but wants to keep women from guessing, what does he do? He keeps his beliefs to himself, and pretends, to allay her suspicions, that what she has in common with other women is precisely what makes her different. Thus her sexuality eventually becomes synonymous with her individuality. *The sex privatization of women is the process whereby women are blinded to their generality as a class which renders them invisible as individuals to the male eye.* Is not that strange Mrs. Lady next to the President in his entourage reminiscent of the discreet black servant at White House functions?

The process is insidious: When a man exclaims, "I love Blondes!" all the secretaries in the vicinity sit up; they take it personally because they have been sex-privatized. The blonde one feels personally complimented because she has come to measure her worth through the physical attributes that differentiate her from other women. She no longer recalls that any physical attribute you could name is shared by many others, that these are accidental attributes not of her own creation, that her sexuality is shared by half of humanity. But in an authentic recognition of her individuality, her blondeness would be loved, but in a different way: She would be loved first as an irreplaceable totality, and then her blondeness would be loved as one of the characteristics of that totality.

The apparatus of sex privatization is so sophisticated that it may take years to detect—if detectable at all. It explains many puzzling traits of female psychology that take such form as:

> Women who are personally complimented by compliments to their sex, i.e., "Hats off to the Little Woman!"

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* "As for his other sports," says a recent blurb about football hero Joe Namath, "he prefers Blondes."

Women who are not insulted when addressed regularly and impersonally as Dear, Honey, Sweetie, Sugar, Kitten, Darling, Angel, Queen, Princess, Doll, Woman.

Women who are secretly flattered to have their asses pinched in Rome. (Much wiser to count the number of times other girls' asses are pinched!)

The joys of "prickteasing" (generalized male horniness taken as a sign of personal value and desirability).

The "clotheshorse" phenomenon. (Women, denied legitimate outlets for expression of their individuality, "express" themselves physically, as in "I want to see something 'different'.")

These are only some of the reactions to the sex privatization process, the confusion of one's sexuality with one's individuality. The process is so effective that most women have come to believe seriously that the world needs their particular sexual contributions to go on. ("She thinks her pussy is made of gold.") But the love songs would still be written without them.

Women may be duped, but men are quite conscious of this as a valuable manipulative technique. That is why they go to great pains to avoid talking about women in front of them ("not in front of a lady")—it would give their game away. To overhear a bull session is traumatic to a woman: So all this time she has been considered only "ass," "meat," "twat," or "stuff," to be gotten a "piece of," "that bitch," or "this broad" to be tricked out of money or sex or love! To understand finally that she is no better than other women but completely indistinguishable comes not just as a blow but as a total annihilation. But perhaps the time that women more often have to confront their own sex privatization is in a lover's quarrel, when the truth spills out: then a man might get careless

and admit that the only thing he ever *really* liked her for was her bust ("Built like a brick shithouse") or legs anyway ("Hey, Legs!"), and he can find that somewhere else if he has to.

Thus sex privatization stereotypes women: it encourages men to see women as "dolls" differentiated only by superficial attributes—not of the same species as themselves—and it blinds women to their sexploitation as a class, keeping them from uniting against it, thus effectively segregating the two classes. A side-effect is the converse: if women are differentiated only by superficial physical attributes, men appear more individual and irreplaceable than they really are.

Women, because social recognition is granted only for a *false* individuality, are kept from developing the tough individuality that would enable breaking through such a ruse. If one's existence in its generality is the only thing acknowledged, why go to the trouble to develop real character? It is much less hassle to "light up the room with a smile"—until that day when the "chick" graduates to "old bag," to find that her smile is no longer "inimitable."

3) *The Beauty Ideal.* Every society has promoted a certain ideal of beauty over all others. What that ideal is is unimportant, for any ideal leaves the majority out; ideals, by definition, are modeled on *rare* qualities. For example, in America, the present fashion vogue of French models, or the erotic ideal Voluptuous Blonde are modeled on qualities rare indeed: few Americans are of French birth, most don't look French and never will (and besides they eat too much); voluptuous brunettes can bleach their hair (as did Marilyn Monroe, the sex queen herself), but blondes can't develop curves at will—and most of them, being Anglo-Saxon, simply aren't built like that. If and when, by artificial methods, the majority can squeeze into the ideal, the ideal changes. If it were attainable, what good would it be?

For the exclusivity of the beauty ideal serves a clear political function. Someone—most women—will be left

out. And left scrambling, because as we have seen, women have been allowed to achieve individuality only through their appearance—looks being defined as "good" not out of love for the bearer, but because of her more or less successful approximation to an external standard. This image, defined by men (and currently by homosexual men, often misogynists of the worst order), becomes the ideal. What happens? Women everywhere rush to squeeze into the glass slipper, forcing and mutilating their bodies with diets and beauty programs, clothes and makeup, anything to become the punk prince's dream girl. But they have no choice. If they don't the penalties are enormous: their social legitimacy is at stake.

Thus women become more and more look-alike. But at the same time they are expected to express their individuality through their physical appearance. Thus they are kept coming and going, at one and the same time trying to express their similarity and their uniqueness. The demands of Sex Privatization contradict the demands of the Beauty Ideal, causing the severe feminine neurosis about personal appearance.

But this conflict itself has an important political function. When women begin to look more and more alike, distinguished only by the degree to which they differ from a paper ideal, they can be more easily stereotyped as a class: They look alike, they think alike, and even worse, they are so stupid they believe they are not alike.

* * *

These are some of the major components of the cultural apparatus, romanticism, which, with the weakening of "natural" limitations on women, keep sex oppression going strong. The political uses of romanticism over the centuries became increasingly complex. Operating subtly or blatantly, on every cultural level, romanticism is now —in this time of greatest threat to the male power role —amplified by new techniques of communication so all-

pervasive that men get entangled in their own line. How does this amplification work?

With the cultural portrayal of the smallest details of existence (e.g., deodorizing one's underarms), the distance between one's experience and one's perceptions of it becomes enlarged by a vast interpretive network; If our direct experience contradicts its interpretation by this ubiquitous cultural network, the experience must be denied. This process, of course, does not apply only to women. The pervasion of image has so deeply altered our very relationships to ourselves that even men have become objects—if never *erotic* objects. Images become extensions of oneself; it gets hard to distinguish the real person from his latest image, if indeed, the Person Underneath hasn't evaporated altogether. Arnie, the kid who sat in back of you in the sixth grade, picking his nose and cracking jokes, the one who had a crook in his left shoulder, is lost under successive layers of adopted images: the High School Comedian, the Campus Rebel, James Bond, the Salem Springtime Lover, and so on, each image hitting new highs of sophistication until the person himself doesn't know who he is. Moreover, he deals with others through this image-extension (Boy-Image meets Girl-Image and consummates Image-Romance). Even if a woman could get beneath this intricate image facade—and it would take months, even years, of a painful, almost therapeutic relationship—she would be met not with gratitude that she had (painfully) loved the man for his real self, but with shocked repulsion and terror that she had found him out. What he wants instead is The Pepsi-Cola Girl, to smile pleasantly to his Johnny Walker Red in front of a ski-lodge fire.

But, while this reification affects both men and women alike, in the case of women it is profoundly complicated by the forms of sexploitation I have described. Woman is not only an Image, she is the Image of Sex Appeal. The stereotyping of women expands: now there is no longer the excuse of ignorance. Every woman is constantly and explicitly informed on how to "improve"

what nature gave her, where to buy the products to do it with, and how to count the calories she should never have eaten—indeed, the "ugly" woman is now so nearly extinct even she is fast becoming "exotic." The competition becomes frantic, because everyone is now plugged into the same circuit. The current beauty ideal becomes all-pervasive ("Blondes have more fun . . .").

And eroticism becomes erotomania. Stimulated to the limit, it has reached an epidemic level unequalled in history. From every magazine cover, film screen, TV tube, subway sign, jump breasts, legs, shoulders, thighs. Men walk about in a state of constant sexual excitement. Even with the best of intentions, it is difficult to focus on anything else. This bombardment of the senses, in turn, escalates sexual provocation still further: ordinary means of arousal have lost all effect. Clothing becomes more provocative: hemlines climb, bras are shed. See-through materials become ordinary. But in all this barrage of erotic stimuli, men themselves are seldom portrayed as erotic objects. Women's eroticism, as well as men's, becomes increasingly directed toward women.

One of the internal contradictions of this highly effective propaganda system is to expose to men as well as women the stereotyping process women undergo. Though the idea was to better acquaint women with their feminine role, men who turn on the TV are also treated to the latest in tummy-control, false eyelashes, and floor waxes (Does she . . . or doesn't she?). Such a crosscurrent of sexual tease and exposé would be enough to make any man hate women, if he didn't already.

Thus the extension of romanticism through modern media enormously magnified its effects. If before culture maintained male supremacy through Eroticism, Sex Privatization, and the Beauty Ideal, these cultural processes are now almost too effectively carried out: the media are guilty of "overkill." The regeneration of the women's movement at this moment in history may be due to a backfiring, an internal contradiction of our modern cultural indoctrination system. For in its amplification of sex

indoctrination, the media have unconsciously exposed the degradation of "femininity."

In conclusion, I want to add a note about the special difficulties of attacking the sex class system through its means of cultural indoctrination. Sex objects *are* beautiful. An attack on them can be confused with an attack on beauty itself. Feminists need not get so pious in their efforts that they feel they must flatly deny the beauty of the face on the cover of *Vogue*. For this is not the point. The real question is: is the face beautiful in a *human* way—does it allow for growth and flux and decay, does it express negative as well as positive emotions, does it fall apart without artificial props—or does it falsely imitate the very different beauty of an *inanimate* object, like wood trying to be metal?

To attack eroticism creates similar problems. Eroticism is *exciting*. No one wants to get rid of it. Life would be a drab and routine affair without at least that spark. That's just the point. Why has all joy and excitement been concentrated, driven into one narrow, difficult-to-find alley of human experience, and all the rest laid waste? When we demand the elimination of eroticism, we mean not the elimination of sexual joy and excitement but its rediffusion over—there's plenty to go around, it increases with use—the spectrum of our lives.

8

(MALE) CULTURE

Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth.

Simone de Beauvoir

The relation of women to culture has been indirect. We have discussed how the present psychical organization of the two sexes dictates that most women spend their emotional energy on men, whereas men "sublimate" theirs into work. In this way women's love becomes raw fuel for the cultural machine. (Not to mention the Great Ideas born rather more directly from early-morning boudoir discussions.)

In addition to providing its emotional support, women had another important indirect relation to culture: they inspired it. The Muse was female. Men of culture were emotionally warped by the sublimation process; they converted life to art, thus could not live it. But women, and those men who were excluded from culture, remained in direct contact with their experience—fit subject matter.

That women were intrinsic to the very content of culture is borne out by an example from the history of art: Men are erotically stimulated by the opposite sex; painting was male; the nude became a *female* nude. Where

the art of the male nude reached high levels, either in the work of an individual artist, e.g., Michelangelo, or in a whole artistic period, such as that of classical Greece, men were homosexual.

The subject matter of art, when there is any, is today even more largely inspired by women. Imagine the elimination of women characters from popular films and novels, even from the work of "highbrow" directors—Antonioni, Bergman, or Godard; there wouldn't be much left. For in the last few centuries, particularly in popular culture—perhaps related to the problematic position of women in society—women have been the main subject of art. In fact, in scanning blurbs of even one month's cultural production, one might believe that women were all anyone ever thought about.

But what about the women who have contributed directly to culture? There aren't many. And in those cases where individual women have participated in male culture, they have had to do so on male terms. And it shows. Because they have had to compete *as men,* in a male game—while still being pressured to prove themselves in their old female roles, a role at odds with their self-appointed ambitions—it is not surprising that they are seldom as skilled as men at the game of culture.

And it is not just a question of being as competent, it is also a question of being *authentic.* We have seen in the context of love how modern women have imitated male psychology, confusing it with health, and have thereby ended up even worse off than men themselves: they were not even being true to homegrown sicknesses. And there are even more complex layers to this question of authenticity: women have no means of coming to an understanding of what their experience *is,* or even that it is different from male experience. The tool for representing, for objectifying one's experience in order to deal with it, culture, is so saturated with male bias that women almost never have a chance to see themselves culturally through their own eyes. So that finally, signals from their direct experi-

ence that conflict with the prevailing (male) culture are denied and repressed.

Thus because cultural dicta are set by men, presenting only the male view—and now in a super-barrage—women are kept from achieving an authentic picture of their reality. Why do women, for example, get aroused by a pornography of female bodies? In their ordinary experience of female nudity, say in a gym locker room, the sight of other nude females might be interesting (though probably only insofar as they rate by male sexual standards), but not directly erotic. Cultural distortion of sexuality explains also how female sexuality gets twisted into narcissism: women make love to themselves vicariously through the man, rather than directly making love to him. At times this cultural barrage of man/subject, woman/object desensitizes women to male forms to such a degree that they are even orgasmically affected.*

There are other examples of the distorting effects on female vision of an exclusively male culture. Let us go back to the history of figurative painting once again: we have seen how in the tradition of the nude, male heterosexual inclinations came to emphasize the female rather than the male as the more aesthetic and pleasing form. Such a predilection for either one over the other, of course, is based on a sexuality which is in itself artificial, culturally created. But at least one might then expect the opposite bias to prevail in the view of women painters still involved in the tradition of the nude. This is not the case. In any art school in the country one sees classrooms full of girls working diligently from the female model, accepting that the male model is somehow less aesthetic, at best perhaps novel, and certainly never questioning why

* Female inability to focus on sexual imagery has been found to be a major cause of female frigidity. Masters and Johnson, Albert Ellis, and others have stressed the importance of "sexual focusing" in teaching frigid women to achieve orgasm. Hilda O'Hare in *International Journal of Sexology* correctly attributes this problem to the absence in our society of a female counterpart for the countless stimulants of the male sexual urge.

the male model wears a jock strap when the female model wouldn't dream of appearing in so much as a G-string.

Again, looking at the work of well-known women painters associated with the Impressionist School of the nineteenth century, Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt, one wonders at their obsessive preoccupation with traditionally female subject matter: women, children, female nudes, interiors, etc. This is partially explained by political conditions of that period: women painters were lucky to be allowed to paint anything at all, let alone male models. And yet it is more than that. These women, for all their superb draftsmanship and compositional skill, remained minor painters because they had "lifted" a set of traditions and a view of the world that was inauthentic for them. They worked within the limits of what had been defined as female by a *male* tradition: they saw women through male eyes, painted a male's idea of female. And they carried it to an extreme, for they were attempting to outdo men at their own game; they had fallen for a (lovely) line. And thus the falseness that corrupts their work, making it "feminine," i.e., sentimental, light.

It would take a denial of all cultural tradition for women to produce even a true "female" art. For a woman who participates in (male) culture must achieve and be rated by standards of a tradition she had no part in making—and certainly there is no room in that tradition for a female view, even if she *could* discover what it was. In those cases where a woman, tired of losing at a male game, has attempted to participate in culture *in a female way,* she has been put down and misunderstood, named by the (male) cultural establishment "Lady Artist," i.e., trivial, inferior. And even where it must be (grudgingly) admitted she is "good," it is fashionable—a cheap way to indicate one's own "seriousness" and refinement of taste —to insinuate that she is good but irrelevant.

Perhaps it is true that a presentation of only the female side of things—which tends to be one long protest and complaint rather than the portrayal of a full and substantive existence—is limited. But an equally rele-

vant question, one much less frequently asked, is: Is it any more limited than the prevailing male view of things, which—when not taken as absolute truth—is at least seen as "serious," relevant, and important? Is Mary McCarthy in *The Group* really so much worse a writer than Norman Mailer in *The American Dream?* Or is she perhaps describing a reality that men, the controllers and critics of the Cultural Establishment, can't tune in on?

That men and women are tuned to a different cultural wavelength, that in fact there exists a wholly different reality for men and women, is apparent in our crudest cultural form—comic books. From my own experience: When I was little my brother had literally a room-size collection of comic books. But though I was a greedy reader, this vast comic book library interested me not in the least. My literary taste was completely different from his. He preferred "heavies" like War Comics (Aak–Aak–Aak!) and Superman; and for relief, "funnies" like Bugs Bunny, Tweetie and Sylvester, Tom and Jerry, and all the stuttering pigs who took forever to get a rather obvious message out. Though these "funnies" grated on my more aesthetic sensibilities, I would read them in a pinch. But had I had an allowance as big, and as little parental supervision, I might have indulged in a "heavy" library of Love Comics (LARGE TEAR. Oh Tod, don't tell Sue about us, she'd die), an occasional *True Confessions,* and for "light" relief, Archie and Veronica. Or the occasional more imaginative variations of boys' comics, like Plasticman (Superman with a rubber arm that could reach around blocks) or Uncle Scrooge McDuck editions of Donald Duck; I loved the selfish extravagance of his bathing in money. ((Many women—deprived of Self—have confessed the same girlhood passion). Even more likely, I would not have invested in comic books at all. Fairy tales, much less realistic, were a better trip.

My brother thought girls' taste was "drippy," and I thought he was a crude slob. Who was right? We both were; but he won (he owned the library).

This division continues to operate at higher cultural

levels. I had to force myself to read Mailer, Heller, Donleavy, and others for the same reasons that I couldn't stand my brother's library: to me they seemed only complex versions of (respectively) Superman, Aak–Aak–Aak, and the Adventures of Bugs Bunny. But though the "male" library continued to repel me, in the process of developing "good taste" (male taste), I also lost my love for the "female" library, indeed I developed an abhorrence; and I would—I'm ashamed to admit it—far sooner have been caught dead with Hemingway than with Virginia Woolf in my hands.

In order to illustrate this cultural dichotomy in more objective terms, we don't need to attack the more obvious paper tigers (all senses implied) who consciously present a "male" reality—viz. Hemingway, Jones, Mailer, Farrell, Algren and the rest. The new Virility School in twentieth-century literature is in itself a direct response, indeed a male cultural backlash, to the growing threat to male supremacy—Virility, Inc., a bunch of culturally deprived "tough guys," punching away to save their manhood. And though they get more credit, these artists write about the "male" experience no more perceptively than Doris Lessing, Sylvia Plath, Anaïs Nin have written about the female experience. In fact they are guilty of a mystification of their experience that makes their writing phony.

Instead, we will examine a bias more insidious (because less obvious) in male writers who honestly attempt to describe the whole spectrum of male/female experience —Bellow, Malamud, Updike, Roth, etc.—but who fail because, often without realizing it, they have described this whole from a limited (male) angle.

Let's look briefly at a story by Herbert Gold, not a "male" writer in either style or subject matter. He writes about what concerns women, that is, relationships, preferably male/female; marriages; divorces; affairs. In this story, "What's Become of Your Creature?" he describes the affair of a harassed young college professor with his blonde, Bohemianish student.

The picture we get of Lenka Kuwaila from the male

character's view is only sensual, if sensitive on those terms. The story begins:

A girl. A gay, pretty and sullen girl, with full marks for both sweetness and cruelty. When he looked in her desk for cigarettes, there was a silken pile of panties folded like flowers, dizzying him with the joy of springtime. When she put on a pair of them, suddenly filling out the tiny pair of petals of cloth in two paired buds, it was as if the sun had forced a flower into delicate Easter bloom. Oh, he needed her, loved her, and so for honor to them both, let us tell the truth, as straight as truth comes.

But the truth that we get "straight as truth comes" is only his view of the truth:

There is a time in the life of every man when he can do anything. It was this time in the life of Frank Curtiss. Despair with his wife had given up to deep gratification with a beautiful girl; he even did better at home; matters cooled and calmed; his work went well; he hardly needed sleep and did not suffer his usual rose fever during the spring he knew Lenka. No sniffles, no pink eyes. Expanded breathing, sharp sight. Of the occasional headache of fatigue and excess he was cured by the touch of her hand, her welcome when he came smiling, showing teeth, through her window.

But her truth must have been an altogether different one, a truth of which there is no trace in the story until one day (out of the blue) Lenka writes his wife a long letter. The failing marriage that had been improving steadily since Frank began his affair with Lenka is destroyed for good:

Lenka left New York without seeing him after his anguished phone call to her: "Why? Why? Why did you have to do it that way, Lenka? Can't you see how it destroys everything between us, even the past?"

"I don't care about memories. What's over means nothing. Over. You didn't want to do more than crawl through my window a couple of times a week—"

"But to write to her like that—what meant—how—"

"You cared more about a cold bitch than you cared for me. Just because you had a child."

"Why, why?"

She hung up on him.

He stood shrugging at the telephone. Women were hanging up on him all over the world. He was disconnected.

Feeling betrayed and tricked, Frank bewilderedly nurses his wounds; throughout the rest of the story one feels his puzzlement: he does not understand what led her to do it, he does not "understand women." Finally he lets it rest by granting her "full marks for cruelty" as well as sweetness.

But Lenka's "cruelty" is the direct result of his inability to see her as more than "a girl" (gay, pretty, *or* sullen), as, instead, perhaps, a complex human being with a self-interest not identical with his. However, due to Gold's authentic recounting of incident and dialogue, a sensitive (probably female) reader might read between the lines: Lenka was the one betrayed. Here is Frank a few years later in Manhattan:

He found a girl to join him in biting into an apple, sucking the sweet juice of it at dawn, finally kissing in good friendship and turning on their sides to sleep. . . . He felt free. . . . He threw away his bottle of aspirins. His married vision of himself as a heavy, shaggy, weary buffalo, head low and muzzle hurt, gave way to another image—he was lean, his posture was good, he was an agile bucko. When his former wife remarried, his last vestige of guilt disappeared. Free, free. He played badminton twice a week with a French girl who pronounced it "Badd-ming-tonn."

A gay bachelor now, Frank impulsively calls Lenka up one day:

But after he told her how long he had been in New York, she said that she was not interested in seeing him.

"I held a grudge, you can understand that," he said. "I still think you were very wrong, but I'm grateful anyway. It worked out for the best."

"And it's over," she said.

Later he runs into her to find her wasted on junk, whoring for a black musician:

She may have invented a foolish lie [in order to invite him up to her room], but she recognized the glare of contempt on his face, and in her life of now a quarter of a century, she had learned only one way to answer the judgment of men. She slid against him, on her face a mixture of coyness and dread, a flirtatious half-smile, a slinking catlike practiced leaning against him, and her eyes filled with tears as she shut them, tears balanced on her wetted lashes, slipping down her cheeks. "Frank," she said haltingly. "I stopped remembering for a long time, I don't know, things were difficult, I thought you were too angry . . . But I've been remembering . . . That's why . . . Forgive . . ."

He put his arms around her, held her to him, but with more confusion than either amorousness or tenderness. . . .

Then he thought of the letters she had just now lied about, and suddenly, as she turned her head up wanting to be kissed, his most vivid fantasy was this one: *She was unclean.* His uncurbed dread ran towards a muddle—deceit, illness, secret pity, slime, and retribution. Not knowing what he feared, he thought only: filth, cunning, running filth, blotches, sores. Because he could not bear her sorrows, he thought: *Deceit and cunning and disease!*

He pulled away before their mouths touched; her nails clawed along his arm, shredding skin; he fled, hearing her sobs at the open door as he careened down the infected stairs and into the free air of the street.

Curtain: Frank caresses his newly pregnant wife, wondering whatever-happened-to-Lenka.

This is not a male story in subject, and it is not a "male" story in style—there is enough description of emotion in it to shame any male writer. But it is still a "male" story by virtue of its peculiar limitation of vision: it does not understand women. Lenka's sensuality and loveliness is as much of her as Frank is able to comprehend. Her motives for writing to his wife, her refusal to see him, her attempted seduction, described with such guilty loathing—these Frank can't deal with, just as in