

Sex

Women's sexual organs are shrouded in mystery.

It is assumed that most of them are internal and hidden, but even the ones that are external are relatively shady. When little girls begin to ask questions their mothers provide them, if they are lucky, with crude diagrams of the sexual apparatus, in which the organs of pleasure feature much less prominently than the intricacies of tubes and ovaries. I myself did not realize that the tissues of my vagina were quite normal until I saw a meticulously engraved dissection in an eighteenth-century anatomy textbook.¹ The little girl is not encouraged to explore her own genitals or to identify the tissues of which they are composed, or to understand the mechanism of lubrication and erection. The very idea is distasteful. Because of this strange modesty, which a young woman will find extends even into the doctor's surgery, where the doctor is loath to examine her, and loath to expatiate on what he finds, female orgasm has become more and more of a mystery, at the same time as it has been exalted as a duty. Its actual nature has become a matter for metaphysical speculation. All kinds of false ideas are still in circulation about women, although they were disproved years ago: many men refuse to relinquish the notion of female ejaculation, which although it has a long and prestigious history is utterly fanciful.

Part of the modesty about the female genitalia stems from actual distaste. The worst name anyone can be called is *cunt*. The best thing ■ cunt can be is small and unobtrusive: the anxiety about the bigness of the penis is only equalled by anxiety about the smallness of the cunt. No woman wants to find out that she has a twat like a horse-collar: she hopes she is not sloppy or smelly, and obligingly obliterates all signs of her menstruation in the cause of public decency. Women were not

always so reticent: in ballad literature we can find lovely examples of women vaunting their genitals, like the lusty wench who admonished a timid tailor in round terms because he did not dare measure her fringed purse with his yard:

You'l find the Purse so deep,
You'l hardly come to the treasure.²

Another praised her shameful part in these terms:

I have a gallant Pin-box,
the like you ne'er did see,
It is where never was the Pox
something above my knee . . .
O 'tis a gallant Pin-box
you never saw the peer;
Then Ile not leave my Pin-box
for fifty pound a year.³

Early gynaecology was entirely in the hands of men, some of whom, like Samuel Collins, described the vagina so lovingly that any woman who read his words would have been greatly cheered. Of course such books were not meant to be seen by women at all. He speaks of the vagina as the Temple of Venus and the *mons veneris* as Venus's cushion, but he abandons euphemism to describe the wonders of the female erection:

. . . the Nymphs . . . being extended do compress the Penis and speak a delight in the act of Coition. . . . The use of the blood-vessels is to impart Vital Liquor into the substance of the Clitoris, and of the Nerves to impregnate it with ■ choyce Juyce inspired with animal Spirits (full of Elastick Particles making it Vigorous and Tense). . . . The Glands of the Vagina . . . being heated in Coition, do throw off the rarified fermented serous Liquor, through many Meatus into the Cavity of the Vagina, and thereby rendereth its passage very moist and slippery, which is pleasant in Coition. . . . The Hypogastrick Arteries do sport themselves in numerous Ramulets about the sides and other parts of the Vagina, which are so many inlets of blood to make it warm and turgid in the Act of Coition.⁴

Collins's description is an active one: the vagina *speaks*, *throws*, is *tense* and *vigorous*. He and his contemporaries assumed that young women were even more eager for intercourse than

young men. Some of the terms they used to describe the tissues of the female genitalia in action are very informative and exact, although unscientific. The vagina is said to be lined 'with tunicles like the petals of a full-blown rose', with 'Wrinkle on wrinkle' which 'do give delight in Copulations'. The vagina was classified as 'sensitive enough' which is an exact description. They were aware of the special role of the clitoris, in causing the 'sweetness of love' and the 'fury of venery'.

The Vagina is made so artificial (affabre is his word) that it can accommodate itself to any penis, so that it will give way to a long one, meet a short one, widen to a thick one, constrict to a small one: so that every man might well enough lie with any Woman, and every Woman with any Man.

'The Anatomy of Human Bodies epitomised'
1682, p.156

The notion that healthy and well-adjusted women would have orgasms originating in the vagina was a metaphysical interpolation in the empirical observations of these pioneers. Collins took the clitoris for granted, as a dear part of a beloved organ; he did not underemphasize the role of the vagina in creating pleasure, as we have seen. Unhappily we have accepted, along with the reinstatement of the clitoris after its proscription by the Freudians, a notion of the utter passivity and even irrelevance of the vagina. Love-making has become another male skill, of which women are the judges. The skills that the Wife of Bath used to make her husbands swink, the athletic sphincters of the Tahitian girls who can keep their men inside them all night, are alike unknown to us. All the vulgar linguistic emphasis is placed upon the *poking* element; *fucking*, *screwing*, *rooting*, *shagging* are all acts performed upon the passive female: the names for the penis are all *tool* names. The only genuine intersexual words we have for sex are the obsolete *swive*, and the ambiguous *ball*. Propagandists like Theodore Faithfull (and me) are trying to alter the emphasis of the current imagery. To a man who had difficulty getting an erection Faithfull wrote:

If you ignore any idea of erection and concentrate your attention on your girl-friend, ignore the clitoris and use your fingers to caress her internally and if you follow such activity by a close association of your sex organs you may soon find that she can draw your sex organ into her vagina without any need on your part for erection.⁵

This sounds like therapeutic lying, nevertheless serious attempts have been made to increase women's participation in copulation. A. H. Kegel, teaching women how to overcome the bladder weakness that often afflicts women, showed them how to exercise the pubococcygeal muscles and found inadvertently that this increased their sexual enjoyment.⁶ What their mates thought of it is not on record. The incontinence resulted from the same suppression of activity that inhibited sexual pleasure; we might find that if we restored women's competence in managing their own musculature many of their pelvic disturbances would cease, and their sexual enjoyment might correspondingly grow. Of course we cannot do this until we find out how the pelvis ought to operate: as long as women cannot operate it, we cannot observe its action, and so the circle perpetuates itself. If the right chain reaction could happen, women might find that the clitoris was more directly involved in intercourse, and could be brought to climax by a less pompous and deliberate way than digital massage. In any case, women will have to accept part of the responsibility for their own and their partners' enjoyment, and this involves a measure of control and conscious cooperation. Part of the battle will be won if they can change their attitude towards sex, and embrace and stimulate the penis instead of *taking* it. Enlightened women have long sung the praises of the female superior position, because they are not weighed down by the heavier male body, and can respond more spontaneously. It is after all a question of communication, and communication is not advanced by the *he talk, me listen* formula.

The banishment of the fantasy of the vaginal orgasm is ultimately a service, but the substitution of the clitoral spasm for genuine gratification may turn out to be a disaster for sexuality. Masters and Johnson's conclusions have produced some unlooked for side-effects, like the veritable clitoromania which infects Mette Eiljersen's book, *I accuse!* While speaking of

women's orgasms as resulting from the 'right touches on the button' she condemns sexologists who

recommend . . . the stimulation of the clitoris as part of the prelude to intercourse, to that which most men consider to be the 'real thing'. What is in fact the 'real thing' for them is *completely devoid of sensation* for the woman.

This is the heart of the matter! Concealed for hundreds of years by humble, shy and subservient women.⁷

Not all the women in history have been humble and subservient to such an extent. It is nonsense to say that a woman feels nothing when a man is moving his penis in her vagina: the orgasm is qualitatively different when the vagina can undulate around the penis instead of vacancy. The differentiation between the simple inevitable pleasure of men and the tricky responses of women is not altogether valid. If ejaculation meant release for all men, given the constant manufacture of sperm and the resultant pressure to have intercourse men could copulate without transport or disappointment with anyone. The process described by the experts, in which the man dutifully does the rounds of the erogenous zones, spends an equal amount of time on each nipple, turns his attention to the clitoris (usually too directly), leads through the stages of digital or lingual stimulation and then politely lets himself into the vagina, perhaps waiting until the retraction of the clitoris tells him that he is welcome, is laborious and inhumanly computerized. The implication that there is a statistically ideal fuck which will always result in satisfaction if the right procedures are followed is depressing and misleading. There is no substitute for excitement: not all the massage in the world will ensure satisfaction, for it is a matter of psycho-sexual release. Real gratification is not enshrined in a tiny cluster of nerves but in the sexual involvement of the whole person. Women's continued high enjoyment of sex, which continues after orgasm, observed by men with wonder, is not based on the clitoris, which does not respond particularly well to continued stimulus, but in a general sensual response. If we localize female response in the clitoris we impose upon women the same limitation of sex which has stunted the male's response. The male sexual ideal of virility without languor or

amorousness is profoundly desolating: when the release is expressed in mechanical terms it is sought mechanically. Sex becomes masturbation in the vagina.

Many women who greeted the conclusions of Masters and Johnson with cries of 'I told you so!' and 'I am normal!' will feel that this criticism is a betrayal. They have discovered sexual pleasure after being denied it but the fact that they have only ever experienced gratification from clitoral stimulation is evidence for my case, because it is the index of the desexualization of the whole body, the substitution of genitality for sexuality. The ideal marriage as measured by the electronic equipment in the Reproductive Biology Research Foundation laboratories is enfeebled – dull sex for dull people. The sexual personality is basically anti-authoritarian. If the system wishes to enforce complete suggestibility in its subjects, it will have to tame sex. Masters and Johnson supplied the blueprint for standard, low-agitation, cool-out monogamy. If women are to avoid this last reduction of their humanity, they must hold out not just for orgasm but for ecstasy.

The organization of sexuality reflects the basic features of the performance principle and its organization of society. Freud emphasizes the aspect of centralization. It is especially operative in the 'unification' of the various objects of the partial instincts into one libidinous object of the opposite sex, and in the establishment of genital supremacy. In both cases, the unifying process is repressive – that is to say, the partial instincts do not develop freely into a 'higher' stage of gratification which preserved their objectives, but are cut off and reduced to subservient functions. This process achieves the socially necessary desexualization of the body, leaving most of the rest free for use as the instrument of labour. The temporal reduction of the libido is thus supplemented by its spatial reduction.⁸

If women find that the clitoris has become the only site of their pleasure instead of acting as a kind of sexual overdrive in a more general response, they will find themselves dominated by the performance ethic, which would not itself be a regression, if the performance principle in our society included enterprise and creativity. But enterprise and creativity are connected with libido which does not survive the civilizing process. Women must struggle to keep alternative possibilities open, at the same

time as they struggle to attain the kind of strength that can avail itself of them.

The permissive society has done much to neutralize sexual drives by containing them. Sex for many has become ■ sorry business, ■ mechanical release involving neither discovery nor triumph, stressing human isolation more dishearteningly than ever before. The orgies feared by the Puritans have not materialized on every street corner, although more girls permit more (joyless) liberties than they might have done before. Homosexuality in many forms, indeed any kind of sex which can escape the dead hand of the institution – group sex, criminal sex, child-violation, bondage and discipline – has flourished, while simple sexual energy seems to be steadily diffusing and dissipating. This is not because enlightenment is harmful, or because repression is a necessary goad to human impotence, but because sexual enlightenment happened under government subsidy, so that its discoveries were released in bad prose and clinical jargon upon the world. The permit to speak freely of sexuality has resulted only in the setting up of another shibboleth of sexual normality, gorged with dishonesty and kitsch. Women who understand their sexual experience in the way that Jackie Collins writes of it are irretrievably lost to themselves and their lovers:

He took her to the bedroom and undressed her slowly, he made love to her beautifully. Nothing frantic, nothing rushed. He caressed her body ■ though there were nothing more important in the world. He took her to the edge of ecstasy and back again, keeping her hovering, sure of every move he made. Her breasts grew under his touch, swelling, becoming even larger and firmer. She floated on a suspended plane, a complete captive to his hands and body. He had amazing control, stopping at just the right moment. When it did happen it was only because he wanted it to, and they came in complete unison. She had never experienced *that* before, and she clung to him, words tumbling out of her mouth about how much she loved him. Afterwards they lay and smoked and talked. 'You're wonderful,' he said, 'You're a clever woman making me wait until after we were married!'

Miss Collins's heroine is prudish, passive, calculating, selfish and dull, despite her miraculous expanding tits. When her husband grows tired of playing on this sexual instrument she can

have no recourse but must continue to loll on her deflated airbed, wondering what went wrong. There is no mention of genitals: everything happens in ■ swoon or a swamp of undifferentiated sensation. He labours for her pleasure like a eunuch in the harem. Sex is harnessed in the service of counter-revolution.

Embraces ■ cominglings from the Head to the Feet,
And not a pompous High Priest entering by ■ Secret
Place.

Blake, 'Jerusalem', pl. 69, ll. 39-40

What Jackie Collins is expressing is the commonest romantic ideal of the perfect fuck. It shows how deeply we believe in the concept of male mastery. Miss Collins's heroine was manipulating her mate's colonizing sexual urge, making him wait, as long as his importunacy lasts, until she is ready. In manipulating his violent impulses she exercised an illusory superiority, for she is tender, sentimental and modest, loving not for her own gratification, but in expression of esteem, trust and true love, until she could civilize him into marriage and the virtuoso sexual performance. The complicated psychic aspect of his love is undervalued; she is still alone, egotistical, without libido to desire him or bring him to new pleasure in her. Jackie Collins and the sex-books show that we still make love to organs and not people: that so far from realizing that people are never more idiosyncratic, never more totally *there* than when they make love, we are never more incommunicative, never more alone.