

card 23 Oct 76

Joanna Russ, 3121 Washington St., Boulder, CO 80302

10 October 1976

Dear Triptrop,

You asked me recently what a senile old primate (your words, certainly not mine, I think you're absurd!) could do. Well, a concrete issue has appeared. And it's a literary one.

Adrienne Rich, the poet, has written a very good book called Of Woman Born, which is about motherhood; I like it immensely. She had done the blasphemous thing (and so necessary to wrench people's minds, especially women's) of writing (1) from a Lesbian point of view, quite casually, and (2) what the Times called "exclusionary"--i.e. as she herself said, it is necessary for women to turn their faces to one another, and that will be seen as ~~xxx~~ turning their backs on men. She's written the book as a firmly woman-identified woman, and that is not to say a Lesbian, though I think at this period of history, it jolly well ~~xxx~~ helps if you want to be woman-identified, to be gay. A heterosexual woman would be torn in two by the conflict.

Well, the Times got a novelist to review it, who came on with Irving-Howe-like language (remember, he called Kate Millet a silly schoolgirl). This is a woman, who calls herself a feminist, and who uses the same language every anti-feminist has been using about feminism from years past. One of the most grotesque examples is her comment about Rich's chapter on other women (woman-to-woman support and the mother-daughter bond) which she calls "clinically interesting and lyrical." I kid you not.

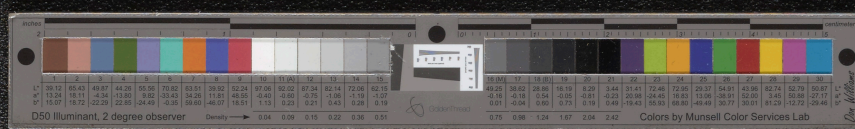
I have written a letter to the Times, luckily having ~~xxxx~~ read the book previously. The Sunday "Times" review is Oct. 10, I believe

Please read the Times review and the book, and write to the Times. Or possibly just read the review; it is quite nakedly silly. It quotes out of context, too, and misstates the book badly, but you'd need to read the book to catch that.

This is something you can do. I think it's important, too; The Times is obviously trying the waters to see if a little anti-feminism won't be ~~x~~ tolerated. We must discourage them. Also, I found the book tremendously moving and good, although I hope you will not use it to fuel your sense of guilt. I can see Traptroop on the floor, beating his forehead against the wood and crying, "Oh, it's all my fault!" It isn't. She does give short shrift to the men in the book, although here and there they peek out: her wonderful little sons, whom she loves, Semmelweiss, who went mad fighting the medical establishment of his day (but by God, they DID start disinfecting their hands!), and a few more.

One of the things I did not say in my letter, but which does matter, is that Rich's real ~~xxx~~ sin is simply to give men short shrift; she has abandoned every woman's obligation to ~~xxx~~ nurture, protect, educate, love...oh, why go on! It's too disgusting.

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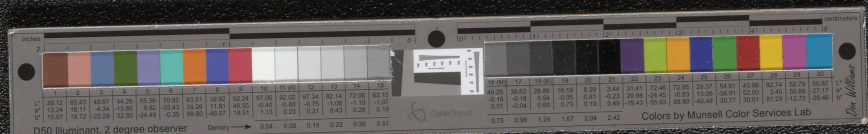
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job for them.

I really don't understand the horror of Lesbianism--not imagined as simply gharstly, like male homosexuality, but as something quite revolutionary. I suppose it is, but you know, it never really occurred to me that it is! Actually it's not that awful!

I'm getting sadly more and more aware of the point of view which sees any deviance as rare, and freakish, and unimportant--a "meaningless" fact--rather than the stuff out of which everyone's life is made in one way or another. It's the classical return of the repressed. I have now met feminists for whom Lesbianism seems to have a peculiar horror and the issues are ~~not~~ not erotic--they're never erotic--they are always "economic" issues, i.e. issues of attention, support, energy, influence. Of course there really are heterosexual women whose energies go to women and there are certainly Lesbians whose energies go to men, Gertrude Stein, for example.

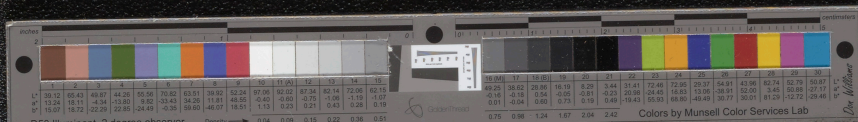
They are probably right; we are subversive. MS magazine, for example, has not only been steering very clear of the issue; the stuff they print (like Joan Larkin's article) is bowdlerized badly (she told me it was) or it's direct trashing (like the article on Jill Johnston, which was a crime). I am very angry at them. What they cut is in both cases the meaning of behavior, i.e. its connection with political theory. Larkin is furious at them, but believes that if she hadn't allowed them to cut her article, nothing would have gone in. It is a very explosive issue. I myself would be willing to leave it at the level of civil rights, but as soon as the homosexuals being discussed are women, suddenly the whole business escalates.

Mary Hartman is getting ~~on~~ it on with another (nice) woman. We await developments. TV has been producing some few homosexuals, all men, with the appropriate liberal attitudes. Sadly these do insist on individual rights BUT (of course) without making homosexuality anything more than an isolated, "meaningless" fact--yeah, we're all different. Which is certainly something. But the liberal tendency to treat every issue as if we already lived in Utopia is extraordinary. It sounds ~~it~~ just like Ursula LeGuin.

Forgive the meef.

But do get OF WOMAN BORN and write something to that damned newspaper. And don't let the book crush you further; I hope you can appreciate it without feeling personally attacked--she really isn't talking personally except where it is quite due, i.e. the men who invented the forceps and kept it a family secret for 1½ generations, saying right out loud that of course ~~this~~ doomed lots of women to death in childbirth, but "God has blessed our industry" and it was THEIR lucrative secret and pfoeey on anything else. There are places in the book I quibble with, but my God, if one-tenth of it is true...! (As somebody said of "The First Sex").

Love,
Joanna



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