

struct their sexualities when disabled lesbian/gay sexual practices are not even depicted in the queer cultures they want to call their own?

I, for one, was tremendously affected by those particular scenes. In that brief depiction of lovemaking between two disabled gay men, I could recognize aspects of my own erotic practices (e.g., the practice of negotiating who can do what, to whom!) that are not represented in non-disabled lesbian erotic imagery. Viewing those impaired bodies making love, my disabled lesbian sexuality was, at last, publicly validated and redeemed. This, I suggest, is just one of the ways in which *Double the Trouble, Twice the Fun* is affirming, and elevating, for the self-esteem of disabled lesbians and gays.

As the organizers of Toronto's Lesbian/Gay Film and Video Festival (the Inside/Out Collective) describe it, *Double the Trouble, Twice the Fun* is Parmar's "most ambitious work to date." Certainly, others working in the film and video medium would do well to adopt some of the techniques Parmar employs here. Especially instructive for other film/video-makers and producers are the innovative ways in which Parmar increases the accessibility of that medium for deaf and hard-of-hearing persons. In some sequences, the speaker is shot face-on in order to enable lip reading; in other sequences, a British Sign-Language interpreter appears in colourized windows on-screen in order to translate the verbal text; at yet other times, verbal text is open-captioned. By introducing these and other techniques into a medium which has by and large excluded persons with hearing-impairments, Parmar confirms her accountability to, and political solidarity with, disabled lesbian and gay subjects.

*Double the Trouble, Twice the Fun* is available from V-Tape, 183 Bathurst Street, Toronto, Ontario (416) 863-9897 (voice), and is distributed by Women Make Movies, 462 Broadway, Suite 501, New York City, NY 10013 (212) 925-0606 (voice).

## THE CHANGE: WOMEN, AGING AND THE MENOPAUSE

Germain Greer. Canada: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.

by *Deborah Heller*

First, the good news. As a writer, Greer has lost none of her energetic irreverence. In *The Change* she takes on the psycho-medical establishment, the "Masters in Menopause," and reduces their manuals and studies to rubble as effectively as if she had passed them through a paper shredder. She observes that while nearly half the women aged fifty or over in Britain are single, menopause manuals are based on the myth of the 30-year monogamous marriage in the leafy suburbs and assumes a menopausal woman's main duty is to attract and stimulate her husband. Studies passing as scientific purport to chart changes in women's attitudes at menopause without establishing a control base for pre-menopausal women. Medical and psychiatric texts are exposed as a jumble of moralism, prejudice, and pseudo-science.

Having discredited the Experts, Greer turns to cultural anthropology, history, folk wisdom, women's writing, and her own experience. Some of the results are fascinating, as, for example, her exploration of the witch role as "a coherent protest against the marginalization of older women and a strategic alternative to it." Her abundant discussions of women writers confronting their own aging and that of those dear to them are frequently exhilarating, likely to send readers back to old friends and introduce them to new ones, except for poor de Beauvoir, Greer's repeatedly flogged *bête noire*. Woolf, the creator of two of literature's most memorable middle-aged heroines—Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay—is never even mentioned, despite what appears as Greer's earnest effort to acknowledge women writers whose achievement has been to defy the prevailing convention that "all our heroines are young."

The woman writer Greer appeals to most frequently, however, is herself. And here we come to the thorny issue of personal preference. No one would wish to

deny Greer the legitimacy of her own experience, but she is irritatingly prescriptive, so that if you don't do it her way, you're somehow in "denial." Greer reiterates that menopause is a time of misery and grief. Statistics and the personal experience of others may tell a different story, but such claims are either discredited or dismissed.

Another reiterated assertion (in a book of many repetitions) is that women lose interest in sex at menopause. Advanced first as a simple matter of fact (for which no evidence is given), it gradually merges with prescription: if women *don't* lose interest in sex, they damn well *ought to*, because by middle-age they are unlikely to find or hold a sexual partner. Viewed in this light who can object? Yet some of Greer's most unsisterly gloating is reserved for women who don't acknowledge the limits of what she considers age-appropriate. She mentions Jane Fonda three times to make the same point, "It's either your bum or your face." In other words, the "strain" in Fonda's face is a providential judgment on her desire to stay trim and, by extension, on her unseemly recent marriage. But must we sneer at Fonda's wrinkles? Might they not be just normal signs of age, which Greer's own logic tells us (elsewhere) we ought not to despise?

Her treatment of George Eliot's marriage at the age of 60 to John Cross, twenty years her junior, reveals similar censoriousness. Six weeks after the marriage, Cross attempted suicide by jumping into the canal in Venice. Determined to see this as an expression of a younger man's revulsion at his older wife's body, Greer deliberately distorts the known facts of the case. Haight's biography of Eliot reports that Cross was suffering from "acute mental depression...not the first of its kind in his life," but Greer, drawing on the same source, assures us that Cross had "never before...showed any sign of mental derangement." One might think that a book ostensibly written to affirm the creative potential of women after menopause would remember George Eliot instead for having written *Middlemarch* in her early 50s and *Daniel Deronda* when she was near 60. But Greer, who tells the Eliot-Cross story twice, has a more important axe to grind.

Some twenty years ago Greer burst on

the scene with *The Female Eunuch*, shocking men and some women by asserting women's rights as autonomous agents of sexual desire. Since then she has sustained a public role as something of a sexual exhibitionist, giving interviews on her preference in lovers and love-making styles. Now that she has apparently lost interest, it seems to her only right that other women should follow suit. Or, maybe, with "the certainty that sex is at least as good for you as bran has successfully been established," Greer is looking for new ways to shock. Late in her book, inserted as the third item is a subordinate clause, and couched in latinate phraseology, is the assertion that "constant exposure of the cervix uteri to the glans penis represents a health risk for women." "Constant"? Is she making a claim about the dangers of prostitution (not otherwise discussed) or of ordinary sexual relations?

The declared purpose of *The Change* is to dispel the myths surrounding menopause and empower women to see it as a time of new possibility. But you've got to do it her way. "Only when a woman ceases the fretful struggle to be beautiful can she turn her gaze outward, find the beautiful and feed upon it." Perhaps women who have always known they would never be beautiful have experienced life quite differently from Greer. And mightn't it just be that not all of us have had to wait for menopause to enjoy the beauty of the world?

## THEORIZING PATRIARCHY

Sylvia Walby. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.

by *Kiran Mirchandani*

The term "patriarchy" has been used extensively in Women's Studies literature, but with little uniformity. Walby's attempt to draw together the various

conceptualizations of the term into a single, yet dynamic model, is therefore a commendable one.

Walby defines patriarchy as a "system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women." This definition underlines the importance of viewing patriarchy as a structural phenomenon rather than one perpetuated by the individual exploitative man. Walby discusses what she calls the six "structures" of patriarchy—paid work, housework, culture, sexuality, violence, and the state. In terms of their interrelation, Walby argues that each of these structures impact upon one another but are also relatively autonomous. Their interrelationships constitute the different "forms" of patriarchy present in a particular society. Walby further argues that the intensity of oppression on a specific dimension constitutes the "degree" of patriarchy. In this, while she presents a model within which the patriarchal nature of a particular culture can be studied, the exact nature of the "patriarchy" remains local to its setting.

First wave feminism, Walby argues, was the successful organization of women around a variety of issues, and led to a significant shift in the form and degree of patriarchy in the West. The present century has seen a shift away from "private" patriarchy and towards a "public" patriarchy in each of the six structures. While pre-twentieth century patriarchy largely involved the exercise of control of a personal patriarch, such as a husband or father, contemporary patriarchy is much more a public and collective phenomenon.

Perhaps the strongest part of Walby's analysis is the manner in which she explores the dialectic nature of the relationship of women to their patriarchal environment without portraying us as helplessly caught in a structure. Women, Walby writes, are not passive victims of patriarchy but rather act out of rational self-interest. While the family may be an oppressive structure for certain women, it may simultaneously be the least oppressive option for others, who without family support would face poverty. Similarly, the restriction of sexuality to marriage benefits some women while it oppresses others. Such an approach to patriarchy recognizes differences between women

and the local and diverse effects a patriarchal structure has on various women's lives.

While Walby's book represents a milestone attempt to integrate and build upon the work of numerous theorists on patriarchy, it leaves, I feel, some important implications unresolved. Towards the end of her study Walby argues that the movement from private to public patriarchy represents not only a shift in form but also a reduction in the degree of some specific types of women's oppression. Entry into paid work, for instance, represents both a change in the form of patriarchy and a reduction in its degree. Aside from the controversial argument that today's patriarchy is quantitatively less than that at the beginning of the century, Walby's work raises another set of important questions: Can some of the six structures oppress women more than others? Can societies around the world be compared or even hierarchically arranged in terms of their "levels" of patriarchy? For instance, should one claim that the houses of American suburban housewives are in fact comfortable Nazi concentration camps (Friedan, 1965: 307)? Or that sex-role socializing is a systematic form of crippling people that can be paralleled to Chinese foot binding (Eichler, 1980: 122)?<sup>1</sup> Such comparisons are inaccurate and disguise the numerous discrepancies between women based on sex, race, and economic well being (see Hooks, 1984). In light of this, I argue that while Walby comprehensively analyzes the first part of her definition of patriarchy (on structure), she is less thorough in developing a theory of oppression. In other words, she insists that the two dimensions of patriarchy—form and degree—must be identified separately, but does not sufficiently theorize the "degree" dimension or the interaction between the two.

Walby's book is, however, an important attempt to construct a framework for understanding the various patriarchies in the world, and pertinent in its insistence that strategies for change must be both diverse and local.

<sup>1</sup>I recognize that both these authors gave the examples cited over ten years ago and presumably used such extreme comparisons to increase the poignancy of their arguments.