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In an era in which it has been fashionable to propound equality of the sexes, it has also become suspect to talk about differences between them. It is trendy to make the sweeping claim that the sexes are equal; however, it is considerably more difficult to be clear about what equality might mean.

If we today compare the complacency of the 1950's to the activism of the 1960's, we are easily left with the impression that the present generation of women has been the first to voice discontent. But if we venture back to the earlier history of feminism, we see that there has been protest of one kind or another for quite some time. In fact there have been repeated waves of feminist protest, and in the lull between these waves only a seeming indifference. Significantly each new wave of protest revealed a change of emphasis; concern about the liberation of women has not always focused on the same issues. Early protests pushed toward securing woman's right to own property and transact business and toward acquiring woman's right to vote. Later feminists asked for equal educational opportunity, equal economic opportunity (equal pay for equal work), and non-discriminatory hiring practices. But the most recent wave of protest raised by and about women centers on "equality" of dignity, self-respect, and pride.

This most recent wave in the series stands out from the rest. Dignity, self-respect, and pride cannot be legislated. The liberation which many women are seeking today involves not the changing of laws but the changing of attitudes. Political, economic, and educational reforms have been incomplete if they have only given women the liberty to act like men if that is what women choose. Before attitudes can be changed some clarity must be sought about the value of making distinctions between "man" and "woman," "male" and "female," or "masculine" and "feminine." It is even more important that we make an end to sloppy equivocation; we must define exactly what we mean by equal. If, in a discussion, equal means "identical for all practical purposes," that should be stated. Or if equal means "separate but equal," that should also be made clear.

The difference between these two definitions of equality is not that "separate but equal" is a compromised form of
equal for all practical purposes.” The proponents of both definitions hold as their goal dignity and respect for both men and women, no one in anyone else’s shadow, equal protection for men and women, and opportunity for the development of each individual’s unique and singular potential. In spite of these apparent similarities each definition of equality has its own origin and its own implications.

No less a keen thinker than the essayist Dorothy Sayers among those who argue that the distinctions male/female and masculine/feminine are vastly over-employed. In a clever piece called Are Women Human? she suggests:

We are much too inclined in these days to divide people into permanent categories, forgetting that a category only exists for its special purpose and must be forgotten as soon as that purpose is served. There is a fundamental difference between men and women, but it is not the only fundamental difference. A difference of age is as fundamental as a difference of sex; and so is a difference of nationality. All categories, if they are insisted upon beyond the immediate purpose which they serve, breed class antagonism and disruption in the state, and that is why they are dangerous.¹

What Dorothy Sayers wishes to emphasize is that the differences between male and female are less noteworthy and less useful than the basic similarity that inheres in their both being human. One ready conclusion we might draw from this argument is this: if a woman wishes to be an engineer, a lawyer, a corporation executive, or a writer of detective stories, by all means let her pursue these dreams and test the mettle of her gifts.

The famous anthropologist Margaret Mead would likely defend the same conclusion; nevertheless she places high value on the distinction between “masculine” and “feminine.” When sex differences are denied and when personality differences reflecting sex differences are eroded, the consequence, suggests Mead, is a loss of complexity and richness:

To insist that there are no sex differences in a society that has always believed in them and depended upon them may be as subtle a form of standardizing personality as to insist that there are many sex-differences. This is particularly so in a changing tradition, when a group in control is attempting to develop a new social personality. To the extent that abolishing the differences in approved personalities of men and women means abolishing any expression of the type of personality once called exclusively feminine, or once called exclusively masculine, such a course involves a social loss. Just as a festive occasion is the gayer and more charming if the two sexes are dressed differently, so it is in less material matters. If the clothing is itself a symbol, and a woman’s shawl corresponds to a recognized softness in her character, the whole plot of personal relations is made more elaborate, and in many ways more rewarding. The poet of such a society will praise virtues, albeit feminine virtues, which might never have any part in a social utopia that allowed no differences between personalities of men and women.²

Both Dorothy Sayers and Margaret Mead oppose that iron rule which sorts everyone into one of two categories—either lacy lady or hairy-chested man. Still they reach their conclusions by way of very different arguments. There is a temptation to assume that the views which Dorothy Sayers and Margaret Mead defend must be contradictory, or that one must be better than the other, or that they are not equally useful. Choosing one view and discarding the other is a concession to simplistic thinking. Dorothy Sayers and Margaret Mead use similar terms, and they might even defend similar social policies, but we can best begin by saying that they are not talking about the same thing. They are discussing in different domains. Dorothy Sayers is considering the public sphere—the sphere in which government laws, institutional policies, and organization regulations pertain. Margaret Mead on the other hand is focusing on the private sphere—that sphere in which varieties of temperament, expressive behaviors, and cultural symbols flourish.

In the earlier waves of feminism, the issue of women’s liberation focused on the public, political sphere. Attention to raising consciousness, increasing sensitivity, and reworking attitudes in the private and non-legal sphere is somewhat more recent. Consequently, we have fallen into the habit of using terms such as “equality,” “individual rights,” and “personal freedom” in an equivocal manner without regard to our domain of discourse. But when we lose basic distinctions we miss the point.

And what is the point? Simply this: when we mask individual differences in the blind pursuit of equality, we do a disservice to both the individual and society. In an era in which obstacles to individual development are countered by demands for equality, and at a time in which personal frustrations are turned into political issues, we run the risk of losing our appreciation for differences. Social philosopher Hanna Arendt says astutely:

... highly developed political life breeds a deep-rooted suspicion of this private sphere, a deep resentment against the disturbing miracle contained in the fact that each of us is made as he is—single, unique, unchangeable. This whole sphere of the merely given, relegated to private life in civilized society, is a permanent threat to the public sphere, because the public sphere is as consistently based on the law of equality as the private sphere is based on the law of universal difference and differentiation... No doubt, wherever public life and its law of equality are completely victorious, wherever a civilization succeeds in eliminating or reducing to a minimum the dark background of difference, it will end in complete petrification.³

What does this all have to say about the liberation of women? It has often been suggested that the contemporary
woman is caught in a dilemma: she must either choose equality and forsake femininity or preserve femininity and resign herself to the status of the second sex. The dilemma is, however, more imagined than real. It is not a question of whether the basic differentiation of masculine and feminine should be maintained or ignored. Rather the issue is how to maximize individuality of development, how to generate a variety of opportunity, and how to achieve flexibility of role within the range of what is basically but unrestrictively feminine and masculine.

Just because we maintain that there are certain experiences and certain patterns of personality development that are characteristically feminine, it need not follow that we force every woman to be either a slave of her femininity or a deviant from it. It is not even very useful to scrutinize the developing sides of a woman's personality to determine whether they are characteristically masculine or feminine. Frequently, when development is allowed to take a natural course, there will be certain stages during which a woman is preoccupied with exploring certain stereotypically feminine behavior, attitudes, and experiences. The same woman may at other times break out of the pattern and need to ignore femininity in order to develop certain other sides of her person. Exactly in the personality of the mature woman both masculine and feminine traits appear simultaneously and without conflict. She needs neither to be ultra-feminine nor un-feminine; she is herself and she is womanly.

The woman who makes a life-long project of being utterly feminine does herself as much injustice as the woman who views femininity as something to be transcended. Instead of a rich complexity of character, both develop an identity full of debilitating ambivalence and inhibition. What is important is that the various masculine and feminine sides of personality be integrated into a comfortable, harmonious whole. A view such as this rests on the assumption that sex-role behavior should not be coerced and that flexibility should be allowed in the behavior of both men and women.

It must not be concluded, however, that uni-sex is the answer. Uni-sex may temporarily solve some problems in the public sphere, but there is more to life than the public sphere. Women and men are also different. Even in a standardized environment the identity of girls would be different from that of boys, and the identity experiences of women different from those of men. Sexual discrimination which minimizes, degrades, or exploits femininity is one kind of injustice; equally great is the injustice which results when the differences between men and women are denied altogether.

FOOTNOTES

An unfortunate thing has happened in the recent discussion in the Christian Reformed community about the whole “woman’s issue.” A great many people who have spoken or written on the subject, particularly as it relates to the question of whether women should be allowed to hold office in our churches, have claimed that those who take the traditional stand are those who hold a “high” view of Scripture, while those who are contending for change are playing fast and loose with Scripture. It seems to me that this is a dangerous and naive simplification which serves neither side and serves instead to needlessly polarize our community on this issue.

In the first place, we all need to realize that nobody comes to the Bible without a good deal of baggage. By baggage, I mean such things as past life-experiences in the home, church, and school; sensitivities that have been aroused by what one has read or seen; temperament; theological presuppositions; and the like. Our common adherence to the Reformed principle of Sola Scriptura does not mean that we are shaped purely and simply by what the Bible says. It does mean that we try to discern what other forces are shaping our thinking, and that we take the Bible to be normative in a way that nothing else is.

The difficulty, of course, is that who we are and the state of our consciousness drive us to Scripture with very different concerns and questions. For example, it is not at all hard to imagine that a slave or ex-slave would see in Scripture something very different from what a slave-owner would see in the days when the debate was raging. Today, blacks see different things than whites do in Scripture. The poor, or those working among them with compassion, read in Scripture what the rich and powerful who are insensitive to injustice simply do not see.

This does not mean that Scriptural interpretation is totally subjective and relative. But it does mean that in order to arrive at the truth into which the Holy Spirit is trying to lead His people various segments of our community must listen to each other very carefully and not dismiss each other as either hopelessly conservative or liberal. More than that, it means that we should listen especially closely to the voices of those who are speaking from the position of disadvantage. If, for example, prisoners and those who run prisons are reading Scripture differently, I should pay special attention to the prisoners, for they are the powerless and oppressed in that situation. The same thing applies regarding the poor and the rich, or the voiceless governed over against those who rule them without their consent.

In short, although either side may be right or wrong, we, along with our Lord, should, as He clearly states, give heed particularly to the cry of the oppressed.

Obviously, all this has direct bearing on the woman’s issue. For today, in all societies, more and more women are becoming conscious as never before of their being in a situation in which they are arbitrarily limited to certain roles, in which they are defined and directed by men, in which they are excluded from equal access to jobs, to financial security, to psychological and emotional independence, to equal civil rights, and in the church, to the enormous privilege of serving God’s people in leadership roles.

Out of this new consciousness, which will continue to mushroom, women in our own community are starting to come to Scripture with urgent questions which probably would not occur to those who do not share their consciousness, whether men or women. We should listen very carefully to them, for they also are in...
a position of disadvantage. Nor should we be surprised if they see something different in Scripture from what our male theologians have so far seen. They come with new concerns, and hence, new questions. And these questions should be allowed, at least for a time, to shape the discussion. To insist on dealing with the woman's issue in the framework of old questions and concerns is to do a grave injustice to the very people who are hurting most.

For example, such women, and I include myself among them, are asking, "What is God's Good News for women today? What is their place in the Kingdom? He is bringing to pass? Are women really created so different from men that there are certain roles they may not take, even if they have the ability? What does God's freedom from the results of sin mean for women? What does His call to women to serve Him imply? How does He want women to use the gifts He gives them in the church and world as well as at home?

It seems to me that there are three basic positions, with all sorts of shades in between, which appear in our community today in response to such questions.

The first is the traditional view, which holds that women are basically very different, in some ways inferior, and are created to submit to and support men in their careers. Their basic and most important role in the scheme of things is to be a good Christian wife and mother, properly submissive at home, busy in church and in good works in the community as time allows. They should most certainly not be allowed to hold positions of authority and leadership over men—at least not in the church, and perhaps not in society either. It is interesting that the question of their voting, holding public office, teaching in colleges, and the like is not much debated any more by the traditionalists, although consistency would demand that such activities should be frowned upon as improper for women, from their point of view.

The second position, probably more popularly supported, and due in large part, I think, to the pressures of society in the last ten years, is that women probably do have as much intelligence and ability in most areas as men do. In fact, some are so extraordinarily gifted that they can even hold certain leadership roles. In society at least, it is all right if women vote, have equal rights, hold office, run businesses, and the like. But in the church, women can certainly do more, but not hold office, since the Bible seems to forbid that. In short, women are equal, but that does not mean they should have the same roles as men, particularly in the church.

The third position, of course, is that women and men equally image God, are equally gifted, equally called to be Christ-like, and ought to be allowed to serve in any way which His gifts equip them to do, whether in home, church, or society. In this view, the headship of the husband is limited to the home, and as described in Ephesians 5, is the headship of service rather than of running the show, designed to restore the unity and harmony broken in the Fall.

The basic issue in the debate between these three positions is: which is most true to the sense of Scripture? The fact is, as our study committees have so amply illustrated (see Acts of Synod, 1973 and 1975), that one can quote a great deal of Scriptural evidence for all three positions.

As in the debates on slavery, on infant versus adult baptism, on the relationship between church and state, and many other similar issues, the real question, not easily resolved, is this: which texts of Scripture, which teachings, should take precedence, and which should give way, when there seems to be a contradiction? On the slavery issue, for example, the church finally decided that the specific instructions of Paul to slaves and masters should be governed by the principal teachings of what man in the image of God and love of neighbors implies for holding someone as a slave. In the debate with our Baptist brothers and sisters, for example, the point to specific texts which clearly indicate one must believe and confess to be baptized as the ruling text while we point to texts which relate to the Covenant and the relationship between the Old and New Testament people of God as the ruling texts.

In all cases, both sides of the issue take Scripture seriously. And I think this is also the case with the woman issue. It is just not true, in our community at least, that the traditional position is clearly obedient to Scripture while the new position is not. Both positions, as well as the one in between, take Scripture very seriously.

The difference is that the first position, and to some degree, the second, take the three classic texts in Corinthians 11, 1 Corinthians 14, and 2 Timothy 2 as the controlling texts for all of Scripture. The third position takes Galatians 3:27, 28 as the basic Scriptural teaching regarding male and female as together imagining God; the creationist cultural mandate given to them both; the instances and statements of God's giving all the gift of His Spirit to all believers, regardless of sex; and the call to become Christ-like and take full responsibility for service in God's Kingdom, and controlling the three texts cited in the traditional arguments.

I would like to establish, by a close look at Scripture, my reasons for taking this position.

Ever since Calvin, a major rule for Reformed interpretation of the Bible has been that the clearer, more principal texts should control interpretation of less clear, more limited texts. In my view, the passages in Corinthians and I Timothy are of the second type—that is, less clear, and more limited.

In the first place, it is clear that the three texts in 1 Cor. 11:3-16, 1 Cor. 14:34-36, and 1 Tim. 2:8-15, are rules of behavior for worship services. They
are each addressed to a certain situation to meet certain specific problems and dangers, like the texts addressed to the questions of eating meat sacrificed to idols, proper conduct during the Lord's Supper, speaking in tongues, and the like. In short, they are not texts which enunciate broad salvation themes or Kingdom principles. They have a limited context and concern.

In the second place, parts of every one of these texts are already accepted, even by the traditional position, as culturally conditioned, that is to say, as limited in application, addressed to a situation which no longer applies in our culture. In I Cor. 11, although Paul clearly commands that women wear veils on their heads when they prophesy or pray in the congregation and commends long hair, we no longer feel these rules of behavior to be normative for us. We don't let women prophesy in the congregation, we don't make them wear veils when they pray aloud, and we don't make them keep their hair long. In I Cor. 14, Paul forbids women to speak at all during the services. Obviously, we do not follow this either. Female missionaries, "SWIM-ers," and others regularly speak in church services in various contexts. We realize that in those days, women and men always sat apart in the sanctuary, and for women to be asking their husbands questions and speaking aloud in disorderly fashion would have been very disruptive. Our situation is different. Therefore, we let women speak in church, although always "decently and in order!"

In I Tim. 2, Paul says that women should not wear braided hair or gold or pearls or costly attire. He says women may not teach men. He says they will be saved through child-bearing, and should be veiled when they pray aloud. But there is another and I think equally valid interpretation of these verses which refer to the creation story: Paul refers to the creation story to make the point that the wife was made for the husband, to be his glory, that is, his support and helper, the enhancer of his good name and influence in the community, a source of strength and joy in their union—the like that he says the Holy Spirit gives to all believers (I Cor. 12, Romans 12, and Eph. 4)?

Such questions have never been answered satisfactorily by those who take the traditional position and claim that they alone are faithful to Scripture.

Only one possible principle can be found in these three texts—and that is the one called the "creation order." It is based on I Tim. 2:13 and 14, and in a subsidiary way, on I Cor. 11:3 and 7-9. In both these passages, Paul refers to the fact that man was created before woman, and that woman was created for man. This is traditionally interpreted to establish an ontological creation order, in which the nature and role of woman is fixed for all time, based on the fact that she was created second. It is claimed that since she was created second (Gen. 2) she may not teach or hold authority in the church. I think that the claim is hard to establish. In fact, the reading of an ontological creation order into this text is heavily influenced by a philosophy of creation orders which is at present influential in Reformed theology.

But there is another and I think equally valid interpretation of these verses which refer to the creation story: Paul refers to the creation story to make the point that the wife was made for the husband, to be his glory, that is, his support and helper, the enhancer of his good name and influence in the community, a source of strength and joy in their union—the sort of woman, in short, described in Wisdom literature in Proverbs 31, who does her husband nothing but good. Paul uses this reference to support his instructions regarding the behavior of women at worship services in Corinth and Ephesus. For a woman to speak in public, let alone go unveiled, was enough grounds for divorce in the Jewish community. The rabbis considered a woman's voice and hair as the most seductive things about her, and the Jews Paul was trying to reach would most certainly have been seriously scandalized by what women
were apparently doing in the context of their new freedom in Christ. Moreover, women would be making it difficult for their husbands to maintain their reputations as good husbands in the pagan society of that day. Their marriages would be threatened and the good name of the Christian community and the gospel tarnished in a culture in which, as recent scholarship has amply demonstrated, only disreputable women went unveiled or spoke in public. Apparently, Paul was willing to take the risk of allowing women to prophesy in public in Corinth if they were veiled. But he was not willing to take that chance in Ephesus. One good reason was that there were probably women prophets of heretical sects whose teaching was threatening the well-being of the church there.

In short, Paul was first and foremost a missionary whose overriding concern was for the progress of the Gospel. He cautioned against anything which needlessly threatened that progress or the welfare of the churches. I think he asked the congregations in Ephesus and Corinth to use restraint in the matter of women teaching in worship services in order to protect the good name and well-being of the churches in their particular situation. It is hard to see how what he says here can apply to the question of women in these offices as we know them. Paul refers to the creation story. There, we read that male and female together were made in God’s image. God is represented by, and His likeness exists equally in, the female as well as the male. They are made different in function, just as the persons of the Trinity differ in function; yet the differences are meant to enrich their union. Together, they are told to have dominion over the earth—to care for it, explore its possibilities, to order it, and be fruitful and multiply in it. Both are equally responsible before God for these tasks. There is no evidence for the many role limitations and stereotypes which various cultures have placed upon men and women. If woman was created as a helper fit for man, shouldn’t women do more in the church and in the world as well as at home to help in the difficult tasks which men have struggled with alone for so long?

The second principle is the call of God to men and women alike to live before Him responsibly as His children and do whatever needs doing as agents of His redemptive plan. In the Old Testament, we find God gifting and calling women to work for Him, even in a highly patriarchal society, in positions of remarkable leadership. Deborah, Miriam, and Huldah have already been mentioned as examples. There is no trace in the Biblical material of the idea that God chose women because no suitable men were available or that it was too bad that women had to lead. These ideas are implanted in the text to help deal with what are rather difficult situations to explain for those who take the traditional view (cf. Monisma, in his commentary on the Church Order).

A third principle is based on the many passages in the New Testament which tell us that the Holy Spirit gives to men and women believers the gifts of prophecy, administration, leadership, healing, giving, wisdom and knowledge, working miracles, discernment, tongues, service, teaching, exhorting, aid, mercy, and contributions (I Cor. 12 and Romans 12). In Ephesians 4, Paul teaches that Christ’s gifts are that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, all in order to build up the body of Christ. In Letha Scanzoni’s famous phrase, “these gifts do not come wrapped in pink or blue.”

If God gives these gifts to all believers, then they must be allowed to use them. In our church this means that if God gives women the gifts of leadership, whether in administration, preaching, exhorting, teaching, wisdom, or the rest, then we must not limit God and tell Him what women may and may not do in the church or in society.

Finally, there is the text in Gal. 3:27, 28. “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” This is obviously a principle, not a limited rule of behavior. Moreover, it does violence to Scripture to limit the meaning of being one “in Christ!” to a purely spiritual dimension. The context is clearly that of the laws and customs which Paul declares we are now to free ourselves from—laws and...
customs which in his day set up all sorts of barriers in everyday life and in Jewish worship between slaves and freemen, Greeks and Jews, and male and female. A close examination of the expressions “in Christ” and “to put on Christ” shows that the scope is as large as life and encompasses all the ways in which these groups relate to each other. Just as this verse was taken to support the view that Gentiles and slaves could be members of and leaders in the church, so also must we see that women are equally included. Faith frees us as Christians to lead a whole new lifestyle in a community where the old barriers and stereotypes and customs no longer rule.

Yet it seems to me that it is precisely tradition and custom and law which are presently controlling the position of women in our Christian Reformed community. On the whole women are not encouraged to use their gifts as fully responsible children of God and full partners with men in the cause of His Kingdom. Only on the mission field, where I grew up, has this happened to some extent. There some women have had the freedom to preach, teach, evangelize, and lead in the founding of new churches. Our own Johanna Veenstra did all of these things and with many others was richly blessed by God. Would God bless a practice that was really contrary to His Word? Surely we do not believe that it is all right for women to teach and lead “native men” but not men in our own churches, even if they have the gift?

Hard questions like these, it seems to me, make it clear that we need to take another long look at the Biblical material. It is my conviction that a good Reformed hermeneutic which addresses the issue of women in church and society responsibly must examine the classic, more limited, less clear texts in the light of the clear, principal Scriptural material I have cited.

If we are willing to take another look at Scripture in the light of the new situation today, I think we will arrive, as the church often has in the past in the light of changing history, at a new understanding of what God is saying about the role of women in the church and world today. Surely it cannot be debated that in a world in which the church is an increasingly tiny minority it needs to use all the gifts of all its members to the fullest. If women are encouraged to be more responsible, independent, and active in the church and in society, if they are allowed to join hands with men as full partners in the awesome tasks given to them as a people of God, I think the church will experience a flood of renewal and vitality.
I am Woman, Hear me roar,
In numbers too big to ignore
And I know too much to go back and pretend. . . .

Remember this bold theme song of the feminist movement, popularized by Helen Reddy? What it asserts could certainly not be said for the women at Calvin College. For one thing, most of the female students at Calvin refer to themselves as girls, not as women, and they certainly do not roar (they rarely even speak out, especially in the presence of men). Their numbers at Calvin are significant—50 per cent of the student body—but they are not taken as seriously by professors, fellow students, and even themselves as their male counterparts are. As far as knowing too much, if this is true it's a well-guarded secret; and the only pretending that I see is that they act as if there is not a major social change taking place in North America.

So what? To many it is just as well that our women students aren't into that "women's lib stuff." After all, in their opinion, it is women's lib that is responsible for the increase in broken marriages and homes, the rise in juvenile delinquency, and the continued rise in the unemployment rate that is currently plaguing our country.

To me, however, it is lamentable that many of our students are not aware enough to evaluate the secular feminist movement. It is lamentable that they have closed their ears and minds to the liberating voice of the Christian feminist movement. But what is most lamentable of all is the waste of talent, gifts, spirit, and minds that takes place at Calvin among its women students.

The first is the woman who enrolls at Calvin for her MRS degree, a trite description of the female student who is interested in establishing an engagement relationship with an eligible male student. This type of student recognizes that Calvin provides one of the better mating arenas for the Christian Reformed Church; she and her parents see the high cost of tuition and residency as minor investments in light of the payoff. Priorities for this woman are to have fun, to meet others (particularly male "others"), and to do well enough in her academic pursuit to stay in school until her primary goal is met.

While not a real nuisance to others, except perhaps in distracting those "male others" from their studies, she is denying her own worth and responsibility as a gifted child of God when she finds value in herself only in relationship to a male.

The second type of woman student is the "stopgapper," someone who is serious about finishing her college education, but sees it only as a temporary stopgap measure until marriage and family can dominate her life. Her goals are defined in terms of declaring a major that is fairly marketable and socially acceptable (such as education), and securing a job that will provide moderate challenge and compensation for several years until she can enter her full-time career as wife, mother, and homemaker. If she is married after her graduation from college, then her earning power may be viewed as crucial to her husband's graduate or professional education, or to provide enough of a financial base to purchase a home. She views her work experience as something that will only last for a few years before she "settles down" to raising a family.

She is characterized by conscientiousness and concern for others. This often makes her a good student but not an outstanding one, because her future always comes second to that of her husband or husband-to-be. She subordinates her goals and her needs to his.

This second category claims many women students who settle for "second best" because they will not risk being a threat to potential marriage partners. They do not consider graduate or professional education because the time and expense might make them less eligible for the roles that they have been socially conditioned to want. While some of
them are considered excellent students by GPA standards, they are not cultivated into scholars—partly because their professors do not challenge and encourage them to be such, and partly because they themselves are not interested in such a role.

While the second type of woman student is work-oriented, she is not career-oriented as the third type is. This third type of woman student, representing a minority at Calvin, is the most serious about scholarship, and her education is an integral step in her career development. If women in this category want to strive for academic excellence and they do thrive on an intellectual diet, but they suffer subtle pressure and rejection from peers and men professors. They deviate from the traditional developmental patterns of women students, and they are viewed as sacrificing their femininity for the sake of achievement. They often get caught in the bind of not only fearing failure in what they attempt, but also fearing too much success. If they fail to do their best, they let themselves down; if they succeed in doing their best, they risk being perceived as a threat to their male peers who have seen that men ought to be smarter than women. This of course makes them less attractive to men, and hence less feminine.

Some of the women who start out their college career fitting this description discover that they cannot endure the lack of affirmation for who they are and what they are doing. They retreat to the more socially accepted role of the second description. Those who refuse to forsake their highest goals because of little support often suffer from loneliness and a lack of self-esteem. Loneliness and little self-confidence can, in turn, inhibit full utilization of their abilities.

Women students who advocate, surrender to, or oppose the pressure to marry all suffer for their choices. Those who advocate it aggressively soon discover that it will not provide the identity and purpose they expected it to provide. Those who surrender to it may discover that they could have pursued higher goals if only they had taken the risk and postponed marriage. And those who opposed the pressure to marry may have denied their need to have relationships with their male peers by isolating themselves from men students.

Certainly I do not suggest that the dilemma described above be solved by doing away with the institution of marriage. It is not marriage per se that creates problems for women. Rather it is the myths and misrepresentations of marriage that contribute to the problem. We live in a society that views marriage for women as a demonstration of their true femininity; women who strive for and achieve this goal are valued more than women who do not by most people. The importance placed on being married blinds women to the importance of other pursuits in their lives.

As I see it, we need to create an atmosphere at Calvin in which women as well as men can re-evaluate old roles and investigate new roles. Social traditions regarding roles are not law. They need to be questioned when, because of such traditions, one half of the population has been denied full participation in the freedom and responsibility that the other half has experienced.

Women need to be challenged to stretch their minds, to reach higher than what they think they can attain. They deserve encouragement and support in their pursuit of scholarship and excellence as well as for the more acceptable, affiliative roles they have previously assumed. They need help in planning their futures so that their lives won’t evolve solely contingent on the lives of others. Women need to see the various possible stages their lives can have rather than simply being locked into the catchall “happily-ever-after” position. Professional education can often be completed before age 28, or be taken up at a later stage; childbearing can be postponed; childrearing can be shared more equally by both parents if they so desire.)

Women need to be creative in viewing their options so that they can design a lifestyle that best suits their gifts, goals, and needs. In doing so, some women may choose to share their lives with a husband and some may choose singleness. Either alternative ought to be acceptable if the woman has considered all of her options and made her decision with the support, but not pressure, of her family, peers, and professors.

Marriage needs to be viewed for what it really is. Men as well as women need to be led in a Christian analysis of what our society says marriage ought to be as opposed to what God intended it to be. We must make a conscious attempt to free ourselves from the marriage myths with which our culture bombards us.

The responsibility for the creation of such an atmosphere belongs to all who make up the Calvin community.

The faculty and administration should, at the very least, do three things:

1. Challenge women students to overcome the societal pressures to fit traditional roles and images (e.g., a woman’s place is in the home; women can’t do math; women are naturally passive and emotional; women are not logical thinkers; etc.) placed on women, and support those who have already begun to do this.
2. Examine their own ideas, beliefs, policies, and procedures for any evidence of sexism that may be preventing women from fully developing their abilities, and make changes accordingly.
3. Encourage women to join their ranks so that future women students at Calvin have a greater number of adequate role models.

Students must develop an awareness of the socialization process so that they can better deal with its negative effects. They need to allow each other the freedom to develop in ways that may counter traditional roles assigned to men and women. Students need to encourage and support each other in striving for their best.

If we are successful in accomplishing these changes in the life of the Calvin community, we can put an end to the pretense that a social revolution is not occurring. We can offer a wider range of options to women, and in so doing offer new options to men as well.
Sonnets from the Misogynist

"... a woman is only a woman, but a good cigar is a smoke."
—Rudyard Kipling
*The Betrothed*, Stanza 25

It is usually dusk when I'm called to
Pursue my pathological pastime,
To conjure memories of the last time
I was feverishly driven to spew
Apallingly glandular *billet-doux*.
It's stairways of embarrassment I climb,
Step on step on shame in pantomime,
Creaking with remorse and regret, all due:
Tiered days of silly passion, past and dead,
Days of foolishness, of taking chances,
Days in which I giddily lost my head
Cultivating saccharine romances.
Cloying toying's made me a pathetic
And damned emotional diabetic.

You know you're worth a lot to me, my dear,
Of light. You keep yourself in shadows where
You remain fairly conspicuous. There
You sit, looking brilliantly austere
In dark glasses in the dark; but I fear
You can't see a thing. I can hardly bear
Your optical elusions. We both stare
At nothing: Even that must disappear.
I've tried to find my place in the shadows,
Unsure of just how dark your thoughts might be
Concerning me. My apprehension grows
Like cancerous Nightshade in this ghastly
Twilight. Don't be surprised if I, therefore,
Can't see my way to love you anymore.

* * *

You know you're worth a lot to me, my sweet;
I've lavishly invested time in you,
But now I'm closing your account. You're too
Delinquent paying and you can't deplete
Your balance any more. Your indiscreet
Speculation has all but ruined you.
I could spend eternity trying to
Unthaw your frozen assets, but you'd cheat
Me out of my commission in the end.
So you're back on the open market, dear,
Free to squander what you will. You're not penn
By long-term commitments. But listen here:
So long as your debts remain extensive
You're not free at all—just inexpensive.
Do you love me, schizophrenic baby? 
Are you crazy with a passion? Do you 
Mean the tender things you say? Is it true 
Devotion, or just a put-on, maybe? 
Do you really hate me, schizoid lady? 
Do you loathe me earnestly? Can you do 
Me harm and still be happy? Do you view 
Me lightly, or is your hatred weighty?
I'm plainly at your mercy, dear. I have 
No idea what goes on inside that 
Head of yours. Your tenderness is a salve, 
But it scarcely soothes our mortal combat. 
You've been on my mind—I know you love it—
So much so you're driving me out of it.

* * *

I've often mutely marveled at your frank 
Yet tactful speech. I'm spellbound by your bright 
Success with everything you touch. You're right 
No matter what you say. You crank 
Out blithe wisdom easily; but point-blank 
Brilliance is disconcerting. My plight 
Is painfully apparent: erudite 
Condescension drives its sharp, poisoned shank 
Fatally through my dully plodding heart. 
Gracious murder of my pride is an art 
You've well developed. You are charming, ducks,
Though I'm not charmed—and that's the crux 
Of all our heartfelt disagreements. Fool 
That I am, I can't stand your ridicule.

My dear, you once infected me with mad 
Longing; but the scarlet fever of our 
Love has left me with a weakened heart. Hour 
By hour I waste away. My health is bad 
And growing worse—further wracked, I might add, 
By your palling ministrations. If dour 
Looks are all this patient gives, I site the sour 
And ineffective remedies I've had 
To take from you. You discount my death throes, 
Then worry to death for a trifling cough. 
Why do you quibble so about the nose 
When it's clear the head will have to come off? 
Our love can't survive this niggling ferment; 
Indeed, it's due for hasty interment.

* * *

A hundred times I've tried to sell my soul 
To you, but you're not the fool to buy it. 
And who else is fool enough to try it 
When other, less demanding, forms of droll 
Amusement still abound? I'm in a whole 
Lot of trouble, I know. I'll have quiet 
Nights for the rest of my life. You sigh, yet 
What the hell good is that to me? I stole 
My kisses—you don't even want them back! 
I gave you my heart, you gave me a laugh; 
I gave you my soul, you gave me the sack. 
And how does a fellow live down that gaffe? 
I'm giving up love for all and for good; 
I'm already used to bachelorhood.
Helen Bonzelaar is an assistant professor of art at Calvin College. A Calvin graduate, she earned her M.A. at Western Michigan University.
Construction: Resurrection Butterfly
Soft sculpture: The Apostles
Carol Jurgens-Fryling is currently an art instructor at Calvin College, where she received her B.A. She will be awarded her M.F.A. by Western Michigan University this spring.
Drawing: Sunday After April
"All my poems come from the Ecstatic Mother; everyone's poems do." Robert Bly

The symbols of the Tarot deck's major arcana are both very old and very complex. The High Priestess of this deck carries the number two and is the guardian of mysteries. This is the card of the poet. Consider the sparse cadence of the untitled poem, and compare it with the poem "Death" by Saint Geraud:

Going to sleep, I cross my hands on my chest.  
They will place my hands like this.  
It will look as though I am flying into myself.

There is a subtle theme running throughout the violent symbolic patterns of the Tarot that would seem to promise a rebirth. At the very heart of poetry there is a paradox. There is the symbol, whose meaning is objective, yet would take an infinite period of time to explicate. There is the tendency of intense imagery toward abstraction. But "New Clothes" is a strong poem. Its abrupt, complex rhythms reinforce the erratic progression of imagery, just as the looser rhythms of "Opinions" complement its structure. There is music in these poems. It is the music Gautama heard at the moment of enlightenment. The poem "St. Augustine's Conversion," by an anonymous friend of Alex Zanzibaar, tells us that it is also the music Augustine heard at his enlightenment:

I am careful in the garden.  
The voices of children  
calling out to Buddha.

The womb of the High Priestess is the source of images, and it is music that binds these images together. It is rhythm that knits together the absurd moments of our lives. To absorb the music of poetry is to participate in the cadence of ancient ceremonies and prayers to the earth, the sea, and the breasts of the Mother. If the rhythms of the seasons have their origin in Persephone's abduction and Demeter's sorrow, one would expect a similar tragedy-that-is-not-a-tragedy in the poet's music. If I ever tell you that Calvinist Christianity is rarely efficacious in the disciplines of purification or that a friend of mine knows Sherlock Holmes personally, at least humor me. It's just part of the price....

David Westendorp
ntitled)

ernity

adowless mind,
ere seconds
uld be
urs or years.
ere’s no way
gauge
less
ver trusts
ternals—
grown child,
grey head,
clock.

Marianne Scholte

st Hymn to Persephone

here are few enough things you miss:
he squirrel stealing from birds
olden belly fur,
eratic flaws in winter,
isky in those icy veins,
ntry music perhaps. Soft winds
istle through your brain,
ough the caves;
ime there is a new black hole
plunge into. Again and again
he ancient lists of images
ee a woman, a raven, and a snake.
here are countless variations on this theme:
ets’ gentle knight,
austus in coition
ith a demon,
eda and the Swan.” The snake binds
e woman and the bird together.

David Westendorp
New Clothes

It was me and Larry—yes Larry, us glittering, arm in arm, sparkling, my boss Larry and me, our first bar crawling, hitting the gay spots, sparkling, like wearing new clothes, finding they fit, but are somehow different; tickled at the stranger in the mirror, thrilling to our first, like going to church in Sunday clothes to find it’s Sunday.

John Richter

Opinions

I still have my opinions on any subject; that women who marry at seventeen are fools but I am not so quick to say them now.

I see myself at thirty, a pound gained on my belly for each year childless and happy. Perhaps by then I'll give up hoping that I'll ever be a dancer accepting my mother's teaching that such things are sin. . . how little she knew, then, or I at seventeen, more beautiful than now.

Perhaps it is the wisdom I have gained from being barren; I know my mother still considers me too young to know the details of men's anatomy.

M. Edmun
Trees

Winter
Lilacs
or wisteria
or purple petunias
should bloom out from grey boughs in white winter.

Spring
Catalpa trees are priests who burn
rare incense on their broad green palms
in slim white urns.
Up golden pillars of the sun
down spiral stairways of the wind
the fragrance runs.

Prayer
Love, be powerful to quell this flux of pulse
that bears me to you only to recede
the affirmation ebbing to denial
surrender to recoil.

Love, be mightier than all-absorbing death
dissolve me drop by drop in thy vast sea
annihilate, blot out the rebel will
captive I will be free.

New Love
If there were crystal wine as cool as dew
as clear as moonlight; if this silver flow
of liquid held the sound of muted music
like far-off bells in water singing low:
then could you taste and hear the joy I know.

The white enchantment of a moonbright night
has not distilled the magic of this brew.
It is composed of all familiar things,
each touch and taste, each sight and sound made new;
changed, charged with wonder by the love of you.

Mildred Zylstra

Mildred Zylstra, M.A.L.S., has been at Calvin for two decades, working first as a librarian and during the past ten years as an assistant professor of English. She has made an outstanding contribution to the college in her teaching and promotion of children's literature.
Women and the Constitution:

“Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.”

“The paramount destiny and mission of woman are to fulfill the noble and benign offices of wife and mother. This is the law of the Creator.” Bradwell v. Illinois (1873) 83 U.S.

The above remark, written about one hundred years ago, was part of a United States Supreme Court decision denying a woman’s right to practice law according to the terms of the Federal Constitution. It is representative of scores of other Supreme Court opinions formulated before and since then which have demonstrated the disturbing truth that the U.S. Constitution, as it stands, does not safeguard the rights and privileges of American women. In the past two decades women have made a great deal of progress, mainly on the state level, in challenging discriminatory laws and practices and securing a legal status equal to that of men. The Supreme Court, however, has remained inconsistent in its interpretations of existing constitutional clauses dealing with the equality of American citizens and continues to handle questions on the rights of women without a unified basis for its decisions. It seems likely that this situation will soon change. After two-hundred years, the country which has repeatedly taken decisive legislative measures to protect the rights of members of numerous minority groups is at last recognizing its responsibility to do the same for that 53 per cent of the population constituted by members of the female sex. By far the broadest and most significant piece of legislation reflecting the present concern for the rights of women is the proposed twenty-seventh addition to the United States Constitution, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA).

The amendment currently before the public is actually not at all new. It has been introduced into Congress every year since 1923. In 1971, after receiving support from congressional subcommittees and presidential task forces, it was approved by the House of Representatives with a vote of 354 to 23. The following year it passed with an 84 to 8 tally in the Senate. Since that time, thirty-four state legislatures have ratified the amendment. In order for it to become part of the law of the land, four more states (providing the necessary three-fourths) must ratify the amendment by March of 1979. The ERA was included in both the Democratic and Republican party platforms written last summer at the national conventions. This year will be even more important for the amendment because all sixteen of the states which have not ratified it will hold legislative sessions of their congresses, while some will hold only budget sessions in 1978.

Although several states ratified the ERA almost immediately after its approval by Congress, support from the final states needed to pass it has been slow in coming, and in some states which initially approved the amendment efforts have been made to rescind ratification. This apparent stall in the ERA’s journey toward adoption is primarily due to an increase in the amount of unfavorable and often misleading publicity aroused by its opponents. Very recently many people have formed reactionary negative views on the ERA based on unsound and sometimes far-fetched assumptions about its possible effects on American society. It is clear that even after the ERA’s long history many people do not know what the bill says or what sorts of changes will result from its addition to the Constitution.

What the ERA says, completely and exactly, is this:

1.) Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.

2.) The Congress shall have power to enforce by appropriate legislation the provisions of this article.

3.) This Amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification.

What the ERA will mean has been the subject of legal research and study throughout its history and produced a mass of general and specific interpretations of clauses one and two of the amendment. Certain broad principles, first of all, are evident simply from the

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Notes on the ERA

Sher Jasperse

determination of amendments to the Federal Constitution.
The ERA forbids discrimination against any person on the basis of sex in all state and federal governmental policies and government-regulated practices. It does not apply to private persons, clubs, or organizations and thus would not affect social customs and mores. As U.S. Senator Marlow Cook has stated, "The only kind of sex discrimination [ERA] would forbid is that which exists in the law. Interpersonal relations and customs of chivalry will, of course, remain as they always have been, a matter of choice."

Furthermore, the amendment does not challenge states' rights, ensured by the Tenth Amendment, to pass or to change their own laws in order to apply the principle of equality between men and women. The third section of the ERA was included to allow individual states time to do just that in the manner they choose. Statements similar to that in section two of the ERA are part of several existing constitutional amendments.

There are good reasons for the existence of a constitutional amendment in addition to statutory reform. It provides a broad principle prohibiting the discrimination that results from sex-role stereotyping. The Fourteenth Amendment, added to the Constitution at the close of the Civil War, promises equal protection of the rights of all American citizens; its original intention, however, was to prevent racial discrimination, and the Supreme Court has traditionally failed to apply it to cases of discrimination on the basis of sex. Major statutory reform usually happens only as a response to strong pressure like that created by an amendment.

Another significant consideration is the fact that the ERA does not deny the differences between men and women or the need for laws which can apply only to people of one sex. It will not affect laws granting maternity benefits or prohibiting rape. Nor will it require that men and women share public restrooms or locker rooms, prison facilities, or dormitories. Laural Berghold of the National Law Center at George Washington University explains:

The policy behind the amendment is that the law must deal with particular characteristics of individuals rather than with the overbroad characteristic of a person's sex. This does not mean, however, that all gender-based distinctions in legislation will be unconstitutional. The legislative history of the amendment and the constitutional right of privacy indicate that in "privacy areas"... distinctions based on sex may continue (Current History, May 1976).

What the ERA will do is render unconstitutional a wide range of sex-based practices in areas such as employment, education, health care, finances, the armed services, and criminal law. It will outlaw all discrimination against women in the public schools, including exclusion from athletic programs. It will forbid the arbitrary appointment of women to the lowest-paid jobs and the denial of Social Security and other government benefits to the families of employed women. Laws requiring that women use their husband's surnames in vehicle and voting registration and similar situations will be declared unconstitutional.

In the controversial area of family and divorce law the ERA will produce several changes. Sex-based presumptions about the ownership and control of family property will be prohibited and the equal division of property in the case of divorce will be required. Child custody and support will be determined on a sex-neutral basis rather than according to the presuppositions that men are independent wage-earners and women are dependent and in charge of the home and children. Opponents of the ERA have suggested that this will deprive needy or unemployed women and their families of alimony payments by the father; laws will demand, however, that "where one spouse is the primary wage-earner and the other runs the home, the wage earner [has] a duty to
support the spouse who stays at home" (Senate Report 92-689). Although in many cases fathers will continue to be responsible for paying alimony, they will not bear a greater liability because of their sex.

Another area of major concern is that of the military services. The ERA will give women equal opportunities to enlist and receive job training, and to obtain the medical, educational, retirement and veterans' benefits currently afforded to men. According to the Yale Law Journal, it "will require the military to see men as it sees women—as a diverse group of individuals, married and unmarried, with and without children, possessing or desiring to acquire many different skills, and performing many varied kinds of jobs" (p. 970).

If the draft is re instituted, women as well as men will be subject to it. Although this possibility has sparked some of the more vehement protests to the ERA, the magnitude of the outcry is not entirely warranted. Congress in fact already possesses the constitutional power to draft women; shortly before the end of World War Two it was preparing for enactment of a law that would have called unmarried, unemployed women to serve in preference to men with families. The present amendment would equalize the status of men and women in the event that a draft were deemed necessary by the government. Under the ERA women would receive the same classifications and exemptions as men, based on marriage, child or other dependent-care responsibilities, physical incapacities, hardships, and student and preferred occupation privileges. They would also be required to meet equally strict physical fitness qualifications.

Among the organizations opposing the ERA are the National Council of Catholic Women, The American Party, The Communist Party, Daughters of the American Revolution, the John Birch Society, and the Ku Klux Klan. Groups supporting it include the National Council of Churches, Evangelicals for Social Action, the American Civil Liberties Union, the United States Department of Labor, the President's Task Force on the Rights and Responsibilities of Women, and the United States Commission on Civil Rights. The ERA has also been endorsed by presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, and Ford.

The Women's Movement, in its most recent form, has followed a course much like that taken by many other challenges to the American way of thinking which have arisen in our country's past. A very few years ago a relatively small group of bra and Bible burners served to startle and awaken the American people to the unequal and consequently unjust treatment of men and women which, over a period of some two hundred years, has gradually been incorporated into the American way of life. That minority has since been replaced or joined by much larger, more broadly-based, more moderate group of men and women who are, however, equally insistent on the need for changing attitudes, laws, and practices that discriminate against any members of society on the basis of sex. The Equal Rights Amendment is a comprehensive and reasonable attempt on the part of such people to effect the necessary changes and in so doing to hold the United States Constitution to the ideals upon which it was founded.
The issue of women's rights has come a long way toward institutionalization in America. Women have fought their way into the business world, into the courts, into politics, into the seminary, into the grudging male world in all its heady and trifling aspects. Surer signs of the institutionalization of the movement than the headlines it produces, however, can be found in its fallout: the cliches, the stereotypes, the rather grim sentiments and jingoism which characterize both its proponents and opponents. Feminists lob militaristic demands into the intellectual community on the college lecture circuit; snide comedians lampoon "libbers" in night-club monologues. Harbinger jousts with Cosmopolitan. Philip Roth and Erica Jong variously inflame their various audiences. On the sidelines, having a grand old time, sits Peter DeVries before a typewriter, a war correspondent in the Battle of the Sexes.

Cliches and stereotypes fuel DeVries's work. He has been eminently successful in transforming stock phrases into outrageous and ingenious puns, in deftly paroclyzing predictable, conventional behavior, and in playing up the absurdities inherent in all doctrinaire mentality. Insofar as the women's movement has become institutionalized and dogmatic it has become vulnerable to his satire.

Throughout his literary career DeVries has principally devoted himself to the chronicling of the human foolishness invested in and about the marriage state. In his later novels he has increasingly concerned himself with the impact of varying degrees of institutionalized radical feminism on the sluggish old institution of marriage. While DeVries is far too tactful (or should we say cagey?) to be didactic, he has drawn some conclusions about the future of matrimony, and has also, bit by bit through his novels, drawn up his own specifications for the ideal woman.

DeVries's views might well be of interest to us at Calvin, for they are in part affected by his Calvinist background. As he writes in Let Me Count the Ways, "That you can't go home again is a truth inseparably linked to the fact that neither can you ever get away from it...." His views on women show that he has left home, but—and perhaps more importantly—they also give evidence that he once lived there.

Since DeVries is principally a satirist, albeit a gentle one, his main characters tend to be composites of humorous character flaws rather than idealized, or even stable, personalities. "There is no comic mileage in good health, an excellent dinner, harmonious unions and well-behaved children," he says, knowledgeably. His broadest strokes paint not the ideal woman, but her opposite. Our search, then, begins among the stones the builder has rejected.

One of the earliest of what we shall call DeVries's "unattractive" women appears in Through the Fields of Clover. She is Elsie Trautwig, one of the four children of Ben and Alma Marvel. Elsie's central problem is the result of her being obsessed and traumatized by sex. She is appalled by the animal appetites of the men with whom she involves herself. As the book's dust jacket wryly suggests, she considers sexual intercourse an unnatural act and is darkly disillusioned when each of her three successive husbands makes carnal advances on the honeymoon. She cannot tolerate this selfishness and atavism from any male for long, and so she is constantly searching for someone new, someone to give her heartfelt poetry rather than dirty limericks. And so, in keeping with DeVries's typical irony, the word gets out that Elsie is sleeping around, though the gossips are unaware that she is doing nothing more than sleeping.

Elsie is filled with bitterness and rage, and she pins the blame on everyone but herself. She slaps her would-be lovers with the charge of hostility when it is she who is hostile. She accuses all men of insensitivity and abnormal lust when it is she who is both insensitive and abnormal. She counts her parents to be the cause of her frigidity, but as her mother says, "... if your generation wants to blame us for everything, we can blame our parents, and they can blame theirs, and nobody will ever take any responsibility for anything." Elsie is essentially a case of arrested development; like an infant, she demands her own rights to the exclusion of the rights of others and at the same time refuses to accept any responsibility for her condition. She is immature despite the sophistication with which she states her case.

Another of DeVries's women who
transfers her hostility onto all men is Nectar Schmidt, a secondary character in Reuben, Reuben. Nectar is another spoiled child beneath a patina of hewed intellect. The weapon she yields most effectively in her war against men is armchair analysis. Essentially, she uses Freudian claptrap to suggest that men's motives are basically vile, and always the opposite of appearances. She accuses a notorious Romanizer, for instance, of chasing everything in skirts in order to mask latent homosexuality. She uses her inverted logic relentlessly, and it becomes an irritant which culminates in real hostility toward her, a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy that at one point provokes a physical attack upon her. He diagnoses it as a burst of self-hate in her attacker. Eventually her inestimable propagandizing destroys the marriage of her best friend. Subsequent to her divorce the two women set about to establish a home for children from broken homes, thus bringing her own brand of madness full circle.

Nectar’s watchword and boon companion is hostility. She presumes herself in her subtle detections of it in others, and yet she is of all most guilty of it herself. Far from mere benign detection of it, she actively generates it and is altogether blind to it in herself. She is calculating and vicious even as she lays the soul of objective concern. She is consumed by the need to be imperious, and indeed she makes herself so, for any arguments against her position are interpreted as being motivated by hostility, and thus they further fuel her gimmick analysis. To use her own reasoning, her desperate need to be superior to men is evidence of an inferior personality.

Another of DeVries’s unattractive women, Rose Piano in Into Your Tent I’ll Creep, is perhaps not so much unattractive as just foolish by virtue of her own pretensions. Miss Piano is one of DeVries’s case studies in doctrinaire feminism. Into Your Tent I’ll Creep is an exploration of the potential absurdities in a modern role-reversal experiment. Miss Piano marries a genial scoundrel named Al Banghart on the condition that he become househusband and free her to her professional career. Al is delighted by the proposition. He sails through housework and cooking chores in no time and spends his afternoons between the sheets with the lady next door. Eventually he is caught—and it is only that which saves his marriage. Because of her avant-garde marriage and her role as breadwinner, Rose had been labeled an emasculating woman, and the gossip was beginning to chafe. When Al’s cuckoldry becomes public knowledge, though, he is considered something of a satyr, and as such quite a catch for any woman. Rather than grounds for divorce, Al’s adultery is the only thing that keeps his marriage intact.

DeVries lays the peculiar psychology of Rose’s situation at the feet of the women’s liberation forces. The principle implicit in that psychology is, in fact, perhaps DeVries’s most serious indictment of radical feminism: egocentrism. A principal motivation in Rose’s choice of a role-reversal marriage, her contemplation of divorce, and her relief at her husband’s adultery is her concern with appearances, and, pointedly, her own image. Like Elsie Trautwig, Rose Piano is jealous of her rights and her reputation; she worries about Al’s reputation only to the extent that it reflects upon her own. DeVries is implying that in some instances dogmatic feminism can amount to little more than a cloak for self-interest. Rose’s self-consciousness makes her pretentious and slightly absurd—and somewhat unattractive.

III

DeVries’s unattractive women all deviate from convention, from expected behavior patterns, in some way. It is this nonconformity which accounts for the humor the characters generate. DeVries’s characters often use flawless logic to work their way into ridiculous situations simply because they begin with unconventional assumptions; he takes simple ideas and expands upon them until they collapse in upon themselves because of the absurdities inherent in them all at one level or another. Rose Piano’s reaction to her husband’s adultery is not illogical as such—it follows naturally enough from her set of values—but the disparity between her reaction and society’s conventional reaction to adultery is ironic, and hence comic. The converse of all this is also generally true in DeVries’s fiction: his attractive women, or at least those who are not simply laughable, tend to be those with conventional values and behavior patterns. Typically they are wives and mothers.

One of DeVries’s attractive women is also one of the strongest characters in all of his fiction. She is Tillie Seltzer, the central character in the novella Witch’s Milk (which was fairly recently made into the film Pete and Tillie) and a minor character, though an important one, in The Cat’s Pajamas. Tillie’s story is a simple one: She marries, at the age of thirty-three, a double-talking wiseacre named Pete Seltzer who looks to be a diamond in the rough but turns out to be a rather callous philanderer. Together they produce a single perfect child, their son Charlie, who dies of leukemia early in his life. Charlie’s death comes near to destroying Tillie and her marriage, but she is able to put both marriage and self back together again after weathering a nervous breakdown.

Tillie’s personality is a paradoxical amalgamation of considerable vulnerability and remarkable strength. Her child is her greatest joy and she remains as fiercely devoted to him after his death as she had been while he was dying. Her absolute loyalty is almost unrivalled in DeVries’s other fiction; only Don Wanderhope’s love for his daughter Carol in The Blood of the Lamb approaches it. It is this essential,
powerful maternal devotion which makes Tillie an attractive woman. She refuses to succumb to the self-pity of despair, to the narcotic of forgetfulness urged by her middle-headed friends, or to the padded complacency of her split-level suburban life. Instead, she stands up to her bitter experiences and fights back, in memory of Charlie. "...I'm with you still," she says to her dead son, "'Always thinking about you no matter what else I may seem to be doing at the time. I'll walk the streets of the city with my raving heart, dreaming of my demolished faun. But I'll be on my way to work, the day dedicated to you. This life too, whatever I can still make of it.' " Tillie's selflessness is the key to her attractiveness; it is a virtue DeVries would seem to hold in very high regard.

While Tillie Seltzer is a character portrayed seriously—in something of a departure from DeVries's characteristic style—he creates another of his attractive women well within his usual high comic boundaries. Mrs. Emma Wallop is at first glance rather an unlikely candidate for the adjective attractive. Haskel Frankel has described her as "a semi-educated, slightly vulgar Midwestern Mrs. Malaprop." She is indeed a meddling battle-ax, a WASP Mrs. Portnoy, but she is also in possession of a sizable fund of native intelligence and common sense, and she emerges from her novel a strangely sympathetic character.

Emma Wallop is a middle-aged widow who finds her prosaic life in little Appleton, Indiana, disturbed by two authors. The first is T. Randall Rivers, a former lodger at her boardinghouse. Rivers is Appleton’s Thomas Wolfe, and his scandalously autobiographical novel Don’t Look Now, Medusa has the whole town buzzing. The principal character, whom he crucifies in the book, is a shrewish landlady everyone assumes to be based on Emma. She is not, but by the time Emma gets to the bottom of things she finds that she is indeed the villainess of a novella written by her own son. Os-good Wallop’s work, The Duchess of Obloquy (printed in full in Mrs. Wallop), is DeVries’s parody of Phillip Roth’s Portnoy’s Complaint.

Both Emma and motherhood in general receive a sound drubbing at the hands of the sophisticated community represented by Rivers, Os-good, and their respective receptive disciples. But the accusations she receives from this quarter are simply too extreme to ring true, especially in the light of the self-defense she offers. She may be a gossip and a meddler, but she is not the malicious monster her critics make her out to be. She comes by her prudish philistinism honestly, so to speak, and meddles in the lives of her extended family not with guile, but out of a genuine concern. In comparison with the pretentious sophistication of the literary crowd Emma is involved with, the simple openness of her maternalistic maneuvering is refreshing, almost commendable. Few things irk DeVries like pretentiousness; Emma’s lack of it makes her an attractive woman.

The attractiveness of both Tillie Seltzer and Emma Wallop arises from the virtues they exercise in their relationships with their children: they are good mothers. Dolly Smackenfelt, in Forever Panting, is another of DeVries’s attractive women, but she is childless. She is married, but she is also a moderately successful actress and playwright. She is bright, witty, charming, and assertive without being either punitive or egotistical. She is liberated, but not smug.

Dolly is married to Stew Smackenfelt, a hammy actor with some traces of nobility. Their typically chaotic DeVriesian marriage ends in a friendly no-fault divorce early on in the novel and both of them remarry, but their continuing affection eventually brings them back together for a collaboration on a play Dolly is struggling to complete. By the end of the book they are having both been divorced from their second marriages, considering a resumption of their interrupted union.

Forever Panting is mostly stock DeVries material, but the final chapter is the closest thing to a genuine love story in the whole of the DeVries corpus. Dolly finds her ex-husband Stew wandering like a lost puppy in the cold New England dusk. Setting aside the self-analytical psychological mauling which so many of DeVries’s characters fall prey to, Dolly decides to take Stew back—simply because they love each other. She realizes that she will have to pander to his still-healthy ego, perhaps at some expense to her own, but this is all right. Stew has meanwhile realized a thing or two himself:

"'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf' sets down the pitched battle between husband and wife. But you’ve got to take The Odd Couple alongside that to get a balanced view. Which is one that cancels the whole point out. People get on each other’s nerves, not just men and women. Human beings get in each other’s hair at close quarters, not just males and females." He spread his arms at the simplicity of it. *** "You can’t pin on the sexual relations what isn’t true of human relations in general. Ergo there is no sex war. It’s a myth. A bill of goods we’ve been sold. In a sense it’s the moral of my life."

Accepting this bromide as philosophical gold is one of Dolly’s first concessions to the self-absorbed Stew, but she does so with a stoic shrug. And that shrug with its implicit charity, is the key to Dolly’s attractiveness, and more broadly the key to attractiveness in DeVries’s women wherever it is found she sacrifices her own interests to those of another in the name of love.
Dolly exhibits the virtue of self-sacrifice by accommodating her husband's untamed vanity. Emma Wallop dreads and muddles and worries over the lives of those she really cares for. Lie Seltzer gives up on life's intrinsic value and invests her years in the memory of the son who had had so few years of his own. These women are happy and satisfied in their relationships to others without being neurotically dependent on them. DeVries's attractive women, on the other hand, are angry, vindictive, and self-conscious because of their inability to tend their concerns beyond themselves. They are unhappily trapped thin their pettiness because they do not care to reach beyond it.

DeVries examines self-sacrifice (and absence) chiefly from the vantage point of marriage because the trials an institution faces are a fascination to him; but the applications and rewards of self-sacrifice clearly go beyond the state of matrimony — as, indeed, the virtue transcends the question of gender. In the end, DeVries is saying, the qualities needed to define the ideal woman will also define the ideal man. The sacrifice of self-interest results in human liberation and supplants the need for any lesser variety. x is not at issue in his fiction; humanity is.

If DeVries's concept of the ultimate liberation through love sounds familiar, perhaps it is because it is homeown. Although DeVries's conclusions are not uniquely Christian, certainly there is ample reason to suspect that his Calvinist upbringing contributed to their formation. As Stew mackenfelt says in the closing pages of Forever Panting, "That's just one liberates himself intellectually find his morality in his very guts." The morality in DeVries's guts and in his novels is something we, as Calvinists, can take a certain amount of pride in.
Mankind has always had a peculiarly romantic notion of its poets. Conjure up a vision of a Browning or a Tenny and the edges are obscured in sfumato. We generally picture them as struggling and oversensitive. We love to picture them laboring over their work in the setting of a garden with flowers, or a cabin in the forest (in a setting unlike Walden Pond). It is difficult to engage them in conversation because they always have that hazy, far-away or visionary look in their eyes. We view them not as men and women, but as some androgynous creature—the poet.

Sylvia Plath demythologizes our concept of the poet. She was never struggling, and she was often insensitive to everything and everyone but her own ego. Her art was her craft, and she devoted herself to her poetry with the same methodical thoroughness with which she handled studies of chemistry or the German language. She was bleary eyed and introverted, but very outgoing, socially and academically. Only fifteen years after her death she has already been established as a classic in American poetry.

Much of modern poetry is very personal. This is true of Plath’s poetry—it is the voice of an inner struggle removed from the metaphysical conceits of John Donne. If the reader is to comprehend more than a surface understanding of the poetry, he must familiar with the poet. Such familiarity will illuminate otherwise obscure and personal allusions and references the poet makes. And intense biographical study of Sylvia Plath will reveal the people and events which molded the poet and gave her her unique view.

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Edward Butscher's *Sylvia Plath: Method and Madness* is most significant of all biographical studies on Plath to date. He does not present her as the happy golden of *Letters Home*, recently published by Plath’s mother, Eileen. Neither does he see her as the hypersensitive introverted Eileen Aird’s *Sylvia Plath: Her Life and Work*. Butscher comes closest to identifying the real Sylvia Plath: overtly confident, yet insecure young woman who was driven by her desire to be a successfully published famous poet.

As Butscher points out, the greatest influence on Plath's poetry was her father, Otto. A German immigrant, he received extensive schooling in the United States and was a noted scholar in biology. His love of academia was inherited by Sylvia, but his cold, staid, reserved manner embittered her. To gain his attention, Sylvia took showing off her intellectual precocity by memorizing the incepted Latin names of insects (Otto's field of specialty) and spewing them out to him. Otto was delighted with her speed. Sylvia's poetry, for the next fifteen years, would always haunt her and her poetry. But she had already become preoccupied with the drive to gain public recognition, however calculatedly, as a substitute for parental love and recognition.

Already in grammar school, her intellectual superiority surged her to excel. She thrived on the awards she won by her desire to be a successfully published famous poet. Sylvia was awarded a guest editorship in 1953, having been a noted scholar in biology. His love of academia renewed itself. And when she graduated summa cum laude in 1955, having been awarded a Fulbright scholarship to Cambridge, she was back on her feet again.

In the following months Sylvia received psychiatric care and did not return to Smith until the spring of her junior year. Although this period of non-productivity (according to Sylvia she was unable either to read or write) seemed like the end of the yellow brick road, she returned to Smith and within several months was back in the mainstream of academic life. Her literary talent also renewed itself. And when she graduated summa cum laude she was back on her feet again.

As she matured, Sylvia became conscious of her role, not only as a poet, but as a woman. Her poetry, subsequently, began to cut through her own facade and painfully examine what was going on in her innermost being. She revealed the bitterness and hatred she still felt for her long-dead father. More importantly, she gave voice to her deep insecurity about being a woman in a man's world. She needed men, and yet deeply resented them.

In an attempt to recover her ebbing security she married Ted Hughes, an Oxford graduate and fellow poet. Their marriage was idyllic for five years, during which time the Hugheses traveled extensively, wrote, and taught.

As part of her growing consciousness of her femininity Sylvia produced two children. Although she loved them deeply, they strained her growing insecurity and inner doubts until she was nearing total mental collapse. Unable to deal with his wife's psychosis, Ted left her.

Sylvia briefly rallied from her depression, mostly on behalf of the children. Having finally arrived at a new awareness of herself, she began producing her best poetry. She was no longer "performing"; she was speaking because she had to. Sylvia's poetry, for the next fifteen years, would be furiously she worked to achieve (and did achieve) it became an obsession. At home, her mother, recently widowed, saw Sylvia's achievements as a source of her new self-esteem.

Her center of gravity was her "femaleness"...