

connection at all with reproduction, which is then a matter of cloning. And nature is full of strange sexual behavior, incidentally including a nice version of transvestism (males appearing as females, often in order to sneak in and do some fertilizing when more macho males are too busy fighting each other to notice). Many animals, from marine iguanas to deer to chimpanzees to orangutans, have been observed pleasuring themselves, and homosexual behavior is also common. And many animals, including lions and chimpanzees, have far more sex than seems to be necessary for breeding. A single lion has been observed to have sex 157 times in 55 hours, with two different females. A female chimpanzee has been seen having sex with seven different males, going at it 84 times in eight days (but chimpanzee couplings are quick, and the male penis only two to three inches long). I take these facts from a glorious recent book by biologist Olivia Judson, which should be required reading for anyone who believes that nature follows any one particular script when it comes to sex, including male and female roles.⁴² We return to the evolutionary psychology of sex again in chapter 13.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Some Consequences

Before returning to more philosophical themes, it is interesting to chase some of the cultural consequences of the dominant Christian tradition that we have sketched. When something is both intensely desirable, and culturally identified as intensely shameful, we can expect psychic turmoil. Shakespeare gives us Hamlet, unable to cope with his mother's remarriage, seething with uncontrollable images of the filth, sweat, and semen of copulation. In general in Shakespeare it is the villains like Iago, or the deranged and ruined like Lear, who view the world in terms of lust, ignoring the humanity of the world, stripping it down to the meaningless and disgusting jerkings of bare forked animals. Not that we should moralize about lust: Lear equally rails against the envious hypocrisy

of moralists who persecute it. But then Lear has rejected the whole human world. The more controlled Iago can see nothing but animal desire in Desdemona and Othello, a desire that will soon be sated and ripe for change. Desdemona will change her affections as soon as she is tired of Othello's body. Love is just a "sect or scion" of lust, merely "a lust of the blood and permission of the will." This is not of course Shakespeare's own view, but a depiction of the disenchantments and fears and jealousies that can arise to torment any of us.

A little earlier than Shakespeare, there was the archetypal depiction of lust in Spenser:

And next to him rode lustfull Lechery,
 Upon a bearded Goat, whose rugged haire,
 And whally eyes (the signe of gelosy,)
 Was like the person selfe, whom he did beare:
 Who rough, and blacke, and filthy did appeare,
 Unseemely man to please faire Ladies eye;
 Yet he of Ladies oft was loved deare,
 When fairer faces were bid standen by:
 O who does know the bent of womens fantasy?⁴³

Who indeed? Whatever it is, it is clearly pretty bad, since just look what they are drawn toward. Jean-Jacques Rousseau thought the

same: "And I really know of . . . nothing more revolting than a terrifying face on fire with the most brutal lust. . . . If we appear like that to women, they must indeed be fascinated not to find us repulsive." This may be why portraits of real honest-to-God slaving lust are quite unusual in Western art. The popular subject of Susannah and the Elders, for example, gives plenty of scope to depict the archetypal dirty old men, but even so they usually come across as more paternal than anything else (fig. 5).

Optimistic, or humane, depictions of lust were possible, even in the Renaissance. The National Gallery in London contains the great Bronzino, *An Allegory with Venus and Cupid* (fig. 12). This picture, painted for Cosimo I de' Medici in around 1560, has had a checkered history. Well before it came to London, restorers had added a veil over Venus's pudendum and a myrtle bush over Cupid's rather prominent buttocks. And when it was purchased in 1860 it was considered sufficiently disturbing that Sir Charles Eastlake, then director of the National Gallery, also caused both Venus's probing tongue and Cupid's nipple-tweaking fingers to be painted over (fig. 13). It was not until 1958 that the painting was restored to its original state, just in time for the swinging sixties.

It is clear that Venus expresses sexual delight and pleasure, along with some surprise, which is perhaps just as well, since it is Cupid, who is her son, doing the kissing and tweaking, and who has plausibly been interpreted as awkwardly bending over

to hide his erection (examination of the painting suggests that Bronzino overpainted earlier postures in order to increase its erotic content).

Although the portrayal of lust is itself delicious, it is also true that the bad things that surround lust are here in force. For Venus holds the apple of discord, which lust or love bring equally into the world. In the background is blind Fate, or *Fortuna*, being revealed by Time (Fortune is blind, somewhat as Cupid usually is, because she rewards the bad and torments the good).⁴⁴ Joy or Delight strews roses on the amorous couple. Yet just behind Venus is Deceit, with her fair face and her honeycomb of pleasure, but also her serpent's tail. Tearing her hair there is Anger or Jealousy. And in one of the most significant touches, the rose-strewing Joy or Delight is treading, without noticing it, on thorns. Cupid is actually about to take his arrows and go off and fall in love with Psyche, so he is really only practicing or playing with his mother. Like Romeo, his affections light on whatever comes next. His infidelity will enrage Venus, which is why Deceit and Jealousy are so visible, but it all ends happily, as the doves in the lower left hand corner foretell.

Given the times, Sir Charles Eastlake's purchase was certainly bold. Bram Dijkstra talks of the only two possible roles for women in nineteenth-century art: the oscillation between

Madonna and Whore.⁴⁵ For most of the century, painting reflects the Victorian denial of female lust. Free from not only lust but almost all human emotion, the women sleep and swoon and lie around in a Tennysonian trance, the kind of enchantment in which all time and all activity is suspended. Sometimes, however, there may be a hint of something draining having just happened, barren kisses, lesbian or solitary sex just finished. Baudelaire is an early voyeur at these scenes, and in England Swinburne followed him.⁴⁶ Dijkstra's own classification tells of the Cult of the Household Nun; the Cult of Invalidism; Ophelia and Folly; Dead Ladies and the Fetish of Sleep; the Collapsing Woman; Solitary Vice and Restful Detumescence; the Weightless Woman; and Women of Moonlight and Wax (fig. 6).

But then toward the end of the century there is a reaction, or perhaps a development, not to something any more healthy, but to decadence. Lust becomes the fascinating essence of evil, and woman is its treacherous ally. Classical and biblical literature alike were combed for stories of the Delilah figure, the castrating and death-dealing woman. The headings become threatening: Poison Flowers; Maenads of the Decadence and the Torrid Wail of the Sirens; Connoisseurs of Bestiality and Serpentine Delights; Leda, Circe, and the Cold Caresses of the Sphinx; Gold and the Virgin Whores of Babylon; Judith and Salome: The Priestesses of Man's Severed Head (fig. 15).

In Dijkstra's words, by 1900,

writers and painters, scientists and critics, the learned and the modish alike, had been indoctrinated to regard all women who no longer conformed to the image of the household nun as vicious, bestial creatures. . . . Woman, in short, had come to be seen as the monstrous goddess of degeneration, a creature of evil who lorded it over all the horrifically horned beasts which populated man's sexual nightmares.⁴⁷

As Dijkstra also points out, in the twentieth century it was not too difficult to transfer these fears onto other degenerates who are supposed to predate on the purity of male Aryan manhood, sapping and impurifying precious bodily fluids, with the consequences we all know. Fear of lust quickly translates into fearful politics.

CHAPTER NINE

Shakespeare versus Dorothy Parker

In Shakespeare's view, erotic love is a kind of overlay or varnish over lust, and what it adds is not itself very much to do with good things like truth and trust. Love is more associated with unreasonable dotings, fiction, madness, bubbles, blindness, and illusion. As Duke Theseus says in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*,

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.