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VAGIT-PROP



by

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1986

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By Annie le Brun (1)

The televised adaptation of the "Second sex", by Simone de Beauvoir,
and Marguerite Duras's works
considered as monuments of a State feminism ...

If some naive or retarded women still nourished illusions on the revolutionary character of the neo-feminist hullabaloo of the last few years, the setting into televised images of the Second Sex will have had the undeniable merit of finally disillusioning them (2).

Here we have -in fact by repeated interventions of the Ministry of Culture and of the Ministry for Womens Rights, in four episodes and thirty -six turbans-, the monument of a State feminism that the worst enemies of women hadn't dared dream of. Here we have nothing but right-thinking and upstart ladies, women ministers, minister's wives, writeresses and all sorts of councillors who mean to draw for us a picture without pretence of the feminine condition under the watchful eye of the Great Mamamouchi Beauvoir (3). Because her gaze must appear with a dreadful objectivity in order to strike us with irrefutable facts for example that incest on small girls is practised "very often with the approval of the mother because she prefers that sperm and money are not spent outside the family; so she encourages this "; or else that the greatest part of men prefer to live as a couple with a woman for the sole reason that it costs them less than to go to the brothel. "There are some ulterior motives like that ... more or less in the head of many men."

(1) Annie le Brun is the author of Lâchez tout, Les Châteaux de la subversion, A distance, and recently Soudain un bloc d'abîme, Sade. (T.N.)

(2) The last of four programmes of the series, "The Second Sex" will be broadcasted on December 5, at 9.30 pm on TF1.

I will not draw a list of this genre of revelations : it would be too long. But it is still interesting to note how such basic truths are inserted in the evocation of real aspects of feminine misery : excision, rape, polygamy, incest..., in order to banalize the veritable dramas of many women and to dramatize the banality of the feminine condition in general.

Because it is less a matter of working to reduce the misery of women than to find in it an unstoppable justification to the exercise of a power which today is no longer only ideological . There is nothing new in this: it is of course on the same casuistry that the diverse Marxist-Leninist bureaucracies have traditionally founded their power. Otherwise, why lay the blame on men, rather than on the Catholic religion and its untenable positions on matter of contraception, the clauses of consciousness still put forward by the doctors who refuse to practice IVG (4) and abortion? Otherwise , why lay the blame on men , rather than on religion , the enslaving of the woman in the Muslim world in Africa, in Pakistan, in India? And , on this subject, one could have wished that Indian, African, North-African women who have given assistance to these programmes would have been a bit more careful to the role that had been allocated to them and been aware of this constant recourse to the atrocities from elsewhere in order to authorize speeches and manoeuvres here, the detestable manifestation of an all purpose third-worldism which justifies everything , which will not have been surely one of the glories of the left of these last twenty years.

(3) Mamamouchi: the mock Turkish title pretended to have been conferred by the Sultan upon Mr Jourdain, in Molière's play Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme. In A new English dictionary on historical principles. (Oxford, 1908). (T.N).

(4) Interruption volontaire de grossesse: voluntary termination of pregnancy. The IVG abbreviation concerns the French legislation which authorises the termination of pregnancy up to eight weeks. Beyond this it is a matter of "abortion", catholic bigots are less than happy about IVG operations being reimbursed by social security. (T.N).

But also everything holds together very well when the moralism which animates these new charitable-works ladies finds its favourite land in Maoist China and its undeniable successes (we're still waiting to know which ones) to "revalorize the image of the woman ", how happy one is to learn this from the mouth of a kind of female screw, an official in charge of education in this place of dreams . That the rights of woman are magnified in a country where the most elementary rights of man are systematically and constantly flouted does not seem to bother our champions of feminine liberty.

Let's note that after having been on the wrong tracks about the freedom of women in the Soviet Union for the last thirty-five years, Simone de Beauvoir does not hesitate one moment to relapse with China. Even if, here or there, she thought it was good to point out feebly that today she has doubts about the existence of a socialist State and that "women must take matters into their own hands ". This does not prevent the Stalinist press (L'Humanité, L'Humanité-Dimanche and even Révolution) being the most enthusiastic about these televised performances which, in the history of ideological progapanda , innovate what will have to be called Vagit-Prop.

You cannot retrieve your losses , and these programmes might one day constitute the most complete example of a feminist realism which, insofar as exaltation of miserabilism , Jesuitism of argumentation and conventionalism of the whole go, has little to envy in the worst socialist realist productions. And this, in two stages (first the stage of clearing womankind up to absolute purity) then three movements : 1) the intensive accumulation of the most horrible examples of feminine distress; 2) the systematic generalisation of atrocity -managing to conclude quite naturally : "To the point of believing that Indian women's vocation is to be burnt"; 3) lastly, the access to the stereotyped ridicule of a degraded woman by beauty treatment, ornaments and despairingly alienated by masculine concupiscence.

And this in so far that, for men, "buttocks and breasts remain priviledged objects ... It is because they are useless, that there is no project which animates them " and that "this is what man looks for in a woman , it is passivity, it is immanence, it is the non-project, it is contingence, the naked presence, the fact of being there without nothing else". At least one would merely like to see the concerned giving their opinions , they might have a different point of view than this areopagus (5) of these State cub-mistresses. Maybe they would even risk speaking about love, which has been and simply passed over in silence, no doubt as a category existentially with no use.

So it seems to me that, after thirty-five years after the founding event of this neo-feminism, women have nothing to be very proud of in this ideological present which is nothing but theoretical fake stuff and sewn with threads tinged with blood, that power would like to force them to accept. But I forgot that at the end of this year the Ministry of culture and the Bureau of cultural animation of the Ministry of Exterior relations (French equivalent of the Foreign Office. T.N) have also stalked on reliable assets of the feminine fuzziness and the guerrilla-fashion, by financing the video autocelebration of Marguerite Duras's works, feminist when needed. Her embroidered Parleuses (talkers) in the company of Xavière Gauthier, not long ago, remain a point of no return in their hatred of men. Always in the direction of history, today you can get for the reasonable sum of around 2000 francs and in a sumptuous red and gold casket the clean (6) cultural kit of desire in the eighties.

Happy the newly elected members who will be entirely at leisure to seek to have fantasies on these heights of Durassian eroticism: "Nothing is more extraordinary than the external rotundity of worn breasts on the body, this externality stretched towards the hands. Even my little brother's little coolie's body disappears faced with this splendour. Men's bodies have shut-in features" (L'Amant, page 89). Oh yes it is as simple as that! It is Nous deux (7) for disillusioned cadres, it is "Harlequin" (8) for casual rebels. With added to this, an obscene fascination with money and its world which will prosper in these times of false consciousness. Because, in this poetic little world, people never stop speaking about diamonds "on the engagement finger", of the diamond "which costs alot". However during a recent "Apostrophes" (9), Marguerite Duras has clearly spoken of the part played by money in her attraction towards this lover. So should we be astonished that, shortly after receiving her prix Goncourt (10), our revolutionary writer had thought

(5) Areopagus: "the hill of Ares or Mars's hill. A hill at Athens where the highest judicial court of the city held its sittings.." In a new English dictionary of historical principles. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1888). (T.N.)

(6) In English in the original text. (T.N.)

(7) Sugar coated mag for mugs. (T.N.)

(8) Publishing house which specialises in the French equivalent of Barbara Cartland's type books. (T.N.)

(9) Literary French State radio prog where books and writers are discussed in the most ridiculous manner by a panel of experts and cultural pimps. (T.N.)

(10) Yearly literary prize. (T.N.)

it good to declare this, more or less, on different television channels (I am quoting from memory) : "If there's a word I detest in the French language and in most languages, its the word dream "? Could we have suspected anything else?

Such would be the new freedom that this State feminism bestows on us, that of choosing between these two poles of womanhood, between the mediocre recrimination or the diamond-tipped subversion.

Fate was fair and they got their just desserts, when these two retired rebels are not busy with the official celebration of their works, they never miss an opportunity to grovel to a power to which they are beginning to owe their beautiful literary old age.

But where can you be Théroigne de Méricourt, Louise Michel, Virginia Woolf?

(*) This text first appeared in Le Monde on December 6 1984. (T.N).

(Translated from the French by Lucy Forsyth and Michel Prigent on June 30 1986, London.)

*Front cover: The blind leading the blind : The nec-feminist and the male chauvinist pig . Many thanks to "The Little Waster" for sending us the Felicien Rops etching. (T.N)

*This text is a colour supplement to The Horse's Mouth no 1 c/o EM CHRONOS LONDON WC1 3 XX.

*Correction: Page 5 , para 3, line 2, should read:"...these two retired rebels are not busy.." instead of "are busy.." Page 1, 2 lines up: "The first of four programmes.." should read : "The last of four programmes..." .Page 3, para 3, line 8:";the access.." should read:" ; 3) lastly, the access.." These errors have been corrected in this edition .(TN).