

The Women's Review of Books

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MARTYRS TO MATRIMONY

by Florence Boos

Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages, by Phyllis Rose. New York: Knopf, 1983, 318 pp., \$16.95 hardcover.

Phyllis Rose has shown that something new can be said about five of the most documented and often-discussed marriages in Victorian England—those of Jane and Thomas Carlyle, John and Effie Ruskin, Charles and Catherine Dickens, John and Harriet Mill, and the extra-legal union of George Eliot and George Henry Lewes. *Parallel Lives* forcefully defines human and psychological issues, rapidly alternates narration, quotation, and generalization, and interweaves passages on the protagonists' reactions to background events. Its cumulative discussions of the constraints of Victorian marriage—its strict sex-role divisions, its heavy burden of social intrusions, its possibilities for self-deception, resentment, and (rarely) tempered happiness—also eventuate in an extended meditation on the nature of marriage in general—what it has failed to be in the past, and what it might become in an ideal future.

Rose's chapters are arranged to present a somewhat unevenly composite hypothetical marriage in chronological stages: the courtship of the Carlyles; the sexual and other difficulties of the Ruskins' brief marriage; the later boredom in the marriages of Harriet Taylor and Charles Dickens; the companionable late maturity and middle age of Mary Ann Evans and George Lewes; and then again the Carlyles—her resentment of his neglect, and his remorse after her death. Rose's introductory and concluding chapters compare these marriages' patterns, note that many situations and assumptions they represent are still with us, and speculate about less imperfect unions of the future.

This is an excellently written book. Its principal difficulties derive from a latent strain between what might be called the "internal" assumptions that the author often seems to invoke in her analyses of Victorian patterns—which suggest that there is a near-timeless category called "marriage," whose patriarchal patterns must to a large degree inevitably recur in the future—and the more "external" assumptions of her feminist commentary on these patterns. Rose's introduction and conclusion could almost frame a different book—one not about institutional marriage at all, much less Victorian marriages, but about alternative methods for creating nuclear and extended families. Her introduction has already broadened her nominal definition of "marriage" to include non-marital monogamous heterosexual unions (the Lewes), "Boston" marriages (lesbian partnerships), and sexless marriages; once one opens up the possibility of evaluating relationships by an extra-legal standard—perhaps one of depth or durability—the possibilities for redefinition, of course, are numerous, and can be instantiated in the period she discusses.

In addition to male-homosexual unions (Swinburne and Watts-Dunton), the nineteenth century saw lifelong sustaining partnerships between siblings (Jane Austen and Cassandra), other relatives ("Michael Field" was the pseudonym of an aunt and niece who lived and wrote together), and same-sex friends (Marx and Engels). Once one rejects legal and sexual definitions of "family," what is to prevent the nuclear unit from extending beyond two persons—perhaps to three (as in Marge Piercy's *Woman at the Edge of Time*), four, or several?

Rose provides convincing reconstructions of the points of view of all the characters in these dramas, even of its (relative) villains, such as Ruskin, Ruskin's father, or Dickens. Appropriately, her characters also reveal themselves—most tellingly in their attacks on each other and their protestations of virtue. But when she speaks in her own voice, Rose's ability to argue eloquently both sides of a case can occasionally neutralize her own observations. Her forceful background commentary on nineteenth-century sexual practices, marital, divorce, property, and child-custody laws, and denial of employment to middle-class women, for example, gradually begins to undercut her otherwise quite plausible seem-

ing claim that nineteenth-century and twentieth-century marriages are more alike than different.

She seems to argue ultimately that marriage should diminish in importance ("marriage still displaces too many other possibilities in our culture"), yet her allusions to marriage sometimes seem to characterize it as a monolithic destiny, whose effects may extend indefinitely into "our" future ("marriage, whether we see it as a psychological relationship or a political one, has determined the story of all our lives more than we have generally acknowledged"). Though several of the pairs she describes were anything but durable, she maintains in the end "a bewildered respect for the durability of the pair, in all its variations."

After an excellent concluding discussion of the ideal of equality she provides a jarringly reductive model: "Some time in the future, the dynamics of equality may be understood, perfected, and described. In the meantime, sparring remains as one of the most convincing images we have of it." Her final model of "equality," allegedly exemplified in Jane Carlyle's marriage to Thomas, is a political one of suppressed and permanent revolution, "where equality consists—as perhaps it must, in an imperfect time such as hers, or ours—in perpetual resistance, perpetual rebellion." But with real equality, who is to rebel against whom? And toward what new equilibrium?

Consider the case of Rose's first chapter, in which she describes the epistolary courtship of the heiress Jane Welsh by the indigent schoolmaster Thomas Carlyle. Unwilling at first to consider him as a suitor, Jane accepted him as a (patient, even exemplary) tutor-by-correspondence. She had written both a play and a

novel in adolescence, and Rose describes Carlyle's early encouragement of her talents. Jane had already developed an archly "comic" tone of self-mockery which characterized her letters throughout her life:

O dear me! I shall never hold a respectable place among literary ladies—but I know I can be a first rate fine Lady whenever I please—the temptation is strong; furnish me with an antidote if you can. (p. 34)

She began and projected many literary works in later life, but never completed any, and her letters and diaries were her sole form of literary expression. Most were destroyed before or after her death.

Rose comments accurately enough that Carlyle's education "so transformed her values, that she was able to perceive him finally as the only fit object for her love." In one sense, though, he simply succeeded in imposing on her a new definition of a brilliantly "successful" marriage; she selected the schoolmaster, rather than another more conventionally distinguished suitor, but retained something of her earliest letters' fantasy of self-bestowal to an admiring audience. Tension between the two conflicting aspects of this dual aim—witty self-display and vicarious achievement—warred within her throughout life.

Rose effectively narrates the full horror of the post-engagement reversal of positions, imposed by their (inherently unequal, almost inevitably manipulative) role-division into "Man-of-Genius" and "Wife-of-Man-of-Genius":

His encouragement of Jane's ambitions ceases. No more talk of Madame de Staël. He assumes with cool majesty that taking care of him is a full-time affair. He

The coming months will see the publication of new books about the cross-cultural study of women, the hazards of housework, women and therapy, the lives of nineteenth-century Black women, mothering, women in Russia, misogyny in the eighteenth century, women blue-collar workers, sexual harassment, feminism and Judaism; new books by Susan Brownmiller, Mary Daly, Germaine Greer, Paule Marshall, Robin Morgan, Marge Piercy and many other women writers, new names and familiar ones.

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imagines the duties of their household rigorously divided:

... when you on one side of our household shall have faithfully gone through your housewife duties, and I on the other shall have written my allotted pages, we shall meet over our frugal meal... (pp. 42-43)

Carlyle's actual views on the relation of husband and wife were nasty, brutish, and short:

The Man should bear rule in the house and not the Woman. This is an eternal axiom, the Law of Nature herself which no mortal departs from unpunished... I must not and I cannot live in a house of which I am not head... it is the nature of a man that if he be controlled by anything but his own Reason, he feels himself degraded... It is the nature of a woman (for she is essentially passive not active) to cling to the man for support and direction, to comply with his humours and feel pleasure in doing so, simply because they are his; to reverence while she loves him, to conquer him not by her force but her weakness... (I Too Am Here, ed. Alan and Mary Simpson, Cambridge University Press, 1977, pp. 33-54)

Predictably, this "Man of Genius" came to reciprocate her vigorous service with diminishing gratitude; his impotence precluded the children which she desired, and who might at least have provided her with occupation and companionship. Jane Carlyle's refusal, repeated many times, to pursue even the limited endeavors and forms of work (intellectual, social, or philanthropic) then available to her—in short to be anything but Mrs. Carlyle—also left her all the more without forms of solidarity which might have provided some solace against her husband's neglect.

Rose's second pair are Effie Gray and John Ruskin. She recounts the initial conditions of background and temperament which made their marriage so conspicuously, even publicly disastrous. The story of their early quarrels—often over petty issues of deference to his parents—is painfully convincing:

Over what pitiful pieces of ground these unheroic matrimonial battles were fought! ... For example, one of the Ruskins' most violent early disagreements, the first round in Effie's protracted battle with her mother-in-law, concerned the care and treatment of a common cold. (pp. 61-62)

Effie Ruskin wanted offspring even more than Jane Carlyle, but might have tolerated Ruskin's refusal to consummate the marriage, if he had not rationalized it so viciously (he eventually denounced her as insane and unfit to rear children). Equally oppressive, as Rose observes, were the domineering intrusions of Ruskin's mother and father—the latter of whom wrote to Effie's father that she should have "thrown herself entirely on our generosity and sought no independent authority."

What is most surprising is that Effie was so willing to obey her older cousin for as long as she was. As John Hunt demonstrates in his recent biography of Ruskin, *The Wilder Sea* (Viking, 1982), she eagerly accepted her role

as his companion, and spent much effort in providing practical assistance in his work. At a surprisingly late stage of their marriage Ruskin cited as a sign of her "petulance" that she no longer sat by him while he drew, as had once been her custom. Together in Venice, away from the carping scrutiny of his parents, they managed to create a kind of amicable truce, and went their separate ways with some residuum of respect and affection.

Explosions principally occurred when she felt she was required to neglect or behave rudely to her own family (e.g., when the senior Mrs. Ruskin demanded that the visiting Mrs. Gray sleep in the attic next to the servants, rather than in Ruskin's dressing room). Ruskin not only equated his own filial responsibility with complete submission to his parents, but demanded that her parents and filial sense be completely suppressed in favor of his. Most revealingly, Rose cites Ruskin's later claim that "his marriage to her was the greatest crime he had ever committed, because he had acted in opposition to his parents" (emphasis mine). When Effie left, he does not seem to have missed her, and seems never to have questioned the complete rectitude of his behavior towards his wife.

One of Rose's strengths, already remarked upon, is her cogent use of her principals' own words. The devouring cruelty of Ruskin's parents is brilliantly condensed into a comment of Ruskin's father to his son, overheard after the announcement of the annulment—"Come along, John... never mind, we have you to ourselves now." No eleven-word statement, perhaps, could better account for Ruskin's later madness and childlike dependencies.

Rose also presents the complicated triangular alliance of Harriet Taylor, John Taylor, and John Stuart Mill with her usual shrewdness and deft use of citation; but she shares what I believe is a common tendency to interpret not only their shortcomings but their virtues as manifestations of priggishness. To her they are almost invariably righteous but self-righteous, devoted but ingrown, an example not of equality but of female dominance.

Rose assumes a subtle manipulativeness to Harriet Taylor's decisions which she does not attribute to her other female subjects. Sometimes her tone seems gratuitously sarcastic and condescending:

You had to hand it to Harriet. She had a solid husband [John Taylor] against whose placidity her own wit could shine all the more dazzlingly... She had one of the most brilliant men in London as her intimate and devoted friend, and she had him convinced she was making a sacrifice for his sake, too. She had the love of her three children, who adored her... Precariously, she even had her respectability. This was evidently a woman of extraordinary talents, as John Mill always said. (pp. 113-114)

In a similar tone, Rose dismisses the "fiction" of Mill and Taylor's relationship:

They cling to each other in London drawing rooms devoted to enlightened discussion. They stroll through Parisian streets discussing the ethics of their behavior. They exhibit supremely, deliciously, that exclusive preference for each other for twenty years, waiting for the chance to marry. Like the lovers in *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*, like lovers everywhere with a respect for the life of the mind, they dote on each other and congratulate themselves on their Reason. (p. 126)

Why are Mill and Taylor simply "doting," but Evans and Lewes an example of mutual devotion? Is there some reason why love between these two intellectuals must be described with such heavy sarcasm? Rose describes Mill's formal repudiation of the legal property and sexual rights of the Victorian husband within marriage as "these dry and graceless sentences." Dry they may have been; but as Rose acknowledges, they provided a then-unique way for Mill and Taylor to live together "respectably" without making one the legal master of the other.

Little direct evidence concerning Harriet Taylor's character or activities has survived; Rose largely accepts her critics' disparagement of her intellect: "... [Mill] valued her intellectual style as bold and vigorous where another person, more like her, might have found her hasty and simplistic." Taylor's brief early essay on marriage is reprinted by Alice Rossi in *Essays on Sex Equality* (1970). In my opinion, it reveals a pithy and forceful mind. Not only did these traits well complement Mill's powerful but unspecific abstractions, but the particular points Taylor makes seems to me accurate and original. The 1851 essay on women's enfranchisement, which Mill published under his own name but later attributed to Taylor, is as comprehensive a discussion of women's disabilities and their redress as appeared in nineteenth-century Britain. It is more complexly argued and documented than the essay on marriage, but it retains something of the latter's iconoclasm and incisive vigor. Mill was a compulsively truthful man, and I see no reason to deny his ascription of authorship, or discredit the quality of these works.

Rose also accepts the stereotypical view that Mill was not simply an inductive logician, but some sort of near-affectless, immature *machina analytica*, whose motive force came from without: "In the production of some of his most important works, he took the position of a schoolboy fulfilling an assignment." Worse, "his soul craved domination" and he even became a unique case of the "voluntary, even enthusiastic, subjection of one man." Much of this seems to be based on the fact that Mill consulted Harriet on the subject and content of each aspect of his work—a common pattern among married male scholars for as long as their wives have been literate—but made the unprecedented gesture of scrupulously recording this fact.

It was his work, after all, published under his name, to which Harriet had devoted the entire energies of an active life, and some compensating tribute of appreciation might have seemed an appropriate redress. The most plausible explanation for Mill's public tributes to his wife after her death, it seems to me—if one sets aside the hypothesis that he was exaggerating or lying—is the simplest. The obvious tactical arguments for not bringing Harriet Taylor's name before the Victorian public had come to seem a failure of nerve, and the alleged *machina analytica* felt a need to make restitution. Their attempts to circumvent the anticipated reaction of their public may thus have made them oblique victims of the sexual roles they tried to oppose.

It is also hard for me to believe that the pair who collaborated on the *Autobiography*, *On Liberty*, and *The Subjection of Women* did not in some essential way know the meaning of a private liberty and reciprocity in their relations with each other. Mill, of all people, would surely have been aware that no degree of domestic deference on his part would redress the suppression of his co-author's name on substantial and influential works of political theory. Moved by this awareness, he finally acted to express their shared regret and his libelous guilt—an appropriate as well as generous gesture, after all, from a man who didn't really need more publications on his *vita*.

Rose's analyses of her final two couples—Charles and Catherine Dickens and Mary Ann Evans and George Lewes—seem more straightforward. She gives a convincing ac-

count of the Dickens' early domestic conviviality, in the period when Charles and his wife had their first four children—a conviviality which deteriorated as she bore six more children, and became lethargic and overweight. Rose also compares Dickens' growing restlessness with the (male-"menopausal"?) changes psychologists have observed in men between the age of thirty-five and forty-five, speculates the middle-aged Catherine may have revived for Dickens painful memories of his own mother, and notes parallels between the role Dickens often played in *The Frozen Deep*—that of a man who sacrifices himself to save another—and his image of himself as someone who had sacrificed his emotional needs to acquire respectability as a successful paterfamilias.

Divorce from his wife was impossible, except on grounds of adultery, and *Georgina* Hogarth provided the domestic services he needed, so one might have expected Dickens to partition his life in the more customary ways between his unloved wife and eventual mistress, Ellen Ternan. Instead, he seems to have decided quite ruthlessly that Catherine had to be put away; complained extensively to friends of their incompatibility (there is no evidence that she ever found fault with his traits or habits); abandoned their shared bedroom and ordered the wall built up between their adjoining rooms; and later accused her of insane jealousy when she commented on the accidental delivery to the house of a bracelet ordered for Ellen Ternan.

Eventually he relegated her to a separate dwelling with their eldest son, and retained the other nine children, whom he discouraged from visiting their mother. Catherine was not invited to the wedding of her daughter and namesake, nor informed of the death of their son Walter, nor invited to the funeral of her distinguished husband. She was always meek, and her one act of self-respect before her death was to give her letters from Dickens to her daughter Kate, hoping that they might be published as proof that the great novelist had once loved her.

This was sadly necessary, for the public celebrant of domestic happiness had at least in part managed to sell his treatment of Catherine to his ardently courted public. His accounts of his domestic life in the *London Times* and *Household Words* had propagated his version of the separation to a much wider audience than would otherwise have heard of it, and perhaps convinced many, though not all, of his readers that Catherine's "mental disorder" and household ineptitude justified his decision to discard her, and take away her children. Dickens never seems to have expressed any lingering self-reproach for his successful banning of Catherine from his and his children's lives. Rose's final judgment, if anything, is remarkably restrained:

Trying to be good, wanting to be loved, he made himself known in his own time as a model of (as they would have put it) ungentlemanly behavior. For us he provides a fine example of how not to end a marriage. (p. 191)

Mary Ann Evans and George Henry Lewes provide Rose with a just example of a mutually satisfying union, and she remarks on the irony that social ostracism gave them more privacy for conversation and work. Rose rebukes criticism of Mary Ann Evans' early direct attempts to find male companionship, and denounces the later "myth of George Eliot's dependency":

What I see is a woman of passionate nature who struggles, amidst limited opportunity, to find someone to love and to love her; a woman who goes to quite unconventional lengths and is willing to be unusually aggressive—almost predatory—in her efforts to secure for herself what she wants... it does seem to me to make some difference whether we think of one of the most powerful female writers ever as neurotically dependent on men or as brave enough to secure to herself what she wanted. (p. 211)

As Rose reconstructs the mutual benefits of her liaison with Lewes, his genial and even temper soothed her despondency, and provided encouragement for Evans' long-submerged plans to write novels; she, in turn, provided affection and care to him and to his three children.

Their arrangement, of course, was widely condemned. It required courage to face the dreary viciousness of Victorian public opinion. Jane Carlyle called Evans, with "subtle" malice, "A marvelous teacher of morals, surely,

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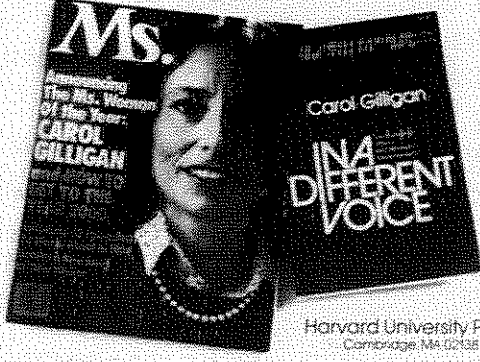
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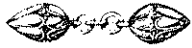
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and still more marvelous in that other capacity, for which nature has not provided her with the outfit supposed to be essential"; the sculptor Thomas Woolner wrote, less "subtly," of the "filthy contaminations of these hidden satyrs and smirking moralists.... stink pots of humanity."



When after 24 years of companionship Lewes died, the 60-year-old Evans/Eliot mourned him intensely. After 18 months she entered legal marriage with an affectionate and not markedly intellectual 40-year-old businessman named John Cross, who read Dante with her, and tended to her financial affairs. The success of their companionship (which Rose presents sympathetically and well) mildly undercuts an explanation offered in the last paragraph of the book for the happiness of Evans' life with Lewes:

whether in accord with some psychological quirk of human nature which resists fulfilling promises, or because sanctioned marriage bears some ineradicable taint which converts the personal relationship between a man and woman into a political one. I cannot finally say, although both may be true. (p. 269)

There is no doubt some truth to this (though all of life is political; formal arrangements simply make the political constitutional); but it seems only just to note in defense of Eliot's judgment and Cross' character that their sadly brief legal marriage seems also to have been happy, and that Cross' later comments on his wife and his *Life of George Eliot* did well by her memory.

Rose devotes her final chapter to the posthumous effect of Jane Carlyle's unhappy diaries. Impervious to her loneliness in life, Carlyle published her letters and expressed lavish remorse after her death. Unfortunately, as the editors of a recent edition of her writings (*I Too Am Here*) point out, "it [was] blindness, not chauvinism, for which he repent[ed]." Even in self-reproach he was self-dramatizing and hyperbolic ("blind, ungrateful.... and crushed down into blindness by great misery as I oftentimes was!"), and he could not praise his wife without sneering at her sisters:

Not all the Sands and Eliots and babbling cabine of 'celebrated scribbling women' that have strutted over the world in my time could, it seems to me, if all boiled down and distilled to essence, make one such woman. (p. 256)

There is a certain sad coherence to all this. Jane apparently shared her husband's penchant for arch insults and slurs. In his "praise" she once observed, "I should be surprised if I found him sentimentalizing over a pack of black brutes!" Her "perpetual resistance, perpetual rebellion" may have become

so complicit with his need to browbeat that it became little more than a dialectical inversion of it, part of a painful, quasi-Hegelian, cycle of "mastery" and "bondage."

In retrospect, the cases Rose presents in *Parallel Lives* are so intricately moving that one is tempted to explore other such liaisons, in other periods—Godwin and Wollstonecraft, for example; the complex familial network of Harriet Shelley, Mary Shelley, Percy Shelley, and friends; or the inexorable husband's progress of Bertrand Russell through a succession of five highly gifted, accomplished, and sadly devoted wives. Rose also does not (re)consider the grand British counter-example in the nineteenth century to her strictures against contractual loyalty: the Brownings. Both wrote some of their best work after their marriage, and they remained energetically congenial till her death, despite disagreements over such subjects as mesmerism and opium. Nor does she examine another sort of counter-example: the unhappy bohemian liaison, whose best-known example among Victorian literati was probably that of Elizabeth Siddal and Dante G. Rossetti.

It would also be interesting to see similarly well-written essays on the often-admirable unions of other nineteenth- and early twentieth-century couples—writers, reformers, and their spouses—whose names are less well-known: Alice and Wilfred Meynell; Barbara Leigh Smith and Eugene Bodichon; Elizabeth and William Gaskell; Josephine and George Butler; Millicent and Henry Fawcett; Richard and Emmeline Pankhurst; Emmeline and Lawrence Pethick-Lawrence; Vera Brittain and George Catlin....

These examples, and the more familiar ones Rose describes so cogently and well, might help us begin to adumbrate some alternatives to the "room of one's own," which would free us from the cycles of "mastery" and "slavery" and realize some tentative sexual forms of Peter Kropotkin's anarcho-communist ideal of "mutual aid." The Brownings, the Mills, and Evans and Lewes all sought variants of this elusive ideal. Indeed, the author of *Ecclesiastes* anticipated its regulative force rather well, when he enumerated three reasons for regret when "there is one alone, and there is not a second":

Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For... if two lie together, then shall they have heat; but how can one be warm alone?

... if they fall, the one will lift up her fellow; but woe to her that is alone when she falleth; for she hath not another to help her up.

(*Ecclesiastes* 4: 9-11; slightly modified from the King James Version) □

THE REPAIR OF THE WORLD

by Marge Piercy

On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader, edited and with introductions by Susannah Heschel. New York: Schocken Books, 1983, xxxvi, 288 pp., \$20.00 hardcover, \$9.95 paper.

A great deal of nonsense is talked and written about Judaism by those who are not Jews, and it becomes at times extremely tedious. The general consensus among many Christians and among many feminists seems to be that Judaism is a quaint relic or else the apotheosis of patriarchy, and that the attachment of Jews to our identity is a form of masochism or a sign of unheightened consciousness. As Alice Bloch writes in *Scenes from the Life of a Jewish Lesbian*:

I take pride in my Jewish heritage, and I am tired of hearing women dismiss Jewish identity as "oppressive" and "patriarchal" without knowing anything about it. I am tired of feminist books that sum up all Jewish thought in that one stupid prayer, "Blessed are Thou... who did not make me a woman," that has probably been invoked more times in this decade by Christian women to condemn Judaism than by Jewish men to thank God. And I am tired of the popular belief in the women's community that Jewish women have had no first-hand experience with racism. Anti-Semitism is a form of racism, and so is the assumption that everyone is Christian... Jewish identity is important to me, because being Jewish is an integral part of myself; it's my inheritance, my roots. Christian women sometimes have a hard time understanding this, because Christian identity is so much tied up with religious beliefs. It is possible to be an ex-Catholic or an ex-Baptist, but it really is not possible to be an ex-Jew. A Jew doesn't have to believe any particular doctrine; she just *is* a Jew. (p. 174)

When I was growing up antisemitism was prevalent. Then it was unfashionable to acknowledge it openly for a period. Now it is once again blatant. At the same time many Jews are far more interested in revitalizing Judaism and the Jewish community, rather than simply fleeing it and being only bagels and lox Jews. On one hand many young people are becoming Orthodox and attempting to live what they feel is a true and complete Jewish existence inside traditional laws; on the other, many Jews are attempting to renew Judaism more or less radically.

Susannah Heschel has put together an extremely interesting introduction to the restructuring of Judaism that feminists are contemplating and carrying out, an activity that has gained momentum and breadth over the past ten years. The collection as a whole moves from works dealing with women's exclusion, oppression and pain, from Rachel Adler's extremely important early piece "The Jew Who Wasn't There" through Erika Duncan's "The Hungry Jewish Mother," about the image of Jewish women in literature by American men and then by American women, to essays about the reform of various aspects of the Jewish observance and community, and the gauging of the powerful forces resistant to women's empowerment.

Lesley Hazleton has an essay on the actual situation of Israeli women as opposed to the legal and the rhetorical equality they are supposed to enjoy. Aviva Cantor takes up the story of Lilith, Adam's first and coequal wife, who would not defer to him and who rebelled against his attempt to dominate her. She studies the two aspects of Lilith, Lilith the heroine and Lilith the demon, and relates them to men's fear of women's independence and strength. The story of Lilith was one my mother told me, and Cantor's treatment is sensitive. Lilith is an important figure to Jewish feminists—one of our magazines bears that name—and she often turns up in our myths and rituals. Deborah Lipstadt digs into the role of women in the large voluntary organizations of the Jewish community, providing much of the work force but comprising few of the leaders.

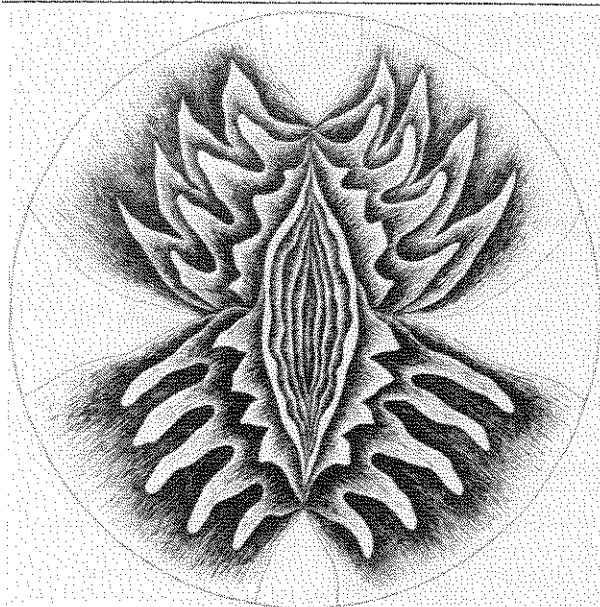
One way of looking at the various essays included in *On Being a Jewish Feminist* is in terms of the degree to which they are interior to the received tradition of Jewish law and practice (called *The Way* or more commonly *halakha*) or the degree to which they situate themselves to the side. How Judaism must be changed to incorporate women into the full community of Jewish life and thought and ritual and how to incorporate women-centered consciousness in the common expression of that religion are vast undertakings which different writers want to start from different foundations. Some of the women who have written essays collected in this volume want minor improvements and some want major changes and some want profound, indeed fundamental transformations that go to the core.

"Kaddish from the 'Wrong' Side of the Mehitzah" by Sara Reguer is about saying the particular prayer for the dead known as the Kaddish. Traditionally it has been said by a son for a dead parent, but many women wish to say Kaddish for their parents. I went to Rabbi Deborah Hachen after the death of my mother, so that I could learn to say Kaddish for her. It is a ritual more for the living than for the dead, as in Jewish tradition there is a defined way of dealing with grief for the dead, which takes you step by step through your mourning and back into daily life. It is a powerful means of dealing with death, and I found no other appropriate either for my mother or for myself.

Deborah Lipstadt's "And Deborah Made Ten" is also about Kaddish, in this case the resistance to and then finally the acceptance on the part of a group of old Jewish men of, first, her saying Kaddish for her mother, and then joining them in their prayers. It is a moving and personal piece, but it is finally the description of an individual woman, through her scholarship and her obvious knowledge of Torah and of halakha, coming to be accepted—as an exception.

Some of the essays are concerned with reforms that may better integrate women into what exists. In "The Noah Syndrome," Rose Felsenburg Kaplan is concerned that recent changes in Jewish life, and the presumably liberating influence of Conservative and Reform Judaism (exemplified in the removal in their services of the curtain between women and men, the mehitzah referred to above) have made Jewish ritual and communal life more family-centered and thus less accessible to single women, divorced women, women alone with children.

When women and men were separated and worshipped with their own sex, Kaplan points out, women had the solidarity of a female social world whether they were married or not.



Drawing from Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*: study for Judith plate, pen and ink on rag paper, 11 1/2" x 14 1/2".
Judith: Jewish heroine, representative of strength and courage of early biblical women.
Photocredit: Susan Eisensteln

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