

From "The Second Sex" by Simone de Beauvoir  
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CHAPTER 1

Childhood

One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine. Only the mediation of another can constitute an individual as an *Other*. Inasmuch as he exists for himself, the child would not grasp himself as sexually differentiated. For girls and boys, the body is first the radiation of a subjectivity, the instrument that brings about the comprehension of the world: they apprehend the universe through their eyes and hands, and not through their sexual parts. The drama of birth and weaning takes place in the same way for infants of both sexes; they have the same interests and pleasures; sucking is the first source of their most pleasurable sensations; they then go through an anal phase in which they get their greatest satisfactions from excretory functions common to both; their genital development is similar; they explore their bodies with the same curiosity and the same indifference; they derive the same uncertain pleasure from the clitoris and the penis; insofar as their sensibility already needs an object, it turns toward the mother: it is the soft, smooth, supple feminine flesh that arouses sexual desires, and these desires are prehensile; the girl like the boy kisses, touches, and caresses her mother in an aggressive manner; they feel the same jealousy at the birth of a new child; they show it with the same behavior: anger, sulking, urinary problems; they have recourse to the same coquetry to gain the love of adults. Up to twelve, the girl is just as sturdy as her brothers; she shows the same intellectual aptitudes; she is not barred from competing with them in any area. If well before puberty and sometimes even starting from early childhood she already appears sexually specified, it is not because mysterious instincts immediately destine her to passivity, coquetry, or motherhood but because the intervention of others in the infant's life is almost originary, and her vocation is imperiously breathed into her from the first years of her life.

The world is first present to the newborn only in the form of immanent sensations; he is still immersed within the Whole as he was when he was living in the darkness of a womb; whether raised on the breast or on a bottle, he is invested with the warmth of maternal flesh. Little by little he learns to perceive objects as distinct from himself: he separates himself from them; at the same time, more or less suddenly, he is removed from the nourishing body; sometimes he reacts to this separation with a violent fit; in any case, when it is consummated—around six months—he begins to manifest the desire to seduce others by mimicking, which then turns into a real display. Of course, this attitude is not defined by a reflective choice; but it is not necessary to *think* a situation to *exist* it. In an immediate way the newborn lives the primeval drama of every existent—that is, the drama of one's relation to the Other. Man experiences his abandonment in anguish. Fleeing his freedom and subjectivity, he would like to lose himself within the Whole: here is the origin of his cosmic and pantheistic reveries, of his desire for oblivion, sleep, ecstasy, and death. He never manages to abolish his separated self at the least he wishes to achieve the solidity of the in-itself, to be petrified in things; it is uniquely when he is fixed by the gaze of others that he appears to himself as a being. It is in this vein that the child's behavior has to be interpreted: in a bodily form he discovers finitude, solitude, and abandonment in an alien world; he tries to compensate for this catastrophe by alienating his existence in an image whose reality and value will be established by others. It would seem that from the time he recognizes his reflection in a mirror—a time that coincides with weaning—he begins to affirm his identity;<sup>2</sup> his self merges with this reflection in such a way that it is formed only by alienating itself. Whether the mirror as such plays a more or less considerable role, what is sure is that the child at about six months of age begins to understand his parents' miming and to grasp himself under their gaze as an object. He is already an autonomous subject transcending himself toward the world: but it is only in an alienated form that he will encounter himself.

When the child grows up, he fights against his original abandonment in two ways. He tries to deny the separation: he crushes himself in his mother's arms, he seeks her loving warmth, he wants her caresses. And he

1. Judith Gautier says in her accounts of her memories that she cried and wasted away so terribly when she was pulled away from her wet nurse that she had to be reunited with her. She was weaned much later.

2. This is Dr. Lacan's theory in *Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l'individu* (*Family Complexes in the Formation of the Individual*). This fundamental fact would explain that during its development "the self keeps the ambiguous form of spectacle."

tries to win the approbation of others in order to justify himself. Adults are to him as gods: they have the power to confer being on him. He experiences the magic of the gaze that metamorphoses him now into a delicious little angel and now into a monster. These two modes of defense are not mutually exclusive: on the contrary, they complete and infuse each other. When seduction is successful, the feeling of justification finds physical confirmation in the kisses and caresses received: it is the same contented passivity that the child experiences in his mother's lap and under her benevolent eyes. During the first three or four years of life, there is no difference between girls' and boys' attitudes; they all try to perpetuate the happy state preceding weaning: both boys and girls show the same behavior of seduction and display. Boys are just as desirous as their sisters to please, to be smiled at, to be admired.

It is more satisfying to deny brutal separation than to overcome it, more radical to be lost in the heart of the Whole than to be petrified by the consciousness of others: carnal fusion creates a deeper alienation than any abdication under the gaze of another. Seduction and display represent a more complex and less easy stage than the simple abandonment in maternal arms. The magic of the adult gaze is capricious; the child pretends to be invisible, his parents play the game, grope around for him, they laugh, and then suddenly they declare: "You are bothersome, you are not invisible at all." A child's phrase amuses, then he repeats it: this time, they shrug their shoulders. In this world as unsure and unpredictable as Kafka's universe, one stumbles at every step.<sup>3</sup> That is why so many children are afraid of growing up; they desperately want their parents to continue taking them on their laps, taking them into their bed: through physical frustration they experience ever more cruelly that abandonment of which the human being never becomes aware without anguish.

It is here that little girls first appear privileged. A second weaning, slower and less brutal than the first one, withdraws the mother's body from the child's embraces; but little by little boys are the ones who are denied

3. In *L'orange bleue* (*The Blue Orange?*) Yassou Gauclete says about her father: "His good mood seemed as fearsome as his impatience because nothing explained to me what could bring it about. . . . As uncertain of the changes in his mood as I would have been of a god's whims, I revered him with anxiety. . . . I threw out my words as I might have played heads or tails, wondering how they would be received." And further on, she tells the following anecdote: "For example, one day, after being scolded, I began my litany: old table, floor brush, stove, large bowl, milk bottle, casserole, and so on. My mother heard me and burst out laughing. . . . A few days later, I tried to use my litany to soften my grandmother, who once again had scolded me: I should have known better this time. Instead of making her laugh, I made her angrier and got an extra punishment. I told myself that adults' behavior was truly incomprehensible."

kisses and caresses; the little girl continues to be doted upon, she is allowed to hide behind her mother's skirts, her father takes her on his knees and pats her hair; she is dressed in dresses as lovely as kisses, her tears and whims are treated indulgently, her hair is done carefully, her expressions and affections amuse: physical contact and complainant looks protect her against the anxiety of solitude. For the little boy, on the other hand, even attentions are forbidden, his attempts at seduction, his games irritate. "A man doesn't ask for kisses . . . A man doesn't look at himself in the mirror . . . A man doesn't cry," he is told. He has to be "a little man"; he obtains adults' approval by freeing himself from them. He will please by not seeming to seek to please.

Many boys, frightened by the harsh independence they are condemned to, thus desire to be girls; in times when they were first dressed as girls, they cried when they had to give dresses up for long pants and had to have their curls cut. Some obstinately would choose femininity, which is one of the ways of gravitating toward homosexuality: "I wanted passionately to be a girl, and I was unconscious of the grandeur of being a man to the point of trying to urinate sitting down," Maurice Sachs recounts.<sup>4</sup> However, if the boy at first seems less favored than his sisters, it is because there are greater designs for him. The requirements he is subjected to immediately imply a higher estimation. In his memoirs, Maurras recounts that he was jealous of a cadet his mother and grandmother doted upon; his father took him by the hand and out of the room. "We are men; let's leave these women," he told him. The child is persuaded that more is demanded of boys because of their superiority; the pride of his virility is breathed into him in order to encourage him in this difficult path; this abstract notion takes on a concrete form for him: it is embodied in the penis; he does not experience pride spontaneously in his little indolent sex organ, but he feels it through the attitude of those around him. Mothers and wet nurses perpetuate the tradition that assimilates phallus and maleness; whether they recognize its prestige in amorous gratitude or in submission, or that they gain revenge by seeing it in the baby in a reduced form, they treat the child's penis with a singular deference. Rabelais reports on Gargantua's wet nurses' games and words;<sup>5</sup> history has recorded those of Louis XIII's wet nurses. Less daring

women, however, give a friendly name to the little boy's sex organ, they speak to him about it as of a little person who is both himself and other than himself; they make of it, according to the words already cited, "an alter ego usually craftier, more intelligent, and more clever than the individual."<sup>6</sup> Anatomically, the penis is totally apt to play this role; considered apart from the body, it looks like a little natural plaything, a kind of doll. The child is esteemed by esteeming his double. A father told me that one of his sons at the age of three was still urinating sitting down; surrounded by sisters and girl cousins, he was a shy and sad child; one day his father took him with him to the toilet and said: "I will show you how men do it." From then on, the child, proud to be urinating standing up, scorned the girls "who urinated through a hole"; his scorn came originally not from the fact that they were lacking an organ but that they had not like him been singled out and initiated by the father. So, far from the penis being discovered as an immediate privilege from which the boy would draw a feeling of superiority, its value seems, on the contrary, like a compensation—invented by adults and fervently accepted by the child—for the hardships of the last weaning: in that way he is protected against regret that he is no longer a breast-feeding baby or a girl. From then on, he will embody his transcendence and his arrogant sovereignty in his sex.<sup>7</sup>

The girl's lot is very different. Mothers and wet nurses have neither reverence nor tenderness for her genital parts; they do not focus attention on this secret organ of which only the outside envelope can be seen and that cannot be taken hold of; in one sense, she does not have a sex. She does not experience this absence as a lack; her body is evidently a plenitude for her; but she finds herself in the world differently from the boy; and a group of factors can transform this difference into inferiority in her eyes.

Few questions are as much discussed by psychoanalysts as the famous "female castration complex." Most accept today that penis envy manifests itself in very different ways depending on the individual case.<sup>8</sup> First, many girls are ignorant of male anatomy until an advanced age. The child accepts naturally that there are men and women as there are a sun and a moon; she believes in essences contained in words, and his curiosity is at

<sup>4</sup> *Le sabbah* (*Tricks*, *Sabbath*).

<sup>5</sup> "And already beginning to exercise his coppiece, which each and every day his nurses would adorn with lovely bouquets, fine ribbons, beautiful flowers, pretty ruffs, and they spent their time bringing it back and forth between their hands like a cylinder of salve, then they laughed their heads off when it raised its ears, as if they liked the game. One would call it my little spigo, another my ninepin, another my coral branch, another my stopper, my cork, my girlet, my ramrod, my awl, my pendant."

<sup>6</sup> Cited by A. Bâlin, *The Psychoanalysis of the Nursery*.

<sup>7</sup> See Volume I, Chapter 2, p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> Besides Freud's and Adler's works, there is today an abundant literature on the subject. Abraham was the first one to put forward the idea that the girl considered her sex a wound resulting from a mutilation. Karen Horney, Jones, Jeanne Lampl-de Groot, H. Deutsch, and A. Bâlin studied the question from a psychoanalytical point of view. Saussure tries to reconcile psychoanalysis with Plaget's and Luquet's ideas. See also Pollack, *Children's Ideas on Sex Differences*.

first not analytical. For many others, this little piece of flesh hanging between boys' legs is insignificant or even derogatory; it is a particularity like that of clothes and hairstyle; often the female child discovers it at a younger brother's birth, and "when the little girl is very young," says Helene Deutsch, "she is not impressed by her younger brother's penis"; she cites the example of an eighteen-month-old girl who remained absolutely indifferent to the discovery of the penis and did not give it any value until much later, in connection with her personal preoccupations. The penis can even be considered an anomaly; it is a growth, a vague hanging thing like nodules, tears, and warts; it can inspire disgust. Lastly, the fact is that there are many cases of the little girl being interested in a brother's or a friend's penis; but that does not mean she experiences a specifically sexual jealousy and even less that she feels deeply moved by the absence of this organ; she desires to appropriate it for herself as she desires to appropriate any object; but this desire may remain superficial.

It is certain that the excretory function and particularly the urinary one interest children passionately: wetting the bed is often a protest against the parents' marked preference for another child. There are countries where men urinate sitting down, and there are women who urinate standing up; this is the way among many women peasants; but in contemporary Western society, custom generally has it that they squat, while the standing position is reserved to males. This is the most striking sexual difference for the little girl. To urinate she has to squat down, remove some clothes, and above all hide, a shameful and uncomfortable servitude. Shame increases in the frequent cases in which she suffers from involuntary urinary emissions, when bursting out laughing, for example; control is worse than for boys. For them, the urinary function is like a free game with the attraction of all games in which freedom is exercised; the penis can be handled, through it one can act, which is one of the child's deep interests. A little girl seeing a boy urinate declared admiringly: "How practical!"<sup>9</sup> The stream can be aimed at will, the urine directed far away: the boy draws a feeling of omnipotence from it. Freud spoke of "the burning ambition of early diuretics"; Stekel discussed this formula sensibly, but it is true that, as Karen Horney says, "fantasies of omnipotence, especially of a sadistic character, are as a matter of fact more easily associated with the jet of urine passed by the male";<sup>10</sup> there are many such fantasies in children, and they

survive in some men.<sup>11</sup> Abraham speaks of "the great pleasure women experience watering the garden with a hose"; I think, in agreement with Sartre's and Bachelard's theories,<sup>12</sup> that it is not necessarily the assimilation of the hose with the penis that is the source of pleasure;<sup>13</sup> every stream of water seems like a miracle, a defiance of gravity: directing or governing it means carrying off a little victory over natural laws; in any case, for the little boy there is a daily amusement that is impossible for his sisters. He is also able to establish many relations with things through the urinary stream, especially in the countryside: water, earth, moss, snow. There are little girls who lie on their backs and try to practice urinating "in the air" or who try to urinate standing up in order to have these experiences. According to Karen Horney, they also envy the opportunity to exhibit that the boy is granted. A sick woman suddenly exclaimed, after seeing a man urinating in the street: "If I might ask a gift of Providence, it would be to be able just for once to urinate like a man," Karen Horney reports. It seems to girls that the boy, having the right to touch his penis, can use it as a plaything, while their organs are taboo. That these factors make the possession of a male sex organ desirable for many of them is a fact confirmed by many studies and confidences gathered by psychiatrists. Havelock Ellis quotes the words of a patient he calls Zemia: "The noise of a jet of water, especially coming out of a long hose, has always been very stimulating for me, recalling the noise of the stream of urine observed in childhood in my brother and even in other people."<sup>14</sup> Another woman, Mrs. R.S., recounts that as a child she absolutely loved holding a little friend's penis in her hands; one day she was given a hose: "It seemed delicious to hold that as if I was holding a penis." She emphasized that the penis had no sexual meaning for her; she only knew its urinary usage. The most interesting case, that of Florrie, is reported by Havelock Ellis and later analyzed by Stekel.<sup>15</sup> Here is a detailed account from it.

The woman concerned is very intelligent, artistic, active, biologically normal, and not homosexual. She says that the urinary function played a great role in her childhood; she played urinary games with

11. Montherlant's "The caterpillars," *June Solstice*.

12. See Volume 1, Part One, Chapter 2.

13. It is clear, though, in some cases.

14. Cf. Ellis [discussion of "undinism" in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*—TRANS.].

15. H. Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, Volume 13.

9. Cited by A. Balint.

10. "On the Genesis of the Castration Complex in Women," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* (1923-24).

her brothers, and they wet their hands without feeling disgust. "My earliest ideas of the superiority of the male were connected with urination. I felt aggrieved with nature because I lacked so useful and ornamental an organ. No teapot without a spout felt so forlorn. It required no one to instill into me the theory of male predominance and superiority. Constant proof was before me." She took great pleasure in urinating in the country. "Nothing could come up to the entrancing sound as the stream descended on crackling leaves in the depth of a wood and she watched its absorption. Most of all she was fascinated by the idea of doing it into water" [as are many little boys]. There is a quantity of childish and vulgar imagery showing little boys urinating in ponds and brooks. Florrie complains that the style of her knickers prevented her from trying various desired experiments, but often during country walks she would hold back as long as she could and then suddenly relieve herself standing. "I can distinctly remember the strange and delicious sensation of this forbidden delight, and also my puzzled feeling that it came standing." In her opinion, the style of children's clothing has great importance for feminine psychology in general. "It was not only a source of annoyance to me that I had to unfasten my drawers and then squat down for fear of wetting them in front, but the flap at the back, which must be removed to uncover the posterior parts during the act, accounts for my early impression that in girls this function is connected with those parts. The first distinction in sex that impressed me—the one great difference in sex—was that boys urinated standing and that girls had to sit down . . . The fact that my earliest feelings of shyness were more associated with the back than the front may have thus originated." All these impressions were of great importance in Florrie's case because her father often whipped her until the blood came and also a governess had once spanked her to make her urinate; she was obsessed by masochistic dreams and fancies in which she saw herself whipped by a school mistress under the eyes of all and having to urinate against her will, "an idea that gives one a curious sense of gratification." At the age of fifteen it happened that under urgent need she urinated standing in a deserted street. "In trying to analyze my sensations, I think the most prominent lay in the shame that came from standing, and the consequently greater distance the stream had to descend. It seemed to make the affair important and conspicuous, even though clothing hid it. In the ordinary attitude there is a kind of privacy. As a small child, too,

the stream had not far to go, but at the age of fifteen I was tall and it seemed to give one a glow of shame to think of this stream falling unchecked such a distance. (I am sure that the ladies who fled in horror from the uriette at Portsmouth thought it most indecent for a woman to stand, legs apart, and to pull up her clothes and make a stream which descended unabashed all that way.)<sup>16</sup> She renewed this experience at twenty and frequently thereafter. She felt a mixture of shame and pleasure at the idea that she might be surprised and that she would be incapable of stopping. "The stream seemed to be drawn from me without my consent, and yet with even more pleasure than if I were doing it freely."<sup>17</sup> This curious feeling—that it is being drawn away by some unseen power which is determined that one shall do it—is an entirely feminine pleasure and a subtle charm . . . There is a fierce charm in the torrent that binds one to its will by a mighty force." Later Florrie developed a flagellatory eroticism always combined with urinary obsessions.

This case is very interesting because it throws light on several elements of the child's experience. But of course there are particular circumstances that confer such a great importance upon them. For normally raised little girls, the boy's urinary privilege is too secondary a thing to engender a feeling of inferiority directly. Psychoanalysts following Freud who think that the mere discovery of the penis would be sufficient to produce a trauma seriously misunderstand the child's mentality; it is much less rational than they seem to think, it does not establish clear-cut categories and is not bothered by contradictions. When the little girl seeing a penis declares, "I had one too" or "I'll have one too," or even "I have one too," this is not a defense in bad faith; presence and absence are not mutually exclusive; the child—as his drawings prove—believes much less in what he sees with his eyes than in the signifying types that he has determined once and for all: he often draws without looking, and in any case he finds in his perceptions only what he puts there. Saussure, who emphasizes this point, quotes this very important observation of Luquet's: "Once a line is considered wrong, it is as if inexistent, the child literally no longer sees it, hypnotized in a way by the new line that replaces it, nor does he take into account lines that can

16. In an allusion to an episode she related previously: at Portsmouth a modern uriette for ladies was opened that called for the standing position; all the clients were seen to depart hastily as soon as they entered.

17. Florrie's italics.

be accidentally found on his paper."<sup>18</sup> Male anatomy constitutes a strong form that is often imposed on the little girl; and *literally she no longer sees* her own body. Sausurre brings up the example of a four-year-old girl who, trying to urinate like a boy between the bars of a fence, said she wanted "a little long thing that runs." She affirmed at the same time that she had a penis and that she did not have one, which goes along with the thinking by "participation" that Piaget described in children. The little girl takes it for granted that all children are born with a penis but that the parents then cut some of them off to make girls; this idea satisfies the artificialism of the child who glorifies his parents and "conceives of them as the cause of everything he possesses," says Piaget; he does not see punishment in castration right away. For it to become a frustration, the little girl has to be unhappy with her situation for some reason; as Deutsch justly points out, an exterior event like the sight of a penis could not lead to an internal development. "The sight of the male organ can have a traumatic effect," she says, "but only if a chain of prior experiences that would create that effect had preceded it." If the little girl feels powerless to satisfy her desires of masturbation or exhibition, if her parents repress her onanism, if she feels less loved or less valued than her brothers, then she will project her dissatisfaction onto the male organ. "The little girl's discovery of the anatomical difference with the boy confirms a previously felt need; it is her rationalization, so to speak."<sup>19</sup> And Adler also insisted on the fact that it is the validation by the parents and others that gives the boy prestige, and that the penis becomes the explanation and symbol in the little girl's eyes. Her brother is considered superior; he himself takes pride in his maleness; so she envies him and feels frustrated. Sometimes she resents her mother and less often her father; either she accuses herself of being mutilated, or she consoles herself by thinking that the penis is hidden in her body and that one day it will come out.

It is sure that the absence of a penis will play an important role in the little girl's destiny, even if she does not really envy those who possess one. The great privilege that the boy gets from it is that as he is bestowed with an organ that can be seen and held, he can at least partially alienate himself in it. He projects the mystery of his body and its dangers outside himself, which permits him to keep them at a distance: of course, he feels endan-

gered through his penis, he fears castration, but this fear is easier to dominate than the pervasive overall fear the girl feels concerning her "insides," a fear that will often be perpetuated throughout her whole life as a woman. She has a deep concern about everything happening inside her; from the start, she is far more opaque to herself and more profoundly inhabited by the worrying mystery of life than the male. Because he recognizes himself in an alter ego, the little boy can boldly assume his subjectivity; the very object in which he alienates himself becomes a symbol of autonomy, transcendence, and power: he measures the size of his penis; he compares his urinary stream with that of his friends; later, erection and ejaculation will be sources of satisfaction and challenge. But a little girl cannot incarnate herself in any part of her own body. As compensation, and to fill the role of alter ego for her, she is handed a foreign object: a doll. Note that the bandage wrapped on an injured finger is also called a *pouppée* ("doll" in French): a finger dressed and separate from the others is looked on with amusement and a kind of pride with which the child initiates the process of its alienation. But it is a figurine with a human face—or a corn husk or even a piece of wood—that will most satisfyingly replace this double, this natural toy, this penis.

The great difference is that, on the one hand, the doll represents the whole body and, on the other hand, it is a passive thing. As such, the little girl will be encouraged to alienate herself in her person as a whole and to consider it an inert given. While the boy seeks himself in his penis as an autonomous subject, the little girl pampers her doll and dresses her as she dreams of being dressed and pampered; inversely, she thinks of herself as a marvelous doll.<sup>20</sup> Through compliments and admonishments, through images and words, she discovers the meaning of the words "pretty" and "ugly"; she soon knows that to please, she has to be "pretty as a picture"; she tries to resemble an image, she disguises herself, she looks at herself in the mirror, she compares herself to princesses and fairies from tales. Marie Bashkirtseff gives a striking example of this infantile coquetry.\* It is certainly not by chance that, weaned late—she was three and a half—she fervently felt the need at the age of four or five to be admired and to exist for others: the shock must have been violent in a more mature child, and she had to struggle even harder to overcome the inflicted separation. "At five years old," she writes in her diary, "I would dress in Mummy's lace, with

18. "Psychologie génétique et psychanalyse" ("Genetic Psychology and Psychoanalysis"), *Revue Française de Psychanalyse* (1933).

19. H. Deutsch, *Psychology of Women*. She also cites the authority of K. Abraham and J. H. W. van Ophujsen.

20. The analogy between the woman and the doll remains until the adult age; in French, a woman is vulgarly called a doll; in English, a dressed-up woman is said to be "dolled up."

\* Bashkirtseff, *I Am the Most Interesting Book of All*.—TRANS.

flowers in my hair, and I would go and dance in the living room. I was Petipa, the great dancer, and the whole house was there to *look at me*."

This narcissism appears so precociously for the little girl and will play so fundamental a part in her life that it is readily considered as emanating from a mysterious feminine instinct. But we have just seen that in reality it is not an anatomical destiny that dictates her attitude. The difference that distinguishes her from boys is a fact that she could assume in many ways. Having a penis is certainly a privilege, but one whose value naturally diminishes when the child loses interest in his excretory functions and becomes socialized: if he retains interest in it past the age of eight or nine years, it is because the penis has become the symbol of a socially valorized virility. The fact is that the influence of education and society is enormous here. All children try to compensate for the separation of weaning by seductive and attention-seeking behavior; the boy is forced to go beyond this stage, he is saved from his narcissism by turning his attention to his penis, whereas the girl is reinforced in this tendency to make herself object, which is common to all children. The doll helps her, but it does not have a determining role; the boy can also treasure a teddy bear or a rag doll on whom he can project himself; it is in their life's overall form that each factor—penis, doll—takes on its importance.

Thus, the passivity that essentially characterizes the "feminine" woman is a trait that develops in her from her earliest years. But it is false to claim that therein lies a biological given; in fact, it is a destiny imposed on her by her teachers and by society. The great advantage for the boy is that his way of existing for others leads him to posit himself for himself. He carries out the apprenticeship of his existence as free movement toward the world; he rivals other boys in toughness and independence; he looks down on girls. Climbing trees, fighting with his companions, confronting them in violent games, he grasps his body as a means to dominate nature and as a fighting tool; he is proud of his muscles, as he is of his sex organ; through games, sports, fights, challenges, and exploits, he finds a balanced use of his strength; at the same time, he learns the severe lessons of violence; he learns to take blows, to deride pain, to hold back tears from the earliest age. He undertakes, he invents, he dares. Granted, he also experiences himself as if "for others"; he tests his own virility, and consequently, trouble ensues with adults and friends. But what is very important is that there is no fundamental opposition between this objective figure that is his and his will for self-affirmation in concrete projects. It is by doing that he makes himself be, in one single movement. On the contrary, for the woman there is, from the start, a conflict between her autonomous existence and her "being-

other"; she is taught that to please, she must try to please, must make herself object; she must therefore renounce her autonomy. She is treated like a living doll, and freedom is denied her; thus a vicious circle is closed; for the less she exercises her freedom to understand, grasp, and discover the world around her, the less she will find its resources, and the less she will dare to affirm herself as subject; if she were encouraged, she could show the same vibrant exuberance, the same curiosity, the same spirit of initiative, and the same intrepidity as the boy. Sometimes this does happen when she is given a male upbringing; she is thus spared many problems.<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, this is the kind of education that a father habitually gives his daughter; women brought up by a man escape many of the defects of femininity. But customs oppose treating girls exactly like boys. I knew a village where girls of three and four years old were persecuted because their father made them wear trousers: "Are they girls or boys?" And the other children tried to find out; the result was their pleading to wear dresses. Unless she leads a very solitary life, even if parents allow her to have boyish manners, the girl's companions, her friends, and her teachers will be shocked. There will always be aunts, grandmothers, and girl cousins to counterbalance the father's influence. Normally, his role regarding his daughters is secondary. One of the woman's curses—as Michelet has justly pointed out—is that in her childhood she is left in the hands of women. The boy is also brought up by his mother in the beginning; but she respects his maleness and he escapes from her relatively quickly; whereas the mother wants to integrate the girl into the feminine world.<sup>22</sup>

We will see later how complex the relation is between the mother and the daughter: for the mother, the daughter is both her double and an other; the mother cherishes her and at the same time is hostile to her; she imposes her own destiny on her child: it is a way to proudly claim her own femininity and also to take revenge on it. The same process is found with pederasts, gamblers, drug addicts, and all those who are flattered to belong to a certain community, and are also humiliated by it: they try through ardent proselytism to win over converts. Thus, women given the care of a little girl are bent on transforming her into women like themselves with zeal and arrogance mixed with resentment. And even a generous mother who sincerely wants the best for her child will, as a rule, think it wiser to make a "true

21: At least in her early childhood. In today's society, adolescent conflicts could, on the contrary, be exacerbated.

22: There are, of course, many exceptions; but the mother's role in bringing up a boy cannot be studied here.

woman" of her, as that is the way she will be best accepted by society. So she is given other little girls as friends, she is entrusted to female teachers, she lives among matrons as in the days of the gynaeceum, books and games are chosen for her that introduce her to her destiny, her ears are filled with the treasures of feminine wisdom, feminine virtues are presented to her, she is taught cooking, sewing, and housework as well as how to dress, how to take care of her personal appearance, charm, and modesty; she is dressed in uncomfortable and fancy clothes that she has to take care of, her hair is done in complicated styles, posture is imposed on her: stand up straight, don't walk like a duck; to be graceful, she has to repress spontaneous movements, she is told not to look like a tomboy, strenuous exercise is banned, she is forbidden to fight; in short, she is committed to becoming, like her elders, a servant and an idol. Today, thanks to feminism's breakthroughs, it is becoming more and more normal to encourage her to pursue her education, to devote herself to sports, but she is more easily excused for not succeeding; success is made more difficult for her as another kind of accomplishment is demanded of her: she must at least *also* be a woman; she must not *lose* her femininity.

In her early years she resigns herself to this lot without much difficulty. The child inhabits the level of play and dream, he plays at being, he plays at doing; doing and being are not clearly distinguishable when it is a question of imaginary accomplishments. The little girl can compensate for boys' superiority of the moment by those promises inherent in her woman's destiny, which she already achieves in her play. Because she still only knows her childhood universe, her mother seems endowed with more authority than her father; she imagines the world as a sort of patriarchy; she imitates her mother, she identifies with her; often she even inverts the roles: "When I am big and you are little . . ." she often says. The doll is not only her double: it is also her child, functions that are not mutually exclusive insofar as the real child is also an alter ego for the mother; when she scolds, punishes, and then consoles her doll, she is defending herself against her mother, and she assumes a mother's dignity: she sums up both elements of the couple as she entrusts herself to her doll, educates her, asserts her sovereign authority over her, and sometimes even tears off her arms, beats her, tortures her; that is to say, through her she accomplishes the experience of subjective affirmation and alienation. Often the mother is associated with this imaginary life: in playing with the doll and the mother, the child plays both the father and the mother, a couple where the man is excluded. No "maternal instinct" innate and mysterious, lies therein either. The little girl observes that child care falls to the mother, that is

what she is taught; stories told, books read, all her little experience confirms it; she is encouraged to feel delight for these future riches, she is given dolls so she will already feel the tangible aspect of those riches. Her "vocation" is determined imperiously. Because her lot seems to be the child, and also because she is more interested in her "insides" than the boy, the little girl is particularly curious about the mystery of procreation; she quickly ceases to believe that babies are born in cabbages or delivered by the stork; especially in cases where the mother gives her brothers or sisters, she soon learns that babies are formed in their mother's body. Besides, parents today make less of a mystery of it than before; she is generally more amazed and frightened because the phenomenon seems like magic to her; she does not yet grasp all of the physiological implications. First of all, she is unaware of the father's role and supposes that the woman gets pregnant by eating certain foods, a legendary theme (queens in fairy tales give birth to a little girl or a handsome boy after eating this fruit, that fish) and one that later leads some women to link the idea of gestation and the digestive system. Together these problems and these discoveries absorb a great part of the little girl's interests and feed her imagination. I will cite a typical example from Jung,<sup>23</sup> which bears remarkable analogies with that of little Hans, analyzed by Freud around the same time:

When Anna was about three years old she began to question her parents about where babies come from; Anna had heard that children are "little angels." She first seemed to think that when people die, they go to heaven and are reincarnated as babies. At age four she had a little brother; she hadn't seemed to notice her mother's pregnancy but when she saw her the day after the birth, she looked at her "with something like a mixture of embarrassment and suspicion" and finally asked her, "Aren't you going to die now?" She was sent to her grandmother's for some time; when she came back, a nurse had arrived and was installed near the bed; she at first hated her but then she amused herself playing nurse; she was jealous of her brother: she sniggered, made up stories, disobeyed and threatened to go back to her grandmother's; she often accused her mother of not telling the truth, because she suspected her of lying about the infant's birth; feeling obscurely that there was a difference between "having" a child as a nurse and having one as a mother, she asked

<sup>23</sup> Jung, "Psychic Conflicts of a Child."



her mother: "Shall I be a different woman from you?" She got into the habit of yelling for her parents during the night; and as the earthquake of Messina was much talked about she made it the pretext of her anxieties; she constantly asked questions about it. One day, she asked outright: "Why is Sophie younger than I? Where was Freddie before? Was he in heaven and what was he doing there?" Her mother decided she ought to explain that the little brother grew inside her stomach like plants in the earth. Anna was enchanted with this idea. Then she asked: "But did he come all by himself?" "Yes." "But he can't walk yet!" "He crawled out." "Did he come out here (pointing to her chest), or did he come out of your mouth?" "With-out waiting for an answer, she said she knew it was the stork that had brought it; but in the evening she suddenly said: "My brother is in Italy;<sup>24</sup> he has a house made of cloth and glass and it doesn't fall down"; and she was no longer interested in the earthquake and asked to see photos of the eruption. She spoke again of the stork to her dolls but without much conviction. Soon however, she had new curiosities. Seeing her father in bed: "Why are you in bed? Have you got a plant in your inside too?" She had a dream; she dreamed of Noah's Ark: "And underneath, there was a lid which opened and all the little animals fell out"; in fact, her Noah's Ark opened by the roof. At this time, she again had nightmares: one could guess that she was wondering about the father's role. A pregnant woman having visited her mother, the next day her mother saw Anna put a doll under her skirts and take it out slowly, saying: "Look, the baby is coming out, now it is all out." Some time later, eating an orange, she said: "I'll swallow it all down into my stomach, and then I shall get a baby." One morning, her father was in the bathroom, she jumped on his bed, lay flat on her face, and flailed with her legs, crying out, "Look, is that what Papa does?" For five months she seemed to forget her preoccupations and then she began to mistrust her father: she thought he wanted to drown her, etc. One day she was happily sowing seeds in the earth with the gardener, and she asked her father: "How did the eyes grow into the head? And the hair?" The father explained that they were already there from the beginning and grew with the head. Then, she asked: "But how did Fritz get into Mama? Who stuck him in? And who stuck you into

your mama? Where did he come out?" Her father said, smiling, "What do you think?" So she pointed to his sexual organs: "Did he come out from there?" "Well, yes." "But how did he get into Mama? Did someone sow the seed?" So the father explained that it is the father who gives the seed. She seemed totally satisfied and the next day she teased her mother: "Papa told me that Fritz was a little angel and was brought down from heaven by the stork." She was much calmer than before; she had, though, a dream in which she saw gardeners urinating, her father among them; she also dreamed, after seeing the gardener plane a drawer, that he was planning her genitals; she was obviously preoccupied with knowing the father's exact role. It seems that, almost completely enlightened at the age of five, she did not experience any other disturbance.\*

This story is characteristic, although very often the little girl is less precisely inquisitive about the role played by the father, or the parents are much more evasive on this point. Many little girls hide cushions under their pinafores to play at being pregnant, or else they walk around with their doll in the folds of their skirts and let it fall into the cradle, or they give it their breast. Boys, like girls, admire the mystery of motherhood; all children have an "in depth" imagination that makes them sense secret riches inside things; they are all sensitive to the miracle of "nesting," dolls that contain other, smaller dolls, boxes containing other boxes, vignettes identically reproduced in reduced form; they are all enchanted when a bud is unfolded before their eyes, when they are shown a chick in its shell or the surprise of "Japanese flowers" in a bowl of water. One little boy, upon opening an Easter egg full of little sugar eggs, exclaimed with delight: "Oh! A mummy!" Having a child emerge from a woman's stomach is beautiful, like a magic trick. The mother seems endowed with wonderful fairy powers. Many boys bemoan that such a privilege is denied them; if, later, they take eggs from nests, stamp on young plants, if they destroy life around them with a kind of rage, it is out of revenge at not being able to hatch life, while the little girl is enchanted with the thought of creating it one day.

In addition to this hope made concrete by playing with dolls, a housewife's life also provides the little girl with possibilities of affirming herself. A great part of housework can be accomplished by a very young child; a boy is usually exempted from it; but his sister is allowed, even asked, to

24. This was a made-up older brother who played a big role in her games.

\*In Jung, *Development of Personality*—TRANS.

sweep, dust, peel vegetables, wash a newborn, watch the stew. In particular, the older sister often participates in maternal chores; either for convenience or because of hostility and sadism, the mother unloads many of her functions onto her; she is then prematurely integrated into the universe of the serious; feeling her importance will help her assume her femininity; but she is deprived of the happy gratuitousness, the carefree childhood; a woman before her time, she understands too soon what limits this specificity imposes on a human being; she enters adolescence as an adult, which gives her story a unique character. The overburdened child can prematurely be a slave, condemned to a joyless existence. But, if no more than an effort equal to her is demanded, she experiences the pride of feeling efficient like a grown person and is delighted to feel solidarity with adults. This solidarity is possible for the child because there is not much distance between the child and the housewife. A man specialized in his profession is separated from the infant stage by years of training; paternal activities are profoundly mysterious for the little boy; the man he will be later is barely sketched in him. On the contrary, the mother's activities are accessible to the little girl. "She's already a little woman," say her parents, and often she is considered more precocious than the boy: in fact, if she is closer to the adult stage, it is because this stage traditionally remains more infantile for the majority of women. The fact is that she feels precocious, she is flattered to play the role of "little mother" to the younger ones; she easily becomes important, she speaks reason, she gives orders, she takes on superior airs with her brothers, who are still closed in the baby circle, she talks to her mother on an equal footing.

In spite of these compensations, she does not accept her assigned destiny without regret; growing up, she envies boys their virility. Sometimes parents and grandparents poorly hide the fact that they would have preferred a male offspring to a female; or else they show more affection to the brother than to the sister: research shows that the majority of parents wish to have sons rather than daughters. Boys are spoken to with more seriousness and more esteem, and more rights are granted them; they themselves treat girls with contempt, they play among themselves and exclude girls from their group, they insult them: they call them names like "piss pots," thus evoking girls' secret childhood humiliations. In France, in coeducational schools, the boys' caste deliberately oppresses and persecutes the girls'. But girls are reprimanded if they want to compete or fight with them. They doubly envy singularly boyish activities: they have a spontaneous desire to affirm their power over the world, and they protest against the inferior situation they are condemned to. They suffer in being forbid-

den to climb trees, ladders, and roofs, among other activities. Adler observes that the notions of high and low have great importance, the idea of spatial elevation implying a spiritual superiority, as can be seen in numerous heroic myths; to attain a peak or a summit is to emerge beyond the given world as sovereign subject; between boys, it is frequently a pretext for challenge. The little girl, to whom exploits are forbidden and who sits under a tree or by a cliff and sees the triumphant boys above her, feels herself, body and soul, inferior. And the same is true if she is left behind in a race or a jumping competition, or if she is thrown to the ground in a fight or simply pushed to the side.

The more the child matures, the more his universe expands and masculine superiority asserts itself. Very often, identification with the mother no longer seems a satisfactory solution. If the little girl at first accepts her feminine vocation, it is not that she means to abdicate: on the contrary, it is to rule; she wants to be a matron because matrons' society seems privileged to her; but when her acquaintances, studies, amusements, and reading material tear her away from the maternal circle, she realizes that it is not women but men who are the masters of the world. It is this revelation—far more than the discovery of the penis—that imperiously modifies her consciousness of herself.

She first discovers the hierarchy of the sexes in the family experience; little by little she understands that the father's authority is not the one felt most in daily life, but it is the sovereign one; it has all the more impact for not being wasted on trifling matters; even though the mother reigns over the household, she is clever enough to put the father's will first; at important moments, she makes demands, rewards, and punishes in his name. The father's life is surrounded by mysterious prestige: the hours he spends in the home, the room where he works, the objects around him, his occupations, his habits, have a sacred character. It is he who feeds the family, is the one in charge and the head. Usually he works outside the home, and it is through him that the household communicates with the rest of the world: he is the embodiment of this adventurous, immense, difficult, and marvelous world; he is transcendence, he is God.<sup>25</sup> This is what the child feels physically in the power of his arms that lift her, in the strength of his body that she huddles against. The mother loses her place of honor to him just as

25: "His generous person inspired in me a great love and an extreme fear," says Mme de Noailles, speaking of her father. "First of all, he surrounded me. The first man surrounds a little girl. I well understood that everything depended on him."

Isis once did to Ra and the earth to the sun. But for the child, her situation is deeply altered: she was intended one day to become a woman like her all-powerful mother; she will never be the sovereign father; the bond that attached her to her mother was an active emulation; from her father she can only passively expect esteem. The boy grasps paternal superiority through a feeling of rivalry, whereas the girl endures it with impotent admiration. I have already stated that what Freud called the "Electra complex" is not, as he maintains, a sexual desire; it is a deep abdication of the subject who consents to be object in submission and adoration. If the father shows tenderness for his daughter, she feels her existence magnificently justified; she is endowed with all the merits that others have to acquire the hard way; she is fulfilled and deified. It may be that she nostalgically searches for this plenitude and peace her whole life. If she is refused love, she can feel guilty and condemned forever; or else she can seek self-esteem elsewhere and become indifferent—even hostile—to her father. Besides, the father is not the only one to hold the keys to the world: all men normally share virile prestige; there is no reason to consider them father "substitutes." It is implicitly as men that grandfathers, older brothers, uncles, girlfriends' fathers, friends of the family, professors, priests, or doctors fascinate a little girl. The emotional consideration that adult women show the Man would be enough to perch him on a pedestal.<sup>26</sup>

Everything helps to confirm this hierarchy in the little girl's eyes. Her historical and literary culture, the songs and legends she is raised on, are an exaltation of the man. Men made Greece, the Roman Empire, France, and all countries, they discovered the earth and invented the tools to develop it, they governed it, peopled it with statues, paintings, and books. Children's literature, mythology, tales, and stories reflect the myths created by men's pride and desires: the little girl discovers the world and reads her destiny through the eyes of men. Male superiority is overwhelming: Perseus, Her-

cules, David, Achilles, Lancelot, Duguesclin, Bayard, Napoleon—so many men for one Joan of Arc; and behind her stands the great male figure of Saint Michael the archangel! Nothing is more boring than books retreating the lives of famous women: they are very pale figures next to those of the great men; and most are immersed in the shadows of some male hero. Eve was not created for herself but as Adam's companion and drawn from his side; in the Bible few women are noteworthy for their actions: Ruth merely found herself a husband. Esther gained the Jews' grace by kneeling before Ahasuerus, and even then she was only a docile instrument in Mordecai's hands; Judith was bolder, but she too obeyed the priests and her exploit has a dubious aftertaste: it could not be compared to the pure and shining triumph of young David. Mythology's goddesses are frivolous or capricious, and they all tremble before Jupiter; while Prometheus magnificently steals the fire from the sky; Pandora opens the box of catastrophes. There are a few sorceresses, some old women who wield formidable power in stories. Among them is "The Garden of Paradise" by Andersen, in which the figure of the mother of the winds recalls that of the primitive Great Goddess: her four enormous sons fearfully obey her; she beats and encloses them in bags when they behave badly. But they are not attractive characters. More seductive are the fairies, mermaids, and nymphs who escape male domination; but their existence is dubious and barely individualized; they are involved in the human world without having their own destiny: the day Andersen's little mermaid becomes a woman, she experiences the yoke of love and suffering that is her lot. In contemporary accounts as in ancient legends, the man is the privileged hero. Mme de Ségur's books are a curious exception: they describe a matriarchal society where the husband plays a ridiculous character when he is not absent; but usually the image of the father is, as in the real world, surrounded by glory. It is under the aegis of the father sanctified by his absence that the feminine dramas of *Little Women* take place. In adventure stories it is boys who go around the world, travel as sailors on boats, subsist on breadfruit in the jungle. All important events happen because of men. Reality confirms these novels and legends. If the little girl reads the newspapers, if she listens to adult conversation, she notices that today, as in the past, men lead the world. The heads of state, generals, explorers, musicians, and painters she admires are men; it is men who make her heart beat with enthusiasm.

That prestige is reflected in the supernatural world. Generally, as a result of the role religion plays in women's lives, the little girl, more dominated by the mother than the boy, is also more subjected to religious influences. And in Western religions, God the Father is a man, an old man

26. It is worth noting that the cult of the father is most prevalent with the oldest child: the man is more involved in his first paternal experience; it is often he who consoles his daughter, as he consoles his son, when the mother is occupied with newborns, and the daughter becomes ardently attached to him. On the contrary, the younger child never has her father to herself; she is ordinarily jealous of both him and her older sister; she attaches herself to that same sister whom the devoted father invests with great prestige, or she turns to her mother, or she revolts against her family and looks for relief somewhere else. In large families, the youngest girl child finds other ways to have a special place. Of course, many circumstances can motivate the father to have special preferences. But almost all of the cases I know confirm this observation on the contrasting attitudes of the oldest and the youngest sisters.

endowed with a specifically virile attribute, luxuriant white beard.<sup>27</sup> For Christians, Christ is even more concretely a man of flesh and blood with a long blond beard. Angels have no sex, according to theologians; but they have masculine names and are shown as handsome young men. God's emissaries on earth—the pope, the bishop whose ring is kissed, the priest who says Mass, the preacher, the person one kneels before in the secrecy of the confessional—these are men. For a pious little girl, relations with the eternal Father are analogous to those she maintains with her earthly father; as they take place on an imaginary level, she experiences an even more total surrender. The Catholic religion, among others, exercises on her the most troubling of influences.<sup>28</sup> The Virgin welcomes the angel's words on her knees. "I am the *handmaiden* of the Lord," she answers. Mary Magdalene is prostrate at Christ's feet, and she washes them with her long womanly hair. Women saints declare their love to a radiant Christ on their knees. On his knees, surrounded by the odor of incense, the child gives himself up to God's and the angels' gaze: a man's gaze. There are many analogies between erotic and mystical language as spoken by women; for example, Saint Thérèse writes of the child Jesus:

Oh my beloved, by your love I accept not to see on earth the sweetness of your gaze, not to feel the inexpressible kiss from your mouth, but I beg of you to embrace me with your love . . .

*My beloved, of your first smile  
Let me soon glimpse the sweetness.  
Ah! Leave me in my burning deliriousness,  
Yes, let me hide myself in your heart!*

I want to be mesmerized by your divine gaze; I want to become prey to your love. One day, I have hope, you will melt on me

27. "Moreover, I was no longer suffering from my inability to see God, because I had recently managed to imagine him in the form of my dead grandfather: this image in truth was rather human; but I had quickly glorified it by separating my grandfather's head from his bust and mentally putting it on a sky blue background where white clouds made him a collar." Yasuni Gauchère says in *The Blue Orange*.

28. There is no doubt that women are infinitely more passive, given to man, servile, and humiliated in Catholic countries, Italy, Spain, and France, than in the Protestant Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon ones. And this comes in great part from their own attitude: the cult of the Virgin, confession, and so on invites them to masochism.

carrying me to love's heart; you will put me into this burning chasm to make me become, once and for all, the lucky victim.

But it must not be concluded from this that these effusions are always sexual; rather, when female sexuality develops, it is penetrated with the religious feeling that woman has devoted to man since childhood. It is true that the little girl experiences a thrill in the confessional and even at the foot of the altar close to what she will later feel in her lover's arms: woman's love is one of the forms of experience in which a consciousness makes itself an object for a being that transcends it; and these are also the passive delights that the young pious girl tastes in the shadows of the church.

Prostrate, her face buried in her hands, she experiences the miracle of renunciation: on her knees she climbs to heaven; her abandon in God's arms assures her an assumption lined with clouds and angels. She models her earthly future on this marvelous experience. The child can also discover it in other ways: everything encourages her to abandon herself in dreams to the arms of men to be transported to a sky of glory. She learns that to be happy, she has to be loved; to be loved, she has to await love. Woman is Sleeping Beauty, Donkey Skin, Cinderella, Snow White, the one who receives and endures. In songs and tales, the young man sets off to seek the woman; he fights against dragons, he combats giants; she is locked up in a tower, a palace, a garden, a cave, chained to a rock, captive, put to sleep: she is waiting. *One day my prince will come . . . Someday he'll come along, the man I love . . .* the popular refrains breathe dreams of patience and hope in her. The supreme necessity for woman is to charm a masculine heart; this is the recompense all heroines aspire to, even if they are intrepid, adventuresome; and only their beauty is asked of them in most cases. It is thus understandable that attention to her physical appearance can become a real obsession for the little girl; princesses or shepherds, one must always be pretty to conquer love and happiness; ugliness is cruelly associated with meanness, and when one sees the misfortunes that befall ugly girls, one does not know if it is their crimes or their disgrace that destiny punishes. Young beauties promised a glorious future often start out in the role of victim; the story of Geneviève de Brabant or of Griselda are not as innocent as it would seem; love and suffering are intertwined in a troubling way; woman is assured of the most delicious triumphs when falling to the bottom of abjection; whether it be a question of God or a man, the little girl learns that by consenting to the most serious renunciations, she will become all-powerful: she takes pleasure in a masochism that promises her supreme conquests. Saint Blandine, white and bloody in the paws of lions,

Snow White lying as if dead in a glass coffin, Sleeping Beauty, Arala fainting, a whole cohort of tender heroines beaten, passive, wounded, on their knees, humiliated, reach their younger sisters the fascinating prestige of martyred, abandoned, and resigned beauty: It is not surprising that while her brother plays at the hero, the little girl plays so easily at the martyr: the pagans throw her to the lions, Bluebeard drags her by her hair, the king, her husband, exiles her to the depth of the forests; she resigns herself, she suffers, she dies, and her brow is haloed with glory. "While still a little girl, I wanted to draw men's attention, trouble them, be saved by them, die in their arms," Mme de Noailles writes. A remarkable example of these masochistic musings is found in *La voile noire* (The Black Sail) by Maria Le Hardouin.

At seven, from I don't know which rib, I made my first man. He was tall, thin, very young, dressed in a suit of black satin with long sleeves touching the ground. His beautiful blond hair cascaded in heavy curls onto his shoulders. . . . I called him Edmond. . . . Then a day came when I gave him two brothers. . . . These three brothers: Edmond, Charles, and Cedric, all three dressed in black satin, all three blond and slim, procured for me strange blessings. Their feet shod in silk were so beautiful and their hands so fragile that I felt all sorts of movements in my soul. . . . I became their sister Marguerite. . . . I loved to represent myself as subjected to the whims of my brothers and totally at their mercy. I dreamed that my oldest brother, Edmond, had the right of life and death over me. I never had permission to raise my eyes to his face. He had me whipped under the slightest pretext. When he addressed himself to me, I was so overwhelmed by fear and respect that I found nothing else to answer him and mumbled constantly "Yes, my lordship," "No, my lordship," and I savored the strange delight of feeling like an idiot. . . . When the suffering he imposed on me was too great, I murmured "Thank you, my lordship," and there came a moment when, almost faltering from suffering, I placed, so as not to shout, my lips on his hand, while, some movement finally breaking my heart, I reached one of these states in which one desires to die from too much happiness.

At an early age, the little girl already dreams she has reached the age of love; at nine or ten, she loves to make herself up, she pads her blouse, she disguises herself as a lady. She does not, however, look for any erotic expe-

rience with little boys: if she does go with them into the corner to play "doctor," it is only out of sexual curiosity. But the partner of her amorous dreaming is an adult, either purely imaginary or based on real individuals: in the latter case, the child is satisfied to love him from afar. In Colette Audry's memoirs there is a very good example of a child's dreaming;<sup>29</sup> she recounts that she discovered love at five years of age:

This naturally had nothing to do with the little sexual pleasures of childhood, the satisfaction I felt, for example, straddling a certain chair in the dining room or caressing myself before falling asleep. . . . The only common characteristic between the feeling and the pleasure is that I carefully hid them both from those around me. . . . My love for this young man consisted in thinking of him before falling asleep and imagining marvelous stories. . . . In Privas, I was in love with all the department heads of my father's office. . . . I was never very deeply hurt by their departure, because they were barely more than a pretext for my amorous musings. . . . In the evening in bed I got my revenge for too much youth and shyness. I prepared everything very carefully, I did not have any trouble making him present to me, but it was a question of transforming myself, me, so that I could see myself from the interior because I became her, and stopped being I. First, I was pretty and eighteen years old. A tin of sweets helped me a lot: a long tin of rectangular and flat sweets that depicted two girls surrounded by doves. I was the dark, curly-headed one, dressed in a long muslin dress. A ten-year absence had separated us. He returned scarcely aged, and the sight of this marvelous creature overwhelmed him. She seemed to barely remember him, she was unaffected, indifferent, and witty. I composed truly brilliant conversations for this first meeting. They were followed by misunderstandings, a whole difficult conquest, cruel hours of discouragement and jealousy for him. Finally, pushed to the limit, he admitted his love. She listened to him in silence, and just at the moment he thought all was lost, she told him she had never stopped loving him, and they embraced a little. The scene normally took place on a park bench, in the evening. I saw the two forms close together, I heard the murmur of voices, I felt at the same time the warm body contact. But then everything came

29. *Aux yeux du souvenir* (In the Eyes of Memory).

loose . . . never did I broach marriage<sup>30</sup> . . . The next day I thought of it a little while washing. I don't know why the soapy face I was looking at in the mirror delighted me (the rest of the time I didn't find myself beautiful) and filled me with hope. I would have considered for hours this misty, tilted face that seemed to be waiting for me from afar on the road to the future. But I had to hurry; once I dried my face, everything was over, and I got back my banal child's face, which no longer interested me.

Games and dreams orient the girl toward passivity; but she is a human being before becoming a woman; and she already knows that accepting herself as woman means resigning and mutilating herself; while renunciation might be tempting, mutilation is abhorrent. Man and Love are still far away in the mist of the future; in the present, the little girl seeks activity, autonomy, like her brothers. The burden of freedom is not heavy for children, because it does not involve responsibility; they know they are safe in the shelter of adults: they are not tempted to flee from themselves. The girl's spontaneous zest for life, her taste for games, laughter, and adventure, make her consider the maternal circle narrow and stultifying. She wants to escape her mother's authority, an authority that is wielded in a more routine and intimate manner than the one that boys have to accept. Rare are the cases in which she is as understanding and discreet as in this Sido that Colette painted with love. Nor to mention the almost pathological cases—there are many<sup>31</sup>—where the mother is a kind of executioner, satisfying her domineering and sadistic instincts on the child; her daughter is the privileged object opposite whom she attempts to affirm herself as sovereign subject; this attempt makes the child balk in revolt. Colette Audry described this rebellion of a normal girl against a normal mother:

I wouldn't have known how to answer the truth, however innocent it was, because I never felt innocent in front of Mama. She was the essential adult, and I resented her for it as long as I was not yet cured. There was deep inside me a kind of tumultuous and fierce

sore that I was sure of always finding raw . . . I didn't think she was too strict; nor that she hadn't the right. I thought: no, no, no with all my strength. I didn't even blame her for her authority or for her orders or arbitrary defenses but for wanting to *subjugate me*. She said it sometimes: when she didn't say it, her eyes and voice did. Or else she told ladies that children are much more docile after a punishment. These words struck in my throat, unforgettable: I couldn't vomit them; I couldn't swallow them. This anger was my guilt in front of her and also my shame in front of me (Because in reality she were a few violent words or acts of insolence) but also my glory, nevertheless: as long as the sore was there, and living the silent madness that made me only repeat, "Subjugate, docile, punishment, humiliation," I wouldn't be subjugated.

Rebellion is even more violent in the frequent cases when the mother has lost her prestige. She appears as the one who waits, endures, complains, cries, and makes scenes; and in daily reality this thankless role does not lead to any apotheosis; victim, she is scorned; shrew, she is detested; her destiny appears to be the prototype of bland *repetition*: with her, life only repeats itself stupidly without going anywhere; blocked in her housewifely role, she stops the expansion of her existence, she is obstacle and negation. Her daughter wants *not* to take after her. She dedicates a cult to women who have escaped feminine servitude: actresses, writers, and professors; she gives herself enthusiastically to sports and to studies, she climbs trees, tears her clothes, tries to compete with boys. Very often she has a best friend in whom she confides; it is an exclusive friendship like a love affair that usually includes sharing sexual secrets: the little girls exchange information they have succeeded in getting and talk about it. Often there is a triangle, one of the girls falling in love with her girlfriend's brother: thus Sonya in *War and Peace* is in love with her best friend Natasha's brother. In any case, this friendship is shrouded in mystery, and in general at this period the child loves to have secrets; she makes a secret of the most insignificant thing; thus does she react against the secrets that thwart her curiosity; it is also a way of giving herself importance; she tries by all means to acquire it; she tries to be part of adults' lives, she makes up stories about them that she only half believes and in which she plays a major role. With her friends, she feigns returning boys' scorn with scorn; they form a closed group, they sneer and mock them. But in fact, she is flattered when they treat her as an equal; she seeks their approbation. She would like to belong to the privi-

30. Unlike Le Hardouin's masochistic imagination, Audry's is sadistic. She wants the beloved to be wounded, in danger, for her to save him heroically, not without humiliating him. This is a personal note, characteristic of a woman who will never accept passivity and will attempt to conquer her autonomy as a human being.

31. Cf. V. Leduc, *L'aphysie (In the Prison of Her Skin)*; S. de Terragne, *La haine maternelle (Maternal Hatred)*; H. Bazin, *Typhée au potage (Typh in the Fix)*.

leged caste. The same movement that in primitive hordes subjects woman to male supremacy is manifested in each new "arrival" by a refusal of her lot: in her, transcendence condemns the absurdity of immanence. She is annoyed at being oppressed by rules of decency, bothered by her clothes, enslaved to cleaning tasks, held back in all her enthusiasms; on this point there have been many studies that have almost all given the same result:<sup>32</sup> all the boys—like Plato in the past—say they would have hated to be girls; almost all the girls are sorry not to be boys. According to Havelock Ellis's statistics, one boy out of a hundred wanted to be a girl; more than 75 percent of the girls would have preferred to change sex. According to a study by Karl Pipal (cited by Bandoun in his work *L'âme enfantine* [*The Mind of the Child*]), out of twenty boys of twelve to fourteen years of age, eighteen said they would rather be anything in the whole world than a girl; out of twenty-two girls, ten wished to be boys and gave the following reasons: "Boys are better: they do not have to suffer like women . . . My mother would love me more . . . A boy does more interesting work . . . A boy has more aptitude for school . . . I would have fun frightening girls . . . I would not fear boys anymore . . . They are freer . . . Boys' games are more fun . . . They are not held back by their clothes." This last observation is recurrent: almost all the girls complain of being bothered by their clothes, of not being free in their movements, of having to watch their skirts or light-colored outfits that get dirty so easily. At about ten or twelve years of age, most little girls are really tomboys, that is, children who lack the license to be boys. Not only do they suffer from it as a privation and an injustice, but the regime they are condemned to is unhealthy. The exuberance of life is prohibited to them, their stunted vigor turns into nervousness; their goody-goody occupations do not exhaust their brimming energy; they are bored: out of boredom and to compensate for the inferiority from which they suffer, they indulge in morose and romantic daydreams; they begin to have a taste for these facile escapes and lose the sense of reality; they succumb to their emotions with a confused exaltation; since they cannot act, they talk, readily mixing up serious words with totally meaningless ones; abandoned, "misunderstood," they go looking for consolation in narcissistic sentiments: they look on themselves as heroines in novels, admire themselves, and complain; it is natural for them to become

keen on their appearance and to playact: these defects will grow during puberty. Their malaise expresses itself in impatience, tantrums, tears; they indulge in tears—an indulgence many women keep later—largely because they love to play the victim: it is both a protest against the harshness of their destiny and a way of endearing themselves to others. "Little girls love to cry so much that I have known them to cry in front of a mirror in order to double the pleasure," says Monsignor Dupanloup. Most of their dramas concern relations with their family; they try to break their bonds with their mothers: either they are hostile to them, or they continue to feel a profound need for protection; they would like to monopolize their fathers' love for themselves; they are jealous, touchy, demanding. They often make up stories; they imagine they are adopted, that their parents are not really theirs; they attribute a secret life to them; they dream about their sexual relations; they love to imagine that their father is misunderstood, unhappy, that he is not finding in his wife the ideal companion that his daughter would be for him; or, on the contrary, that the mother rightly finds him rough and brutal, that she is appalled by any physical relations with him. Fantasies, acting out, childish tragedies, false enthusiasms, strange things: the reason must be sought not in a mysterious feminine soul but in the child's situation.

It is a strange experience for an individual recognizing himself as subject, autonomy, and transcendence, as an absolute, to discover inferiority—as a given essence—in his self: it is a strange experience for one who posits himself for himself as One to be revealed to himself as alterity. That is what happens to the little girl when, learning about the world, she grasps herself as a woman in it. The sphere she belongs to is closed everywhere, limited, dominated by the male universe: as high as she climbs, as far as she dares go, there will always be a ceiling over her head, walls that block her path. Man's gods are in such a faraway heaven that in truth, for him, there are no gods: the little girl lives among gods with a human face.

This is not a unique situation. American blacks, partially integrated into a civilization that nevertheless considers them an inferior caste, live it; what Bigger Thomas experiences with so much bitterness at the dawn of his life is this definitive inferiority; this cursed alterity inscribed in the color of his skin: he watches planes pass and knows that because he is black the sky is out of bounds for him.<sup>33</sup> Because she is woman, the girl knows that the sea and the poles, a thousand adventures, a thousand joys, are forbidden to her: she is born on the wrong side. The great difference is that the blacks

32. There is an exception, for example, in a Swiss school where boys and girls participating in the same coeducation, in privileged conditions of comfort and freedom, all declared themselves satisfied; but such circumstances are exceptional. Obviously, the girls could be as happy as the boys, but in present society the fact is that they are not.

33. Richard Wright, *Native Son*.

endure their lot in revolt—no privilege compensates for its severity—while for the woman her complicity is invited. Earlier I recalled that in addition to the authentic claim of the subject who claims sovereign freedom, there is an inauthentic desire for renunciation and escape in the existing;<sup>34</sup> these are the delights of passivity that parents and educators, books and myths, women and men dangle before the little girl's eyes; in early childhood she is already taught to taste them; temptation becomes more and more insidious; and she yields to it even more fully as the thrust of her transcendence comes up against harsher and harsher resistance. But in accepting her passivity, she also accepts without resistance enduring a destiny that is going to be imposed on her from the exterior, and this fatality frightens her. Whether ambitious, scatterbrained, or shy, the young boy leaps toward an open future; he will be a sailor or an engineer, he will stay in the fields or will leave for the city, he will see the world, he will become rich; he feels free faced with a future where unexpected opportunities await him. The girl will be wife, mother, grandmother; she will take care of her house exactly as her mother does, she will take care of her children as she was taken care of: she is twelve years old, and her story is already written in the heavens; she will discover it day after day without shaping it; she is curious but frightened when she thinks about this life whose every step is planned in advance and toward which each day irrevocably moves her.

This is why the little girl, even more so than her brothers, is preoccupied with sexual mysteries; of course boys are interested as well, just as passionately; but in their future, their role of husband and father is not what concerns them the most; marriage and motherhood put in question the little girl's whole destiny; and as soon as she begins to perceive their secrets, her body seems odiously threatened to her. The magic of motherhood has faded: whether she has been informed early or not, she knows, in a more or less coherent manner, that a baby does not appear by chance in the mother's belly and does not come out at the wave of a magic wand; she questions herself anxiously. Often it seems not extraordinary at all but rather horrible that a parasitic body should proliferate inside her body; the idea of this monstrous swelling frightens her. And how will the baby get out? Even if she was never told about the cries and suffering of childbirth, she has overheard things, she has read the words in the Bible: "In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children"; she has the presentiment of tortures she cannot even imagine; she invents strange operations around her navel; she

is no less reassured if she supposes that the fetus will be expelled by her anus: little girls have been seen to have nervous constipation attacks when they thought they had discovered the birthing process. Accurate explanations will not bring much relief: images of swelling, tearing, and hemorrhaging will haunt her. The more imaginative she is, the more sensitive the little girl will be to these visions; but no girl could look at them without shuddering. Collette relates how her mother found her in a faint after reading Zola's description of a birth:

[The author depicted the birth] with a rough-and-ready, crude wealth of detail, an anatomical precision, and a lingering over colours, postures and cries, in which I recognized none of the tranquil, knowing experience on which I as a country girl could draw. I felt credulous, startled and vulnerable in my nascent femininity . . . Other words, right in front of my eyes, depicted flesh splitting open, excrement and sullied blood . . . The lawn rose to welcome me . . . like one of those little hares that poachers sometimes brought, freshly killed, into the kitchen.\*

The reassurance offered by grown-ups leaves the child worried; growing up, she learns not to trust the word of adults; often it is on the very mysteries of her conception that she has caught them in lies; and she also knows that they consider the most frightening things normal; if she has ever experienced a violent physical shock—tonsils removed, tooth pulled, whitlow lanced—she will project the remembered anxiety onto childbirth.

The physical nature of pregnancy and childbirth suggests as well that "something physical" takes place between the spouses. The often-encountered word "blood" in expressions like "same-blood children," "pure blood," and "mixed blood" sometimes orients the childish imagination; it is supposed that marriage is accompanied by some solemn transfusion. But more often the "physical thing" seems to be linked to the urinary and excremental systems; in particular, children think that the man urinates into the woman. This sexual operation is thought of as *dirty*. This is what overwhelms the child for whom "dirty" things have been rife with the strictest taboos: How, then, can it be that they are integrated into adults' lives? The child is first of all protected from scandal by the very absurdity he discovers: he finds there is no sense to what he hears around him, what

34. See Introduction to Volume I.

\* *Claudine's House*.—TRANS.



he reads, what he writes; everything seems unreal to him. In Carson McCullers's charming book *The Member of the Wedding*, the young heroine surprises two neighbors in bed nude; the very anomaly of the story keeps her from giving it too much importance:

It was a summer Sunday and the hall door of the Marlowes' room was open. She could see only a portion of the room, part of the dresser and only the footpiece of the bed with Mrs. Marlowe's corset on it. But there was a sound in the quiet room she could not place, and when she stepped over the threshold she was startled by a sigh that, after a single glance, sent her running to the kitchen, crying: Mr. Marlowe is having a fit! Berenice had hurried through the hall, but when she looked into the front room, she merely bunched her lips and banged the door. . . . Frankie had tried to question Berenice and find out what was the matter. But Berenice had only said that they were common people and added that with a certain party in the house they ought at least to know enough to shut a door. Though Frankie knew she was the certain party, still she did not understand. What kind of a fit was it? she asked. But Berenice would only answer: Baby, just a common fit. And Frankie knew from the voice's tones that there was more to it than she was told. Later she only remembered the Marlowes as common people.

When children are warned against strangers, when a sexual incident is described to them, it is often explained in terms of sickness, mania, or madness; it is a convenient explanation; the little girl fondled by her neighbor at the cinema or the girl who sees a man expose himself thinks that she is dealing with a crazy man; of course, encountering madness is unpleasant: an epileptic attack, hysteria, or a violent quarrel upsets the adult world order, and the child who witnesses it feels in danger; but after all, just as there are homeless, beggars, and injured people with hideous sores in humanitarian society, there can also be some abnormal ones without its base disintegrating. It is when parents, friends, and teachers are suspected of celebrating black masses that the child really becomes afraid.

When I was first told about sexual relations between man and woman, I declared that such things were impossible since my parents would have had to do likewise, and I thought too highly of them to believe it. I said that it was much too disgusting for me ever to do it.

Unfortunately, I was to be disabused shortly after when I heard what my parents were doing . . . that was a fearful moment; I hid my face under the bedcovers, stopped my ears, and wished I were a thousand miles from there.<sup>35</sup>

How to go from the image of dressed and dignified people, these people who teach decency, reserve, and reason, to that of naked beasts confronting each other? Here is a contradiction that shakes their pedestal, darkens the sky. Often the child stubbornly refuses the odious revelation. "My parents don't do that," he declares. Or he tries to give coitus a decent image. "When you want a child," said a little girl, "you go to the doctor; you undress, you cover your eyes, because you mustn't watch; the doctor ties the parents together and helps them so that it works right"; she had changed the act of love into a surgical operation, rather unpleasant at that, but as honorable as going to the dentist. But despite denial and escape, embarrassment and doubt creep into the child's heart; a phenomenon as painful as weaning occurs: it is no longer separating the child from the maternal flesh, but the protective universe that surrounds him falls apart; he finds himself without a roof over his head, abandoned, absolutely alone before a future as dark as night. What adds to the little girl's anxiety is that she cannot discern the exact shape of the equivocal curse that weighs on her. The information she gets is inconsistent, books are contradictory; even technical explanations do not dissipate the heavy shadow; a hundred questions arise: Is the sexual act painful? Or delicious? How long does it last? Five minutes or all night? Sometimes you read that a woman became a mother with one embrace, and sometimes you remain sterile after hours of sexual activity. Do people "do that" every day? Or rarely? The child tries to learn more by reading the Bible, consulting dictionaries, asking friends, and he gropes in darkness and disgust. An interesting document on this point is the study made by Dr. Liepmann; here are a few responses given to him by young girls about their sexual initiation:

I continued to stray among my nebulous and twisted ideas. No one broached the subject, neither my mother nor my schoolteacher; no book treated the subject fully. Little by little a sort of perilous and ugly mystery was woven around the act, which at first had seemed so natural to me. The older girls of twelve used crude jokes to bridge

<sup>35</sup> Cited by Dr. W. Liepmann, *Youth and Sexuality*.

the gap between themselves and our classmates. All that was still so vague and disgusting; we argued about where the baby was formed, if perhaps the thing only took place once for the man since marriage was the occasion for so much fuss. My period at fifteen was another new surprise. It was my turn to be caught up, in a way, in the round.

... Sexual initiation! An expression never to be mentioned in our parents' house! . . . I searched in books, but I agonized and wore myself out looking for the road to follow . . . I went to a boy's school: for my schoolteacher the question did not even seem to exist . . . Horlam's work, *Little Boy and Little Girl*, finally brought me the truth. My tense state and unbearable overexcitement disappeared, although I was very unhappy and took a long time to recognize and understand that eroticism and sexuality alone constitute real love.

Stages of my initiation: (1) First questions and a few vague notions (totally unsatisfactory). From three and a half to eleven years old . . . No answers to the questions I had in the following years. When I was seven, right there feeding my rabbit, I suddenly saw little naked ones underneath her . . . My mother told me that in animals and people little ones grow in their mother's belly and come out through the loins. This birth through the loins seemed unreason-able to me . . . a nursemaid told me about pregnancy, birth, and menstruation . . . Finally, my father replied to my last question about his true function with obscure stories about pollen and pistil. (2) Some attempts at personal experimentation (eleven to thirteen years old). I dug out an encyclopedia and a medical book . . . It was only theoretical information in strange gigantic words (3) Testing of acquired knowledge (thirteen to twenty): (a) in daily life, (b) in scientific works.

At eight, I often played with a boy my age. One day we broached the subject. I already knew, because my mother had already told me, that a woman has many eggs inside her . . . and that a child was born from one of these eggs whenever the mother strongly desired it . . . Giving this same answer to my friend, I received this reply: "You are completely stupid! When our butcher and his wife want a baby, they go to bed and do dirty things." I was indignant . . . We had then (around twelve and a half) a maid who told me all sorts of scandalous tales. I never said a word to Mama, as I was ashamed; but

I asked her if sitting on a man's knees could give you a baby. She explained everything as best she could.

At school I learned where babies emerged, and I had the feeling that it was something horrible. But how did they come into the world? We both formed a rather monstrous idea about the thing, especially since one winter morning on the way to school together in the darkness we met a certain man who showed us his sexual parts and asked us, "Don't they seem good enough to eat?" Our disgust was inconceivable, and we were literally nauseated. Until I was twenty-one, I thought babies were born through the navel.

A little girl took me aside and asked me: "Do you know where babies come from?" Finally she decided to speak out: "Goodness! How foolish you are! Kids come out of women's stomachs, and for them to be born, women have to do completely disgusting things with men!" Then she went into details about how disgusting things had become totally transformed, absolutely unable to believe that such things could be possible. We slept in the same room as our parents . . . One night later I heard take place what I had thought was impossible, and, yes, I was ashamed, I was ashamed of my parents. All of this made of me another being. I went through horrible moral suffering. I considered myself a deeply depraved creature because I was now aware of these things.

It should be said that even coherent instruction would not resolve the problem; in spite of the best will of parents and teachers, the sexual experience could not be put into words and concepts; it could only be understood by living it; all analysis, however serious, will have a comic side and will fail to deliver the truth. When, from the poetic loves of flowers to the nuptials of fish, by way of the chick, the cat, or the kid, one reaches the human species, the mystery of conception can be theoretically elucidated: that of voluptuousness and sexual love remains total. How would one explain the pleasure of a caress or a kiss to a dispassionate child? Kisses are given and received in a family way, sometimes even on the lips: Why do these mucous exchanges in certain encounters provoke dizziness? It is like describing colors to the blind. As long as there is no intuition of the excitement and desire that give the sexual function its meaning and unity, the different elements seem shocking and monstrous. In particular, the little girl is revolted when she understands that she is virgin and sealed, and that to change into a woman a man's sex must penetrate her. Since exhibitionism is a widespread