

"Desire Comments"

Evelyn Reilly

Commentaires du désir

Dans "Commentaires du désir," Evelyn Reilly commence d'abord par citer divers "grands hommes" du passé au sujet des femmes ou de la féminité: "il a très peur qu'elle souffre d'un désir artistique," "aucune oeuvre dépourvue d'un caractère agressif ne peut être un chef-d'oeuvre," "le bonheur que les hommes connaissent lorsqu'une vraie femme les écoute." Par la suite, elle recompose, réécrit, et répond à ces remarques. Dans "Consentement" (Consent), elle suggère que la femme n'est probablement pas une vraie femme si l'homme n'est pas heureux de l'écouter qu'elle fait. Le désir d'écrire, le désir artistique est là et la femme doit composer, construire elle-même son écriture. Reilly redécoupe et recolle à sa manière l'être d'une femme artiste.

i. Archive

a man must produce a woman in full beauty out of the shell¹
a woman all right a poem I mean a woman bringing her to light²
always on the firm ground of life and attached only to that³
building her up in the warm agreeable made of pure consents⁴
he has a respect for women and couldn't say anything really obscene
however depraved he might think them⁵
he is very much afraid that she suffers from a thwarted artistic desire but
she will get over it⁶
it's a woman even if it's a mathematical formula for relativity⁷
no fixed idea about God no abstractions⁸
no work without an aggressive character can be a masterpiece⁹
the capacity to absorb all that is best in what a man shows of himself¹⁰
the clever comments elaborated in their own little mental workshop¹¹
the happiness men know when women listen to them¹²
the modesty which in outward appearance ought never to desert them¹³

ii. Arrangement

Even if it's a mathematical formula,
bringing her to light can be a masterpiece,

building the clever comments she suffers from,
about God, relativity, anything really,

adding artistic desire
without an aggressive character,

putting her up in the little workshop,
absorbing what a man shows of himself,

elaborating her out of the shell men know
when true women listen only to them.

iii. Strophes

*that you should be moving here, among us, grief-filled
you (a woman a poem) full of sources and night
the happiness when you listen however depraved
a shade-giving tree of sleep for the restless
always on the firm ground of life and attached only to that
the breaking away of childhood left you intact
built up in the agreeable made of pure consents
as if completed in a miracle, all at once
a man must produce a woman in full beauty out of the shell
like bread on the alter before it is changed¹⁴*

iv. Anything That She Suffers Absorbs Artistic Desire

Leaking
remnant
desire,

stumbling
on the heels
of earlier forms,

she mumbles charms,
 flashes a few
 sad baubles.

If we could just follow after,
 disguising her
 puddled footprints.

v. Antimemoir

And there was Cynthia, that
 Vivacious girl, who worked
 For Capezio's (they made shoes
 For ballet dancers) and lived
 In Charles Street in the Village
 Announcing with embarrassment
 That she was knocked up and
 Most likely it was mine. Hardly
 A case for my family doctor.
 Bill thought it was funny. He
 Found an old Italian woman in
 Ho-Ho Kus who took care of the
 Matter for \$200. Luckily she
 Knew her stuff; there were no
 Complications. Cynthia settled
 Down and married a nice young
 Professor at CCNY.¹⁵

pure consents
 however depraved
 attached only
 to artistic
 desire
 afraid
 no abstract
 aggressive character
 a formula
 clever
 fixed
 on the pure ground
 of life
 a really
 obscene
 little workshop
 all right

vi. Triad

(Woman) I cannot say
that I have gone to hell (I mean a poem)
for your love (a woman a poem)

but often

found (a poem I mean a woman I mean) myself there
in your (a woman a poem) pursuit.¹⁶

vii. No Work Without an Aggressive Character Can Be a Masterpiece

To sing the love of danger —

shoving the Coke
into its bucket of ice

The punch and the slap —

making
the device

A violent attack on unknown forces —

mastering
shouldering

The world's only hygiene —

the gaudy spokes
the share wheel¹⁷

viii. Warm

Clambering about her own little mental workshop and squelching her capacity to absorb all that is best in a man, she was very much afraid that she suffered from an artistic desire. Calamity. And at the far edge

of child-bearing age. Having been a drudge well nigh on twenty years already, she paused, tongs upraised, as the smithy frankly belched. Where was that mother now when she could really be of use? Oh well. She rarely had a second to herself, so it was the moment to gather or not her full forces. Obscenely, she fanned the flames, and, however depraved, began forging one after another of the peculiar figures.

ix. Figure

easily embarrassed and yet athletic
tomboy heterosexual mildly deprived

fond

a fount of good will and anger
the normal deformations of the girl

her aggressive character

her obscene modesty

x. Figure

in slant
thin through grass
her mossy gate
to keep
to herself
along with
radical skepticism
her dear mate
her shell beauty

xi. Figure

une curieuse petite personne a curious little person l'illusion
the illusion des gens qui pensent toujours of those who always think
que la famille est quelque chose dont on est proche that family is
something to which one is close l'illusion the illusion des gens
qui ont en quelque sorte of those who have in certain ways stylisé
l'amour stylized love et après cela ils y ont cru and then having
believed in it sont obligés a le vivre are obliged to live it
tandis que whereas ils l'auraient vécu tout autrement they could have
lived entirely differently s'il n'y avait pas eu toute cette littérature
derrière eux if they didn't have all this literature behind them¹⁸

xii. The Happiness Women Give He Experienced
Building Them Up in the Warm Agreeable

You are near me. The night (happiness)
is rectilinear and light (women)
in the new lipstick
on your (give) mouth and on the colored
flowers. The (experienced) irises are blue.
As far as I look we are (building) across.
You are sleeping
and day starts its (up) lipstick.
Where (warm) do we go from here?
Blue (agreeable) irises.¹⁹

xiii. Consent

It seemed it was his despair vs. her despair. The long heat spell didn't help. It was hard to sleep well, hard to work at anything. Now he was taking longer to return than normal. This worried her, because she had angered him by trying to make him feel better about something he felt it was important to feel bad about. She could tell this made him feel lonely and betrayed. Although for the most part they had been happy.

xiv. Redistribution

respect afraid depraved fixed suffers desire
 comments little bringing abstractions work absorb
 aggressive idea masterpiece mathematical obscene
 best capacity formula happiness mental consents
 appearance workshop outward life clever full
 firm man woman shows shell beauty mean
 consent light modesty ground relativity attached
 only warm agreeable pure character true listen

xv. Configuration

respect of afraid the depraved fixed suffers
 desire comments? oh little bringing
 abstractions that work that absorb aggression
 an obscene idea of masterpiece
 the best capacity the happiness of consent
 the formula of appearance the workshop of outward life
 clever full firm a woman a man
 show us shell beauty light modesty
 the ground with relativity attached
 warm impure (un>true

Sources:

1. William Carlos Williams, quoted in *Remembering William Carlos Williams*, by James Laughlin, New Directions Books, 1995.
2. Ibid.
3. From the letters of Vincent Van Gogh. *Dear Theo*, Doubleday & Co., 1969.
4. Williams, *ibid.* This quotation has been compressed somewhat. The original reads: "...building her up and not merely of stone or colours or silly words, but in the flesh, warm, agreeable, made of pure consents."

5. From *The Journal of Eugene Delacroix*, translated by Lucy Norton, Phaidon Press, 1995. The original reads in the first person: "I've a respect for women and I couldn't say anything really obscene to them. However depraved I may think them..."
6. Van Gogh, *ibid.* This quotation, in which Van Gogh is referring to his sister, has been compressed. The original reads: "I am very much afraid that she suffers from a thwarted artistic desire, but she is so full of vitality that she will get over it."
7. Williams, *ibid.*
8. Van Gogh, *ibid.*
9. From *The Manifesto of Futurism*, by F.T. Marinetti, translated by R.W. Flint and Arthur A. Cappelletti, printed in *Poems of the Millennium*, edited by Jerome Rothenburg and Pierre Joris, University of California Press, 1995.
10. From *War and Peace*, by Leo Tolstoy, translated by Rosemary Edmonds, Penguin Classics edition, 1968. The original reads: "the capacity to select and absorb all that is best in what a man shows of himself."
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. Delacroix, *ibid.*
14. Lines 1,2 (except for parenthetical words) 4, 6, 8 and 10, from Rilke's "Antistrophes," translated by Stephen Mitchell. *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, Vintage Books, 1982.
15. Left column from James Laughlin, *ibid.* "Bill" refers to William Carlos Williams.
16. Except for parenthetical words, from William Carlos Williams' "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower." *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems*, New Directions, 1962.
17. Lines 1, 4, 7 and 10 from F.T. Marinetti, *ibid.*
18. Excerpts from *Marguerite Yourcenar, L'Invention d'une Vie*, by Joysane Savigneau. Gallimard 1990. Translations are my own.
19. Except for parenthetical words, from Joseph Ceravolo's "Passion for the Sky." *The Green Lake Is Awake: Selected Poems by Joseph Ceravolo*, Coffee House Press, 1994.

Punctuation, line breaks, and capitalization have been altered in some of the source quotations.