



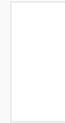
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How to Make a Woman at the Harvard Epworth Church every Fri. and Sat.

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By **Carol R. Sternhell**,

October 30, 1970

FLASHBACK (a true story about choice): Once upon a time, when I was six years old, there were two little girls, one of which was me, and two big dolls, one of which was beautiful. My sister and I were each supposed to choose one of the dolls, and I, of course, wanted the beautiful one, which had curly brown hair and rosy cheeks and a blue ruffled dress (and which was later named by my sister Patty Mary Barbara Sternhell). My sister, who was only two years old, didn't really understand what was happening, but when I reached out toward Patty Mary Barbara she reached out too, saying, "I want." I protested. My parents reasoned. "But darling, she's only a baby. But darling, you're a big girl. But darling, you don't care about a doll." I reconsidered. "Now, darling, which one do you want?" I chose-Cookie, with sunken eyes and stringy hair. Years later, asked by my sister why I had ever chosen that awful doll, I delivered a thoroughly convincing defense of her superiority.

(At the opening of the evening two men wheel in a plastic-wrapped dressmaker's model with chalk-white face, silvery breastplate and miniskirt. They twist her limbs into contortion upon contortion, her face into horrifying grimace upon grimace. Finally they are satisfied, saying, "This will sell.")

And in fact it will. "There are no other dresses," protests one of the men, later. And when one young woman cries of a pair of well-formed breasts suspended from a hanger, "I don't want it!", the mannequin (alive) answers firmly, "Everyone wants it. It fits all of us."

How to Make a Woman, I should explain, is the story of two women-Mary (Barbara Fleischmann) and Aili (Aili Singer)-who meet in a dress shop, relive their lives in several versions while attempting to choose the right dress (role), and end up, I guess, where a lot of us are now. Mary gives in, for a while at least, smiling and twisting as the men chant, "Pose, Smile. Change," again and again. Aili screams in despair.

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IN MANY WAYS, the play is a prose-poem, a multi-media Greek tragedy: the pantomime of lovemaking, pregnancy, childbirth, all in rhythm; the sitting home waiting, the pains of leaving, all in rhythm; the cries of anguish, synchronized. The new-born parents dealing with newborn child ("It's a girl!"-"Oh, shit."), the kid jumping about uncontrolled as the father shouts helplessly, "Do something!"

The philosophy here is decidedly not anti-male. The emphasis is on women, fucked up and fucked over, but the men.-Joseph Volpe (Wolf) and David Starr Klein (Hunter)-are choosing among equally meaningless roles. At one point when Aili, forced into the role of "Big Mama," urges her husband out of bed and out to work, he protests, "But I went to work yesterday." And when Mary's daddy cheerfully attempts to teach her a song-"Roll me over/ in the clover/ do it again!"-her mother grabs the child away in horror. Daddy tears his hair, crushed.

("When I speak of female liberation . . . I don't mean liberation from men," reads a quote on the "program" distributed by Caravan Theatre. "Men and women are mutually oppressed by a culture and heritage that mutilates the relationships possible between them.")

wonderful, but it isn't art: How to Make a Woman. I think, is. It's poetry.

Dialogue (Mary, wrapped in a white net birdcage, and her husband, Hunter, fighting his way in):
 "Don't touch me." "I'm your husband." "Why do you hunt, then?" "It's my thing."

Monologue (Hunter, after their first sexual experience, as Mary moans): "I'm sorry. But you'll get used to it. You'll learn to love it and like it as I do. Otherwise you'd be like the other objects, sitting around and gathering dust. . . . Well, I have to be going out now-have a nice day. Next time I'll kiss you more. . . . I'll always remember this first time we loved together."

Monologue (Mary, at home keeping the birdcage clean): "My husband is fulfilling himself. . . . It is important to be good and sweet . . . to dust the phone . . . to bring up his children, to change my name to his, to be another's. . . ."

I'M SO AFRAID. It would be so much easier simply to stop now, to choose and be done with it, to leave certain questions unanswered. Aili prods, "Keep going, Mary. Keep going until you know who you are." In the closet, the mannequin (Anne Barclay), an old woman now, with smile frozen, holds up a tattered veil. Frozen stiff with waiting. she holds forth the veil to the younger women; it is their turn to wait. And when He comes, she says, "strangle him with it." One solution.

Another solution. Those plastic breasts. It fits, after all, all of us, desire. Mary chooses, and grinds sexually, chanting, "Wow. Wow. Wow." "She's tight," they taunt Aili, who tries to refuse. "Very tight. And dry. Very, very dry." And when Aili shouts, "Isn't there something else?" the answer is simply, "No."

In a hip, egalitarian marriage, wife encourages husband in his work, then turns to hers, but he needs his resume typed, now. "Don't finish," chants the chorus. "You're not important. He's important." And when he decides (again) to move, disrupting (again) her work, she tries to tell him of a dream, in which she is left, naked, beside the frozen peas. "It's only a dream," he says. "Now pack."

"David," she says, "I'm not going."

"Then stay here and freeze."



murmur. "Pose, Smile, Change," and, "Bang, I'm a man." Aili screams for help.

I too need help.

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