

*** ALL THE PHILO LADIES ***

EFFRACTION English 2 : THE SECOND SEX (1949) de Simone de Beauvoir

ONE is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society ; It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine. Only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an Other. In so far as he exists in and for himself, the child would hardly be able to think of himself as sexually differentiated. In girls as in boys the body is first of all the radiation of a subjectivity, the instrument that makes possible the comprehension of the world : it is through the eyes, the hands, that children apprehend the universe, and not through the sexual parts. The dramas of birth and of weaning unfold after the same fashion for nurslings of both sexes ; these have the same interests and the same pleasures ; sucking is at first the source of their most agreeable sensations ; then they go through an anal phase in which they get their greatest satisfactions from the excretory functions, which they have in common. Their genital development is analogous ; they explore their bodies with the same curiosity and the same indifference ; from clitoris and penis they derive the same vague pleasure. As their sensibility comes to require an object, it is turned towards the mother : the soft, smooth, resilient feminine flesh is what arouses sexual desires, and these desires are prehensile ; the girl, like the boy, kisses, handles, and caresses her mother in an aggressive way ; they feel the same jealousy if a new child is born, and they show it in similar behaviour patterns : rage, sulkiness, urinary difficulties ; and they resort to the same coquettish tricks to gain the love of adults. Up to the age of twelve the little girl is as strong as her brothers, and she shows the same mental powers ; there is no field where she is debarred from engaging in rivalry with them. If, well before puberty and sometimes even from early infancy, she seems to us to be already sexually determined, this is not because mysterious instincts directly doom her to passivity, coquetry, maternity ; it is because the influence of others upon the child is a factor almost from the start, and thus she is indoctrinated with her vocation from her earliest years.