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English

Critical Appreciation Essay

The Dialect of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution

Chapter 7: The Culture of Romance

Shulamith Firestone, a central figure of radical feminism, is remembered for her most notable piece of work – *The Dialect of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*. This book was authored in the early 1970 and was published that year. Though the book is above fifty years old, its seventh chapter, *The Culture of Romance*, holds many points that are still valid today, if not more valid with the current teenagers and children. This chapter raises many questionable and thought-provoking ideas, that are not openly seen in major feminist movements these days. Ideas like “men look at women as only things whose resistance to entrance must be overcome”, the characteristic distinguishable for men to see in women is only sexually, treating women more like objects, the ideal beauty doesn’t exist – women can only strive to achieve it, yet never can (what good is an ideal if it exists?) and with the social media as it is, all we see is a perfect snapshot of another person, not the full spectrum of them. Though the last point is not directly expressed to portray social media, it is clearly a reference to something they did not have in the 1970s.

“Eroticism. A prime component of romanticism is eroticism.” As the author states without eroticism, there would not be much left of romanticism. Romanticism is only ideal when both parties are interested in the experience and not just the momentarily feeling. With the current state of romanticism, this is more of a man’s “needs” projecting onto a woman, being the only “love” object to a heterosexual male. Being so sexually dependant has made women regard themselves as erotic. Firestone then goes on to write that the only exception to this eroticism is a man’s behaviour to his children and family. A man now must express his emotions to his children and wife, cutting him off sexually to the rest of the world – hence, the creation of a structured marriage. We live in a patriarchal society; this is the reason for why a man is the head of a family and why his “needs” are the ones to satisfy. The author hints that if this were not the case, women wouldn’t be seen as objects for men to express themselves sexually.

The second point made by the author is that men see women as objects more than people of the same species. She goes on to state the worst part of this is that women do not know that they are this undistinguishable apart from the way men see them sexually. Man also has an ideal woman, “The One”, someone that associates closely with himself, “but in general cannot tell the difference between chicks. And he likes it that way”. Women may not see this generalisation until they get into a quarrel with their partner, when a man simply cared for her only for her legs or bust, not really appreciating her for the person she is, simply for the things she brought him. But to a man, he can find this anywhere else if need be. This encourages men to see women as objects or “dolls”, “differentiated only by superficial attributes”. Since women seem to be looked at only in this way, men seem to be irreplaceable to a woman. The second points of this is that man seems to be searching for “The One”, an ideal woman that is a perfect match for him. But satisfaction is one thing that doesn’t seem to exist with men, as he can easily replace his mistress for someone different. This leads to the last point, an ideal beauty that is never achievable.

Social media is a catalyst for romance. The perfect picture shows only one shade of a person. A person soon loses themselves in the multi layered number of images and farces uploaded and made to make them seem like a better person. A man sees an ideal woman online, but when the eventually decide to meet offline, he doesn't see the ideal woman he saw in the pictures, but instead a regular woman, someone not ideal. Because of this, women are trying to become the ideal, trying to "squeeze into the glass slipper" to be the best. In this process they try to change what nature itself has given them, forcing them into beauty programs and diets all for the sake of their social influence and integrity. Due to this, women "become more and more look-alike", but should also have an individuality. This is simply not possible, as not everyone can be individual yet attain the ideal standard. "They look alike, they think alike, and even worse, they are so stupid to believe they are not alike." 'Ugly' women are soon becoming extinct, as more and more women follow the trend to become more similar.

"And eroticism becomes erotomania". As more public displays feature "breasts, legs, shoulders, thighs", men walk in a state of excitement wherever they go. With this sexual excitement it is hard to focus on anything else, as it is blasted everywhere. "Ordinary means of arousal have lost all effect", as clothing seems to become more minimal by the day, making women closer to the sexual objects men think them to be. This is not an attack on beauty itself, but the means that women are willing to go to achieve an impossible task. Nature is meant to grow and decay and change. But a sex object cannot and will not, it is purely artificial.