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"The Lovely Evil"

The Pregame Sex Myth and the Denigration of Women

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The notion that sex before a contest impedes male athletic performance has exercised a remarkably strong hold over the popular imagination and has secured a hallowed place within the lore of the sporting fraternity. The purpose of this article is to deconstruct the pregame sex myth, revealing that the various ontological layers by which the myth is constituted relate to men's deepest fears of physical and personal enervation. Grounded in an interdisciplinary approach, the article argues that the pregame sex myth represents a formidable form of antifeminine thinking derived from masculine insecurities that resonate across time and that are easily translated into denigrating actions and attitudes toward women.

In the preface to *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes (1957) describes his impatience with what he calls the "falsely obvious." "I resented seeing Nature and History confused at every turn," he writes, "and I wanted to track down, in the decorative display of *what-goes-without-saying*, the ideological abuse which in my view is hidden there" (p. 11). Although Barthes is primarily concerned with the contemporary mass media, I think something of this attitude should govern our approach to the topic I wish to discuss here, namely, the pregame sex myth, the notion that sex before a game is deleterious to male athletic performance.

Although to contemporary observers, the pregame sex myth may appear both passé and inconsequential, in fact, it continues to exercise a remarkably persistent hold over the popular imagination and maintains for itself a hallowed place within the subculture of the sporting fraternity (House, 1989; Messner, 1994; Messner & Sabo, 1994; Older, 1985; Sabo, 1994a; Sabo & Pane-

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pinto, 1990; Sabo & Runfola, 1980; Telander, 1989). The outcomes of major sporting events have been attributed to the debilitating effects of pregame sex; according to Walker and Burton (1982), for example, the Peruvian soccer team lost to Poland in the 1982 World Cup because of the sexual escapades of team members on the night before the game. Athletes, including boxers (e.g., Ali & Durham, 1976), baseball players (e.g., House, 1989), basketball players (e.g., Swift, 1991), runners (e.g., Longman, 1996), football players (e.g., Sabo & Panepinto, 1990), and hockey players (e.g., Mirkin & Hoffman, 1978) have all testified that sex before the contest saps their strength and undermines their resolve. Muhammad Ali (Ali & Durham, 1976), recounts that he "listened with rapt attention to the old pros who testified on the evils of sex" (p. 106), and Sabo and Panepinto's (1990) research on football players shows how coaches enforce homosociality at the expense of involvement with girls, which is said to "promote distraction, siphon energy, and erode team loyalty" (p. 120). Professional soccer players in England are enjoined from participating in sex before a match on the basis of the "standard regulation" of "nothing after Wednesday if you're playing on Saturday" (Douglas, 1973, p. 116). Women are still routinely barred from NFL and NCAA college football training camps, and coaches at all levels warn men against the dangers of sex (Sabo & Panepinto, 1990; Telander, 1989): "Stay away from the booze and split-tails," players are warned (Messner, 1994, p. 21). In short, women are still commonly construed as one of the primary ingredients in a seductive, sybaritic lifestyle that undermines male athletic performance at the same time as it poses a serious challenge to the primacy of the athletic endeavor in the lives of men.

But the pregame sex myth is built on more than matters of fatigue or distraction. In the end, encoded in the pregame sex myth is a tenacious and debilitating form of patriarchy, one that rationalizes and justifies a misogynist ideology that contributes to the current culture of violence and predation against women. After all, whereas sex before a contest may well be considered taboo, sex after a contest is often viewed as an appropriate form of catharsis, even an entitlement (Nelson, 1994). Nowhere is violence more glorified than in the world of sport, and pregame abstinence coupled with postgame license fosters homeopathic and misogynist attitudes that ultimately lead to female degra-

dation and disempowerment (Benedict, 1997; Curry, 1991; Nelson, 1994).

The purpose of this article is to deconstruct the pregame sex myth, in the process revealing the various ontological layers by which the myth is composed. In so doing, I will borrow most heavily from literature, especially sport literature, but I will also draw on a broad range of historical and mythological data and argue that the pregame sex myth represents a formidable and persistent form of antifeminine thinking derived from masculine ambivalences and insecurities that resonate across time and that are easily and commonly translated into denigrating actions and attitudes toward women. In the end, I will also try to show that within the pregame sex myth, recurrent individual and ideological deprecations of the feminine are phrased in the unimpeachable language of everyday common sense and shrouded in the unexamined authenticity of taken-for-granted practices and attitudes.

"THE LOVELY EVIL"

The notion that sex weakens a man emerges in part from the actual and accurate observation that the process of detumescence that follows sexual intercourse invariably leaves a man feeling weak and tired. The temporary price for love making is beautifully portrayed in Sandro Botticelli's *Venus and Mars* (see Figure 1), a classic representation of what Lightbown (1989) calls "love's power to subdue the harsh masculine nature" (p. 164). His lips "softly parted in the deep sleep that follows amorous dalliance" (pp. 164-165), Mars' post-coital lassitude clearly allows the satyrs to take full advantage of his reduced abilities. He responds to the sound of neither the conch shell by his ear nor the wasps buzzing in and out of the hollow bough in the tree trunk.

But the enervating properties of sex were taken to the extreme under the auspices of the repressive sexual mores that characterized Victorian England.¹ Numerous commentators (cf. Macdonald, 1981) railed against the dangers of sex, suggesting that intercourse drains a man not only physically but even intellectually. As Dr. Sylvannus Stall (1897) warned, "If the thought is permitted to center upon the sexual relation the blood will be diverted from the brain and the muscles and the entire man will suffer because of the



Figure 1: Sandro Botticelli's "Mars, Venus and Satyrs" (c. 1483)
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depletion and drain which comes as an inevitable result" (p. 5).² Even women supported the taboo against excessive sexual activity. Arguing that sexual orgasm for the man was more debilitating than a "whole day's work," Mrs. Elizabeth Osgood Goodrich Willard (1867) believed that

It is the constant abuse of the sexual organs, producing constant failures and the most loathsome diseases; it is the ridiculous force of a strong man putting forth all the nervous energy of his system, till he is perfectly prostrated by the effort, without one worthy motive, purpose or end; it is this which has so disgraced the act of impregnation. . . . We must stop this waste through the sexual organs, if we would have health and strength of body. (pp. 306-308)³

But the historical forerunner to the stereotypical model of the contemporary athlete impaired by sexual proclivities is Enkidu, the legendary rival of Gilgamesh in one of the great classics of Mesopotamian literature, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Pritchard, 1958). Seeking to find ways to disable his adversary—"the barbarous fellow from the depths of the steppe" (line 7, p. 44)—Gilgamesh dispatches a temple harlot to ensnare his unwary opponent:

The prostitute untied her loin cloth and opened her legs, and he took possession of her comeliness:
She used no restraint but accepted his ardor,
She put aside her robe and he lay upon her.
She used on him, the savage, a woman's wiles,
His passion responded to her.

For six days and seven nights Enkidu approached and
 Coupled with the prostitute.
 After he was sated with her charms,
 He set his face toward his game.
 But when the gazelles saw him, Enkidu, they ran away;
 The game of the steppe fled from his presence.
 Enkidu tried to hasten after them, but his body was
 As it were bound.
 His knees failed him who tried to run after his game.
 Enkidu had become weak, his speed was not as before.
 (lines 16-28, p. 44)

Although the two rivals ultimately become friends, the legend clearly suggests that women are specifically designed to entrap men, to weaken them, and to prevent them from reaching their full and true potential. In this precursor of a stereotypical Eve or Delilah, women are portrayed as a source of delight as well as a delusion, a matter of conceit as well as deceit.

Even Homer in the *Hymn to Aphrodite* (Shelmerdine, 1995) depicts men as hapless victims in the face of their sexual longings. Having succumbed to the beautiful Aphrodite, Anchises, her mortal lover, begs her thus:

The first minute I saw you with my eyes, goddess,
 I knew you were a god. But you did not tell the truth.
 By Zeus who bears the aegis I beg you,
 do not let me live without strength among men
 but have pity, since the man is not strong
 who sleeps with immortal goddess. (p. 135, lines 185-190)

But there is more to the pleas of Anchises or the tribulations of Enkidu than a temporary loss of vigor and energy; the fear of sexual encounter is expressed as a fear of emasculation.⁴ The feminization of society as well as the feminization of the individual athlete has long been a source of male insecurity and anxiety (cf. Dubbert, 1979). From a masculinist perspective, to become effeminate, or to be exploited and ruled by a woman, is clearly far worse than to die honorably in battle or to be humiliated by a hated enemy on the playing field—which is presumably one of the reasons why male athletes are often taunted as “pussy whipped” (Messner, 1994), why coaches ridicule athletes as “pussies” or “limp

wrists" (Sabo & Panepinto, 1990), and why male homosexual athletes fear "coming out" (Pronger, 1990).

But perhaps Giovanni Boccassio (as cited in Figes, 1970) provides the quintessential example of the effeminized male in a story about Hercules. Seeking revenge for the death of her father, King Erytus, at the hands of her lover, Hercules, Iole uses "caresses" and "artful wantonness" to degrade "that powerful man" (p. 46). Having persuaded Hercules to put aside the symbols of his strength, including the skin of the Nemean lion, the poplar wreath, and his quiver and arrows, she subjects him to further feminization.

First she asked him to adorn the fingers of his hands with rings, anoint his head with Cyprian unguents, comb his shaggy hair, anoint his rough beard with nard, and adorn himself with girlish garlands and the Naeonian headdress. Then she made him dress in dainty purple clothes, believing that she, a young woman armed with her deceit, had performed a greater deed by weakening with luxury a robust man, than if she had killed him with steel and poison. Certainly, thinking that she had not sufficiently satisfied her wrath, she brought that man, who had given himself up to luxury, to such a pass that he would sit like a woman among other common women and tell the story of his labors. Taking the distaff, he would spin wool, and his fingers, which had been hard enough to kill serpents when he was still a baby, now at a vigorous age, in fact his prime, were being softened by spinning wool. (pp. 46-47)

Hercules with a woman's distaff suggests the ultimate in humiliation for the epitome of masculine strength.

Likewise, and no doubt expressing the feelings of many a male athlete, Milton's Samson proclaims self-loathing and feels rightly punished for having allowed himself to be ruled by a woman (Broadbent & Hodge, 1977).

But foul effeminacy held me yoked
Her bond-slave; O indignity, O blot
To honour and religion! Servile mind
Rewarded well with servile punishment!
The base degree to which I now am fallen,
These rags, this grinding, is not yet so base
As was my former servitude, ignoble,
Unmanly, ignominious, infamous,

True slavery, and that blindness worse than this,
That saw not how degenerately I served.

(*Samson Agonistes*, pp. 169-170, lines 410-419)

Nowhere are male insecurities about sexual performance and the fear of effeminization expressed more blatantly than in the ritualized behavior of male English rugby union players. As Sheard and Dunning (1973) have shown, obscene songs and poems mock, vilify, and defile women by symbolically expressing masculinity "in a virulent form, men's fear of women, and their simultaneous dependency on them" (p. 14). Encoded in well-known ballads, such as "Eskimo Nell" and the "Engineer's Hymn,"⁵ are sexual scripts of eroticism and objectification that embody hostile, brutal, and yet at the same time, fearful attitudes toward women and sexual intercourse. One of the prime purposes of these songs is to render the perceived threat of women's power and sexuality symbolically harmless; sadomasochistic lyrics transfer male fears of sexual inadequacy into murderous sexual aggression and portray women as having voracious and unquenchable sexual appetites (Nelson, 1994).

Within the classic Freudian construction, of course, women were commonly portrayed as sexually insatiable⁶, an edifice upon which masculine supremacy was partly constructed. Whereas male power and potency, including sexuality, were construed as fixed and finite, women were thought to be all sexual appetite. Born of feelings of inferiority about her lack of external genitalia, a woman was likely to emasculate a man by sucking him dry, even castrating him with her vagina dentata. From a strictly psychological point of view, the Freudian notion of "penis envy" always overshadowed the Jungian concept of the "great mother," with the result that the narcissistic rejection of the woman by the man—a rejection infused with more than its fair share of fear, disdain, and loathing—caused numerous psychologists and sociologists to interpret female inferiority on the basis of Freudian principles (e.g., Flugel, 1945; Stephens, 1953; Taylor, 1954; Unwin, 1933, 1934).⁷ Influenced by both Freud and Marx, Hays (1964), for example, argued that male attitudes toward women were strongly influenced by profound anxieties, which were almost universal, and that men tended to project their sexual fears and anxieties into denigrating attitudes toward women, insisting that

women were evil, inferior, and valueless. Therefore, women should be subjugated to men, kept in their place, and assigned unequal roles that neutralized their influence in the public domain of society. Emergent from such convictions are clearly traditions and stereotypes that are easily used to ensure male domination over women. Even those who rejected Freud's theory of the "castration complex"—"the ego-soothing canard of female 'penis envy,'" as Davis (1971, p. 150) puts it—nonetheless recognized that masculine hegemony and female denigration were firmly grounded in feelings of male sexual inadequacy and envy. "Behind man's insistence on masculine superiority," wrote Erikson, "there is an age-old envy of women" (as cited in Evans, 1967, p. 44). And Horney (1967) argued that the perception of "female inferiority had its origin in an unconscious male tendency to envy women" and that "behind this conviction of female inferiority lies a very powerful . . . impulse . . . to deprecate women" (p. 62).⁸

Within the world of sport, the formalization of female inferiority on the basis of male sexual angst is well expressed by Messner and Sabo (1994a), who argue that young male athletes' ragged insecurity about their masculinity and sexuality coupled with the complex dynamic of competitive sparring for status and recognition within the athletic subculture itself has all too often been manifest in male athletes learning to treat women as objects of sexual conquest and hence subject to exploitation, denigration, and self-indulgent abuse. In locker room conversations, love and sex are seldom allowed to mix, the one tempered by tenderness and commitment and the other by public proclamations of conquest and debasement (Curry, 1991). In the athletic subculture, male athletic posturing often serves as a cover for a more self-destructive sexual schizophrenia; as Sabo (1994b) puts it, "There was a terrible split between our inner needs and outer appearances, between our desire for love from women and our feigned indifference to it" (p. 38). Something of this male ambivalence toward women is well expressed by Donnie "Cake" McClure, the narrator in Frank Deford's novel, *Everybody's All-American* (1981):

To star athletes, women are mere booty. . . . Very few of them like women, enjoy their company. Women intrude upon athletes. Teams are company. Teams are comfort. Of course, athletes do like

to screw women, and they do that left and right, but that is something else again. (p. 21)

A similar self-destructive, sexual ambivalence is evoked even more bluntly by Phil Romano, the aging power forward in Jason Miller's play *That Championship Season* (1972), when he admits: "You know the only woman I ever loved . . . my mother, fuck the psychiatrists . . . my mother is the only woman I ever knew. The rest are all cunts" (p. 127).

The almost universal fear of women's sexual functions has also translated itself into socioeconomic terms.⁹ In the *Theogony*, Hesiod, for example (Caldwell, 1987) warns of the debilitating economic appetite of women.

For from her is the race of female women;
[from her is the deadly race and tribes of women]
a great plague to mortals, living with men,
not suited for cursed Poverty, but for Wealth.
As when bees in covered hives feed
the drones, companions of evil works,
the bees work until sunset, all day
and every day, and make the pale combs,
while the drones stay inside, in the covered hives,
reaping the work of others into their own stomachs;
Similarly for mortal men, high-thundering Zeus
Made an evil: women the partners of evil works.

(pp. 62-63, lines 590-601)

By the 19th century, the primary attribute of male power and influence—in short, of patriarchy—became economic wealth, and the Victorian drone of the Hesiod emerged as a courtesan who prevailed upon her lover to indulge her with houses, clothes, and jewelry, thereby bringing him to the verge of bankruptcy, an economic form of castration. A strain of economic enervation infuses the character of Roy Hobbs in Bernard Malamud's (1952) *The Natural*. Roy's lust for Memo Paris, one of the two temptresses in the novel, and his compulsion to dutifully impress her gradually drives him toward physical, moral, and economic ruin. When Roy begins to want money, it is precisely to impress Memo; and when he accepts Gus Sand's challenge to bet, it is because he wants "to win in front of Memo" (p. 99). For her part, Memo admits that she

is “afraid to be poor” (p. 88) and that she must have all that accompanies material success, so Memo takes full advantage of Roy’s feelings of insecurity. Fearful that his dream with Memo will be forever destroyed, Roy is induced to throw the final game for a bribe, supposedly so that he may marry her. Batting in the championship game, he breaks his bat, Wonderboy, the phallic symbol of his physical power and potency, and his career ends not in Ruthian heroics but in Caseyesque failure—he strikes out and loses the game. Stripped of his self-esteem and exposed to public ridicule, Roy’s tragic enervation is all but complete: “He will be excluded from the game and all his records forever destroyed” (p. 217).

A similar fate awaits Felix Batterinski, the traditional, marriage-minded, Polish-Canadian-Catholic hockey goon in Roy MacGregor’s (1983) *The Last Season*. Unable to handle the kind of liberated relationship of equals that Kristiina Jalonen, an educated, independent and sophisticated Finish architect, envisions, Felix bemoans his entrapment in the form of an inverted economic debilitation: “How odd all this is. Her date, her car, her cottage, her plans. I feel weakened by it all” (p. 101). Sensing his progressive emasculation at the hands of Kristiina, he later rants: “Batterinski is her toy, isn’t he? Nothing but a goddam fucking toy you take off the shelf when you’re bored and kick under a chair when you’ve better things to do” (p. 339). Increasingly angered at his self-indulgent emotional and economic enslavement, he responds in the only way he is capable of, impulsive destructive violence; he vandalizes a telephone booth, “a phone booth in the middle of nowhere” (p. 336).

Like so many fictional heroes, Felix Batterinski lives largely in a womanless world incapable of sustaining a meaningful and enduring love relationship because he comes from the closeted, even sanctified world of sport where women too often have only one purpose: to satisfy the male urge for sex. For Felix, sex is pathological and an impediment to the development of a more mature, mutually fulfilling sexual relationship. Revealing his regressive convictions, Felix lives by the degenerate credo that “woman are just another form of wildlife, yours to do as you will. Worship, screw, beat, ignore—it’s your business alone” (MacGregor, 1983, p. 251). He also subscribes to the androcentric notion that women are “either fallen or precious saints” (p. 270),

and he embraces the traditional Polish proverb that “a woman must be continually reminded that she is incapable of ever having any wise or important thoughts or opinions” (p. 188). He therefore rejects the life of shared intimacy and mutual accommodation and succumbs to the reality of his own emotional deficiencies: “How many times have I been through this same idiocy?” he inveighs against Kristiina.

Talk, in all the years of Batterinski’s experience, has yet to solve a single goddamned thing. Talk has both caused my problems and finished them off completely. Talk I can do without. . . . Why can’t people just screw until they solve things?” (p. 178)

Felix’s plight captures the tragedy of many a fictional athletic hero; lacking the sensibilities or having failed to develop the necessary sensitivities to distinguish between illusion and reality, the athlete struggles with the claims made on him by women. Within this scenario, sex is equated with an even more debilitating form of effeminization, domesticity. As Leslie Fiedler (1966) has noted about American fiction in general, so also in the world of sport literature: The typical sporting hero is coerced into a variety of extrasocietal confrontations because of his inherent anxiety and fear of the sexual encounter, an encounter that inevitably presumes quotidian responsibilities and ties—the restraints of “civilization” as Fiedler puts it (p. 26). The tribulations of numerous fictional athletes, including John Updike’s Harry “Rabbit” Angstrom (1960); Irwin Shaw’s (1977) Christian Darling; William Faulkner’s (1942) Ike McCaslin; Bernard Malamud’s (1952) “natural,” Roy Hobbs; James Jones’ (1964) Robert Prewitt; Leonard Gardner’s (1972) Bill Tully; and even James Fenimore Cooper’s (1991) Natty Bumppo¹¹, touch on one of the most powerful themes in American sport literature: the inability of the athlete to comprehend and embrace the alien world of women and domesticity (cf. Umphlett, 1975). Rather than embrace the challenges of the domestic world, the athlete instead seeks self-definition and self-determination in the unencumbered world of sport, the site of past glories and of lost youth and innocence. In so doing, he is invariably condemned to a life of loneliness and isolation, bereft of female companionship. And so Rabbit runs from the responsibilities of his marriage in a desperate search for the “sacredness of achievement” that he once found on the basketball court (Updike,

1960, p. 62); Christian Darling, in a moment of nostalgic impulsiveness, flees the confines of the intellectual lifestyle created by his successful editor wife and returns to the site of his 80-yard run on the football field (Shaw, 1977); and all the characters in Jason Miller's play *That Championship Season* (1972) cling to the Pennsylvania State high school basketball championship trophy that alone offers them security and succor in an otherwise lonely bureaucratized existence.

Over the shoulders of all these alienated fictional heroes "hovers the shadow of Natty Bumppo, who," as Umphlett (1975) writes, "with his code of fairness, worship of the primitive, asocial feelings, sense of determination and quality of endurance as well as his anti-feminine outlook exists as the archetype of the romantic conception of the sporting hero" (p. 48). The recurrent dream of the athlete resides in the ritual of competition, not in the requisites of domestic obligations and compelled patterns of family behavior. In his indictment of women, particularly for their sexual roles, which rob men of their innocence and drain them of their strength, Faulkner's (1942) Ike McCaslin speaks for many an athlete when he claims that women "are born already bored with what a boy approaches only at fourteen or fifteen with blundering and aghast trembling" (p. 314). Resisting the real world and his wife to the bitter end and choosing instead the natural world of the hunting camp, Ike reminds himself that ultimately "the woods would be his mistress and his wife" (p. 326). Even Rocky Balboa—Sylvester Stallone's famous "Italian Stallion" in the film, *Rocky III* (1982)—drained of his "fight" by the civilizing exigencies of domesticity and weakened by the excesses of economic success, returns to his roots to regenerate his strength. Only in the austere surroundings of the Philadelphia ghetto gym, his wife and son exiled to suburbia, does Rocky recapture the "eye of the tiger."

Despite Rocky's experience, many fictional heroes actually reject urban life because it symbolically denies the masculine innocence of the playing field. Umphlett (1975), in fact, argues that the sophistication of the city is feminine in nature and therefore quite unfathomable to the infantilized athlete. Dreaming of creating "a more meaningful life than he sees available to him in the streets" (Eisinger, 1979, p. 79), Lefty Bicek, the protagonist in Nelson Algren's (1965) *Never Come Morning*, rejects the streets because they fail to give life substance: Chicago becomes "a

cagework city, beneath a coalsmoke sky" (p. 59), the "landscape of nightmare" (p. 105). His estranged and enervated existence is revealed in his tortured relationship with Steffi: "But what could you do with a girl once she was yours? You couldn't keep on just sleeping around, above a poolroom or on a beach or in a corner as though she were some Clark Street tramp" (pp. 34-35). And like so many other athletes, both fictional and real—and sounding remarkably like Felix Batterinski—Lefty ultimately sees women as nothing more than a conduit through which to satisfy sexual urges: "The thought broke over him like another man's idea. 'Get some liquor in her. That's what dames are for'" (p. 55).

Robert E. Prewitt, the "Bolshevik" hero of James Jones' (1964) *From Here to Eternity*, is another athlete who embraces individualism in the face of the modern bureaucratic world. Seeking to establish his own sense of integrity, like Lefty, Prewitt also adopts a stereotypical antifeminine attitude, embracing the notion that women are only good insofar as they enhance the male ego through sexual intercourse. Prewitt's androcentrism as well as his domestic imprisonment are well instantiated in his abortive and stultified relationship with Violet, his highly prized "shackjob": "To a man who lives his life among the flat hairy angulations of other men, all women are round and soft, and all are inscrutable and strange" (p. 92). In the end, Prewitt predictably renounces any thoughts of marriage to Violet.

I didn't want to sweat my heart and pride out in a goddam coalmine all my life and have a raft of snot-nosed brats who look like niggers in the coaldirt, like my father and his father, and all the rest of them. What the hell do you dames want? To take the heart out of a man and tie it up in barbed wire and give it to your mother for Mother's Day? (p. 442)

Herein, as Geismar (1958) notes, lies the central refrain in Prewitt's love affairs in the novel as well as the central refrain in the love affairs of so many of our fictional heroes: "this barely veiled hatred and fear of women, who are so essential to men and so delicious, but whose sexuality is designed to subdue and tame (and destroy) the masculine integrity, the masculine virility" (pp. 232-233). "They do not want you to find yourself in them," Prewitt laments. "They want instead that you should lose yourself in them" (Jones, 1964, p. 506). As Geismar (1984) further argues:

Sexuality is sharp, acrid, angry, and bittersweet in Jones—powerful, antagonistic, and delightful, the highest pleasure in the world. But love enfeebles it, and marriage destroys it, one way or another; all feminine sexuality aims at love and marriage. Net result: male impotence. (p. 233)

Because the male athletic hero is rarely capable of exhibiting any significant depth of self-reflectivity, it falls to a woman—Lucky Valenti, the beautiful urban sophisticate of James Jones' (1967) *Go to the Window-Maker*—to recognize the real underlying problematic for men when she insightfully intones,

all this contemptuousness toward women, all this standing together in a block against the suffocating inroads of womanhood, this *need* to have a world apart that women could not enter, were incapable of understanding, all this had to come from a deep-seated dislike of women, a misogyny, that could only be the result of insecurity and a lack of confidence. (p. 371)

Ron Gant, Jones' male protagonist, unlike many athletes, ultimately comes to a reconciliation with his woman, Lucky, through the mature and timely recognition that the world of the athlete—in this case, Al Bonham, the Caribbean skin diver whose entire life represents an attempt to escape the bondage and bureaucracy of women and who inevitably sees women merely as sexual objects—is the world of “small boys, playing that they're men” (Jones, 1967, p. 371).

Ultimately, within the world of the fictional sport hero, women and sex come to represent an obstacle, a threat to the male athlete's existential quest to seek identity, freedom of expression, and fulfillment within an idealized world to which he forever seeks to return. Given such an improbable quest, the hero not unsurprisingly encounters a constant barrage of threats to his ontological health and well-being: authority, social ties and duties, bureaucratic structure, intellectuality, and women. It is in his encounters with women, particularly his sexual encounters with them, that he confronts some of the most problematic existential constraints. In effect, sex comes to represent an end to autonomy, the demise of authentic self-determination, and so an untimely death. Separated from his wife because she reminds him of the glory days of his youth, Bill Tully, the drifter and ex-fighter in

Gardner's (1972) *Fat City*, takes up with a woman he meets in a bar. Feeling fatally enervated by the sexual encounter,

he lay quietly, oppressed by a sense of dwindling life, of his youth dwindling away as he rested beside a woman he should never have known, here so far off the course he knew should have been his that he wondered with panic if it had been lost forever. (p. 112)

It is only after he leaves Violet that he wins a fight again, invigorated and fortified by a renewed optimism and self-confidence: "He felt whole, self-sufficient, felt his life had at last opened up and that now nothing stood between him and the future's infinite possibilities" (Gardner, 1972, p. 157). For Tully's youthful colleague, Ernie Munger, the sexual relationship becomes even more morbidly debilitating.

It was not comprehension that he wanted, only her awareness that he was not like anyone she had known before. But it was as if what distinguished him was what she did not perceive. At times as he lay in bed listening to her breathing, a fear came over him that after marriage death was the next major event. (Gardner, 1972, p. 74)

And so behind the pregame myth and the sexual encounter of the athlete in general, lies perhaps the most deep-seated fear of all, the fear of aging, the fear of *la petite mort*—not *la petite mort* that all men experience after orgasm with its accompanying sense of depression and entrapment (cf. Chesler, 1978)—but *la petite mort* of retirement, the fear of leaving the world of the game and the tragic sense of loss that goes with it: the loss of youth, of innocence, of purpose, of meaning, and of immortality. "It's a death experience," says Dave Meggysey, the former pro linebacker (as cited in Lipsyte, 1986, p. 58). Nowhere, of course, is the aging athlete's sense of loss more beautifully captured than in A. E. Housman's (1977) poignant poem, *To an Athlete Dying Young*.

Now you will not swell the rout
Of lads that wore their honor out,
Runners whom renown outran
And the name died before the man. (p. 66, Verse 4)

The association of women and sex with both life and death and man's ambivalence toward women's sexuality as well as his quest to control it are most powerfully expressed in the mythic confrontation between Clytemnestra and Orestes in the *Oresteia* by Aeschylus (Lowell, 1978).¹² The breast that Clytemnestra bares to Orestes is both erotic and nurturant, the emblem of the most basic dilemma posed by women's sexuality, "the double association of women as mothers with life and nurturance on the one hand and women as death and destruction on the other" (Harris, 1973, p. 157). But the most powerful symbol of women as death comes in the form of the Erinyes, the Furies, who seek to avenge Clytemnestra's death at the hands of her son, Orestes. Sucking the blood from their living victims, the devouring voracity of the Furies represents the ultimate in female sexual predation and male devitalization. In their preternatural depiction, the Erinyes evoke the deepest fantasies and fears of buried male sexual terrors and anxieties. Daughters of the Night, their ultimate pacification represents the ideological effort to solve the dilemma of female sexuality as well as man's ambivalence toward it. Seeking to reconcile the polarities between female eroticism and nurturance, between malevolence and beneficence, between woman as giver of life and memento mori, the triumph of Zeus and the establishment of marriage as the institution to contain female sexuality symbolizes the demise of female power—ancient matriarchy—and the paradigmatic ascendance of patriarchy, and with it, the hegemony of male materialism and imperialism (cf. Zeitlin, 1984).

But the notion that sex threatens male spiritual and psychic energy as well as male moral probity was exponentially reinforced by the spread of a Christian ethic that vilified both sex and female sexuality. As one medieval preacher put it: "In the woman wantonly adorned to capture souls, the garland upon her head is as a single coal or firebrand of Hell to kindle men with that fire" (as cited in Owst, 1933, p. 392).¹³ In *Samson and Delilah*, his famous painting in monochrome (see Figure 2), Mantegna clearly offers a warning in the very best medieval tradition against the enfeebling wiles of women and the debilitating aftereffects of lascivious love (Lightbown, 1986). With women freely associated with sex and sin, death became a constant companion of the woman's image.

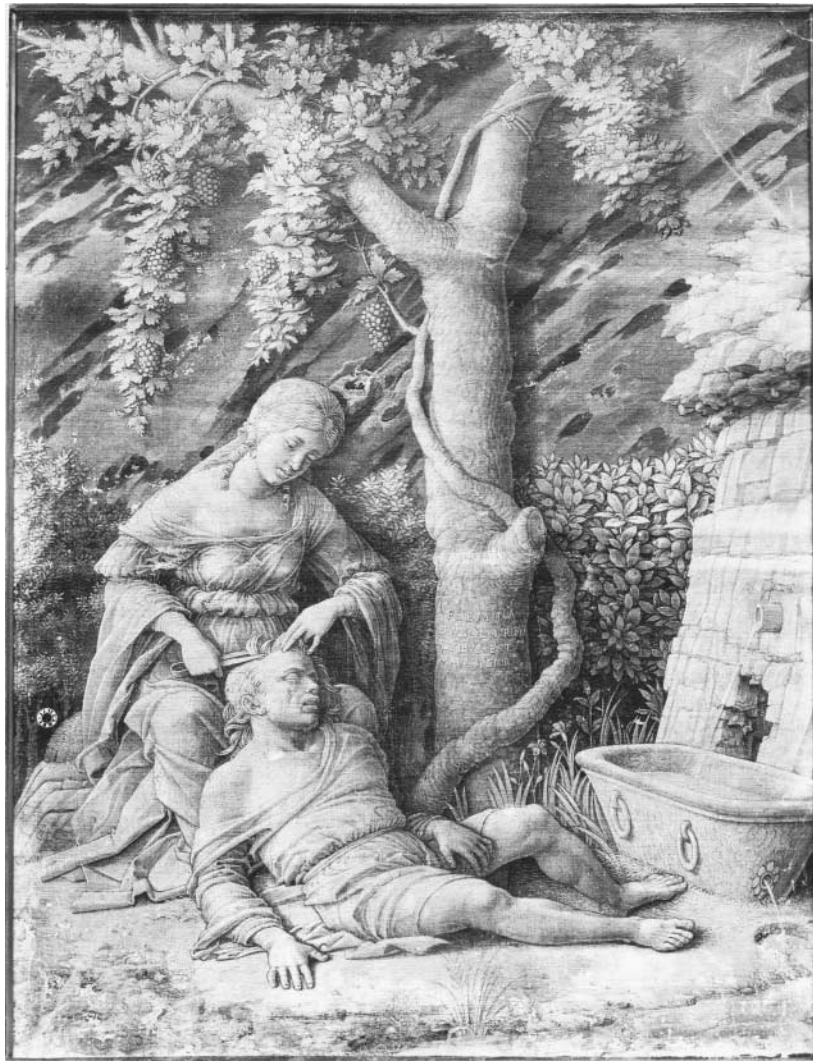


Figure 2: Andrea Mantegna's "Samson and Delilah"
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As Bassein (1984) writes; "Sex/woman representing sin lead many males . . . to look upon woman as destroyer. Sex/woman not only destroyed the soul but also came in the orthodox mind to mean death" (p. 21). Even in the eyes of the church, it was women who destroyed men's souls, not the other way around. Heresy, like women, clearly had allurements, and both became associated with death. In the end, as Ferrante (1975) notes, the object of men's

temptation, woman, became “the cause of it”; men projected their own weaknesses onto women (p. 21). Moreover, through a whole variety of polarities and dichotomies, the complex theological fabric of Christianity established an elitist religious and social hierarchy that presumed the sanctity of the male and emphasized the anti-life tendencies that degraded and diminished women’s functions and roles (Bassein, 1984).

The inextricable linkage between women, sex, and death was also affirmed in the misogynist poems of John Donne. In macabre verses, woman becomes “mummy”, “a murderer”—“When by thy scorn, O murtheress, I am dead”—and Donne’s mistress transforms him into a walking corpse (Grierson, 1912). According to Bassein (1984), the origin of the notion commonly found in medieval and Renaissance literature that sexual intercourse so enfeebles a man that each session takes a day off his life can be found in the conviction that so much vital strength is spent when semen is lost to a woman that death will soon follow. The fanatical fixation of Christianity on asceticism, reinforced by a stringent Teutonic primitivism, demanded the virtual elimination of sex, one of the assumptions being that sexual coitus actively contributed to a very real process of wasting away.¹⁴ Comparing Eastern and Western cultures, Dworkin (1974) says that

the loss of semen, and the feeling of weakness which is its biological adjunct, has extraordinary significance to men. . . . For those Western men for whom orgasm is simultaneous with ejaculation, sex must be a more literal death, with the mysterious, muscled, pulling vagina the death-dealer. (p. 136)

As a result, sexual continence became one of the chief virtues and chief doctrines of the Christian faith, the first and indispensable condition of righteousness and so health, vigor, and vitality (cf. Bullough, 1974).

Beyond the biological death associated with sex lays the death of the soul, ascribed invariably to the insatiable carnal lust of women. Even the enlightened Roman, Tertullian, argued that women destroyed God’s image, man, and that to save man, Christ had to be sacrificed (as cited in Bassein, 1984). Although she did not invent it, the charismatic image of woman as death in life popularized by Betty Friedan (1972) resonates across time in the poems of Sir John Suckling, Samuel Coleridge, Sir Edgar Allen

Poe, and Adrienne Rich; in the theology of Mary Daly; and in the literature of Flaubert. But it is perhaps in the figures of witches, vampires, and succubi that men's deepest fantasies about the morally and spiritually corrosive qualities of sex are most fancifully deployed. Margaret Mead (1949) offers the following characterization of a succubus: "She will hold your cheeks, you will hold her breasts, your skin will tremble, you will sleep together, she will steal part of your body fluid, later she will give it to the sorcerer and you will die" (p. 211).¹⁵ In Victorian iconography as well as in the turn-of-the-century popular imagination, the mermaid came to instantiate the enervating evil of women. In describing the mermaid, Auerbach (1982) writes: "Her hybrid nature, her ambiguous status as creature, typify the mysterious, broadly evocative demonic powers of womanhood in general" (p. 94). As Burne-Jones portrays her (see Figure 3), the mermaid entrances us because "nonhumanity in human form looks out at us" (Auerbach, 1982, p. 94).¹⁶

Something of this "nonhumanity" and certainly something of the "demonic power of womanhood" reside in the beautiful enchantresses of Malamud's (1952) *The Natural*. Both Harriet Bird—"a girl in a dressy black dress" (p. 8), "a snappy goddess" as Malamud describes her (p. 24)—as well as Memo Paris, who also dresses in black, appear as sorcerers who precipitate the death of Roy's inherently innocent nature as well as compromise his otherwise burgeoning baseball career; both, of course, actually shoot Roy. Both also represent the distorted values that ultimately undermine Roy's allegorical quest for productive assimilation into adulthood. At the heart of Malamud's syncretism of baseball folklore and Arthurian legend lies a poignant fable about cultural renewal, about the *elan vital*. Roy, of course, as the self-centered athlete, is blind to the communal and reproductive purpose of his vitality and so easily falls prey to the guiles of both Harriet and Memo.

Too naïve to discern the spell that Harriet casts over him, Roy is fatally drawn to her urban sophistication—she is, after all, as Malamud (1952) writes, "one of those high class college girls" (p. 9). Alone in the big city, Chicago, and "sick for home" (p. 32), Roy is enticed to Harriet's hotel room where, as Wasserman (1965) puts it, "the nude terrible mother reaches into her hat box, fits the



Figure 3: Edward Burne-Jones's "The Depths of the Sea" (1887)
© President and Fellows of Harvard College. Courtesy of the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop. Reprinted with permission.

talismanic hat on her head and pumps a spirit-shattering silver bullet into his guts, into his vital force" (p. 447).

Equally as seductive and equally as threatening, Memo Paris becomes the *mater saeva cupidinum* of the second part of the novel. The symbolic scene in which Roy seeks sexual consummation with Memo results in his psychic immolation, and he enters a terrible slump, during which, as Wasserman (1965) wryly notes, his bat "Wonderboy sags like a baloney" (p. 441). Although Roy cannot see the destructive, life-draining qualities of Memo's morally regressive sexuality, Pop Fisher, the disenchanted coach of the New York Knights can: "I think there is some kind of whammy in her that carries her luck to other people . . . she is always dissatisfied and will snarl you up in her trouble in a way that will weaken your strength if you don't watch out" (Malamud, 1952, p. 114). Roy does not and, in fact, cannot "watch out," and although he has a vision of Memo as a "singing green siren" (p. 106) and of being sucked down in a whirlpool of dirty water reminiscent of Burne-Jones's mermaid—"the polluted water of maternal death," as Wasserman (1965, p. 453) characterizes it—Roy nonetheless cannot help but succumb to the seductive charisma of Memo, Malamud's modern-day mermaid. Selfishly infantilized of spirit, Roy is condemned to live and indeed die in his own inward, enervated reality, the victim in part of women and sex as harbingers of death.

From the strictly masculinist perspective, there is little doubt that Zeus had indeed "quickly made an evil for men" (line 570).

And when he made the lovely evil to pay for the good,
he led her where the other gods and men were
she delighted in the finery from the great father's
owl-eyed daughter; awe filled immortal gods and mortal
men when they saw the sheer trick, irresistible to men.

(Hesiod's *Theogony*, as cited in Caldwell,
1987, pp. 61-62, lines 585-589)

CONCLUSION

What I have tried to demonstrate in this essay is that prejudice against women, avowed or covert, personal or institutionalized, is located at various levels within often seemingly innocuous

customs and habits. In this particular case, I have focused on the pregame sex myth, a myth that encodes men's deep-seated fear of women's sexuality and putative immorality, especially men's fear of enervation—physical, emotional, intellectual, economic, spiritual, and psychic enervation—which, taken to the extreme, connotes existential annihilation and hence both symbolic and real death. The antecedents to this misogynist and androcentric way of thinking are to be found in a variety of Greek myths of women as sexually uncontrollable and powerful beings, both human and divine, whether Aphrodite, Calypso, Circe, Phaedra, Posiphone, or Sthenetoea: female figures who trap, incapacitate, and destroy men.

The prototype of “the lovely evil” was, of course, Pandora who “opened the jar’s great lid with her hands and . . . wrought sad cares for men” (Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, lines 94-95, as cited in Caldwell, 1987, p. 103). To escape these “sad cares,” the impulse of the male athlete, especially within the neoromantic tradition of sport literature (cf. Umphlett, 1975), has been to return to the Edenic arena of the playing field, just like the ancient Greeks in Hesiod’s vision (Caldwell, 1987) who, prior to the creation of women,

lived like gods, with carefree hearts
 free and apart from trouble and pain; grim old age
 did not affect them, but with legs and arms always
 strong they played in delight, apart from all evils.
 (*Works and Days*, p. 104, lines 112-115)

And so the athlete, a child bred in the idealized world of the game, faces the exigencies of his existence, especially the exigency of aging, by seeking to reclaim his dream of immortality on the playing field. Striving to remain forever young and whole, he tries, to use D. H. Lawrence’s classic phrase, “to go backwards from old age to golden youth” (as cited in Umphlett, 1975, p. 23), to return to the “golden race of men” (Caldwell, 1987, line 109) of whom Hesiod speaks. On such a quest, the sporting experience is privileged and, before the game at least, women and sex are summarily eschewed. “I love this moment,” our “big dumb Polack” (p. 100) from MacGregor’s (1983) *The Last Season* intones.

Christ, you can take all your orgasms and fine wine and fancy restaurants and movies and music and compliments and financial windfalls and you can shove them where . . . only the custom agent's flashlight ever shines. I love *this* moment, no matter what anthem or what arena or what country, just me on one side and them on the other, everyone wondering what Batterinski will do. (p. 162)

But there is more to the pregame sex myth than a code of continence: Pregame abstinence presumes postgame license, and so for a variety of fictional heroes, from Seth Maxwell in Pete Gent's (1973) *North Dallas Forty* to Joe Bob Sparks in Lisa Alther's (1976) *Kinflicks* as well as for a whole host of real-life contemporary athletes (cf. Johnson & Novak, 1992; Nelson, 1994; Swift, 1991), sex becomes an almost religious experience, a near-frenzied attempt to expand and glorify self. In indiscriminate acts of postgame sexual rapacity, intimacy is eschewed and women are treated as instruments of pure sexual gratification.

And these athletes are not completely alone in this regard. As Kate Millett (1969) so poignantly demonstrates, in a violent repudiation of the female, some of the most misogynist fiction writers of the 20th century, including D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, and Norman Mailer, portray women solely as sexual beings and as sexual objects, often to be used only for the purposes of titillation and ego reinforcement, a perspective that has profound ideological implications because conceiving of women as nothing but body blocks women's progress in a whole variety of important cultural arenas, including equal employment rights, media portrayal, marriage status, access to political power, and rape prevention. But as Bassein (1984) argues, "Of all the forces working against women at the present, those involved with sex and its resultant violence remain the most devastating" (p. 150). Consequently, one of the most destructive ramifications of equating women with sex can be seen in the latest outbreak of violent crimes committed against women (cf. Thornhill & Palmer, 2000), especially those committed by male athletes (cf. Benedict, 1997; Lefkowitz, 1997).¹⁷ As Benedict (1997) writes, "The link between athletes' unbridled sexual appetites and their crimes is most poignantly illustrated among the upper echelons of revenue-producing sports, both college and professional, which have recently experienced escalating rates of violence against women" (p. 213).¹⁸

According to Gearheart (as cited in Roberts, 1980), within this misogynist world of unreason lies a burgeoning individual frenzy that expresses itself most powerfully against women within a complex urban environment in which communication is eviscerated of emotion and reduced to aggressive verbal assaults. "The city," says Gearheart (as cited in Roberts, 1980), "is a specter of violence and necrophilia," which projects the "misogynist element" of our culture into the future. "The city symbolizes the future of patriarchy, a place where women's lives are subject not only to violence but also to trial and death at the hands of hunters who track and kill those 'witches' insubordinate to their rule" (p. 74). Perhaps, within the context of Gearheart's perspective, we should not be surprised to find that football and basketball players are overrepresented in populations of athletic felons (Nelson, 1994; see also Hofman, 1986; Koss & Gaines, 1993), not only because football is the quintessentially violent team sport of our time but also because both football and basketball are urban games. The former is the most salient metaphor for our contemporary modern culture—mechanized, bureaucratic, and impersonal (cf. Ross, 1971)—and the latter belongs to the inner city because it reflects the rhythm and style of the congested urban environment (cf. Novak, 1976).

Demonstrating the inverted values that all too often govern their lives, many highly visible and successful male athletes routinely ignore family and friends and elect instead to prioritize athletic accomplishments over all else. "It was to me the greatest feeling in my life," Wayne Gretzky said after winning the Stanley Cup (as cited in ESPN's "Outside the Lines" special on "Winning and Losing," August 1998). According to Phil Simms, the New York Giants quarterback, having his name announced prior to the 1996 Super Bowl was "the single greatest moment in my life" (as cited in NBC's "Pre-Game Show" prior to the 1996 Super Bowl, January 1996).¹⁹ And so driven by an unending quest to validate their identity and seek immortality through their athletic exploits rather than through their domestic or parental achievements, contemporary athletes routinely ignore, dismiss, and hence denigrate the women in their lives as well as the lives of women. Perhaps, as Sabo, Gray, and Moore (2000) suggest, the modern institution of sport serves as a readily accessible and potent cultural site where men can resolve their resultant fears and anxieties

from getting too close to women by enacting misogyny and male supremacy through the deployment of aggressive and violent behavior.

Recalling his youthful days on the gridiron, Sabo (1994) recently wrote:

I already had it in my head that the way to succeed was to be an animal. Coaches took notice of animals. Animals made the first team. Being an animal meant being ruthlessly aggressive and competitive. . . . Friendships with other males were always tempered by competition. . . . As far as friendships with women, they were virtually impossible. All that boys and girls were supposed to do together were neck and pet. (p. 12)

No doubt reiterating the experience of many an athlete, Sabo suggests that from the very earliest ages, young male athletes are routinely trained to foster their most instinctive "animal" impulses.²⁰

If such be the case, then one of the most visible and popular role models in contemporary American culture—the young male athlete—will remain essentially a beast, not the "blond beast" ("blonde Bestie") proscribed by Nietzsche (1887/1967, p. 40)²¹ as the suprahistorical antidote to a dispassionate degeneration, but the legendary beast of Grimm's fairy tales: the self-centered, self-indulgent, egotistical juvenile who, buffeted by his ambivalent and schizophrenic attitudes toward sex and love, fails to realize, even recognize, his moral obligation to normalize male-female relationships for the benefit of self and community.

NOTES

1. For an interesting compilation of quotations from "the 19th century's most eminent authorities on the conjugal and the carnal relation including questions concerning the inferiority of women" and "written with delicacy and refinement," see Macdonald (1981, p. 1).

2. Major Seton Churchill (1887) even went so far as to recommend that during the day, a man should cultivate the habit of focusing his thoughts on proper subjects with a view to avoiding improper ones, but that during the night, that is, "during the hours a person is actually in bed, the habit of not thinking at all should be cultivated" (p. 48).

3. Allegiance to the broad-based belief that sex weakens a man is not limited to Western cultures. Many diverse cultures and tribes, including Hindus and ancient Chinese, have enjoined continence on warriors and hunters (Carstairs, 1967; Ngui, 1969). The notion that sexual excess can lead to emaciation and death is still prevalent among Indian and Chinese cultures based on the thinking that "one drop of semen is derived from ten drops

of blood and each drop of blood is derived from the eating of ten grains of rice" (Tan, 1981, p. 374).

4. Anchises' anxiety here may also be due to fear of retribution. Recalling his challenge to fight any god who would stand in his way (lines 149-155), he may well fear punishment for his hubris. Greek mythology is full of examples of mortal lovers of the immortal who are castigated for their hubris (e.g., Tityos and Ixion) or because of the jealousy of another god (e.g., Semele) (cf. Shelmerdine, 1995).

5. For the full text of the "Engineer's Song," see Nelson (1994, pp. 88-89).

6. Freud never actually expressed it quite this bluntly. Rather, the woman, he said, is incapable of renouncing her instinctual demands in the interest of civilization (cf. Freud, 1918/1959).

7. Freud's (1918/1959) theory of "penis envy," from which all women were purported to suffer, held currency for only a few decades. Among the great post-Freudian psychologists who held that the theory of penis envy was a fallacy, a mere figment of Freud's traditional Jewish upbringing, according to Kelman (1967), were Horney, Fromm, Reich, Kelman, and Zilboorg (cf. Davis, 1971). "Quite in contrast to Freud's assumption," writes Fromm (1951), "there are better reasons for assuming . . . pregnancy envy in the male" than penis envy in the female (p. 233).

8. Horney (1967) further notes that man "has very obvious strategic reasons for keeping his fear and envy of women quiet. . . . Relief is sought and found in the *disparagement* of women that men often display ostentatiously in their speech and attitudes" (p. 136). We might also note that Mary Wollstonecraft (1967) observed that "as long as physical love is man's favorite recreation, he will endeavor to enslave women" (p. 126).

9. Marriage was often regarded as the acquisition of property. Even as property, however, a woman was an extension of male ego. In many ancient cultures, adultery was less a sin against morality than a trespass against private property.

10. Although it might appear that the only motivation in both Hesiod's *Theogony* and his *Works and Days* is simple misogyny, a categorical view of women as at best a necessary evil and a great plague—as in the *Theogony*—or as responsible for the presence of evil and suffering in the world and hence the instigation for labor—as in *Works and Days*—we must remember, as Caldwell (1987) points out, that if women are to be faithful to their divine precedents, they must be evil because this is the role handed down to them by their divine forebears, Gaia and Rhea, whose maternal allegiances regularly turned them against their husbands. As Caldwell (1987) notes, "From the viewpoint of the son, the good mother is necessarily a bad wife, since she must take the side of her son against her husband. And the viewpoint of the son is the viewpoint of the *Theogony*" (p. 100). For more insights into the characterizations of women in both Greek and Roman literature and mythology, see Lefkowitz and Fant (1992).

11. Natty Bumppo, of course, is the hero of several of Cooper's classic frontier sagas. Collectively, the five romances in which Natty Bumppo appears under various sobriquets are called *The Leather-Stocking Tales* (Rans, 1991). Arranged according to the chronology of their hero, the sequence is *The Deerslayer* (pp. 204-244), *The Last of the Mohicans* (pp. 102-130), *The Pathfinder* (pp. 169-201), *The Pioneers* (pp. 46-101), and *The Prairie* (pp. 131-168).

12. For an especially insightful analysis of the Orestia, see Zeitlin (1984).

13. This is from a sermon by a 14th century English preacher named John Bromyard. We might also note that a French monk, Roger de Caen, said something very similar, capturing the depth of misogyny that pervaded the clerical ranks: "There is no plague which monks should dread more than women: the soul's death" (O'Faolain & Martines, 1973, p. xiii).

14. One is also reminded here of the plight of Odysseus. Stranded on Calypso's island and forced to have sex with the beautiful goddess, Homer writes that "life with its sweetness was slowly trickling away" (Rouse, 1937, p. 65).

15. For fascinating discussions about women as vampires, see Auerbach (1982, 1995) and McNally (1983). McNally (1983) also offers an interesting real-life report about a succubus:

A Venetian priest named Brognoli traced the story of a 22-year-old man from Bergamo who upon retiring at night heard the sound of a soft footfall near his bed. He was amazed to see his fiancée Teresa, there. She said that her parents had thrown her out and she came to him for refuge. She got into bed with him, her lust was boundless and insatiable. In the morning she told him she was a succubus. She visited him again and again until he became exhausted. Staggering to the confessional, he begged Father Brognoli for deliverance: "This monstrous commerce lasted for several months, but God finally delivered him through my pleas, and he did suitable penance for his sins" (p. 116).

This story, incidentally, is very reminiscent of Jonathon Harker's account of his seduction by Dracula's "sisters" in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897/1997).

16. For an in-depth discussion of mermaid as Victorian demon, see Auerbach (1982).

17. It is certainly worth noting that in response to the escalating violence against women by athletes, Kathy Redmond recently formed the National Coalition Against Violent Athletes. Herself a victim of rape at the hands of a University of Nebraska football player, Redmond formed the coalition in 1998 to track violence by athletes and help navigate victims through the legal system. With the aid of about 30 volunteers, Redmond runs the organization in her spare time out of her home in suburban Littleton, Colorado. She routinely speaks to schools, teams, and the public in general. A graduate of Columbine High School, Redmond offered to work with the students at Columbine after two teenage boys killed 12 other students and a teacher there in 1999. Although she publicly condemned the teenagers for what they did, she is among those who believe harassment by athletes helped fire the teenagers' rage (Elliott, 2000).

18. Ironically, the greater sexual freedom acquired by women and female athletes during the course of the 20th century may not have always redounded to women's advantage. The focus on women's sexuality may have been at the expense of other aspects of women's ontology. In sport, the emphasis on women's sexuality may have contributed to the establishment and success of those sports deemed appropriate for women (e.g., tennis, gymnastics, skiing) at the expense of those sports culturally condemned for women as being distinctly unfeminine (e.g., wrestling, boxing, ice hockey) (Nelson, 1994).

19. I should note here that I certainly do not wish to condemn all athletes in this regard or to characterize all male athletes in the same way. The more we study masculinity in sport, the more we recognize that there are multiple masculinities involved. As feminist scholars (e.g., Lorber, 1994), men's studies scholars (e.g., Brod & Kaufman, 1994), and sport studies scholars (e.g., McKay, Messner, & Sabo, 2000) have pointed out, the level of generalization surrounding masculinity and men and femininity and women is rapidly being lowered as we continue to degender gender (Lorber, 1994). With regard to male athletes and their priorities, I can think of two recent examples of highly celebrated athletes who specifically testified that the most important moments in their lives came with the birth of their children and not as a result of a pivotal athletic accomplishment: John Elway, the Denver Broncos quarterback, during his postgame interview after the 1999 Super Bowl and Walter Payton during a retrospective look at his life during the pregame show of the 2000 Super Bowl.

20. For informative insights into the socialization of young male athletes into sporting subcultures that denigrate and exploit women, see, in particular, Fine (1987) and Lefkowitz (1997). The former is a firsthand observation of the preadolescent world of Little League baseball, with its emphasis on sex and aggression, and the latter is a disturbing account of the Glen Ridge rape story. Several other accounts also depict the misogynist culture of youth sports, including, for example, Oppenheimer (1991) and Whitson (1990).

21. As is often the case with Nietzsche, concepts and references remain complex and carefully nuanced, and his reference to the blonde Bestie—made only four times in all of his work—is no exception. Nietzsche both condemned the blond beast as a sort of suprahistorical symbol of the extirpation of the impulses and, at the same time, celebrated it as the symbol of a passionate and regenerative cultural energy. On one hand, he argued that the passionate and erotic reaction of the body was essential in the regenerative cultural project, especially artistic creativity, and yet on the other hand, he construed the blond beast as an ideogram for the conception of an unsublimated and destructive animal passion. Whatever else it might be however, and despite popular conceptions, the blond beast was not a racial concept and at bottom, and certainly as a reflection of the positive way in which I use the concept here, Nietzsche construed the blond beast as a major means of the will to power. For a detailed discussion of the blond beast, see Kaufmann (1974).

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