

Against whom?

"The myth of the heroic rapist" is not, however, merely a manifestation of clearly political struggles such as war and revolution. It permeates our literature and culture. From early Greek mythology to Mick Jagger, revelling in the murderous rage of the Boston Strangler ("ya we're talking about the Midnight Rambler"), our culture has extolled the virtue of masculine brutality and feminine submissiveness. From fairy tales such as Snow White and Sleeping Beauty, to confession magazines which elevate the neurotic and masochistic vulnerability of a Marilyn Monroe, to the twisted intellects of artists like Norman Mailer and Ayn Rand comes the stuff that rape is made of.

All these works perpetrate the myth that femininity equals passivity and that forcefulness and strength is synonymous with masculinity. What's worse, is that authors like Mailer, Rand and countless others perpetuate the absurd theories of Freudian fools like Helen Deutsch, who defined women as masochists by nature.

PALING MYTHS

Somewhere under all these falsehoods is the true picture of rape, rape victims and rapists. Brownmiller asks rhetorically: "Do women want to be raped? Do we crave humiliation, degradation and violation of our bodily integrity?" She answers "Must a feminist deal with this preposterous question?" The answer is 'yes' because this question is the basis for the overwhelming majority of inquiries into rape, whether

the inquirers are novelists, psychoanalysts, policemen or jurists.

Victims of rape are continually berated to prove that they did not ask for it, and indeed to prove that their accusations are not total lies, concocted to satisfy a need to revenge the defoliation, which they actively sought, of their virtue and then for some neurotic reason found unsatisfying.

When Brownmiller holds up these preposterous myths to light of hard fact, they pale in their credibility but not in their viciousness.

In a study done in New York it was found that false reports of rape accounted for about two percent of all complaints. Thus the incidence of reports of rape that weren't identical to those of all other crimes.

RAPISTS UNDER 25

By the most conservative estimates, only one in five rapes is reported, as compared to one in two for other crimes. This is a direct result of the way rape is viewed by society. Police, prosecutors, judges and the public place the onus of proof so overwhelmingly on the victim, that she is usually transformed into the criminal by the legal process. Even if she is eventually vindicated, she is still often viewed by her family, husband or boyfriend as something which is used and dirty.

In 1973, the FBI reported 51,000 founded cases of forcible and attempted rape across the U.S., a 62 percent rise in a five year period. Of these 73 percent were rapes and the rest attempted rapes. The legal differentiation between a rape and an attempted rape is depth of penetration of the vagina. For a sexual assault to be classified as a rape, the assailant must penetrate the victim to a depth of one inch. This definition of rape is an anachronism, which stems from the days when women were legally defined in terms of whom they belonged to.

Rape laws were enacted to protect a man's goods — his wife or his daughter. If vaginal penetration was not affected, then the goods were not considered to have been sufficiently defiled to justify a charge of rape. Therefore all other attacks are classified as either assault, sodomy, or attempted rape — depending upon the nature of the attack.

The most stunning statistics, however, are those which relate to rapists. Sixty-one percent of rapists in the U.S. are under 25 years of age. About 50 percent of all rapes are committed by two or more assailants and in studies done in Toronto and Philadelphia, rapists who operated in groups accounted for 71 percent of all offenders.

BOY NEXT DOOR

This is in startling contrast to the standard profile of the rapist formulated by Freudian criminologists. Typically they view the rapist as a middle-aged,

introverted, repressed masochist. The rapist is actually more likely to be the boy next door than a deprived fetishist. Brownmiller says that "the typical American perpetrator of forcible rape is little more than an aggressive, hostile youth who chooses to do violence to women . . . far from the stereotypic psychiatric construct of mild mannered, repressed, impotent homosexuals with an Oedipus complex, they are better understood as brutalized, violence-prone men who act out their raging hatred against the world through an object offering the least amount of physical resistance — a woman's body."

This is really the essential truth about rape, that must be accepted before rape laws and attitudes can be altered to fit reality. Rape is not essentially a sex crime, but a crime of violence — in a sociological sense somewhere between theft and assault. It contains elements of both, in that the rapist attempts to steal a sexual union from his victim (not so much for sexual gratification but to prove that he can) and that it violates the bodily integrity of the victim.

Brownmiller qualifies rape best in her description of the mob rapes of Mormon women by Missourians in the 1830's, during their attempt to drive them out of the state. "It mattered little to the rapists acting under the cover of a mob whether or not their victims were attractive. This is significant since it argues that sexual appeal, as we understand it, has little to do with rape. A mob (or an individual) turns to rape as an expression of power and dominance. Women are used as inanimate objects, to prove a point among men."

PORNOGRAPHY AND PROSTITUTION

Perhaps the most controversial of Brownmiller's speculations on rape concern pornography and prostitution. As the sexual attitude of the general public have become more liberal, the legal constraints on pornography and prostitution have lessened. This trend has the support of the public, particularly of the young. Brownmiller, however, is totally against the legalization of pornography and prostitution. In fact, she feels that they must be stamped out before society can become truly non-sexist. This is a contention exceedingly hard to accept for anyone who considers themselves a liberal.

Brownmiller convincingly argues that pornography is predominantly written from a male-sexist point of view and thus serves to perpetuate some of the most degrading and reactionary myths about women. "Pornography", she argues, "is the undiluted essence of antifemale propaganda. It views women as anonymous, panting playthings, adult toys, dehumanized objects to be used, abused, broken and discarded."

What would civil libertarians do, she asks "if, come tomorrow morning, the bookstores and movie theatres lining 42nd street in New York City were devoted not to the humiliation of women and torture, as they currently are, but to the systematized, commercially successful pleasures of gassing Jews or lynching blacks," — a deeply disconcerting argument which continues to plague me two weeks after reading the book.

In the same vein she argues that rape is encouraged by prostitution. Brownmiller insists that boys who grow up with access to prostitutes come to believe that "being a male means access to certain mysterious rites and privileges, including the right to a woman's body. Implicit in consumer sex is the notion that if the goods are withheld, or priced too high, they may be taken by force. Business, after all, is theft by other means."

Brownmiller says that her "purpose in this book has been to give rape its history. Now we must deny its future."

