
Joanna Russ

*Magic
Mommias,
Trembling
Sisters,
Puritans &
Perverts*

Feminist Essays

1985

Chapter 5

**Pornography
By Women For Women,
With Love**

YES, THERE IS PORNOGRAPHY WRITTEN 100% BY WOMEN FOR A 100% female readership.

Surely I mean erotic?

Well, let's just say that to call something by one name when you like it and another when you don't is like those married ladies we all know who call what they do "making love" while what is done at singles bars is "shallow and trivial sex," and what homosexuals do is "perversion." (There are also those folks who call a work of art that supports the status quo "art" and works that question it "political.")

I tend to get restive at such honorifics, yet in the anti-pornography/anti-anti-pornography fight, "pornography" has become a loaded word, so for the purpose of this discussion we need a neutral one. Now that the title has caught your eye, and made some of you bristle, I'm going to talk about neither erotica nor pornography, but "sexual fantasy."

But first I must tell you about *Star Trek*.



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In the late '60s, *Star Trek* brought into science fiction fandom a large number of women. Science fiction readers are very often amateur printers who publish their own non-profit fan magazines, or "zines," who attend science fiction conventions (and run them), and who know each other via all sorts of friendship networks, amateur press associations, and discussion groups. Pre-*Star Trek* fandom was roughly ninety percent male; *Star Trek* has moved the sex ratio much closer to equity, though nobody seems to know the exact figures. This influx of women is surprising in view of the fact that the *Star Trek* television show focused on the work relationship and friendship of three male characters: James T. Kirk, the ambitious, sometimes impulsive and emotional, rather *macho* Captain of the starship *Enterprise*; Spock, his First Officer and Science Officer, who is half human and half alien (from the planet Vulcan) and who is almost completely unemotional, logical, and self-controlled; and the ship's doctor, Leonard McCoy, a peppery, outspoken cuss, who serves as a foil to the other two, who (because of their very different personalities) serve as foils to each other. While the usual science fiction fanzine consists of personal essays, letters, gossip, Amateur Press Association news, book reviews, and philosophical or scientific speculation, the *Star Trek* zines (certainly the ones I'm going to consider) specialize in the fan writers' own stories and poems, which are based (often very minimally) on the TV show and now the two *Star Trek* movies. Within the *Star Trek* fan world lies a specialized sub-group of writers, editors, and readers who edit, write, and read fanzines called "K/S."

"K/S" zines are anthologies of fan-written stories about the relationship between Kirk and Spock. The authors rate their own stories G, R, or X, and their premise is that Spock and his Captain are lovers. This fact is often assumed in the G-rated work, very often talked about in the R-rated poems and stories, and the X-rated work shows sex between the

two characters again and again and again. (And again. Ditto the illustrations.)

And all of the editors, writers, and readers are women.¹

If your autonomic nervous system does the nip-ups mine does upon reading merely the premise of this material, it's quite irrelevant to talk about the beauty of friendship or the necessity of empathic compassion in human affairs. These are sexual fantasies. I've shared this material with eight women I know who like science fiction and *Star Trek*; they all shrieked with delight and turned bright red with embarrassment upon hearing only the *premise* of the K/S zines.

Briefly: not only are the two characters (Kirk and Spock) lovers (or in the process of becoming so; many of these are "first time" stories), they are usually bonded telepathically in what amounts to a life-long, monogamous marriage, which is often literally impossible for either party to dissolve. Sometimes the union of minds lasts only until death (often the death of one bondmate precipitates that of the other) but often it is assumed to last after it. Like Tristan and Iseult, the two are fated to love; even stories that don't specifically state this fact assume it. Anyone who knows the K/S literature knows that in a sense this love already exists—an assumption which imposes a kind of retroactive inevitability on the K/S "marriage," no matter whether the story chooses to comment on the inevitability of the relationship or not. Sometimes the stories show the death of one or the other or both, or separations (either final or temporary) or the impossibility of combining love with career. Moreover, even in the stories that end happily there is an extraordinary amount of frustration and delay; in these tales Spock's Vulcan notions of propriety (emotionlessness and pure logic) are used to postpone the declaration and consummation of the love, or the conflict between Spock's Vulcan and Human natures, or Kirk's pride, or everybody's scrupulousness and doubts and reasons not to—which

sometimes go on for sixty or seventy pages. These endless hesitations and yearnings resemble the manufactured misunderstandings of the female romance books (themselves sexual fantasies for women). In fact, so paralyzing are these worries and scruples and hesitations to the two characters involved that over and over again the lovers must be pushed together by some force outside themselves. Somebody is always bleeding or feverish or concussed or mutilated or amnesiac or what-have-you in these tales. Either both are starving to death on a strange planet, in which case they can at least die in each others' arms, or they are (temporarily) immured in a cave and Spock, concussed, thinks he's dreaming and acts on his passion for Kirk, or Kirk is suffering from brain-burn and is reduced, mentally, to childhood, in which condition he innocently makes sexual advances to Spock, who is horrified, not by Kirk's innocent actions, but by his own response.

In short, the stories, over and over, set up situations in which the two are not responsible. Other (R- and G-rated) stories present various beatings, blindings, and mutilations which necessitate not only intense emotional intimacy, but also one character's touching and holding the other with an eroticism only lightly veiled in the story (and probably not veiled at all in the readers).

So far the material sounds like the irreverent description by two of my friends: "Barbara Cartland in drag."² But if that's all K/S stories are, why don't the women who read them and write them simply read romances and be done with it? Why the "drag"? Why project the whole process on to two male science fiction characters?

First of all, K/S is not about two men. Kirk is a man, to be sure, but Spock isn't; he's a half-human alien. Susan Gubar has speculated in a recent essay³ that when women s.f. writers write about aliens they are very often writing about

women. Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana Veith also suggest (brilliantly, I think) that although Spock is not literally female, his alienness is a way of "coding" into the K/S fantasies that their subject is not a homosexual love affair between two men, but love and sex as women want them, whether with a man or with another woman. Lamb and Veith cite many more details which support this view: briefly, that Spock's reproductive biology is cyclical and uncontrollable, that although "a prince among his own people," Spock is just another Fleet officer in a Federation ruled by Human men, that he is isolated both from Vulcans and from Humans (as non-traditional women are alienated from both traditional women and from men), that he has no command ambitions, that he often gets Kirk out of difficulties caused by Kirk's impulsiveness and rashness (qualities Spock does not and cannot afford to display), that his Vulcan and Human sides are at war, that Vulcan is matrilineal, that he must be self-controlled and guarded, and so on. (The argument is much more detailed and convincing than I can mention here.) I would add that the lovers come from literally different worlds (the stories constantly emphasize the difference in their natures and backgrounds), and that the sexuality in the stories is only nominally male. (There are betraying details: the characters leap into anal intercourse with a blithe lack of lubrication that makes it clear that the authors are thinking of vaginal penetration, both approach orgasm with a speeded-up intensity of pelvic thrusting, and in many stories there is multiple orgasm.)

Although Spock encodes many female characteristics, what is striking in these stories (again I agree with Lamb and Veith) is the androgyny of both characters, the way responsibility, initiative, activity, passivity, strength and weakness shift constantly from one to the other. Spock, for

example, is the “female” alien, but he is also physically stronger than Kirk, and is unemotional and an expert in scientific logic, all characteristics we associate with masculinity, while Kirk, his superior in the Federation hierarchy of command, and also the “tomcat” many-times-lover, has the emotionality and impulsivity we consider “feminine.” And so on.

As Lamb and Veith point out, the “marriage” of these two is in many ways ideal: neither has to give up “his” work in the world; both have adventure *and* love; telepathy provides lifelong commitment and the means of making such a union unbreakable and extremely intimate; and while both partners are “masculine” in the sense of being active in the world, they yet provide tenderness and nurturance for each other in a very “feminine” way. And the sex is marvelous.⁴

And yet—

If you ask “Why two males?” I think the answer is that of eighteenth-century grammarians to questions about the masculine-preferred pronoun: “Because it is more noble.” Certainly the TV series made the Kirk-Spock friendship a matter of real respect and real love, in contrast with Kirk’s absolutely *pro forma* affairs with various women. Lamb and Veith simply state that no one (including themselves) can imagine a man and woman having the same multiplex, worthy, androgynous relationship, or the same completely intimate commitment.

Camilla Decarnin’s “Interviews with Five Faghagging Women” in *Heresies* No. 12 have almost the same point to make. “A faghag is a woman, whether lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual, who devotes an important part of her social, affectional, or sexual attention . . . to homosexual men and who finds them erotically interesting because of their homosexuality. This attention need not be overt; it can take the form of fantasies.” Decarnin’s explanation of the motive for

this behavior is almost identical with my explanation of K/S: “the woman recognizes in the faggot a socio-erotic position she herself would like to hold, as the recognized peer *and* the lover of a male, a position impossible for women in sexist culture to secure.”⁵

One of K/S’s best writers says, “The problem is [women who] don’t like their own bodies enough, they can’t see themselves saving the universe once a week, they can’t let their own sexuality out without becoming dependents or victims. So Kirk and Spock do it for them.” She notes also, “the sex in Trek fiction (written by women for women) is female sexuality. . . . The readers . . . want to be strong, beautiful, complete adults who choose to love without limits, to trust utterly and never have their trust betrayed. . . .”*

I agree with both writers. It’s very, very difficult even for art, with its complexity and thoughtfulness, its inevitable alloy of reflection, its complicated evocations of emotion, to transcend the culture’s givens. To do so in sexual fantasy (necessarily pretty primitive) is, I think, totally impossible. The K/S sex scenes are usually just as thin, just as repetitive, just as stylized, just as interchangeable, just as full of magic words, as those of male pornography, and just as anti-art.

What! (says the reader). All that tenderness and empathy and commitment and nurturance and scrupulous delay merely pornographic? On the contrary, the superiority of female sexual fantasy is proved by precisely those things: The lovers’ personal interest in each others’ minds, not only each others’ bodies, the tenderness, the refusal to rush into a relationship, the exclusive commitment one to the other.

* For legal reasons—these writers and editors are open to legal action for violation of copyright, even though their work is very different from the TV and movie plays of Star Trek—I will not name any of the names of the women quoted or list their fanzines. I *am* quoting real people, though. Honest.

Is all this merely a sexual turn-on?

The subject gets very difficult here, but what I'm trying to make clear is that fantasy isn't simply an attenuated version of reality, and the same imagination that provides the tender loving care (in the extremely common "hurt-comfort" scenes for instance) also provides the battering, mutilation, and torture that are the pretexts for the nurturance.⁶ In fact, the nurturance in these stories is quite unreal, just as the misunderstandings, the scrupulousnesses, and the worries that keep the lovers from declaring themselves, are pure ritual, manufactured for the occasion. By "unreal" I don't mean simply glamorized or idealized but *totally unlike reality*; if your beloved appears at your door bleeding and battered in real life, you probably don't feel a rush of erotic *tendresse*. In fact, once you've called for an ambulance, covered said beloved with a blanket, made sure the patient's head is lower than the patient's feet, and administered what medical help you can, you are far more likely to go into your bathroom and throw up. The nurturance in these tales is like Bette Davis's resolution in *Jezebel* to care for Henry Fonda, who has yellow fever, while she looks heavenward (in a very becoming gown) and the sweetness of a thousand violins swells up on the sound-track. Nowhere do you see, for example, Fonda vomiting blood or Davis ugly with lack of sleep or resentful of her never-ending, gruelling contact with such romantic objects as full bedpans.

I do not believe that the supposed female virtues of the K/S material (and that of similar female fantasy, like the romances) are morally privileged—though some feminists talk as if this were so. Rather we have—ingeniously, tenaciously, and very creatively—sexualized our female situation and training, and made out of the restrictions of the patriarchy our own sexual cues.

For example, women wait. Women are (quite realistically) wary of heterosexual activity. Thus the endless analyses

of motives and scruples for pages and pages, a delay that is in itself erotically arousing, since it's a sexualization of what is or was presented to us as "the real thing" for women. (Decarnin has suggested, in correspondence, that this waiting be taken metaphorically, as related to women's need for long "foreplay" in order to achieve orgasm.) Women must not initiate sexual activity. Thus the enormous plot conventions which finally free the lovers to be sexual, in which that lack of responsibility is itself exciting, an intensifier of arousal, vulnerability, and emotion made out of condition. Thus the "hurt-comfort" material, which pictures nurturance as a lot of open sexual touching and strong emotional intimacy (generally in the stories which lack explicit sex) is (again) something that has become a sexual cue, not anything resembling real help or real illness. Thus also the material about the death of one or the other or both (so ubiquitous, I'm told, that editors now refuse to accept it!), the meditations at the graveside, the grief that is somehow beautiful and exciting, not painful, all of it delicious. And let's not pride ourselves on the monogamy, either; this is another patriarchal imposition which women have sexualized—in fact, I believe it can be seen in the K/S material (as in the romances) as a metaphor for intensity. The telepathic union can also be read as a way of expressing intensity and completeness, not duration, but here too sexual expression waits on "love" while desire, by itself, is not enough. Again I think we're dealing with a sexualization of the feminine condition. What was, historically, the female terror of unmarried pregnancy, the main enforcer of women's anti-sexual training, has here been made into something sexually arousing in itself. That is, in the K/S world, *the myth of romantic love works*.

But that's not all that's in the material. In many ways the K/S world is a great advance over the standard romances. For one thing, there is explicit sexuality instead of the old

Romances' one-kiss-in-the-moonlight. And I believe Lamb and Veith see rightly when they describe the androgyny of the relationship, the impossibility (despite the coding into the Spock character of so many female traits) of assigning gender roles to either partner, ever—obviously this is very different from the romances, in which a woman's problems in life are solved for her by a dominant male. The K/S insistence that the characters be first-class human beings is inevitably compromised by the social necessity of awarding that V.I.P. status only to men.

To me one important conclusion we can draw from these stories is that sexual fantasy can't be taken at face value. Another is that no sexual cues are morally privileged (though some kinds of sexual *behavior* certainly are) since sexualizing any kind of behavior drastically changes the meaning of that behavior. Translated into real life, the "hurt-comfort" theme of K/S would simply be pernicious, from the woman who can do sex only under the guise of pity, to the lover who wants to keep her beloved dependent and powerless, in which condition she can then "love" the beloved. What excites in fantasy is both far more exaggerated than real life and not the same as in real life; that is, fantasy isn't just a vicarious substitute for real experience; its meaning as experience becomes changed when it's made into fantasy. Without understanding the rather complicated context of the fantasy, one "reads" it literally—like the woman friend of mine (new to *Star Trek*) who said in disgust that K/S was about rape and power games. This is simply not true in terms of the genre. In fact, the story that evoked this response is a classic K/S tale in which Spock goes into *pon farr** again after pages and pages of agonized misunderstandings, thus (thank goodness!) providing a way for the lovers finally to declare themselves and make out

* A state of heat in which he must "mate" or die. Kirk must, of course, offer himself to save Spock's life.

like crazy.

What seems to be happening in sexual fantasy is that any condition imposed on or learned with sexuality is capable of becoming sexualized, either as sex or a substitute for sex or as an indispensable condition of it. Such a process is certainly at work in the K/S universe. Yet it's perfectly clear to me that K/S writers and readers don't literally wish to become male any more than they literally want their dear ones to bleed and die in their arms or to die with their lovers. What they do want is sexual intensity, sexual enjoyment, the freedom to choose, a love that is entirely free of the culture's whole discourse of gender and sex roles, and a situation in which it is safe to let go and allow oneself to become emotionally and sexually vulnerable. The literal conditions and cues of the K/S world, far from being impeccably moral, are sexualizations of situations and behavior K/S fans did not choose and quite likely wouldn't want in reality. Moreover they are situations and behavior that are absolutely antithetical to getting sexual and emotional satisfaction in the real world, which fact at least some of the K/S readers and writers know perfectly well.

I'm convinced, after reading through more than fifty volumes of K/S material (most of it "X-rated") that only those for whom a sexual fantasy "works," that is, those who are aroused by it, have a chance of telling us to what particular set of conditions that fantasy speaks, and can analyze how and why it works and for whom. Sexual fantasy materials are like icebergs; the one-tenth that shows above the surface is no reliable indicator of the size or significance of the whole thing. Sexual fantasy that doesn't arouse is boring, funny, or repellent, and unsympathetic outsiders trying to decode these fantasies (or any others) will make all sorts of mistakes.

I've spent so much time on this material partly because it's the only sexual fantasy I know of written without the inter-

position of interests that are political or commercial.⁸ In some ways these stories stick to the old Romance formula (I find this aspect of K/S destructive, although it too can be read metaphorically) but in others they put forth an emphatic claim to experience that radically transcends the conventional. These readers and writers want a sexual relationship that does not require their abandoning freedom, adventure, and first-class humanity (these are points I've taken from Lamb and Veith), they want sexual enjoyment that is intense, whole, and satisfying, and they want intense emotionality. They also want (and I find this absolutely fascinating and aesthetically very valuable) to create images of male bodies as objects of desire. One of the worst things forced on us in the name of "femininity" is passivity, a distortion created by the heterosexual institution and a guarantee of sexual and human paralysis. The writers and readers of these fantasies can do what most of us can't do in reality (certainly not heterosexual reality), that is they can act sexually at their own pace and under conditions they themselves have chosen. The K/S stories, ritualized as they are, are the only literature I've ever seen in which women do describe male beauty—not "masculinity," mind you, but the passive, acted-upon glories of male flesh. Some of this is very well done, e.g., the lovely convention that Spock, when sexually aroused, *purrs* like a giant cat, and Kirk praising his lover's alien genitals as a beautiful flower, an orchid. (Shades of Judy Chicago!)

Until recently I assumed, along with many other feminists, that "art" is better than "pornography" just as "erotica" is one thing and "pornography" another; and just as "erotica" surpasses "pornography," so "art" surpasses "erotica." I think we ought to be very suspicious of these distinctions insofar as they are put forward as moral distinctions. I've said elsewhere that material presented outright as a sexual turn-on and nothing else can be a lot less harmful

than material that is presented as if it were a thoughtful and complex depiction of real life. One of the great virtues of the K/S stories is that there is far less misery and death in the X-rated stories, by and large, than there is in the G- and R-rated ones. I think we are probably right in seeing sexual repression as a very important source of violence in the patriarchy—though we must at once remember that we're talking about all spontaneous pleasure, not just sex, and about quality, not just quantity. (Elizabeth Fisher puts forward this idea in *Woman's Creation*.)⁹ Wilhelm Reich (with whom Fisher agrees) also said flatly that if you lift sexual inhibitions part-way (which is certainly the situation today, with the mass media force-feeding us plastic sex which is not only limited as to color, age, gender, and "flawless" personal appearance, but which is still very rigid about tactility and the real nature of real human sexuality and emotionality), you get sadism—by which Reich did *not* mean S & M (he did not discuss it at all in *The Sexual Revolution*) but rape, violence, brutality, and callousness.¹⁰

If female sex fantasies can't be taken at face value, maybe male fantasies can't either. Books like *Punished Slut*¹¹ (I have fifteen S & M paperbacks on my desk and am wading through them) don't excite me, so perhaps I shouldn't speculate about them. But it seems to me that such fantasies may be a kind of half-way house *out of* violence rather than into it. This isn't the common feminist view, but I think the comparison holds: if female K/S fantasies are complex and multi-dimensional and if one of their achievements is the reversal of women's substitution of romance for explicit sexuality, then (if I read them correctly) male fantasies of violence, either accompanying sexual activity, serving as a precondition for it, or as a cue to it, are attempts to partly undo the violence in the "respectable" part of the culture, where violence has been *substituted for* sexual enjoyment. I believe that movies like "A Clockwork Orange" or "Apoca-

lypse Now” are far more dangerous than *The Sadistic Sisters of Saxony*.¹² The latter are *at least* sexual. I agree with Fisher and Reich that quality counts, and by “sex” I mean pleasure that isn’t joyless, furtive, perfunctory, unspontaneous, forced, guilty, partial, or trivialized (or made into a plastic goodie, either). I’m convinced now that the patriarchy damages male sexuality just as it does ours, though perhaps less than ours and certainly not in the same way. (Gay men don’t seem to me exempt from the process; they’re raised in the same culture and educated much the same.) Feminists who live apart from men (as one heterosexual feminist told me) forget how limited and foolish most of them are, and how thoroughly they are controlled by the culture’s expectations. From the viewpoint of the female situation, I think we sometimes see men’s sexual freedom as greater than it is, because it is in fact greater than our own. If you see male freedom as absolute, or close to absolute, then male fantasies of sexual violence will look, in a sense, worse than they are. We know that women don’t want to be raped; episodes in female fantasies that look like rapes really are something else, *i.e.*, Will somebody, something, for heaven’s sake, enable me to *act*? I think male pornography in which a woman is “raped” (*i.e.*, made to experience sexual pleasure against her will) may be struggling with a similar problem of permission—not that the man can’t initiate sexual activity, but that he can’t let go while doing it. And without letting go, self-abandonment, whatever you call the opposite of self-controlled and rigid behavior, sexual activity will be minimal and partial.

I’ve always thought that patriarchal male sexuality must be a rather difficult business. To over-simplify: A partner’s hostility or boredom is ordinarily a real turn-off—and yet this is exactly the situation under patriarchy, where so many women are not interested, not excited, not participants, and not happy. Yet men must penetrate and ejacu-

late if there are to be any babies—and so the problem for patriarchy (whether you think of this as a one-time invention or a constant process) is to construct a male sexuality which can function in the face of a woman’s non-cooperation or outright fear and hostility. Of course such a sexuality is, in fact, common. It is also furtive, guilty, miserable, unspontaneous, forced, unfree, and minimally sensual. No wonder Philip Slater writes about the perfunctoriness of sex for so many men (“the quicker it is done with, the better”) and maintains that women’s complaints (“he’s only interested in sex, in my body”) are missing the point: “A man who behaves this way is not interested in sex, either. . . . he is interested only in releasing tension.” Slater interprets male fantasies of rape as twofold: “First, it expresses the common masculine wish for some kind of superpotency” (notice: not superreactivity!) and “it is *men* who have bottled up feelings and long to burst their controls. But since this yearning endangers the whole of our culture it cannot be allowed direct expression and is projected onto women. . . . the emotional specialists in our society.”¹³

It sounds odd to say that men’s fantasies of rape have their roots in a desire to be overwhelmed and acted on, but I think this may be at least part of the truth. Women, after all, fantasize “rape” as the solution to issues of permission and forced passivity; why shouldn’t men (who must deal with the issues of forced activity) use the other side of the same fantasy?

What frightens me is not those sleazies on my desk (in one of which a woman puts needles through a man’s nipples). It’s the mainstream American habit of substituting violence *for* sex and presenting the result as “real life” and, even, Heaven help us!, “decency.” In the one *Star Trek* TV show in which Spock went into *pon farr*, the first twenty minutes titillated female America with the promise of the controlled, logical Vulcan engaging in uncontrolled sexual

behavior (a consummation greatly to be wished). But the second twenty minutes gave us, not sexuality (which the K/S writers know perfectly well ought to be there and which they do put in their stories) but a good old (and very disappointing) American fight—between Kirk and Spock! I certainly prefer sex. Think also of “Klute” in which Jane Fonda as a call-girl (aha! bad) is threatened by one man and saved by another. And for a particularly nasty example, try the Hitchcock Hour’s 30-second advertisement of a few years ago: a montage of different women screaming in terror. Or the plastic cheesecake of *Playboy*, as drearily fake as the expensive stereos and fancy cars the readers probably don’t have either. Get stuck on those photos of women and your sexual failure is assured; for one thing, women don’t come airbrushed.

Well, I’m speculating. What I’m sure of is that we do not have nearly enough knowledge about female sexuality. For example, “masochistic” rape fantasies have bedeviled the women’s movement for a decade *as if they were a literal representation of what women want*, when they are quite obviously nothing of the kind. I’m sure there are female S & M “tops” who like S & M because they’re into power over others—but I also have two friends, one of whom still does S & M and one who dropped it non-traumatically, and they like(d) it because they found it a *sexual* (not characterological) turn-on. Similarly, there may be women in the K/S network who are really turned on by a lover’s illness or mutilation—but I doubt it, since what the writers obviously want is not twenty-four-hour-a-day nurse duty or people really bleeding and dying in their arms, but the sexual turn-on that the fantasy of touching and holding the lover gives them.

Fifteen S & M paperbacks is probably no representative sample, nor have I read all the K/S fanzines. Women probably read romances in much greater numbers than the K/S

readers anyway. (About 125 zines have been published since 1975-6, in editions of 500-1500.) Yet in all these stories I’ve found a lot less to complain about than I can find simply by turning on my TV at random on any evening at all. I don’t believe that men are taught to be violent by commercialized sexual fantasy; there are far too many worse teachers around. If anything, commercial, male-oriented sexual fantasy is (I suspect) a half-assed attempt to undo masculinity training, rather than the reverse. I don’t want to idealize it, but it’s certainly less offensive to me than (for example) “The Short and Happy Life of Francis Macomber,” Hemingway’s macho-misogynist short story which was taught to me (to us!) as “great literature,” full of “eternal truth,” and so on.

Many feminist women seem only to be following their gut reactions in hating male sexual fantasy and spending so much of their energies on it. I agree that it’s important to know one’s gut reactions, but before we make the jump from “It offends me” to “Therefore it is bad,” to “Therefore we must fight it” we need to know a lot more than we do.

I hope I haven’t offended anyone by calling K/S “sexual fantasy.” *If it weren’t, I wouldn’t pay any attention to it.* I love the stuff, I love the way it turns me on, and I love its attempt to establish a very radical androgyny in its characters. So many feminist creations of Amazons and Goddess-worshippers and so on simply don’t work—most are very thin—but *K/S works*, if you know and like *Star Trek*, and (as I mentioned) it is the only sexual fantasy by women for women that’s produced without the control or interposition of censorship by commercial booksellers or the interposition of political intent by writers or editors. It’s also a labor of love for the women involved, since it is (and must be, because of the possibility of lawsuit) non-profit. I find it raw, blatantly female, and very valuable and exciting, a judgment I owe to Lamb and Veith, since they had the

courage of their reactions and continued to study this material for close to six months, while I merely got embarrassed (because, I think, the stuff was so female and my response to it so intense) and hid it away—in the closet, of all places! I know now that it does not mean what it seems to mean—that we don't like sex except in committed relationships, that we think about "love" all the time, that we are sentimental, that we are altruistic, or any other sexist litany of our supposed virtues. What is so striking in K/S is the raw sexual and emotional starvation the writers are expressing so openly—and the attempt to picture a totally androgynous situation, *not* "Brigitte Bardot scotch-taped to John Wayne" (as I once called "androgyny") but a situation in which questions about who is the man and who is the woman, who's active and who's passive, even who's who, *cannot even be asked*. This is very heady stuff. Instead of presenting us with a couple who are of different sexes but the same species, K/S creates a couple who are of different species, but the same sex. I've already mentioned why that sex is pictured as "male"—and what subverts that "maleness" and makes it ambiguous—but the stuff works (at least on some of us) as fantasy. Such statements cannot be made in realistic literature, and one of the crucial things the K/S material has done for me is to make me glad I write science fiction and fantasy. And now, if you will excuse me, I must go back to my ancient Vulcan castle with the carved bedposts where I have left my two characters, Guess Who and Guess Which, in a very dramatic and painful situation. In fact, I left Spock preparing to beat Kirk, whom he has bought as a slave in an alternate universe in which violent Vulcan (Spock's planet) never reformed. Of course the point of the whole scene is that Spock can't bear to do any such thing because he is madly in love with Kirk. So he smites his forehead with his hand (or some similar gesture) and rushes out to agonize.

Meanwhile Kirk (who's of course in love with Spock) agonizes too, but in the opposite direction, so to speak.

They will do this for a long as I can contrive, and then they will make great music together, also as long as I can stretch the scene out.

Yum.

And so on.

Author's Notes

An editor: "It is pornography for women produced by women." Another notes that readers "fear their own interest in K/S will be interpreted as lesbian by friends and family."

About the "hurt-comfort theme," a writer friend of mine writes, about her playing at adventure with a friend (both were preadolescent): "An increasingly regular feature of this business was that characters who were sworn and bitter enemies were continually forced into situations in which one . . . would be wounded in some specifically painful manner and the other would grudgingly but lovingly, take care of him."

In "Big Brother is Trekking You" by James Wolcott (*Village Voice*, 2/2/76) Wolcott describes "Star Trek Lives!" by Jacqueline Lichternberg, Sondra Marshak, and Joan Winston (a commercially published book): ". . . these women have their libidinal thermostats turned up pretty high . . . [Fans'] stories . . . are sexually charged-up. . . the return of the runaway boys on the biggest damn raft you can imagine. . . 'Star Trek' also hooks the women by

the sexual tension beneath that buddy-buddiness. . . . Spock becomes a parody of the unreachable woman. He's practically an extra-terrestrial Garbo." (Wolcott's "raft" refers to Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel*, in which Fiedler derives a theory of American fiction from American novelists' male pair-bonding. Lamb and Veith also begin their first paper by citing Fiedler.)

A newspaper-catalogue of media fiction *in toto* (of which *Star Trek* is only a part) lists twenty-two kinds of media fiction, from *The Chronicles of Amber* to *The Wild Wild West*. The list includes *Dracula*, *Battle Star Galactica*, *Sherlock Holmes* (!), *MASH*, and *Hill Street Blues*. One story I have read from *Starsky and Hutch* media fiction, as well as one story I've managed to find from *Magnum, P.I.* media fiction both treat the male pair as Spock and Kirk are treated in K/S fiction, *i.e.* the two are lovers, yet somehow without being homosexuals. (There is no homosexual sub-culture presented, no awareness of being derogated, no friends or family, absolutely no gay friends, no gay politics, and so on. The men are masculine, even macho figures—and somehow they are lovers without ever thinking of what they do as "homosexuality." I would guess that other male-bonding pairs are treated in the same way in other media fiction.)

NOTES

1. Several K/S editors give these statistics. Moreover, only one piece of fiction or poetry out of forty volumes bears the statement that it was written by a man. The zines themselves always refer to writers, readers, or editors as "she."
2. Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana Veith, "The Romantic Myth and Transcendence: a Feminist Interpretation of the Kirk/Spock Bond," Conference on Fantasy, Boca Raton, FLA, 1982.
3. Susan Gubar, "C.L. Moore and the Conventions of Women's Science Fiction," *S.F. Studies*, 7:1, March 1980, pp. 16-25.
4. Lamb and Veith, unpublished.
5. Camilla Decarnin, "Interviews with Five Faghagging Women," *Heresies*, No. 12, III:4, 1981, p. 10.
6. In one self-parody (K/S writers enjoy such pieces and write them surprisingly often) the two alternately beat each other in the head with a shovel, and then say, "Let me be with you in your hour of pain," and similar statements. The self-parody seems to me to be a tongue-in-cheek recognition of the necessity for hurt *in order to show comfort*.
7. Monk's Secret Library, 1983.
8. I am thinking of Samois, *Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M*, Up Press (Palo Alto, California: 1981). The purpose of the book, stated in several places, is explicitly political, *as well as erotic*.
9. Elizabeth Fisher, *Woman's Creation*, (New York: Doubleday) 1980.
10. Wilhelm Reich, *The Sexual Revolution: Toward a Self-Governing Character Structure*, 4th ed. revised 1969 (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux) 1971.
11. *Punished Slut* (no location: Dame) 1980.
12. *The Sadistic Sisters of Saxony*, Monks Secret Library, (New York: dame distributors) 1980.
13. Philip Slater, "Sexual Adequacy in America," in *Intellectual Digest*, November 1973, pp. 17-20.