

الكلمات، النساء، الكلمات *

ايتيل عدنان

النساء يحبين الكلام. هل يجدن في الكلام نوعاً من السلطة، تأكيداً للذات، هذه الذات التي يحققها الرجل بعمله، بمكانته في المجتمع؟ بالكلام تستطيع النساء تذكير أنفسهن والآخرين بأنهن موجودات. كذلك تستخدم النساء الكلام سلاحاً، فالشتائم تخيف ولا يستطيع المرء حيالها شيئاً. وللتعويض عن ضعفهن الجسدي قياساً الى قوة الرجال استخدمن الكلمات في السحر والرقى والتعزيم منذ أقدم العصور، فكانت الكلمات وسائل إغراء وتهديد وثأر، بل وحاملة موت، كأن للكلمات كيانه مستقلاً بإمكانه ان يصنع الخير او الشر، وليست من خلق البشر. ولكن النساء يتأثرن ايضاً بالكلمات : في الشعر والأدب والأغاني والأفلام؛ ويتأثرن بكلمات الحب ويصدقن أكثر مما يصدقن فعل الحب. الفكرة قد تمحوها فكرة أخرى، اما الكلمة المؤثرة فلا يمحوها شيء في الواقع. في البدء كانت الكلمة.

تحرير النساء متصل بالحريات التي تمنحها المجتمعات التي يعشن فيها، ولا ربح يكون نهائياً. فالنساء يحاربن على عدد من الجبهات، وكما يكون الأمر في حرب أهلية - لأنها في الواقع حرب أهلية -

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اتيل عدنان

تتسم المعركة بالفوضى وبالتحول الدائم : من غرفة النوم، الى الطريق، او المكتب او الصالونات. ويختلف الصراع من بلد الى آخر، من حي الى آخر. فالمسألة كروية، وليست شبيهة بخط مستقيم. والمشكلة تتعلق بانفعالات الفرد المتفجرة. ان العنف يرسل آلاف الأسهم التي تخترق كل ما يصادفها. ولم تبق المسألة مسألة توضيح الفرق بين الأنثوي والذكوري، وانما إعادة تحديد الجنس البشري.

ترجمة نازك سابا يارد

من بعض كلمات ايتيل عدنان عن المدن والنساء (رسائل الى فواز) ١٩٩٣.

WORDS, WOMEN, WORDS

Etel ADNAN

Women love words. Women in general love words and I don't mean exclusively educated women. I speak of the vast majority of women that I encountered and still encounter in my life.

When I was a child growing up in Ain Mreisseh and the Clemenceau area, in the still small city of Beirut, I felt surrounded by women's words. Put it simply : I grew up thinking, because witnessing it, that men were silent and that women were talkative.

Women used to make - and still do around the Mediterranean - many visits a day to their friends or neighbours. It was like a continuous chatter.

Women talked to their children, at home, always telling them something, if not giving them orders. Besides their numerous domestic occupations they seemed to have infinite energy for talking and sometimes shouting. Was it that they found in the use of words a kind of power, an affirmation of their selves that men could satisfy by already having a job and, through their jobs, a place in society ? For women to talk was a way to keep reminding themselves and everybody around them that they existed, and if I remember so, it is because there was something aggressive in their ways of talking : they were making sure that one was listening.

When the women friends of my mother came and talked in our living-room (and this was done usually in Greek), I used to hear an end-

less string of confessions... but my awareness was not of what they were saying - both mysterious and banal to a child - but of the very fact that a flow of words was filling the space. They weren't coming to say specific things, it seemed to me, because of the numerous repetitions of the same stories that I was hearing, but were coming to exercise that special function of speech that they enjoyed particularly.

It is also true that women use words in circumstances where men would use action : while men were paying the grocer the women were chatting with the grocer ; when men were busy with the formalities of a funeral, for example, women were shrieking , crying, or talking ; when something dreadful was happening in the street, men were agitated and usually efficient, and women were watching in horror and then telling the awful stories again and again to whomever they found that would listen. Words were their particular possessions and they used them freely .

They used them also as weapon. Men's violence, when it erupted, ended often in physical blows, or stopped suddenly and retreated in a silent rage. Women would be experts in verbal abuses : knowing the power of words they would use them with skill , a subversive weapon against which there are no laws of restraint, a weapon that could drag their opponents to insanity. Verbal abuse leaves no traces for inquiries and in the poor neighborhoods you could hear it just walking in the streets, and it is both terrifying and invisible, creating an engulfing universe of terror against which little could be done. So many men are or have been throughout History more scared to confront the verbal onslaught of their wives than to go to war !

Going further with their sense of power women traditionally were more prone to use magic than their masculine counterparts. They believed in the power of curses and used them profusely. Being in a position of inferiority in relation to naked physical power they seem to compensate with the occult powers of words : witches were notoriously feared for their magic words and incantations. Women have

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been the repository of verbal magic and its consequences. From Babylonian times to the Greeks and then to the Medieval world (both Arabian and European) goddesses and lesser feminine figures were specialized in litanies of curses and magical practices that seemed to be a world of their own. Ritualized formulas, use of numbers, skilled repetitions, the power of the sacred, were harnessed to words specifically uttered at specific occasions and these were deemed to be as powerful and reliable means as men's more "rational" endeavours.

Men, of course, knew the power of words and used it, but throughout History they left the obscure fringes of that power to women or, to put it differently, women developed a belief in the magic power of words that went beyond men's interests in that power, and appropriated to themselves a whole world where words were used as powerful instruments of direct action, seduction, threat, revenge, and were even carriers of death.

It is certain that such a reliance on words as women have had has endowed words with a power which has been objectified, which has been seen as autonomous, as a direct attribute of the words themselves. Forgetting that words are human creations people acted as if they believed that they were autonomous entities, "things" with their own capacities of bringing good and evil.

We can say that women do "things" to words, imprint them with their will and superstitions, but the reverse of the coin is that women behave in ways that show often that not only do they control words to their advantage but that also words affect them and, to a great degree, even "control" them as if they were free and efficient agents.

By investing words with intrinsic values women fall under the power of these words. This magic that they use on others works on them, too.

Women love words : they enjoy them ; they love the arts which use them : poetry, song, writing.

I noticed all along my life the attention that women paid to words : in the movies, they will notice the things said to each other by the main protagonists. Reading novels, they will enjoy the endless conversations that go between the main characters. Words will impress : many of their superstitions will involve particular words, or sentences. Much more than men they will fear to pronounce certain words lest they bring about what they mean : names of diseases, for example.

Women are incredibly sensitive to words of passion. Their instinctive fear of sex (or, rather, of its consequences such as pregnancy, disease, etc.) seems to have developed in them an overwhelming love, or even need, for the verbal expressions of love. They tend to believe words more than deeds when it comes to love : for years, they may not remember some moments of passion as much as they would remember every possible word of love pronounced by their lover. And even in cases when a lover's actions would prove the contrary, they will believe what he said rather than his negative behaviour. For years they will repeat to themselves the few words of love that had been told to them even when the love had remained platonic or when for some reason the lover did never pursue the matter.

Words can imprison with their power : some women would wait for a life time a promise to be fulfilled even when everything would have alerted an objective listener to the futility of that waiting : the reality of the word pronounced or given being stronger than any other reality.

Women can manipulate words best because they know their own vulnerability to that matter : they are particularly susceptible to rumors, to the magic (again) aura of pronouncements, to the shadow side of things half said and half heard ; they are particularly sensitive to that realm where the irrational and the dream touch the world of language because in there it is not the ideas that make an impact but rather key words, words that could appear to be benign, but which, under certain circumstances, could create havoc in one's soul.

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Women do live under the spell of words : because these act on our psyche in ways that rational thought cannot analyze : one can destroy an idea with the help of other ideas but one cannot destroy a certain word said at a certain time because there is nothing to destroy. Words become at certain moments magical imperatives and they make us act, not understand, they infiltrate like arrows, they create inner cataclysms, they bypass the mind and the will.

I consider words like little atoms, like particles emanating from our organism, like audible emanations of our mental and emotional make-up, like creations closest to our being. These little “energies” are similar to atoms in the sense that they contain tremendous power. Once they touch our psyche they leave their imprint, their impact, and they seem to affect women most durably, even if it is simply because women traditionally were less in contact with the “outside” world, and remained closer to their inner selves and their memory.

I would give an example that struck me most. It was just before the outbreak of the war in Lebanon and I was walking in the sheer magic of the Baalbeck Festival, among the ruins, just before the spectacle started. I came face to face with a dear friend of mine whom I hadn't seen for about twenty years as I was living in California and not corresponding with her. She saw me in that golden light of Baalbeck when you didn't know if the light was coming from electricity or from the stones themselves, and with no preamble she started reciting to me by heart the letters of love that a fellow student of ours during our years at the Ecole des Lettres of Beirut had sent her, then, years ago. Not much had happened after their encounter and the few letters he had sent, but he had told her “I love you”, in words pronounced and then in words written, and had left... and she knew that he had afterwards had many tumultuous affairs with other women, and a marriage. But his words had taken possession of her and when she saw me unexpectedly his words took over and nothing else was said but that hypnotic recitation of love words.

Etel Adnan

In a moment of History where violent action prevails not only on battlefields but also in movies and television, where sexuality seems to be the only expression of desire or love, or of both, let us bring back to our attention the fact of words, their role, their importance, and remember that, like the little atoms that they are, they participate in the energies of Life, and they still have the power to create Paradise or Hell. Indeed, in the beginning was the Word...

LES MOTS, LES FEMMES, LES MOTS

Les femmes aiment les mots. A travers les mots, les femmes existent. Les mots sont leurs armes. Pour compenser leur faiblesse physique, elles usent de magie et de sorcellerie depuis les temps immémoriaux. Les mots sont le moyen de séduire, de menacer, de se venger. Les mots sont porteurs de mort ou de vie.

Les femmes sont aussi sensibles aux mots, à la poésie, à la littérature, à la chanson, aux films. Elles s'émeuvent aux mots d'amour. Elles y croient plus qu'à l'amour lui-même. L'idée efface une autre idée, mais la parole qui touche ne s'efface pas...

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* Amongst her publications :

- *Sitt Marie-Rose*, Paris, des femmes, 1977 ; translated into English by G. Kleege, California, Sausalito, Ca., Post-Apollo Press, 1978.

- *The Arab Apocalypse* (a long poem), Sausalito, Ca., Post-Apollo Press, 1993.

- *Of Cities and Women (Letters to Fawwaz)*, Sausalito, Ca., Post-Apollo Press, 1993.