

**«The Secret of Being a Woman»  
On Etel Adnan's Quest**

**Mona Takieddine Amyuni<sup>(\*)</sup>**

Etel Adnan describes a group of friends who gather frequently in Mill Valley somewhere in California, supposedly to paint. Basically, however, they are fully involved with perception. Etel quotes one woman in this group who says:

To perceive is to be both objective and subjective. It is to be in the process of becoming one with whatever it is, while also becoming separate from it (**Journey to Mount Tamalpais**, p.11)<sup>(1)</sup>.

And she adds that the moment of perception is a moment of art (**Journey...**, p.28).

I read Etel Adnan. I meet her sometimes in Beirut. I try all the time to perceive the kind of writer she is, the woman she is. She tells us that her books are the houses she builds for herself (**Cities and Women...** p.111)<sup>(2)</sup>, that she settles nowhere, that she lives all over the world in newspapers, railway stations, cafés, airports. Feeling different early in life she writes: «Memories are as fresh as cool water and a cool breeze floats over one's fever (**Journey...**, p.13).

Her memories take her back to her childhood in Beirut where she

---

(\*) Assistant Professor, Civilization Sequence Program, American University of Beirut.

(1) Adnan, Etel, **Journey to Mount Tamalpais**, an essay. Sausalito: California, the Post-Apollo Press, 1986, hence forward mentioned in abbreviation followed by the page number in the body of the essay. Similarly for other quotes from the author's works.

(2) Adnan, Etel. **Of Cities and Women (letters to Fawwaz)**, Sausalito: California, the Post-Apollo Press, 1993.

lived in an «old big house, with huge windows, lace curtains and a flower stand painted in green». She remembers Beirut as a magical place flooded all over with light. Her mother was a Christian Greek from Smyrna, her father a Muslim Syrian from Damascus. He belonged to a family where the men served in the Army of the Ottoman Empire. They settled in Beirut at the end of World War I and Etel was born in 1925. Lebanon was a French mandate and French schools multiplied then. Arabic was forbidden in these schools and Etel spoke French as a child. She said later in an interview that she could only express herself in Arabic through painting<sup>(3)</sup>. Educated in a strict nun's school, she felt that dogmatism occupied the totality of her mental space. She grew up thinking the whole world was French, and felt alienated to her natural environment. Moreover, her mother was as strict as the nuns at school, and constantly warned her about the «danger» girls would encounter everywhere. Men would «devour» her, said the mother, anytime she lacked vigilance. With her usual sense of humor, Etel writes that her mother made her feel men were like «the Chaos of Greek mythology, the original void, the unending vertigo». («Growing Up...», p.8).

Etel's singularities accumulated for she was the only girl at school to come from a mixed background, to be dressed up like a boy and to wear a boy's hair cut, with her hair cut very short **à la garçon**, in the latest Parisian fashion. Her mother decided, as well, to have her baptized while she discovered simultaneously the East through her frequent visits to Damascus with her father. They stayed with relatives and she delighted in the discovery of this different world with Muslim feasts, dinners on huge copper trays put on rugs, mounts of delicious sweets brought in from the market by boys carrying them on their heads. In brief, Damascus was the East with all its splendor. There she was a child of city Arabs mixed with Turkish blood and culture, at the door of the Islamic world:

Thus I got used to standing between situations, to being a bit marginal and still a native, to getting acquainted with notions of truth which were relative and

- 
- (3) As quoted by Ammiel Alcalay in her review of Etel's two latest books **Of Cities and Women**, and **Paris, when it's Naked**, Post- Apollo Press, 1993. The review is entitled «Our Memory Has No Future», **The Nation**, March 7, 1994, p.311; henceforward referred to as **The Nation**.
- (4) These biographical details come from a sketch by Etel Adnan entitled «**Growing up to Be a Woman Writer in Lebanon**», in Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke, eds., **Opening the Gates, A Century of Arab Feminist Writing**. London: Virago Press,

changed like the hours of the days and the passing seasons («**Growing Up...**» p.11)<sup>(4)</sup>.

Would this «standing between situations» be the basis of Etel's inner freedom, a freedom one feels in all that she writes»? This question will be entertained throughout our quest for Etel's identity as woman and writer, and for her own approach to Feminism.

Later, Etel works for a living in Beirut and continues her higher education in Beirut, Paris, and the United States where she has been living for very long. Thus, she writes in French and English poetry, novels, essays, literary criticism, articles for journals and newspapers. She also paints. She is unquestionably, as well, an Arab writer asserts rightly Ammiel AlCalay in a beautiful article on Etel and Ammiel adds:

How, then can one come to an easy definition of Adnan? Is she a Lebanese writer, a French writer, an American writer, a woman writer? (**The Nation**).

These questions come in the context of a review of a collection of letters Etel writes between 1990 and 1992 to a friend of hers, Fawwaz, a Lebanese writer and journal editor living in exile in Paris. Fawwaz had asked her to write for his journal **Zawaya** an essay on feminism for a special issue on Arab Women. The essay begun in Barcelona at a feminist book fair, turns into a series of letters entitled **Of Cities and Women (Letters to Fawwaz)** that Etel addresses to her friend throughout her peregrinations from city to city. The epistolary form adopted, the affectionate tone the writer uses to address Fawwaz, the first person point of view, create a unique blend of intimacy, complicity, and immediacy, which captures the reader and takes one along the author from city to city. The Marquise de Sévigné's **Letters** come to mind here and another contemporary novel **Lettre Posthume** written by a Lebanese author, Dominique Eddé, with the Lebanese war (1975-1990) as its background<sup>(5)</sup>. Such works, although limited to a friendly correspondence between two close people, reflect the ethos of an author but also of a whole epoch, in a privileged way. Etel Adnan perpetuates, as well in **Of Cities and Women...** an atavistic identification between City and Woman, be it mother, protectress, mistress, prostitute, Femme Fatale, or simply the Beloved One<sup>(6)</sup>. Italo Calvino's beautiful essay? novel? fantasia? **Invisible Cities** is echoed here, too. The aged, melancholy ruler of the Tartars, Kublai Khan, engages in a dialogue with the visionary Venetian traveler Marco Polo. The latter evokes cities he has known and inflames the old man's imagination by giving them seductive female names: Cities and Memory, Cities and Desire, Cities and Signs, Cities and

---

1990, pp.3-20, mentioned as «**Grwoing up...**» in the body of the essay.

(5) Eddé, Dominique, **Lettre Posthume**. Paris: Gallimard, 1989.

(6) See Lewis Mumford's fascinating study **The City in History**. England: Penguin Books, 1961, and more particularly pp.20 ff on the female element in the growth of cities.

Eyes, Cities and the Dead called Diomira, Zaira, Dorothea, Anastasia, Tamara etc... The great Khan asks the cunning Venetian:

**On the day when I know all the emblems, shall I be able to possess my empire at last?**

**And the Venetian answered: «Sire, do not believe it. On that day you will be an emblem amongst emblems»<sup>(7)</sup>.**

Similar to the Venetian traveler, Mediterranean Etel Adnan travels from city to city hunting for «the secret of being a woman» («**Cities & Women...**, p.23). Neither she, nor Kublai Khan will seize the secret, for woman is as vast as empires, as evanescent as possessions. Such secrets, indeed, turn into emblems, legends, and myths, rather than being ever possessed.

Etel, in any case, allows herself free rein while she vibrates with each city she traverses, fully opening up to the multifold spectacles she offers (the personalization of the city as woman, here, is quite in tune with the climate of the book). She walks in Barcelona, looks at women, and marvels at the freedom and harmony they seem to live inwardly and with the world around them. In Marrakech or Beirut, Etel reflects, women carry malaise in their gait, divisions of all sorts in their looks. In Barcelona, women appear to have control over their bodies and their movements. They make you feel they are whole, that there is unity in their persons, a unity between minds and lives. Etel immediately universalizes this impression:

They remind me that it is interesting to be alive, to be a human being, and to be part of a precise moment in time and space, that theories get lost when confronted with privileged experience (**Cities and Women...**, p.3).

The girl who refused dogmatism while growing up would reject all along any sexist categorization, any preconceived theories. Indeed, woman and man are human beings and live specific experiences that make them what they are at a precise juncture in history.

Lived experiences are what basically interest our author who insists by saying a little later:

I've known for a long time that theories must never let go of experience... it is in women's experience that we might find some general ideas on their condition...

By establishing relationships, all sorts of relationship,... I begin to think... (**Cities and Women...**, p.15).

In fact she explores all kinds of relationships between cities, places, streets, people, painting, singing, dancing, to come closer to her quest for «knowledge acquired by experience goes directly to the heart, to the truth of the matter...» (**Cities and Memories...**, p.98).

Woman is the keeper of memory and of origins. Grandeur is in the memory, in the belonging, in pride, the grandeur of primordial things: the ocean,

---

(7) Calvino, Italo, **Invisible Cities**. N.Y. and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972, pp.22-23.

everyday life, a table, fruits, a woman. It should be so simple to think about woman! What is woman's «problem» therefore?

Of course, it's a problem of liberty, Etel answers herself. It's personal, it's social, a secret problem, a problem of society. But it shouldn't be a problem, she adds, for inner liberty doesn't wait for institutions, «freedom is a state of mind». She illustrates her real meaning by taking the example of Ferdaous, a woman the eminent Egyptian feminist Nawal Saadaoui had met in prison in Cairo and has interviewed several times. Saadaoui collected the interviews in a book entitled *Ferdaous* where she says that the woman was condemned to death for having killed a savage pimp. When President Sadat heard of the case, he said he would free the woman if she pleaded her own case. The woman refused for she did not want to owe her life to Power.

Etel gives other examples of freedom as she conceives it, walking into the streets of Barcelona. A poor, fat old woman sings a flamenco, real, authentic, beautiful. Men and women form a circle around her, rich and poor, young and old, listening to the best voice in town. Two or three poorly dressed women start to dance, the crowd is intensely present and happy. The evening stretches on capturing a variety of emotions. Etel suddenly realizes that in an Arab city, in Beirut for example, men would have made fun of these old and ugly women who sang and danced:

Men from our country do not accept women who express themselves with their body in public... Here, on this avenue, the women didn't have to be considered «beautiful» to dance in the street. They were respected... They were free (*Cities and Women....*, p.10).

Respect, freedom, harmony with self and world, those are the values erected at every turn Etel takes in her voyage in quest for the feminine, but essentially for the human. With great lucidity and honesty she tells Fawwaz about herself and the Arabs in general, in contrast with what she saw in Barcelona and later in Rome:

... We are terrorists, not terrorists in the political and ordinary sense of the word, but because we carry inside of our bodies - like explosives - all the deep troubles that befall our countries... We are the scribes of a scattered self, living fragments, as if parts of the self were writing down the bits and ends of a perception never complete (*Cities and Women....*, pp.54-55).

A statement which goes to the core of our existence in the Arab world as Etel Adnan sees it in her two political books, her novel *Sitt Marie-Rose* and her long poem *The Arab Apocalypse*, both originally written in French<sup>(8)</sup>

With a perception that is whole Etel writes about «the deep troubles that

---

(8) Adnan, Etel, *Sitt Marie-Rose*, Tr. Georgina Kleege. Sausalito: California, The Post-Apollo Press, 1978, 1982.

—, *The Arab Apocalypse*, Tr. Etel Adnan. Sausalito: California, The Post-Apollo Press, 1980, 1989.

befall our countries». Indeed, she becomes the scribe of scattered selves, of lost souls, of men who fall upon each other, tearing each other apart and decimating their cities out of sheer impotence and backward tribal mentalities. «Our memory is made of war» Etel writes, Beirut clings to her «like hot wax, even in slumber» (*Cities and Women...*, p.73). Beirut and Marie-Rose are identified and both crucified on the altar of man in *Sitt Marie-Rose*. Etel had to exorcise anger, hatred, and violence out of her soul by writing this modern tragedy in the strict classical shape of drama with respect of the unities of action, time, and place, and in highly stylized fashion.

The story of Marie-Rose is certainly tragic as this woman is trapped by forces beyond her capacity to control, yet transcending them in her heroic spirit. Etel writes the true story of Marie-Rose who was director of a school for deaf-mute children in a Christian suburb of Beirut. Christian herself and pro-Palestinian, she lived in the Western side of Beirut known for its allegiance for the Palestinian cause and several leftist ideologies. She «crossed» daily a divided city at the early stage of the Lebanese war during which «crossing» from West Beirut to East Beirut was often fatal. The city was in the hands of militia gangs which imposed their own arbitrary laws in a broken down State. It is in the midst of such a terrorist situation that Marie-Rose was arrested and killed by a «group» of young Christian militia men.

Previous to the war, these young men entertained themselves on hunting trips to Syria, driving plush cars with great speed and killing birds by the hundreds. Thus, Etel's novel is divided into Time I «A Million Birds», and Time II «Marie-Rose». The parallels are obvious between innocent birds and woman, hunter and prey; the gun, the killing, and the game are present in both. Ironically, too, Mounir a young rich man asks the Narrator (Etel herself?) in Part I to help him write the scenario of a film on Syrian workers who come to Beirut for a living.

The scenario of the film becomes Marie-Rose's lived tragedy in Part II, the unifying element being Beirut suddenly ablaze:

Violence rises from every square meter as if from a metallic forest... The city is an electromagnetic field into which everyone wants to plug himself... The whole country is responsive without reserve to this call for violence...

And Etel strikes at the core of her feminist and political theme when she adds with arresting economy of means:

On the barricades...youths who have not even properly slept with a woman display their blood - stained shirts. Or they ride around in cars whose red splashes haven't been washed off. On the contrary. (*Sitt Marie-Rose*, pp.13-14).

While she, the female narrator, creator and preserver of life witnesses the madness of men and writes:

Time is dead. Action is fragmented... My spine is like a twisted, stunted, fallen tree, disappearing in the sun. (*Sitt Marie-Rose*, pp.17-18).

This is violence, naked, ugly, cosmic, reducing woman to some stump. The

drama at hand reiterates ancestral primitive dramas which demolish all human constructions.:

Everything becomes primitive. The cells remember the solar pulses of their first days, back when they were still sleeping, back in the pre-human stage. Everything that has been learned seems to become blurred. Bodies, too, erupt like hatred, like lemons squeezed to the point of bursting (**Sitt Marie-Rose**, p.19).

In part II, the trial and execution of Marie-Rose is staged and the ritual takes place in 3 times, and each time 7 very short monologues build up towards a climax as one voice after the other speaks and brings us close to the victim's execution. Pattern and rhythm in imitation of the ancient chorus's punctuate the short monologues which weave the trial's fabric turned into a fierce attack by Marie-Rose. The «group» of young assassins obviously cannot cope with her strength and her indomitable spirit. Even Mounir who loved her when they were both sixteen, is struck dumb to see her as beautiful and as strong as ever. Their only alternative is to kill her:

This female monster dares stand up to us when she's at our mercy. What a fool! What a fool! I should have squashed her like a bed bug the moment we captured her (**Sitt Marie-Rose**, p.92).

Fear grips them and translates itself into violence since they have not been taught to love, respect, and reciprocate with women. Love of mother alone dominated their lives, implies Etel, with possessiveness and high expectations:

The citizens of this country are accustomed to fear, fear, the immense fear of not deserving their mother's love, of not being first at school or in the car race, of not making love as often as the other guys at the office, of not killing as many birds as their neighbor etc... (**Sitt Marie-Rosé**, p.68).

With great irony, Adnan underlines their trivial preoccupations and then adds:

Marie -Rose frightens them. They have all the means in the world to crush her in a second... but they've known from the beginning that they wouldn't be able to conquer either her heart or her mind... (**Sitt Marie-Rose**, p.68).

And Adnan transcends the three unities of action, place, and time that frame her tragedy by digging up the young's men ancestral memory of female goddesses worshipped on the altars of the Arab world. Marie-Rose becomes thus a new emblem of the feminine essence. These young men, and even the priest Bouna Elias, find themselves terrified before Marie-Rose who stands up to them:

She breaks on the territory of their imaginations like a tidal wave. She rouses in their memories the oldest litanies of curses. To them love is a kind of cannibalism. Feminine symbols tear at them with their claws. For seven hundred years the goddess Isis has given birth without their being a father. Isis in Egypt, Ishtar in Baghdad, Anat in Marrakech, the virgin in Beirut. Nothing survives the passing of these divinities: they only loved power, their Brother and their Son. And you expect Marie-Rose to hold her head up to this procession of terrible women and find grace in the eyes of the males of this country? (**Sitt Marie-Rose**, p.69).

Of course not. The «males of this country» will seize power in their own hands out of sheer terror of woman and will force her to submission unto death. Only the Mother resists the turning upside down of the game of power by internalizing all its rules and holding power in her hands once she begets boys<sup>(9)</sup>. And the vicious circle operates from generation to generation in the midst of never-aging tribal mentalities. Adnan's answer to break the vicious circle is quite simple:

When a man and a woman find each other in the silence of the night, it's the beginning of the end of the tribe's power, and death itself becomes a challenge to the ascendancy of the group (Sitt Marie-Rose, p.55).

In other words, Adnan suggests that so long as the individual has no specific identity, separate from the group's, the tribe's, there is neither a chance for man nor for woman to fulfill themselves in true love, in shared equality and mutual respect. Mounir's heart went out to Marie-Rose when he saw her standing in front of him so beautiful, so dignified. But he belonged to the «group» and could not act the way he would have loved to. In reality he was one of the few who could admit woman as a worthy partner but he would have been laughed at by his «group» (p.35).

A recent interview given by the eminent Mexican writer Octavio Paz (Nobel prize winner, 1990) comes to mind here. Paz says that he cannot conceive civilization as separate from the invention of love. Desire of the «other», the idea of the «other» and of love, are the foundations of civilization. If the concept of the individual disappears, civilization itself disappears, asserts the Mexican author. Twice, he adds, in our century the West was threatened with annihilation under Nazism and Communism. In love, the object becomes individual conscience, individual subject. I ask the other to choose me;

---

(9) See Evelyne Accad, **Sexuality and War; Literary Masks of the Middle East** in which she has an excellent study of Sitt Marie-Rose. Accad's main thesis in this study, triggered by the Lebanese war, is that war and the way people «perceive and act out their sense of love and power» are very closely connected. Moreover, Accad suggests that «sexuality is centrally involved in motivations to war and if there were more justice, compassion and mutual respect between the sexes wars could be avoided. She quotes several studies on sexual politics and violence. Betty Reardon says, for example, that «Fear in men is channeled into aggression, in women into submission» (p.33) which is dramatized, here, by Marie-Rose and the militia men who execute her. Accad also quotes Etel Adnan who explains that the deaf-mutes in her novel represent the Arab people and how tribalism leads to genocide. Adnan adds: «I think my book is about the moral and physical death of a city. It will take a long time to feel innocent in Beirut» (p.64). We find again here the identification of woman and city.

See also Miriam Cooke, **War's Other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese War**. N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1988. Cooke discusses Sitt Marie-Rose with great insight.

reciprocity operates together with equality. Love in the West, concludes Paz, was born with the concept of the individual human being<sup>(10)</sup>.

In the same vein, Etel Adnan's heroine stands for «love, new roads, the unknown, the untried» (p.58). The Arab world has yet to learn what an individual means, what human rights based on the concept of man as «an end in himself» means (to put it in Kantian terms). Marie-Rose's spirit conquers fear and she throws at her executor's faces their spiritual poverty, their cowardice and ignorance:

For ten thousand years in this part of the world we've always been tribal, tribal, tribal. But Gilgamesh left alone, all ties forever broken searching for life and death. Since that distant day... we haven't had a single man, who sought on his own account, to understand good and evil who could stand up crucified without anyone knowing it... Shepherd or sheep you always have defined yourselves in terms of herds (Sitt Marie-Rose, p.58).

But her anger is too unmanageable for those young assassins. They cannot cope with her strength, her anger, her defiance. They're getting bored: «We should get it over with. Talk, talk, talk» (p.61), «We've got to hurry» (p.87), «one less isn't going to make a lot of difference with 30.000 dead» (p.61), says Fouad, the «Perfect Killer» and he adds:

The human being is just another cockroach encumbering Nature. This female monster dare stand up to us when she's at our mercy. What a fool!...

She howled like a dog. She scratched my face. She vomited on my parts. But I quartered her with my own hands. And these imbecile children watching us... (Sitt Marie-Rose, p.92).

The novel closes up in an arrestingly graphic way as those «imbecile children» watch the execution, then dance holding a diabolic Sabbath:

Whether you like it or not an execution is always a celebration. It is the dance of Signs and their stabilization in Death... It is the explosion of absolute darkness among us. What can one do in this Black Feast but dance? The deaf-mute rise, and moved by the rhythm of falling bombs their bodies receive from the trembling earth, they begin to dance (Sitt Marie-Rose, p.105).

Thus, ends Etel Adnan's tragedy written with great economy of means, with intense concentration of emotion, with syncopated rhythms marking the last gasp of breath Marie-Rose must have used before howling like a dog, and falling down under the assassins' blows. Etel Adnan vehemently asserts that she is not alone in her death. Her comrades everywhere are falling down, too: «From the East to the Mediterranean, tanks come to continue the work of crushing life» (p.104). The Arab Apocalypse is at hand, fires will spread from Beirut to all the Arab world.

In **The Arab Apocalypse** Adnan draws a huge «mixed media» canvas where she fuses poetry, painting, and music to create her own **Guernica**, with

---

(10) In *Le Nouvel Observateur*, No. 1544, June 9-15, 1994, pp.52-54.

the Sun setting then dying away in gradation all over the scene. The «Witches' Sabbath» continues:

And I saw: masked men execute a carnage

We have to drink blood in order to join them and wait for them in hell (*The Arab Apocalypse*, p.33).

underscored by syncopated rhythms and haunting refrains:

flies are buzzing worms stink blood is turning white

They came wearing masks STOP They came poisoned STOP They came castrated STOP (p.46).

or later in Eliotic stance:

There is no bread no water no air no light (p.50),

or with extreme concreteness:

it is by peeling onions that cities fall stone on stone (p.73),

or in an end of the world imagery:

LAUGHTER The sun in LAUGHTER the sun is laughing LAUGHTER the sun is laughing 5 billion years . are grass snakes hiding in the texture of TIME, . . . . .

or highly lyrical, highly elegiac: . . . . .

In the dark irritation of the eyes there is a snake hiding

... Out Out of its borders pain has a leash on its neck

... Out Out of Time there is spring's shattered hope

In the deluge on our plains there are no rains but stones... (p.55).

Adnan captures thus in very fine poetry reverberations and echoes which spring from the deepest layers of man/ woman's psyche in such apocalyptic times. Suffice it here to remember T.S. Eliot after World War I who describes a parched up world, a waste land in the following manner:

Here is no water but only rock

Rock and no water and the sandy road

... If there were water we should stop and drink

... There is not even silence in the mountains

... But dry sterile thunder without rain

... What is the city over the mountains

Cracks and reforms and bursts...

Falling towers

Jerusalem Athens Alexandria

Vienna London

Unreal...<sup>(11)</sup>.

To which Adnan would add: Beirut Jerusalem Damascus and all other Arab cities where «innocence is drowned» as W.B. Yeats expresses it, catching an

---

(11) «The Waste Land» (1922) in *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot*. London: Faber and Faber, 1969, p.72.

apocalyptic moment, too, at the same period, in the West:

Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned...<sup>(12)</sup>.

To sum up. Our voyage in the company of Etel Adnan in quest of «the secret of being a woman» has taken us from city to city back to Beirut, Etel's original home, to Marie-Rose her sister and ours, as well, to the tragic plight of both man and woman in this «Nomadic and immobile Orient» as she paradoxically calls it, (p.100), where the only outlet for pent-up feelings and frustrations of all sorts is in terms of violence, and an exercise of power that thinly covers up fear. Our quest for the feminine broadens and turns for a quest of the human being as such. A definition of woman is one of civilization and I cannot agree more with our author in this last decade of the century, where such issues of feminism, human rights, individual rights, equality amongst people and nations have become global, all frontiers falling down, one by one in the world. Etel feels it deeply and she writes recapturing woman's battles and civil battles in general be it in Lebanon or elsewhere:

Women's liberation is a function of the liberties granted by the societies in which they live, and no gain is definitive. They are thus fighting on several fronts, and, as in any civil war - because it is a civil war - the battle is chaotic and constantly shifting: in the bedroom, the street, the office, the salons. The fight differs from state to state, from neighborhood to neighborhood. The question is not linear, but spherical. The problem concerns the explosive impulses of the individual. Violence shoots its thousand arrows and pierces all that it encounters. It is no longer a question of clarifying the distinction between the feminine and the masculine, but of redefining the human species.

Absolutely. In fact, to subject or to be subjected are the two poles of the same rod. One wonders who is internally richer and more fulfilled Marie-Rose, the victim, or those mad young assassins, her torturers. She died but her liberty sprang from within. They would live thwarted until the end. Indeed, «freedom is a state of mind» as she asserts. Thus, «the secret of being a woman» for Etel, is in living fully one's humanity and similar to some women she encountered in her journeys, it is

Living with a kind of independence which is reflected in their bodies and in their ideas, in their attitudes towards life. It is as though things have been worked out in private, in the delight of existence (*Cities and Women...*, p.98).

Many women feel it to-day and live it. Many men are joining hands, too, although we all recognize that there is still a long way to go in Etel Adnan's concept of what it means to be alive and self-fulfilled. We are indeed, grateful to her for having sharpened our perception and shared in «the secret of being a woman».

---

(12) «The Second Coming» (1921), in *Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*. London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1965, p.211.

