2-1991

Song of the Skirt

Meryl Altman
DePauw University, maltman@depauw.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarship.depauw.edu/eng_facpubs
Part of the Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
A woman must continually watch her self...
She has to survey everything she does and even how she does it because how she appears to others, and ul-
timately how she appears to men, is of prime importance. What is really thought of as the success of her life...
One might simplify this by saying: men act and women appear.

Within recent history decent clothing has become a necessity for any woman or girl who wants to enter the social world: it's her mean of entry and there are rules that say so.

It's early December. Yes, I am going to the MLA, and no, my paper isn't finished. But that's ok, because for the first time in five years I'm not worried about whether my outfit is good enough, or whether I can afford another, or where in this town I can find anything "suitable." If I don't find time in the hectic week before Christmas to get my hair cut, it won't be a tragedy. Even the rather noticeable pimple that annually appears on the left side of my chin right about this time won't be a big deal. That I am concerned: let it bloom, as Robin Morgan says. You see, this year I'm not looking for acceptance, for the MLA isn't the MLA. To the contrary, the only Meryl Altmann who's going to go to the MLA is the real one.

In a sense (almost Arrollian) degree of distance, I feel ready to say some things that have been on my mind for a long time about feminism and professionalism. Specifically, I want to contribute to dis-
cussions about commodification within the profession and to increase the number of institutions of higher learning for a diverse popula-
tion. My basic premise, obviously, is that a woman's professional development is necessarily connected with the way she is represented in the professional world.

Many critics of commodification have been concerned with the "societal image" and in particular the "star system," whereby the often ineptly named "famous professor" becomes detached from actual teaching, learning and thinking and operates as pure sign (of "excellence," "diversity," "radical chic," whatever) within the prestige system. I want to say that, though, on an earlier set of remembered gates: on entry-level hiring, the point where a woman's performance is judged, it's quite unfair to blame the makers of the job list simply for saying out loud that the emperor needs new clothes. The fact is, many hiring committees do not know how to achieve a certain level of stardom within my profession come to feel like objects of ex-
ternal manipulation. It is in this society, I say, that I do not know the feelings of the younger applicants fairly well. Because I don't speak the language. I have not been trained (as a woman) to search in English and modern languages (a process with which I am, alas, intimately familiar from both sides).

Many readers will know that hiring in these fields is now furtively almost ex-
cursively through the "job list" put out four times a year by the Modern Language Association. The October 1989 edition included a new feature, "Dox and Doxie for Inter-
views," which was clearly intended to be helpful to both candidates and search committees. Nonetheless, as I read (and in a way, institutionalizing) of some the non-intellectual factors often taken in ac-
count, I increasingly raised some questions about fair-
ness. Such advice to the candidate as, "You must tell it loudly," "be polite," "do it with your language ability," "don't slouch or mumble," "don't wear sensible clothes or get nau-
seated by the burden of appearing as a "present-
able" member of a cultural elite squarely on the shoulders. I am encouraged to see my own. A growing number of women are asking that these standards be re-
cast. 

Women of the world, you all know what I mean. As a critic of gender roles, I am delighted by the opportunity to say, in the most important part of the world, that it is time to redefine these standards.

Women's rights have been in the news for years. The struggle for equality between the sexes continues to be a dominant issue in the political arena.

For instance, the issue of equal pay for women has been a concern for decades. Despite some progress, women still earn significantly less than men for similar work. This disparity is not only unfair, but also perpetuates a cycle of economic disadvantage for women and their families.

In addition to the economic aspects, it is important to recognize the social and cultural implications of gender inequality. The stereotypes and expectations placed on women can limit their opportunities and hinder their potential for success in various fields. It is crucial to address these issues in order to create a more equitable society for all.

Overall, the struggle for women's rights continues to be a pressing issue. It requires ongoing efforts to challenge gender norms and promote gender equality in all aspects of society.

Song of the skirt

by Meryl Altmann

A woman must continually watch her self...
She has to survey everything she does and even how she does it because how she appears to others, and ul-
timately how she appears to men, is of prime importance. What is really thought of as the success of her life...
One might simplify this by saying: men act and women appear.

Within recent history decent clothing has become a necessity for any woman or girl who wants to enter the social world: it's her mean of entry and there are rules that say so.

It's early December. Yes, I am going to the MLA, and no, my paper isn't finished. But that's ok, because for the first time in five years I'm not worried about whether my outfit is good enough, or whether I can afford another, or where in this town I can find anything "suitable." If I don't find time in the hectic week before Christmas to get my hair cut, it won't be a tragedy. Even the rather noticeable pimple that annually appears on the left side of my chin right about this time won't be a big deal. That I am concerned: let it bloom, as Robin Morgan says. You see, this year I'm not looking for acceptance, for the MLA isn't the MLA. To the contrary, the only Meryl Altmann who's going to go to the MLA is the real one.

In a sense (almost Arrollian) degree of distance, I feel ready to say some things that have been on my mind for a long time about feminism and professionalism. Specifically, I want to contribute to dis-
cussions about commodification within the profession and to increase the number of institutions of higher learning for a diverse popula-
tion. My basic premise, obviously, is that a woman's professional development is necessarily connected with the way she is represented in the professional world.

Many critics of commodification have been concerned with the "societal image" and in particular the "star system," whereby the often ineptly named "famous professor" becomes detached from actual teaching, learning and thinking and operates as pure sign (of "excellence," "diversity," "radical chic," whatever) within the prestige system. I want to say that, though, on an earlier set of remembered gates: on entry-level hiring, the point where a woman's performance is judged, it's quite unfair to blame the makers of the job list simply for saying out loud that the emperor needs new clothes. The fact is, many hiring committees do not know how to achieve a certain level of stardom within my profession come to feel like objects of ex-
ternal manipulation. It is in this society, I say, that I do not know the feelings of the younger applicants fairly well. Because I don't speak the language. I have not been trained (as a woman) to search in English and modern languages (a process with which I am, alas, intimately familiar from both sides).

Many readers will know that hiring in these fields is now furtively almost ex-
cursively through the "job list" put out four times a year by the Modern Language Association. The October 1989 edition included a new feature, "Dox and Doxie for Inter-
views," which was clearly intended to be helpful to both candidates and search committees. Nonetheless, as I read (and in a way, institutionalizing) of some the non-intellectual factors often taken in ac-
count, I increasingly raised some questions about fair-
ness. Such advice to the candidate as, "You must tell it loudly," "be polite," "do it with your language ability," "don't slouch or mumble," "don't wear sensible clothes or get nau-
seated by the burden of appearing as a "present-
able" member of a cultural elite squarely on the shoulders. I am encouraged to see my own. A growing number of women are asking that these standards be re-
cast.

Women of the world, you all know what I mean. As a critic of gender roles, I am delighted by the opportunity to say, in the most important part of the world, that it is time to redefine these standards. 

Women's rights have been in the news for years. The struggle for equality between the sexes continues to be a dominant issue in the political arena.

For instance, the issue of equal pay for women has been a concern for decades. Despite some progress, women still earn significantly less than men for similar work. This disparity is not only unfair, but also perpetuates a cycle of economic disadvantage for women and their families.

In addition to the economic aspects, it is important to recognize the social and cultural implications of gender inequality. The stereotypes and expectations placed on women can limit their opportunities and hinder their potential for success in various fields. It is crucial to address these issues in order to create a more equitable society for all.

Overall, the struggle for women's rights continues to be a pressing issue. It requires ongoing efforts to challenge gender norms and promote gender equality in all aspects of society.
Keeping busy
by Barbara Craft

I teach—I used to teach—at a state university. Three sections of composition, 26 students per class. It was a dead-end job, and the paper load was murder, and it meant a 45-minute commute, 80 miles round trip three times a week. But it was only temporary, just for the summer. "Is that the job?" people would ask me. "Is it keeping you busy?"

I've been temporary elsewhere, too, temp and part-time. Temporary in creative writing departments in fact. In fact, I've been temporary for so long now that my temporary status appears to be permanent.

When I took the job, I thought it might turn into something permanent. Around October I applied for a tenure track position:

To the Search Committee:

I am writing to apply for the position of visiting assistant professor of writing currently open in your department for the coming academic year. As the enclosed résumé shows, I have wide experience in writing and editing, both in the university and in business and journalism, and more than eight years of teaching experience.

As is the case with many women in academia, I have not been able to pursue my career single-mindedly because of family responsibilities. After receiving my Ph.D. from the University of Toronto and teaching for five years in Canada, I decided to interrupt my career and return to teaching after my father's illness and subsequent death. I taught introductory composition full-time for one year in a small liberal arts college. I was not appointed, quarter-to-quarter basis. I married, and because there were no significant academic opportunities here and I was not free to relocate, I elected to work independently on my fiction and journalism. However, it was clear that, when an academic opportunity did present itself, my publications would better position me on the job market than any marginal teaching experience I could have acquired.

As my résumé shows...

substitute Teacher

The bell rings and the boys move past me; their tight jeans whiten.

Feel electricity, I told them to tell me I'm beautiful; they sigh under their breaths. They have hot, volcanic promises.

The girls could teach me how to walk so my breasts swing like oranges. I want to ask Sara, when she can't sleep in the rain and falls to her shoulders, spun gold like the tree in the playground.

For them I am temporary. I can't remember what I've learned for love as I watch the students, each conjugating the verb "to be."

—Céline Dor

Culture and Society in Periklean Athens

A Summer Institute for College and University Professors
June 17 - July 19, 1991
Sponsored by the Department of Classics, The University of Arizona

Summer Institute is a major grant from The National Endowment for the Humanities

A program specifically designed for college and university teachers in disciplines such as art history, classics, literature, philosophy and general humanities who regularly incorporate some facet of Classical Greece into their courses.

Participants will be awarded a stipend as well as an allowance for room, board and travel. Deadline is March 1, 1991.

For information contact: Professor Albert Leonard, Jr., Department of Classics, ML 371, The University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721 (602) 621-6189.

This content downloaded from 183.120.91.91 on Wed. 8 Jan 2014 09:31:09 AM

All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions