
THE WOUND

by

John Rowan

I am a man.

At first that may sound like an ordinary sort of statement, pretty obvious really. So what else is new?

Yet in a way it is a confession, an admission - it is rather as if I were to say - "Yes, I dropped the bomb on Hiroshima". Except that it goes further, into the tiny details of everyday life. It is like adding - "And I'm putting a little arsenic into my wife's tea every day".

The days when I was discovering this were some of the worst days of my life. My wife had discovered feminism, as I had in theory too, and got busy to confront me on all the things she had been suppressing or not noticing or glossing over for eighteen years of our marriage. As a good revolutionary, I agreed in theory with everything she said: it was important to learn this stuff. But I was being wounded: it hurt. And as a good member of the growth movement, I allowed it to hurt.

This book is all about what I and other men did and are doing to heal that wound, or similar wounds. It is about how I and other men were

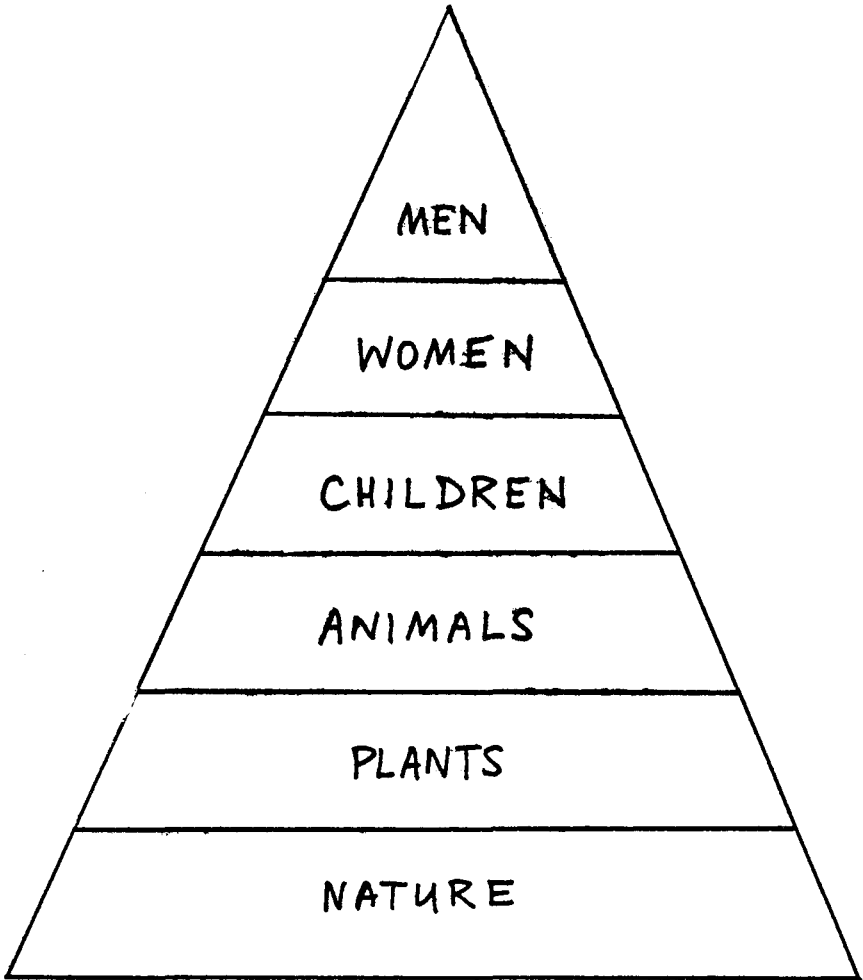
affected by feminism, and what can be done about it. And I am going to argue that it is important for men to allow themselves to be wounded. The wound is necessary before any healing can happen.

Now obviously there are many different strands within feminism, and one could argue indefinitely about exactly who and what and how and when and where and whither, but what I can't help feeling is at the heart of it is the most basic and straightforward version of radical feminism, which says that the male as such is suspect.

It is men who dominate, it is men who aggress, it is men who run things, it is men who ride roughshod over feelings and subtleties, it is men who run the media of mass communication, it is men who go in for linear thinking and terrible simplification, it is men who set up and maintain the basic hierarchy who goes up in the way shown in Figure 1.

Now this system is often called patriarchy, but it is well to pause for a moment here and see whether this is really the best word to use.

G O D



The world-map of Patriarchy. Taken from:

Elizabeth Dodson Gray - Patriarchy as a conceptual trap -
Roundtable Press 1982.

Patriarchy

This is a term which came into currency in the early 1970s, though it had been used before. It seemed that we had to have a word which spoke of the whole system with all its levels, and "patriarchy" did just that. It connected the political with the personal, it spoke of the conscious and the unconscious, it included the material and the spiritual, and it emphasized that the language with which we criticised patriarchy was itself patriarchal. The peace campaigner Donna Warnock says this:

Patriarchy is a society which worships the masculine identity, granting power and privilege to those who reflect and respect the socially-determined masculine sex role. (Warnock 1982)

What is interesting, in fact, is the way in which people concerned with peace and ecology have found the word not only useful but inescapable. It fits very naturally into their argument:

When the intellect and the dominating, controlling, aggressive tendencies within each individual are defined as the most valuable parts of their being, and those same attributes are emphasised in the political and economic arena, the result is a society characterised by violence, exploitation, a reverence for the scientific as absolute, and a systematic 'rape' of nature for man's enjoyment. The result is patriarchy. (Swain & Koen 1980)

What is so clear to emerge from this analysis is that feminism, by its

opposition to patriarchy, makes patriarchy's boundaries clearer, its shape more well defined, its contrasts more stark:

The power of patriarchy is such that to see through it requires a special kind of vision, a consciousness of the most 'ordinary' experience. To understand it requires 'thinking across boundaries', as Mary Daly says. To overcome it demands the reinvention of revolution. This consciousness, this vision, this experience, this understanding, this revolutionary politic is feminism. (Warnock 1982)

This is the language of paradox, because it is only thinking across boundaries which can establish new boundaries, which in turn need to be surpassed, since there is no single day of revolution after which everything is different and forever fine. The work of rethinking and of revision always needs to continue. Women were the first to see this so well, but now men are having something to say, too:

Patriarchy, which links characteristics (gentleness, aggressiveness, etc) to gender, shapes sexuality in such a way as to maintain male power. The masculine game draws strength from homophobia and resorts habitually to violence in its battles on the field of sexual politics. It provides psychological support for the military state and is in its turn stimulated by it. (Kokopeli & Lakey 1982)

The links are tightly drawn between sexuality and war in this way. The fear of homosexuality and the fear of the female are closely linked to

the fear of softness and being a wimp. But weak males are not wimps any more than all strong males are macho, as we shall see later.

Now one of the dangers of the word patriarchy is that it seems to suggest to some people that all that is female is wholly good, and all that is male is totally evil. But this would be a very unpolitical or even counter-revolutionary position. Betsy Wright says in a marvellous essay:

Reducing social change into a struggle between good and evil and saying that oneself and one's movement belong entirely on the good side is simplistic and similar to the objectification that has hurt women so much . . . Social forces are seen in motion, not fixed . . . Of course, the institution of patriarchy has been terribly cruel and destructive, but it is not a monolith, and understanding its internal dynamics will help enable its opponents to topple its institutions and replace them with something better. (Wright 1982)

So patriarchy is seen as an historical structure, which came into being and can go out of being, and has internal dynamics which are changing it all the time. It is nothing to do with biological determinism, as some critics suggest. It is about socially and historically defined gender, not about biological sex.

Dworkin (1974) points out that since there are six things involved in sex identity (genetic sex, hormonal sex, gonadal sex, internal sex, external sex and psychosexual development)

and since there can be contradictions of various kinds between any of these, we seem to be "a multi-sexed species which has its sexuality spread along a vast fluid continuum where the elements called male and female are not discrete". It is precisely the fault of patriarchy that it takes this amazingly subtle and sensitive mixture and clamps on it two firm and fixed categories, one of which, and one only, is OK. It would be an absurd error for anyone to accept this twofold categorization and say simply - "No, it's the other one which is OK"!

It was feminism which allowed us to see that all the struggles against oppression are one struggle, the same struggle, the struggle with patriarchy. It is very important that the black struggle and the gay struggle are one with the women's struggle. A black member of the National Black Feminist Organization once said -

We are often asked the ugly question, 'Where are your loyalties? To the Black movement or the feminist movement?' Well, it would be nice if we were oppressed as women Monday through Thursday, then oppressed as Blacks the rest of the week. We could combat one or the other on those days - but we have to fight both every day of the week. (Quoted in Dunayevskaya 1981)

It is feminists who have seen that the ending of patriarchy is not about just one question, the question of equality, of equal rights. It is a full-blooded and two-pronged question which affects everything:

... first, the totality and the depth of the necessary uprooting of this exploitative, sexist, racist society. Second, the dual rhythm of revolution: not just the overthrow of the old, but the creation of the new; not just the reorganization of objective, material foundations but the release of subjective personal freedom, creativity and talents. In a word, there must be such appreciation of the movement from below, from practice, that we never again let theory and practice get separated. That is the cornerstone. (Dunayevskaya 1981)

So patriarchy is essentially a unifying term, which enables us to see the single pattern underlying many apparently separate struggles. And we shall see later how important is Gray's (1982) point that - "The decisive question is always, 'Who controls the myth system?' - who is in charge of the social and religious construction of reality?"

Now all this is very abstract in a way. It was necessary to put it in because the basic case is very rarely spelt out so succinctly, and I did not want just to refer the reader to other sources. But the real question is - how do men react to this news? How can men respond to this news? And the best way I know of dealing with that is to say how I reacted, and how I responded, together with the men I knew.

I was very split. In one way I was totally convinced and in favour. My wife had been very modest and withdrawn and family-oriented, and now she was going out to three meetings a week, tending bookstalls, helping to organize events, coming

back with excited reports about visits to schools and so on - it was obviously very good for her. I read the literature and found it very persuasive, as if saying very obvious things which had been suppressed for a long time and desperately needed saying.

But at an action level I was quite different. I simply held on to my old habits and my own ways in the home as I had always done. And I got confronted on this, day by day. I got accused of rigidity, of not changing, of not really wanting to change.

It seemed to me at the time that my wife was exaggerating. Things couldn't be that bad or that important. She was blowing things up beyond what was reasonable. It is hard to put into words the experience of what all this felt like. I was very struck by a recent piece of Vic Seidler (1985) which does seem to capture the flavour very well.

I can hear the cry of anger and frustration as if it is directed at me. It is all too familiar, even though I pretend to understand it intellectually, I am always surprised and shocked when this happens. I recognise that something is terribly wrong but I don't really know what to do about it. I'm shaken by the fury and the bitterness. I find it hard to accept that things can be that bad, though I know at some level that they are. Part of me just wants to flee or withdraw. It is as if all long-term heterosexual relationships in our time are doomed. For all my efforts at a more equal relationship I have to recognise how blind and insensitive I am. It is harder to know what to do about it.

That is just how I felt at the time. It was a sort of baffled feeling - "How on earth am I ever going to get it right?" I would really intend to listen to what my wife said, but find myself criticising her logic, her motives, her sense of balance - anything to avoid really listening or hearing what she was really trying to say.

One thing I got very clearly from all this, though, was a clear vision that women are dominated and oppressed in ways that men are not dominated or oppressed. It is true that there are some groups of men who from time to time do get treated badly - gay men, disabled men, handicapped men and so on - but even these get treated better by society than the equivalent groups of women. It is as if there were a gradient or slope in society, such that men can move easily, aided by gravity, as it were while women have to move up the hill and against the grain.

This I could see quite well, but whenever I said this to another man he would deny it and resist it. He would always claim to be oppressed, sometimes even claiming to be oppressed by women. The best answer I found was in Karen Lindsay's statement:

The error here is the failure to recognise that such men are not, in fact, oppressed by the patriarchy - some of their patriarchal privilege is withheld because they are not top-notch oppressors. (Lindsay 1979)

Some men I respect still do not agree with this statement, but it seems to me that unless it is fully accepted we have still not got the point - tha

there is a radical rift in society, whereby men are given supremacy and women are continually relegated to service roles.

In a patriarchy male ways of talking, thinking and acting are generally held to be better than female ways of talking, thinking and acting. Men are rewarded more, therefore, in all kinds of ways, but financially in particular.

Again men don't like to hear this, and object that many female ways are highly rewarded - look at the success of women novelists and romance writers, look at the success of actresses like Elizabeth Taylor. Such men need to look at the massive evidence accumulated, for example, in Judy Chicago's art work (and the books based on it) **The Dinner Party**. In this work, the artist and her hundreds of collaborators have examined women's history, and come up with over a thousand great women, eminent in many fields, who were finally killed, forgotten or otherwise squashed by a patriarchal society which could not admit that they existed. Their names should be in every history book, but they are missing because they are women. This is the social story.

The sexual story is even worse. The history of **suttee** in India, of footbinding in China, of genital mutilation in Africa, of witch-hunts in Europe, of gynaecology in the USA, have been documented by Mary Daly (1979). The war against women celebrated in pornography has been documented by Laura Lederer (1980) and her collaborators. The importance of rape as a

process of intimidation which has very widespread effects on women is documented by Andrea Dworkin (1974). And a more recent approach to much of this material is to be found in Rhodes & McNeill (1985).

It is one thing to read these things in books; it is quite another to have someone in your own home facing you with such issues day by day. It was clear that I was oppressing my wife, and I didn't know what to do about it. But I was learning all the time, painfully and with difficulty. I learned about patriarchal values.

Patriarchal values

Values under patriarchy are basically supremacy values, but are hardly ever talked about or referred to in those terms. The basic assumption is that all things must be divided into superior and inferior, and general supremacy given to that which is superior. This is a method of control, and it is thought to be the only method of control which is stable and natural. If it is not clear at any point who or what is superior, a competition or contest will reveal the truth. Thus the basic way of deciding things under patriarchy is by a power struggle. Physical coercion is there all the time under patriarchy, sometimes overt and sometimes covert. Violence is normal and natural, where it proves to be necessary.

These values enter into everything - work, leisure, politics, religion, even sex. "Fucking" means both intercourse and exploitation or assault. Rape is the end logic of male sexuality under patriarchy.

Again, men object to this assertion. We think of our needs for love and

affection and warmth, as expressed for example in Hite (1981). We think that men are rather tame - not many rapists in our circle of acquaintances. But any serious study that looks beneath the surface very quickly finds the male need to dominate and be in control. Even in the Hite report there are a lot of indications of this. And in psychoanalytic studies by Seidenberg (*Is Anatomy Destiny?*) in Miller (1973) and other deep studies such as Fasteau (1975) and Adcock in McAllister (1982) it comes out very clearly. The reason why men resist so strongly the truth of the assertion is because to admit it would be to admit the whole patriarchal case in a very personal way which comes very close. Men are quite content to discuss patriarchy at a general level, where it affects whole societies, but when it comes to the personal, it hurts too much.

This can easily be seen in the home. In the home we can see domination and submission in action. If a man and a woman are living together in a shared home, and particularly if they are married, and even more particularly if there are children, the household tasks will move, due to the pressures of a patriarchal culture, in such a way that the most boring tasks are carried out by the woman. For the evidence on this, see Oakley (1974). When this is pointed out to men on the spot, they come back with lines such as:

You're so much better at ironing than I am.

*I'm not really cut out for that. **Ihate** it more than you do.*

Of course I'll do it! (And then we don't).

Why should I have to do it to your standards?

Housework is so trivial!

All the lines which are dealt with so well by Pat Mainardi in Morgan (1970) are relevant here. What is going on is an unspoken mini-oppression. This was all so familiar to me personally. I had used every one of those lines when talking to my wife, and to see them written down in a book was shocking and hurtful. Although it was right, and just, and even funny as written, it pained me. I felt really wounded and beaten-up.

But I knew that I had to persevere. What I was doing reflected the domination-submission culture in which I had been brought up, and which I had maintained even while denouncing it. This is just the sort of contradiction which Lucia Sanchez Saornil referred to when she said:

You, can you imagine a bourgeois saying that the workers should be emancipated? So, if you find it logical that, like the bourgeois with the worker, the anarchist as a man keeps woman chained up, it is absurd to hear him shout 'women must be emancipated'. And if he does shout it, how can one not say to him 'you start'. (Quoted in Emmanuel Reynaud 1983)

It is in this atmosphere that rape comes to seem almost normal. Every study of rapists (e.g. Groth 1979) which has been carried out finds that rapists are quite normal, not particularly different from other men. It is power they want much more than sex.

Pornography reinforces this culture too, no matter how soft or innocuous

it may seem to be, because it shows women basically in service to the phallus. They are there for the benefit of the phallus, which rises up to salute them. As long as they play along with the phallus, they are acceptable and interesting; the moment they do not, they are objectionable. As long as they flatter the phallus, they can stay; as soon as they do not, they must go. Their worth is conditional.

This is one of the main areas where men deceive themselves. They consider to be freedom and liberation what is actually serfdom and slavery. Women are encouraged to be free only in the way that suits and serves the phallus. This is because there is a curious idealization of the phallus in many men, quite unconscious and unremarked. There is a sort of insane phallic optimism, which assumes that women really want sex just in exactly the way that feeds the phallus - only they are too inhibited to say so, or to own up to it even in private. In reality, women are much more variable in their sexual needs and wishes than the phallus has time for. See the many examples of this in Hite (1976).

But of course the phallus is not to be taken for granted either. As soon as we come to any serious questioning of the phallus, we find, as Litewka in Snodgrass (1977) says, that it is highly socialized - in other words, it is taught to be that way by messages coming in from the culture ever since childhood. We are taught as men that women are "other" - they are like some complicated subject (or object) that has to be studied, learned, mastered. We are taught by

other males that it is OK to be fixated on parts of the female, particularly the breasts:

And in movies, on TV, in advertisements, where else can we look when the camera's eye focuses on breasts? So our eye is trained and we fixate. Emotionally, too. We learn that if we do that, we will eventually get pleasure and have fun. And be men. Be seen as male. Be reacted to as male. (Litewka)

This leads to the third characteristic of the phallic approach - conquest. Reynaud (1983) points out that this is so important because for so many men sex is not actually pleasurable, due to their inability to let go and experience the pleasure. If we say that orgasm is precisely this letting go, this surrender to the involuntary movements of the whole body, then ejaculation is not orgasm, and many men are nonorgasmic. So power becomes the main thing.

It is often more satisfying to a man to get a woman's knickers off than actually to have sex with her. The one gives immediate power gratification, while the other makes extra demands too. And so, as Litewka points out, male sexual responses often have little or nothing to do with the specific female who is present. The socialized phallus is interested in ejaculation, not in being friends.

But when it comes to the crunch, even the phallus is only a servant in the need for control, power and domination. This need for domination is so strong in our culture that it extends right up and down the hierarchy (see Fig.1). But

men deny this. We do not feel as if we are dominating. We are usually not sophisticated in the way that, for example, Su Negrin (1972) is. Here are some brief examples of what she says:

What being dominated feels like

Being dominated feels like always wondering if I did the right thing.

Being dominated feels like worrying how I look when someone's coming over.

Being dominated feels like singing along instead of singing.

Being dominated feels like being depressed and not knowing why.

Being dominated feels like needing someone instead of loving her.

Being dominated feels like realizing that all the man I ever lived with can't spell and have lousy handwriting and that I can do both well.

Being dominated feels like being good at school instead of finding out what I wanted to know.

Being dominated feels like not being able to distinguish myself from my kids.

Being dominated feels like believing it when my (male) lover told me I was as possessive as a sponge.

What dominating feels like

Dominating feels like wondering if my son, Paul, lies to me and if so why.

Dominating feels like sleeping with my younger sister's boyfriend without giving it a thought.

Dominating feels like hearing a new Cuban rock album and feeling good about the revolution because it produced music I really liked, and not even realizing I liked it because it sounded like American music.

Domination feels like needing directions and mindlessly bypassing a Chinese man to search for someone else.

Dominating feels like throwing away Paul's toys without asking him.

Dominating feels like **not knowing** how much of my compulsive behaviour those two kids have internalized.

Dominating feels like realizing I've lost touch with my own centre.

We as men have very often lost touch with our own centres. It is only because I was lucky enough to find mine again that I could even begin to write this book. Only then could I see for myself what was going on, and what I was implicated in. What I am implicated in is nothing much less than a war of men against women.

But it is not the old sex war, which is the subject of so many films, cartoons, stories and poems. It is a new feminist challenge.

The old sex war is something we are all familiar with. The conversation goes something like this:

First man: You know, women really are oppressed in this system -it has to change.

Second man: I don't know, men have a pretty rough time too - at least women don't have to go out and fight if there's a war.

And so the argument goes on. We have slipped from a discussion of feminism to the argy-bargy of the old sex war in two sentences. In the old sex war there is a kind of evenly matched symmetry -it goes something like this.

THE MEN SAY

Women are oversensitive
Women are martyrs
Women are too picky about sex
All women want out of a relationship is children
Women are too dainty and houseproud
Women are too timid
Women are only interested in children and clothes
Women just want to gossip together
Women are too devious
Women have it easy - they don't have to go to war or down the mine
Women are like children
Women are unfair
Women want to be flattered

THE WOMEN SAY

Men are insensitive
Men are selfish
Men are obsessed with sex
All men want out of a relationship is sex
Men are too messy, dirty and careless
Men are too aggressive
Men are only interested in sport and cars
Men just want to go down to the pub with their mates
Men are too brash
Men have it easy - they don't have to do all the shit work
Men are like children
Men are unfair
Men want their egos massaged

This is really all quite comfortable for men, because we always have a ready riposte and can keep our end up in an argument. But the thing about the new feminist challenge is that it is not symmetrical. There is no equivalent charge to hurl back. If women get 65% of the wage of a man for doing the same work, if women are kept out of the high-ranking jobs, if women are only tolerated in service roles (or up on pedestals), if women can only be accepted if they play the male game in the male way, there is no answer except to say "You're the oppressed one - it's up to you to change it". But that is offensive if it actually means that the man is going to feed and reinforce the patriarchal system which keeps things that way.

But if men do begin to feel that things need to be changed, there are two crucial questions we have to answer. How can we change? and what do we change into?

There are subsidiary questions, too, such as - What is our motivation to change? Are we just trying to help the women, or is there something in it for us too?

All these questions, and others like them, have been addressed by the

anti-sexist men's movement, and so it will be profitable to turn now to a consideration of this response to the challenge of feminism.

But I can't leave this chapter without remembering the worst wound of all, the one that sticks in my mind still now, ten years later, when my wife said that she had heard a theory that originally there were women on the earth, and that men had come from another planet. They were really aliens, not human beings at all. And she looked at me and said she could believe this theory. That was the worst thing she ever said to me, and I can still feel the pain of that moment.

The trouble with men is that they read something like that and think to themselves - "Can't he see she is full of shit? What rubbish!" When they would do better to think about the depth of feeling that must have been behind her, to say something like that. And it is that depth of feeling which needs to be dealt with, not the accuracy of the statement itself. If she feels that deeply, if she is that alienated, if the gap seems so great, there must be something very wrong, something that desperately cries out to be healed.

This is an extract from John Rowan's forthcoming book "The Horned God" (Feminism and men as wounding and healing) to be published by Routledge and Kegan Paul later this year.

For references see Page 78

a Community Groups course in Lambeth, the Lonaon Borough of Islington decentralisation programme, an I.T. project 'Link' in Hackney, the British Association of Settlements and Social Action Centres; and work is planned to begin shortly with workers at an Asian Women's Refuge.

Southgate's book about this method - 'Community Counselling Circles, a New Social Invention', subtitled 'A Book of Working Notes, Cartoons and Diagrams for Teachers of the Method' - is available from the Institute for Social Inventions, 24 Abercorn Place, London NW8 9XP - Price £8.95 (libraries and institutions), £5.95 (postage included) for Self and Society readers.

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