

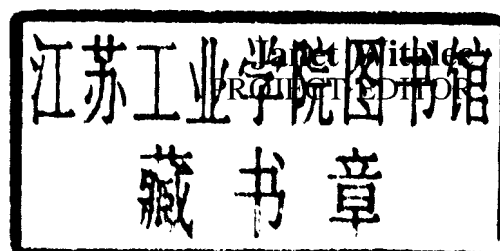
☐ Contemporary
Literary Criticism

CLC 159

Volume 159

Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works
of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and
Other Creative Writers



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Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 159

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ISBN 0-7876-5859-6
ISSN 0091-3421

Printed in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Preface

Named “one of the twenty-five most distinguished reference titles published during the past twenty-five years” by *Reference Quarterly*, the *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)* series provides readers with critical commentary and general information on more than 2,000 authors now living or who died after December 31, 1999. Volumes published from 1973 through 1999 include authors who died after December 31, 1959. Previous to the publication of the first volume of *CLC* in 1973, there was no ongoing digest monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion and explication of modern literature. *CLC*, therefore, has fulfilled an essential need, particularly since the complexity and variety of contemporary literature makes the function of criticism especially important to today’s reader.

Scope of the Series

CLC provides significant passages from published criticism of works by creative writers. Since many of the authors covered in *CLC* inspire continual critical commentary, writers are often represented in more than one volume. There is, of course, no duplication of reprinted criticism.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or dramatic production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science fiction writers, literary and social critics, foreign authors, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author’s career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the author’s works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete biographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

Organization of the Book

A *CLC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.

- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- Whenever possible, a recent **Author Interview** accompanies each entry.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by the Gale Group, including *CLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *CLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces an annual cumulative title index that alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in *CLC* and is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Yvor Winters, *The Post-Symbolist Methods* (Allen Swallow, 1967), 211-51; excerpted and reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, vol. 85, ed. Christopher Giroux (Detroit: The Gale Group, 1995), 223-26.

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Susan Brownmiller

1935-

American nonfiction writer and novelist.

The following entry presents an overview of Brownmiller's career through 2001.

INTRODUCTION

One of the first politically active feminists at the onset of the women's liberation movement during the late 1960s, Brownmiller is best known as the author of *Against Our Will* (1975), which analyzes the use of rape by men from antiquity through the modern era as a tool of oppression against women. In this bestselling work, Brownmiller provoked widespread controversy at the time with her famous assertion that rape "is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men* keep *all women* in a state of fear" (italics in original). Brownmiller has courted controversy to a lesser degree with her other works, which continue to pose arguments that question cultural assumptions about gender in terms of power. An outspoken feminist, Brownmiller is widely recognized for her seminal role in promulgating the principles of the women's liberation movement in particular and feminism in general.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

The daughter of a salesperson at Macy's department store and a secretary at the Empire State Building, Brownmiller was born February 15, 1935, in Brooklyn, New York. She attended Cornell University on scholarships from 1952 to 1955 and later studied at the Jefferson School of Social Sciences without completing degree requirements at either institution. After working a string of odd jobs during the late 1950s, including a stint as a theatrical actress, Brownmiller held a series of editorial and research positions during the early 1960s with various periodicals, ranging from the *Coronet* and the *Albany Report* to *Newsweek* and *Village Voice*. Meanwhile, Brownmiller joined the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and participated in its civil rights demonstrations, most notably during Freedom Summer in 1964 when activists went to the Deep South to register disenfranchised African Americans to vote. In 1965, Brownmiller joined the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) as a staff writer, but she signed on the next year as a network news writer for the American Broadcast Company (ABC) where she remained until 1968 when she parlayed her growing interest in women's rights into dual careers as freelance journalist and political activist. That year, she co-founded the New York Radical



Feminists, who organized public protests and sit-ins advocating equal rights for women, including a demonstration at the offices of *Ladies' Home Journal* opposing its representation of women. In 1969 Brownmiller wrote a feature story for the *New York Times* on Shirley Chisholm, the first African-American woman elected to Congress. Brownmiller adapted this article into her first book-length publication, *Shirley Chisholm* (1970), a biography for young readers. In 1971 Brownmiller helped to organize a "Speak-Out on Rape," and the speech she delivered at the rally became the basis for *Against Our Will*. The subsequent controversy and notoriety that followed its publication brought Brownmiller to national prominence as a leading feminist. She was named one of *Time* magazine's twelve Women of the Year in 1975 and appeared on numerous television talk shows. In 1979 Brownmiller helped to organize the national lobbying group Women Against Pornography, clarifying her views in the widely anthologized essay "Let's Put Pornography Back in the Closet" (1979). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s Brownmiller

continued to engage women's issues as a lecturer and writer, sporadically publishing books on feminist themes, including *Femininity* (1984) and *Waverly Place* (1989), her first novel. In 1992, Brownmiller toured Vietnam on assignment for *Travel & Leisure* magazine and recorded her impressions of the country and its people in *Seeing Vietnam* (1994). Her memoirs of significant events during the women's liberation movement, *In Our Time*, appeared in 1999.

MAJOR WORKS

A seminal text of American feminism, *Against Our Will* provides an overview of myriad ways that rape has been used by men throughout history to subjugate women. The thesis of this work proposes that rape is not a sexual act but an act of aggression determined by anatomical difference and used to assert men's dominance over women and women's subservience to men. Supported by research in diverse fields ranging from history, literature, and myth to sociology, psychology, and law, *Against Our Will* traces the history of rape in human society, documenting the politics of rape in times of war, outlining the evolution of American rape laws, and discussing such topics as interracial rape, homosexual rape, and child molestation. Less confrontational than Brownmiller's first work, *Femininity* analyzes culturally determined Western definitions of "feminine" standards, detailing such characteristics as body, voice, hair, skin, clothes, movement, emotion, and ambition. In addition, this work also explores the extent to which many women adhere to those ideals, arguing that they restrict the scope of and limit the opportunities in real women's lives. Taking its cue from the headlines of the late 1980s, *Waverly Place* is a fictional account of the real-life murder of six-year-old Lisa Steinberg in New York's Greenwich Village where Brownmiller lived at the time. The novel recounts events in the stormy and abusive relationship between Hedda Nussbaum and her longtime domestic partner, attorney Joel Steinberg, that led to his trial for the beating death of his illegally adopted daughter, Lisa. *Seeing Vietnam* is a photographic and textual record of Brownmiller's 1992 tour of Vietnam that blends historical information about the Vietnam War with her impressions of how the country has fared nearly twenty years after the war ended. Part history and part memoirs, *In Our Time* traces the rise and spread of the women's liberation movement in the United States during the late 1960s and 1970s based on Brownmiller's personal recollections of significant events, interviews with other eyewitnesses, and extensive archival research.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Upon its publication, *Against Our Will* instantly made Brownmiller a literary celebrity but it also prompted controversy. The bestselling work was named a featured selection by the Book-of-the-Month Club and one of the ten outstanding books of 1975 by the *New York Times*

Book Review. Some critics have praised the book for its extensive research, lucid argument, and groundbreaking perspective on a formerly taboo subject, with many hailing its refined treatment of criminal aspects and legal implications of rape. Feminists, activists, and lobbyists have embraced its central idea that rape is a tool of patriarchal power rather than a mere sexual act. However, other commentators have objected that the thesis of *Against Our Will* is simplistic; they have questioned whether the physical capacity to commit or threaten rape alone accrues power to men. Brownmiller's other theoretical work, *Femininity*, has yielded a similar mixed response among reviewers. While some critics have found the work's insights on feminine ideals and female conformity accurate, others have opined that it neglects the perspectives of women of color and disregards similar impediments that men encounter with unrealistic masculine ideals. Most critics have concurred that *Waverly Place* is poorly conceived as a novel, with the majority of complaints centering on character motivation in relation to theme. Many reviewers have also questioned the purpose and ethics of Brownmiller's decision to fictionalize a well-publicized and graphically detailed media event. Generally unimpressed with *Seeing Vietnam*, commentators have noted that Brownmiller missed an opportunity to make observations from her usual feminist perspective. However, she has redeemed herself in the eyes of most critics with *In Our Time*, which many reviewers have praised as an important contribution to feminist history, although a few have judged it little more than gossip about the infighting among major participants within the women's movement.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Shirley Chisholm: A Biography (biography) 1970
Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape (criticism) 1975
Femininity (criticism) 1984
Waverly Place (novel) 1989
Seeing Vietnam: Encounters of the Road and Heart (travel essay) 1994
In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution (memoirs) 1999

CRITICISM

Michael F. McCauley (review date 5 December 1975)

SOURCE: McCauley, Michael F. Review of *Against Our Will*, by Susan Brownmiller. *Commonweal* 102, no. 19 (5 December 1975): 602-03.

[In the following excerpt, McCauley praises *Against Our Will* for addressing a timely issue that concerns everyone.]

Four years ago when journalist Susan Brownmiller began writing *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, she often encountered embarrassment concerning rape and rape victims. For the most part this attitude has changed due, largely, to the women's movement and the staggering projection that half a million women will be raped this year. In this compelling, unflinching account of Ms. Brownmiller's confrontation of her own fears and intellectual defenses she details her conversion from the typical liberal stance to a disarming realization of her own vulnerability. Backed-up by carefully-selected, well-documented research encompassing psychoanalysis, sociology, criminology, law and history, *Against Our Will* explores current discriminatory rape laws that are still obscured by medieval codes, traditional sexist prejudices and sheer fantasy. Ms. Brownmiller exposes a widespread, unspoken tenet of male-dominated society which virtually denies the fact of force, suggesting that "all women *want* to be raped," thus doubly violating the victims by adding to the actual physical assault the psychological trauma of being accused of enticement or compliance. *Against Our Will* is a poignant, candid and long-overdue analysis of a subject that concerns all. As long as present legal outlooks and cultural mythologies prevail, we are, each one of us, victims of this unspeakable attack on our humanity.

Gillian Tindall (review date 12 December 1975)

SOURCE: Tindall, Gillian. "Sexist Appeal." *New Statesman* 90, no. 2334 (12 December 1975): 761.

[In the following review, Tindall argues that *Against Our Will* is thoughtful, informative, and well-researched, but criticizes the volume for presenting an oversimplified, one-sided view of human sexuality.]

Reading these two studies in the same week, one on prostitution and the other on rape, you get the uneasy impression that they are somehow mutually exclusive—that the social situation described in the one could not exist on the same planet with the other and vice versa. I think this is the fault of both books; both, in different styles and at different intellectual levels, have their points, but each manages only a one-sided view of the complex field of human sexuality. Through the eyes of the whores whose reported testimony makes up the bulk of Jeremy Sandford's work, men seem a pretty harmless lot; there is the odd tale of rape or bullying, but the general impression is of a docile horde of faceless males, easily parted from their money, easily pleased by the gratification of perverse tastes more infantile than vicious. How, one is inclined to wonder, can this horde fit into the inherently brutal society of masculine domination depicted by Susan Brownmiller, a world in which, according to her, 'all men keep all women in a state of fear'?

Those who read this remark at the end of her introductory chapter may feel inclined, as I did, to mutter, 'if you believe that you'll believe anything,' and to feel that the

rest of this lengthy work is going to be a waste of time. However, much of *Against Our Will* turns out to be thoughtful, informative and well-researched. In her chronicle of bygone wars, she attempts to steer a path between believing all atrocity stories and believing none of them, and she is interesting on the part apparently played by aggressive homosexuality in jails: she is right, I am sure, that the rationale underlying this is not frustrated sexual desire but power politics—the physical abuse of weaker men is about the only way an imprisoned criminal can still be, literally, cock of the walk.

Yet there is a vein of obtuseness running through this book, a doctrinaire refusal to carry certain trains of thought through to their logical conclusions. The essential theme is the way in which men, historically and actually, use sexual domination as a symbolic expression of other forms of power, particularly economic power or victory in war. But through all the cumulative and inevitably repetitive examples the author cites of masculine aggression, she avoids any fundamental examination of the nature of male sexuality—or female, come to that. Though insisting that a generalised fear of rape is common to all women, she yet manages to convey the impression that rape is a pathological phenomenon having nothing in common with unforced sex, let alone with sexual love. The truth, however, is surely that rape is simply one end of a sexual continuum which stretches all the way from loving consideration, through many gradations of benign playing-tough, coercion and so forth, and that *this* is why it is such a difficult subject to discuss or legislate about.

Despite the furious denials of the sort of feminist group to which Ms Brownmiller belongs, many women *do* have a taste for being 'dominated,' or at any rate cajoled into 'giving themselves' (the phrase itself says much), and many perfectly kind men have a realistic awareness of this fact. It is precisely because the idea that 'women enjoy rape really' is not *total* masculine fantasy that it is so insidious and ubiquitous. In practice, this author's well-intentioned attempt to define rape as all occasions on which a woman 'chooses not' to have intercourse, simplifies the subject to the point of uselessness. She also fails to make out any kind of convincing case against the widely held theory (when she finally gets round to admitting its existence) that masochism is an essential and healthy element in feminine sexuality. She confines herself to saying that this theory 'has been for me a particular symbol of that which is inimical to all women': this is to confuse truth with ethical desirability.

Yet a lot of far-ranging reading has gone into this work, and if the result is a little turgid it is so in a most honourable, decent, Simone de Beauvoir-ish way. Turning from it, back to Jeremy Sandford, his book seems superficial, despite his sensible views on the need to recognise prostitution as an integral part of society, and despite one excellent quote from the Victorian monster Acton to the effect that most prostitutes are no more happy or unhappy in their work than anyone else. The blurb claims that this

book is the second in a series, of which *Gypsies* was the first, 'which is designed to add up to a composite portrait of contemporary British people,' which I do *not* believe: you don't start to eat a cake by picking out all the bits of candied peel and polishing them off first—or, if you do, the large and stodgy remnant will hardly be worth consuming.

Ann Marie Cunningham (review date January 1976)

SOURCE: Cunningham, Ann Marie. "Spotlight on Rape." *Progressive* 40, no. 1 (January 1976): 52–53.

[In the following positive review, Cunningham asserts that *Against Our Will* provides important information on the role of rape in human history.]

Susan Brownmiller wrote this remarkable, prickly book [*Against Our Will*], the first history of rape, because she changed her mind. A woman who always walked quickly and carried a confident look, a civil libertarian whose sympathies went out to the accused, Brownmiller had to hear victims' testimonies at a 1970 public speak-out before she stopped believing that if women were raped, it was their own fault. She realized then that the physiological truism that women can be raped but cannot rape, has meant that although few men are rapists; the threat of "the one crime" has cut across age, race, class, and time to chill and circumscribe all women's lives. Basically a violent means of overpowering and humiliating women or other men, rape has been used as "a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men* keep *all women* in a state of fear."

Initially, Brownmiller comes across as a bit of a crank. I could not take her woman-centered revisionism seriously when I found it bolstered, early in *Against Our Will*, by such shrilling as: "Man's discovery that his genitalia could serve as a weapon to generate fear must rank as one of the most important discoveries of prehistoric times, along with the use of fire and the first crude stone axe." But as Brownmiller learned by listening, so too I learned by reading her exhaustive, horrifying documentation of atrocious treatment accorded women in the course of human events.

In the past, women, whether high-born or low-born, were property to be claimed by seizure; more recently, "Women have been raped by men, more often by gangs of men, for many of the same reasons that blacks were lynched by gangs of whites: as group punishment for being uppity, for getting out of line, for failing to recognize 'one's place,' for assuming sexual freedoms, or for behavior no more provocative than walking down the wrong road at night in the wrong part of town and presenting a convenient, isolated target for group hatred and rage." When this analysis of Brownmiller's appeared, more than halfway through *Against Our Will*, I could not call it overreaching.

Rape literally has been an unspeakable act. Freud, amazingly, never wrote a word about it, and "a casual reader of history quickly learns that rape remains unmentionable,

even in war." Breaking the silence, Brownmiller pulls rape's badly tangled story from many skeins: the Old Testament, the *Iliad*, military history, tribunals and propaganda, war correspondents, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, law texts, a diary kept by a slaveowner's wife, Eldridge Cleaver, anthropology and zoology, *The Pentagon Papers*, histories of the American Indian wars, records of inter-racial rape cases, those "baffling crossroads" of racism and sexism.

As its history has been obscured, so rape's nature and attendant problems of law enforcement have been clouded by folklore and movie versions. Like the soldier who rapes in war, the police-blotter rapist is statistically an all-too-average aggressive youth, not a sexual highwayman out of Ian Fleming or Harold Robbins. He may actually be someone a woman would expect to trust—a policeman, a relative. As for victims, classes at police academies and law schools have traditionally been taught to regard them as descendants of Potiphar's wife—a legend common to Christian, Hebrew, and Moslem. Yet in New York City, when police-women began interviewing rape complainants, the number of false charges dropped to the same rate reported for other violent crimes.

Against Our Will accomplishes so much that I would like to call it impressive in every way. Unfortunately, Brownmiller will not let the evidence make its own capable case. What she learned in her research made her angry, and she wants her book to startle, upset, and rally readers to one victim's cry, "It's a war and you can't let them win." And Brownmiller not infrequently undercuts herself with misplaced black humor.

I have been asked—by men as well as women—about Brownmiller's ideas on the confounding question of female rape fantasies. Why is the thought of violation embarrassingly titillating? The reality is terrifying for the victim, and rarely erotic for her attacker. What, if any, is the connection here between thought and deed? "Such is the legacy of male-controlled sexuality, under which we struggle," Brownmiller writes. After drawing amplification from Jean Genet, *Red Riding Hood*, and Helene Deutsch's theories of innate female masochism, Brownmiller seems to tire and resorts to italics: "*The rape fantasy exists in women as a man-made iceberg. It can be destroyed—by feminism.*"

I, for one, hungered for a better answer, one less grandly political. The clashes over political solutions promoted during the recent murder trials of Joan Bird and Inez Garcia, two who abandoned the St. Maria Goretti model of Gandhian resistance, demonstrate how far we must go to understand and prevent rape. *Against Our Will* is one firm step: ignorance of its appalling history is no longer an excuse.

Incidentally, publication of Brownmiller's book indicates an interesting shift in the popular wind: the Book of the Month Club, which bypassed *The Feminine Mystique* and other nonfiction by feminist intellectuals, did select *Against Our Will* and thus guaranteed it a large audience.

Ellen Chesler (review date 5 January 1976)

SOURCE: Chesler, Ellen. "Abnormality as a Norm." *New Leader* 59, no. 1 (5 January 1976): 16-17.

[In the following review, Chesler asserts that the argument in *Against Our Will* is superficial and contradictory, questioning Brownmiller's use of sources to support her arguments.]

Five years ago, while helping to organize a feminist speak-out on rape, Susan Brownmiller made a discovery: Rape could be seen as an extraordinary historical metaphor, a fundamental "way of looking at male-female relations, at sex, at strength, and at power." Now, after four years of what she describes as grueling and methodical research, she has given us a book [*Against Our Will*] that jams the facts—against their will—into the Procrustean bed of her original "moment of revelation."

This is not the definitive "historical analysis" it purports to be. It is a passionate, often angry, sometimes downright nasty treatise on man's historical oppression of woman, an oppression that Brownmiller feels is rooted in the incontrovertible biological truth that only the male can initiate forcible sexual intercourse. "When men discovered that they could rape, they proceeded to do it," she asserts at the outset. "From prehistoric times to the present, I believe, rape has played a critical function. It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which *all* men keep *all* women in a state of fear." (Author's italics.)

The proof: rape in tribal and feudal societies; in war, in riot and in revolution; on the plantation and on the frontier; in the ghetto and in the prison; between anonymous strangers, husband and wife, father and child; in fact and in fiction. Brownmiller gathers more data on violent sexuality in human history than anyone could ever have conceived existed, as if the sheer weight of the numbers would convince. What she gives us, though, is often superficial and contradictory. One comes away accepting the tragic reality of rape and the author's contention that it has been ignored by male historians, yet skeptical of the meaning she assigns to it in the context of the male-female dilemma. Indeed, her own scholarship seems to confirm the very argument she is seeking to refute: that rape is a dimension of social and psychological pathology, and may have little to do with the historic inequality of the sexes.

Brownmiller begins in the primitive past, when physical strength was presumably the law of the land. "Female fear of an open season of rape, and not a natural inclination toward monogamy, motherhood or love, was probably the single causative factor in the original subjugation of woman by man," she speculates. She does not mention the alternative anthropological hypotheses that tribal woman may have been viewed as man's equal because of her little understood procreative power, or that her fertility and industry may have made her an object of male worship

and not a captive of his militancy. This prompts one to examine the author's sources, listed in the back of the book, and they turn out to be a newspaper clipping about the folklore of "bride capture" in Sicily, another from the *New York Times* about the stone-age Tasadays of the Philippines, and a 1959 article from the *American Anthropologist*.

Moving on to the American past, Brownmiller tells us the experience of the slave South is a "perfect study of rape." She quotes from Winthrop Jordan's towering analysis of race and slavery, *White over Black*, to establish the point: "White men extended their dominion over the Negroes to the bed, where the sex act itself served as a ritualistic reenactment of the daily pattern of social dominance." But his words are too mild, she then declares, "a vastly inadequate description of the brutal white takeover and occupation of the black woman's body."

More compelling, Brownmiller says, is a 1931 economic study of U.S. slave trade that leaves unchallenged the favorite arguments of 19th-century abolitionists who deliberately exploited the sexual anxieties of their Yankee constituency by dwelling upon the lasciviousness and immorality of the male slaveholder. She dismisses the controversial 1974 work by cliometricians Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, whose statistics on the antebellum South indicate that sexual abuse of black women was uncommon.

Brownmiller barely considers, moreover, the historical literature that shares neither abolitionist fury nor Fogel and Engerman's problematically happy view of life on the ole plantation. Had she really done her homework here, she would have had to acknowledge that most historians writing today find evidence that the sexual exploitation of female slaves was tempered by sexual inhibitions, religious constraints, and the presence of a large resident white population. Contrary to her testimony, it is generally held that institutionalized slave breeding scarcely existed in the South and that slave marriage was widely encouraged, along with other Christian ritual. Historians now emphasize the *conflict* between desire and aversion that shaped the typical Southern slaveholder's attitude toward his black female property.

This is not a mere academic quibble; it speaks to the underlying intellectual problem of Brownmiller's book. One cannot accept the evidence she assembles to prove that rape is a basic aspect of male-female relations unless one is willing to go along with the proposition that male sexual behavior is, by definition, pathological. For in her vast catalogue of crimes, all the examples of rape are set in situations of violent social upheaval having more complex roots than she allows.

Thus, in her portrait of slavery and in her more substantial material on rape in war—from Troy to Vietnam and Bangladesh—she can maintain that rape was not simply peripheral to the violence, but she fails to show that it was

something beyond a symptom of the general civil and social disorder. One is left agreeing that women have been victims of sexual abuse, without being able to see the logic that links this to the norm.

Brownmiller's treatment of "the police blotter rapist" is another example of her problem. She introduces the subject by announcing: "The typical American rapist might be the boy next door." Yet the next sentence contains the significant qualification that this is true only if you happen to be part of the lower socio-economic classes and happen to live in a neighborhood that fits the description of a ghetto. She even commends the recent work of criminologists who have placed rape at the center of a "subculture of violence" formed by "the poor, the disenfranchised, the black"—or "the thwarted, the inarticulate, and the angry"—whose values counter those of the dominant culture and whose only expression of power may be physical.

Similarly Brownmiller notes that in personality profiles comparing criminals, the rapist falls midway between the man who commits aggravated assault and the man who commits robbery. This sociological portrait, she reminds us, has supplanted a Freudian analysis favored in the 1950s of the rapist as "weirdo, psychic, schizophrenic," beset by a domineering wife or mother. But that doesn't exactly make him your everyday kind of guy, either, as is suggested by her conclusion: "Rather than society's aberrants or 'spoilers of purity,' men who commit rape have served in effect as front-line masculine shock troops, terrorist guerrillas, in the longest sustained battle the world has ever known."

Assuming all men are guilty, Brownmiller demands a crackdown on criminal rape that would abrogate much of what falls under the category of civil liberties, including the publication of pornography portraying unchecked male lust. (She doesn't comment on today's high-brow pornography, which tends to display woman as man's "playmate," and sex as guiltless childlike fun.) She argues convincingly that the presumption of innocence in rapists has entailed a presumption of female complicity. The female victim of rape has been forced to offer evidence of noncompliance—in effect, to prove *her* innocence. Not surprisingly, many women have refused to suffer this ordeal.

The situation has been further complicated because theory and reality have not always corresponded in the American system of justice. Since class, race and ethnicity have historically been intertwined with criminal rape in our society, the accused has often been presumed guilty before taking the stand. Seeking to compensate for the court's bias, liberal defense attorneys have concentrated on the psychological and sexual elements of the crime, sometimes to the extent of introducing easily misinterpreted Freudian and neo-Freudian theories about female rape fantasies.

Nevertheless, the frequent abuse of these theories in the courtroom hardly seems adequate cause for Brownmiller's unrestricted tirade against Freudianism. In fact, one would

have thought that psychoanalysis, given its emphasis on biology as destiny and its coupling of female penis envy with male castration anxiety, would be of particular interest to her.

What is more important, assigning guilt to every man will not put an end to rape, nor is it the way to redress the discrimination women have suffered at the hands of judges or psychiatrists. By using rape as an analytical tool for a treatise on sexual politics, Brownmiller leads us far afield from the criminal act. Her difficulty is that she hasn't come to terms with what is normal and what is deviant sexual behavior—where sex ends and rape begins.

M. J. Sobran Jr. (review date 5 March 1976)

SOURCE: Sobran, M. J., Jr. "Boys Will Be Rapists." *National Review* 28, no. 7 (5 March 1976): 220, 222.

[In the following review, Sobran offers a negative assessment of *Against Our Will*, commenting that the work's central thesis is illogical and that Brownmiller's argument is intellectually sloppy.]

Neither Susan Brownmiller nor *Against Our Will* needs much in the way of introduction. There has not been a more spectacular book-club meteor since the days of, oh, Kate Millett, anyway. You *do* remember Kate Millett? Cover of *Time*, and all that? Well, Miss Brownmiller has not only made *Time*'s cover, she has done so as one of 12 Women of the Year. Her book has been a Book of the Month, one of everybody's Ten Best of 1975, and a best-seller. Two *Village Voice* reviewers—Eliot Fremont-Smith, of course, and some dizzy feminist—hailed it in such terms as "landmark" and "classic," thereby announcing not only their own enthusiasm but that of posterity.

At this writing—January 26—it is still a classic, and Miss Brownmiller is still popping up on talk shows, trying to make her thesis sound scientific-like. She holds, as you may know, that rape is no mere aberration of the occasional brute or sociopath, but the act that defines the relations between the sexes: it is *normal*, central to the whole system of male oppression of women, producing benefits even for men who do not rape—and they know it. As she puts it in a much quoted sentence, rape is really "a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men* keep *all women* in a state of fear." (Her italics.)

Now the funny thing is that Miss Brownmiller does not seriously try to prove this. She offers some awfully confident speculations about prehistory, when man "must have" learned to rape and threaten rape. She prances through recorded history, plucking out the male atrocity and the *faux pas* with equal indignation. She concludes on a personal note, describing her fun in her self-defense class when she learned to hurt and frighten men. Not men who had wronged her: just men, plain old men, implicated by their genitals in the war of every man against every

woman. If they are not rapists, why then they are cryptorapists, cashing in on the dirty work of the guy who jumps women in the alley: the common police-blotter rapist is the "Myrmidon" of his fellow males, subserviently sowing terror on their behalf, thereby forcing women to depend on them for protection from him.

All of *Against Our Will* is animated by hostility to men as such. "Male" is itself a term of reproach, as in "outdated male values." Miss Brownmiller speaks casually, and with a straight face, of "egocentric, rapacious man," by which she seems not to mean one kind of man as opposed to another, but simply to express the character of men in general, as "many-wiled Odysseus" describes Odysseus without suggesting there's another one with fewer wiles. And of course "all men" terrify women, and consciously. How is this undifferentiated hatred of a whole sex different from that which drives the rapist? On the other side, she treats women less as a biological category than as a sort of tribe, to which loyalty is owed. She even denounces Ayn Rand as "a traitor to her own sex" because she glorifies a rape in one of her novels: Randian woman, assaulted by Randian man, lies back and enjoys it. Solidarity with your own sex, in Miss Brownmiller's view, seems to have higher claims than romance with the other.

How preposterous. Do I even have to say so? Is there anyone out there who doesn't know it's preposterous? Yoo-hoo! Fremont-Smith! I'm talking to you! It's so obviously cuckoo that even the book's praisers keep a prudent distance from its thesis—which makes no sense, since it is the thesis that makes it a book. We hardly needed Miss Brownmiller to tell us that rape is despicable, even if she does tend to talk as if it were legal everywhere but in a few counties in Alabama. We know too that it is one of the gruesome features of war: so why heap honors on her merely for collecting the data? The whole point of her book is the tendentiousness of her research: all of it serves a polemic purpose against a whole sex. Her only original contribution, as far as I can see, is to tell me that I am either a rapist or the conscious and willing beneficiary of other men's rapes.

I do admire her cunning as a self-promoter. She has managed to put nearly all her male reviewers on the defensive. They stand accused; they may not simply judge the book like other books, but are under a subtle pressure to vindicate themselves. What she is engaged in, really, is not scholarship but henpecking—that conscious process of intimidation by which all women keep all men in terror. Indeed, only one man, to my knowledge, has dared to attack her book, and reader, you're looking at him.

"It's intelligent—a rarity and a thrill—and it's handsomely written," marvels Fremont-Smith. This is almost the contrary of the truth. Consider: is rape a "process" of intimidation? No, it is a violent act, though it may be *part* of such a process, which I gather is what she means to say. She also speaks of men's historical "conscious process of intimidation, guilt, and fear." What is a process of guilt

and fear? She must mean a process of *instilling* guilt and fear. But in that case "fear" is redundant, since "intimidation" means "instilling fear." The sloppiness is not only intellectual but stylistic: "Punishment for raping a virgin of property was thoughtfully reduced to castration and the loss of both eyes by William the Conqueror." She means that William reduced the penalty, not that he inflicted it. Why not just "castration and blinding"? And why "thoughtfully"? Apparently this is just Miss Brownmiller's compulsive sarcasm ("knowledgeable humor," her publisher calls it), which so often insists on manifesting her sentiments even when it obscures her sense. Thus the reader takes it that she thinks the story of Potiphar's wife is a male fabrication, not because she offers any evidence or reasons but because her tone conveys her pervasive suspicion that it would be just like a man to invent such a yarn. She is really a sound-effects specialist, and she has caught the tune of the time, and the Fremont-Smiths like the music so much they pay no attention to the words.

Charles W. Stewart (review date 26 May 1976)

SOURCE: Stewart, Charles W. "Rape as Domination." *Christian Century* 93, no. 19 (26 May 1976): 524–25.

[In the following review, Stewart offers a positive assessment of *Against Our Will*, observing that Brownmiller succeeds in her efforts to raise consciousness about the issue of rape.]

[In *Against Our Will*,] Susan Brownmiller is one of the first women to undertake an investigation of rape. She writes deeply, personally and polemically of what she believes is an age-old injustice in the relations between women and men. By their superior physical strength, and by their superior position in society maintained through the institutions of law, marriage and the family, men have raped women's personalities and have kept their bodies in bondage: "Rape is a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear." Legally, men have defined rape as "the penetration by an act of sexual intercourse with a female, not one's wife, against her will and consent." Related to the definition are such matters as the threat of force, the use of drugs or intoxicants, the possibility of mental deficiency, and the age of consent. In her personal definition, the author says: "In rape the threat of force obtains a highly valued sexual service through temporary access to the victim's intimate parts, and the intent is not merely to take but to humiliate and degrade."

Ms. Brownmiller is angry, and her anger has been ignited by her research; spending over three years in libraries, she has dug out previously inaccessible materials and brought them into the light of day. She ranges over legal history and finds the basis of women's forced subservience in Jewish and English law. Women were treated as property through the Middle Ages, and the institutions of marriage