hugger-mugger hokum and if the dialogue were grave when serious and amusing when funny, instead of the other way round. The stars are names-down-the-list. Excepting possibly Jason Robards, I can't believe that the leading roles were accepted by the producers' first choices. (No wonder.) For instance, Richard Jordan as a swashbuckling ex-navy captain—preferred over Robert Redford or Steve McQueen? I'm not saying that a lesser draw than Redford or McQueen, or a complete unknown, couldn't be good in the role; I am saying that Jordan is pitiful and *looks* like desperation casting. The only agreeable performer is Anne Archer, as a Washington reporter who used to sleep with Jordan and now sleeps with someone else, but her role is offensively written.

Then there's *The Final Countdown*—a title as pointless as the picture, by the way. The ad copy tells enough: "On December 7th, 1980 the nuclear carrier *USS Nimitz* disappeared in the Pacific . . . and reappeared December 7th, 1941 . . . off Pearl Harbor." Courtesy of a wild electrical storm that whirled the ship back almost 40 years.

You know in advance that there's going to be a lot of dialogue like: "This is crazy." "What's going on around here?" "Wait a minute, let's take this one step at a time." "You mean to say that we're . . . we're. . . ." And so on. But all one asks from an SF idea like this—fantasy, really, not science fiction—is that it be used cleverly to some purpose: pop entertainment, pop metaphysics, pop historical reflection, pop moralism, pop *something*. All that happens here is that the *Nimitz* goes back in time, has a chance to stop the Japanese fleet before Pearl Harbor, doesn't, and comes back to the present. A senator who disappeared back in 1940 disappears back there once again. (We're supposed to believe that this joker, fat and pampered, had been out in mid-Pacific in a 50-foot boat.) His female assistant and a naval commander survive together in an undisclosed way, which suits me. There's no fun in the time-shuttling and no smattering of idea.

Kirk Douglas is the ship's captain, phony from Moment One. Martin Sheen of *Apocalypse Now* is in this Apocalypse Then, and no more forceful, though his part is less pretentious. Some of the footage shot by Victor J. Kemper is crisp. It made me think that there might be a lively film about life on such a ship, an updated version of the navy pictures we got during World War II, which exploited all the new hardware and investigated present-day military/naval behavior.

Punishing the liberated woman.

Soft-Porn Culture

by Ann Douglas

Popular culture is out to get the so-called liberated woman. Mass culture increasingly specializes in dominance games, fantasies in which women lose and men win. It is important that such fantasies are popular among women as well as among men, and that they are fantasies.

Women Against Pornography is a New York-based group that offers guided tours of 42nd Street to any woman who wants to see what usually only men see: peep shows, masturbation booths, porn shops featuring leather goods, dildos, and dozens of periodicals with titles like *Obedience and Dominance, Hot-Assed Divorcees,* and *Pain,* as well as unauthored paperbacks belonging to the Slave Woman Series or Bestselling Bookline called *Club Sadistic, Slave to Anal Sex, Pain Dungeon,* and *Tortured Beauty.* Within the pages of such magazines and books, a woman can learn what some deem fit punishment for her claims to independence: "Bondage the Answer to Women's Lib" reads a caption in *Obedience and Dominance* above three photographs of women tied, gagged, chained, and collared. Hard porn's law, to pervert Descartes, runs: "I hurt you, therefore I exist." The title of one of the books in Bestselling Bookline, *Shamed Virgin,* could be the title for them all.

Forty-Second Street looks like a freak show. It isn't. What one finds there is disturbingly evident, if more discreetly packaged, in popular entertainment dealing with sex roles and mass-market paperback love stories. Too often they are covert carriers of porn's message for women: "Don't travel alone"; "men can't stand it"; "men won't let you get away with it." The story such cultural fare purveys is one in which the strong woman seldom fares well, or if she does, it is at a man's expense, and thus at her own.

Among these cautionary fables for women are the new, often highly acclaimed, "tea and sympathy" films which dramatize the sad plight of the male in a world of liberated women: Blake Edwards's *Ten,* Alan Pakula's *Starting Over,* and the classic of the genre to date, Robert Benton's *Kramer vs. Kramer.* These films are not female "weepies," nor male-bonding films. They are male weepies. They compensate by lavish over-interest in their heroes' plights and by forced happy finales for their underlying less happy theme. Men are in big trouble: they don't know who they are or what they want. The hero of this new genre is deciding between the glamor of excitement and success, and the camaraderie of comedy that will enable him to get through his various life crises (the current substitutes for plot). He chooses the latter. But what about the woman in the case?

Women in these films shift meaning and character drastically in their frantic scramble to regroup more or less tidily around the male hero's confused emotional and narrative needs. In *Kramer vs. Kramer,* Meryl Streep supposedly has a "case," but it is a wildly incoherent one. She rightly leaves a tyrannical husband one year and unjustly tries to separate a sensitive loving man (the same guy) from their son the next. At the start of the film Streep abandons her child because she doubts her ability to be good for him; at the close, she gives her son up again, for pretty much the same reason. And this, despite (or because of?) a career which has taken off with magical ease in a mere 15 months of freedom, therapy, and California. Low self-esteem is Streep's fate whatever she does. Isn't it odd that Meryl Streep, with

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her strong features and air of independent intelligence, the media-proclaimed "actress of the 1980s," in all but one of her four recent roles (*Kramer, Manhattan, The Seduction of Joe Tynan*) has played women who either can't keep their men or brutally reject them? Isn't it odd that she, like the hard-core heroine, is either haughty or humiliated?

The message, again, is "stay home," and women don't need to go to the movies to get it. Soft-core pornography, specifically designed for women who would not frequent 42nd Street for any purpose, nor even attend movies regularly, is flourishing. One subset of soft porn, the Harlequin Romances, particularly demands attention. Their rise to popularity has been phenomenal. A British Canadian venture, Harlequins sold 14,000 copies in 1966 and somewhere over 50 million in 1979. Once addicted, you will be maintained in your habit; you can buy them at supermarkets and drugstores and airports and train stations; you can even become a Harlequin member and receive 12 Harlequins a month for wonderfully little money. The timing of the Harlequins' prodigious success has coincided exactly with the appearance and spread of the women's movement, and much of its increasingly anti-feminist content reflects this symbiotic relationship. A Harlequin heroine gives up a job more easily than her maidenhead; better yet, she abandons them simultaneously. As in male weepies and hard porn, female identities are obligingly so much tinder in the crucible in which male ego is to be reforged.

Harlequins focus on one aspect of female experience, courtship: not courtship in the Jane Austen style with its intricate processes of choice, but coupling in the wary primitive modes of animal mating. The Harlequin heroine is a young girl; on rare occasions, she may be as old as 25 or 26, but she has seldom enjoyed more than a few kisses from the opposite sex. She is not a beauty, nor is she talented, nor invariably good-tempered. She is a candidate for subduing, and for gratitude. If she is good-looking and competent, her gifts are but provocations, we quickly learn, to brutal destiny. As the story opens, the heroine has usually lost a parent, a home, or both, making her especially vulnerable. The hero is always the heroine's superior, older, handsome in a predatory way, dressed in stunning clothes, lord of at least a plantation and sometimes head of a corporation. The heroine, usually an immigrant from another less modern

culture to the energized, bewildering terrain of the male, is literally in his power: he is often her boss or temporary guardian. Her inevitable loss of control constitutes the Harlequin plot. The Harlequins—and herein lies their power—crudely elaborate the physiological and psychological condition of girls in love, dilated and contracted by the uncertainties of passion.

The Harlequins last their stipulated 180-odd pages because the main protagonists are locked in a duel of sexual stupidity. Both are emotional illiterates. He is usually too angry, she too scared, to say anything honest about how they feel. At least half the heroine's energies are absorbed in learning the language of the male's land: how to ride, how to drive a jeep, how to placate hostile or lecherous peers and superiors on the job. Dim to begin with, the heroine has few female friends to bolster her intelligence, to help her put the hero in perspective. Those she does have, perhaps a sister of the hero, or a worker in his office, are at least as impressed by the hero as she is. Little wonder that the heroine alternates between terrified silence and ill-timed protests.

The hero is an arrogant, glamorous figure who travels alone. Some woman, a first wife or his mother, has hurt him, and for this he holds the opposite sex in permanent suspicion. The Harlequin girl must love the Harlequin man no matter how viciously he treats her; he can despise and abuse her (and other women) on the grounds that one woman once ill-treated him. The logic is startling, the fantasy obvious: women need men pitifully more than men need them; they can't afford such sweeping judgments nor stand such sexual exile. In this totally anti-feminist world, the Harlequin heroine is fighting for the status of an exception; she neither wins nor wants the vindication of her sex: clearly a lost cause.

On the scene, as a warning to the heroine and an explanation for the hero's sadism, we usually find the good-looking older single woman. Her wickedness is suggested by the mere fact that she is the hero's own age (32 to 39). To be coeval, to retain her attractiveness without the cosmetic of male domination, is to be tainted, if not willfully depraved. Vain, grasping, materialistic, she is seldom committed to being a wife and never interested in motherhood; indeed, sex itself is often repulsive to her.

The crime of the older woman is her failure to be fully sexually dependent. Of this sin the heroine, despite a superficial pertness, is truly blameless. She vibrates helplessly to the hero's punitive mood swings: his hostile silences punctuated by sardonic put-downs and devouring, punishing kisses leave blood on her lips and awe for male authority in her heart. Occasional quixotic expressions of tenderness vanish inexplicably without a trace, except the heroine's yearning for more. The hero awakens her sexually long before he says he loves her and her response is comparable to an earthquake. The hero's proximity alone can send the blood pounding through her veins, make her hands tremble, deprive her of speech and reason. His touch devastates. She

can only cling, like a drowning woman to a spar, to the notion that she must not "give in" to the hero until he says he loves her. "Not like this" is the saving thought that wrenches many (though not all) Harlequin girls from the bruising penultimate embraces of the men they love.

It is arguable that the heroine is fighting for woman's ancient right to be loved where she is willing to be possessed. She is at heart "old-fashioned" in every way, often a fine little cook, a plucky apprentice (but of course no more) to masculine sports and interests, the product of a traditional home, someone who usually longs for children above all else. The encouragement to take sex more freely, more casually, that "Women's Lib" (as it is always called in the Harlequins) seems to offer women, the Harlequins imply, may strip an unsuspecting girl of her surest source of power. If the Harlequin heroine, Miss Monogamy herself, suffers what Freud called sexual "thralldom," she also has the not inconsiderable power of the voluntarily enslaved. Her dependency, her worldly innocence—and a catastrophe or two—force crude conversation, and voilà! she wins love and a proposal of marriage.

Yet it is difficult to see the Harlequins as picking up on any feminine struggle—even the ancient battle to be loved as well as desired—ignored by the women's movement. The emotional force of current Harlequin Romances comes from the brute energy of the male and the over-responsiveness of the female. The heroine's sexual holding out is a dubious business at best. There is a sizable minority of recent Harlequins in which the male rejects the virgin's eager offer to go to bed with him. In Margaret Parrageter's *Only You* (September 1979), the virginal heroine, Sara Shaw, is totally receptive to Mark Fenwick's skillful kisses even though they leave her lips "so bruised" that she can only say (of all things) "thank you," even though she realizes they are merely a substitute for the "whip" he would have used on her a century earlier. On a weekend at his isolated country place, her rapidly intensifying sexual "addiction" finally reduces her to ignominy. He comes to her room, starts to make mad love to her, curses and breaks off tantalizingly (as Harlequin heroes are apt to do). She holds out "her thin young arms," and pleads "Mark, please!" Mark, for his own reasons, at this time totally unknown to reader and heroine, ruthlessly rejects her: "God, you've all the makings of a proper little bitch, haven't you?" he says as he leaves her bedroom, adding savagely from the door, "Don't imagine I ever loved you." Any 42nd Streeter would recognize her: another "Shamed Virgin."

When the heroine does hold out successfully, she prolongs the male's sadism as surely as her virginity. Since she always responds fiercely to his preliminary lovemaking, when she tears herself away at the belated command of her conscience, he can think of her as a "tease" and lessen what little mercy he had apportioned her. His confession of vulnerability and his protestations of love usually occupy only the last two pages of the story, and he quickly reasserts his authority in his new role as husband-to-be. In Rose Elver's *Golden Apples* (July 1978), the hero (compared at one point to Nero) fires Vere, his prospective bride, from his ad agency by way of proposal, and announces, "I'm not having my wife working in the agency and no arguments, Vere." "No arguments about *that*," she replies. *Finis.*

The Harlequins are porn softened to fit the needs of female emotionality. They are located inside the female consciousness, but so are most current hard-porn (heterosexual) stories and magazines; so, for that matter, are the Marquis de Sade's *Justine* and John Cleland's *Fanny Hill*. Female, not male, consciousness is the most satisfactory repository and register for the forced acknowledgment of male power. The Harlequin heroines initially resist domination, but so do the hard-core heroines. Breaking down female antagonism is half the fun.

The Harlequin hero is well equipped for his special sport. He has strong, even "razor" sharp features, a penchant for "whip cord" trousers, he likes neck "chains," and he is as cruelly omnipotent as his hard-core counterpart. When he "presses" the heroine's usually "petite" body to his own, his "contours," to use the Harlequin's euphemism, are always bruisingly "hard." His behavior is not just moody; it occasionally approaches the homicidal. In Elizabeth Graham's *Man From Down Under* (June 1979), the hero almost chokes the heroine to death—lest she make a scene that will disturb her sick father! It is a strange world we're in: the heroine doesn't think to tell her doting parents about the hero's killer impulses; she only desires him the more. In Charlotte Lamb's *Love is a Frenzy* (January 1980), Mark, dressed in tight black jeans and shirt, embraces

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Rachel: "His hands shot out and imprisoned her face, tightening until they were crushing her bones like matchwood. 'I could like hurting you, Rachel,'" he tells her.

Like hard-core porn and the male weepies, Harlequins are dramas of dependency. Dependency, or a shifting series of dependencies, becomes the *modus vivendi* of a person or a culture when the structure of the self in its more traditional Freudian incarnation has vastly weakened or collapsed. The Harlequin heroine guarantees the continuance of her initial youthful ignorance of life by her avid willingness to let the first chance at sexual bondage do the work experience is usually asked to accomplish. The idea of "growing up," of maturation, is the one most taboo in porn, and this taboo constitutes one of its great attractions. The Harlequin heroine averts the pain of not knowing who she is by courting the (only) apparently greater pain of addicting herself to a powerful and totally unknown male. He, in turn, prolongs her retardation in order to go on being his inscrutable self. They "torment" each other—a favored Harlequin word—by their apparently incommunicable love into facsimiles of the selves neither possesses.

The complete sexual stereotyping of soft and hard porn handily solves the confusion rampant in the more self-conscious works of Edwards, Benton, and Pakula. But in soft porn, hard porn, and male weepies alike, the male ego is preferred, protected, stabilized. In the world of shifting sexual identities in current films, female strength must be siphoned to the male or shown run amok; in the legends of hard porn, feminine self-reliance must be brutalized and broken; in the soft-porn fantasies of the Harlequins, woman's independence is made horrifically unattractive and unrewarding, her dependence presented as synonymous with excitement.

Admittedly incomplete surveys of readers suggest that Harlequins, concerned exclusively with the defloration and marriage of young girls, are consumed not only by schoolgirls but by "normal," active women in their 30s, 40s, and 50s. If true, this statistic hardly assures us that the Harlequins are harmless ("They must be all right if grown up middle-class women like them"), but provokes instead serious concern for their women readers. How can they tolerate or require so extraordinary a disjuncture between their lives and their fantasies? Probably the Harlequins are not written by men, although the bland WASP noms-de-plumes of the supposed authors tell us nothing; but the women who couldn't thrill to male nudity in *Playgirl* are enjoying the titillation of seeing themselves, not necessarily as they are, but as some men would like to see them: illogical, innocent, magnetized by male sexuality and brutality. It is a frightening measure of the still patriarchal quality of our culture that many women of all ages co-sponsor male fantasies about themselves and enjoy peep-shows into masculine myths about their sexuality as the surest means of self-induced excitation.

If these cultural phenomena constitute a backlash against the independent woman, it is an attack on an opponent felt as formidable. The voices of the opposition cannot drown out the refrain forming perhaps for the first time in the hearts of countless American women and perhaps of many American men: it is better today to be born female than male. The opportunities are at least new, the problems still interesting. Recently, male scholars and observers have commented profusely on modern man's post-Freudian destabilized "narcissistic" ego, what could be called the transfusion self. Yet one can wonder—the male observers and scholars usually do not—whether their observations hold equally true for the female psyche. Might it not be closer than the male's to the older Freudian ego model with its implications of a coherent narrative of the self and a predictable dynamic of conflict?

Women's best self-expression surely bears more affinities to Victorian precedents than does that of men. Non-porn cultural fare, of varying worth and popularity, more consonant with feminine and human as well as feminist needs than porn, is also burgeoning, if less rapidly. TV movies such as last year's "Like Mom, Like Me," contemporary films like Paul Mazursky's *An Unmarried Woman*, Adrian Lyne's provocative *Foxes*, Claudia Weill's *Girl Friends*, Fred Zinneman's *Julia*, Hal Ashby's *Coming Home*, Herbert Ross's *The Turning Point*, Ingmar Bergman's *Autumn Sonata*, Richard Brook's *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*, the important works of authors like Adrienne Rich, Marge Piercy, Gail Godwin, Marilyn French, Joan Didion, Margaret Atwood, Doris Lessing, and Margaret Drabble offer the first sometimes awkward, sometimes brilliant, strangely moving vignettes of women liking women. They suggest that power passes down the matriarchal line as surely as it does down the patriarchal line. They dramatize and detail portions of female experience—aging, so-called sexual abnormality, the long stretches of married life, maternity, the crisis of divorce—seldom before treated as subject matter.

In harvesting the material generated by the new freedom and the new roles open to their sex, women are able to regenerate, free from any effective charges of anachronism, the more traditional forms, like the novel, the memoir, and the narrative, whether in film or fiction, treated as passé by their male contemporaries. Because these forms are dependent for vitality on the presence of genuine social change, women, implicated willy-nilly in such change, need not abandon or violently reorder their structure as men, whose status is currently more static, apparently must. Women are able to use forms, in other words, that have long proved both their immense popularity in the marketplace and their place in the halls of artistic fame. Today women are creating an art, with all its shortcomings, genuinely their own, an art both traditional and bold, an art that contrasts with, more readily than it supplements, the work of its authors' male contemporaries.

Such works of feminine art, mass or elite, are constructing for the first time in Western history a complete visible biography for women: the maturation forbidden in porn is a possible subject here. A complete feminine biography in art has hitherto been impossible for the simple reason that, like male biography, it involves the acknowledgment that its subject is somewhere autonomous, is sometimes alone, lonely, whether terrified or independent, and yet survives.

This construction of a total imaginative feminine biography is critical because biography is the base fantasy life of "healthy" people, the product of the profound hope that our lives be complete and entire and, most of all, shaped—that they not be the series of random incidents and fatally reiterated mistakes terminated at some unknown and incomprehensible juncture we sometimes fear they are. From such

Coming:

Jim Miller on Elvis Presley.

entire female "biographies" articulated by pieces and stages in the culture, fantasies with some depth and significance about a particular phase or incident of the feminine biographical life cycle—a love affair, a job, a major life change—become available to art, popular and elite. That many men, and many women, are, and will continue to be, uninterested in, and even antagonistic to healthier female fantasy is both true and discouraging. Pornography is a phenomenon to be watched, and in the case of violent hard porn, to be fought. Yet porn's prevalence cannot alter the fact that for the first time a strong base for a variety of popular feminine fantasies not based on female humiliation is being laid; it will be built on. The Republican party, our long-time provider of political soft porn, with its anti-abortion, anti-ERA platform, may be acting out the dream-life of part of the nation, but the UN is right: it is the Woman's Decade, and probably her century.

Moore: G. E. Moore and the Cambridge Apostles by Paul Levy

(Holt, Rinehart and Winston; $18.95)

Paul Levy is a young American who has moved to London and carved out for himself a respectable place as a *Bloomsburylehrer*. He is, in other words, one of those writers who is continuing to analyze (and promote) the fame of the wonderful generation of novelists, painters, economists, and artists, most of them living in London a stone's throw from the British Museum and connected with Cambridge University, who captured the attention of the English after World War I and of the Americans after World War II—Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Vanessa and Clive Bell, Lytton Strachey and Maynard Keynes, Roger Fry, Desmond McCarthy, E. M. Forster, and the rest. Paul Levy has become very well connected with English literary society, as the preface to his new book testifies, and he has made himself particularly expert on the life and writings of Lytton Strachey; but in this book his subject is the person to whom many of the Bloomsbury group themselves pointed as their inspiration, even though he himself was scarcely ever to be seen in the neighborhood of Gordon Square. This was the Cambridge philosopher G. E. Moore, who lived from 1873 to 1958, and published one book of extended philosophical argument (*Principia Ethica*, 1903) before settling down at Cambridge in 1911 to a career as the leading expositor and teacher of analytical philosophy.

The story Paul Levy has to tell is curious, intriguing, and also disturbing, particularly for anyone like me, who grew up in the shadow of Moore and has felt obliged to develop some psychological distance, both from him personally and from his philosophical techniques. (When I was first married, my wife and I lived in the coach house at the bottom of Moore's garden in Chesterton Road, Cambridge; and I retain vivid memories of Moore in old age, working in his garden, singing Schubert *Lieder* in a light, pure voice, or filling his pipe before his weekly conversation with Ludwig Wittgenstein, who had succeeded him at Trinity in the Chair of Philosophy.)

It is a curious story because, except for one thing, the name of G. E. Moore would mean no more to the general reader in America today than the name of his counterpart at Harvard, C. I. Lewis, means to the general reader in Britain. That one thing was Moore's connection with a longstanding and influential secret society at Cambridge University, officially called the Cambridge Conversazione Society, but generally referred to as the Apostles—a name first given in scorn but soon (like the name of Quakers for the Society of Friends) accepted with pride. From the year 1820 on, the Apostles had had a remarkably consistent record of co-opting to itself the most brilliant Cambridge undergraduates of each generation; and it did so with most notable effect during the decades immediately before World War I, which saw the election of just about all the (male) members of the later Bloomsbury group, and also of the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, the mathematician G. H. Hardy, assorted Llewellyn Davies, Trevelyans, and Stracheys, as well as Edward Marsh, Rupert Brooke, Wittgenstein (of whom more later), and a dozen other figures notable in Cambridge and London life. Presumably, too, the society still exists, in its own clandestine way: Paul Levy speaks of only one current member—Jonathan Miller—though he mentions 1970 as the year that saw the first election of a female Apostle.

It is an intriguing story because Keynes, Strachey, and their Bloomsbury associates took Moore's *Principia* as their inspired text, while at the same time cheerfully misrepresenting its message.

G.E. Moore

The central point of Moore's concept of "intrinsic goods" was austere and philosophical: as contrasted with the classical utilitarians, he argued that material conditions (such as the state of drains) were not good in themselves, but only good to the extent that they promoted good human states of consciousness. Those states of mind alone were capable of being "good" without qualification. As illustrations, Moore cited the states of mind associated with human friendship and artistic experience; but there is no reason to believe that these illustrations were meant to be an exhaustive list, even of the most important "goods." Moore's Bloomsbury followers, however, understood him to be enthroning Art and Friendship—particularly friendship between men—as the supreme occasions for "good" states of mind. Hence there arose the odd spectacle of Lytton Strachey treating the chaste and unworldly Moore as a prophet of aesthetic homosexuality. And this, as Paul Levy makes clear, compels one to face the question: just what was it about Moore and his role in the Apostles that gave