

# Book Reviews

## Rape: The Price of Coercive Sexuality.

LORENNE CLARK and DEBRA LEWIS.  
Toronto: Women's Press, 1977. Pp. 220.

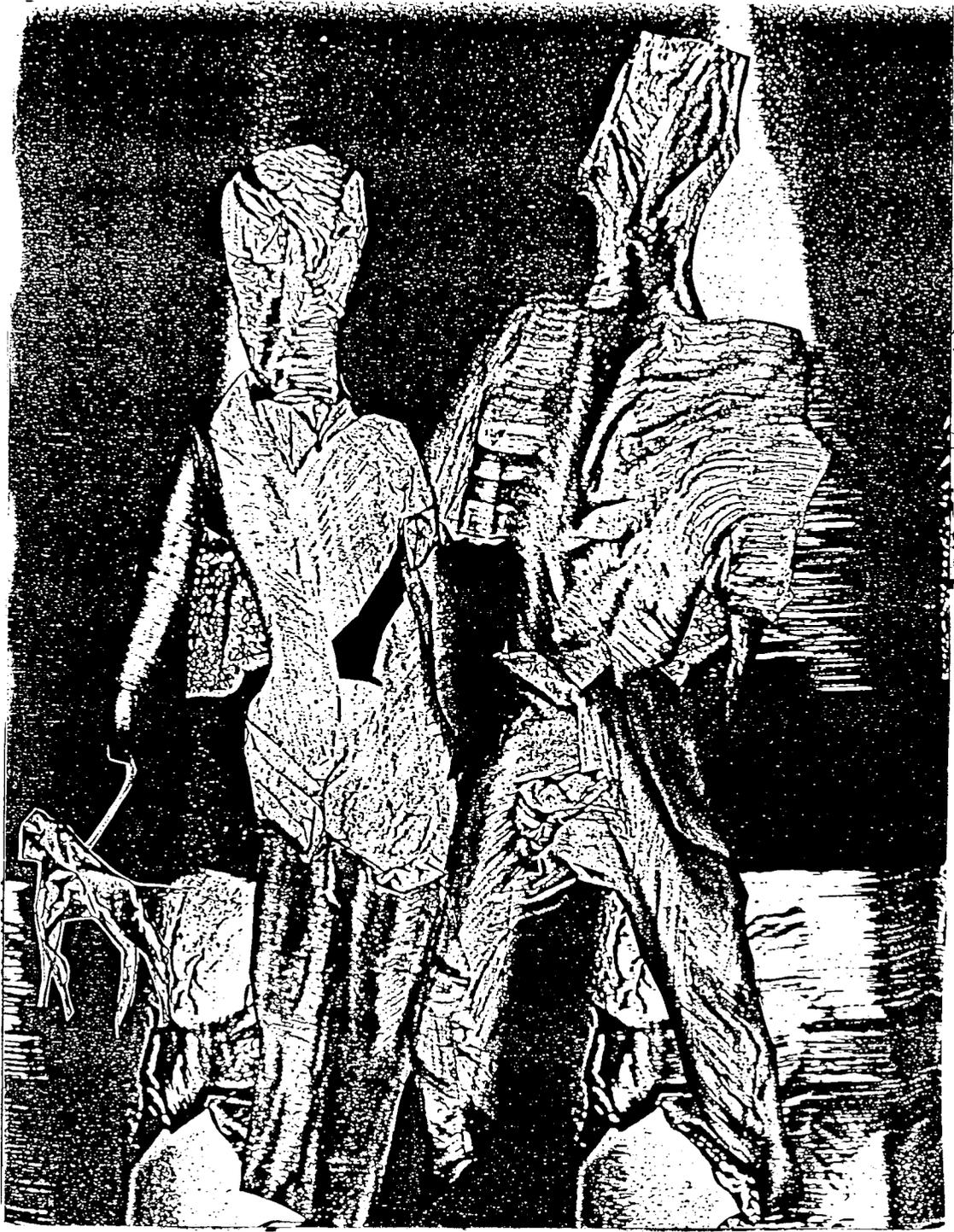
Rape has become one of the major issues of the Canadian women's movement. Along with matrimonial property rights it is the major focus point for changes in law. The pressure for new laws has been increasing over the past five years, as a variety of individual feminists and women's groups (notably the National Action Committee, the federal and provincial Advisory Councils on the Status of Women and individual Rape Crisis Centres) have made representations to the federal government to clarify, simplify and rationalize legislation relating to sexual offences in the Criminal Code. Increasing public awareness is also apparent, no doubt partly because of increasing media investigation of the subject.

Loranne Clark and Debra Lewis have made a timely academic contribution to this latest round in the push for equal rights for women with their book Rape: The Price of Coercive Sexuality. They have made a constructive attempt to use empirical data as a foundation for explanation and policy analysis. The void that has existed in the literature has persisted far too long and the authors have made a pioneering attempt

to fill this gap. In so doing they provide us with a useful base for further exploration. This is the first time that rape information and research has come out in book form in Canada and in this way it has drawn together much of the work that advocates of change have had to sift through in a much less palatable form.

It is refreshing to read a book which states its ideology at the start. Clark and Lewis indicate clearly in chapter 1 that theirs is a feminist perspective--a relief from the many personal sexual biases which are passed off as "objective" recommendations.

The authors view rape as a crime against property. In a clear and precise manner, they trace the historical development of rape legislation, showing how the definition of women as the private property of men is the basis for the present provisions in the Criminal Code. The authors allude to the Marxist analysis which they are using but fail to carry their argument to its logical conclusion. For example, in the final chapter, the authors briefly mention the parallel between this interpretation of women and the "colonial mentality" but they do not develop this idea. A discussion of rape based on the premise that women are "forms of private property," must surely examine the political roots of a system of private ownership. If ". . . (t)he primary determinant of



Tara Jackson '77

existing social relations is private property, and the primary determinant of the social relations between the sexes is the status of women as forms of private property under the exclusive ownership and control of men . . . ." (p. 74), then to do anything beyond 'legal' law reform (that is, juggling legal statutes and reforming administrative procedures involving the police and courts) is going to require a great deal more than the surprisingly incrementalist measures the authors recommend.

The elimination of rape requires much more than attitude change, no matter how wide-spread it is or the elimination of misogyny (a factor whose explanatory power is greatly exaggerated).

The authors repeatedly incant the well-worn slogan of structural change, but shy away from any concrete delineation of this important but distressingly vague notion.

Private property is a function of the capitalist system. Therefore the elimination of rape, which the authors argue is a consequence of the private ownership of property, requires a fundamental transformation of the economic and political system.

As a statistical study, the book contains some rather serious drawbacks--most of which the authors freely admit. Few if any generalizations can be drawn from such a small sample--

dealing as it does with some hundred victims and about thirty offenders. As well, the data is dated. This is not, however, an indictment of the study. Its value lies in creating an analytical approach to which other, more extensive data can be applied as it becomes available. It is a little surprising, however, that they chose not to make more use of some of the regularly collected crime statistics to provide a national overview of the situation. They do make use of some other authors' findings which does help to fill out the picture.

Unfortunately in interpreting the data the authors make a variety of conclusive statements for which they simply do not have enough evidence. For example, we are told that some of the "most interesting" (p. 98) data is about the offender's occupation, and that "approximately one quarter (24.1%) were classified as 'idle' or 'unemployed' . . . ." This is interesting, except that upon looking at the accompanying table we find that in real numbers we are speaking of seven individuals in a sample of twenty-nine. It is not only interesting--it is misleading. Developing hypotheses for further testing from such a limited sample is one thing--drawing definitive generalizations is quite another. We are told that the average height of the offenders is 5 feet 9 inches and the average weight is from 130 to 200 pounds

and he is of slight to medium build, from which the authors conclude that ". . . he appears to be a bit smaller than average . . . ." (p. 97) Is that really smaller than average? For some reason, the authors find this surprising because they have a notion that one would expect a rape victim to remember her assailant as larger than he was. The point escapes me.

Further on we are told that ". . . he (the assailant) is certainly not handsome" (p. 106), with no evidence to that effect except what the authors consider attractive. The list of characteristics (on p. 98) which are used to support this is hardly convincing. Indeed they could easily apply to a variety of people we all know, non-rapists included.

From this collection of sketchy data and shaky analysis, the authors arrive at the assumption that ". . . our social structures have produced so many "losers" whose sexual alienation expresses itself in rape." Whatever the validity of this conclusion there is little in their data to substantiate it.

The real drawback in the data section of the book is that the authors somehow feel they must speak to every piece of information they have. In so doing, they make unsupported generalizations and draw attention to facts which can only be peripherally related to the central concern.

Even with the identified shortcomings, however, Clark and Lewis have provided a thought provoking book and a step in the continuing effort to eliminate the crime of rape.

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### **The Hite Report: A Nationwide Study of Female Sexuality**

**SHERE HITE.** New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1976. Pp. 633.

The art of analysis presupposes a body of material that is sufficiently distinct and serious enough to be studied. Given that women have been sexual beings since year one, it is nothing short of mind-boggling that a member of the species has only just published a study laying bare some facts about our sexuality that we did not know. It is no less remarkable that the reason she has been able to accomplish this is that we women are only just beginning to take ourselves and our