

Penny Vincenzi reviewed

A WOMAN'S WORLD - 138-9 CHRI PLUS

in a piece published in the November 1980 Issue of **Cosmopolitan**:
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Difficult to single out one above the rest, but I think that **A Woman's World – 138-9 Chri Plus**, by Hilary Jerome (The Thorn Press, £5.50) is the most enthralling. It's not the most masterly piece of writing perhaps, but the concept is wonderfully clever. *A Woman's World* takes place in the future: 2122 our time, 138 Chri Plus theirs, dating from the revolution which put Chri, a woman (named Christina, but all names have been de-sexed) into absolute power over this country. Chri has wrought many wonders; under her most benevolent dictatorship all kinds of sexual reforms have been introduced.

Society is run by women (loud cheers) and is peaceful, gentle and exquisitely organized. Males are shut away in semenaries (do I hear cheering still? I do, I do) and those who are allowed out are castrated manikins, kept by women as useful little pets (thunderous applause now) to do the housework, cook the supper and provide some mild masturbatory sexual pleasure (diminished applause). Women and men do not have sexual intercourse because, "The power of the penis is the power of penetration. Without that power there is no longer an oppressor or competitor." (Who's cheering still?) Most women are sterilized, breeders are carefully chosen and impregnated artificially via the men in the semenaries, and love, marriage and family life are legends of the past. World peace has, I need hardly tell you, arrived.

A Woman's World is the story of Fra, a successful, clever woman whose home and life are invaded one night by an escaped male. I think you will not be too surprised to learn that Fra and the male, Triss, fall in love, run away and join a community of Primmies, people who have left the perfect world of women and lead a life of their own, doing strange things like setting up home and having babies. Fra is initially captivated by the whole thing (penetration particularly) but gradually (and this is where the book turns most piercingly parable-like) grows weary of her new life where she is forced to play a subservient role.

The women initially surprise and then shock her ("They seemed to feel that the men knew best") and gradually familiar resentments grow in her. She begins to miss her life as a TV producer, she is ostracized by the other women because she is sterile, and gradually she wearies of this strange new, old world. What happens in the end is sadly inevitable; I'm not sure what the moral is but I'm sure you'll find the book hard to resist.

The publisher of ANIMAL FARM, Fredric Warburg, wrote in a letter to the author:

...

Your book is a triumphant success. Original (very), exciting, well-written...

...

I think it will shock some people slightly, but I believe it will sell, possibly very well indeed! The sexual theme!

The book should establish you as a novelist to follow.

**A WOMAN'S
WORLD**

138-9 CHRI PLUS

Hilary Jerome

THE THORN PRESS

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Dedication:

For Teil the partly-begetter

Hilary Jerome, 1980

Hilary Jerome was born in 1928 and died of cancer in 1986.

This edition of **A WOMAN'S WORLD – 138-9 CHRI PLUS** has been revised by 'Teil' to take account of changes which have taken place since it was first written.

PRELUDE TO THE FIRST EDITION

It is 2122 AD, or rather, 138 Chri Plus, in Chriland, the structure of English cities which Britain has by then become. Here is an outwardly peaceful,, contented and beautifully organised society dominated by women. There are males, but they are shut away in semenaries; there are manikins, but they are little more than pets, they have no power in the society.

It is then, a new society: a woman' world. Yet maybe somewhere beyond its confines there are pockets of an older one, 'primordial' communities, men's worlds, as well. And maybe too this new society is not quite as peaceful and contented as it seems. Males do occasionally break out. Women do perhaps occasionally condone their doing so.

A Woman's World is a powerful fable for our and any time, and an exciting story of a future world, illuminating – warning – the world we live in now.

A Woman's World is neither pro- nor anti-feminist, pro- nor anti-male. It is pro-human beings, and pro-humane relationships.

'Manikins', 'primmies', 'juddering' – these may well enter the language much as 'prole' and 'newspeak' did.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Grateful thanks are due to Evelyn Harris who helped with the first revision of the original text. Particular thanks are due to Gillian Geering who not only brought a great deal to the newly revised text, but also substantially enhanced it by suggesting enrichments which take account of changes in the world since 1980. More thanks are due to her for so carefully copyediting the book.

Any errors remaining are, of course, entirely the responsibility of The Thorn Press.

ONE

'Did you hear some males had broken out?' asked Viv, walking with Fra along the corridor from their offices in the Chrriterion. There was a note of nervous excitement in her usually matter-of-fact brisk voice.

'What, here? From the New Bristol Semenary?' Fra's jade-green eyes sauced into fear, her normally vibrant tone subdued.

'That's what I heard on the sphere in the Refreshment Centre.' Viv's voice was husky with tension. 'I thought you said you'd meet me there at sixteen hours.'

'I'd too much on today. I simply couldn't get away in time.' Fra straightened her bag, clinched the protector she always kept inside, the sharp metal bruising her fingers as she twisted it the wrong way.

They'd reached the second-floor escalator, hogged it by standing hips touching as though by accident.

'Seven of them, it seems.' Viv sounded calm, assured, stepping back to let two young executants overtake them.

'What were they saying on the sphere?' Fra's quite uncharacteristic tremble infuriated her. The tense clearing of her throat wouldn't have fooled a manikin.

Viv's slit eyes had a mocking look. 'Same as the last time: sentinels expected to capture them quite shortly, not to be alarmed, take a Kalmex, put protectors on as soon as possible, see to the securipanel, report anything suspicious.'

'Of course.' Fra nodded, feeling irritable. 'I don't suppose they'll get particularly far.' She was aware that, though the Central Semenary was less than a hundred metres off, the Special Sentinels' Headquarters was closer, between them and the semenary. But she was also thinking back to the last time some males had broken out from a semenary in the north and what was reported to have happened there: six or seven young executants, together with a manikin, taken hostage in a module and held, terrified, for several hours. Three of the executants were said to have been savagely penetrated.

As the two friends reached the bottom of the second-floor escalator and walked towards the first, Fra felt the lozenge dissolving in her mouth; then, almost as soon as she had swallowed, the tension easing in her chest and her vivacity returning as it did.

'Actually, I left my protector back at home,' she lied cheerfully.

'Me too,' her friend said. 'Thank Chri, it hardly ever happens. They can't really expect us to carry them around all the time just on the off chance.' A grin. 'Did you know,' she turned her small dark eyes on Fra's, 'in the World Wars persons were supposed to carry things called gas-masks about with them? Even the children, to and from school.'

'Gas-masks?' What had that to do with males?

'They put them over their faces. Supposed to protect them from a poisonous gas the males had made. They didn't use it, though; the gas I mean. I think they'd used it in the war before,'

she added in a vague tone of voice. But looking round and back.

'What war?'

'You know, the one they called the Great War.'

'That was a World War.'

'All right, all right. I know you're the history expert...'

'Anyway – crazy.' Fra tossed her short-cropped, coral-coloured hair. 'No wonder there were changes.'

Stepping off the first-floor escalator they joined the stream of home-ward bound executives from the seventeen-thirty stagger as well as those leaving the ground-floor offices as – a little less tranquilly than usual, the buzz of their voices more pronounced – they made their way across the spacious foyer to the glass front doors. A few of the women, Fra saw, had already put their protectors on, ostentatiously displaying the hard shiny metal outside their bodysuits.

'I'm meeting Jule at the jubar on First Diagonal.' Viv, quite unlike her usual placid self, sounded excited. They'd reached the bottom of the steps outside and walked on to the moving pavement. 'Actually I think there's a kaftan he's got his eye on. Want to join us?'

'Not tonight.' Fra put her hand up to shield her eyes, apparently against the sun, as they were borne towards the outer orbitals. Quite apart from Viv's disturbing news, she'd had a ruffling day. She was desperate to get back home as quickly as she could and have a calm, relaxing time. 'I feel completely powdered out. And I've a script to work on.' She nodded at the briefcase she was carrying. She didn't bother to explain that her manikin expected her in half an hour and that there'd be sulkiness and – Sim's latest weapon – silence if she was late. She thought about him irritably, his doe-eyed look, his lack of strength.

'Right.' Viv moved on to the fixed pavement of Second Orbital and paused, her eyes scanning behind Fra. 'See you tomorrow. Chri speed.'

'Chri speed.' Fra watched her normally brisk friend hesitate, looking left to right, then back to front towards the bridge across the orbital.

Fra turned towards the stat. Should she hang around to see if anything exciting was going to happen, or head straight for home?

Home: she had the script to edit. Entering the stat she took a couple of steps past the transparent slider door, then glanced back to check if anything exciting was happening. Nothing that she could see. She drew out her debit disc, lodged it in the nearby registat and put her index finger into the depression in the centre of the disc. Within seconds a small green light showed a match and she tapped in 465, programming the nearest empty orbiter to take her to the stat closest to the module cluster where she lived. She slotted the disc into her belt again and joined the three other women at the exit just as Orbiter 372 halted outside. The first two passengers stepped into it. Moments later it was gliding away.

Looking idly at the floodlit orbital through the transparent panel of the stat, Fra saw one of the special sentinels' steel-blue craft flash silently past between the circuits. A grunt of satisfaction came from a middle-aged practitioner standing right next to her. Fra's nostrils widened as she glanced round the stat. She thought she recognised a senior executive from the Chriterion and was about to speak to her and maybe introduce herself when another orbiter drew up and the executive was gone.

Watching her go, Fra noticed two elderlies, their purple cloaks hugged round them, edge over from the registat and sidle up to her, clearly about to ask for support, perhaps intending to ask her to see them back to their modules. She knew it was her duty to help any elderly who approached her, but... Just then her orbiter, the numerals 465 illuminated in green on the

panel at the front, turned in from First Diagonal. It halted by her and she boarded, relieved to get away from them, wondering whether Sim had already heard about the males.