



*Sex Makes the World  
Go Round*

**COLETTE CHILAND**

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# SEX MAKES THE WORLD GO ROUND

*Colette Chiland*

Translated by David Alcorn and  
Philip Slotkin (Chapter 1)

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*Philia*

*Agapè*

|          |                                  |     |
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## *ABOUT THE AUTHOR*

**C**ollette Chiland read philosophy and psychology, then medicine and psychiatry at the University of Paris. She taught clinical psychology at La Sorbonne, then at Université Paris Descartes, and is training analyst at the Paris Psychoanalytical Society. She was psychiatrist-in-chief at the Alfred-Binet, and is Honorary President of the International Association for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Allied Professions.



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## PREFACE

The idea of writing this book came to me as a result of the many themes that over time had caught my attention. I had for several years taught a seminar on the topic of women, the modern world and psychoanalysis. I do not intend here to discuss in any depth Freud and the post-Freudians; I shall simply refer to some of Freud's points of view.

I was also researching the topic of sex differences in psychopathology: more boys than girls are taken to be examined by a child psychiatrist; boys are more vulnerable than girls in their psychobiological development; on average, men die younger than women. In other words, the weaker of the two sexes is in fact the male one, even though women—Simone de Beauvoir's famous "second sex"—are treated as being inferior.

I had long been familiar with Robert Jesse Stoller's work, about which I recently published a book (Chiland, 2003a), when, one day, a 4-year-old boy entered my consulting-room; he looked exactly like the description that Stoller makes of what he used to call in the 1960s "a transsexual boy". That was my first encounter with transsexualism; I was later to spend several years working in a Gender Identity Clinic.

That work made me think again and from a different perspective about masculinity and femininity and encouraged me to write two books, published originally in French then in English translation: *Transsexualism: Illusion and Reality* (Chiland, 2003b) and *Exploring Transsexualism* (Chiland, 2005).

The present book is a further development of my thinking on sexuality and gender identity. Before training as a physician and psychoanalyst, I had studied philosophy: I tend therefore to integrate what I learn from clinical practice into the way I think about humanity in general; when I do this, however, I strive to avoid any “jargonizing”. I am thus very much part of the French tradition in that philosophical concerns are always present in my mind, but at the same time I stand back somewhat from that tradition in that as far as possible I use ordinary words to express my ideas.

Naturally enough, this book contains several references both to English texts and to French writers; since not all of the latter have been translated into English, the ideas developed in them may well be unfamiliar to the English-speaking world. The anglophone reader may at times feel disoriented. France is not bathed in the same cultural light as are Britain and America. The fact that some texts referred to have not been translated into English is not the main point: what is uppermost is the difference in cultural atmosphere.

In France, persecution of homosexuals has never reached the kind of heights that the United States has had to contend with, for example, or Britain for that matter. No candidate for employment has ever in France been asked about his or her sexual orientation. There has never been the kind of puritanism that gave rise to laws prohibiting anal intercourse, nor have legal proceedings been taken against any man for wanting to have intercourse with his wife three times a week . . . and so on. As a result, it is still possible, in France, to ask questions and to discuss issues that have become more or less taboo in the United States. I am not homophobic, but neither am I “heterophobic”, as is the case in some feminist quarters where heterosexuality is thought of as leading to the enslavement of women and to forced procreation.

There are two main themes which run through the whole of this book. The first is the distinction, established by Freud and based on clinical data, between the two currents of sexuality: tenderness and sensuality. For sexuality to be complete, both of these currents have to be combined. Some people challenge the merit of the distinction drawn by Freud. It is nonetheless a leitmotif in his writings that seems to have gone largely unnoticed. I, however, have found it extremely helpful in trying to disentangle the various issues involved in what I call “sexual wanderings”—the sexual quest that plagues

human beings and leads some of them to perversion, pornography or prostitution. Tenderness is reduced almost to the point of disappearing altogether, leaving the way clear for sensuality alone.

It is at this point that the other main theme of this book appears: women have always been treated as inferior beings. They have always lost out whenever sexual wanderings have been uppermost. It is only in the past two hundred years that a feminist movement has emerged in the West; thanks to that movement, women are much more liberated than before and their overall status has undoubtedly improved.

The paths an individual follows in choosing his or her object are always specific to the person involved, whether that object be of the same or of the opposite sex. To use John Money's well-chosen term, every one of us has a "lovemap", a combination of biological factors and life experiences that define the conditions under which any given individual will be able to experience pleasure. Why do some people think that, when we evoke the "psychological bedrock" which, derived from the child's earliest interactions with the environment, marks him or her for life, we are out to make the person involved feel guilty? Why do they think that only biological considerations—the "biological bedrock"—should be taken into account in order for that person not to feel guilty?

It is well known that Freud laid great emphasis on sexual matters. In the years that followed, a distinction was drawn between sex and gender, and the idea of gender identity was introduced. Human beings do not spend every minute of their lives copulating—but at every minute of their lives their gender identity is present. *Sex makes the world go round* implies that sex is everywhere, provided that we take into account both sexuality and gender identity. Of course, as far as material reality is concerned, money and other economic factors also make the world go round.

To focus for a moment on sexuality, it is undoubtedly true to say that it does play a major role in the lives of human beings. It ensures reproduction of the human species. However, in human beings, sexuality is dissociated from oestrus and from the reproductive process; it is infiltrated by ideology. In all societies, writes Maurice Godelier, one of the greatest of French anthropologists, sexuality is the echo chamber for all sorts of oppressive and exploitative relationships (Godelier, 1982, p. 353).

The struggle for equal rights should not make us forget the “sexual difference”. Men and women *are* different—as to their genital organs, their psychosexual development, their position during intercourse, their roles in the reproductive process. Every society, however, interprets that fundamental difference in its own way—and that interpretation, of course, can and must be challenged.

I refer in this book to a distinction that is familiar to contemporary French philosophers involving three forms of love, expressed by the Greek words *Eros*, *Philia* and *Agapè*. I do so here in my own way, which is not that of other philosophers, because of the reference I make to sensuality and tenderness. In modern Greek, where it means simply “love”, *Agapè* does not have the same religious connotation as it has in French. Although I have found it helpful to quote the apostle Paul, my overall perspective on this issue has nothing to do with religion as such. My intention is to make room for the moments when true love, acting selflessly and with egotistic sexual aims pushed aside, keeps destructive impulses firmly under control.

## The heart of the matter<sup>1</sup>

As I write these lines in the year of grace 1998, no one can doubt that sex makes the world go round, for it is all-pervasive in the press, the broadcast media, and the Internet. One of the planet's leading politicians, President Bill Clinton of the United States, risked his public career for the sake of a private sexual affair. The barrier between the private and public domains has crumbled under the onslaught of a moralism that barely conceals the political interests lying behind it. The sexual antics of the great and famous as a rule occupy the minds only of "little people", who momentarily assume princely status by identifying with their joys and sorrows as reported in a sensationalist media that brings tears to the eyes of consumers of romantic pulp novelettes. This time, fact and fiction came together. The historical event mentioned above shows that the sexual appetite for seduction makes men throw caution and discretion to the winds. However, the subject-matter of my book transcends this consideration and concerns the personal life of every individual.

When I say that "*sex* makes the world go round", I am referring not only to *sexuality*—i.e., sexual relations—but also to *gender identity*, which denotes an individual's sense of belonging to one or other sex or gender. Rather than compile an encyclopaedia on the subject, I wish to discuss the *importance of sexuality and gender identity* in human life—for they are so important that sex may indeed be said to make the world go round.

Aside from schizogenesis in single-celled organisms, cloning, and parthenogenesis, all three of which result in the reproduction of an identical individual, life is perpetuated by innovative sexual procreation. Hence sex, life, and death are interconnected. Some organisms die in the process of mating, having seemingly lived through the stages of growth, metamorphosis from egg to larva or caterpillar, and then to butterfly or adult insect, solely in order to reproduce in a single act and to die. Others reproduce throughout their lives, but at certain times only.

Although human beings are not subject to oestrus and can have sexual intercourse outside the ovulation-related period of heat, there is still a “biological clock”, for the menopause marks the end of the human female’s reproductive capacity. Even if humans can come together at any time simply for pleasure, the complications of their psychic life have led them to invent ideological connections between sexuality and procreation. Liberated in their bodies, they remain the prisoners of their individual and collective representations, their personal fantasies, and their cultural myths. Human sexuality is always a *psychosexuality*, a source of abundant riches and of harsh vicissitudes alike.

Because our culture has developed the sense of individuality to an extent unparalleled in any other, the individual insists on the right to gratify his or her demand for pleasure, often at any price. Even though sexuality has become dissociated from procreation in many ways, it encounters prohibitions: since man is a *zôon politikôn*—a social animal subject to the constraints of civilization—human beings must sacrifice some of their “savage” sexuality (the “sexual life of savages” is not the same as savage sexuality).

I wrote this book on the basis of my experience as a psychoanalyst, my meditation on the writings of Freud, and my reading in a variety of fields. Freud, of course, is one of those who did most to draw attention to the importance of sexuality, with the result that he has been—wrongly—accused of pansexualism, whereas it seems that many of the psychoanalysts who came after him have forgotten about the importance of sexuality (but see McDougall, 1995; Green, 1997). Nor, perhaps, have psychoanalysts written much about love (those who have include Person, 1989, and Kernberg, 1995).

Some seek to minimize or even to forget the fact that man is an animal. Man is admittedly a special animal, but an animal for all that:

the most gifted of animals in the spheres of mental representation, communication in language, toolmaking, and attempts to conceive of the universe as a whole, in terms of its origins, meaning, and purpose, as well as the invention of worlds beyond worlds. Man is also the most tortured of animals—a “denatured animal” in the words of Vercors (1952)—who has lost the capacity to experience the immediacy of satisfaction, and can rediscover how to live the instant to the full only through a spiritual, ascetic quest.

Even if human sexuality is a psychosexuality, it is nevertheless rooted in biological reality, as Freud was always aware. I disagree with Laplanche (1993) that Freud was guilty of a “biologizing sidetracking of sexuality”. Following in the footsteps of others who have studied gender identity—a subject not tackled by Freud as such, given his concentration on sexuality—I (Chiland, 1997) came to realize the extent to which the ultimate foundation of all differences between the sexes is the *sexual difference*. By this I mean everything, based on the difference between the genital organs, that comes to govern the relations between the sexes: the experience of one’s body, the sexual cycle, the position in intercourse, and the role in procreation. Every society imposes an interpretation of the sexual difference on the individual, defining female and male in such a way that it is quite hard work to identify the elements that cannot be obliterated or denied in the sexual difference.

A child’s discovery that there are other human beings who are both like and unlike him- or herself, is a trauma that underlies such manifestations as castration anxiety and penis envy. To make this trauma bearable, humans feel a need for the support of a peer group, and one group tends to disparage the other in order to sustain the sense of its own worth. Men’s disparagement of women has outweighed women’s disparagement of men. Even if this has not always been so—who can say what the situation was in the beginning?—it is certainly the case throughout our present reality, giving rise to what H eritier (1996) calls the “differential valence of the sexes”. This difference has always been interpreted as an inequality in women’s disfavour, leading to their demeaning, subordination, and even ill-treatment. We may—indeed should—ask (yet we seldom do), why women put up for so long with this attribution of inferior status; why the “great revolution” (Abensour, 1921) of feminism took place only yesterday. If feminists neglect to