

WOMAN

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Woman by Magdeleine Marx & Henri Barbusse & Adele Szold Seltzer

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MAGDELEINE MARX & HENRI BARBUSSE & ADELE SZOLD SELTZER

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By
MAGDELEINE MARX

INTRODUCTION BY
HENRI BARBUSSE

TRANSLATED BY ADELE SZOLD SELTZER



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INTRODUCTION

A splendid book in which a soul lives so profoundly human and so purely feminine that any words of introduction seem leaden and intrusive. You feel as though you were violating the essential delicacy and powerful life of this soul to comment upon the remarkable revelation of it between the very covers that contain the revelation.

Yet, as a modest friend of letters, I should like to express an opinion here—the author did not ask me for it—and pay homage to the brilliant originality of this work. I want to give myself the pleasure of saying how important I think it is.

It expresses—and this is a fact of considerable literary and moral import—what has never been exactly expressed before. It expresses *Woman*.

The more woman has been spoken about, you might say, the less she has been revealed. She has been hidden under a plethora of words. The supreme vision rising up out of these pages is as luminous as a heavenly revelation. From the author's tone, so simple and penetrating, you perceive that women feel differently about the things that we men see and proudly proclaim.

The thought and spirit of *Woman* will be a surprise and a shock to the old masculine traditions, in which women also acquiesce, probably because of their old traditions of slavery. But we know that always and everywhere the opposition such thought arouses is sublimely lacking in truth.

Here is a woman who cries out with magnificent impressive sincerity against the fallacy of the maternal instinct—the "call of the blood"—against the exclusiveness of love; who knows and asserts that death kills only the dead, and not those who are left behind; who recreates in new forms the law and the creed of the relations between man and woman, motherhood, and suffering. And this new expression of woman—a new expression, therefore, of the whole of life—this striking

gospel, young and strong, which overcomes artificial, unnatural ideas, resounds at the very time when woman is at last entering humanity and is preparing to change her rôle of breeder of children and handmaid in common.

The book is strictly, religiously objective. Everything is perceived only through the eyes, the mind, the heart of the "heroine"—the word usage thrusts upon us for this woman who has no name, who is just truly herself. Through the commanding will of the author the creative richness of the book springs altogether from the magnificent oneness of a human being. No outside approach mars this unity. In no other book perhaps so markedly as in this has the integrity of an individual been more respected, and never has an imaginary character so consistently warded off whatever is not of itself. You don't even seem to feel that this "Woman" talks or tells a story. You simply know what she knows.

And because of this very fact, this intimate association which unites us jealously with this one being of all others, the book is poignant and moving. A world is born beneath our eyes. In some scenes, short or long but always important and vital, a tragedy shudders, and the entire succession of the events of life, ordinary and on a big scale, passes in the book in clear outline, in essential poetry.

To say this is to say that the author is a master, that her technique is subtle, that the action concentrates all the dramas of the world in one spiritual drama, and the book reveals a prodigious gift for presenting a whole of vast impressions which creates unity.

Woman does not belong to any class of writing; it is not tied down by any formula; it does not lower itself by imitating. It is a powerful, a rebel, a virgin work, and it ranks Magdeleine Marx among the loftiest poets of our age.

HENRI BARBUSSE.

CONTENTS

BOOK I

| | PAGE |
|----------------------|------|
| BEING BORN | I |

BOOK II

| | |
|-----------------|----|
| BEING | 71 |
|-----------------|----|

BOOK III

| | |
|--------------------|-----|
| BECOMING | 151 |
|--------------------|-----|

