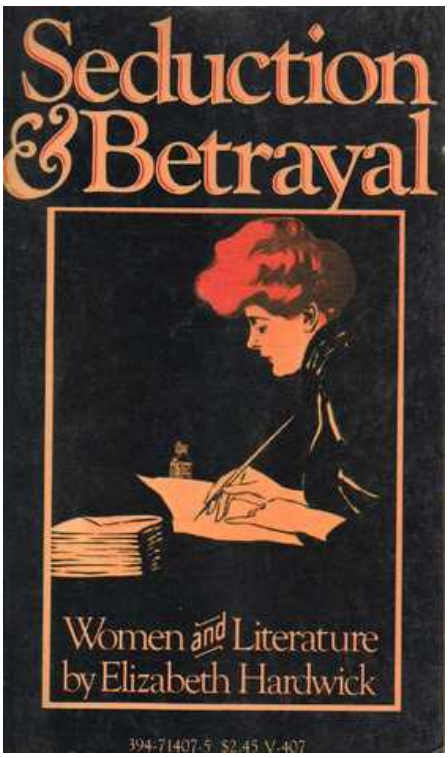

Seduction and Betrayal

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The novelist and essayist Elizabeth Hardwick is one of contemporary America's most brilliant writers, and *Seduction and Betrayal*, in which she considers the careers of women writers as well as the larger question of the presence of women in literature, is her most passionate and concentrated work of criticism. A gallery of unforgettable portraits--of Virginia Woolf and Zelda Fitzgerald, Dorothy Wordsworth and Jane Carlyle--as well as a provocative reading of such works as *Wuthering Heights*, *Hedda Gabler*, and the poems of Sylvia Plath, *Seduction and Betrayal* is a virtuoso performance, a major writer's reckoning with the relations between men and women, women and writing, writing and life.

Seduction and Betrayal Details

Date	:	Published April 12th 1975 by Vintage (first published May 28th 1974)
ISBN	:	9780394714073
Author	:	Elizabeth Hardwick
Format	:	Paperback 218 pages
Genre	:	Nonfiction, Writing, Essays, Feminism, Criticism, Literary Criticism, Books About Books

From Reader Review Seduction and Betrayal for online ebook

M. Sarki says

A remarkable collection of essays. Elizabeth Hardwick was certainly a talented writer who was not afraid to broach any subject. Informative and interesting, this is definitely a book worth reading.

Ena Alvarado says

The essays on the Brontë sisters and Zelda Fitzgerald were excellent. Those on Sylvia Plath, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Wordsworth, and Jane Carlyle left much to be desired.

Kirsten says

One reviewer described Hardwick as a "portraitist in miniature" and this seems very apt. In this collection of critical essays (critical only in the sense that they engage in some close reading of texts; I wouldn't consider them academic), she turns an erudite and gently puzzling tone to the work and life of the Bronte sisters and their characters; Sylvia Plath's incantatory "heroine" status in 20th century poetry; Virginia Woolf & Bloomsbury; the female characters of Ibsen; and the complex creative relationships between the Fitzgeralds, the Carlyles, and the Wordsworth siblings. In the title essay, she explores illicit sex as a character-defining act for certain literary characters of a certain era. Throughout, Hardwick explores the intersections between what it means to be a woman, what it means to be a woman writing, what this means for female characters, and what it means to be a muse. I didn't necessarily agree with all of her evaluations, but learned many pertinent biographical facts that do further illuminate these beloved authors and their equally beloved characters. Especially interesting were the essays on the Brontes, Plath, Jane Carlyle (I now have every intention of reading her collected letters), and Ibsen's "A Doll's House." I've always found the character of Nora troubling, and Hardwick does a great job confronting the character from a fresh and sympathetic perspective. All in all, a thumbs up.

Teatum says

Brilliant, beautiful writing. Loved "Zelda" and "The Brontës." Read if you can get your hands on it.

Jan Priddy says

"The problem of creating sympathy for the woman whose destiny must run the narrow road..."

Hardwick looks at perspectives and writing by and about women, always looking for how their pathway, both as people and as characters is hemmed and defined by gender. After the Brontës, this is less about how women write about their own experience, than how men write about women and how the women related by

birth or marriage to writers suffer from the relationship. I am grateful she does not follow the example of so much analysis of this family by pouring over poor Brandon. It was the sisters who created art and Hardwick dispenses with the male family members without sentimentality.

I read *Zelda* a year or two after reading *The Great Gatsby* and never forgave F. Scott. Hardwick works hard to present facts without passing judgement, but it is impossible to miss that she comes down solidly on Zelda's side. The wives of writers often suffer. Women are often closed down and shut up and then blamed for their very existence. I always think of Ray Carver. I think of Wallace Stegner's almost entirely unacknowledged use of the journals of women in his works. (He does not credit anyone in *Big Rock Candy Mountain* though I recognized much of his plot from the diaries of women in the west, and then the wife is blamed in that novel for the failure of her husband to achieve what he might have without her. No mention of what *she* might have achieved without him—and of course that might have been little enough considering the opportunities for a woman in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. And then there is *The Angle of Repose*.)

Even so, Hardwick mostly presents facts without passing judgement. She explains class bias and speaks from within it without condemning the elitism that bends voices to assume privilege and power. There it is and nothing to be done about it a century later.

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lindy says

"At the time Seduction and Betrayal was first published, a reviewer in the New York Times complained that if the book had a fault, it was that its author failed to 'make sufficient distinctions between the real and the literary.' That there are no such distinctions to be made, that the women we invent have changed the course of our lives as surely as the women we are, is in many ways the point of this passionate book." --Joan Didion

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Deborah Schuff says

Read a recent article in the New York Review of Books about a soon-to-be-published collection of the author's literary essays. Intrigued, I bought and am reading three of her previous books. She's smart and fascinating.

Jessica says

A collection of essays about women in literature, whether they are writing the novels (Plath, Woolf, the Brontes, Zelda Fitzgerald), women characters of male writers (Ibsen's plays), or they were women in the shadow of great writers (Jane Carlyle, Dorothy Wordsworth, also Zelda...). Hardwick is able to capture almost mini-biographies of these people and characters, and their relation to history and men and readers. Whenever I find myself reading classics, I often have a thought in the back of my mind about how women were written in that point in time... and Hardwick wrote these essays in the '70s, and even so much has changed since then. There are moments that I didn't agree with, but perhaps that's because I'm a woman reading this in 2018.

I was most taken by the essays on the Brontes, Zelda Fitzgerald, and surprisingly, the essay on Hedda

Gabler. I remember just absolutely loving the play when I read it in college, and dissected it, too. And now I feel like I need to re-read... because it may seem different now.

Will definitely be reading more Hardwick...

Anna says

Hardwick writes with great eloquence and clarity and a feminist spirit. Those essays are nearly faultless and filled with awesome quotables that kept my highlighter engaged.

I wish I'd discovered Hardwick's literary criticism while close-reading Ibsen at uni. I really, really hated Ibsen then. Perhaps with Hardwick's sympathetic analysis at hand I would've had an easier time seeing through my distaste for the standards of the era which he wrote about, and seen his female characters with a bit more compassion.

Also, a reminder: this guy had 18 year old girls throwing themselves at him throughout his writing career:

Aida Ghazar says

A brilliant work of art.

Arlian says

I was very disappointed with this book. A previous reviewer quoted the introduction, and I decided to quote her review:

" 'In the introduction, Joan Didion says: "Elizabeth Hardwick is the only writer I have ever read whose perception of what it means to be a woman and a writer seems in every way authentic, revelatory, entirely original and yet acutely recognizable.' That's nice."

I wasn't sure if this reviewers "That's nice" comment was meant to be factitious or cutting, but I second her comment but infuse my tone with disdain, sarcasm, and patronization. Further, despite Joan Didion's comments, Hardwick clearly doesn't understand what it means to be a writer or a woman in many instances, as is patently clear from her book.

There is nothing new in any of these articles, even considering the fact that the book was originally published in 1974. This short book is incredibly devoid of substance. It's like a Wikipedia article that needs to be culled due to bias in the author. Elizabeth Hardwick shows an astounding lack of nuance and insight in these extremely shallow essays. For example, in the article about Ibsen she says something like "He has the hardheartedness of all people who are unable to reconcile themselves to their family." To me, this in an incredibly weird statement, some strange bias the author has and believes to be universal and deep. Her essay

on Sylvia Plath shows that Hardwick has CLEARLY never struggled with depression, and doesn't understand what it means to feel numb because of it. Her essay on Zelda Fitzgerald is almost insane in it's inability to critically think about how abusive Scott Fitzgerald was to Zelda, and how the repressive culture and backwards views of mental health practitioners exacerbated her issues. Further, she directly states that Zelda is "no Scott" when it comes to her talents. This is demonstrably false, with many critics have been re-engaging with her works--both written and artistic--and have deemed her worthy as a writer and artist on her own merits. In fact, critics began discussing her work as legitimate as early as the 1950's----so Hardwick should have been aware of and at least mentioned this discourse.

Ultimately, I'm disappointed by the essays (being mere recitals of facts, except when the book falls into obvious, unsubstantiated and plain stupid bias) but more so because I mistakenly thought Elizabeth Hardwick was a feminist--and that's my own bad for assuming so. Her book CLEARLY demonstrates that she is neither a feminist, nor a strong literary critic capable of the supposed "universality" her the introduction accuses her of.

A complete failure if it is meant to be read as a serious academic book, and merely uninteresting and uninspiring when read as the petty musings of a literary critic.

Lavanya says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. Hardwick is brilliant and moving in her portraits of the amateurs, Jane Carlyle, Dorothy Wordsworth, Zelda Fitzgerald. Her close reading of the life and works of her subjects and her identification of various echoes in her subject matter make for erudite yet humane essays. She is pretty forthright in her views but doesn't come across as scathing. Definite reread.

Jill Blevins says

This collection is like a mini-biography of each female writer, as if there weren't enough material for a whole biography but too much for an essay, and focused in a kind of meandering way through a field of uncomfortable relationships between men and women.

I picked it up to read while on a destination wedding weekend and boy oh boy, was this the wrong book to bring. Here I was thinking all these wonderful thoughts about the future bride and groom, seeing hope personified, feeling the love between such a perfectly matched couple, and to sit down to some reading time to the obstacles women writers in our history have had to overcome, and how they mostly didn't, was a chasm too wide to cross. Instead, I just skimmed over it and tried to feel the accomplishment of the writers themselves. If these writers weren't so brilliant and so talented, they certainly wouldn't have been worth writing about here, and this writer is worth reading almost always.

Just not while at a destination wedding.

Keith says

Terrific essays on canonical female writers and man-made female characters (title essay traces the subject

from Richardson to Hawthorne to Hardy), but even better on the relationship between amateurs (Zelda F., Dorothy Wordsworth, and Jane Carlyle), their famouser male counterparts, and the act of writing.

Willow says

Hardwick is a gifted critic, and I did enjoy her book a bundle. Keep in mind that Seduction and Betrayal is soley focused on examining female authors, and the wives of some famous male authors. Because of this, it seemed repetitive sometimes, although there were some stand out essays such as her pieces on Plath, and Fitzgerald's wife Zelda. The long title essay is also one of the better works in this collection.

Isa C. says

Brilliant!

Helen says

Truly amazing. What a book. Such thought provoking essays by Hardwick about women in literature, women authors and a final essay with the same name as the title. Harwick explores the idea of heroism, betrayal, seduction and victimhood of women in literature. I loved reading every page of this book. I highly recommend it.

Aubrey says

As is the case for many a writer, what makes for good writing doesn't make for good human being. Hardwick has the sort of odious confidence whose origins always lie in hierarchical classification of the arbitrary, whether it be sanity, gender dichotomy, or class. Take away all that, and all that'd be left would be various petty, if artfully syntaxed, rantings about peep show suicide, the righteous introvert, the inevitable pathos of rape, and men needing to do what men need to do. The fact that I still find this extraordinarily comfortable to read simply attests to how often I've been trained to associate the various name drops and theories with manna from the heaven, not instinctive preference. I keep my head more often than not these days, so I'll be taking this self-absorbed meditation on the Brontës, Ibsen, Zelda Fitzgerald, Plath, Woolf, and Dorothy Wordsworth as simply that: informative, but solely as a map with myriads of spaces that need be filled with something more humanely filling than "Here there be Monsters."

The book started on decent note and went downhill from there, belying the admittedly well structured quality of prose that maintained itself throughout. While I'll admit to falling more often into the trap of uncritical engagement when it comes to any of the Brontë sisters, Hardwick herself couldn't do much to compromise her still grudgingly admiring picture of the trio other than go poor Branwell every five to ten pages. Oh yes, poor poor white boy, the only one to get a supreme education without dying of tuberculosis cause the school's a cesspit, so so sensitive in the face of being everything his sisters could never have been and still fucking everything up. After that, there was Ibsen (apparently 'women and literature' meant 'literature and women as tangential as possible to actual production of literature of involving actual women), Z.

Fitzgerald/Plath/Woolf (reading Hardwick's fetishistic treatment of mental illness is like being forced to watch someone attempt to masturbate with a bookmark), and Wordsworth/Carlyle (sister in one and wife and the other, but you could tell Hardwick was dying to make the incest connection). As such, this book is little more than a wayside on the way to better pastures, as afterwards I'm hellbent on reading Z. Fitzgerald/Plath and studying the others (even Ibsen cause it's not his fault Hardwick's so weird), as well as chasing after Sexton, whose excerpted quote is to die for:

> *Like carpenters they want to know **which tools**.*
> *They never ask **why build**.*

Closing off, it was also nifty to find out that the Disney version of the Sorcerer's Apprentice has more concrete origins than some artist's brain. I'm also sure that whatever other facts I've picked up (such as de Quincey's surprisingly keen observations of D. Wordsworth) will serve me well in my academic future, as well as the knowledge that Hardwick has outlived her use. While I could probably stick with her fiction, there's no telling if and how often one of her preciously tortured insane archetypes will go wandering through to make a rhetorical point, and I've enough of that in Goodreads' message boards. In any case, this is why I get the majority of my books used at paltry couple of buck prices. These results would've been harder to bear had I actually gone and spent the dough for NYRB's fancy pants edition.

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astried says

the last chapter by itself deserves four stars

the rest of the book is a wonderful study on women in relation to literature. writer, characters and writer spouses. Hardwick posed the question on what it meant to be a woman, how they are portrayed in literature by author (men/women), how even when the women has not written the story themselves the live they shared with the authors influenced the literary characters, how being a woman hindered or supported the struggle of being a writer. Highly recommended.

Jenna says

I wanted to like this book a lot more, given how much I adore *Sleepless Nights*. Some parts I did like: (1) the Bloomsbury essay, which trained my eye to be more attuned to the way Woolf's class prejudices manifest in her writing (Hardwick's juxtaposition of Woolf's handling of the Miss Kilman character in *Mrs. Dalloway* and Forster's handling of Leonard Bast in *Howards End* makes a convincing argument), and (2) the "Aha!" moment in the title essay where Hardwick analyzes how readers react differently to the Clyde and Roberta characters in Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* (Roberta, unlike Clyde, buys into the idea that marriage with Clyde could paper over the wounds inflicted by capitalism and income inequality, and it is this "simplicity" that makes Roberta "unforgivable" to the reader, Hardwick argues). I wish there were more "Aha!" moments like that in this book. I was disappointed in particular at the sparsity of new insights in the essay about the Brontes, but maybe this has to do with me being a huge Bronte aficionada who's read everything that's been thought and said about the Brontes already.

It's interesting to see the range of responses other Goodreads reviewers have had to this book: e.g., how a

couple criticize Hardwick for what they perceive as her lack of empathy for the mentally ill in the essays about Woolf, Plath, and Zelda Fitzgerald. Having recently read Kay Redfield Jamison's book detailing Hardwick's marriage to Robert Lowell, I personally find it impossible to attribute any irregularities in these essays to a lack of empathy, per se. The Zelda essay is actually especially fascinating when one considers the parallels Hardwick must have perceived between the Fitzgerald marriage and her own marriage to Lowell: when one recalls how much pain Lowell caused Hardwick by appropriating excerpts from her letters and diaries for use in his books, this context adds significant nuance and irony to Hardwick's observation that "It does not seem of much importance that [Zelda's] diaries and letters were appropriated [by Scott].... Zelda herself did not seem greatly concerned about any of this...." And then one starts to wonder whether Hardwick's restraint in describing FSF's great cruelties to his wife might have been influenced by her own unwillingness to view her own husband as such a villain. In any case, FSF's inhumanity comes across loud and clear without any need for embellishment on Hardwick's part -- one might argue that her restraint makes it come across even louder and clearer.

Here, from an essay about Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*, is another passage where Hardwick seems to speak with the wisdom of not only literary learnedness but also personal experience: "In a love triangle, brutality on one side and vanity on the other must be present.... Without the heightened sense of importance a man naturally acquires when he is the object of the possessive determinations of two women, nothing interesting could happen.... The triangle demands the cooperation of two in the humiliation of one, along with some period of pretense, suffering, insincerity, or self-delusion."

And from the same essay, this passage about Ibsen's *The Master Builder*: "Ibsen has not made [the character of Mrs. Solness] appealing enough, not been able to imagine just what an artist's wife, or the wife of a man of great ambition, can do except be jealous, suspicious, and ill."
