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Originally published in France in 1958 and immediately banned, this novel concerns the sexual games of domination and punishment that take place between two women to which only the narrator has access.

The Image Details

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From Reader Review The Image for online ebook

Vikram Saini says

To summarize, I will pick the text from Wikipedia link The Image (novel)

The Image is centered on a triangular relationship between the male narrator and two women, Anne and Claire. The narrator is puzzled by the meaning of their behavior throughout, gradually accumulating clues which only make full sense in the closing chapter, when Anne is revealed as the mirror image of the woman he actually loves, Claire.

It took long, for me, to understand where the story is going on. It's mostly related to BDSM which is not my taste. But still I read it to the end as it's marked one of the 5 most erotic class novels of that era.

It's fine to read once for me. Not going to read it again.

M. Sarki says

Very disappointed in this book. I found it boring and basically a waste of time. If you are interested in why I did not like it, and more about what I do like and why, I have written a review of THE IMAGE here: <http://hubpages.com/hub/Sex-Without-L...>

Daphne says

After reading the Vanity Fair piece on Catherine Robbe-Grillet, I admit, I was utterly fascinated. Hunted down the book on the Internet and the rest, as they say, is history. It's a pretty intense read, enough to make most people blush (and maybe tingle, if they are into that kinda thing). I always have a slight issue with translated works, but will refrain from comment until I actually read it in its original french.

Bob says

The movie adaption was named "The Punishment of Anne", which is either misleading or somewhat subtle. The more significant punishment is of Claire. I got the sense that Anne was the surrogate ("The Image") for a younger Claire who was abused. The connection between the two was reinforced when Claire showed Jean a series of photos of Anne, with a photo of Claire, her head cropped out, as the last one. When Jean asked if they're all of Anne, Claire said they were. Which perhaps means, on another level, they were all of Claire. The punishments and comforts that Claire bestowed on Anne seemed to reflect the ambivalent feelings Claire had toward expressing and enjoying her own sexuality.

Jean, whom Claire made an accomplice in her mistreatment of Anne might be the surrogate ("The Image") for the man who abused her. Perhaps his resemblance is why he was chosen. To me, a key turning point in the story is toward the end when Claire tells Anne "Go and kiss your master, who loves you." That may have

been the first time the word "love" showed up in the text. And it seemed to signify that Claire now believed that Jean loved Anne, and since Jean was a surrogate for her abuser, that her abuser had really loved her. This twisted rationalization seemed to open up the barriers that Claire had built to protect herself from having been treated as an object, not only allowing her to offer herself to Jean, but to put Jean in the frame of mind to accept her, which previously he had not been.

Adriana Scarpin says

Catherine Robbe Grillet, como fotógrafa e dominatrix, tem um olho bem treinado no assunto e descreve as cenas de maneira visualmente impecável, mas como tenho uma queda por dominatrices que lidam com homens submissos, vou ficar devendo uma nota maior, embora o lance da sua escrava ser na realidade o seu duplo é de fato bem engenhoso.

Evan says

I've never seen Radley Metzger's 1970s porno filming of this novella (retitled *The Punishment of Anne*) but reading this I can visualize it shot by shot and scene by scene: I can see women in retro garb but with late 60s faces shot through gauze on semi-grainy film acting woodenly with voices that aren't exactly synched properly. Maybe I'm all wrong about the film (I have seen other Metzger movies, which I generally like, so I do have some experience; the black-and-white *Therese and Isabelle* is a particular favorite) but this book is the perfect template for a cheesy soft-core flick.

It actually is elegantly written. The story is sparse and spare. A man, the author is at a boring society party and spots an old lady friend, Claire, a photographer with a haughty manner yet quite alluring, and a young girl in white, Anne, to whom she exchanges knowing glances. He becomes intrigued by Anne and his friend Claire's apparent connection to her. Soon enough, the three are hooked up into strange sessions in which Claire verbally and physically humiliates Anne, who's her photo model, in front of Jean -- training her to be her submissive slave and to submit also to his desires. But it is Claire who is entirely in control of the dynamic.

There are meticulous descriptions of the S&M photos in which Anne is posed; the various degradations to which she's subjected, including the placement of a thorned rose stem between her garter and skin at her upper thigh. Jean at first seems a little taken aback by all this but soon enough is a game and enthusiastic participant and instigator of Anne's punishments.

The book will strike many as frivolous, but I have to say it is better written than Pauline Reage's similar "The Story of O," of which to date I've only read part. The author pays homage to Reage and the latter also writes the foreword to this book.

Those who agonize over gender politics -- the humiliation of women and the patriarchal male gaze and such -- will not dig this. Or maybe they can just roll with it as a lesbian sex fantasy.

FINAL:

Well, Anne represents not only a form of delayed gratification for Claire, but a surrogate of sorts, as we see at the end. I can't say anymore. At first, it seems like Anne has a bit of a personality, even a bit of individual defiance, but as things progress, her character becomes completely objectified. The idea of someone choosing to be dominated is OK, I suppose, but here we really don't even get an indication of that, since we

get no insight into Anne -- her life, her motives, her personality -- at all. That left me somewhat dissatisfied. This was a super fast read. I'm not into S&M, so it didn't get my juices going in the manner of "The She-Devils," but it was a decent-enough read within its limits.

NOTES: De Berg is a nom de plume for Catherine Robbe-Grillet. Not sure why she changed it, although I suspect it might be to eliminate marketplace confusion because there is another writer of more prominence with that last name as well as a well-known French film director.

Since writing my review I've seen some images from "The Punishment of Anne" and the pictorial quality looks better than I suggested, though some of the imagery is close to what I had imagined. I may have to see this now.

Dana Jerman says

Here's one bdsm/power-scenario tale that is actually about someone showing a potential lover how they would like to be loved, just as much as it is about sex... and the film isn't half bad either.

One of the best books to be read at night... esp by chapter to a lover over the phone.

Came across a few copies by chance in a great beatnik used bookstore. A very petite novel, but one abounding cautiously and strangely with a menage cast of characters who care very much for one another it seems, in the face of their brutal S&M play. (The protagonist has the same first name as the author)

It is a man's own story of these events as the narrator and the other 2 characters are women. I wonder how the tale would play out in a more modern context should the roles be reversed.

Nonetheless, the writing is excellent- lush and controlled. Revealing and disciplined. Each chapter only 5-7 pgs, which allowed each of them to be paced and devoured like sinfully sweet chocolates. The last questions I am faced with in reading what I might call very "classy smut" is: "could I handle being in a relationship like this? What would I want to give/recieve from being part of such a union?"

Fred says

i read this book in 1967, in front of a live lobster tank at logan airport (boston), totally fried on LSD. it is provocative to put it on the feminist shelf - it is wholly concerned with the sadistic torment of a young innocent woman by jaded aristocrats.

cf. jelinek, sebold

Philip Fracassi says

I don't know what to tell you. If you liked Story of O, I guess you'll like this.

Erotic fiction in general is pretty trite and boring. I'm just not sure where it fits in with the entire breadth of literature. I don't mean it shouldn't be written, or read, I just don't think TEXT is the best form of porn. Maybe 100 years ago it made sense. But today...not so much.

I guess 50 Shades of Gray might put up an argument, but it's a cowardly form of pornography for cowardly people. It's the idea of doing something wrong but knowing you can get away with it, that's why housewives go crazy for the stuff.

I don't judge, I just don't think it's worthwhile reading material. Why read 50 Shades garbage when you could be reading Handmaid's Tale or Narcissus and Goldmund?

Let's keep reading at a certain elevation, can we? And let's keep erotica where it belongs: VHS tapes.

Laurent says

Sadomasochistisch cultverhaal uit 1956 van Jean de Berg (vermoedelijk pseudoniem van Cathérine Robbe-Grillet), met een voorwoord van en opgedragen aan Pauline Réage (van 'Histoire d'O.'). Stijlvol maar weinig diepgaand en te veel opgesmukt met de Franse slag.

Chetty says

A nice little read enabling us to get a glimpse of Parisian S&M life in the 50s with a trio of actors who are not shy to get into it devotedly.

This erotica story has also got a sort of cinema-like style of describing the characters and especially the way they move; this opinion might be directly linked to the fact that actually both of the writers behind the "Jean De Berg" pseudonym were involved into the seventh art environment as well.

John Hall says

Quite good. Not particularly raunchy, but still. Quite good. As I mentioned earlier, my attention was drawn to this book after reading about an essay (not the essay itself, but an article about the essay) by Susan Sontag called "The Pornographic Imagination." In that essay, she mentions this book along with four others as examples of "pornographic literature." I would say that this is a fun read, but compared to the kind of stuff that people write today, it's scarcely pornographic. I would say the same about Story of O, another book she mentions. On the other hand, Another book, Story of the Eye, is one of my favorites, and I look forward to reading the other book by the same author (George Bataille) entitled "Madam Edwarda." I purchased that story in a volume with two other Bataille works, which I shall also probably read. Because it is his work that I should most like to emulate in the novel I am working on right now. I aim to write a book of transgressive erotic fiction, and I'm looking to these books (and the fifth book (The She-Devils) mentioned in Sontag's essay, and the essay itself) for inspiration. If anyone reading this has any suggestions for other books I should look at, please let me know (johnshallesq@gmail.com).

One of the things that I found most striking about this book is that it is called The Image, and it brought to mind an image that I have seen before--I think in Penthouse Magazine. It might have been the image used in

Xavier Hollander's column (called "Call Me Madame") or it might have been elsewhere in the magazine. It's the image of a rose with thorn pressed against a gartered thigh. The thigh is bleeding a few droplets of blood. The image itself never struck me as awesomely hot or anything, but when the process of pressing the rose against the thigh is described in this short novel, well, it's very hot. If you're into that submission/slave sort of thing. Which I am, sometimes.

M. Sarki says

The hardcover Grove Press copy, clocking in at 143 pages, makes this book a pretty fast read, that is, if it weren't so pathetically boring. I know I know, Susan Sontag has blessed it with true literary status, as have countless others starving for a good erotic read. But I never got the point. I never believed in anybody or anything. I never had any stake in it. There was nothing of me involved with anything that mattered. Early on I figured the book was obviously written by somebody from high society, well-educated, and somewhat worldly, at least in their belief system. I have since researched enough to find out that the author was actually Catherine Robbe-Grillet, the wife of a very talented, but dead, writer in his own right, not to mention that Alain Robbe-Grillet did a bit of erotic writing himself that I have found a little more difficult and high brow than his spouse's foray in to the genre. Alain's, JEALOUSY, had more eroticism in it from what he left out than the entire book written by Catherine in all its graphic detail. It is possible I am merely a square, that I have not developed the necessary libido to enjoy this type of deviant behavior (deviant as different, not necessarily bad). Whips, ropes, and chains are definitely not of my cultural upbringing and have no place in the world I live in, unless I am missing something of my neighbors' life. Don't get me wrong, I like a bit of kinky sex as much as the next fellow, but I just wasn't feeling it with this little book, and feeling, feeling it in my body, is what I am always after. Nothing presented in the book made me feel anything strongly pro or con about even trying a little tie up at home.

The hard part now is where to go from here in my personal quest for sexual awakening. Sontag, according to sources, also blessed Pierre Louys', THE SHE DEVILS, George Bataille's, STORY OF THE EYE & his MADAME EDWARDA, and THE STORY OF O by Pauline Reage. After reading a few reviews and one synopsis I have ordered MADAME EDWARDA simply because of the incest factor and the threat of pain I can't imagine on my own. THE IMAGE was too predictable. It was written so simply I felt it was not for me but instead it was written for somebody afraid of the language and what the words might possibly do to me. I want to be challenged intellectually. I want to be confused enough to want to know what's true. The main problem with THE IMAGE was, it did not make me care.

Dinatalia says

This book was excellent! my father gave it to me, little did he know that this book is very graphic. I still read it though obviously. There was so much detail put into this book, I was socaptivated by the detail, hence the title "The Image" you could imagine everything. I tend to enjoy books when you're able to have a "mental picture" or "mental movie" I could not put this book down, only when my mom called me for dinner...haha funny. Anyways, I reccomend this book for someone with a mature mind, they'll value the book a lot more rather than an immature 15 year old. I think that's another reason why I enjoyed this book. Overall excellent piece of writing by Mr. Berg, just excellent.

Jonathan says

I read this when I was far too young for it. I picked it up again for the Kindle - 80 cents - and am pleased to find that the book is as good as I remembered it. Naughty, literate filth from the late 1950s, by the New Wave novelist and film maker Alain Robbe-Grillet and his wife Catherine. Enthusiastically recommended for those of a perverse bent!
