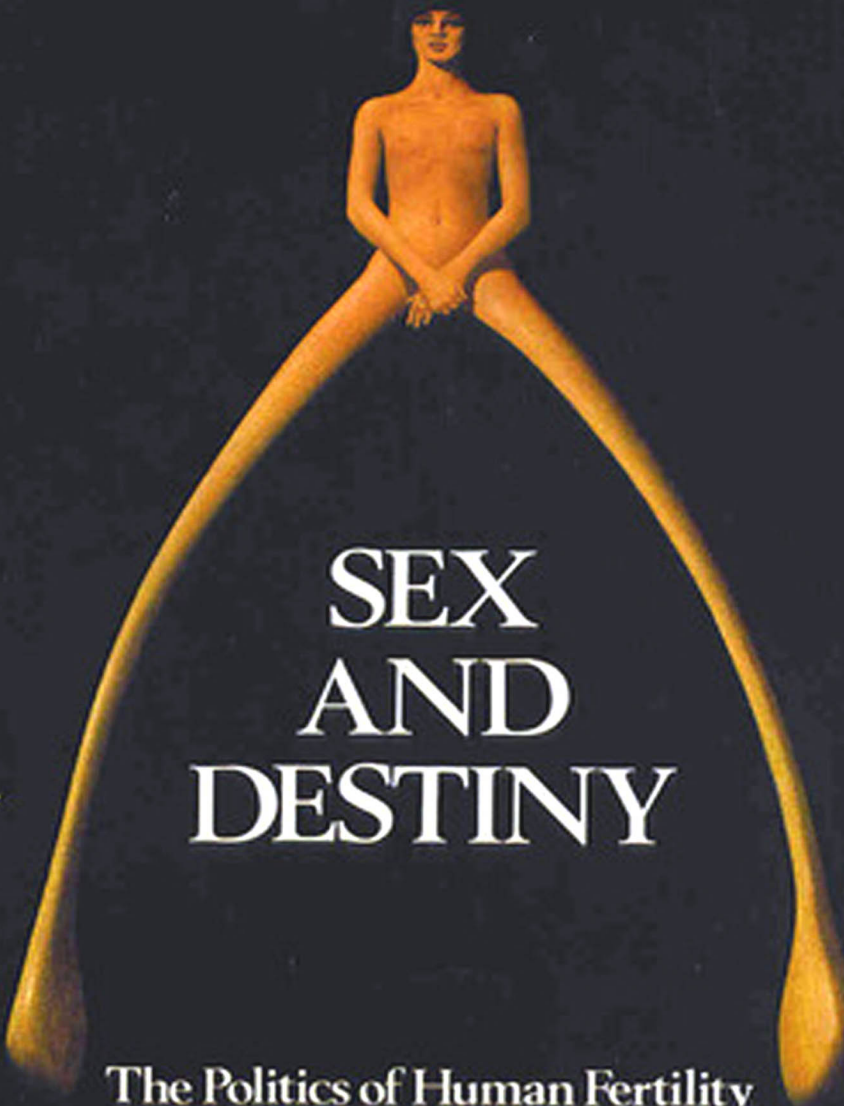


Germaine Greer



SEX AND DESTINY

The Politics of Human Fertility

Chapter Five

Polymorphous Perversity

... even in its most simplified and rudimentary form, human sexuality involves the development of motivation through a lengthy and complex process: the positioning, the looks and gestures, the movements and responses; all these are necessary before orgasm occurs. It is all a far cry from the insertion of turgid penises and the depositing of seminal fluid, like squirting jam in a doughnut.

Brian J. Ford Patterns of Sex

We know, from sources other than those recognised by the historians of population, that the European pattern of late marriage existed side-by-side with prolonged courtship, and that in many countries courtship was not conducted under the watchful eye of a chaperone. Parish records, a kind of evidence which is extensively used by demographic historians, tell us that marriages often preceded christenings by too few months for the conception of the child to have been the result of marital intercourse. A similar pattern prevails in parts of present-day rural Tuscany, and an examination of what it actually entails may prove illuminating for those who are perplexed by the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English pattern.

In some parts of Tuscany (and in many other parts of rural Italy from Asti to Agrigento) a young man begins to keep company with a young woman while he is still in his teens, with the full knowledge of both his and her family. Once the courtship has proceeded beyond a certain point, not in itself easy to define, but related to the amount of time which they have spent in no other company but their own and the extent to which their relationship is public knowledge, the young woman cannot be set aside without serious consequences for her future and the friendship of the two families. The young woman will be known as *fidanzata* although no announcement will be made, no ceremony undergone, and she will wear no ring. The degree of sexual intimacy will gradually increase by dint of wearing the young woman's resistance down with caresses and entreaties, a kind of intense foreplay which may be carried on over years,