

Preface

Look about and you see the rise of daughters in the world—daughters who have more opportunities to increase their freedom and power. The concerns and interests of daughters and fathers, the education and erotic experience of boys and girls, and the vocational ambitions of men and women are converging as never before. The gender gap narrows and gender roles blur. It might be the biggest story of our lifetime. And yet this process has produced and does produce turmoil and psychological confusion as well as promise.

My subject is the crucial development of father-daughter, older men–younger women relations in history, psychology, and art, and, specifically, in the creative experience of figures important in the shaping of modern culture. That huge story features women’s continuing quest for authority, especially in the last two centuries. I tell it mainly through a wide-ranging series of portraits analyzing and dramatizing the remarkable life and work of famous men and women who, in their diverse ways, have made the world care more deeply about the destiny of daughters. I start off with a world-historical biblical family and those prophets, saints, painters, and writers who first interpreted them and represented them for posterity. My gallery then goes on to include Luther, Calvin, and Shakespeare; and then the nineteenth-century novelists Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, and the Brontë sisters—pioneers in giving brilliant, passionate daughters a voice. Continuing through the ages, I discuss the comic subverter of patriarchy Lewis Carroll and also the major father figure of psychoanalysis and modern mind-reading, Sigmund Freud. Then follows my array of influential twentieth-century celebrities: Shirley Temple, Woody Allen and Mia Farrow, Carolivia Herron, Bill Clinton, his wife Hillary Rodham Clinton, their daughter Chelsea, and Monica Lewinsky. All of them play big parts in ongoing human drama of what I call the “Lot complex”—mutual attraction between young females and older males.

In light of the Lot complex, I intend my studies of these figures to show them

clearly and in a new perspective. And I mean this book to have a broad appeal. One of my goals is to make it vital and engaging for anyone who has an interest in any or several of its diverse cast of characters—whether or not you care at all about psychological theories or Bible history. The chapters make a collective whole, but individually, they can stand—and be read—on their own. You can, for example, read and learn about the miracle of the amazing Brontë family without knowing anything about Martin Luther. You can see why Shirley Temple really matters without poring over Scripture or discover the visionary power of Renaissance painters of Lot's daughters without thinking about Woody Allen. You can see what Freud and Clinton were up to without comparing them to Shakespeare (even though setting these subjects next to each other turns out to be remarkably revealing).

I hope *Lot's Daughters* is a work on the side of the angels, telling of women's progress and men's progress too. It is, however, liable, for one basic reason, to be disturbing and controversial: its major premise is that a disreputable Bible story of father-daughter incest (Genesis 19) offers an effective means and model for understanding the history of gender and familial relations not only in the past but right now. This book begins with the power and reality of incestuous attraction and what humanity does about it. But that word "incest" can give you the creeps, and so I worry about being misunderstood. I feel a silly urge to write *Reader, I'm not "soft" on incest; I never lusted after my daughters; our relations are good; I'm a nice grandfather, etc., etc.* Still, like novelist Carolivia Herron, I believe that the dark Lot family narrative, with its unavoidable, cosmic disaster, its irrepressible sexual sin, its pressure to sublimate erotic familial desires, and its potential for redemption, goes on living in us because it holds repressed secrets of the past and epic possibilities for the future. I mean to show how and why what happens in this scandalous myth comes down through the ages, roils people's imaginations, gets modified, and helps explain contemporary life—why, for example, father-daughter relations have been getting more and more critical attention and why, in a time of raised feminist consciousness, older men and younger women keep taking up with each other seriously and show no signs of stopping.

But there's no denying the Lot story *is* shocking, does describe offensive behavior, does probe shameful erotic secrets, and does make readers face troubling moral and psychological issues that emerge out of the old chaos of sex lives. People like and need to gild the past—but there was no golden age for girls. If the history of civilization features women rising, the Lot text shows how long that climb has been. It describes, for instance, a benevolent Old Testament patriarch, by the standards of his times a moral man, not bad man. Nevertheless, when a mob threatens his home, he offers his own daughters up to the vicious men as sex objects for their diversion. It tells of a wife and mother obliterated and then replaced as her husband's mate by their willful daughters. It makes the girls the active, in-

cestuous seducers. It sexualizes the relationship of fathers and daughters and sets forth as one absolute basis and strain of human culture and history the potentially eroticized father-daughter tie. It suggests that there is, for some reason, a potential erotic component in father-daughter relationships not paralleled in mother-son relationships and that civil culture must face that problem.

Obviously such material sets up resistance. You might resent being told that you somehow share the sleazy heritage of Lot's cave. Daughters and fathers and middle-aged men and young women may not like to read that they have repressed erotic complexes or that their lives are the result of the way other people lived out such complexes in the past. They may be uneasy about reflecting on the way they use each other's love and regard to get what they want. Those coming up like to feel strong and independent—that they make it on their own—and so women, long kept down, may resent the idea that their achievement relies on help from older males with sublimated crushes on them. Daughters may not want to admit that they adored their fathers, longed to be like them, and looked down on their mothers. Older men may not like the self-image of running out on wives, nor do they want to admit that they see younger women first as symbols of their own youth and power (which they desperately want to hang onto) rather than as unique people. Fathers don't want to talk much about how they love their daughters madly and need to displace inchoate longings towards them in positive, moral acts of responsibility and help. And fathers and daughters—older men and younger women—may be queasy about the kinds of bonding between them that alienate and demeans aging wives and mothers. There is something off-putting about saying that in some important way, daughters want to be like their fathers but sons do not want to be like their mothers. These, however, are key facts of social life worth exploring.

My overall argument is that the consequence of the Lot's-daughters myth, as it plays out in the Bible and in history, art, and real life carries hope—the hope and the narrative direction that my subtitle to *Lot's Daughters* traces: *Sex, Redemption, and Women's Quest for Authority*. The scriptural text begins with the fact of sexual possibilities and incestuous desire as a biological and cultural *given* of history, but then its heritage moves towards modes of moral redemption and the long quest for female empowerment. That is my narrative, but let me end this Preface with an incident that captures both the communal, enduring nature of the Lot's-daughters pattern and the rich particularity, struggle, and changing implications alive in it:

In Bill Clinton's autobiography, there's a snapshot of the president with his teenage daughter Chelsea. They're at the funeral of a dear family friend who was suddenly cut down in the prime of life. The girl stands very straight, looking somber and grown-up in her sensible coat and dark glasses. Her tall father has turned to her, bowed his head, and laid it on her shoulder. It is a gesture of paternal intimacy. He wants and obviously expects the support and sympathy of a strong

young woman, and she looks like she's there to give it to him. She looks like a person who could be in charge. The gesture is anything but improper, but it's not without its unconscious erotic tinge. Hundreds of pages earlier, Clinton describes getting together with Chelsea's mother: "Hilary sat . . . and I sat beside her talking. Before long, I leaned over and put my head on her shoulder. It was our first date."¹ The intimate gesture of alliance with the daughter uncannily repeats and amplifies the former act of affectionate supplication towards his ambitious, forceful wife-to-be. It is the extended meaning and the human potential of that picture—*everything old is new again*—that I wish to wish explore and bring to life.