

RISMED 00113

Risk, estrogens – and a poem

On p. 321 of this issue, the Swedish sociologist Ingar Palmlund presents in brief her study in societal risk evaluation of estrogen use. The paper is based on the Ph.D. awarded to her in the summer of 1990 by Clark University for her thesis; the latter is distributed by UMI, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106, U.S.A.

It must be highly unusual for the author of a thesis to distil poetry from it; but the field is not one devoid of emotion, and in her poem Dr Palmlund portrays the scene as many have experienced it.

M.N.G.D.

THE ESTROGEN PLAY

Enter from Right
P in gorgeously expensive garb, followed by
M in white. Both men,
in vantage.
In proud and praising language
they vaunt the benefits of an invented drug,
the mimicry of what makes women want to
love
and bear children

Both do gain in fame and fortune. They will
do well
by the drug, do Good
and gain yet more in fame and fortune.

The stage is full of women searching
love
fertility and femininity.

Later, some weeks or lunar cycles or many year later.
Center stage: a group of women.
They suffer. They are
diseased, dying, dead.

Around them families bereft,
and other women fearful, accusing.

The audience aroused
by pity for the victims and by fear
for their own lives.
They call for judgement and
preventive action.

They want to know the truth.
They want to stop the harmful
practice.

And then the explanations start:
the bodycounts, the rhetoric,
the fugues and subterfuges
the statements and the counterstatements,
the wallowing in scientific jargon, the defensive
chiding of reality.

The unwanted aggression
and the sadness.
The anger over games and trickery.
The anxiety,
the doubts,
the greed, the injured
vanity.

The chorus, loud,
comments,
laments
and blames.

Where are the gods
descending from above
to restore harmony?

The arbiters (in gray) react,
but slowly.
They are machine gods.
They blandly pass their judgement to appease
the audience.
The chorus then reverts to silence.

What is the play about?

The struggle over power
and control: who decides
to do what to whom
and why?
The actors caught in roles,
the roles defined by settings,
each actor moving in a web of power,
each with but a narrow interval of free
choice.

The battle over morals:
whether 'tis better to produce and sell
and to control,
than to prevent uncertain harm and . . .

The human sacrifice
in order to promote the interests
of those in dominance.

Ingar Palmlund