CHAPTER III

Commodification of Sexuality

In a patriarchy woman is often identified with her body and treated as an object of desire. This objectification of woman leads to commodification of female sexuality. Commodification is the process of attaching a material value to something that could not be previously limited by valuation. Thus many human attributes, culture, language, art, literature and even human body get commodified. Sex work for example, is a form of sexuality put on for sale. In capitalist and sexist societies woman is treated as a commodity. Irigaray in This Sex Which Is Not One comments: “For woman is traditionally a use-value for man, an exchange value among men, in other words, a commodity. As such, she remains the guardian of material substance, whose price will be established, in terms of the standard of their work and of their need/desire, by “subjects”: workers, merchants, consumers. Women are marked phallicly by their fathers, husbands, procures. And this branding determines their value in sexual commerce” (31). In ancient and medieval societies woman was regarded as a possession, a gift or trophy won in a context, a space conquered or a luxuary or treasure to be displayed. The contemporary manner of commodification is only a continuation of the treatment of woman in primitive capitalism. Once women were also included in a man’s wealth. The commodification of woman is a natural outcome of women’s subordination. Irigaray also comments about such a situation: “In
our social order, women are ‘products’ used and exchanged by men. Their status is that of merchandise, ‘commodities’… The use, consumption, and circulation of their sexualized bodies underwrite the organization and the reproduction of the social order, in which they have never taken part as ‘subjects’ ” (84).

According to Dworkin, the suppression of women through sexual subordination is the most dangerous oppression in the society: “The oppression of women occurs through sexual subordination. It is the use of sex as the medium of oppression that makes the subordination of women so distinct from racism or prejudice against a group based on religion or national origin” (Cornell 30). Considering women as mere sex objects is a threatening situation in the society. According to her, “pornography is the material means of sexualizing inequality; and that is why pornography is a central practice in the subordination of women” (Cornell 30). Pornography is an important area where the commodification of female body takes place. According to Mackinnon, “…pornography is not harmless fantasy or a corrupt and confused misrepresentation of an otherwise natural and healthy sexuality. Along with the rape and prostitution in which it participates, pornography institutionalizes the sexuality of male supremacy, which fuses the erotization of dominance and submission, with the social construction of male and female” (Cornell 171). She underlines that pornography eroticizes sexual inequality and institutionalizes male sovereignty.
Jelinek was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in the year 2004. The Nobel Committee was not unanimous in their decision to award her the prize. One member walked out of the Committee describing her work as whining, unenjoyable public pornography. Her works always shock the readers with the graphic description of sexuality. Such a mode of storytelling makes them look like written pornography. In this regard, Dworkin’s comment is remarkable: “Pornography, even when written, is sex because of the dynamism of the sexual hatred in it” (Cornell 28). But Jelinek was not writing sex for sex. The pornographic elements in her novels have a greater purpose than arousing sensuality in the readers. She does not support the stand of radical feminists like Kate Millett and Gayle S. Rubin that pornography can be used to empower women. By portraying the power relation within the sex acts, she supports Dworkin’s argument that it is a way of perpetuating male supremacy because it trains, educates and inspires men to despise women:

Pornography is not a genre of expression separate and different from the rest of life; it is a genre of expression fully in harmony with any culture in which it flourishes. This is so whether it is legal or illegal. And, in either case, pornography functions to perpetuate male supremacy and crimes of violence against women because it conditions, trains, educates and inspire men to despise women, to use women, to hurt women. Pornography
exists because men despise women, and men despise women in part because pornography exists. (Cornell 42)

*Lust* falls into the category of written pornography. Here we are reminded of the analysis of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* by Millett:

The scenes of sexual intercourse in the novel are written according to the “female is passive, male is active” directions laid down by Sigmund Freud. The phallus is all; Connie is “cunt”, the thing acted upon, gratefully accepting each manifestation of the will of her master. Mellors does not even condescend to indulge his lady in foreplay. She enjoys an orgasm when she can, while Mellors is managing his own. (240)

Connie is reduced in to a mere passive creature receiving all the sexual fantasies of Mellors without any resistance. Jelinek reproduces such a power relation in *Lust*. The sex between the active husband and passive wife, which carries the title of ‘legal rape’, is graphically represented in the novel. Jelinek is adamant in giving the minute details of their copulation. Gerti’s passivity is depicted in such a way that it evokes nausea in the readers. In *Lust* the husband forces the wife for sex more than once daily, and he is interested only in oral and anal sex. The resistance of the wife has no place in that household. In this context, Russel observes: “The term abusive sexual behaviour in… pornography refers to sexual conduct that ranges from derogatory, demeaning, contemptuous or damaging to that which is brutal,
cruel, exploitative, painful, or violent. Degrading sexual behaviour refers to sexual conduct that is humiliating, insulting and/or disrespectful: examples of degrading sexual behaviour include urinating or defecating on a woman, ejaculating in her face, treating her as sexually dirty or inferior, depicting her as slavishly following men’s orders and eager to engage in whatever sex acts males want, and/or calling her insulting names such as ‘bitch’, ‘cunt’, ‘nigger’, ‘whore’, while engaging in sex” (Cornell 50). Hermann carries out such derogatory and demeaning sexual acts on his wife. Most of the times he uses obscene language.

The degradation of wife into that of a whore and the elevated position of the husband as the “lordandmaster” portrays the unequal power relation in that household (Lust 39). The woman is treated as a commodity whose flesh is of use for the husband. He buys her material things so that she will satisfy his sexual needs. The time and place for the copulation are of his interests. The inferior position of Gerti, her humiliation, pain and torment are pictured in such a way that Lust does not fall into the category of cheap pornography. Jelinek does not openly give an answer to the question whether pornography is good or bad in the novel. But Gerti’s degraded position throws light on the brutalization of women in pornography.

The oral sex makes Gerti vomit most of the times and the husband has no regard for her mental and physical condition and he continues his actions. The graphical representation of the oral and the anal sex which the husband
forcefully carries out on the wife does not really provide an entertainment to the readers. It invokes a kind of disgusting feeling in the readers. Jelinek deconstructs the entertainment quality of porn movies through her writing. The plight of Gerti points to the subordination of women in most of the heterosexual relationships. Dworkin and Mackinnon argue that pornography depicts sexual subordination and it leads to inequality between sexes and sexual exploitation. Jelinek portrays sexual exploitation of the wife by the husband, but the author, never voices in the novel that it is bad. She indirectly convinces the readers that inequality between the sexes is a bad phenomenon in the society. The child who grows out in such a household learns all the bad qualities of father and considers mother as a secondary citizen.

Both the husband and the lover consider Gerti as a commodity. Hermann rapes Gerti before her lover, Michael. He shows revenge on the person who has used her and conveys that she is his own property. Hermann makes sure that Michael sees all the action through the window of his household: “… every time the Direktor withdraws his sturdy prick a little he casts a forceful glance at his silent admirer at the window” (Lust 198). Hermann thus transforms into the macho character in a porn movie, who does all the aggressive acts on a passive female and thus gets secret admirers for his actions. Michael in turn is getting the effect of watching a porn movie. Mackinnon has also commented on the three dimensional body acts of men
watching pornography:

With pornography men masturbate to women being exposed, humiliated, violated, degraded, mutilated, dismembered, bound, gagged, tortured and killed. In the visual materials, they experience this being done by watching it being done. What is real here is not that the materials are pictures, but that they are part of a sex act. The women are in two dimensions, but the men have sex with them in their own three-dimensional bodies, not in their minds alone. (Cornell 101)

The same situation happens in Lust. He starts masturbating at that scene: “Perhaps the young man will cop a handful now as well! As far as I can tell, he’s really doing it. From the waist down, we men are all members of the same club, when all’s said and done” (Lust 198). The law student whom Gerti considers her saviour thus turns out to be a voyeur. For both the husband and the lover, she is just a piece of flesh which can be used for their pleasures. The dynamism of sexual hatred involved in Lust does not create any kind of sexual arousal in the readers. It creates sympathy in the readers towards the pathetic and inhuman condition of women.

In Wonderful Wonderful Times, Otto Witkowski is presented as a man with an interest in pornophotography. His wife is his model. The reluctant wife is forced to do such a duty with constant thrashings, slaps, beatings and
threats. Pornophotography is the act which provides him pleasure: “It’s a twofold pleasure for me, once when I take the pictures and then secondly when I look at them and evaluate them critically. Between the two stages come the developing and enlarging. That is enjoyable too” (*Wonderful Wonderful Times* 15-16). He keeps the nude pictures of his wife in the pistol case. One example for his photopornography follows. He asks his wife to enact the role of a housewife who is spied on by a stranger: “A housewife who is being spied on by a stranger while she’s washing in the kitchen tries to cover up but all she has for the purpose is (say) an inadequate oven cloth. Which doesn’t even cover her vital parts, her privates, thank God. And the privates are what I want… Come on, Gretl, come on” (*Wonderful Wonderful Times* 16). Otto thus forces his wife to be the naked model for his camera. According to him, this is the only enjoyment or hobby left for him.

Brownmiller has also commented on the degradation of female body: “The staple of porn will always be the naked female body, breasts and genitals exposed, because as man devised it, her naked body is the female’s shame, her private parts the private property of man, while his are the ancient, holy, universal, patriarchal instrument of his power, his rule by force over her” (394). Otto threatens his wife to adjust with his hobby of pornophotography. Margarethe verbally shows her displeasure, but physically obeys him. She enacts various roles according to his demands ranging from a housewife to a virgin, landlady, maid, girl, gymnast and so on. In all these
enactments he wants fear in the face of wife which he once witnessed in the faces of Nazi victims: “You have to look afraid, it’s always a terrific feeling to smash down resistance, I smashed resistance quite often myself in the war and liquidated numerous persons all on my own” (*Wonderful Wonderful Times* 16).

Otto’s pornophotography constitutes a reinscription of the fascist war crimes. It is in utter contrast with the super masculine power which he once enjoyed as a SS officer. Once he had the enjoyment of killing innocent people with his gun. Now the only thing left in his hands is a camera and the only available victim for carrying out his hobby is his wife. Instead of the gun, which he once held as a SS officer towards innocent victims, now he is holding his camera towards his wife. Once he had immense power as a SS officer. He has seen thousands of enemies got away through the chimneys and crematoria of Auschwitz and Treblinka. Those days are gone and now he gets an invalid pension and a job as a night porter. Now the only persons on whom he can take his power are his wife and children, and he makes them suffer a lot. He threatens his wife to obey him completely to fulfill his dream of pornophotography: “I get my fulfillment from nude photography. Whenever you block off my forays into the realm of photography I could bash your skull in” (*Wonderful Wonderful Times* 17). Margarethe obeys him without any displeasure. She even defends him before the children by saying that he was a soldier once and is made of a coarse stuff which is very much
needed for that profession: “If he were not of such coarse stuff he wouldn’t have been able to kill. He needed that coarseness” (Wonderful Wonderful Times 41). Otto has seen mountains of naked corpses during his reign as a SS officer. His wife’s nakedness does not arouse any kind of temptation in him: “Once you have seen mountains of naked corpses, women among them, the charms of your housewife back home offer no more than a paltry temptation” (Wonderful Wonderful Times 98). He sometimes shows these photos to his friends and boasts about it. Thus, Margarethe becomes a commodity which is used for the enjoyment of others.

The images of women are commodified in such a way that either they are angels in the household or whores outside. This dichotomy helps the patriarchal world to perpetuate male superiority because most of the women have internalized this value system. In order to be known as normal in a society, women never question it. Brownmiller points out that such a dichotomous situation is present in pornography also: “It is no accident… that females in the pornographic genre are depicted in two cleanly delineated roles: as virgins who are caught and banged or as nymphomaniacs who are never sated. The most popular and prevalent pornographic fantasy combines the two: an innocent, untutored female is raped and subjected to unnatural practices that turn her into a raving, slobbering nymphomaniac, a dependent sexual slave who can never get enough of the big, male cock” (394). In this sense pornography presents two extreme cases of women.
Both Gerti and Margarethe have to satisfy their husbands’ voyeuristic attitudes. Margarethe has to be the model for pornophotography whereas Gerti has to wear the erotic dresses which Hermann buys for her. He buys lingerie for the wife from advertising catalogues: “Essentially the Man is a big creature of pleasure, a bankable piggy, a citizen singing and gaming. So that his wife’s body will be in a state to report for its daily duty, he chooses lingerie for her from a mail order catalogue. And lo, his choice has fallen upon naughty items, so that she can try to be like the models in the photos” (Lust 3). He wants her to look like models in the photos. Deep inside his heart he likes to “exchange his old Ford for a more up-to-date, more powerful model” (Lust 17). He considers his wife a commodity, a used worn out car, which he wishes to exchange for a new one. But the threat of AIDS holds him back. So he makes the maximum use of his own available model. In a consumer culture, the high esteem and values attributed to women are completely lost. They are being treated as modern day slaves. Hermann’s image of woman is also a product of the consumer culture. It is evident from his act of buying lingerie for the wife and his expectations of her to look like a model in the advertisement.

Women are reduced into mere bodies, which are for the consumption of male buyers in a patriarchy. She is like a commodity in the supermarket: “One can buy the women ready seasoned and only has to shove them in the oven” (Greed 247). In Greed, Gerti tries to satisfy the male gaze of Kurt
through her expensive lingerie. She changes herself into a commodity which is therefore the satisfaction of Kurt Janisch. She believes that such an expensive lingerie will enhance her sexual appearance and Kurt will love her more: “…wearing exclusively the new, expensive lingerie she bought just for him at Palmer’s in town. Is that not a brilliant idea for her brilliant appearance? Is that not a change for his eyes, which on grey roads have had to see much worse things…” (Greed 82).

The small sex shop which Erika visits at Prater sells sexy dresses. Jelinek suggests that objectification of women is present in households also. Husbands take such dresses home and compel wives to wear them. Thus they satisfy their voyeuristic taste: “… tiny nylon panties with many slits, in front and / or in back. At home, you can put them on your wife and then reach in, and your wife doesn’t have to take them off. There’s a matching tank top with two round holes. The woman sticks her breasts through these holes and the rest of her torso is covered transparently” (The Piano Teacher 49). The sexuality of women is used in various vulgar ways to satisfy the male hunger. Even women are misdirected to believe that such erotic dresses are needed to satisfy their male partners. In her sadomasochist letter Erika asks Klemmer to get her such a dress: “Erika suggests he get Erika a kind of apron made of solid black plastic or nylon and cut holes in it so One Can Glimpse the Sexual Organs” (The Piano Teacher 222). Women are relegated to the position of mere fleshes for the satisfaction of masculine needs.
According to Carter, “Pornography, like marriage and the fictions of romantic love, assists the process of false universalising” (Cornell 534). Erika in *The Piano Teacher* is a prey of this false universalisation. Dworkin also comments about such a universalizing aspect of pornography:

> The most terrible thing about pornography is that it tells male truth. The most insidious thing about pornography is that it tells male truth as if it were universal truth. Those depictions of women in chains being tortured are supposed to represent our deepest erotic aspirations. And some of us believe it, don’t we?.

(Cornell 42)

Erika’s life is an example of it. Her sexuality is suppressed by her mother and grandmother during her adolescent years. She grows up in a strictly restricted condition with her mother and grandmother. They never allow her to mingle with the boys: “Mother and grandmother, the female brigade, stand guard, rifle in hand, to protect Erika against the male hunter lurking outside” (*The Piano Teacher* 33). They never allow anything other than piano learning. Mother often makes the remark: “If SHE were left to her own devices, SHE would show more enthusiasm for some young man than for her piano playing” (*The Piano Teacher* 35). If they found out any kinds of relationships of the daughter, they put her in house arrest, until she agrees to forget that man. Such a condition makes her to restrain her own sexuality. During her school days, she was attracted towards boys: “All HER attention is secretly
focused on the boys at school. From the extreme corners of her eyes, she
steals glances at them, while her head held high, flashes in a totally different
direction, taking no notice of these future men or boys trying to practice
manliness” (The Piano Teacher 80). Her mother has played nasty tricks with
a normal girl. She is threatened by the mother that she will kill herself if she
finds Erika with a man. She must capture a man only with her knowledge and
ability and not with any beauty tricks. Thus she develops an attitude of
avoiding boys directly, but deep inside her heart she is only interested in
them. She has internalised her mother’s advice and developed an attitude of
false pride inside her. She behaves as if as if she is interested only in music:
“The future men and present music pupils with whom she performs chamber
music and is forced to play in orchestras arouse an ache in her, a yearning,
which has always seemed to lurk in her. That is why she flaunts tremendous
pride…” (The Piano Teacher 83).

Jelinek portraits Erika’s mysterious character through her attitude
towards a young man during the violin practice. She has a strong affinity
towards that young man. But she never shows it. She never shares any eye
contact with him: “He can never catch her eye since she has been majestically
eyeing the ceiling for a long time now. She does not see the person in him,
she sees only the musician; she does not look at him, and he is to realize that
he means nothing to her. But on the inside, she almost burns up. Her wick
burns brighter than a thousand suns, focusing on the rancid rat known as her
genital” (*The Piano Teacher* 84). Thus Erika, who has internalized the rules and regulations of her mother avoids company with boys, by tormenting herself and waits for a future which will reward her abilities as a musician: “SHE waits impatiently for her value as a future star to rise on the stock exchange of life. She waits silently, more and more silently, for someone to choose her, and she will then promptly choose him. He will be an exceptional man, musically gifted, but not conceited” (*The Piano Teacher* 85). Thus, the suppression of her sexuality gradually leads to her frigidity. The Prater scene in the novel discloses her frigidity. Erika witnesses copulation between a couple at Jesuit’s meadow in Prater. Erika feels an urge for urinating when she sees the couple reaching their climax: “The twosome, without realizing it, is turned into a threesome. Suddenly certain organs labour in the spectator, and she can’t control them; they work double-time or even faster. Strong pressure on her bladder, an irksome disturbance that overcomes her whenever she gets excited” (*The Piano Teacher* 144). The live sex between couple excites the piano teacher, but the suppression of her sexuality as a result of the over dominance of mother creates only a feeling for urination. She is unable even to view an orgasm directly. She channels out her energy through other methods. She considers the razor as her “bridegroom” (*The Piano Teacher* 43):

This blade is destined for HER flesh. This thin, elegant foil of bluish steel, pliable, elastic. SHE sits down in front of the
magnifying side of the shaving mirror, spreading her legs, she makes a cut, magnifying the aperture that is the door way into her body. She knows from experience that such a razor cut doesn’t hurt, for her arms, hands and legs have often served as guinea pigs. Her hobby is cutting her own body. (*The Piano Teacher* 86)

She engages in masochist actions to gain pleasure. Her mother has curbed her from mingling with others. But the mother never thinks of the possibility of her daughter’s negative character development through that. The bruising of her body does not make any harm to others. But Erika is interested in hurting others also. She assaults travelers in the street cars and puts the mask of an innocent musician and thus escapes from mob anger: “SHE bangs into people’s backs and front with her stringed instruments and wind instruments and her heavy musical scores. Her weapons bounce off these people, whose fat is like a rubber buffer. Sometimes, if the whim strikes her, she holds an instrument and a briefcase in one hand while insidiously thrusting her other fist into someone’s winter coat, rain cape, or loden jacket”(*The Piano Teacher* 15). Erika gets a kind of pleasure by hurting others. While in school, she steals things which interest her. She is afraid to take those things to her home, so she leaves all those things in the garbage boxes. She puts smashed tumbler in the coat of a girl student whom she has seen talking with Klemmer. That girl’s hand hurts very badly.
Later when Erika becomes economically independent, she watches porn movies and peep shows to get an idea about female sexuality. Her views on heterosexual relationships are based completely on these mediated versions. According to Dworkin, these medias create a distorted view of women: “The insult pornography offers, invariably, to sex is accomplished in the active subordination of women: the creation of a sexual dynamic in which the putting down of women, the suppression of women, and ultimately the brutalization of women, is what sex is taken to be” (Cornell 25). Erika wants to know what’s lying deep inside a woman. She is searching for that secret both within herself and also through porn movies and peepshows: “The man must often feel (Erika thinks) that the woman must be hiding something crucial in that chaos of her organs. It is those concealments that induce Erika to look at ever newer, ever deeper, ever more prohibited thing. She is always on the lookout for a new and incredible insight. Never has her body even in her standard pose, legs apart in front of the shaving mirror- revealed its silent secrets, even to its owner” (The Piano Teacher 108). Erika, misguided by this distorted views of female sexuality, thinks that brutalization under the hands of man will give her a real sexual experience. In this context, Mackinnon has also commented on such a situation in her essay, “Not a Moral Issue”:

In pornography women desire dispossession and cruelty. Men, permitted to put words (and other things) in women’s mouths, create scenes in which women desperately want to be bound,
battered, tortured, humiliated and killed. Or merely taken and used. This is erotic to the male point of view. Subjection itself, with self determination ecstatically relinquished, is the content of women’s sexual desire and desirability. Women are there to be violated and possessed, men to violate and possess them, either on screen or by camera or pen, on behalf of the viewer. (Cornell 171)

Such a misconception about sexuality is also deep rooted in Erika.

The porn movies, which she watches often depict sadomasochist actions, give a false notion of female sexuality: “Another women’s face on the screen is twisted in pain, for she has just been whipped, albeit lightly” (The Piano Teacher 106). That is why she asks Klemmer to perform sadomasochist actions on her. Sadomasochism features in more than one of the novels. In this regard, Pat Califia comments:

Sadomasochism is not a form of sexual assault. It is a consensual activity that involves polarized roles and intense sensations. An S/M scene is always preceded by a negotiation in which the top and bottom decide whether or not they will play, what activities are likely to occur, what activities will not occur, and about how long the scene will last. The bottom is usually given a ‘safe word’ or ‘code action’ she can use to stop the scene. This safe word allows the bottom to enjoy a
fantasy that the scene is not consensual, and to protest verbally or resist physically without halting stimulation. The key word to understanding S/M is fantasy. The roles, dialogue, fetish costumes, and sexual activity are part of a drama or ritual. The participants are enhancing their sexual pleasure not damaging or imprisoning one another… S/M relationships are usually egalitarian. (Jackson and Scott 232)

Such a mutual understanding is not present in Jelinek’s fiction. It deviates from the fantasy level to that of sexual assault.

In the novels, characters become aware of the Sadomasochist actions through porn movies. According to Brownmiller, “Pornography is the undiluted essence of anti-female propaganda” (394). Gerti’s husband is an addict of porn movies. He watches it to get sexual arousal and carries out various sadomasochist actions on the wife:

The woman twitches like a fish. Her hands being bound. While the Man tickles and prickles her a little with pins. He pricks an ear at the store of feelings he’s hoarded deep within. Words fall from the video screen like leaves, they fall to the floor, floored by this one man win in the human race. (Lust 47)

Erika reveals her fantasies of submission through a letter to Klemmer. Sadomasochism is of two kinds. In the first type the performer cuts
himself/ herself or hurts others. In the second type partners use it for sexual pleasures. Erika belongs to both these categories. She cuts and wounds herself. She hurts others also. She asks Klemmer to perform sadomasochist actions on her. Her idea of sexuality is a medicated one which is full of fanciful things. She fancies herself to be in the position of a wounded and bruised partner who twitches like a worm in pain:

Hogtie her, bind her up as thoroughly as he can- solidly, intensely, artfully, cruelly, tormentingly, cunningly. He should bore his knees into her abdomen, if you’ll be so kind … she wants him to smash his fists in her stomach and sit down so hard on her that she’ll lie there like a plank, unable to stir in his cruel, sweet bonds…. her letter says, I will writhe like for worm in your cruel bonds, in which you will have me lie for hours on end, and you’ll keep me in all sorts of different positions, hitting or kicking me, even whipping me!..There’ll be old nylons lying around. Just stuff them into my mouth as deep as you can and gag me so cunningly that I can’t emit the slightest peep. (The Piano Teacher 215-18)

The mediated versions of sexuality created such false notions in Erika. She collects various accessories for the Sadomasochist ritual and shows it to Klemmer. After handing over the letter Erika realizes that she needs affection
more than torture in her life. Her fantasy turns out to be a real sexual assault from the part of Klemmer, who is a typical example of an egoist male:

She would like to see pain eliminated from the repertoire of love gestures. Now she’s feeling it personally, physically, and she begs to return to the normal version of love … Walter Klemmer overcomes the woman violently, even though she says she’s changed her mind. Please don’t hit me. My ideal is shared feelings again. Erika revises her opinions too late. She expresses the opinion that she, as a woman, needs lots of warmth and affection. (*The Piano Teacher* 266)

Erika’s pleas for help are not heard by Klemmer. In reality she wishes for love and care from him but she is unable to voice it correctly because of her negative upbringing. She is brutally raped by Klemmer and it leads to her attempts at self-extinction.

Erika is portrayed as passive, masochistic and narcissitic in adhering to the Freud’s principles on proper femininity. She becomes a subject and active only when she is in her bathroom and inflicting pain on her body. Her body turns into her object. Jelinek herself has commented on the situation of Erika:

It is a seemingly private story. It is, however, also about the destruction of a woman through the predetermined model of female upbringing. Just as she is a voyeur of life, rather
participates only passively... This is the sanctioned role of woman and the extension of this role in deviant behaviour. (quoted in Jaqueline Vansant 56)

Erika is fragmented by male versions of woman. Jelinek never portrays a positive female in her novels. She uses male defined females in her novels; such a negative representation of women based on patriarchal rules questions the constructed notions of femininity.

The sexual objectification of women is present in peepshow business. It is a place for selling the flesh of women. The only difference it has from prostitution is that the buyer cannot touch the flesh. He can only see and utilize it for his sexual pleasure. He can only view it as long as he inserts money into the coin box:

This little shop of whores, in which naked women stretch and sprawl, fits precisely into the arch, hand in glove. The women spell one another. They rotate, according to some displeasure principle, through a whole chain of peepshows, so that steady customers can always get to see new flesh at specific interval… After all, they bring good money here and insert it, coin for coin, into an insatiably gaping slot. (The Piano Teacher 48)

The women in the peep shows are selected after scrutinization: “Good looks and a good figure are the basic requirements. Each applicant has to undergo a
thorough physical investigation: No proprietor buys a pig without poking her… They are evaluated according to the size of their female curves” (*The Piano Teacher* 53). Women are objectified into mere fleshes in such a business. They do not have an identity. They are mere fleshes which are for the visual consumption of males standing outside. Jelinek describes the peep show business: “The coin goes in, the window goes up, and rosy flesh comes out- a miracle of technology. You mustn’t touch this flesh; you couldn’t, because of the wall” (*The Piano Teacher* 48). Erika visits peep shows to get a better understanding of female sexuality. She is not a lesbian. She does not masturbate while all other men present there do it: “But Erika doesn’t want to act, she only wants to look. She simply wants to sit there and look. Look hard. Erika watching but not touching” (*The Piano Teacher* 52).

Commodifying the female partners is a recurring phenomenon in Jelinek’s novels. Most of the male characters consider their lovers as commodities for sexual gratification. In most of the novels the relationship between lovers is that of a consumer and product. There is no element of love, recognition and mutual respect in most of the relationships. The women are feelingless creatures in the eyes of male partners, who approach them only for sex. Women long for love from them but men are after lust in most of the novels. The commodification and sexual exploitation of women mainly take place because they are economically dependent on men in these instances. In *Women As Lovers* Jelinek asserts the view that women find themselves as
commodities in a patriarchal capitalist society. The author shows that woman’s capital is her body which is for the male buyer:

brigitte has a body to offer, apart from brigitte’s body many other bodies are flooding the market at the same time. the only thing that positively stands by brigitte on the path, is the consmetics industry and the textile industry. brigitte has breasts, thighs, legs, hips and a snatch. others have that too, sometimes even of a better quality”. (Women As Lovers 10)

Brigitte has to make her body more attractive with the help of cosmetics industry and textile industry. For Heinz, the availability of Brigitte’s body is the most luring thing in their relationship. The physical relationship between Anna and Hans gradually turns out to be something in which Hans considers her as a commodity, a commodity that can be used only for his pleasure. He has no emotional attachment to it. The equality and the weightage which Anna expects in that relationship gradually disintegrates. Even from the beginning Hans is making use of the opportunity: “His interest in Anna is dwindling in proportion to his love of Sophie. Already it has almost disappeared. Nowadays he only gives her hurried kisses by way of a thank you for sex, which Sophie doesn’t yet want to perform” (Wonderful Wonderful Times 215). Erich has no love towards Paula. For him: “…sex only does his cock good, it doesn’t reach the brain…” (Women As Lovers 136). Erika’s cousin takes advantage of the girls who have come to play with him.
He views the girls as a commodity: “... he likes a girl to wear a teeny weeny bikini, which has just come into fashion. With his friends, he uses a slide rule to measure what a girl has to offer him, and makes fun of what she doesn’t have to offer” (*The Piano Teacher* 38). He treats those girls as his slaves.

Hermann does not consider his wife as an individual. He always thinks of her in terms of her body parts. For him she is mere flesh. One day, when he watches his wife taking meat from the freezer in the supermarket, he thinks about the flesh business between them: “His wife’s hand is rummaging among dead cellophane-wrapped creatures in the freezer, and when he looks at her, the paltriness of her meat, her fine clothes, he is beset by terrible impatience to let her partake of his own ample meat, his dong, his wonderful shlong” (*Lust* 63). Jelinek comments that Gerti “puts up with his ever ready meat battery” (*Lust* 73). The wife’s role in *Lust* is that of a prostitute. She satisfies the flesh needs of her husband for material benefits.

The female characters in Jelinek’s novels are fascinated by the romance stories in the magazines, television and movies and are unable to have a reality check of their own: “that paula connects love with sensuality, is a result of the magazines, which she likes to read” (*Women As Lovers* 31). Heterosexuality monopolizes most of the literature in our world. Millett comments on the romance mystique which helps in controlling and commodifying female sexuality: “The concept of romantic love affords a means of emotional manipulation which the male is free to exploit, since love
is the only circumstance in which the female is (ideologically) pardoned for sexual activity. And convictions of romantic love are convenient to both parties since this is often the only condition in which the female can overcome the far more powerful conditioning she has received towards sexual inhibition. Romantic love also obscures the realities of female status and the burden of economic dependency” (37). Patriarchy romanticizes love and marriage to subordinate women. According to Millett, romantic love and marriage are emotional manipulations committed by men on women. Society mystifies love and marriage to ensnare women in the cobweb of domesticity. As Millett points out, romance is a form of oppressive ideology by which men continue to subordinate women.

Television showcases soap operas which propagates romantic versions of heterosexuality. Cinemas are also like that. In Jelinek’s novel, television is an important medium through which most of the women create ideas about hetero-sexual relationships. It warps women’s minds and encourages female passivity. In The Piano Teacher, Jelinek’s comment on T.V is noteworthy: “…the TV set, which prefabricates, packages, and home delivers lovely images, lovely actions” (5). Erika and her mother are addicted to the TV. Most of their free times are spent before the TV. Gerti, like most of the women, is charmed by TV soaps. That is why she easily fell into the traps of Michael. She could not resist the advancements of Michael because she immediately recognizes a saviour in him. Gerti thinks of their relationship as
a lasting one: “The woman thinks …. That she cast a glorious net over the young man the day before. She clapped her frightful image upon him, and now he keeps the picture in a breast pocket, a dart of cloth, and is forever taking it out to look at it” (Lust 150). She falls into the romantic mystique and “wants to be dazzling bright in Michael’s eyes” (Lust 150). But Michael, who is full of young blood, is not at all concerned about the emotional state of Gerti. Her age and looks are of concern for him. She is lured by his physical charm and she also gets a kind of enjoyment in cheating her husband. More than ten years of sexual colonisation takes away traces of subjectivity in her. That is why she runs away again into Michael’s house from her “penal colony of sex” (Lust 66). Hermann follows her and drags her back into the car from Michael’s doorsteps. Gerti in Greed is in greed of erotic pleasures and sensual experiences from Kurt. She is very much caught up in the romance mystique. She believes that she has met the man of her dreams in Kurt. Even though she is an educated and independent woman, she is after sensual experiences:

You are the man of my dreams. Tall, strong, blond, blue-eyed and you look like a Viking, only a little smaller. You have a powerful erotic effect on me. In addition you are the tower of strength I have always longed for, exactly, that’s what it says here and as far as I’m concerned it can stay. (Greed 88)
Even when the lover turns to an oppressor, Gerti is unable to restrain herself from such a relationship. The author suggests that Gerti is boiling over with love and desire for Kurt.

Paula is presented as a dreamy one, whose thoughts are controlled by movies and magazines. But Brigitte is a practical one. Paula is ready to accept love which will strike her “like a thunderstorm” (*Women As Lovers* 33). She is waiting for someone whom she can mention as “mine” (33). Like a sponge, she absorbs the physical and spiritual love of film stars, pop singers and TV stars through magazines and other medias and waits for something like that to happen to her. Unlike Brigitte, who gives pleasure and relaxation a secondary place in her life unless she gets a good future, Paula gives all the importance to love, pleasure and relaxation. She thinks that love will happen first and then the future follows. Paula gets permission from her father and brother to learn dress making. More than learning, her mind is engaged in the concept of falling in love. Paula lives in an imaginary world. She compares love with flowers, buds, grasses and foliage. She has no clear view about her future: “paula herself has never learned to choose and to decide. paula experiences everything in the passive voice, not in the active voice” (*Women As Lovers* 31).

Paula feels love towards the handsomest man in the village: “as handsome as a picture with his black hair and blue eyes, just the one to fall in love with” (*Women As Lovers* 41). Paula picks Erich as her lover who has no
liking for his job as a wood cutter. Brigitte chooses the one whose ambition is to be a businessman. Paula gives importance only to the physical features: “all that matters is that love has come at last, and that it hasn’t come to an ugly, worn out, drunken, exhausted, vulgar, common wood cutter and her, but to a handsome, worn out, drunken, strong, vulgar, common wood cutter and her. that makes the whole thing special” (*Women As Lovers* 42). Paula falls for physical features of man. Erich is a good looking man with blue eyes. But Brigitte looks for the monetary benefits and a safe future. So she opts Heinz, who has a bright future as a businessman. Heinz is a physically handicapped one; he has lost one of his hands during a factory accident. Such a deficiency does not discourage Brigitte from seeing her future in him.

Paula has romantic concepts about her love: “paula once read about certain men, who in ordinary surroundings seemed like panthers in a jungle. exotic, dangerous and a pleasure to the eye and heart. she had never believed that she herself would one day have a man in her ordinary kitchen who would seem like a dangerous panther in a dangerous jungle” (*Women As Lovers* 46). Paula is full of false notions about romance. She imagines him as a strong and exotic panther, but he is a slow and lazy person who has a strong appetite for drinking. In reality Erich is gulping up everything which is given to him: “slow erich sits on the bench and eats enough for three… slow erich spreads like a plant over the bench and on the bench eats and eats, and is thinking of nothing else except his engines, his moped that can go so incredibly fast,
above all when he’s had a drink” (*Women As Lovers* 48). When Erich leaves Paula’s kitchen, he has no warm memory about her, but “only a memory of the results of this person, that is pleasant warmth in the stomach from schnapps and a sweet feeling of being full, like wise in the stomach, of cake” (*Women As Lovers* 66).

Paula gradually loses her interest in dressmaking. She does not see a future in dress making. Paula thinks that Erich will provide her everything in life, but he himself is not a successful person. He always thinks about engines, cars and motor cycles: “erich never thinks about paula, unless he has to, because she happens to be there” (*Women As Lovers* 58). But Paula is trapped in romantic mystique:

paula thinks about her cuddly soft son. paula thinks about a white hospital room. the very best thing that paula can think of, is how her family will regret the thrashings, which they gave her in a worse life. when the photographs have been taken, the family will leave the hospital room again as one man. after that erich will present red roses, which will not be dreams and shadows, but a dream that came true.( *Women As Lovers* 58-59)

Mediated versions of love and romance have taken away the clarity of thought from Paula.
According to Bartky, women have become docile bodies because they care too much about their external appearance and believe that a male panoptic surveillance system is there to assess them. The women characters try various methods to adhere to the beauty norms. The overimportance given to the external appearance is a result of the commodification of sexuality. Patriarchal world has succeeded in creating beauty norms which women blindly follow. A deviation from such norms never occurs to them because they are deeply conditioned in it. All types of medias propagate the norms regarding proper femininity. Thus, women try to be in a particular mode— a commodity— suitable for the appreciation of male gaze. Erika watches two girls at an ice cream parlour. Two of them are so much concerned about their looks and movements: “Both girls are well versed in feminine movements. Femininity pours from their bodies like small clean brooks. A plastic compact is opened; in the shine of the mirror, something is freshened in frosty pink, something is emphasized in black” (The Piano Teacher 58). Bartky has commented on such feminine traits of women which is the result of male panoptic surveillance.

Most of the characters in Jelinek’s novels are affected by the beauty myth. Cosmetic and Textile industry have a strong hold over women. They help women to make themselves more attractive towards the male gaze. Gabi in Greed is very much interested in cosmetics and modelling. She has taken photos of herself for amateur model competition. Jelinek shows Gabi’s
interest in cosmetics: “Gabi has accumulated a whole collection of eye shadows, mascaras, foundations and lipsticks, nowadays it’s pure stupidity, and ignorance, if four-year-olds don’t paint their fingernails, but they do it because there’s always someone else who has started, and so they do it, too: keeping pace with us and our realized behavior” (Greed 149-50). Even girls of small ages are attracted to the beauty myth. Erika is always interested in looking beautiful. But her mother never allows her to use any kinds of makeups. So inside her mind, she has created beautiful faces of hers which she can change according to the situation: “SHE thinks she is beautiful and gives herself a fashion-model face, all in her mind … She can change these faces at will; sometimes they are blondes, sometimes brunettes—gentleman prefer either. And she goes along with such preferences, because she’d like those gentle men to like her” (The Piano Teacher 81). Erika after falling in love with Klemmer starts giving too much attention to her external appearance: “Recently Erika has conspicuously adorned herself for Klemmer’s sake: chains, cuffs, belts, cordings, high-heeled pumps, kerchiefs, scents, removable fur collars, and a new plastic armband that rubs against the keyboard. This woman has made herself attractive for one man. After all, nature doesn’t get all gussied up when it starts mating. Only a few birds, mostly male, have enticing plumage, but that’s part of their normative appearance” (The Piano Teacher 202). Jelinek contrasts Erika’s new found interest in making herself up with other animals in nature. It is only among the human beings the
female ones give more importance to their appearance when they fall in love or search for a good mate. Nature’s rule is different.

The women who do not follow feminine traits are considered freaks by the society. Such a thing happens with Anna. Anna visits a psychiatrist for her speech problems, the psychiatrist on the other hand advises her to behave in a more feminine way. Anna wears only jeans and outsize men’s pullovers and ridicules other female students who dress up stylishly. Deep in her heart she likes to wear designer dresses. But her pocket money does not allow her doing so. So she despises all the trendy looks of girls in her schools and opt a manly dress code to make a statement of her attitude. The abusive parenting has made psychological problems in Anna. She has got bulimia. She sometimes loses her voice for days. As an adolescent, she has tried to deflower herself with an old shaving mirror and a razor blade. Her speech problems start when a group of mothers of her classmates in school complains to the teacher about her gross jokes. The psychiatrist is unable to find out the real psychological problem of Anna which causes her unable to speak for days. His solution for her is to stick to the feminine ways of behavior: “Why don’t you get something nice to wear and have your hair in curls, basically you’re a pretty lass and you ought to be taking dancing classes” (Wonderful Wonderful Times 10). She envies the blond looks of Sophie. Anna who feels physical attraction towards Hans wishes to be like Sophie, who emulates feminine qualities: “She reflects that now things are becoming serious she
would rather be sweet and blonde like Sophie” (*Wonderful Wonderful Times* 82). She thus tries to escape from her boyish looks and attitude to suit the patriarchal notion of femininity.

Gerti in *Lust* who suffers sexual exploitation for more than ten years spends huge amounts for designer clothes and accessories. She makes herself more attractive when she goes to visit her lover. Brigitte gives over importance to her appearance for Heinz. Through her looks, she wants to secure her future, which is Heinz: “now brigitte also takes care of her appearance for heinz, because if one is a woman, one can no longer turn back from this path, and one must take care of one’s appearance” (*Women As Lovers* 5). She deploys various methods to grab his attention. She colours her hair as ripe polished chestnuts to get his attention: “I love you so much, says brigitte. my gleaming hair supports my love” (*Women As Lovers* 25). Paula also gives importance to her looks like Brigitte when she finds her love interest in Erich. She wears her best Sunday dresses when she goes to visit him. She distributes sweets to kids in the consumer store to impress Erich. All these women take care of their appearances, dresses and attitudes to impress their love interests.

Brigitte, her mother and Paula in *Women as Lovers* are presented as workers in a bra making factory. Jelinek’s depiction of bra factory employees is not a coincidental thing. She draws our attention to a clothing material which has become an inevitable thing in women’s dress code. Bras have
become an emblem of femininity. The main aim of bra is to enhance the appearance of breasts to satisfy the male gaze. Brassiers are used to cover up, restrain and modify the appearance of breasts of women. For some feminists like Germaine Greer, bras are restrictive, uncomfortable and oppressive ones. They are just another tool of patriarchy to curb the freedom of women. Feminists who stood for female liberation in 1960’s directed a new form of rebellion known as bra burning movement. The things which made women mere sex objects such as high heeled shoes, false eyelashes, curlers, hairspray and bras were burned in a public demonstration to declare the liberation of women from patriarchal notions of femininity.

Nowadays Bra manufacturers commodify the looks of an ideal woman. They have classified the appearance of a woman’s bosom into categories such as flat, pointy, conical, push-up, elevated, natural and so on. They have succeeded in narrowing down women into mere sex objects. Like the material which Brigitte sews, which is used to confine the movement and freedom of a female organ so that it will suit to the male notions of femininity, she has confined her own individuality. Both her life and work are there to satisfy the masculine needs. She has no independent existence. She considers Heinz as her future. Witches in the earlier times were outcastes among women who never followed the patriarchal notions of society. Here a special type of bra-witch bra-is being made by Brigitte to satisfy the male gaze: “…brigitte sits at her sewing machine and stretch sews, feels form rubber and stiff lacy
borders under her fingers, the new little witch bra in the fashionable colour…” (Women As Lovers 8). Jelinek purposefully makes such a contradiction. Jelinek comments that “allegedly every woman, who puts on a bra sewn by brigitte, will feel like a queen” (Women As Lovers 128).

The society has a biased attitude towards the appearance of man and woman: “even if it is not so important for a man to be good looking, whereas it is very important for a woman, it is nevertheless nice if a man is good looking” (Women As Lovers 41). A woman has to be good looking in order to make an impression in the eyes of others. Her intelligence counts less. Man’s good looks are not the criteria to assess his value. In Paula and Erich’s relationship, their advantages and disadvantages are dependent on the gender of the person. Apart from the good looks, Erich has got advantages on his side because of his male gender: “too great is erich’s advantage because of his physical assets and his gender” (Women As Lovers 59). Paula is disadvantaged as an ugly looking woman: “paula on the other hand has to bear all the disadvantages of her appearance and her gender” (Women As Lovers 60).

In Wonderful Wonderful Times, Jelinek portrays the school going children’s attitude towards their relationship. Their viewpoints reveal how strong the value system of the patriarchal society is. Even as adolescents boys and girls are concerned about their society: “They (Boys) say what they did with girls at the weekend, in the basements (converted for partying) of their
parental homes, in their own rooms in comfortable apartments at Hietzing, in the woods while looking for mushrooms, or in a changing cubicle at the swimming baths. The girls say what they allowed to be done to them or how they refused to do it and how the boys begged. But they were adamant because they want to stay A Virgin” (Wonderful Wonderful Times 20). Boys brags about their sexual advancements while girls talk about the boundary lines they laid in their relationships so that they can remain virgins. For the boys it is like hunting a prey, while the girls adhere to virginity because it is a patriarchal tool to assess the feminine quality.

As children, Anna and Rainer have undergone the cruelties of their father Otto Witkowski. They have revolted against these cruelties by losing control over their bodily functions even in the public sphere. They deliberately lose control over their bodies and urinate and vomit before others. When they become adolescents, Anna tries to mutilate herself and engages in sex with hardly known people (classmates in her school) and Rainer thinks about incest. Later, the twins along with their friends take out their aggression on strangers, public property, animals and their own parents. They assault strangers as a group and loot money from them. They put a bomb in the school and luckily nobody gets hurt. Sophie is given the task to strangle a cat under water to prove her entry into violent acts. But whatever be the forms of aggression they perform, they are adapted to strong gender specific roles. It is evident in the way they attack people. Hans attacks strangers in a
masculine way: “As a man, he keeps to male ways of playing the game of violence: punches and treacherous, pile-driving head butts” (Wonderful Wonderful Times 108). He hands over the less masculine types of fights to girls in the gang: “He leaves the universally notorious kick in the shins to Sophie, who avails herself of it time and again” (Wonderful Wonderful Times 8). While Sophie is engaged in pulling out the hairs of that defenseless person, “Anna bites, scratches, and slaps away in true woman’s style...” (Wonderful Wonderful Times 202). Even though they are attacking innocent people, their acts of aggression follow gender specific formulas. Among the groups of men and women, the topics of discussion also vary according to gender: “over the coffee the women talk about the household, the appliances that go with it, the earners of the household money and the children. over coffee the men talk about football, football, work money and about football” (Women As Lovers 36). Women have discussions within the private sphere, whereas men always discuss about the public sphere. On her way to peep shows, Erika comes across fewer women and more men. Jelinek comments that it is a usual condition in the patriarchal society. Men rule out doors and women remain indoors. Women are always inside the four walls of home. They never come outside. It is an all pervasive condition. Their activities are given less importance:

More and more men cross Erika’s path. The women, as if having heard a magic formula, have vanished into the holes that
are called apartments here … Their inconspicuous but so
necessary activities are pervasive everywhere. Kitchen odors.
Sometimes the soft chattering of pots and scratching of forks.

(\textit{The Piano Teacher} 47)

The distinction between private space and public space is designed in such a
way as to relegate women to domesticity.

Jelinek argues that patriarchal society has developed certain value
systems and behavioural codes to keep the feminine sexuality under control.
In a patriarchal system, values assigned for man and woman are different. De
Beauvoir also points out the double standard of society: “She has no right to
any sexual activity apart from marriage; sexual intercourse thus becoming an
institution, desire and gratification are subordinated to the interest of society
for both sexes; but man, being transcended towards the universal as worker
and citizen, can enjoy contingent pleasures before marriage and
extramaritally” (454-55). Woman’s erotic pleasure is controlled by the
society, while man enjoys more liberty. Man’s moral lapse is often trivialized
while woman’s get penalization. Value system of the society is different for
both the sexes. Men like to flirt with women, but when it is time for
marriage, they usually like a woman who is an unused one: “…all of them
uninterruptedly need women and make use of them too, but they themselves
by no means want to buy an already used woman for further use”\textit{(Women As
Lovers} 15). Used women have little demand in a patriarchal society. If she is
with an illegitimate child, then her destiny is doomed. Men are hypocritical in their attitude towards women. They treat women as mere creatures whose value decreases, if they are sexually used by men. Irigaray also comments on such a situation in *This Sex Which Is Not One*: “The virginal woman… is pure exchange value… Once deflowered, woman is relegated to the status of use value, to her entrapment in private property, she is removed from exchange among men” (186). Men are arrogant about their masculine superiority because “the already used” do not refer to them in any way. The “already used” title equalises women to the level of a vehicle or any other commodity and takes away their value as human beings (*Women As Lovers* 15).

The double standard of the society is revealed in the condition of Paula. She is being treated as a stray dog by the village people. Paula is not allowed any kind of enjoyment because of her illegitimate pregnancy, whereas young men are praised for their process of sowing wild oats: “since paula enjoyed a forbidden pleasure long ago, she is not to be allowed to enjoy anything at all anymore. while everyone watches the process of sowing wild oats and locking horns by the young men and greets especially large knocked off horns with applause, paula walks silently home from the shadows” (*Women As Lovers* 134).

Paula is made a joke by the young men in that village. The saddest part is that even Erich is involved in that gang. The idea of mine has never struck Erich and he thinks that what majority does is the correct thing to do.
So he goes along with the group which pokes fun at Paula. The young men are after her passing comments on making sex. They do so because she is an illegitimately pregnant one and they do not have to bother about the child. The responsibility of the child would not fall on their shoulders because it is already another’s:

and the young men always walk right behind paula for the purpose of sowing wild oats. they want to sow their wild oats and plough paula at the same time, because it’s safe now. they certainly won’t have to pay for the child, but have some first class post-conception fun. erich can also be spotted right at the middle of the pack which hurts Paula. (*Women As Lovers* 135)

While “paula has no market value any more”, Erich enjoys the title of “grand impregnator” (*Women As Lovers* 145). Often it is the women who get all the humiliation in circumstances such as this. When she enters the bar to meet Erich, all the inmates treat her as a joker. She receives shouts, stamping of feet, whistles and applause. She receives no glimpses of respect, even though she is pregnant. The consequence of her one time act follows her wherever she goes. But Erich’s condition is entirely different from Paula’s. He appears among other men and lads as a person to be respected because he is capable
of making a woman an illegitimate mother. They congratulate him for his action:

until now everyone saw erich only as a workhorse, unlike themselves, who are all workhorses too, but don’t feel that they are. now everyone pays erich their respects with regard to cracking paula... congratulations erich, the free beers, free glasses of schnapps and wine, the free hair ruffling and free of charge rib pokes, and the jocular kicks up the arse for nothing really pile up. (Women As Lovers 144-45)

The stupid Erich becomes the centre of attraction because he has made a 15 year old girl pregnant and she follows him wherever he goes because she has no other option. Erich feels that he is a man of worth after the tragedy of Paula. He thinks that he has earned recognition and respect among his contemporaries through his act of grand impregnation. He considers it as a moment to enjoy because he has never had too much fun in his life. The tragedy of poor Paula does not create any kind of sadness in his life: “nevertheless it’s fun now to appear among the men and lads as a person to be respected… little man, very big” (Women As Lovers 145). Paula’s condition is worse than a stray dog. Jelinek comments that even apples will have grades according to its quality but Paula is not at all having any grade: “paula no longer has a grade such as even eating apples must have. paula has no market value any more” (Women As Lovers 145).
The double standard of the society towards the sex of the child starts from the birth itself. Paula wishes for a boy child because she believes that it will smoothen her level of humiliation: “hopefully it will be a boy and not a girl hopes paula” (*Women As Lovers* 147). But, (un)fortunately she gets a girl child. Paula’s parents threaten her that the girl child will lessen her chances of marriage with Erich. Paula shares her wish to learn dressmaking to her mother. But her mother discourages her by saying that no girl in her village “learns” anything: “that’s never happened before in the village, that a girl wants to LEARN something” (*Women As Lovers* 16). It reveals the biased attitude of the society towards feminine sex. Jelinek also hints at a system of the society related to wedding: the parents of the girl give various gifts to the new family. The author mockingly says that they are shopping for the daughter’s death: “…parents are going shopping for the daughter’s death: sheets and towels and dish clothes and a used refrigerator” (*Women As Lovers* 16). The girl child in the family brings extra burden to the parents because they have to spend lots of money for the daughter’s marriage. So in Paula’s village, the society considers boys as a fortune because they will bring money into the household through marriage.

Chastity and fidelity are weapons used by patriarchal society to keep women’s sexuality under control. Paula’s chastity is questioned by Erich’s mother when her aunt pleads her for permission to marriage. When Paula’s aunt intimates Erich’s mother about the necessity of the child to have a father,
she angrily responds about the purity and chastity of Paula: “who knows, whether erich is the dada at all, retorts the angry woman darkly, if a girl goes with one man, then if she has to she’ll go with several men. who knows, perhaps my erich isn’t the data at all, who knows” (Women As Lovers 156). Such humiliating remarks by Erich’s mother throws light on the plight of unwed mothers. In the eyes of society Paula is a bad woman. But Erich has no problem at all regarding his social acceptance. Nobody considers Paula as a human being. The society ill-treats her like an animal. Erich’s mother is not ready to believe that it is her son’s child.

Like all catholic marriages, Erich and Paula will have to undertake a premarital class. The author comments that during such event, Paula’s condition will be equal to that of dirt because she has already violated the rules: “before that (marriage) there is still catholic marriage instruction in that presbytery, where paula is treated like dirt” (Women As Lovers 159). The chastity concept is always in relation with the female gender. Men are exempted from it. Later in their life Erich easily gets divorce from Paula because of her prostitution. But nobody takes time out to find out the reason why she has turned into such a profession. His job as woodcutter is spent mostly for his interest in liquor. She chooses such a profession only with a dream of having a good apartment. There is not much option left for such an uneducated woman to fulfill her dreams. A man’s pride is of importance in a patriarchal society: “when a man’s pride is injured, then it is difficult to make
good again. a woman doesn’t need to bother with pride” (Women As Lovers 184). Erich’s indolence never counts in that relationship. But when Paula takes a deviation from the accepted rules she becomes a caste out.

Hermann is portrayed as a man full of lust. His pervert nature is visible when he mingles with the daughters of his factory workers: “At times the Direktor stops by and dandles the little girls in his lap. He toys with the hems of their skirts, ahem, and plays with their dolly tea-cosy dresses, isn’t this cosy, but doesn’t dare wade deeper in their waters” (Lust 72). He is interested in visiting brothels but the fear of AIDS holds him back. But he cannot accept the relationship of Gerti with Michael, so he rapes her in front of him. Otto is always suspicious of his wife’s fidelity. She cleans houses of others for meeting both ends. Otto doubts that she is having relationship with those strangers: “In the homes of those strange people there are strange men. For this reason Father roars like an ox being roasted alive. Mother won’t be spared, there’s nothing to protect her, constantly she’s kicked and knocked about” (Wonderful Wonderful Times 32). Margarethe always gets beatings from her husband for her imagined infidelity. He cuts the new apron which she sewed herself for using during her cleaning duties in other houses. He accuses her that the new apron will increase her sexual attraction. Her feminine qualities have to be minimized during her outside job, otherwise strange men will follow her. He always takes his anger on her. The twins have often heard moans of their mother from the bedroom: “All the son and
daughter hear of mother is a low moan, but that is enough to tell them that she is being beaten again for her marital sins, particularly infidelity. You whore, you whore, the moment my back’s turned you’re in bed with another man. And this other man is the businessman downstairs that I’ve been keeping an eye on. I won’t put up with these goings on for long though” (*Wonderful Wonderful Times* 137). Otto enjoys his position as the supreme head of the family and blames his wife for various reasons: “By telling her that her body bears an ever-increasing resemblance to a mouldy piece of cheese, or by pinching the housekeeping money from the china mug where it’s always kept and accusing her of squandering it on herself” (*Wonderful Wonderful Times* 34). Otto even accuses their own son of having an illicit relationship with the mother: “His son’s silence turns father nasty and he accuses him of incest, have you screwed your Mama too, when I was out slogging my guts out for all of you” (*Wonderful Wonderful Times* 140).

Otto, who accuses infidelity in his wife is a complete flirt. His impotency does not allow him to actively involve in extra marital relationship, but he spends his money and time to unknown girls. He sometimes takes his son to witness such incidents: “Father is already flirting with a strapping dark-haired can’t-be-more-than-mid-twenties at the next table, all on her own, he buys her a wedge of Sachercake with a particularly large dollop of cream and a glass of wine to go with it” (*Wonderful Wonderful Times* 141). The son feels
an urge to kill the father while witnessing such events. Otto does not repent about such actions.

Millett points out that “Woman is till denied sexual freedom and the biological control over her body through the cult of virginity, the double standard, the prescription against abortion, and in many places because contraception is physically or psychically unavailable to her” (54). Paula, the fifteen year old’s first time attempt at sexual experience makes her pregnant. She gets thrashings, blows and thorns from everyone in the family. They take various indigenous measures to kill the child in Paula’s womb: “Paula feels that she is being treated as unpleasant object and not as the human being that she is. If her parents had laid into a hard, unyielding object, they would probably even have cracked a wrist” (Women As Lovers 116). But it turns out to be futile. Women As Lovers discusses at length the problem of legitimacy in a patriarchal society. Paula’s illegitimate pregnancy is a big problem for the village people. Millett argues that legitimacy is a strong weapon in the hands of patriarchy to control the crucial functions of reproduction:

To insure that its crucial functions of reproduction and socialization of the young take place only within its confines, the patriarchal family insists upon legitimacy. Bronislaw Malinowski describes this as “the principle of legitimacy” formulating it as an insistence that “no child should be brought into the world without a man- and one man at that-assuming the
role of sociological father”. By this apparently consistent and universal prohibition (whose penalties vary by class and in accord with the expected operations of the double standard) patriarchy decrees that the status of both child and mother is primarily or ultimately dependent upon the male. (35)

The illegitimately pregnant mother gets the cruel treatments of the village people. When she goes to do the shopping, they throw stones at her. She is held as a bad example by mothers of grown up girls: “Often, when paula... goes to do the shopping in the village, little stones strike the back of her head, her arse, her stomach, her calves or the shopping bag, worst of all the shopping bag and in it the bottle to return, which gets broken” (Women As Lovers 133). Other legitimately pregnant mothers are excluded from all the household duties and enjoy their off season. They are provided all sorts of comforts by other family members. But Paula suffers ill treatments. Paula’s mother makes her do all the household chores. When Paula’s labour pain starts, she is not comforted by anyone because it is an illegitimate pregnancy. Only a woman with man’s security can ask for care and comfort during those critical times and others are exempted from such benefits: “if paula had a man, then one would comfort, pamper and calm her before the labour pain” (Women As Lovers 147).

The behavioural codes attributed to men and women are different in a patriarchal society. When Erika comes to visit peep show, men looked at her
like a “creature from another world” (*The Piano Teacher* 50). They yell things at Erika which she does not understand. The common concept in a patriarchal society is that female sexuality is only for the enjoyment of the male world. Women have no say in such a system. The entry of Erika into such a condition is unbelievable for them because the presence of the opposite sex to visit such a show is the norm there. Erika, who belongs to the same sex, perplex them and some of them even think that she should have spent time at a mirror in her home instead of coming here. Things which men come to see here is already in her possession.

The qualities attributed to men and women are always different in a patriarchal society. Cleanliness is always associated with women. The patriarchal society believes that female sex is naturally born with the qualities to keep things clean around them. Jelinek comments that the brassiere making company is very clean because majority of the workers are women: “in completely male factories sometimes something nasty is left lying around on the floor, without anyone immediately doing something about it. in the brassiere factory only pretty things are left lying on the floor, sometimes a piece of lace, a salmon pink ribbon, though that too is eliminated immediately... the women and girls vie with one another to be the first to discover a speck of dirt or dust or a stain...”(*Women As Lovers* 50).

In Jelinek’s novels women are noted for their lack of sisterhood among them. It is the divide and rule policy of the patriarchal society. In this regard,
Rich has asked women to form a sisterhood among them, otherwise they cannot shatter the superiority of male world. Paula’s mother treats her as a stray dog when she becomes illegitimately pregnant. But she forgets the fact that she has undergone such an experience earlier in her life. Heinz’s mother hates Brigitte because she is nothing, the daughter of an unwed mother. She is just a worker in the brassier company. She only knows how to sew a brassier. But Heinz’s mother was also in a similar state, with no money when she married her Van driver husband. She knows the helpless situation of Brigitte very well because once she also faced such a situation. But there is no empathy in Heinz’s mother towards Brigitte: “once, many years ago, heinz’s mother before she became a van driver’s wife, even before she became a future businessman’s mother, had been nothing and a nobody. so she knows this condition inside out. she herself is out of it in any case and old” (Women As Lovers 35-36). She makes Brigitte do various household duties, but she is not at all interested in accepting her as future daughter in law. Brigitte helps Heinz’s mother in the kitchen. She cleans their lavatory bowl. Even though his parents allow her to do the household duties like an unpaid servant, they feel embarrassed to present her as Heinz’s lover to others. Heinz’s mother hides her under the coffee table when his sister comes for a visit. They are embarrassed to introduce her as future daughter- in-law.

Brigitte gets a rival in Susi, whom Heinz has met at the open air swimming pool. Susi is a grammar school girl and her family has a bright
future. Heinz’s parents are interested in Susi because she offers a good future for him, whereas Brigitte has nothing to offer him. Susi goes to the grammar school to learn cooking whereas Brigitte goes to the factory to fulfil her piece rate target. Brigitte feels Susi as a threat to her future and fights to make her life safe: “brigitte cannot summon up any love for her fellow women, it has all been destroyed” (Women As Lovers 77). Brigitte is unsure about her own future. So she is unable to form any kinds of companionship with her fellow women. She takes all of them as a threat to her future. In Greed, Gerti is a silent victim of the murder of Gabi by Kurt. She does not inform the police about his cruelty. Instead, she goes back to Vienna and commits suicide. In Lust, Gerti is cruelly raped by Michael and his friends of both sexes. The girls feel no companionship towards the helpless state of Gerti. In order to secure her future safe, the mother in The Piano Teacher destroys her daughter’s life through over-indulgence and control. Nowhere in the novels, a positive companionship between women is portrayed by Jelinek.

Patriarchy conditions women to grow up without companionship among themselves. If women start sharing a strong bond among themselves, it will lead to the disintegration of patriarchy. Women are being taught to concentrate only in familial relationship which is needed for the perpetuation of patriarchy. The patriarchal rule can continue only if a Father/Husband/Man ruling family exists in society. Women are indoctrinated into heterosexual relationships through romance and marriage mystique in magazine, TV and
movies. The behavioural codes and values for both the sexes are different in a patriarchal society. Women have to follow strict rules in relation to their sexuality in a hegemonic world. They have to be modest maidens and chaste women most of the times while men are free from such titles. Women have become docile bodies in a male panoptic surveillance system. They are strongly conditioned by beauty myth and try everything to suit the male gaze. Textile industry and Cosmetic industry have a strong hold over women. Women try to be commodities by adhering to the pseudo beauty principles to satiate the male hunger. Thus, they live without self worth and self reliance. Apart from the self committed actions of women to turn themselves into commodities, there exists a market where a direct selling of female body takes place. Pornography is an area where the extreme commodification of female body is present. Porn movies and peep shows sell female flesh for the erotic pleasures of the male world. The objectification of women present in such areas creates false notions of masculinity and femininity in younger generation. It aggravates the female subordination. It enhances loveless sex in couples and leads to the cruel treatment of women under their partners for their erotic pleasures. Man-woman relationships are disintegrated into the level of a consumer/commodity in a patriarchal capitalist society. Women need to be indoctrinated about the commodification of female sexuality to free them from the clutches of patriarchy.