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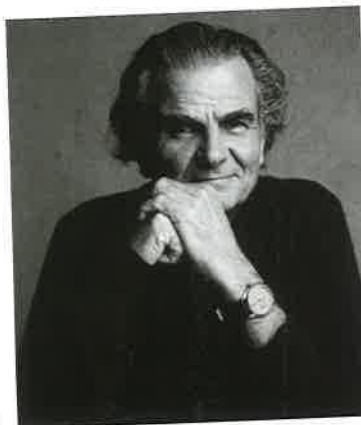
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## Contributors



### Patrick Demarchelier

Demarchelier and Luigi Murenu, the hairstylist whose work he shot for "Romance, Novel," balance each other perfectly. "Patrick is a master photographer, while Luigi is a little edgy," says *Allure* creative director Paul Cavaco. Demarchelier thinks about his collaboration with Murenu in egalitarian terms: "Classic beauty is beautiful. Modern beauty is beautiful. Every kind of beauty is beautiful." "Patrick Demarchelier: Part II" is now at the Staley-Wise Gallery in New York City.



### Rebecca Mead

Mead, who wrote "Unzipped" about *Fear of Flying*, Erica Jong's 1973 novel of a woman's sexual liberation, compares the book to an unexpected best-seller: "You can draw a parallel between *Fear of Flying* and *Eat, Pray, Love*," says Mead. "Both were seized upon by women who recognized themselves in the stories. And they're both about figuring out what your version of freedom is—even though it's through different means." Mead's *My Life in Middlemarch* (Crown) comes out in January.



### Nicolas Moore

Guy Bourdin's provocative photographs from the 1970s were the basis of Moore's images in "Technicolor Dreams." "Bourdin's characters look very consistent," says Moore. "His hair and makeup were a strong sense of inspiration, so I used mirrors on the floor to magnify [model] Crystal [Renn]'s face." Where some critics find darkness or even violence in Bourdin's photos, Moore sees beauty. "His women seem much softer than his contemporaries', like Helmut Newton's. There's a delicacy or femininity to them."



### Elizabeth Siegel

For "Zero-Effort Hair," Siegel interrogated hairstylists about their best quick tricks. And as it turns out, *Allure*'s senior beauty editor is a beauty MacGyver herself. "Once when I was going to a wedding, I put coconut oil in my hair so it would dry smoothly," she says. "I used so much that I looked really greasy." With no time to rewash, Siegel remembered that the alcohol content in hair spray soaks up oil—except she didn't have any on hand. "So I ran tequila through my hair like a serum. It totally worked!"



# Unzipped

More than erotica, less than a manifesto, *Fear of Flying* captured the spirit of the sexual revolution—and still hasn't lost its punch. By Rebecca Mead

**I**n the early 1980s I was a high-school student with a love of literature, a love I shared with a small knot of friends. We recommended novels to each other: the works of D. H. Lawrence or F. Scott Fitzgerald, celebrated classics that we were discovering for the first time. But one morning, one of our number arrived at school with a discovery of a very different sort. She'd laid her hands on a copy of *Fear of Flying*, the best-selling novel by Erica Jong, which had been published back in 1973 to scandalized acclaim. My friend unloaded her textbooks into her locker, self-assuredly tossed her hair, and went on to enlighten me and our group about something called the "zipless fuck."

The details of what she told me are now a bit hazy, but I distinctly recall that it involved a train, a tunnel, a mountain, and uncomplicated, anonymous sex with a fellow traveler whom one would never see again. I did not know what to make of this idea. At 15, my minimal sexual

experience had involved an awful lot of zippers. (I grew up in England, which has a cold climate at the best of times, so there was a lot of grappling through anoraks.) And sex seemed to be necessarily complicated: How could it be otherwise? It was rife with risks—the risk of heartbreak, the risk of pregnancy, the risk that by doing it or not doing it one could be forever deemed either slutty or repressed. Furthermore, what I aspired to was not an anonymous encounter but an actual boyfriend—someone who would stick around when the train emerged at the end of the tunnel, someone who might even want to get off at the next station with me. A rushed coupling, however frictionless, with a stranger seemed much more alarming than alluring. Why would anyone even want such a thing?

I didn't actually read *Fear of Flying* until 20 or so years later—you think there was ever a copy on the shelf at my local public library?—and by that time I had realized that this was not, strictly speaking, a book about having sex with strangers on trains. Certainly many of its millions

of readers scoured it for the dirty bits, but unlike *Fifty Shades of Grey*, the erotic best-seller of this moment, *Fear of Flying* gave expression to women's liberation rather than merely supplying women's titillation. At the time of the book's publication, Jong's heroine, Isadora Wing—a 29-year-old Barnard grad, already staidly married but hungering for erotic adventure—served as a representative of a generation of women whose lives were being transformed by feminism. According to a 1975 story in *Newsweek*, Jong was among “the map-makers of the new female consciousness, sending back firsthand reports on the real—and hitherto unmentionable—terrain of feminine experience.” Some influential readers felt that the territory the book uncovered might be better left covered up; television networks pointedly declined advertisements for the paperback.

**B**ut other readers welcomed it as a way to understand women, and to understand themselves: It became a textbook in college sociology courses and a tool for marriage counselors to help troubled couples work it out or find their separate paths. Among women who were active in the feminist movement, the success of the book was both a vindication of their cause and, in some ways, a disconcerting distraction from their ongoing quest for equality. “Newspaper and magazine feature writers and literary critics were always telling us that this book was our manifesto, or that person was our leader,” says Susan Brownmiller, a feminist activist only a few years older than Jong, who in 1975 published her own influential book, *Against Our Will*, a treatise about rape. Brownmiller remembers *Fear of Flying* as impudent and funny—something her own book had no aspirations of being—and Jong as blonde and gorgeous. Jong was certainly ready to embrace her celebrity, and thereby to give voice to a movement whose members might not have shared her personal pizzazz. “It was the right book for the moment,” Brownmiller says now.

The timeliness of *Fear of Flying* meant that within just a very few years of its publication, what had felt revolutionary about it seemed more or less obvious: By 1977,

Sally Quinn could write in *The Washington Post* that the book hardly seemed shocking any more. Canadian newspaper columnist Arthur Johnson, writing a year later, remarked that the sexual braggadocio of female writers like Jong might initially have had a certain novelty, given the deficit of literature that looked at sexual pleasure from a woman's angle. But, he also suggested, the genre was already becoming tired, and in a few years would only be of interest to “very young, very unworldly women. Boring. Locker-room stuff. Kid stuff.”

To some extent, of course, Johnson was right: Women who came of age in the '80s—women now in their 40s—encountered Jong's book as an illicit text when they were still half the age of its heroine or younger. Elizabeth Gilbert, the author of the best-selling *Eat, Pray, Love*, first read it as an 11- or 12-year-old, while babysitting. “It was in the babysittee's house, on the mother's bedside table,” Gilbert says. “I snuck bits of the novel every time I went over to babysit, after the kids were in bed.” Gilbert's new historical novel, *The Signature of All Things*, centers around a nineteenth-century female botanist who is given to secreting herself in a closet with a scientific book that outlines stimulating varieties of sexual taste and activity; Gilbert's own reading of *Fear of Flying* was no less furious. “What I remember most about reading it is the burning and urgent sensation that the door was about to open, that the parents of my young charges were about to come home, and that I was about to be caught reading an absolutely filthy book,” she says. “I can remember every detail of the view of the front door of that house, as I glanced up at it from the couch every few sentences, terrified of being busted. I remember my shame and nervousness—and that door—far better than I can remember anything else about the novel. Except the word ‘cunt.’ That I remember clearly.”

But if the critics of the 1970s were right that the book would become kids' stuff, read by precocious preadolescents like Gilbert or curious adolescents like my school friend, they were wrong in their assumption that the sexual revolution it heralded was irreversible. For those of us who came of sexual age during the advent of AIDS, casual sex didn't look so much like a route to liberation as it did a potentially perilous trap. If you were 18 in 1985 or 1990, sex seemed to have less to do with *Fear of Flying* than it did with fear of dying.

## Cover to Cover

Zippers and airplanes and breasts, oh my. The book's design has changed over the years, but certain themes emerge.



Women of Jong's generation may have been thrilled by the way the novel spoke to them of their own struggles, but the daughters of those women grew up in a different climate, with different priorities. The divorce that seems to be an essential element of one's freedom if one is a 29-year-old trapped in an unhappy marriage has quite different implications if one is that frustrated wife's child. Jong's own daughter, Molly Jong-Fast, a novelist and memoirist who was born in 1978, has written memorably of growing up in a town house painted pink and decorated with erotic art. As an adult—and after a stint in rehab when she was 19 years old—she has made more conservative choices. Jong-Fast was married at 24 and a mother of three by 30, and she prefers to dress, as she has written, “like the Orthodox.”

**J**ulie Klam, another novelist who grew up with free-spirited parents, also reacted against what *Fear of Flying* represented. “My parents would walk around naked, and I was dressed in three turtlenecks,” she says. Though the book was prominently displayed on Klam's mother's bookshelf—she remembers reading the word “fuck” on the flap copy at the age of six—Klam didn't read it until the '80s, in a women's-studies class at college. “I was a little weirded out by the sex,” she says. “Because even though it was groundbreaking in 1973, by the mid-'80s things were back in the closet. I hadn't read a lot of books about men's balls.” (A sample from an early chapter: “His penis... is the tall red smokestack of an ocean liner. And I am moaning around it like the ocean wind.”)

To many women born around the time it was published, *Fear of Flying* seems almost quaint in its pre-occupations, and dated in its delivery. “It seems written more out of manic impulse and less out of genuine emotion,” says Lizzie Skurnick, the editor in chief of Lizzie Skurnick Books, an imprint devoted to reviving forgotten young-adult literature. Skurnick is exactly the same age as *Fear of Flying*, and feels it hasn't stood up well to the test of time. “If a friend told me these stories, I would just think she was going through a crazy stage,” she says. And if you're a decade or more younger than *Fear of Flying*, there's a good chance you haven't even read the book: It no longer feels essential, as it did for women in the '70s, or surprisingly raunchy, as it did in the '80s, or necessary for an understanding of second-wave feminism, as it did in the '90s.

If you're 30 or younger and you *have* read the book, it might appear to be a peculiar document of a long-bygone age—even if the behaviors it celebrated have, in some sense, become pervasive. Rachel Syme, a New York writer who was born in 1983, says that for women her age the notion of a zipless fuck is a familiar one, even if it's now referred to as a hookup. “My generation might have been one of the early ones to engage in what is now a very

common thing, college hookup culture,” she says. “Before us, even though there was a lot of experimentation, most people were expected to find a relationship. But when I was in school, that was never an expectation. The idea was that you would sleep with people, and nobody was bound to anybody.” To Syme, Isadora Wing's fantasy of deliberately unencumbered sex “didn't feel like a radical new concept. That is what everyone was engaging in.” Whether such behavior serves women's interests in the long run is an open question: Syme knows a lot of women who are smart and powerful and unhappily single. “Our generation has really internalized the thing that our mother's generation couldn't,” she says. “I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing.”

But even if the form that Wing's yearnings took now seems dated and her choices problematic, there is something about *Fear of Flying* that remains perpetually relevant. That's the question of what a young woman should do with herself: how she should reconcile her own ambitions with the dictates of society; what place, if any, the traditional themes of love, marriage, family, should have in her own life. These are themes that preoccupied the greatest novelists a century and a half ago—George Eliot in *Middlemarch*, Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre*—and they remain as pressing today as they ever were.

*A rushed coupling, however frictionless, with a stranger seemed much more alarming than alluring.*

Novelist J. Courtney Sullivan says that it is this dimension of *Fear of Flying* that struck her, rather than what she calls the “cringe-y” sexual descriptions that gave the book its notoriety, when she read it almost a decade ago at the age of 23. “What really impressed me was Jong's wit and wisdom on the issues of marriage and family, gender, and—especially—the writer's life,” Sullivan says. “The main character wanted to be a novelist, and so did I, and a lot of the issues Jong raised felt very much alive and relevant.” And in this sense Jong's novel might still resonate with any young woman 40 years after it first appeared, because it's about being a young woman who aspires to a more meaningful, fulfilled, contented life, whatever form that meaning, fulfillment, and contentment might take. Women are still fearful—fear is an inevitable part of life—but we also still want to fly. ♦