



SINISTER WISDOM



the rape our lack of language:  
last night Boston November  
the river flat pewter veined with light

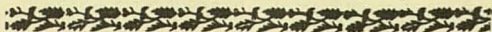
"you can't write poems about sunsets, the ocean, or love"  
explained my Expos teacher freshman year

prick

*sunsets are nonlinear* Isis  
squats over the water Her  
thighs opening Her  
great angry Uterus heaving writhing  
bloody scarlet streams of clouds  
sun splitting sky birthing dying  
curved over latitudes  
to a different dawn

a different set of suckling stars.

-Susan Leigh Star



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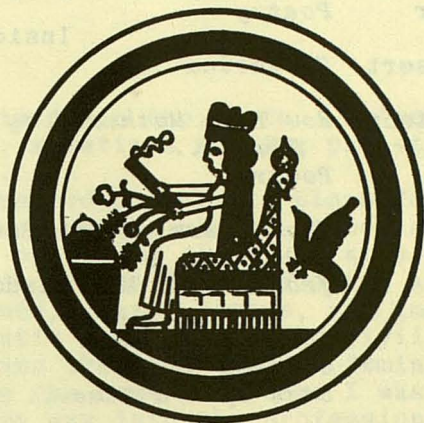
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# SINISTER WISDOM

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TO PROSPECTIVE CONTRIBUTORS:

"Deadlines" are the lifelines of a magazine. Our lifeline for the third issue is December 15, 1976.

We welcome ALL forms of material that develop the vision of *Sinister Wisdom* (see "Notes" on pages 3 and 27). Please do not submit poetry that is unrelated to the creation of a revolutionary lesbian imagination in politics/art. (We're overwhelmed with fine poetry, and we must choose according to content.) We need line drawings.

Right now we pay contributors with a year's subscription. However, as soon as we're able to cover production costs, we'll publish a rate schedule for contributing writers and artists.

We protect your work with copyright, but all rights revert to you. We would like *Sinister Wisdom* credited when work is reprinted.

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# Harriet

## NOTES FOR A MAGAZINE I

### The Editors:

We're lesbians living in the South. We're white; sometimes unemployed, sometimes working part-time. We're a generation apart.

Catherine directed university plays for twenty years until the spring she pasted on her office door: "You are a witch by saying aloud, 'I am a Witch,' three times, and *thinking about that*. You are a witch by being female, untamed, angry, joyous, and immortal."

I was an erratic activist in the civil rights movement, the Left, and then the radical feminist women's movement. During the same ten years I was first a student, competing my way into the professional classes, and then a wife/stepmother, having settled on marrying in.

Between us we span the political/cultural abyss. Catherine is vulnerable to criticism from writers, artists, and heads of English departments. I'm vulnerable to all criticisms couched in Marxist terminology. We're both quick to perceive or imagine slights on our motives or abilities.

A nightmare reveals our fears: Catherine dreams that she wakes next to me. I'm holding slides of mutilated bodies and soundlessly screaming. Catherine looks up at the blank TV. A single open eye stares at us from the screen.

So why take chances? Because we needed MORE to read on, to feed on, more writing to satisfy our greedy maws. We'd become lesbian separatists because no other political position satisfied. But that left us with scattered beginnings of a culture and no viable strategy. We believed with the CLIT papers that consciousness is women's greatest strength, and we both responded strongly to Mary Daly's call for "*ludic cerebration*, the free play of intuition in our own space, giving rise to thinking that is vigorous, informed, multi-dimensional, independent, creative, tough." But how to think that keenly and imaginatively, how to develop that consciousness?

We knew how far we'd come with each other. We'd given each other the strength to let go of illusory "safe places," those toeholds the patriarchy offers women who deny themselves and other women. We'd talked and talked and set fire to each other's imaginations until, with the help of other lesbians, we were spinning visions and digging more and more deeply at the roots of our experience as boundary dwellers. Thinking about our past together, we decided to do with numbers of women what we've done best with each other; we decided to extend the love affair with *Sinister Wisdom*.

*Sinister Wisdom* is also our political action. We believe that writing of a certain consciousness has greater impact when it's collected, when several voices give weight, harmony, and countermelody to the individual message. The consciousness we want *Sinister Wisdom* to express is--briefly--that of the lesbian or lunatic who embraces her boundary/criminal status, with the aim of creating a new species in a new time/space.

We're using the remnants of our class and race privilege to construct a force that we hope will help ultimately destroy privilege. We have the freedom for a year to edit and produce a magazine. We're paying for and controlling the contents of three issues. When someone sends us \$4.50 anytime in the following year, they'll receive the three issues of Volume I. THAT'S A BLOOD PROMISE. If contributions of money and labor materialize, we'll continue for a second year, a second volume of three issues.

-Harriet Desmoines

None of the women who contributed to this issue knew what our vision was. They had only an ambiguously worded leaflet; most had neither known nor heard of us. Contributors should not be held responsible for the politics of the magazine. Nor should Issue I be taken as a definitive model of what you might want to submit for future issues.

For coming, coming, Coming...see p. 72.

The title *Sinister Wisdom* was suggested to us by a line in Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), p. 70.

# Julia

## A CURSORY AND PRECURSORY HISTORY OF LANGUAGE, AND THE TELLING OF IT

Today I offer my words to the women who created me in love and in life, in our lives, of whom I am and will be in this life. This is my telling of our history, of how I dreamed it, of how we came into our own sayings.

*(the men) say that they have said, this is such or such a thing, they have attached a particular word to an object or a fact and thereby consider themselves to have appropriated it. The women say, so doing the men have bawled shouted with all their might to reduce you to silence. The women say, the language you speak is made up of words that are killing you. They say, the language you speak is made up of signs that rightly speaking designate what men have appropriated. Whatever they have not laid hands on, whatever they have not pounced on like many-eyed birds of prey, does not appear in the language you speak. This is apparent precisely in the intervals that your masters have not been able to fill with their words of proprietors and possessors, this can be found in the gaps, in all that which is not a continuation of their discourse, in the zero, the 0, the perfect circle that you invent to imprison them and overthrow them.*

*(Monique Wittig, LES GUERILLERES, p. 114)*

Winter Solstice, the year 400 of the Age of Women. The time of processes evolving themselves out of what has been. The women emerging into the light, out of the earth that had sheltered them for 200 years. This is the story of one woman and her going-out, the story of what she knew and carried within her, bringing her past to the future.

The "feminist solution" had come easily, as things do, when everyone had relaxed and stopped stumbling over themselves. As usual, the solution was the easiest and the most obvious, and had been within reach forever, but no one had seen it. We had been looking off into the distance for so long that the obvious was easy to miss, being obvious. And the analysis of the feminist situation came even easier.

Energy. That simple. Women had energy. Men, *lords and masters of the earth*, as they'd like to call themselves, with typical presumption, had indeed been "masters" of a simple trick of manipulation which had given them the control of energy they needed to maintain their "ego-strength." During the dark centuries known as the Time of Men, they had learned to tap into energy sources. They had learned to draw the huge quantities of energy they required from the earth, water, fire, sun, and atom. Most importantly, they had learned how to draw energy from women. The major difference, however, between the energy of women and other kinds of energy was that the energy of women, *psychic energy*, couldn't be stored or controlled. So men had put the women in little boxes, which they called "houses," restrained the power of female energy with monogamy, channeled that energy into maintaining the nuclear family, and plugged it in a direct line to male supremacy. This insured that every man would have a life-long supply of one woman's psychic energy to support him in his struggles with other men. No man had to earn such support; it was his as a result of what some called "divine right" and others called "survival of the fittest." Fortunately, men didn't live as long as women, so we had a few years to ourselves as we prepared for our dying. Now, without that permanent source of psychic energy, men were about as powerful as dead storage batteries or burnt-out light bulbs. And the analogy will hold if you work it out to its conclusion.

Now, some have insisted on asking *why* women, if they were so strong, even in those days, went on letting men harness them and use them without resisting in some way. Some have even gone so far as to suggest that this *lack of resistance* proves the "inferiority" of women. After all, how could any person be *stupid* enough to remain trapped for so long? Which is only one way of asking a ridiculous question, a pseudo-question. Women did not "fight back" because they didn't have the energy to construct alternatives for themselves. They had learned to be content with living, breathing, and caring, each in her own way. It was the women, after all, who maintained living, who nurtured, who fed, who clothed, who created the "home." They had not yet realized that they could nurture and feed each other, and they rarely begrudged their giving to these weaker creatures who seemed to need nurturing so much more than they did. Consequently, there was no "battle to be fought." Women smiled, encouraged, and sometimes wept, and went on being women, although they began to wear themselves out trying to fulfill the needs of men. (Men required tremendous quantities



of energy.) You could always spot a woman who was connected to men in those days, especially toward the beginning: they began to age quickly, usually within three or four months after accepting the male. They would develop a harried, haggard look, severe lines around the eyes and mouth, and their eyes would become clouded with pain and frustration. In the latter days, women began to turn to each other, and the effects of living with men became clearer to everyone, because these woman-loving-women, who had as little as possible to do with men and their tiring games, looked fuller, healthier, somehow more alive and self-satisfied.

The men, meanwhile, went on about their "business," making more "business" for themselves, setting traps and springing them, breaking them, putting them back together. Of course, part of the arrangement that pleased the men the most was called "the double standard," even back then. Women were taught, usually by their mothers, that they were to love only one man forever, and it usually worked out that way, because the women didn't have the time or the energy for exploration. The men, on the other hand, were free to "raid" other women of their energy, as long as no one noticed that they were draining more than one woman. In fact, having more than one woman for energy was a great source of pride to them, since it proved that they were "manlier than other men," and they loved to boast of their "conquests."

At any rate, once women began to love themselves and each other, they awakened and realized what had been happening to their lives, and they started to move together, what they called "a movement," a moving in and out of each other's lives, and it was only a question of time until they came to know each other, and the future began to happen. Therein lay the solution, although no one knew it then, looking back on the events that we now see to be inevitable. Energy being energy, it will always flow in the direction of least resistance. You can cut channels for it, as the men had, channels like "marriage," to make it move easier, but energy will flow with or without the channels.

What sparked those first feminists was the fact that men had begun to take themselves seriously, actually believing that their pretensions and pomposities were profound and important events! They thought they were NECESSARY!! They began to believe that they were self-perpetuating, and it finally reached a point where they had plundered and pillaged, ravaged and raped, not only the women, but the earth, and each other. It became clear that the energy was running low, because men *used* a lot of energy, but they were

physically and psychically incapable of *returning* energy to its source. They never put anything back into the resources they were using up so quickly, and things got worse and worse, and the men became dissatisfied and irritable as they had less and less energy with which to propel themselves, and they didn't understand what was happening. They didn't think there was anything to understand.

The feminists, all this time, went on having meetings where everyone disagreed about everything imaginable, talking and arguing with other women, putting out a lot of energy and getting a lot of energy from other women, which they called "consciousness-raising," learning to love themselves and each other, and learning to do all the things they had believed they couldn't do. Nothing seemed to make sense, and then all of it made sense, and they continued to become what they were becoming. They were getting ready for what was going to happen, preparing themselves for living in a new world coming around. They had ceased to oppose the ordering of the men, had realized that opposing, the act of opposing, drains energy, creating its opposite, lack of energy. They had learned that opposing a thing merely feeds it and strengthens it, giving it a reason to continue itself. Instead, they withdrew into their centers, forcing the men to oppose them, to drain themselves in the idle activity of battle *against*, while the women began to live *for*. The women, growing toward wholeness, began to understand that opposition is itself: *opposition*. The men, in their appropriation of the world, had defined identity *as* opposition. The women, in becoming themselves, began to create identities out of themselves, on a new ground. They refused to oppose, for opposition merely validates that which it negates. Now, none of them knew how to live differently, but they came to understand that whatever was coming around would grow out of their lives, and they knew that "dissent must transcend the status of negative identification." They had to create the future out of themselves.

The feminists went underground all over the world, moving into the large networks of underground caverns, taking with them their psychic energy, leaving the men to their own violent devices. They took their power into themselves and transformed their lives. Because things that are going to happen, will happen, women gave their energy to each other, which meant there was no depletion among them, and the men destroyed themselves on the "horns (so to speak) of their own dilemma."

When the women began to withdraw more and more noticeably, in increasing numbers, the men didn't know what to do. But they tried everything that could come

into their one-track minds, and all they could think about was "how to get the women back." What is a man without a woman? So they stormed, they threatened, they raged, they killed, and finally, they begged, pleaded, and, yes, even wept. To no avail. We'd heard all the lines before, maybe phrased a little more subtly, but a line is a line!

Things went back and forth for awhile. It took anywhere from three to five years in those times for a woman to be born to herself again, and even today we're still sorting through, getting rid of centuries of bondage and drainage. Those of us alive now will never be whole, but we'll die on the way to regaining our full womanpower. Others, who come after us, will be the women we aspire to be.

Back to our story. The women began to leave the men, singly at first, then in twos and threes, often waiting until nightfall to slip away to the nearest underground group. The men couldn't find them, although they tried. Even if they had been able to find them, there was nothing they could do to accomplish their purpose, getting back the women. This was their dilemma: they needed the women in order to continue to do the things they had always done; but all they knew was violence and hatred. In order to get the women out of the caves, they would have had to blow the caves up, thus killing the women, thus destroying the very thing they were after. In their anger, they would have destroyed the women who were the targets of their anger, and the reason for the anger in the first place. All that they knew how to do was fight and coerce and destroy. Even their promises were transparent threats. Therein lay the paradox, the consequences, and the solution. Since men needed women for psychic energy, they couldn't risk destroying them. Without women, they had only their own negative energy, and in one, last, desperate rage, they turned their negative energy on themselves, blowing themselves into eternity. Leaving the earth, such as it was, to the women.

And we learned and grew together in the caverns, reclaiming the powers we had put aside and denied, learning much together of joy and wholeness. Learning again to love, creating from our loving a language of feeling, of movement, of growing. The language of women loving became a language of sharing love, a speaking of minute sensualities and flickering tongues, a language that expressed our thoughts and feelings, quick things, languid things, but alive and changing.

The language we had learned in the world of men, the language we had brought with us to the caverns, gradually fell away from our minds. Its rigidity, the inflexibility of its categories, its need for classifi-

ication, were no longer sufficient for the things we were experiencing. We no longer had space for dichotomies and abstractions, for as we outgrew dichotomies, we found we didn't need abstractions. Our eyes became alive, and our language formed itself out of our perceptions of distinctions evolving within us and around us. We no longer needed that peculiar fusion of opposites in expressing our joy or our disappointment. Words that had once served the dual functions for describing our sexuality and our feelings of rage or disgust began to drop out of usage; we did not need to speak of being fucked, screwed, nailed, or ripped off, nor did we have any use for the strange combination of violence and sex that we had learned from such words. As our understanding of change grew out of our own changes, so our use of time began to change, and we understood how the present was the creative evolution of the past blending with the possibility of the future. And our language gradually developed a time in which our memories of the time before and our hopes for the days to come blended and fused.

In the caverns, we learned to explore silence, both what it had meant to us before and what it might come to mean in our understanding. In the old days, before we had come to know ourselves, we had felt uneasy within our silences, the silences that often come among people. Then, our silences had been painful, uneasy obstacles that we tried to leap with words; but our words were empty, not carrying meanings to ourselves or others, because we were afraid of our meanings, of our feelings. Because our words were empty, we would throw them into our silences, trying to fill our silences with noises, chattering teases, lips and tongues struggling toward meaning, but our throats tensed to strangle any meaning that might slip through our defenses. We had carefully been taught to excise our thoughts and feelings from our spoken words and, in the process, we came to realize how we had falsified our words and our silences, thereby betraying ourselves. We had filled our silences with words that pointed *away* from our center, and the awkward silence into which we had hurled our useless words had remained, full of the strain and tensions of our unexpressed motivations, expectations, and fears. And that jostling crowd of what we did not say became the air we breathed.

As we grew in knowing ourselves, we put aside the language we had once cherished for its ambiguities, although we had called those ambiguities "subtle nuances." We had once been proud to speak a language in which we had no means of speaking our meanings clearly, even to ourselves. First, we had to discover our meanings, and out of that discovery grew a language

that expressed them clearly. As strength dissolved our need for fear we began to explore our silences, which came to satisfy us as rest and the fulfillment of meaning. We learned to speak only when there is meaning in our words. That was the hardest thing we had to learn, so many of us did not know we had meanings.

The language that evolved out of our learning together was a language of acting in the world, rather than "events"; it was a speaking of our living, not our "lives"; of our doing, not our "deeds"; of our touching, eating, tracing, dancing, of moving, not "motion," of dying, not "death." The nouns of men became our verbs, what had been "objects" became doers. The abstraction, the labeling, the classification, the imposing of a fixed, external order was no longer needed. "Love," "death," "honor," "dignity," and "trust" were expressed in our living together; we did not need to speak of such things as though they were unreal, fragile. Through the verb we entered into the world and began to understand the other beings in the world as they lived. We began to learn to participate in the world, to move and grow with it, and so our speaking became our meaning in the life of the world.

There is a story we still tell for the joy of the telling, of a group of women who once gathered together, and some of the women called for words from the other women, and out of these words they wove a chant, and the chant became a singing together. And one woman yelled out the word *anarchism*, which was then woven into the fabric of the chanting, and in the chanting that word became *orgasm*, going on.

Accept this telling of me as it is of you. We belong to ourselves. Feel the power that is yours swell and lift within you. It is yours. It is you. It is all of us. Womanlove self-creating womanpower within us. Take your power into your hands and lift them up, your power living in you. Let us join our hands together in strength and in love, the radiant power of women. Let us speak the language of our living.

-Julia Stanley

*I have trouble writing about myself in the first person. I'm always writing either about myself or to myself, but most importantly, I write out of myself. So it's hard to write out of myself about me writing out of myself. (Am I making myself clear?) Other women often ask me WHY I write, WHY I engage in the activity of putting my words down on paper so that other women will read them. It's a good question that I can't answer, and I often ask myself the same question. I think they want to know "who the hell I think I am" and "why do I think my ideas are important enough to be committed to paper." Again, I don't*

know the answer(s). I do know that things happen in my life that start things happening in my head, and then I start to find it hard to know where I began and where I'm going, and I start to write it all out of me, which forces me to really listen to myself and what I'm saying. The act of writing creates an organization (when I get lucky), and I can then examine my thinking and what's going on in my head. When I'm writing, I'm hard at play with myself.

Now, you may say, it's all very well for you to talk to yourself by writing, but WHY publish the results? If I'm explaining myself to myself, what makes me think that anyone else is interested? To be honest, hardly anyone is interested. But a few are. All of us talk to ourselves. Some of us write, others paint, or write poetry, or sing, or dance, or act, or meditate. In each, the primary activity is the talking to oneself. Communication with others begins with talking to oneself. (Maybe this is the reason males can't communicate with others--they don't talk to themselves, and spend vast quantities of time talking at or about others.)

Finally, I believe that every speech act involves personal risk on the part of the speaker or writer, if she is being honest with herself. And I believe that taking this risk is necessary and healthy. If I choose not to expose my thoughts and feelings, I am safely hidden. I can also hide behind language, but I try not to. The writing of my fable, "A Cursory and Precursory History of Language, and the Telling of It," involved great personal risk, because I also believe that trust must be based on a demonstrated and consistent correlation between one's words and one's actions; and I cannot yet match my own actions to the words in the fable. As I wrote the fable, and as I spoke it at the GAU conference, I was shaking, shaking because my self was "on the line." I was frightened, and I am still frightened when I read it, because I cannot match my words. But I was writing out of my self, writing of a self that does not yet exist, a self that has not been born. But I am engaged in dialogue with her.

-Julia Stanley

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# Leigh

*for Jeanne d'Arc, burning*

in the end  
the fire is all that we will see.  
already its glow shames my fear of death:  
I close my heated eyes,  
smote against  
Her indigo sky.

(listen  
I have found another of us)  
our life the struggle torn  
and melted, wounds suspended

she too has trained to burn in silence  
who moved in dry and aching quiet  
who loves with deadly grace.

At every rape  
at every stake  
incessantly whispered into  
incessantly scraped across  
each of our body's sacred openings  
moment by moment for all the days of our lives  
We hurl molten suns  
and slide and tear to kiss  
containing movement  
and slowly finish screaming:  
We rip ourselves  
into each other's blood,  
a union of liquid and blazes  
burnished with aloneness

*there are no echoes anymore in what is named love*

I speak her name clearly into your eyes

ashes melting: out

of the flames, unraped eyes  
there was never

a time when  
we did not know  
the stakes  
are high

our silence whole

you cannot hear a scream

we also wound by naming

for which we have no language we  
also wound by naming tear  
open to  
heal

tigre mariposa\*  
we do not fear  
your winged  
poison your petalled  
poise of  
death  
for some

---

*\*literally, "tiger butterfly"  
in Spanish; the most deadly type  
of Venezuelan snake, whose bite  
is alleged to kill in thirty seconds.  
"Mariposa," it may be noted, is  
vernacular for Lesbian.*



now poised to perceive  
with my arched uterus.

a great arc  
stretches from your eyes  
through my spine  
across which the faintest  
rustle of thought  
rocks my cervix my center with  
tremors which are not  
different from the nuzzle  
and bulge of the moon

Artemis

slipper perfect silence travels between us  
who knows how long I waited to feel  
to see to hear  
as a panther walking  
picks her way  
across a shelf of thin crystal glasses:

your hands lurk with that quality  
soft searing pulses  
poised

---

*Susan Leigh Star is a name I chose for myself--taking the first two which are my birth-names and the last from a special Tarot reading in which the Star came up as the card of self/highest ideals.*

*My writing first of all is divided up sharply--a reflection of "them," not us--between poetry and social science theory. It's easiest for me to conceptualize the difference in terms of right brain-left brain activity: writing my thesis in psychology, for example, meant days of linear, slow connections--"logical" by the male definition of the word. Poems come in an instant, for the most part; they "brew" for weeks or years in some section of my right brain and then burst forth in a very nonlinear fashion. But there is some sharing on each side (the creative flash in theory writing or the slow reworking of lines of poetry to make them "talk" right), which gives me a hope of integration someday. I cherish both modes for myself and would like to see them appear together in my work and in my world.*

*I live in Somerville with March, who is often the subject, sometimes the object, and always a participant in my writing. We are radicallesbianwitchspiritualsexualpoliticalpersonal feminists, none of which labels can beat my favorite characterization of myself as a true deviant. (True deviants do not deviate from any norms--and, therefore, another name for us is "normal.")*

-Susan Leigh Star

# Ellen Marie

## CHRISTINA

"Christina" is a work that has a lot of emotion attached to its writing and to writing for me in general. As an undergraduate, I was the only woman in the "creative honors program." Although I had been writing longer, living harder, etc, I was the only student and thus the only woman whose thesis (a collection of poems) did not get passed. One month later, I was being awarded the first short story prize for an early version of "Christina." That year I was enormously confused and wrote a second chapter. With these two, I was admitted into a graduate program in Creative Writing--in fiction. In the first few weeks of class, I was told my work was boring, too close to the bone, and with a titter--"pornographic." Later I was teased about it to the point of humiliation for the class' amusement. Out of my strong sense of injury, rage, and feminism, I worked to create 13th Moon, a literary magazine publishing women exclusively.

It was two years before I was able to look at "Christina" again. As a friend helped me gather the confidence to work, I keenly regretted having been so cruelly excluded from learning a craft I wanted to know. It is now a very great joy to me that Sinister Wisdom, a women's publication, has chosen to publish this work.

-Ellen Marie Bissert

---

I have few friends and few social obligations during the holidays. I am aware people are gathering in mid-town and I feel ashamed to be alone. I begin a trip toward an island with long beaches of rotting shellfish. I know I am going home but I don't know where I'm going.

I meet a childhood sweetheart or facsimile. I am again high-strung and virginal, he tense and plodding. We ride again the train we rode. It is now going in the opposite direction. It had been filled with warm morning sun; now I stare numbly through the grimy barred windows at a littered, flattened landscape. We pass turn-of-the-century stations painted in fluorescent colors, then stations painted in somber ones. In this section we leave the train and go to a small garden with tables and chairs. It seems to be a private restaurant. A man, resembling a neighbor famous for

his windows lined with cactus plants, waits for us to order. We don't. Still patient the waiter says to my companion, "You want to marry her because..." He winks and taps my companion's head.

I get up and walk very quickly to the station where the train is about to pull out. I catch it with desperation. Inside the car my skin quivers like a rope about to snap. I feel again the cold sand penetrating my legs. Again I smell of his damp hands after he had urinated in the weeds.

As soon as I arrive at my mother's, I go to the store. While I am traveling on the bus, some boy begins embracing me, saying how soft and how especially clean I am. He stops abruptly and asks if I am a Catholic. I snicker to myself--once a Catholic, always a Catholic. Thinking he is a fool, a Catholic, and a boy, I endure it because it is expected of me.

I get off the bus to go to the record store to buy a phonograph needle. I see a man behind a counter surrounded by records through the glass. When I walk inside, there is a dark, empty room with a bed in one corner and two young girls on the other side of the room. There are no windows and that boy is in the bed. He calls me over and begins the same line. He doesn't realize he can dispense with his seduction. I understand how I must adjust to this situation and am anxious to have it over. Yes, I will go into that bed with him with those girls in the room. I don't care if they titter and secretly masturbate while they watch. I don't care if these fragile, unbroken girls are the virginal "I." I just want to buy that needle.

There is a police raid. Before they break in, the boy lets me go. I escape to my grandmother's tenement house. My new apartment is next-door to hers. My door faces the basement which opens to forgotten voices. This is the very apartment to which my parents returned when I was five, doe-eyed and stringbean legged. It is warm and dark in the living room which overlooks a hexagonal courtyard. The kitchen is next to it and overlooks a garden. I have moved so impulsively I have no curtains. I am afraid to go out and buy them, but I am even more afraid I may again see the faces of animals and animal-like people grimacing at me.

It is Saturday night and I begin cleaning the kitchen. I think of the cucumber seeds which became a nest of roaches, of the mouse my father killed with a coat hanger. A large rat approaches me as I sit on a wooden dolly with my legs tightly closed, waiting for them to let me through the window.

I go to the hardware supply store for something I have been needing quite badly. I go by bike in shorts. I look thirteen but I am older. This is because I am not wearing the clothes I want to wear or riding the bike I want to ride. I am in the discipline of expedient compromise. Still I scold myself for not having given myself the pleasure of cycling before or at least sooner after my green racing bike was stolen. As I get closer to the store, I become apprehensive. I don't like it. The very second I leave my bike I become aware of myself as a body that is expected to look one of a certain number of prescribed ways which is Girl. I become sweatier as I move toward the store. My clothes are bands tightening around me. "Supposin' to be a girl," resounds from every pane of glass where I must reflect myself as Girl.

Everyone thinks that this store has everything and is everything, but its panes of glass are splattered with mud from the store's uncultivated plot. The insides of these panes have been painted black and reveal me to myself with sharp, unflattering clarity. They say, "Yes but no no." I almost forget how to stand and walk.

It has stopped raining after a long downpour, and the sun is shining fiercely on my skin because I have been washing too much. I am now raw to blister. The twelve panes of glass I must go by to get to the door chatter, scream, and hiss, "supposin' to be a girl." This is a men's place and I cannot belong. In it I must be Girl which means I must be checked and evaluated in every mirror and every reflecting surface. In one mirror, "You are too short and fat" is repeated ten times. In the next, the shaping of my eyebrow is discussed--each hair, its history, my gestures toward it, its tweezing, its follicles, its relationship to my metabolism, my social, my sexual life. An analyzed history of each of my cells is given for my ultimate perfection, for unless I am perfect I will not become Woman.

After visiting fifteen mirrors I feel I am going to faint. But this would prove me even more ugly, gauche, and stupid. I want to die but my rage saves me. This is all unnecessary. I have told myself these things before.

A man comes over and asks me what I am doing in the store. I can't remember. I become so anxious I feel I am going to sweat the two of us into a puddle. With effort I tell him I am looking for a part to something. He laughs at me and goes away. Then another man who is or who looks like my father takes me into a cool gray bedroom. He is tall, cool, and ascetic like the room. I have wanted this room and its colors. I have wanted such a man.

Later when we walk out of the room, I am covered with excretions while this man remains clean. He looks like my father. Have I been sleeping with my father? Surely it can't be. It is unlikely he could have created such an elegant room. But like my father this is a realistic man, addicted to inflicting the facts of harsh comparisons.

He brings me before a poster of a very fragile, fawn-like woman. This is what I am supposed to be like, dress like. He places me at an angle with the picture's glass to juxtapose my image beside hers. I want to kill myself. He is delighted I am so quick to understand and with the exuberance of one whose ego has been deeply gratified conducts me through a complete tour of his posters. At the end there is a hold-up during which I am taken to bed by a gangster. He, too, drags me through his gallery. He demands that I become one of his buxom poster girls, for these are the real women and making love to one of them is to experience Sex.

Finally I am thrown downstairs with the Women. I am now at a ball where everyone except me is formally dressed. The men hand me over to the Women as if I were a beast which they occasionally fuck. I am accepted for the men's sakes.

These women are what I once thought I wanted to be. They will transform me into Woman. Slowly they encircle me. They are about to rip my genitals "supposin' to be a girl."

In a medium-sized room I am eleven years old. I am with people older than I and have talked with a half-dozen of them without leaving the golden sofa. At first I think this is cowardly of me. I try to get up but I am so weak I cannot move. My limbs are small and underdeveloped. The night progresses and I grow bigger while people talk with me. At the end of the evening I am a plump seventeen year old.

Perhaps for this reason I get invited to the next meeting where I am the only female. I am not particularly bothered about this at first. I feel very strong and have had a good dinner so I will be able to maintain myself. I do so without adding to the self-important arguments. At 11 o'clock my yellow dress grows brighter. I am pleased I have not let the situation give me a headache. I then see one of the men whispering to the other. "She looks young, flat and ugly but she's a mean fuck." I stiffen. These are supposed to be my colleagues, not my prospective lovers.

They laugh with each other. It is as if I were invisible. I hear Miranda's name whispered and see the leer in their eyes. They have all slept with her

but cannot admit that not one of them has been able to give her an orgasm. They were nothing to her.

Through their lust, I see their sickly flush of impotency. They do not seem to know I am Miranda's first lover.

They begin to discuss their affairs with other women, congratulating themselves on the number. I try very hard to control the smirk on my face. I have slept with more women than any of them.

I am smoking with the confidence of a man with a large stool-like cigar when it is suddenly my turn. I am unprepared as I have been fantasizing caressing Miranda. The remark upsets me and denies Miranda her orgasm by twenty seconds. I am so confused I cannot speak. There is a riot and the lights go off.

I am in a narrow, black room with some boy. I am thirteen and my body is in delirium. My stomach is bloated and my limbs are painfully thin. A 300-watt bulb glares five feet above my head and illuminates my every physiological defect to this sweaty, pimple-faced boy. For him I am supposed to be perfect. He begins to kiss my neck while he manages to whisper how I should make up my face, wear my clothes, and walk down the street. I use him to take me behind the staircase the children climb to say their prayers. My mother is meeting a lover and I am in the closet with this boy, trying to watch her undress. As I poke my head from behind the door, her lover sees me and slams my head against the wall. My mother runs out in her bra and screams when she sees that my glasses have been smashed into my eyes. My reflection in the vestibule mirror amuses me. I am rewarded with a blindness dark and warm.

The next day somewhat recovered I enter my mother's room. She is pretending to be sick and to have had her legs permanently disabled. She is about to blame me when she seductively takes her legs out of the covers and sees they are fine. She passes the mirror to me and I see that my neck is full of cankerous sores and my nose is stretched over its base. I laugh then leer at her as she dresses herself in front of me. It seems the more aware I become of her stupidity, callowness, and conceit, the more beautiful and voluptuous she becomes. I am so beside myself I run from the room.

Later at a hamburger stand, I walk around without letting anyone see my face. Overheard remarks confirm my opinion of myself as being tall, thin, with onion-white skin. Only at this time can I eat hamburgers. I get two for my mother and myself and am able to make six out of the two. My mother is pleased with my cleverness. When I give the burgers back to have relish added, they are taken away. I tell my mother

who jokingly laughs that food is not the only pleasure in life. I look at her carefully and ask, "Why don't you just kill me?"

My girlfriend and I are eleven years old. It is early summer and we have had our first experience of menstruation. Both of us are beginning our cycles, and we have a strong romanticism about ourselves as women. My friend is blonde with finely freckled skin. Her arms have fair down as does her entire body. Next to her roundness I feel angular and coarse. Fortunately she is ignorant of my feelings. As we walk through the forest lush with goldenrod, thistles, ferns, and varicolored mosses, I am anxious. Her innocence annoys me. I live in my head and face, but she barely seems to be anywhere inside herself.

When we arrive at the home where we are to babysit, the children rush out to greet us. Their parents leave and we have lunch of chocolate egg-nogs and tuna-fish sandwiches. Within the chocolateness of milk and the saltiness of mayonnaise I feel safe. I eat until I am full.

After lunch we walk with the children under the willow trees. There is no breeze. It is a still afternoon with a harsh midday sun. When it is time to go back, I realize I must approach that house without her. I must sleep alone in a strange bed in a blackened house with crying children. I dream I see her white naked torso. I dream I am sixteen and must walk into twenty-one. I must walk all night into the day when I will be twenty-one and woman.

Through a gloomy, moist forest with cool wet ground, I am thin to coltishness and am wearing an Egyptian necklace. The voluptuous night breeze does not terrify me, and as I walk my necklace becomes brighter. I hear a voice announcing "It is now time for the virgins to go to the temple to give themselves to strange men. You cannot leave until you have done so. Some of you because you are attractive will return quickly, others never. You must go now to become women."

My body begins to tremble and as I walk through the city's gates, the forest goes white and I fall. Dirt is forced into my mouth and lungs. I am covered with a whitish sticky substance. I vomit into my crotch.

I go to the northern section of the island where there are piers and factories and where I have to walk through the alleyway of my childhood where flies buzz around the carcasses of mutilated rodents and where tailless cats prance about them. I am again that child about to leave home.

As I walk down this street, I am looking for the address where I am to apply for a job. Before I get there I must pass through a park where children smile to each other sinisterly as they sit in groups of four and five under the trees. The girls insert the prickly seed ball of the sycamore tree in and out of their vaginas while alternating another fruit about their necks, breasts, buttocks and clitorises. The boys split the balls and make cones. They walk around with the cones in hand trying to put them on someone else's penis who once caught is spun about by his organ. Although the children are not undressed, their genitals are available for easy caress or assault. Several are having anal intercourse under the beechnut trees and their exposed buttocks look like pale stones in the sun. When I pass them, they watch me indifferently.

Before I reach the piers, I wander into a deserted storefront with a broken window whose pieces are scattered beneath the ashes about the room. It is the gray November of the twenty-third century and the fog is coming off the bay. This is my new home.

I go to bed with food on the table. No sooner do I fall asleep when the phone rings. It is a painter friend of mine who wants to meet the next day to discuss some project on which we are both involved. Somehow in the course of the conversation I become aware that I have not eaten chicken for five years. The point of my friend's conversation is to convince me I must now or at least very soon prepare chicken. I open the refrigerator and a chicken is sitting on the top shelf defrosted. Almost as soon as I begin to clean it, the phone rings again. It is my friend or a mutual friend of ours saying that the meeting is at 10 o'clock at my painter friend's house in the Heights. I say yes, yes I will try to get there on time. As I walk back into the kitchen I become exhausted. I realize that only if I go to bed now will I be able to get enough sleep. I shuffle into my bedroom and collapse into my bed without taking off my clothes.

The next morning I walk into the kitchen and see the chicken in the sink. Immediately I think of the roaches eating and laying eggs on my uncooked chicken through the night. But because the chicken cost me five dollars, I repress my revulsion. I decide to clean it and put it in the refrigerator to prepare when I return. But before I can even begin washing it, the phone rings once more. It is my friend. She says I am already very late and I should come over at once.

I rush out of my apartment and into the subway station. A train comes in about twenty minutes. I ask the conductor if I should get on this one. He says yes but I know he is wrong. I let the train pass.



While I am waiting, I realize I am still wearing my winter coat although it is the beginning of summer. I then see the girl who was once the beauty of my hometown traveling with her mother. I am surprised Iva is still unmarried. She always had her choice of boyfriends. Without her being aware, I study her. She still looks like a Scarlet O'Hara with her heart-shaped face, narrow shoulders, full breasts, small waist, and short thin legs. Her eyes flash tauntingly and her smile leers in contemptuous provocation.

Since Iva is going into Manhattan, the mother and daughter seem to have decided Iva should look as sexy as possible. The mother has always wished her daughter to marry a rich man or at least one who could support them in comfort. Iva always chose her boyfriends as she wished but now it seems Iva realizing her youth is fading is willing to carry out her mother's schemes. And today could be the one that Iva meets that nice rich man who will irresistibly be attracted to her. With her mother's help, Iva lifts her yellow tank top and removes her white bra exposing her large breasts with long brown nipples to an appreciative audience of middle-aged men.

The train going to the Heights arrives and we get on together. I know they are going the wrong way but I cannot bring myself to tell them. Iva is flirting with the men on the train thinking they must be rich since the train is taking them into the city. I feel sorry the train is taking them to the Heights and even sorrier I have again left the chicken in the sink. I move to another car passing the mother coaching Iva from the nearest corner.

My mother sends me a picture from my childhood. She sends me a picture of myself as a chrysanthemum. I am near my grandmother's garden. I look out of the window to it. I see Iva. I see two dreams spelled out in granite blocks in the garden. One dream suggests Iva wants to sleep with the boy who is now standing in the doorway. It says there is a train and a woman and the woman stands so the train goes over and over. The first dream says I am a chrysanthemum girl. As I go to the picket fence to read these dreams I see a rabbit. I make amiable noises to the rabbit who draws nearer. As I draw nearer to the window to get it some food, it finds a carrot in the grass. It seems pleased. I am delighted the rabbit now has a carrot. I go nearer to it. My mother is in the house and moves toward the window. She says I am a chrysanthemum girl. My dog, who has grown longer legs, a bigger face and longer back, comes to meet me with an apple she has picked from the garden. The sun is moving underneath the trees. I try to assure the rabbit that

the dog will not hurt it. The dog is a pony. A pony does not chase a rabbit. We walk toward the second half of the garden. I read the dream that says a train now runs over and over a woman who won't let it stop. This is Iva standing in the doorway across the yard kissing her boyfriend, who is exposing her breasts to caress them in the afternoon sun. I am eating an apple while I walk out of the garden with my dog. The rabbit has run away. My mother meets me at the gate with a picture of me as a chrysanthemum girl. I am not a chrysanthemum. I am not Iva. The chrysanthemum girl only exists in her mother's mind and Iva in her boyfriend's arms. I am neither.

A friend returns from an extremely painful abortion. She comes back to me in my alcove adjacent to a monastery which overlooks a bend where two rivers merge. I am somewhat annoyed that from my window I cannot see the river, the sky, or the monastery where the monks flagellate themselves at the third, sixth, ninth, and twelfth hours of the night. I want to watch their bare backs lashed in the open field to the right of the chapel beside the bend.

I turn from the window and glance at my apartment as I sense my friend's approach. She will be the first person to visit this apartment. It is dark less from want of paint than from a lack of a certain quality of spirit that would require cheery surroundings.

My friend comes into this rarefied atmosphere approaching me with such energy I am thrilled. I am happy to see her and relieved to know she is still alive. I am somewhat taken back when she kisses me and sticks her tongue into my mouth.

As she fondles my breasts, a group of our friends arrive. I try at once to stop her and to stall our friends from coming into the room. Both are impossible. The doorway is covered with a dark heavy drape and our friends merely announce themselves before they push it aside and burst into the room. They find me undressed attempting to remove my friend's bloody winter coat.

It is Saturday night and a friend is willing to go with me to my doctor's. My doctor practices at night and I have come to survey his patients. It is about 8 o'clock when we arrive. Shortly after a young woman comes in dressed in blue jeans and an army jacket. She is about twenty-five with green eyes and black hair.

We talk about the problems of finding a good doctor. She agrees that there wasn't much we could do except come back to this one whose treatments, hours, and personality were at best eccentric. She is then called in.

My friend and I are quiet after she goes into the examining room. Because only a curtain is covering the door, my friend can easily overhear. He tells me her symptoms are the same as mine--headaches, fatigue, nausea, and insomnia.

Another woman enters. She removes her hands from the pockets of her pea coat as she tells us she paints houses, rooms and boats for a living. I am so fascinated by her hands, I can barely listen. Her very long fingers and white hands make me feel weak. I go up to her and caress them. I cannot let go.

Suddenly the room is very crowded and everyone gets on top of us as we lie on the secret bed underneath the table. Her body is as soft as her hands. I can't think. The pressure of her breasts against mine is so pleasurable I am almost nauseous with its sweetness.

When everyone goes into the doctor's room, she takes my hand and leads me outside to the park. There has been a fierce rain and the ground is wet. She takes me to an antique car with a high dashboard and we sit on the stone wall near the car. Once again she permits me to caress her long thin fingers. She then walks over to the car and lies down beside it, motioning me to come near her as she unbuttons her jacket. I cannot. I cannot lie down naked on the cold concrete in the middle of winter on wet leaves to make love to even her. I do not understand why we cannot spread ourselves on the fallen leaves under a tree on the hill. I cannot tell her because I want her too much.

My friend comes over to us and gives me a hug. He then looks at the woman lying on the wet pavement. She says with irritation, "I was trying to show her how to get high on engine grease but she's too dainty to lie down on the concrete." My friend takes my arm and walks me back into the doctor's office.

I board the train that will take a ferry which in turn will bring me to an island. Instead the train goes over a bridge parallel to the amusement park where I was born. A storm is raging and the waves pound the shore with such vengeance it is as if I were watching a cartoon where the waves hit the beach like a great fist. I am about to laugh when I see the bridge collapsing. Instantly we reach the park where the sun is shining.

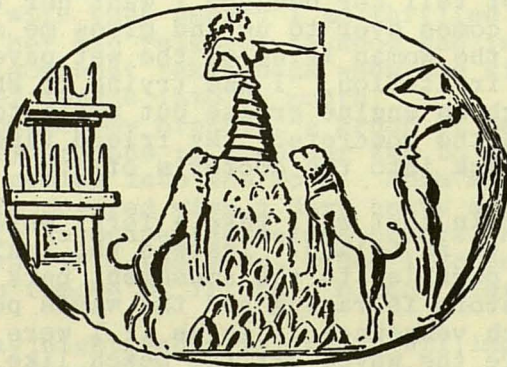
I phone a friend to tell her I am walking down to the far end of the beach to meet the very highest waves. I am very anxious to ride them. I can barely stop myself from undressing as I am talking to her and as I continue to walk to the bathhouse.

The bathhouse is a large Grecian building with multiple sets of steps which have been washed by the waves that have left purplish sandy residues in the corners. The sand has a livid, ominous quality. As I climb the steps I realize I am in a country where the women perform unspeakable acts on each other with their small beautifully tanned bodies.

I change quickly with them in the common dressing room. As I go out of the building, I turn my ankle on the staircase and the waves beat their purplish foam up to my step. The waves continue to rise and ebb for about a half hour while the sun is beaming mercilessly.

When I finally get to the beach, it's cloudy. The women warn me there are giant eels in the water. The water is killing the eels. Even as I watch the eels thrashing themselves to death on the shore, I cannot believe the water can kill. As I move closer to the shoreline, I am overcome by the stench of the eels dying on the shore.

-Ellen Marie Bissert



The Title:

We call our space *Sinister Wisdom* because the root meaning of "sinister" is "from the left side." The Law of the Fathers equates right-over-left, white-over-black, heterosexual-over-homosexual, and male-over-female with good-over-evil. *Sinister Wisdom* turns these patriarchal values upside down as a necessary prelude to creating our own.

The left, the genuine Left, means revolution. We choose "sinister" because we mean, we intend revolution. Revolution that destroys the structures of oppression as we seize power over our own lives.

And the left side connotes intuition, the bringing into light of all that has lain dormant within us. Six months ago I wrote this about the right and the left in a letter to lesbian friends:

*The right side, the analytic side of my body, is as deadlly as it is necessary for my survival. From its vantage point, I trust no one, least of all myself. When I rest alone on my right, when I lie on the cutting face of the double-axe, I center in death. From the center of my own recurring deaths, I recognize the deathdealing of others--each moment the oppressor denies the oppressed, each moment the oppressed deny themselves and each other. Remembering her knowledge of who's-doing-what-to-whom-when makes a drastic dyke drastic; remembering distinguishes her from humanists, mystics, and liberals.*

*From another vantage, looking at you and at myself, we unfold into animals breathing, huge as the universe and reflecting a universe in our eyes. From the left side of my body, I can barely form words to describe what my mind knows as flux, what it senses as streams, the flowing we are alone and as we converge. Everything living and hoping breathes in my left side; it's the dark only spring of ecstasy, love, and will. From the left side of my body, I hold you. From the dark part of my head, I know you without the words to say it--some intimately, some by flashes only.*

Finally, a sinister wisdom is reversal. Show the underbelly, praise the underbelly, and the beast rolls onto its back. Thereby baring its throat to the fangs of the Furies.

## Who-o-o-o is a Lesbian?

The content of *Sinister Wisdom* grows out of a lesbian consciousness. Lesbian consciousness marks a style of the body: a leaning toward women; it marks a style of the mind: the female mind swung like a winnowing fan, sifting the chaff of terror for the broken remnants of grain. (The winnowing fan was used not only to winnow grain but also as a cradle for babes and the fruits of the earth. In Demetrian cults it symbolized purification and rebirth.)

But lesbian consciousness is also a process that begins long before a woman comes out and is never completed, only strengthened and enriched. No one lives with it all the time. Personal example: I couldn't do this magazine if I weren't a lesbian. The energy and the vision come from women--and the loving needed for working. But there were moments and pages before I became a lesbian when I anticipated. Some few times, still living with men, I wrote out of a consciousness characterized by sinister wisdom. And there are times now, whole days often enough, when I'm straight and stupidly scared in my head. Consciousness, its spectrum and its process, cuts across even the divisions of time and identity.

Consciousness expressed in printed work has its own peculiarities. Compare a magazine to a concert: lesbian music played for lesbians generates higher energy than lesbian music played for a general women's center audience because the energy and art of the music come into being somewhere between the audience and the performer. Words, too, come into being somewhere between the writer and the reader, but the immediacy of group emotion is lost and has to be carried by the communal nature of the language. Any lesbian reading *Sinister Wisdom* reads probably alone or in a group of her own choosing, and her experience is not affected by the possible fact that at the other end of the continent a curious feminist, husband clutching her arm and babe clutching her skirt, is skimming the magazine in a bookstore. A magazine is not a poetry reading; it's a public document, not a public event.

Not all the women who subscribe are lesbians; we don't think that makes this any less a journal devoted to the creation of a lesbian imagination. And we do think that creating a specifically lesbian imagination in politics and art is the most important gift any woman can give to all women, whether it's recognized as a gift or not. A consciously radical lesbian is a radical feminist with "oomph". The consistency of her politics does NOT make her morally superior, but it does give her freedom to imagine and freedom to lead. She has broken

the Big Taboo, freely chosen Monsterhood; she's thus better able to call up and focus energy.

(Heterosexual behavior is so ritualized that it requires enormous energy for a woman to retain independence in a marriage or an affair. And the single celibate woman, if she holds herself back from being touched by women, loses the energy that's generated by stroking, the physical acts of caring that give a woman support in a world intent on breaking her spirit. Many lesbians are notoriously energetic for good and simple reasons. And most lesbians exist outside the structural locus of female oppression: the family.)

Not all the women who've contributed to this issue are lesbian-identified. In part that's because many women who write or draw work ahead of themselves; they prophesy. There's a tentative license (easily revoked) to put forbidden parts of oneself on paper, as long as it's called "art." (Why else do you read things in women's poetry that you don't find for another five years in their political statements?) Now, what we mean by "lesbian consciousness" is really a point of view, a view from the boundary. And in a sense everytime a woman draws a circle around her psyche, saying "this is a room of my own," and then writes from within that "room," she's inhabiting a lesbian consciousness. Each woman represented in the magazine is moving outside patriarchal culture. All are boundary dwellers; it shows in their visual language and in their words.

*Sinister Wisdom* speaks primarily to and for lesbians because most feminist boundary-dwellers are lesbians. We didn't conjure up that fact, as a check of local militants will show; we simply want to recognize it as a fact. But *Sinister Wisdom* also leaves the ninth door ajar. (This is a queer, enticing little door at the end of a narrowing passageway.)

#### Class:

The only real intellectuals I've known personally, people for whom ideas are bread and wine, the sustenance of their lives, have been people from the working and lower middle classes. The people in this country with the greatest reverence for the power of the word have been rural Southern Blacks. The most moving poetry and music written in the United States roots itself in the rhythms and passion of the original Blues singers, the daughters and granddaughters of enslaved Black women. We don't think we're being "classist" by wanting the most beautiful and articulate writing we can lay hands on. We insist on the political relevance of philosophy, scholarship, drama, experimental fiction...all that has been claimed by those who want to keep "the masses" ignorant.

As lesbians, we know with only a moment's reflection that our lives are our art, pregnant with revolution. We who have fallen between the rungs of the class ladder know that we need an art that makes art of survival, that song alone makes labor in isolation bearable, that theory for us is never abstraction but a thread spun out of our bellies to guide us through the labyrinth.

Yes, we want art and yes, we want theory expressing the depths of lesbian experience...but with emphasis on the words of the lesbian who is without Daddy-privilege, without resources, the lesbian who faces each morning a renewed battle for food, shelter, and pleasure. She's reality-check.

### Racism:

A central part of our vision has been to exorcise the unconscious and therefore most deadly forms of racism in the feminist movement. But here we are with Issue I, birthed white as the day is long. Meridel Lesueur said this about a white woman and an Indian woman: "The two women had lived a parallel life curiously knowing each other, but the Indian was the knower. something in the white woman willed not to know...willed to evade the final knowing."<sup>1</sup> And so it is with white lesbians.

We need material from Third World women, especially Third World lesbians. We can't do what we set out to do without it. We're not asking for support, we're not asking for endorsements, we're asking for SOMETHING TO PRINT.

These names off the top of my head: Audre Lorde, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and before them Nora Zeale Hurston. Have these women not come closest to a new language that is sensuous and intellectually powerful and female in its voicing? Who has travelled so nonchalantly onto the edge as Toni Morrison in *Sula* where, with a flick of her wrist, she renames good and evil? Third World women tend to be more firmly ensconced in the consciousness of the boundary dweller. At this point I feel no shame in saying who my Muses are.

"They say, take your time, consider this new species that seeks a new language." (Monique Wittig)

We are lesbians; we are boundary-dwellers.<sup>2</sup> How do we manage to survive/subvert/create on the boundaries of patriarchal reality? Boundary space by definition is a boundary relation: we exist in the interface between a death culture and the faint beginnings of a culture of--not humans--but life-lovers, a culture that embraces animals, plants, stars and those women who choose the future at the risk of their "sanity" and security.



To avoid cooptation, our moving center must remain in the new feminist time/space, despite our necessary relation to that which is still dying. Our aim, the immanent logic of our practice, must be to create ourselves, a new species with power of presence to each other and power of absence to the old, the patriarchal. The distinctive mark of a new species will be new *ways* of thinking. We will speak in mermaid tongue, the renewal and transformation of a once universal language.

Language begins with its subjects, the ones who speak. To begin again is to begin within the body/mind of the woman who speaks to women. But the only words to hand are the words of the male body, the only known heritage a trail of blood. In *The Lesbian Body* Monique Wittig centers in this historical contradiction and spins a way out. She splits the French subject *je* because it is implicitly male. "*J/e* is the symbol of the lived, rending experience which is m/y writing, of this cutting in two which throughout literature is the exercise of a language which does not constitute me as a subject."<sup>3</sup>

After tearing apart the body of male language in order to constitute herself as *herself*, she sings the words of the female body, spinning out of her viscera a lesbian universe. "...let those who call for a new language first learn violence."<sup>4</sup> Wittig fires the old bones; a phoenix leaps from the ashes...the crimson purple female tongue.

The Bakweri women of Cameroon<sup>5</sup> also exercise a kind of violence--the power of absence; they constitute themselves as non-human mermaid women, generating among themselves a magical language which expresses the subjectivity of the female and the animal. Mermaid language is the vehicle and sign of their bonding together as a sisterhood on the boundaries of the male-dominated village.

The Bakweri are a small Bantu-speaking people living on the slopes of Mt. Cameroon, the highest mountain in West Africa, an active volcano rising next to the sea. The patrilineage controls residence, the inheritance of land and cattle, and political office. But, though the women are bound in marriage, they control their own bodies, and they are the ones who farm outside the village fence while the men stay inside, caring for the pigs and venturing out only to hunt elephants or to labor on plantations.

"Ethnographers report that women cannot be reached so easily as men. They giggle when young, snort when old, reject the question, laugh at the topic and the like." The Bakweri woman is as unfathomable to Bakweri men as she has been to European scholars; she is regarded uneasily, and the men admit that the ethnographer's

difficulties are "simply a caricature of their own daily case."<sup>6</sup>

When a Bakweri girl reaches puberty, water spirits attack her. A mermaid doctor must administer vomiting medicine; otherwise, she'll be lured away into the wild. After she has vomited up the seeds of the wild banana (a female fruit), an older woman sponsor gives her a mermaid name and teaches her the secret mermaid language. Dressed in fronds and bark, she's secluded in a room of her own. All European goods and dogs must be kept away from her. She's forbidden to kill rats, whom she regards as her "husbands." When she goes out, she carries a rattle that makes any man who molests her permanently impotent.

After seclusion, the girl is either immersed in a stream or "killed" in a mock tug-of-war. In the latter rite, nine calls in the mermaid tongue revive her. The men then regard her as immune from the water-spirits, safe to marry; but the women regard her as a familiar of the water-spirits. She carries her spirit name and speaks mermaid language with the initiated women the rest of her life. She is in effect reborn into a woman-identified culture that is half wild, half human; she becomes the untamed female who lives necessarily near males but who is uncontrollable. The initiation rites are now being revived by Bakweri women in the cities; for them, the wild is a state of mind.

The analogy between the untamed mermaid women and the untamed lesbian is irresistible. Both accommodate the two logical sets, male/female and human/non-human, differently from men. Males even in pre-literate societies bound themselves from nature in the European way. Their model for "mankind" is man; women are placed ambiguously at the boundary of "mankind." The male solution to ambiguity has been to enslave women, bringing their "wildness" under male control. And the male reaction to nature, the non-human, has been to destroy all links leading back to his original association with other life-forms. Men hunt, and they also make war on other "men." The metalevel of categorization, "ourselves-and-our-women/other men-and-their-women" slips back imperceptibly into the fundamental male dichotomy "human/non-human." War and genocide become inevitable consequences; it's easy for a male of any nation to regard other nations as sub-human, to be dealt with as he has dealt with nature, by killing.

On the other hand, many pre-literate women, including Bakweri women, seem to distinguish primarily between life-lovers and death-lovers. Men are included in the "community" of women, plants, and animals only insofar as they refrain from ignorant violence. Pre-literate women make few distinctions between "us" and "them";

the Bakweri women are notorious for consorting with other tribes. They're warriors only in the sense that witches are.

The Bakweri wife feels more akin to fish than to her husband. Though she does not deal with what is alien to her by ridiculing, enslaving, or killing it, neither does she forget who the killers are. The Bakweri woman, unlike her "liberated" sisters in industrialized societies, does NOT allow male control over her body, her perceptions, or her language. Artemis March has said that patriarchy is an escalating system of control, in which increasing levels of female energy are coopted with increasing levels of female consent.<sup>7</sup> In our society, women are largely tamed: men determine the available methods of contraception, and all women are subject to rape, murder, and dismemberment. Perhaps worse, most Western women have succumbed to humanism, even regarding it as the ideological basis of our fight for "equality." The mermaid-women are laughing at us.

"Winged words make their own spiral,--caught up in them, we are lost, or found." (H.D.)

If "humanity" is constituted by its language, a new species composed of life-lovers will be created with and expressed by new language. And what better place to experiment with new naming than in a magazine? We do this by wrenching the old words out of their patriarchal contexts (tearing apart the body of male language) and using them, reborn, to speak to women out of women's shared experience. We rename the universe out of a subjectivity that is female and animal; and the violence we practice by doing so is the violence of leaving the dead to bury their own dead. Our curses are "to each his due"...let the evil be destroyed by his own evil and the innocent sheltered by her innocence.

New naming requires exaggeration, misstep, frequent plunges into absurdity, and a close attention to process. June Arnold writes in *Plexus* that the lesbian feminist genius is a collective genius, expressed here and there in a phrase, a chapter, a new tactic, sudden revelations. For this reason, we're not claiming that what we print succeeds as revolutionary art or theory, only that it reveals process. (A critic might note that SW is neither very sinister nor very wise.)

We're interested in attempts at cracking the shell of genres. We're interested in letters, riddles, fragments, responses to what was in the last issue, and *always in histories of how a certain piece came to be*. We want to document the process of dealing with the Strange.

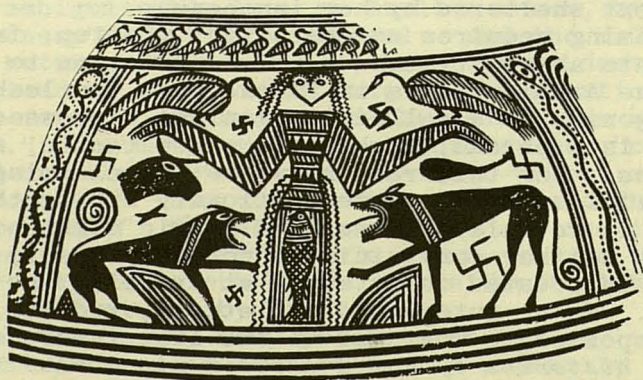
For lesbians, who have been without faces, without voices, without a validating herstory, the urgency of

speaking is the urgency of surviving. We *need* to think our way out of an entire universe. We *need* to end female self-sacrifice by developing imaginatively and practically an Amazon culture. Amazon culture means thinking the unthinkable, doing the inappropriate, and thereby learning how to survive/subvert/create. *Sinister Wisdom* wants to be an Amazon Culture Center on paper.

-Harriet Desmoines

#### FOOTNOTES:

1. "Journal Excerpts," *The Lamp in the Spine* (Summer/Fall 1974), p. 119.
2. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), pp. 40-43.
3. Translated by David Le Vay (New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1975), pp. 10-11.
4. Monique Wittig, *Les Guerilleres*, translated by David Le Vay (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), p. 85.
5. All information on the Bakweri from Edwin Ardener's "Belief and the Problem of Women," *The Interpretation of Ritual*, edited by J.S. La Fontaine (London: Tavistock Publications, Ltd., 1972).
6. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
7. Speech given at GAU conference, Columbia University, November, 1975.



For coming, coming, Coming...see p. 72.

# Catherine

HOW RAGE MOTHERED MY THIRD BIRTH AND EXPLODED ME  
OUT OF THE UNIVERSITY INTO A NEW TIME/SPACE ON  
THE BOUNDARY WHERE, THANKS TO MARY DALY, ON A  
CLEAR DAY I CAN NOW SEE JANE HARRISON

*The following piece is in no way intended to be a model for the New Woman's scholarship. It is the process I went through in order to break out of traditional patterns of approaching scholarship which had inhibited me for years. I suppose that printing it could be considered unwarranted self-indulgence. But I enjoy reading or hearing about how women, once they see that they have been exploited and enslaved by patriarchal values, claw their way to a different and better place. Most of the time we are presented only with the finished product, and my burning curiosity about how it came to be is left burning. So this exercise in rage is included here to quench the fires of others like myself who probably hid True Confessions under their mattress when they were kids. (In the interest of space limitations footnote documentation has been omitted, but it is available on request. Please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope and allow nine months for delivery.)*

I don't think I will begin this piece by explaining who Jane Ellen Harrison is. Because everyone ought to know who Jane Ellen Harrison is, goddamnit! Her name should be a household name, and the reason it isn't is the same reason that enrages me whenever I become conscious that I'm standing in the stacks of the university library tower and looking up at the topheavy shelves... In 1947 I was sitting in a reading room of a small women's college library, a spanking brand new one, watching the staff busily stack shelves with the old books from the old library. The head librarian, a little middle-aged spinster--I was watching her because I had never seen her move with such quick grace--was silently singing and dancing those old books onto the new shelves, pirouetting on a ladder stretching to squeeze the last book on the top shelf. From where I was sitting I could see the stack begin to topple, but it was too late to warn her. I can still hear her tragi-comic wail as those thundering books stamped her to the floor.

Back in blind 1947 I ran out the white Georgian door of the library and threw up on one of the boxwood bushes guarding the entrance and wandered around sad and empty for the rest of the day. Now that I am a

middle-aged spinster, I flash in menopausal rage when I recall that image of violent betrayal: I bulge out my eyes, stick out my long broad tongue, shake my gray snake hair, and for a moment anyway the half-shelf of books at eye-level fossilize forever.

I feel better for a little while. Until I find in the current periodical room a three-year-old copy of *APHRA: A Feminist Literary Journal*, and read:

*Jane Ellen Harrison was one of the great classicists of her time. She died in 1928, the year Virginia Woolf wrote A Room of One's Own, and was for Virginia Woolf and the feminists of her generation the woman scholar par excellence, who had succeeded against great odds in a male academic world. Though her work reflects Victorian thinking and does not appeal strongly to the modern imagination, she has influenced several writers whose work does--among them Robert Graves and Joseph Campbell.*

My rage leaps again, but I can only howl in frustration because as far as I know Medusa spells don't work on women. I push through the turnstyle between the electronic eyes that guard this latter-day library muttering: How "modern" is the imagination of a feminist in 1973 who still casts a woman in the role of a muse for men: Graves' White Goddess again, Gertrude-Stein-was-Hemingway's-teacher again!..."her work reflects Victorian thinking and does not appeal strongly to the modern imagination..." indeed!...indeed Jane Harrison was born in 1850, and indeed her two important works: *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* and *Themis* were published in 1903 and 1912 respectively, and indeed she was a "Victorian" insofar as the span of her birth and death dates indicate, but she did not stay home like a proper spinster (yes, spinster she was) and listen to Papa--no, indeed; instead she educated herself into Cambridge in the '70's, where she was called "the cleverest woman in England," repapered her room with William Morris papers, worshipped George Eliot--

By this time I had reached my study, and lying around in my little piles of notecards, xeroxed sheets, acorns and seedlings were comments by her friends, admirers, critics, students, readers--a fairly distinguished lot, all told--all telling me how anti-Victorian she was. Here's an example from Prince Mirsky:

*...the intellectual work of the generation that saw the turn of the epoch could only be revolutionary and destructive. More consciously perhaps than many of her contemporaries Jane Harrison was a revolutionary...an intellectual revolutionary who by the end of her life work had emancipated herself--and others--from all the eidola that had presided over her coming into the world. She did this work of liberation with the times, but in her own way and ahead of others--and with that sense of the coming age which is the hallmark of the revolutionary mind.*

I was a bit calmer now, and I laughed at the echo of "JEH was one of the greatest classicists of her time..." Jane Harrison would have laughed, too. Flattering, but untrue. Great classicist she wasn't and never pretended to be. True, she was the first woman to take the Classical Tripos at Cambridge, but the Examiners after serious deliberation placed her second instead of first. The men pronounced that her Greek was never quite good enough because she lacked the solid schoolboy grounding in the language (she was self-taught) that her male colleagues had acquired in their Etons and their Harrows. But I occasionally envy anyone who can easily label her a classicist or an archaeologist or an anthropologist or a linguist or anything... He or she must sleep easier every night because to classify her glibly is to dismiss her, and the root of my rage is that she has been mostly dismissed or overlooked. I cannot with good conscience label her, and that of course is why I did not begin this piece with a correct and easy statement about who she was. She was not an archaeologist, although she visited Athens when Dorpfeld was digging and correcting our conceptions of the fifth century B.C. Acropolis and (at his request) published his findings in English; she was not an anthropologist because she never packed her portmanteau and went to live with the natives in Africa or Australia; she was not a linguist because, although language was her passion (and she knew 17 of them) the science of linguistics was just aborning.

In the four years that I have spent studying--living intimately with Jane Harrison's life and work I have been continually frustrated with the problem of labeling her until it finally hit me that "labeling" is a male process: men are very uneasy about living in this world and they must control it the only way they know how by naming people, animals, objects and ideas. They started out with naming, and since naming wasn't enough to give them enough control, they "progressed" to categorizing and began to "label" (a word which originally meant "rag, shred, tatter.") Labeling suppresses fear and increases one's power because it packages people, objects, ideas, etc. and therefore enables one to sell, enslave, play games with or file them away--that is, imprison them in metal dungeons so they won't stick their tongues out at one and fossify one.

I don't recall Jane Harrison ever using the word "label"; she certainly never thought it. But she did use the word "name," and she named--re-named--new named people and objects and gods (ideas) when they involved her enough to love or hate them. In her search for the origins of Greek religion, which was the focus of her major scholarship, she became outraged at the atrocities committed by the invading patriarchal Achaeans to the

old matriarchal Earth Goddesses. In her eyes the Olympian Zeus and his arrogant son Apollo were goddess rapers, child snatchers, shrine pillagers and usurpers, and woman enslavers. She re-named Zeus "imposter" and "the arch-patriarchal bourgeois," and Apollo she called an "ill-mannered prig." But, more relevantly to the point I'm making here, she new-named herself: "*Potnia Keron*," later abbreviated to "*Ker*."

*Potnia Keron* translates "Lady (Mistress, Goddess, ruling power) of the *Keres*." In a chapter of the *Prolegomena* entitled "The Demonology of Ghosts, Sprites, Bogeys," she explains what *ker* means. According to Jane Harrison, there is no English equivalent of the Greek *ker*: it means ghost, or the soul that escapes the body after death, or winged sprite, and its home is the underworld. In ancient Greek art and literature *keres* are depicted as evil: as sources of pollution and disease ("Eating is highly dangerous because you have your mouth open and a Ker might get in." p. 168); as well as madness, wars, suicide and all the other evils flesh is heir to. When Pandora opened her "box" (*pitthos* or jar--Jane Harrison renamed that, too) what escaped were *keres*. *Keres* evolved into differentiated bogeys: gorgons, sphinxes, harpies, sirens, Erinyes (furies), etc.

Why should Jane Harrison identify herself with such monsters by signing her letters to her friend Gilbert Murray *Potnia Keron* or *Ker*? Just a whimsical little "in" joke, you say. You call yourself a "witch" to your friends, that's true, but if Mary Daly would call you a witch the irony would be more profound, for she sees the witch, among other things, as an adherent of an older religion denigrated and persecuted by the Christian Fathers. When the heretic Jane Harrison calls herself *Ker*, she speaks wittily from a "sympathetic imagination" which enables her to "think back the 'many' we have so sharply and strenuously divided, into the haze of the primitive 'one.'" She knew that the *ker* undifferentiated had a double nature--both good and bad--the bringer of life and creativity as well as disease and death. And she knew too that "when we find the good, fruitful, beneficial side of the *Keres* effaced and ignored we must always remember this fact that we see them through the medium of a conquering civilization." Another victim of the patriarchal Zeus. Perhaps, then as *Potnia Keron* she saw herself in the dual role of destroyer of established values and creator of a new life-enhancing world.

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## TRANSITION

This was not the end of the rages--or the rage-writing. Women's rages are like women's orgasms: they are multiple. And there must be some correlation between their beneficial effects..At any rate, when I was spent, the air had cleared and I could see Jane Harrison.

The exercise in labeling Jane Harrison had been the result of my *second* spate of rages. In 1975 my *first* spate against the academic pricks had resulted in my resignation from the university (from all universities but most particularly a new university that has as its center a bell tower--an unadorned stiff prick which everyone euphemistically saw as a phallus, but which Kate Millett more accurately and prophetically saw as a plastic vibrator.) The energy generated by my multiple rages had moved my center to the new space/time boundary defined by Mary Daly: "Its center is the lives of women, whose experience of becoming changes the very meaning of center for us by putting it on the boundary of all that has been considered central."<sup>1</sup> But the gravity of that center was weak still, and a lot of my energy was spent just trying to keep my balance. When I tried to complete my work on Jane Harrison I found that the noxious vapors of my academic past were polluting the air of my new space, and my remaining energy was spent fighting suffocation.

It was then that the rages ignited me again and the hot flashes burned away the residue of the poison. When I could breathe again, I could see that I had been naively trying to force the male academics to recognize the unique brilliance of Jane Harrison's scholarship, and by doing so I had structured my argument to *their* mold: I had wanted to please *their* eyes, so I was continuing to use *their* categories, *their* labels, and *their* values. Of course it didn't work.

Jane Harrison would never "make it in a man's world," as the *Aphra* writer claimed she had.<sup>2</sup> That is, she couldn't make it for very long. She did, however, make it through a second edition of *Themis* in 1925, where she wrote in the preface that *Themis* was a dangerous book: "A hand had been laid upon their ark."<sup>3</sup> And indeed it had. Her iconoclastic attack on the Olympians was essentially an attack on the phallo-centric structure of our culture--humanism upheld by enlightened Christian theology: Jesus Christ and Apollo had shaken hands a long time ago, and discovering their mutual homosexual attraction had never let go of each other. The male academic by and large ignores Jesus Christ, but he identifies with Apollo: "castrate *him*, you castrate me," he warns.

So in the mainstream of academia the heretic Jane Harrison's work is relegated to a footnote, her books are out of print, and she is omitted from bibliographies; while Edith Hamilton's paperback *Mythology* and *The Greek Way* can be bought in the corner drugstore, because she was the true daughter of her Father, extolling the virtues of Zeus and Apollo and educating the young for the patriarchy. (I can breathe a lot of fire about Edith Hamilton, too!)

Now from the boundary I can see that the key to Jane Harrison's creative scholarship lies in the fact that she was always the "Compleat Outsider,"<sup>4</sup> *ludic cerebrator par excellence*, woman-identified woman. Now in the calm after the rages I am free to write about Jane Harrison, addressing myself to myself and other women.

The following piece is not about Jane Harrison, although it includes references to her; it is about the necessity for women to leave the university. It is addressed primarily to women academics, a lot of whom will disagree with my argument. I would very much like response--both from those who dispute and those who support my thesis. Also, I do not include here any positive speculation about the nature of women's scholarship as it might evolve in the new time/space. But Harriet and I have talked at length about some possibilities, and we would like to hear your thinking on the issue.

-Catherine Nicholson

### THE THIRD BIRTH REDEEMING ATHENE'S REPUTATION

In order to become a scholar in this man's world a woman must be born again--from the male womb of the university Graduate School. Some women are seduced inside--others claw their way in. But in either case they must suffer the initiation rite of passage, gorging on the forbidden fruit of tribal secrets and undergoing a grotesque sex operation, until the Daddy-mother's time is fulfilled and they can issue forth with a rolled diploma grafted to their vagina, which fools nobody, least of all their new Daddy-mother.

Now that these bright-apple, clever women have achieved their second birth they are privileged to grow up in the Man's House, tidying all the thunderbolts (which look and feel like double-axes when you carry them in your hand) and capturing all the worms and cooking them for dinner. Until they run out of recipes for worm casseroles. Or until they are eaten by the worms.

Or until they walk out leaving a note to their professors and male colleagues: You deal with the worms.

Those few who walk out have probably been hounded by the Furies protesting their traitorous second birth: the birth of Athene, which in mythology was a co-opted first birth, defined by Jane Harrison as "a desperate theological expedient to rid an earth-born (maiden-goddess) of her matriarchal conditions."<sup>1</sup>

Now I realize that there is nothing original in my use of the Athene myth to symbolize the academic woman's situation. But there is an important point about the *real* mother of Athene that has often been overlooked, and I believe that if you're going to use a myth you might as well milk it dry. So bear with me.

Daughter Athene sprang full-grown from the head of Zeus after he had swallowed her mother Metis, the goddess of wisdom, who was pregnant by him (he had raped her). Why did he swallow Metis: it was not because he was hungry, greedy as he was, but because an oracle of Mother Earth had said Metis' first child would be a girl and that her second would be a son who would depose his father Zeus as Zeus had castrated Cronus and Cronus had castrated Uranus and so on back to the beginning of patricide (there was already a museum of balls). So the imposter Zeus was protecting his power. And Athene became the prototype of Daddy's girl: "...a sexless thing, neither man nor woman...manufactured, unreal," protested an outraged Jane Harrison. "Nowhere is this artificiality, this unreality of Athene...so keenly felt as in the famous myth of her birth from the brain of Zeus...It is all an unreal, theatrical show, and through it all we feel and resent the theological intent. We cannot love a goddess who on principle forgets the Earth from which she sprang; always from the lips of the Lost Leader we hear the shameful denial:

"There is no mother bore me for her child,  
I praise the Man in all things (save for marriage)  
Whole-hearted am I, strongly for the Father."<sup>2</sup>

But perhaps Mother Earth knew what she was about (after all, one shouldn't muck around with oracles; look what happened to that mother-fucking Oedipus). By allowing Zeus to turn himself into a mother and suffer the pangs of childbirth (he had a raging headache and Hephaestus performed the first pre-Caesarian caesarian on him by splitting his skull) to deliver a daughter that was actually a pseudo-son--by this grotesque reversal of sex roles, the prophecy of wise Mother Earth would be fulfilled some day. The pseudo daughter-son would destroy the Father: someday the woman scholar would pack her bags with all the thunderbolts and walk out on the worms.

And with all that rage packed inside her she would demand a third birth.

In order for a woman scholar to live in a woman's world she must be born again for the third and last time. But this time she must conceive, mother and midwife herself.

One classical myth which could possibly depict a woman giving birth to herself is Aphrodite rising out of the sea. Jane Harrison tells us that this sea birth myth is a late and patriarchal version of the rising or the ritual bath of an earth goddess, which would make it actually a rebirth. This would be acceptable, but somehow Aphrodite's popularity with male artists has layered her myth with connotations that repel me. I prefer the "Bringing up of Semele" myth, which Jane Harrison restored to an earlier version. In *Themis* she presents a reproduction of a vase painting which pictures a woman rising out of the earth. The significance of this particular version of a common art motif is that the woman, an earth goddess, is not being brought up by a son: she is *rising on her own*:

*Tradition said that Dionysos fetched his mother up from the underworld... "Finding that he was a god, men paid him worship, but he went and fetched his mother up out of Hades, gave her the title of Thyone and went up with her into heaven." The hasty Assumption of the mother, viewed as history, strikes us as abrupt and unmeaning. It is of course simply an Olympianized saga-mythos of the old ritual of the "Bringing up of Semele." Semele, Earth, never could or did go to heaven, but she rose up out of earth. She needed no son to bring her, her son was indeed the fruits of the earth, the child Ploutos. But when patriarchy came in, and the Mother takes the lower place, someone has to "fetch her up." <sup>3</sup>*

Now if we can place this ritual of the rising Semele on the boundary of patriarchal territory, in the new space/time located and named by Mary Daly,<sup>4</sup> surround her with expectant sisters, and place in her hand the thunderbolt/labrys, we might incorporate this myth in the new feminary. The thunderbolt has a two-fold symbolic significance: (1) The lightning energy of rage that "is required as a positive creative force," according to Mary Daly, to blast our way out of the "inauthentic structures" of patriarchy.<sup>5</sup> (In the patriarchal version of the Semele myth, Dionysus renames his mother "Thyone" after he fetches her up. *Thyone* means "the raging one," an appropriate epithet, for the earth goddess was obviously violently protesting this unnatural Assumption forced on her by the son!) (2) The double-axe weapon and tool (sceptre of the Cretan Mother Earth emblemizing

the thunderbolt<sup>6</sup>) that should come in handy to the woman who must excise her misbegotten loyalty to the academic (and other) fathers as well as carve a space for her new center of life on the boundary of patriarchal territory.

When the woman scholar sees the phoniness of her second birth and experiences the rage that is provoked by her exploitation, why must she leave the Man's House? Why not seethe and remain to subvert the university through "affirmative actions," AAUP Committee W, or threats of EEOC investigations? Why not teach a Women's Studies course and focus all her research on resurrecting forgotten heroines and their deeds? Why not form a woman's caucus in the learned society of her discipline to demand greater esteem from her male colleagues?

I believe there are three good reasons for not staying:

1) The air there is bad. "In universities," according to Mary Daly, "...are poisonous gases which are almost invisible and odorless, and which gradually stifle women's minds and spirits."<sup>7</sup> In her new infant state she might not be strong enough to survive. Or if she doesn't succumb to the poison, she might develop a paralysis of cynicism, a death-in-life that neutralizes her energy--which is exactly what the enemy wants.

2) Scholarship is political. Regardless of the academic's claims for objectivity, the facts of the past and present are viewed through the filter of the cultural preconditioning and unconscious value-assumptions of the scholar. As long as her center--or her desired center--is in the university, she participates in a value system which demeans and ignores women as a group. And even the fiercest feminist fighter is vulnerable to the lure of seeking male approval for her scholarship. She wants those bastards to accept the fact that she is just as intelligent, just as capable of using the skills of scholarship as any of them, and she is damned well going to be recognized and rewarded for her work. But she may be unaware that she's thereby accepting the university's male model for the research and writing she is doing. Her choice of inquiry, to dig up women's contributions to history, is not enough. If her material must be shaped to the mold sculpted and preserved by the enemy, the impact of her research will be dulled and distorted--which is exactly what the enemy wants.

Moreover, fighting male-hardened structures can consume a major part of her energy. And that's all well and good if she recognizes that she is making creative scholarship her second priority--perhaps giving it up entirely to make a space for younger women to work in.

But if she chooses this apparently noble role, she is running the risk that her women-student scholars, having no female model to follow, will continue to conform to established inauthentic standards of the prick university--which is, again, exactly what the enemy wants.

3) Suppose the female scholar succeeds in moving her center to the boundary of the university, invents an effective gas mask to protect her from the noxious fumes, and chooses to remain inside--not to fight, this time, but to create authentic women's scholarship. She still cannot be an effective force for change. FOR SHE WILL BE CONSIDERED INSANE BY THE MALE HEIRARCHY THAT CONTROLS THE UNIVERSITY. This seems like a drastic statement, and it is, but I believe that it is true. Let me explain:

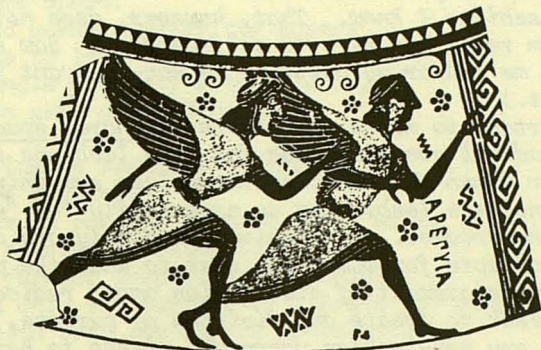
In the patriarchal world woman is an outsider--more aptly put an "undersider." She cannot possibly view the phenomena of that world directly from the perspective of the male dominant insider--or "topsider." The view of the oppressed and the oppressor are dangerously different. In the theatre if you use footlights as your principal source of illumination, the actor's face is considerably distorted by the upward angle of light. She or he appears unnatural to an audience conditioned to viewing people illuminated from over-head light sources. Similarly, if a woman must view the reality of the topsider's world, she is forced to use a mirror to achieve the male angle of vision, like the periscope used by the submarine captain to view the surface of the ocean. As long as the woman scholar is content to use a periscope, she is safe, tolerated because she is not threatening. But once she begins to use her own eyes--once she insists on expounding her own vision of the male (or female) world, what she publishes will appear distorted, inaccurate, and irrational. The male-identified audience can only pronounce her insane and either mercifully ignore her rantings or lock her up. Which is exactly what the enemy wants.

So the woman-identified scholar has really no valid choice. Once her eyes are opened to the inauthenticity of her second birth, and she experiences the rage that mothers her third birth, she must leave. And if her leaving inspires her sisters to leave and if there is a mass exodus of women from the university "toward a woman-centered university" (Adrienne Rich's phrase),<sup>8</sup> the mass absence of women from the male-centered university at this point in history could precipitate a holocaust that would redeem Athene's reputation by fulfilling the oracle of Mother Earth. And the woman scholar with all the women scholars on the boundary would be free to create a vital new scholarship that is continually growing and becoming...

And the ghost of Jane Harrison would rejoice. In her *Reminiscences of a Student's Life*, written near the end of her life, she said:

*If I had been rich I should have founded a learned community for women, with vows of consecration and a beautiful rule and habit...*<sup>9</sup>

-Catherine Nicholson



#### FOOTNOTES FOR "THE THIRD BIRTH":

1. *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (New York: Meridian Books, 1955), 3rd ed., p. 302.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 302-3. Quotation is from Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, ll. 736-8.
3. *Themis: A Study in the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (New York: Meridian Books, 1962), 2nd ed., pp. 419-20.
4. *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), pp. 40-43.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
6. Harrison, *Themis*, p. 171.
7. "The Qualitative Leap Beyond Patriarchal Religion," *Quest*, I (Spring, 1975), 24.
8. "Toward a Woman-centered University," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 21, 1975.
9. (London: Hogarth Press, 1925), p. 89.

#### FOOTNOTES FOR "TRANSITION":

1. *Beyond God the Father*, pp. 40-1.
2. Leah Zahler, "Matriarchy and Myth," *Aphra*, IV (Summer, 1973), 25.
3. P. viii.
4. Daly, "The Qualitative Leap," pp. 28-9.

# Jan

I am going to try making a non-lesbian statement without sounding anti. I am not sure this is possible.

The statement does not come from any passionate need to dis-associate myself from my lesbian sisters (if that were the case, my work would not appear here). Rather, I feel that my "radical feminist" politics bring me close (but not uncomfortably so) to many political lesbians I know. That, however, does not make me a lesbian. (I am referring here to self-concept. How society chooses to label me and/or my politics is non-relevant to me and to this statement.)

What is important to me is that there be shared space within the collective radical consciousness for both lesbians and non-lesbians (and for women who consider themselves something else or neither). I do not see lesbianism as necessarily the "ultimate" in my own thinking process. Lesbianism seems only one of many desirable self-concepts for women who seek to undo the patriarchy.

In making this statement of distinction among radical thinking women, I do not seek to create any division of purpose, only to open a space for any non-lesbian woman who wishes to have ideas, scribble, write, create, laugh, cry, or scream through, for, or in publications such as Sinister Wisdom.

I do not believe that I occupy this space alone.

-Jan Millsapps

## WATER AND FIRE

when the storm hit  
it tore your book to shreds,  
the very words you had open, reading,  
ripped savagely from your head.  
your chair is still warm  
and holds your impression.  
mary's cat was dead  
and mine were missing.  
we began searching through puddles  
for survivors.

there were no words left  
to bleed from wounded volumes,  
wrinkled and drowned,  
white pages glaring from the wreckage,  
a blank mocking death-stare.  
we closed them, careful morticians  
not knowing what else to do.  
we gathered the flooded rubble  
into a mass casually said,  
crossed ourselves and set a match.



mary is a fire sign  
and I am water.  
your chair is still warm  
and holds your impression.

it wasn't so much  
the cats being gone as you,  
abruptly with the storm  
without so much as a clue  
to the sphere or cloud or universe  
where you came apart.  
your orphaned words clutter the cosmos  
with no books to live in,  
and you strangle yourself with silence,  
disjointed in your quick departure.

we used to live in soundless nights.  
we used words sparingly.  
you kept them in reserve on book-lined walls  
to prime my passion by withholding.  
you built a furnace deep within my bowels,  
then offered only the surface of a brain for comfort.  
my fingers slid over the smooth convolutions,  
a gray diluted landscape your only prize  
when I wanted to scale mountains  
and leap into your thighs.

you left me dangling in the world,  
reticent in water and fire.

TO THE MAN WHO DID IT IN MY GAS TANK, 10/31/75

why he  
took advantage of my car  
I'll never know  
and surely his penis would rather  
enter openings elsewhere  
but the shame-faced mechanic mumbles  
"there's your-ine in the gas tank, ma'am"  
as if it were my own

imagine that  
now the message here is obvious:  
mixed with gas  
it not only smells bad  
but fouls my plugs and such  
and gets very poor mileage  
this unexpected additive

by unscrewing the gas cap he had  
quite the opposite  
effect on me  
and I must pay for his  
privileged rape

it's possible  
that this man made an error  
men do that I know  
supposing it a new shape of shiny green urinal  
and elegant parking lots  
may even be equipped with such  
though I doubt it

assuming then the worst  
that he really meant to do it  
and now refuses to claim his own  
I must arrange for the extraction  
it's legal but expensive  
and most mechanics don't like to do  
that kind of thing  
demanding instead  
to know why I used  
no protection  
though it seems I heard  
locking gas caps may cause cancer  
at any rate the thing is  
to get it over with

properly exorcised  
of its infection  
my car seems somehow wiser  
as we speed to recovery on crowded boulevards  
and swerve to avoid  
hitting men

-Jan Millsapps

# Deena

from SCARS ON THE BODY POLITIC

*Scars on the Body Politic* is the fifth novel I've written. Each of the books I discover in retrospect...concerns itself with the issue of relationship--how two come together to end the agony of isolation and solitude, and how everything in the society acts to impose isolation, solitude, separateness. The metaphor of Scars was the Adam/Eve myth--because Eve, being built upon a rib, was dual; incorporated another within her; knew, therefore, profoundly what relationship means. Adam, on the other hand, has a hole in his side, is solitude. The theme of the novel is that solitude leads to power and power leads to war. That relationship and connection are modes which are antagonistic to power, to heirarchy, and to murder.

A few years ago, I might have been unsure when answering a question regarding my vision, but no longer. It has been formed to a great extent through three circumstances. One event was a stay in Chile during the Unidad Popular, the Allende government, when I saw for the first time a government for the people, not against them, and I understood that there was some possibility that institutions and governments might be humane. Secondly, my involvement in the movement (teaching women, helping to create the Woman's Building and the Feminist Studio Workshop) and my research into Woman's Culture (which has resulted in a monograph I've just finished--"In Her Image: Woman's Culture") led me not only to a sweetness and a life-sustaining, death-defying view of existence but helped me to identify new forms of being, of relationship, of art, of work...which seem intrinsically healing and humane. And finally, my own relationships, which are deep and wonderful and verify a possibility of interaction--emotional and intellectual--which I can use to sustain me against all the darkness. The vision as it guides me now is two-fold. On the one hand--torture, war, napalm, atomic weapons, rape, poverty, oppression; and on the other--compassion, understanding, relationship, the imagination, the dream, the child, the work of art, the moment of loving. When I recently delivered a paper on rape ("It is Always the Woman Who is Raped") to the American Psychiatric Association, I wanted to stress two ideas: first, that rape was a socially, culturally taught activity; the other, that community could heal the rape victim. I don't have any difficulty seeing the world where rape exists--Dachau, Viet Nam, etc. are always in my consciousness--but I also see the other, what we create which opposes such brutality and madness.

One of the reasons I write is to communicate the experience, the voice of being a woman--it is a world rarely entered. Even now, when we have permission, still the voices of women (despite the content) often sound like the voices of the dominant culture. I think that there is another voice, another sensibility, which comes out of an experience which has been part of us, yet somehow not only unexpressed in the public world but unexpressed often even within ourselves. My desire has been to create language, to find the content which exists in the secret core of ourselves and which must be uttered and known.

About my life...much you know from the above. I have two sons, a lover; I teach at the Feminist Studio Workshop at the Woman's Building; I write fiction, poetry; I teach among other things journal workshops and am now developing writing/healing workshops.

Lastly, Scars...began as a novel which developed the male/female relationship against the background of political development. The struggles between the man and the woman in the novel were similar to the struggles to set up a committed society. On one level the novel depicted the story and events in the lives of a man and a woman who were traveling to and then living in Chile during the short-lived socialist government. The personal and the public were analogues of each other. Then the brutal coup came. The novel broke in half. Those friends that I had made in Chile, dear friends though we had known each other for only a short time, were now dead, or underground, or in jail, or in exile. At first I thought of abandoning the book (going on with it as if nothing had happened was impossible); but (abandoning it) was also impossible. So the book interrupts, incorporates the coup, incorporates murder. Moments which I had just noticed become omens as the fascist stain seeps to the surface.

So you see, my concerns repeat themselves--fascism and woman's culture as two poles, the dark and the light, alienation and community, how to work it out, how to make the revolution that will stick, how to overthrow power...

...It is not powerlessness that keeps (women) from being criminals. It is something else--and I care about making that public and bringing what we know of light into the public world, before they kill us all.

-Deena Metzger

And Eve is the enemy of God and when He takes her, He takes her by force. He takes in the night and without knowing He takes her in silence and invisibility.

And when the son breaks the flesh between her legs, when she can no longer protect him, God leads him to slaughter.

What are Eve's names? Gita and Mary and Sara.

\*

Who is the Lamb? It is Eve's son. And God rejoices in his dying. The lamb is Eve's son, is always Eve's son. So God hates him and devours him.

Adam is obedient. And he loves God. They are blood brothers. And they make offerings to each other. Placations. Booty. And Adam is a thief and steals the child from Eve's legs, even as it is covered with her blood, he smears the blood on his mouth and calls the son, his. And Cain cannot bear her name and she mothers him in secret because Adam claims him.

Adam has his son's blood on his mouth from the beginning and he likes the taste of it. And when God calls for blood, Adam is obedient and gives up even his own son. And Eve is powerless for she will not come to death. She does not put out her wrist to God. She will not kill Adam. Though God seduces her, she does not acquiesce. She is not blood sister to him. She pours her own blood out on the ground.

And when she extends her womb around Cain, she makes an ally of time. It is not possession; it is desperation. And Adam mocks her because he is impatient to murder.

\*

So Eve is the first to know desire which is loss. And she is in mourning.

\*\*\*\*\*

Afterwards when she can talk about it, he asks her, "Do you want me to kill him?"

There is a long silence. She thinks about wiping the blood away which is seeping out from between her legs. ("Blood again!" you say, "again!")

Yes, again and then again. But you see, she didn't invite it, or create it. It happened to her and then again and then, alas, again. So you cannot turn your back anymore than she can.)

But she wants him also to see the blood; now it is no longer necessary to hide it. He must know.

"Are you serious?" she is startled by his question.

"Oh, yes," he answers. "It will not be hard to find him."

"Whom are you going to kill?"

"Him."

"Which one?"

"The one that did it."

"Which one?"

"Don't worry," he says, "we will find him."

"Him?"

She is continuing to bleed. The hemorrhage does not endanger her and it is not the kind of bleeding that pregnancy stops. Otherwise she would suggest that they make love. But love is not a poultice at this instant. "Him?" she asks. "There have been thousands."

He probably wants her to douche, use a tampon, or call a doctor or put a bandage between her legs. "How about infection," he asks, "isn't there a chance of infection or disease. Aren't you going to do anything about it."

"Maybe women should organize," he says. "Of course, it offends you that I should want to kill him. An exchange of weapons. Maybe you should do something. Make him an example. You and your women friends could do it. You could join together. If he knew you were armed, if another knew you would retaliate, if you left him swinging from the tree with his genitals severed, it would not happen again. Look, he says, it's because you've never had a gun, that he does this to you...He thinks you're helpless and he hates you. Well, even I've had a gun. I didn't go into the service, you know that, but at school, we trained. And now of course, we all need that training, you know that. Otherwise we're at the bastards' mercy. As you were. Look, I'll teach you. It isn't difficult."

"It isn't difficult," she repeats. "Isn't it odd. It isn't difficult to kill a man."

*He turned his entire body into a gun to assault me. What an advance on technology.*

The blood flow diminishes, after all it is only symbolic.

She turns her back on him.

"What are you going to do?" he demands. "You can't just sit here!"

"I'm going to see a woman, women friends, Jane, Barbara. We'll talk."

"And then?"

"Nothing."

"And him?"

"He is your problem, your burden because he's your brother. I have nothing to do with his crime."

"Shall I kill him for you?"

"For me? For me? Kill all or nothing."

"That isn't an answer. What shall I do? What shall I do?"

"Promise not to do it again."

\*\*\*\*\*

Eve names the children who will be taken by God. Cain was the first that God stole. After that she became wary; she hid her son in the bulrushes but God discovered him. She was not deceived when God spared her son in the terrible bloodletting of the firstborn. She did not distinguish between one child and another. She bides her time under the rain of plagues; she is learning how to make her own war without murder. Soon she will bring him down and end the bloodletting.

-Deena Metzger

# Elsa

"What needs to be understood is that erotic love between women is not a deviation from some presumed "normal." The Lesbian, to use a designation with an honorable history, is not a spoiled, failed or diverted so-called heterosexual woman. Neither is she a pseudo-male frustrated within female flesh and bones--the few who feel so are frustrated by society's ignorance and persecution. She is from birth and perhaps prenataally an essentially different being with different needs and desires. She is constituted as she is because Nature has made her so. After lifelong meditation on the matter (I am 74 years old as this is written), after observation of and discussion with others who do not fit the crude male-female categories, plus wide reading, I will go a step further and say, Nature needs the Lesbian as she is. She needs me as I am.

"...Nature has kept on producing women like her. Why? What is the Great Mother up to?..."

"Who instructs the dolfin or the pine, the clover or the bee, how to grow and function? How should they need instruction, being cells of the being of the Universal Mother, carrying within themselves her design? And is it not so with us?...I have never observed any argument to the effect that among butterflies the fritelary is abnormal for not conforming to the pattern of the monarch; nor is it suggested that the male sea horse is a shame to his sex for nurturing the young of his kind within a pouch in his abdomen.

"In the sub-species woman of humankind there likewise emerge different types..."

"...Nature is sane and produces what can sanely be used. Nature wastes nothing. Shall we, humans, be sane enough not to waste her gift of women "more pregnant in their souls than in their bodies" and use them to recreate societies more sanely, more spiritually informed?"

-Elsa Gidlow

*These excerpts are from Ask No Man Pardon: The Philosophical Significance of Being Lesbian. We're printing them to entice you into reading the booklet, available from: Druid Heights Books, 685 Camino del Canyon, Mill Valley, Ca. 94941, \$1.35.*

*For a full review, see Womanspirit, Box 263, Wolf Creek, Ore., 97497, published quarterly at equinoxes and solstices, \$6/yr.*

*Diana Press will soon be issuing a new book by Elsa Gidlow.*

# Mandy

## Journal Entries, 1975:

I...still am putting art & the sense of achievement involved with art & the time that is involved in art in the way. First of all, the sense of achievement from it has been unsatisfactory compared to that of seeing myself--not less but less complete. My art isn't number one. I am. I will do my art out of me & me can't be made out of my art. Now that I am talking about art in this way I don't want to call it "art" anymore. Because that word is meant to separate a part of myself from myself...

When a baby spits oatmeal in its mother's face, that's a lovely statement. When the baby gets big though, it just gets up from the table angry & frustrated. We are all denied our outs. Self-presentation never stops. It's refinding the means that is my becoming an artist...It takes a virtually constant attention to the dynamics of yourself to...grab a piece of that self & formalize it. It's like unloading a moving boxcar from the ground...

...a radical rightist...has taught me alot about what is going on in this country. He said...that the more goods a person can produce the happier they can possibly be--that the goods themselves are not important but the power from producing them and exchanging them is & that that's why a capitalist chooses to produce & profit toward infinity. This power, now that I have repeated his words to him, he describes as a sense of achievement. And finally I see women's art. It is without the artificial patriarchal factory of creation. It is the real thing. It is dynamic in process; it is organic. It is in groups or not in groups. But it is not a construction of identity. It is self-presentation...

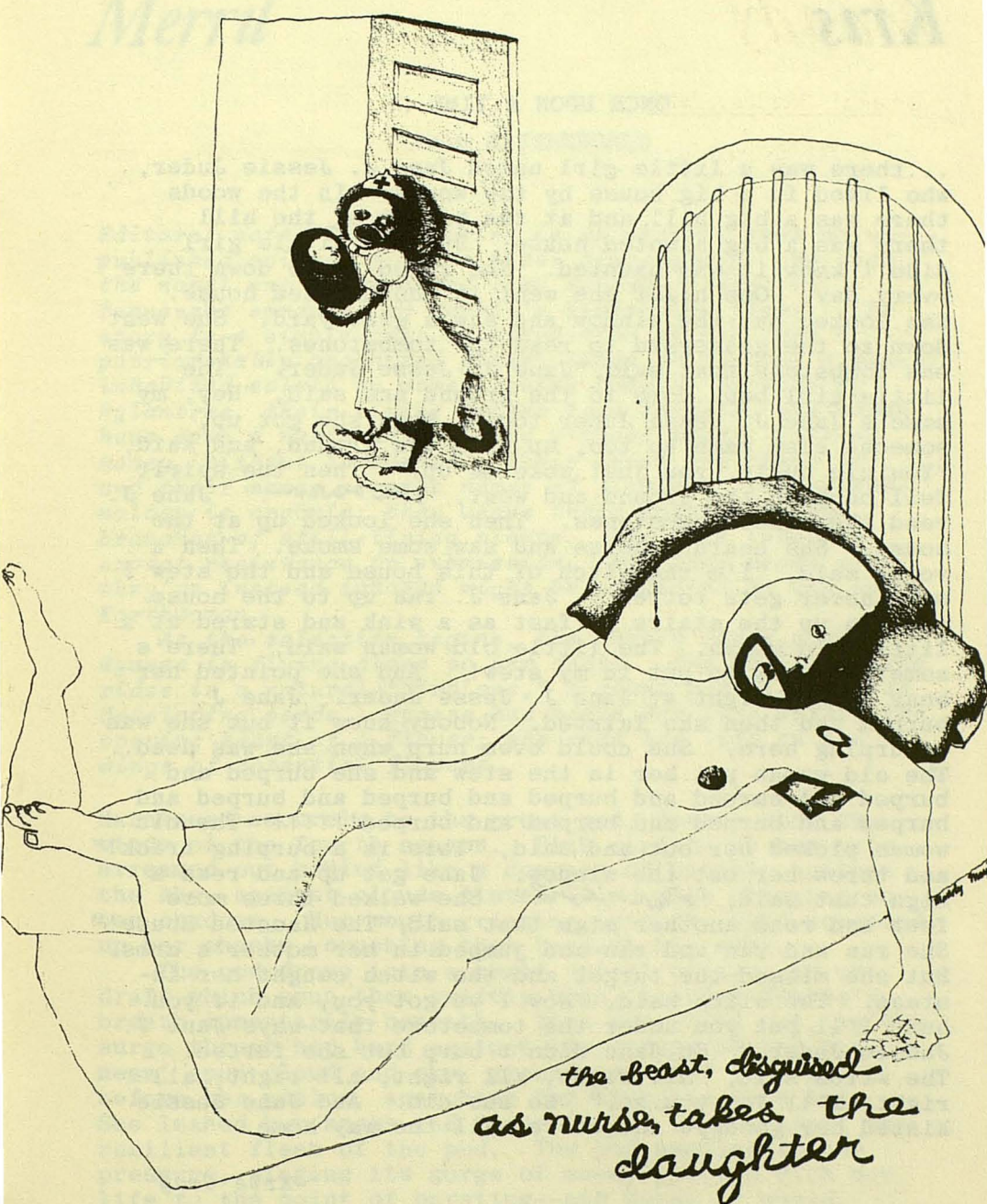
i have seen man's time  
as it captures my knowing  
and seen it wind and run  
like a fool:  
a pinning wings to the table contest.

...My work always has a degree of melancholia about it. Nobody knows what it means. I don't know what it means until after the fact--just like everything I do. Margaret is a Moose Maid. A book called Margaret is a Moose Maid after the first drawing. Then White Goose Pumps for Jane. I insist on doing these things for people. That is where my impetus lies or at least they are connected in a quite origin-type place...

...and I'm free to let myself loose with all these kangaroos hopping through tall grass.

-Mandy Wallace





# Kris

## ONCE UPON A TIME...

...there was a little girl named Jane J. Jessie Juder, who lived in a big house by the woods. In the woods there was a big hill, and at the bottom of the hill there was a big haunted house. But the little girl didn't know it was haunted. She loved to go down there every day. One night she went in the haunted house. She looked out the window and saw a graveyard. She went down to the graveyard to read the tombstones. There was one tombstone that said, "Jane J. Jesse Juder." The little girl bent down to the ground and said, "Hey, my name's Jane J. Jesse Juder too!" When she got up, someone else came up too, up from the ground, and said, "You big bully, you just woke me up." Then the spirit fell back on the ground and went, "~~she~~ ~~was~~ ~~born~~." Jane J. read the other tombstones. Then she looked up at the house. She heard a noise and saw some smoke. Then a voice said, "I'm the witch of this house and the stew I make never gets rotten." Jane J. ran up to the house and ran up the stairs as fast as a wink and stared at a little old woman. The little old woman said, "There's something new to put in my stew!" And she pointed her bony finger right at Jane J. Jesse Juder. Jane J. burped and then she fainted. Nobody knew it but she was a burping hero. She could even burp when she was dead. The old woman put her in the stew and she burped and burped and burped and burped and burped and burped and burped and burped and burped!!!!!! The old woman picked her out and said, "This is a burping trick!" and threw her out the window. Jane got up and read a sign that said, "~~she~~ ~~was~~ ~~born~~." She walked three more feet and read another sign that said, "The Haunted House!" She ran and ran and ran and jumped in her mother's arms. But she missed the target and the witch caught her instead. The witch said, "Now I've got you, and if you burp I'll put you under the tombstone that says Jane J. Jessie Juder." So Jane didn't burp but she farted. The witch said, "All right, all right, all right, all right, I'll let you go." So she did. And Jane Jessie kissed her goodbye and snored all the way home.

-Kris Gray

*Kris Gray is seven years old and attends the Stone Soup School in Cullowhee, North Carolina. She makes up her stories as she goes along.*

# Merril

from SISTERWORLD

*Editors' note: The following is an excerpt from an unpublished science fiction novel Sisterworld. We read the novel one charmed and lazy Sunday morning in Tennessee sprawled on Merrill's livingroom floor. The story is a simple one: an expedition of men from a patriarchally organized planet lands on Khaton, a planet inhabited solely by women-loving women. Blessed by Hylantree, their living Mother Tree Goddess, the women have spun a nurturant culture without power, without money, without bloodshed. Their lives are their art, and their names are the names of flowers. Their technology is organic; they weave their homes from the branches of still-living plants. The male invaders expect resistance or submission. How they react when they're instead ignored might be predicted by any aware Earthwoman.*

*As the selection begins, the Khaton woman named Hyassa is flying alone to her death. The "vehicle" she rides is a natural "airplane," a giant pod filled with developing seeds. Hyassa had begun her life within the opening heart of a flower; she ends her life on the wings of potential flowers.*

Harnessed securely to the great pod, Hyassa rode the winds of the fourth season. Pink strands of her hair streamed out behind like a company of banners against the sky, against clouds tinted lilac with changing amber shadows. Her mouth grinning into the wind squeezed up her cheeks, crushing them beneath her eyes.

The pod drove into a small spiral breeze, an up-draft which spun them swiftly high, leaving Hyassa's breath momentarily beneath. Then she cried out, as the surge thrust her hard against the straps of the harness; spun cloud and sky, ground and leaf in a whirl before her vision, snatching her thoughts from her. She leaned her knees and inner thighs hard against the resilient flesh of the pod. The pod swelled to her pressure, singing its gorge of seed, glutted with new life to the point of bursting--and burst it would, spilling seed and perhaps Hyassa, too, into new life, new song.

*But not yet. Hyassa stroked the pod's skin with her fingertips. Not yet. First we must reach the forests; then we both may have our Time and the luxury of singing. The pod dipped and soared, borne and bearing, erratic motion carrying always toward the forests and away from all pasts, away, and away.*

Hyassa rested her chin on her chest, and sudden tears of her weeping briefly silvered the air. *It is my Time. She threw her head back, facing into the rush of wind. Breezes blew through her open jaws scouring her tongue dry. Her lips curled high over her teeth, wide apart, spread to expose the pink scream of her throat. Mine. My Time. Air a gale in her mouth seared the private places inside her cheeks and the soft flesh at the base of her gums. She gagged, epiglottis glued against the back of her tongue, parched flesh sticking to itself. I go toward. Forward. Her lips floated together, quivered. Peeling skin reaching for moisture stood high, brushed closing surfaces like butterfly feet. Saliva began to flow again, and Hyassa licked her mouth around the inside and then out and over her lips. She tilted her head to one side, and the warm gush of sorrow spilled down her cheek. So why am I grieved? Why, then, do I weep?*

Hyassa slept, her form draped over the body of the great pod. The pod continued forward, bobbing on, supported on air by the buoyant gas that was expelled by the seeds developing inside it. Hyassa dreamed--swift recollections, brief pictures flooding through her mind and then away, fleeting remembrances of childhood and youth, budding dreams of puberty, questions, mind-reaching; and Hylantree:

*...DEAR MY CHILD, TO LIVE IN HARMONY AS KHATON, AS ALL THAT IS AND IS OF THE MOTHER...*

*Hyassa lived, growing in Khaton, sharing, exchanging, singing joy in chorus with her sisters. Life is blooming, touching, being; and Hylantree:*

*...THIS WORLD FOR YOUR DELIGHT, AND ONE ANOTHER...*

Leucothae, smiling through pasts, smiled in Hyassa's memories--Leucothae, who dreamed her, Hyassa, into being; then plucked her as fruit from the soul of a flower. Leucothae was, as were the others--as was Arbey, with great plum-colored eyes and melon breasts; as was dusky Vitis; as was even Ixoray, sister of her, Hyassa's, heart, whose Time came early. All were, as Hyassa rode forward toward the forests of her own Time; and Hylantree:

*...WHEN YOUR TIME IS BEFORE YOU, YOU WILL KNOW, AND YOU MUST MAKE YOUR PREPARATIONS. CHOOSE YOUR POD BEFORE THE FIRST CHILL OF HARVEST SETS IT FREE, AND SECURE IT WITH RIBBONS OF YOUR OWN. WHEN YOUR TIME IS UPON YOU, YOU WILL BE READY. THEN YOU MAY MOUNT YOUR POD, FREE IT ON THE WINDS, AND SEEK THE FORESTS OF THE GREATER CONTINENT TO FIND YOUR TRUTH...*

The pod ascended, and Hyassa woke, light-headed from the thin air and fasting. They rode above clouds streaked with purple and orange. They flew ahead of the triple suns, but slowly; so that the great cluster of light moved closer to them until it passed them and continued ahead, moving around the planet to leave the sky darkened for the paler show of the moons--one lilac, one amber--which orbited twice and thrice around the planet Khaton in the course of a night.

The air cooled, and the pod flew lower. Brush tips of shrubbery reflected light in pinpoints far below, as the moons chased each other by the pod, crossing the night with pastel shadows. Lilac and amber phosphorescence caught in sudden movement from a rippling surface of water. Moonlight played on it for a space of time until the rising of the three suns illuminated miles of deep turquoise color which their combined light pulled from the sea.

Hyassa dozed and wakened until conscious thought no longer distracted her from being. She was, and she was, and the pod carried her on over the sea toward the greater continent.

Again stretches of land were beneath them--stark and rocky land with only occasional patches of vegetation. In the distance, beneath streaks of clouds colored pink, mauve, and pale orange, shone the jeweled colors of the forests. The suns rose high in the sky, shining on treetops in patches of red, purple, and green. Hyassa saw, and then she slept again.

She was jolted awake by a sharp cracking sound, and the pod lurched suddenly, throwing her against the straps. With a pop, a large fissure opened in the surface of the pod near Hyassa's thigh, and a series of black seeds, each perhaps the size of her fist, shot forth. Tiny filaments of golden silk blossomed from each seed, catching in the currents of the air and carrying the seeds away from each other and the pod. The pod dropped sharply. There was another crack and pop, and another stream of seeds spurted, this time from the underside of the pod, followed by a third and a fourth break.

The air became golden threadwork dotted with ebony through which shone the light from the suns, broken into occasional rays of pure color by the brilliant web of seeds. Hyassa watched, enthralled, her face reflecting the glory of color. Then the entire pod exploded from beneath her, and she fell. Shreds of pod trailed from the harness which she still wore, and black seeds clung to the scraps and sprouted golden floss which snatched at the air to slow Hyassa's fall. Then the universe erupted into blinding no-color, sucked her in, and swallowed her.

*-Merril Harris*



## Cathy

"Opening Conclusion" is the concluding section of a book I've written. It's the product of thinking about climaxes--about how male-created work tends to move in an ever upward fashion toward a single earth-shattering climax. I like the idea of repetition but found the single climax approach an alien one. It occurred to me that women live in cycles--that this is the underlying motivation for attacks on things linear, especially linear thinking. So the "progression" in this piece is toward a center, the lines peeling away in what I hope is a thoughtful way til the heart line is revealed. The use of thirteen lines and thirteen syllables is for women's luck. It seems to me that the process of growth is through layers: layers of recollection (the past), layers of senses (the present), and layers of imagination (the future). Movement is away from or toward a center--in itself circular and changing, sometimes one of fusion, sometimes a center of fission. And there is the center of the self, knowledge of which is after all the point of everything.

Also, it is I think woman's long alienation from herself that more than anything else oppresses her. Or to reiterate Atkinson's provocative question: why didn't second generation slaves have to be chained?

-Cathy Cruikshank

## OPENING CONCLUSION

In my solitude the sea was a consolation. I lifted my feet from earth and cruised the first frontier; small memories and gusts of oxygen balanced me. The calm water exposed the magician's heaving hands and then purified I watched the mysterious tides. I visited the ruins of my father's temple. I found my own bones, I found my self-created soul. I used my mother's words like boosters to rocket me and from invisible space I admired the earth, I aimed my laser and made my fears conspicuous. The sweetened air, a dozen dreams a week gave me life. Reentry focused my shadow and we became friends. In the ocean women were swimming like astronauts.

I lifted my feet from earth and cruised the first frontier; small memories and gusts of oxygen balanced me. The calm water exposed the magician's heaving hands and then purified I watched the mysterious tides. I visited the ruins of my father's temple. I found my own bones, I found my self-created soul. I used my mother's words like boosters to rocket me and from invisible space I admired the earth, I aimed my laser and made my fears conspicuous. The sweetened air, a dozen dreams a week gave me life. Reentry focused my shadow and we became friends.

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And then purified I watched the mysterious tides. I visited the ruins of my father's temple. I found my own bones, I found my self-created soul. I used my mother's words like boosters to rocket me and from invisible space I admired the earth.

I visited the ruins of my father's temple. I found my own bones, I found my self-created soul. I used my mother's words like boosters to rocket me.

I found my own bones, I found my self-created soul.

*-Cathy Cruikshank*

### I

#### PURPLE PASSAGE THE LAST MELODRAMA

I dwell in the halls of my father. I sigh, I cry, "I am bored, I am hungry, I must have something to feed on--to read on," I say. I moan, I groan. I bite my fingernails to the bone.

"I am lonely," I say.

I brood.

---

I cut a hole in the roof of the house and I take all the furniture of my father and heap it in the middle of the occidental rug. And then, using all of the books of my father for faggots, I light the fire and sit down beside it. I mull and muse...

---

I wonder what C. Sirius Dogstar would write if she woke from her coma--

*Come out of your coma  
dear Connie  
dear Sirius  
dear Dogstar*

Dear Dogstar is a pathetic creature, very low life, very ambivalent--a lover and a fearer of words--ooh--oh Connie Canoodling Dogstar is so afraid of words that she can only play jacks with them.

Puce is a color very much liked by Connie Sirius Dogstar. It is a dull purple--brownish, dense of hue, no, not dull, too rich and mysterious to be dull. It is not, however, bright and shining and glowing, oh no siree, it is not one of your exhibitionistic flaming barfly colors. Puce has its own protective coloring: it opts for being overlooked except by the most sensitive, the brightest eyes, because only in certain side-glances of light is it vibrant. An indescribable mixture of brownish and bluish and reddish tones, the formula for the proportions of brown, blue, red is as elusive as a flea: it is some unfindable blend of eggplant and old-fashioned English postage stamp; "the penny puce."



*Puce* is also a word very much relished by Connie Sirius Dogstar: the persimmon pucker of the lips to say it--"pu---u--ce--ssc", and the nice prolongable hiss at the end. She feels sophisticated, veddy, veddy superior, awfully, awfully Brit-tishh--the possessor of a secret-superior-elitish *PUCE*.

Constance Serious puts on her thick spectacles, unboxes the oblong lens, opens the BOOK, and places the lens over a square of tiny print:

*"Flea-coloured"; purple-brown or brownish purple; "Dip a feather in aqua fortis, put it on the ash,...and it will make it a cinnamon, or rather a puce or flea colour." (18th century)"*

Connie S.D. is crushed, deflated...then angry: whoever but whomsoever knew the colour of a flea?!!

---

Connie Sirius Dogstar sat around and thought about purple in all its manifestations and ramifications: purple in all its shades and tints is the color of perversion: mauve (the mauve decade, shade of Oscar Wilde); magenta (flashy, vulgar); lavender (soft, pungent smells); lilac, plum, orchid, violet, heliotrope, amethyst. Yes, there's enough there, she said, a purpurescent plenty of sights, smells, tastes, touches, sounds--sounds? No sounds. A silent community of purple, with here and there accents of yellow and green (perhaps the sounds would just come later, no need to worry about that now, just begin). Connie Sirius Dogstar starting out with the deep eggplant shades of her closet (the empty one with the naked coathangers and the dust and a musky mildew odor), starting out to build a community of purple--

*(Purple and green, purple and green and white, shoulder to shoulder Suffragettes...old ladies wear purple, it looks good with their white hair...Connie Sirius Dogstar has been dreaming lately about old ladies--demented senile old ladies whose nails want trimming, whose fingernails grow not just longer but broader and when Connie Sirius trims them they bleed and the old lady Janellen Dogstar (long dead) cries and crumples to the floor, and Connie S.D. is wet with the anguish of Janellen's real pain and both of them are purpled in blood. And while Connie Sirius Dogstar is wondering why, why, WHY do and how can fingernails bleed and what does the dream mean--)*

Connie Sirius Dogstar starting out within the deep eggplant shades of her empty closet to build a community of purple (with here and there accents of green and orange, but nowhere accents of blue and red and yellow) Connie Sirius Dogstar Puce, who sometimes was a timid

serious scholar, sat in the corner of her eggplant closet in a small pool of flashlight with a pad of 4x6 cards and a timid, fineline lavender ballpoint with her friend Daisy's new crispy copies of the fore-shortened Oxford English Dictionary squinting through the Bausch and Lomb rectangular reading glass at the potentials and limitations of purple, lavender, mauve, violet, magenta, orchid, plum, lilac, puce, heliotrope, grape, amethystine, solferino, livid, and cyanotic (med.), Connie Sirius Dogstar sat--eyes and legs crossed, mouth gaping, waxing sodden on the purpurescent juices of the OED:

*Lavender: "things to be washed"... "to lay up in lavender"; "to put out of the way of doing harm... by imprisoning him or the like"... "What woman has not the bridal favors and raiment stowed away, and packed in lavender, in the inmost cupboards of her heart" (Thackeray, 1858); "the lavender of memory"... "the violet paths of pleasure"... plum: a good thing, one of the best things to be found... "This Tenche was so plumme and fat that she might serve him for a good meal"... plum: "to swell up, to become spongy as dough"... heliotrope: "green stone streaked with blood"... purple: "Should my passive Body be pregnant by the purple Villain"...*

There she would have "purpled and died away in grey and mourning shadow," asphyxiated by lavender mists, laid out livid in her amethyst-encrusted eggplant vertical tomb, had it not been for the violent hand of Daisy Eyebright Bellatrice, who boldly without knocking threw wide the closet door and demanded of her best friend and sometime *doppelganger* Connie Sirius Dogstar that she come out and account for herself.

For Daisy E.B. knew perfectly well what was going on and she was going to stomp a lot, threaten thunders—do anything short of drastically smashing the Bausch & Lomb (Daisy E. was not going to do anything that stupidly violent, because the OED and the Reading Glass belonged to her, after all, as a result of the daring con game she'd played and won with the Book of the Menses Club), but this time, THIS TIME she was not going to let the pansy-livered Connie Sirius get away with it. For she had seen it all happen before and before and before: that Connie Sirius Dogstar would flash brilliantly with a bold idea for a new world (one Daisy desperately wanted to help build and live in) and then retreat to books, shrink like the violet she sometimes was to a puce flea with a big mouth drinking the blood of her dead betters and swelling to sodden immobility, sleep, and dream away her vision.

Connie blinked up at Daisy and down at a 4x6 card: "I have read of a woman with an orchidaceous face (1864 Miss Yonge TRIAL I 84)," she read.

Daisy Eyebright Bellatrice snatched the card from Connie Sirius and READ IN A LOUD VOICE: "Orchidaceous: Resembling an orchid in some way; (mumble, mumble, mumble) "The simple old type of manhood is lost long since in endless orchidaceous variation"; (babble, babble, babble) "ENGAGED TO BE ORCHIDACEOUS AND FLAMBOYANT AS THE IMPROPER PERSON OF BABYLON."

"BABYLON--BABYLON!!" Daisy Eyebright kept screaming, and yanking Connie's wrist as she tried to pull her out of the closet. Connie's fingers tightened on the handle of the Bausch & Lomb Rectangular Reading Lens. Daisy tried to pry the fingers loose and snatch the lens, but it hit the doorjamb of the closet and smashed.

"I--I--eyeI--eyeI!!" Daisy screamed and stared at her right hand.

"The red blood flowed fresh/ that underneath (her) feet soon made a purple plesh," Connie quoted breathlessly as she tried to rescue her stack of 4x6'es from the purple drippings and the broken glass.

Daisy, holding her cut-up right hand, was screaming now without making a sound. She closed her eyes and fled, leaving Connie Sirius babbling in the wallow of her closet.

Unable to close the door because of the glass fragments and the empty coathangers that had clattered down during the struggle, Connie Sirius Dogstar crawled cautiously out into the half-light of the hallway, and began shakily to order her note cards, beginning with two on side-edge--end-edge to end-edge--two more on side-edge--end-edge to end-edge, they stood alone like four walls; carefully she added a ceiling, another room, and another, ceilings and storeys and rooves--Connie Sirius Dogstar was scarcely breathing at all now, afraid to disturb the thing. Her face was turning purple from her effort to hold her breath. She drew her knees up to her chin, locked hands around her legs, and rolled several feet away from the card-tower.

When she began to breathe easily again, she unrolled herself and lay flat out on her stomach. She realized that there was only one card left in her hand. She looked at the tower: it would be perfect! she crowed--everything coming out just right--no leftover droppings to clean up: this one card would lid the tower and square the edifice complete--no loose ends--everything neat, perfectly proportioned. There it stood: upright standing by itself; all it needed now was for her to spray it evenly and lightly with transitional-phrase lacquer, punctuate the panels with period plums, then tissue-wrap in quotation marks, box in lavender manilla, and mail to the PMLA!

Connie Sirius Dogstar froze. She belched a bad taste, swallowed too quickly, and began to hiccough in what-if's: WHAT-IF the last card were too heavy? WHAT-

IF it were too small to roof the thing? WHAT-IF her right pinkie twitched and disturbed the balance? WHAT-IF the sweat from her now very wet palms dripped and weakened the fabric? WHAT-IF it needed a steeple? WHAT-IF--WHAT-IF--WHAT-IF--she hiccupped--she sighed--she cried--she wept--she slept. She awoke finally in the deep purple gloom and looked at the ugly, livid, grotesque, ill-proportioned obscenity still standing waiting to be lidded--the last card still in her still sweating shameful hand. She deserved it: how had she Connie Sirius Dogstar dared to disturb the universe by begetting and midwifing this monster--this pathetic mongoloid idiot. With her own hand (still holding the lid) she must complete it and box it away in her closet, to be dismantled later when she felt stronger.

She began to slither weakly across the floor, still on her belly, holding high the last white card like a flag of surrender--

A door opened suddenly at the end of the hall and a white light was suddenly there, like a powerful ellipsoidal spotlight catching Connie downstage center:

---

(SCENE: A small room with a high vaulted ceiling; lots of gothic arches like wishbones everywhere; thick stone walls covered with shields covered with coats-of-arms, swords, and trophies of the chase. There are no windows and the room is lit by a sloppy, drippy, smoky candle perched on the high slanting writing table stage left. There is a thick door up center, which has just been boldly thrown open introducing into the murky room a great swatch of dazzling white light silhouetting DAISY EYEBRIGHT BELLATRICE, clothed in bright red papier-mache armor fashioned like Jeanne d'Arc's. (She is, however, not riding a horse.) Distant sounds of a battle in progress: clashing steel, shouts, trumpets, grunts, etc.

Downstage center, clothed in a blue medieval scholar's robe with matching mortar board (like Doctor Faustus's), lies CONNIE SIRIUS DOGSTAR flat on her stomach with hand uplifted holding a little white card. In front of her is an untopped high tower made of white 4x6 cards.

DAISY strides confidently forward, her scarred right hand fisted and lifted high. She stops upstage right of CONNIE and with a graceful swoop removes the card CONNIE has been clutching.)

DAISY (reading the card): "In the prismatic spectrum and in our normal spectrum we found no representative of purple, or purplish tints. The sen-

sation cannot be produced by one set of waves alone, whatever their length may be: it needs the joint action of the red and blue."

*(DAISY carefully places the card on top of the tower of cards, stands back, folds her arms, looks at the tower, steps back up center, raises her right-scarred fist)*

DAISY: Childe Rowland to the Card Tower Came! *(Puffs cheeks, blows on tower which collapses immediately. ALL SOUND STOPS.)*

CONNIE: *(drops hand, collapses):* Oh-h-h

*(DAISY puts her fingers to her lips and gives three long shrill whistles, then quickly opens her arms. From stage left there begins a small puce breeze which swells to a magenta wind powerful enough to blow out the candle and spiral the cards into DAISY's arms. Holding the cards, she exits, laughing, running into the light up-stage center. CONNIE picks herself up and runs after DAISY, babbling and crying.)*

#### CURTAIN

---

The wind behind her Connie Sirius Dogstar, babbling and shivering and stumbling over her blue robe is running after a whirling red Daisy. C. Sirius's spectacles ice thick and "the wind has reached hurricane proportions and what is the name (she babbled) of this one? Alice, Bertha, Caroline, Daisy, Eye--eye--aiyh--oh, oh, oh here I am in the middle of--freezing to death, my feet are sticking to the sidewalk--oh, oh, oh, like Eliza crossing the frozen river--the dogs are barking (she sheds her spectacles and her near-sight can only follow the gleam of the crazy-Daisy flame licking up lollipop oxygen ahead of her) if we can only make it to the library (pant-pant) leaving skin footprints on de cold, cold ground (pant-pant--Connie Sirius is panting like a dawg) with the (pant) little fire (pant) the little (pant-pant) perpetual flame (pant) mem-memorializing Daddy Dogstar in the rare book room (pant-gasp-pant) ifIshoulddiebeforeIwake (gasp) IpraytheLordmy (gasp, gasp, gasp) ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes (pant-pant-pant) deeperthandideverplummetsoundi'lldrown my--no (gasp) His--no, I mean (gasp) her BOOK---

---

Suddenly there they are in the quiet eye of the hurricane, and there is the little prickling perpetual flame, and around them are the leaning stacks of leather-bound books, but Daisy Eyebright is tearing off her own phony

red-chainmail armor and skinning off her red leotard and tights and throwing them on the fire and stripping off Connie's medieval blue robe and throwing it on the fire and Daisy is leaping in her own skin and tossing her Maenad head and Connie Sirius shapes her mouth into a NO, but she has lost her voice and Daisy Eyebright Ball-o'-tricks, leaping and whooping, flings wide her arms, and some of the cards fall into the fat purple bonfire, and the still unvoiced Connie, flipped over on her back from the disrobement, her arm and leg appendages flailing "stop it! stopit! stopit!" watches the white cards fly up out of dazzling Daisy's arms, flap their wings and coo-coo-coo like hysterical doves as they circle the fat luscious bonfire, and as she blinks her eyes the cards change colors, click-click-click--like slide projector images: magenta, violet, orchid, amethyst--explode into Catherinewheels, gush and shower down on Connie Dogstar, prickling and tickling her poor canoodling body until she sneezes and sneezes and comes and comes and comes-----

And Daisy Eyebright Bellatrice bends down and gathers Connie Sirius Dogstar into her arms and holds her tight and kisses her long and deep and whispers into Connie's ear as she snuzzles it:

"Look over my left shoulder," and Connie Delirious Sirius opens her eyes and looks over Daisy Crazy Eyebright's lovely left shoulder as she chews on it and sees in the mauve leftover glow of the firewords shower an angel-band of whitehaired old-lady harpies with orchidaceous faces and long broad fingernails and amethystine wings, wearing purple and green and white ribbons flapping forth out of the whistling winds--all looking like Janellen Dogstar and all looking like their own orchidaceous, precious selves and smelling strongly lavender as they cackle and hoot and snatch all the leather-rare books and chuck them into the spittle-licking fatfire--

And Connie Sirius Dogstar suddenly knows that there is now space for her purple world to exist and that Daisy Eyebright Bellatrice knows what the dream meant--has known all along. She closes her eyes and when she opens them again there is no eternal flame, no rare-book room, no library and no wind; the moon is shining, the beach is ash-lilac and empty and waiting.

*Puce is a quiet schizophrenic flea who spends her days on the inhospitable left flank of a tortoise-shell cat and her nights inside the second volume of the Oxford English Dictionary.*

1. PATRIARCHY, THE CLASS RULE OF MEN OVER WOMEN, IS HUMAN SOCIETY STRUCTURED ACCORDING TO THE LAW OF THE FATHER. UNDER THE FATHER'S LAW, WOMEN ARE OBJECTS, NOT SUBJECTS, AND VALUED PRIMARILY AS MOTHERS-OF-SONS. THE BODY OF THE MOTHER IS RESERVED TO THE USE OF THE FATHER; THE FRUITS OF HER BODY, HER CHILDREN, ARE SEIZED AS MALE PROPERTY. HER BODY BECOMES THE TEMPLE AND SEWER AND MAGICAL COMMODITY OF PATRIARCHY.

2. PATRIARCHY IN ITS PRESENT DUAL MANIFESTATION (MULTINATIONAL CAPITALISM AND STATE SOCIALISM) STRUCTURES ALL ASPECTS OF LIVED HUMAN EXISTENCE:

A. PATRIARCHAL BIOLOGY: THE PARTITION OF THE BODY. GENITAL SEXUALITY IS SEPARATED FROM SENSUALITY AND HARNESSED TO HETEROSEXUAL INTERCOURSE, WHICH IS CHANNIELED BY THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE (AND IN CAPITALIST SOCIETIES, BY THE INSTITUTION OF PROSTITUTION) FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE MALE.

B. PATRIARCHAL ECONOMICS: PRODUCTION AND EXCHANGE IN WHICH THE PRODUCT, THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION, AND THE SURPLUS VALUE GENERATED BY HUMAN LABOR ARE APPROPRIATED BY A NON-PRODUCTIVE RULING CLASS. WITHIN ITS CAPITALIST FORM, THOSE BELOW THE MALE RULING CLASS ARE FORCED TO SELL THEIR LABOR POWER AS A COMMODITY WITHIN THE PUBLIC SPHERE AND/OR TO LABOR UNPAID WITHIN THE PRIVATE SPHERE. IN ITS STATE SOCIALIST FORM, PRODUCTION AND EXCHANGE ARE CONTROLLED BY NON-PRODUCING BUREAUCRATS.

C. PATRIARCHAL "CULTURE": MEANING STRUCTURES CHARACTERIZED BY OBJECTIFICATION OF THE OTHER AND "POWER-OVER" RELATIONSHIPS. LANGUAGE, DREAMS, RITUALS, AS WELL AS THE MORE SELF-CONSCIOUS FORMS OF ART AND PHILOSOPHY, EXPRESS MALE SUBJECTIVITY AND CHARGE THE FEMALE AS EVIL. THE UNDERLYING ETHOS IS ONE OF RAPE, GENOCIDE, AND WAR.

3. THE CONTRADICTIONS OF EACH ASPECT HAVE INTENSIFIED TO A BREAKING POINT. THE PATRIARCHAL CONTROL OF REPRODUCTION HAS LED TO A GENOCIDAL IMBALANCE OF POPULATION AND RESOURCES; PATRIARCHAL CONTROL OF ECONOMICS HAS RESULTED IN CONCOMITANT INFLATION/DEPRESSION IN THE CAPITALIST COUNTRIES, FAMINE IN THE DEPENDENT COUNTRIES, SPIRALLING DEFENSE BUDGETS, THE THREAT OF NUCLEAR WAR, AND ECOLOGICAL CRISIS. PATRIARCHAL CONTROL OF MEANING HAS CLIMAXED IN THE ZOMBIE-LIKE CHARACTER OF MASS CUL-

TURE. AS A REIGN OF TERROR ACCELERATES, PATRIARCHY BECOMES MORE CLEARLY THE FUNERAL PROCESSION OF THE HUMAN SPECIES.

4. A REVOLUTION GREAT ENOUGH TO RESOLVE THE CONTRADICTIONS OF PATRIARCHAL REPRODUCTION, PRODUCTION, AND LANGUAGE WILL BE A QUALITATIVE LEAP IN THE WAYS WE MEAN OUR LIVES, A LEAP BEYOND HUMANISM, BEYOND EVEN THE ANDROGYNOUS IDEAL, WHICH IS THE FURTHEST LIMIT OF THE HUMANIST IMAGINATION. THE REVOLUTION WILL BE IN EFFECT THE CREATION OF A NEW SPECIES: A SPECIES WHICH REDEFINES SEXUALITY AND REPRODUCTION; THE PRODUCTION AND EXCHANGE OF USE VALUES; AND ALL THE LANGUAGES OF THE CONSCIOUS AND SUBCONSCIOUS.

5. THE NEW SPECIES IS ALREADY EMERGING ON THE BOUNDARIES OF PATRIARCHALLY DEFINED REALITY. UNDER PATRIARCHY WOMEN HAVE LIVED A CHAMELEON-LIKE BOUNDARY EXISTENCE, SOMETIMES THE GOOD MOTHER, SOMETIMES THE BAD MOTHER, BUT ALWAYS THROUGH MALE EYES, THE OTHER. AND IN ALL KNOWN SOCIETIES LESBIANS ARE A CRIMINAL CLASS, THOSE WHO ARE CAST OUT. THE EMERGING SPECIES ARE WOMEN WHO EMBRACE AND REDEFINE THEIR ASCRIBED BOUNDARY/CRIMINAL STATUS, WOMEN WHOSE LIFE IS WITH AND FOR WOMEN, WOMEN WHO ARE LESBIAN IN THE OLD AND THE NEW SENSES. "LESBIAN" HAS DENOTED WOMEN WHO HAVE SEXUAL RELATIONS WITH WOMEN; THE NEW SPECIES, THE EMERGING LESBIAN WOMAN, INCORPORATES THE OLD MEANING WITHIN A FULLER MEANING: LESBIAN, A WOMAN IN TOTAL REVOLT AGAINST THE PATRIARCHY.

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*\*lifted from the song "Go Tell Aunt Rhody the Patriarchy is Dead" on Alix Dobkin's album LIVING WITH LESBIANS (\$6 from Project No. 1, Preston Hollow, N.Y. 12469)*

*"Aunt Rhody" was written to be used by women as a springboard for discussion. This notice gives permission to reproduce it.*

*-Harriet Desmoines*

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For coming, coming, Coming...see p. 72.



NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS:

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---

(Editors' note: Merril Harris, author of the pornographic classic Dirty Alice (Olympia Press, 1970) and the play Quad (presented by LaMama, 1970), is experimenting with removing the duality based on female/male conflict. She believes that the basic duality is not between male and female but between plant as earth and woman as spirit. The woman riding toward spiritual rebirth on the swelling pod is an attempt to create union between embodied spirit and plant life. Woman, because she is both flesh and spirit, creates a new trinity of woman, earth, and plant as she grows into harmony with her natural world.)

SINISTER WISDOM

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ANNOUNCING

"For lesbians, who have been without faces, without voices, without a validating herstory..."

SINISTER WISDOM Issue 2

November, 1976

"Lesbian Feminist Writing & Publishing II"

Edited by Beth Hodges

In her introduction to the first collection of articles on lesbian feminist writers (published in 1975 by *Margins*), Beth wrote: "We are witnessing the renaissance of lesbian literature. And we have much to do, that is, develop a lesbian feminist aesthetic and validate, through criticism, our flourishing literature."

*Sinister Wisdom* agrees. In this second collection edited by Beth Hodges (more focussed, more comprehensive, more in-depth than the *Margins* issue)--

Look for articles on: JUNE ARNOLD, SANDY BOUCHER, MARY DALY, BARBARA DEMING, JEANNETTE FOSTER, JILL JOHNSTON, KATE MILLETT, PAT PARKER, ADRIENNE RICH, JOANNA RUSS, MONIQUE WITTIG, OUT AND OUT BOOKS, "THE IMAGE OF THE LESBIAN IN THE CONFESSION MAGAZINE," "TRENDS IN LESBIAN FEMINIST POLITICAL WRITING," and "LESBIAN THEATRE: A VISION," along with many others, of course.

Look for reviewers, interviewers & overviews: RITA MAE BROWN, ELLY BULKIN, EMILY CULPEPPER, BARBARA GRIER (a.k.a. GENE DAMON), KARLA JAY, JOAN LARKIN, HONOR MOORE, JULIA STANLEY, and BONNIE ZIMMERMAN, among others, of course.

Look for graphics by: MANDY WALLACE, TEE CORINNE (the cunt artist), and photographers CAROL NEWHOUSE, PAT GOZEMBA, and ELLEN DENUTO, to name a few.

If you're a book-loving woman, don't miss  
SINISTER WISDOM  
Special Issue Number Two.

---

Submission deadline Issue 2: August 31, 1976

"Like the leaves you fly away at the slightest breeze, beautiful strong light subtle and prompt of understanding as you are. Beware of dispersal. Remain united like the characters in a book. Do not abandon the collectivity."

*-Monique Wittig*

