

SINISTER WISDOM



Inside the Archives



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CONTENTS

Photographs by JEB	2, 3, 6, 11, 13, 66, 68, 70
Photographs by Lynda Koolish	23, 40
Photograph by Katherine Bouton	62
Pen and inks by Sarah Clark	29, 43
Lesbian Herstory Archives: An Interview by Beth Hodges	3
Why There Are No Ghosts of Wimmin Martyrs	Meg Jochild 14
Poems	Marilyn Hacker 16
Beginnings	a story J. Z. Grover 18
THEORY:	
Lesbian Celibacy	Susan L. Yarbrough 24
Random Thoughts on Victimization	Andrée Collard 30
Stillness and Motion	Barbara Hammer 39
Conceiving Women	Joyce Trebilcot 43
RESPONSE:	
Pat Kuras, Martha Yates, Martha Courtot, Joanna Russ, Eleanor, Judith Schwarz, JR Roberts, Tracy Moore, Sue-Ellen Case	51
REVIEWS:	
Letter to Readers	Julia Penelope 67
Review of <i>Eye to Eye</i>	Deborah Snow 69
Review of <i>Wanderground</i>	Julia Penelope 71
Photographs of Energy and Color	a story Katherine Sturtevant 74
POETRY:	
“Embroidered Breast”	Quimetta Perle 83
Cher’rie Moraga Lawrence	84
Jan Hardy	87
Janice Maiman	88
Elizabeth Alexander	90
Teresa Anderson	91
Becky Birtha	92
Julie Blackwomon	93
Terry Wolverton	94
Diane Stein	96
Announcements	100
Contributors’ Notes	102

6

"WE ALSO HAVE OUR OWN VOICES":



AN INTERVIEW WITH JOAN AND DEBORAH OF THE LESBIAN HERSTORY ARCHIVES

by Beth Hodges

Photographs by JEB



In 1974 there was a pantry, dark, and empty except for a single file cabinet. I knelt on the floor to examine the contents of the cabinet, a complete set of THE LADDER. This was the embryo of the Lesbian Herstory Archives.

Five years later the Archives has outgrown the pantry, spills into the kitchen, the dining room, the front hall, the bedrooms of the upper West Side apartment that houses it. In the pantry where I first held THE LADDER, shelves of our serial publications line an entire wall. And all over the apartment I see walls of books, of file cabinets, flyers, posters, collages, framed photographs, and a bulletin board whose announcements include notice of lesbian raft trips, a black bibliography, a southeastern lesbian writers' conference, a Jewish lesbian anthology.

Today there are over three thousand volumes in the Archives collection. How many unpublished papers and letters and articles, clippings, taped interviews, radio shows, videotapes, photographs and manuscripts there are, no one knows exactly.

The Archives collective has lost members and gained members, but three have been constant from the beginning. Valerie Itmyre, Deborah Edel and Joan Nestle together have done the day-to-day work of the Archives these five years.

In April I spoke with Deborah and Joan, the two who share their home with the Archives collection and with the hundreds of women who visit each year. Since much of our conversation concerns beginnings, visions and quests, Joan starts out with the story of a woman who chose to begin her journey at the Archives

Joan: The Archives reaches out in ways that we didn't plan for. One day we were sitting around and there was a knock on the door. I went to answer it and it was a woman, probably in her mid- to late forties, and she had a huge backpack on.

Deborah: A little lady.

J: She said her name, she said she was from Hawaii and she'd tried to call us but the line was busy so she just took the risk of coming. Her story was that she had been married for many years. She had raised, I think, five children—the oldest was in his twenties. She had gotten a divorce, gone to law school, and come out as a lesbian woman. She'd just finished law school, and "before she got married to another institution," is how she put it, she wanted to make a pilgrimage through, or to, the lesbian community as she had understood it to be from Hawaii; and she had certain places on her journey that she was going to stop. She'd made no previous arrangements.

The place she wanted to begin her journey was the Archives. So we welcomed her, and I went to take her backpack from her, and it must have weighed at least sixty pounds. She stayed here for three days. What she would do, she would get up in the morning, have her healthy breakfast, and she would sit—she didn't even sit on a chair, she sat on the floor in a corner of the Archives—and she would just reach out and pull out things.

We would have dinner together and she would tell us her itinerary. She would say she was going to Buffalo and we would say, "but"—I don't want to use her name—"but woman," we'd say, "it's terrible snow storms up there now, you know: you're from Hawaii." "No, no, that's o.k., that's where my spirit tells me I have to go," and then when she left she said she knew she was right to begin here, that it was like sitting under a waterfall, in the Archives room.

We said good-bye to her and we told her to keep in touch with us. And around two months later two women came to the Archives from the Actors' Sorority, a lesbian theater group in Kansas City, and they said Jackie says hello. So she was making her trek. It's this image of an older woman launching herself into the lesbian world, and finding it, that symbolizes the Archives.

D: She did something that I thought was very brave also. She had written a series of coming-out letters to old friends, and if their responses weren't fully real, she wanted to go deal with them directly.

J: Her courage and her spiritual vision and her faith that we'd all be there is symbolic of the Archives. Her courage to journey at this point in her life.

Something we found from the Archives is that many, many of our women are on journeys. The Archives gives them a stopping-off place, a renourishing place. We are a very brave people.

Beth: Will you tell about Mabel, a brave woman who has been important to you on your journey?

J: Mabel was the first lesbian woman I knew. I was around ten years old when I met Mabel. She was sort of a buddy of my mother and also was hired by my mother to take care of me—my mother was a working woman. Mabel used to read old lesbian paperbacks and she would keep them in her raincoat pocket with the book cover turned outward so I couldn't see the covers. And one day I took it out of her pocket—it was an invasion of privacy—and I read, devoured this lesbian novel. And Mabel just watched me grow.

D: How did you link back up with Mabel?

J: Mabel always stayed friends with my mother because they went to the race track together all the time, and they helped each other through hard times. So I knew Mabel, and Lillian, the woman she lived with for forty years who died this June.

Mabel was the witness to my coming-out, and to my mother's upsetness. Mabel told me something the last time she was here, that when I was coming out, my mother called her in the middle of the night and said, "If my daughter is a lesbian, I'm going to kill myself"; and Mabel said to her, "There's nothing you can do, she chooses, that's her life, you have to let her do it." Mabel was sort of the bridge between me and my mother.

I remember the first woman I was involved with, Susan. Mabel was at the house and my mother came home drunk and was in a very bad way. Susan got very scared and ran out of the apartment. I was holding on to my mother, trying to get her to calm down, and Mabel turned to me and said, "Now you leave your mother alone and go after your woman." And I ran out the door after Susan. This was the first recognition and support for my relationship.

But how we got together again was, when I was out, I guess around 1960, I was with Carol, and I'd been off and on in touch with Mabel. And Mabel told me there was going to be this big dance up in the South Bronx. It was going to be drag dance, for male and female homosexuals. I wanted Mabel to meet Carol so we went to their home and spent the night there; and we went to this dance at this ballroom. It was just incredible, hundreds of people, women in suits and men in dresses.

D: What did you wear?

J: I wore a dress, Carol wore a suit, and I remember to this day coming down the steps and a woman saying to Carol, "Can I borrow your woman? She's really saying something."

D: And you love it, you love it!

J: I love it to this day, being an old femme.

B: You said once that the Archives really began with Mabel. That she was an example for you of strength and self-cherishing.

J: Yes. Mabel was raised in the south by her grandmother and then came to New York when she was about seven. She stayed for a short time with an uncle who molested her. She ran away and worked in white people's houses from the age of nine. She said she was a lesbian from when she was a little girl playing in Winston-Salem.

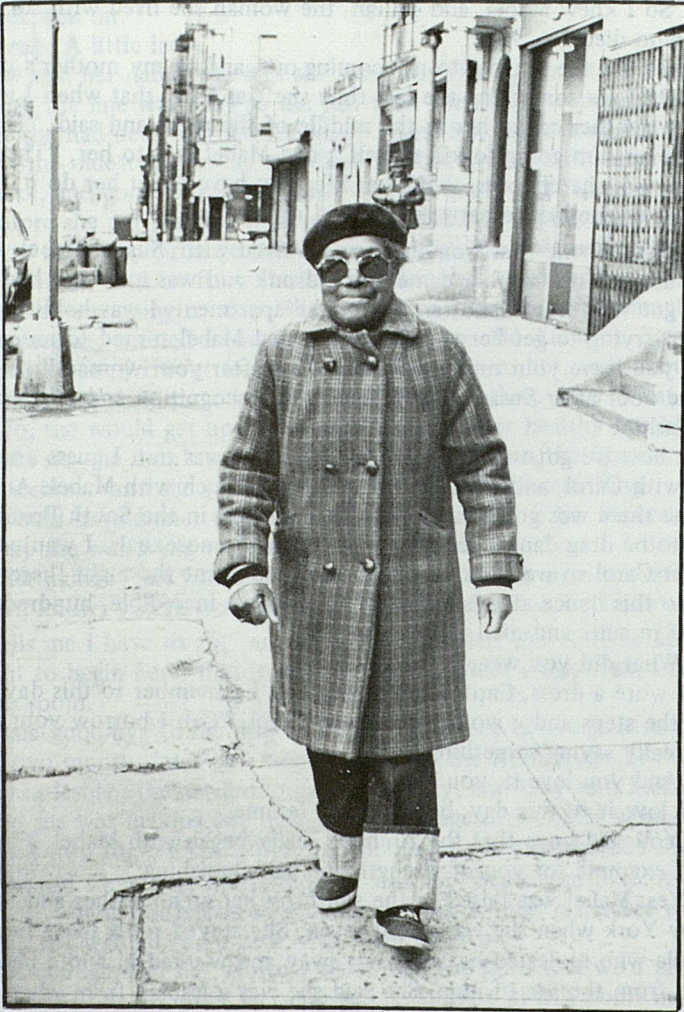
Years ago she was doing the things that we as a community are doing now. In her own way she was an archivist. Her whole life she was always looking for lesbian images. She taught herself to read; and she'd save the Wonder Woman comics because they were images of strong women.

D: She saved the old paperbacks.

J: She had a lot of the fifties paperbacks, which she prized.

She was political in her own way. She was cherishing of her own history, and knew there were other women like her. She tried to find the hidden images. And she was also seeking another way of knowledge; she joined the Rosicrucians in a search for a spiritual vision which she preserves today in

the Eastern Star. Because she had a strong sense that things were wrong, that men were keeping women from their full power.



B: What is Mabel's relationship to the Lesbian Herstory Archives today?

J: She has become very important to the Archives. In fact, she uses it more than any other woman. Even though reading for her is very hard because she's had cataract operations, she spends hours in that room, reading through what she's missed. It's like a hunger. She's just finished reading *Patience and Sarah*. And she just read Ethel Waters . . .

D: And Ann Shockley.

J: Yes, if Ann Shockley could hear this, Mabel wants so much to thank her for *Loving Her* which she read three times and made sure we gave copies to every one of her friends. She felt it was such an important work for her.

We sent her the newsletter. And Mabel, who is living on social security, sent us a donation—when she’s donated her whole life. And she tells all her friends about the Archives.

D: Also she gave us her thirties, forties, fifties paperback collection. Our collection has grown since then, but it’s what she had saved all these years that started the Archives’ collection.

J: We’ve been doing an oral history with Mabel. And finally around a month ago she said, “All I want to do is be remembered.”

B: I don’t think she needs to worry.

J: It’s beautiful to see the kind of recognition she’s getting now. One day there was a woman working here in the Archives and she just kept seeing we had all these pictures of Mabel, Mabel working at her desk, and the woman said, “Is this woman a writer? Why do you have so many of her pictures?” And we said, “No, she’s Mabel Hampton. She’s a lesbian woman.” And really it’s about her that the Archives is. And all the other women like her.

B: Judith Schwarz has been a member of the collective for about two months now, hasn’t she? How did you get together with her?

J: One of the very exciting things about the Archives is that so many women are beginning things, particularly research in lesbian history. They’re working without support, those that aren’t academically based. It’s exciting that we share beginning moments, and one was when Judith Schwarz, whom we did not know at all, who has now become a member of the Archives and also a member of our family—she wrote us a letter about how she’d been doing grass roots research in the Library of Congress, hours and hours, after her ACLU typist job, and women told her she was crazy, all she was interested in was dirty linen, why did she want to know about women’s private lives, that was gossip.

She wrote us a letter saying, “Am I crazy?” It was a very finely typed and finely worded letter. I read it and I got so excited, I sat down and typed one of my emotional outpourings about how it was just the opposite, that what she was doing was putting the center back into things, that she could not listen to those who questioned the importance of what she was doing because they were the ones who created the emptiness in the first place. And I was so afraid that my letter was going to be too crazy . . .

D: . . . for this proper woman, who typed so neatly.

J: She wrote back and she was so grateful we just exchanged letters almost weekly after that.

D: Also, both of you had discovered the connection of your mothers’ deaths which was very present for both of you at the time, and it was another bond between you.

B: Does this happen often, that you bond with women who write you or who come to use the Archives?

J: That’s another thing that makes the Archives so special. Since the Archives is in our home, when women use it, they do share in what is going on in our lives. One of the principles of the Archives is that it be an integral part of lesbian reality, not an isolated collection. We try not to let what’s

going on here personally get in the way of a woman who has something concrete and special to do. But what we found—we've had hard times here—is an incredible caring on the part of women who we have never met before and may never meet again but who come here and, either through a conversation or through something they overhear us say, become involved.

I have gotten incredible caring and support for my own difficulties. It is a world of caring that grows out of that room, a center that radiates. A caring for the collectiveness of all of us also deepens the caring for us individually. So whenever I hear women saying they don't know where the lesbian community is, it's very hard for me, because we always feel that . . .

B: . . . you live there . . .

J: . . . we live there, that the Archives is at the heart of things.

D: It's also been incredible because it's never stopped; no matter what was going on in our lives, it's always managed to keep on flowing. The week Joan was in the hospital two women were staying here . . .

J: . . . working on their anarchist record of lesbian music . . .

D: . . . taking telephone calls and occasionally letting women in for us.

B: Will you talk about what the Archives has meant to you?

J: It has meant life to me.

It started as a political and philosophical and personal issue, but I never imagined it would be as personal as it has become. It's, I would use the word magic—how can I say it?—it's almost as if it has an understanding of things, almost as a living person. During the time I've been ill, whatever I *can* do, the Archives has something for me to do. It has never made me feel useless or valueless or completely dependent. There is always something to create with it, even if it's just clipping articles, which is what I do sometimes.

B: You once said that you would remember these early years of the Archives as its golden age. Why?

J: I just see it as very gentle and very personal, the way it is now. There's a glory to it, in its simplicity, in the smallness of the room, and in its coherency. We don't have large amounts of money to worry about now and it's all very manageable. Now every woman who comes, helps create it, and it's still small enough that every woman can see her own impact, can touch everything that's there. Women sit shoulder to shoulder, as if the voices could all hear each other still. As we grow as a culture, or as we accumulate more as a culture, some of that immediacy won't be there. But now there's a quiet strength to it that I wish all lesbian women could share in.

B: Fran Winant is an example of a woman seeing her impact on the Archives.

J: Yes. I had known Fran superficially for years and years but never have I been able to tell her how really important she is. To me she is one of our women who has kept her own voice and her own imagination and is constantly growing with it. There's a wonderful integrity to her. And she finally came the other night to the Archives. Way before we knew she was coming, we had made a blow-up of one of her paintings of her dog who's very dear to her.

B: She wrote a whole volume of dog poems.

D: Yes, and did a whole series of paintings. . .

J: . . . with her special language. And we had posted it. Someday we'd like to have the originals, but we do what we can, so we made a slide and we

blew it up. She walked into the Archives room, this woman who I thought would know for sure how at the center of things she was, and she wept.

What she wrote in the book, we read afterwards, was, "This has brought tears to my eyes. You understand." And for us it was such a gift to be able to say to her, "You have to understand too, you have to know how it's voices like yours who've kept our spirits intact." So it was a beautiful moment of being able to say thank you to someone I wanted to thank for many years.

B: Do you dread the future, that the Archives will change so much and your relationship with it will change?

D: We realize that the Archives has to grow . . .

J: . . . into its own entity. We have a future vision of it, of its having a house with various rooms for all aspects of lesbian culture. So our visual artists would have space, our performing artists would have space, our sculptors would have space, and there would be room for women to sleep in and to eat together in. There would be a living creating of culture at the same time it is being documented. The Archives house would be a living symbol of our cherishing of generations. And it would have its own kind of excitement and its own kind of spirit.

D: I hope that it will always have a sense of caring that so many larger spaces lose in the process of becoming larger and dealing with more money and more objects and more things. There can be a hollowness to a building. I'm sure that won't happen, because in the shaping of the Archives, we will have already created a nurturing space, and so it can't grow into a hollow.

B: How are you shaping the Archives?

J: We thought that the first, say, ten years of our life with the Archives would be spent building an atmosphere as much as building a collection. We would be creating a world of confidence in us who are working with the Archives, an attitude of acceptance, and getting our community used to the idea that there would be an on-going intergenerational place that would be for *all* lesbian women. Not for a specific school of thought or a specific age group or specific class or specific cultural group, but for *all* of us.

How the Archives does things is as much a part of the culture it has created as what it collects. For instance, it wouldn't be our Archives—it wouldn't be a lesbian archives—if it ever was some place where lesbian women didn't have access to it. It wouldn't be our Archives if you ever needed a letter of referral to be able to use it or if there wasn't a place for women to rest when they were tired or to eat when they were hungry.

B: Or if there was a fee to use it.

D: Or if we got swallowed up into someone else's collection. Even if it was a feminist library.

J: We drew up some principles that we hope will be picked up by the next generation. One principle we hope will always stay loud and clear is that the word *lesbian* will never be diluted, will never be lost. And our Archives will never be turned into a woman's archives or a gay archives. But will be the one place that the word, the noun, *lesbian* will echo through the generations.

Though we know that women each time may choose a different word to call themselves—I mean, when I first came out, *dyke* was a very hard word

and now it's a wonderful word. Each generation will take the glory of naming itself. That's the spirit of the Archives, that we take what has been abused and turn it into cherishing.

B: Are you training another generation to come along and take over for you?

D: We see that as part of what we have to do.

J: The first thing that we have done—we hope when this interview is published we'll be incorporated—is set up a legal identity that gives us a way to hand down what we've created and keep it safe from the patriarchal society. We have created a foundation, and we hope that the Lesbian Herstory Educational Foundation will become an umbrella group to encourage and provide sustenance for lesbian cultural workers in all different fields, and that out of these women working will come those who take on the Archives as their generational commitment.

But we've realized that in any time there'll be only a small group of women who can say, or will want to say, "Yes, this is my way of being political; this is how I want to live, giving all my time and energies to the Archives." So we're working out other ways. For instance, having what we call Daughters of the Archives, women who undertake a project for a short period of time and don't have to say, "I'm giving all my life, I will become a vestal virgin of the Archives," but instead can say, "I will work," for instance, "on documenting lesbian photography from 1970 to 1980."

Once we build up a sense of our endurance and our integrity and our commitment, and we do as much of the shit work as possible, like getting the incorporation out of the way, getting our cataloging, setting up the procedures so that when women come into it they don't have to do the paperwork but can be more imaginative—once we do this, we think that we really won't have any problems in getting women to commit themselves to working on the Archives.

Also, there's a whole generation now of lesbian archivists. We've got in touch with several who've been trained in patriarchal archival schools who are now saying, "How can I contribute my skills to the Archives?"

And we hope eventually the Archives will be able to pay us a salary, will be able to reimburse women who are giving their skills.

B: Do you have a lifetime commitment to the Archives? Do you see yourself working in the Archives, in the middle of the Archives, until you die?

J: We do have a lifelong commitment. We've also learned that lifelong can be as long as tomorrow or ten years or fifty years.

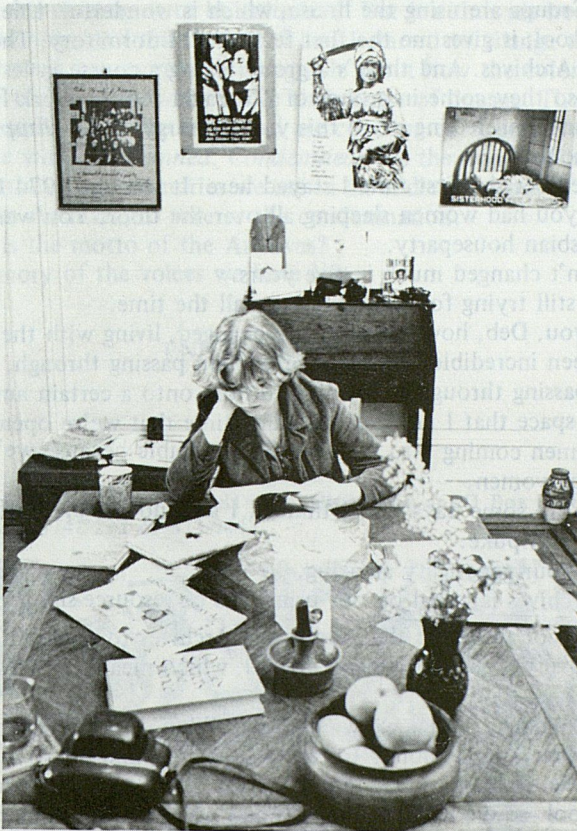
B: Deb, do you have any reservations about a lifetime commitment to the Archives?

D: As long as I can see myself in a fluid relationship to it, no. But I would, if I thought we would be so involved and so tied to it that we would end up creating an atmosphere that would exclude other women. I have a strong sense of commitment to the Archives, but it doesn't mean that thirty years from now I'm going to be living with the collection, either literally or figuratively, on such a day-to-day basis. That I have no way of knowing. Ten

years ago I had no vision of the Archives, so it would be wrong of me to try to be literal and say, "Yes, in ten years I still will be cataloging." But I *have* committed myself to the Archives, to helping it grow.

B: Can you talk about how your life has changed, living with this collection?

J: Our days are in layers; we never know what's going to happen. The telephone rings all the time. The other night it began with a woman here using the Archives. She was going to hear Kate Millett speak the same place we were and since she lived in Westchester and didn't want to go all the way



back, we said, "OK, why don't you stay for dinner?" Then another friend came, and then a woman from Boston, Monica, called and we ended up having ten for potluck dinner.

B: Are you kidding!

J: No, it just grew. And then we all traipsed over to Gay Women's Alternative. But very much, that's what happens, depending on the women's needs and what's going on in the house. A visit to the Archives seldom stops with using the material. It becomes women sitting down at the table and talking about "why are you interested in this?" or about an issue in the community; it's women sharing food.

B: Do you find there are greater numbers of women coming here?

J: Yes. Sometimes there are so many women working here that nobody knows who lives in the house—just the final statement that we've changed the nature of the apartment. Tee Corinne was one of the women working here and never knew who the women of the Archives collective were until she saw us much later. If women have been here several times, they'll give the tour of the Archives. Whoever is in the house with the most knowledge about things sort of takes over.

B: Do women ever come as groups?

J: Yes. Groups are using the house, which is wonderful. I never went to a private school; it gives me the first feeling of a dormitory. There are field trips to the Archives. And there's a group taking a course in lesbian literature at Barnard, so they come in groups of three and four to work here; and there's a wonderful feeling of all this young energy. I can *shutup* them with coffee and soup.

B: I remember the first time I stayed here. It was the 1974 Gay Academic Union, and you had women sleeping all over the floor. You were so happy to have a lesbian houseparty.

J: I haven't changed much in five years.

D: She's still trying for pajama parties all the time.

B: And you, Deb, how has your life changed, living with the collection?

D: It's been incredible, the sense of women passing through, and they are always passing through. It's trying to hold onto a certain amount of privacy and space that I need, at the same time that we've opened up our house to women coming into it. It's been incredible because we've met wonderful wonderful women.

But there are some days that I think if I see another piece of paper or an index card I will puke.

B: I find your generosity amazing.

J: The Archives is based on our principles of resource-sharing. We have a whole history of resources that allows the Archives to come into being. If we didn't have the size apartment we had, which means, if we didn't have the jobs that we have . . .

We say, "What is it that we want to do? What do we have that we can share?" We didn't have money to rent a separate building, so we used our apartment. We didn't have the money or the knowledge—we hadn't gone to archival school—so we went to libraries and we spoke to women who did. We learned about archiving and we found places we could buy things cheaper.

Every time a woman comes to the Archives there's another sharing. Women will say to us, "Oh, you need stationery? OK, I'll rip it off from my office" or "You need xeroxing? I'll do that."

The Archives is an act of empowering. We have taken a power or we have *created* a power. We must not stop at the limits imposed upon us but must think imaginatively, "How far can we take what we have?" And I think one of the givens of being a lesbian is that we have huge amounts of imagination and strength.

This is a message to the whole community: I see us as a colonized people,

and one thing a colonized people know is that the society who thinks you shouldn't exist in the first place isn't going to make it easy for you to create or to survive. And so, rather than talk about what we don't have, we use what we *do* have.

B: How did you come to see us as an oppressed people?

J: It was reading a passage in a book. This was around five years ago. I had been teaching a third world studies program for six years. I had been reading the literature of colonized peoples and part of me knew that being a lesbian in this country is to be colonized. But it didn't hit home until I read *The Colonizer and the Colonized* and I started to change the pronouns to *she*. There was one incredible paragraph about how the colonized are ruled out of time, and how they lose their sense of lineage. The last sentence in the paragraph was, "The colonized are condemned to lose their memory."

It was the word *condemned*. *Condemned*. It's the image of imprisonment to death. Without our memories we are in an endless prison. It became the banner of the Archives, to reverse the condemnation.

B: What is the motto of the Archives?

J: In memory of the voices we have lost.

END OF PART ONE

You may reach the LESBIAN HERSTORY ARCHIVES at PO Box 1258, New York, N.Y. 10001, 212-874-7232 or 873-9443.



WHY THERE ARE NO SKELETONS OF WIMMIN MARTYRS

A Story

"Of course, many of my acquaintances from the outside are struck by the oddity of this lady who lives with me. They have said she seems to be, at times, removed from reality, or a visionary. I think I will have to agree with them on the word *visionary*. She *is* a visionary; she has been called such for several centuries, though they do not know it.

"As for the lady, she is very happy here, incredibly happy. If she were not, I would return her, or find another place for her. But she wishes to stay by me, in my bed, in my world; and upon her real death, what she has written will fill several more volumes. The dry period of her last decade before I came has vanished.

"I think she is most pleased when I show her the books we were taught from in school, for in them she is held up as the example, the Writer, that she feared she never was. It must be a stretch of the self-concept to know that children are reading words she wrote five hundred years ago, reading and understanding and being swept with an emotion half a millenium old. —No, wait—her greatest pleasure came the time I took her to a play based on her life. She laughed long afterward, and when she could finally speak, she said, 'They were so close, and yet so far from knowing.'

"Here in the collective, of course, she can be herself, and that is who we know and love. Age has not lessened the 'boldness like a wren' of her, nor the chestnut in her hair. And she still wears white, but her hair falls free over her shoulders, and the Amazon just arrived next door is teaching her to ride a horse.

"And when we love, she is a girl again, a wild-hearted girl who loved too greatly for her time but not for mine. I am trying, very hard, to make up for the decades she lived with a broken heart. I think I can do this because I loved her for decades, reading the lines both written and silent that told how like me she was.

"And her oddity to those not part of the collective, part of the secret, is no real threat. We are all considered to be odd, we here on the sprawl of land and mountain we have claimed as ours for a livelihood and a home. And if our numbers seem to grow suddenly, it is explained by the appeal of our freedom, the lure that calls in wimmin needing a sanctuary.

"And this is no lie. From the very moment I made my discovery (or was given the secret by the Mother, as Beata insists), I knew how I would use it. I had waited too long for the womon separated from me by my

birthtime to consider anything else. The rest of it came when I realized that my dream was not alone, that other of us here had room and need for their own heroines. And so now we are a great gathering of lovers, poets old and new, who listen to one another with an intensity that can only grow from having been torn apart.

"Next to the first journey, where I gained my love, the best was whisking the French maid from the flames. She wears trousers and short hair with no fear now, and hears the voices of angels each time she speaks with us. Her eyes are so very brown, and the pain is faded altogether.

"Last week I returned with the Amazon, from the Steppes, who could see the erosion of her nation-tribe coming soon. I am going back often to that place—there are many who wished to come. What? Yes, of course they lied, all the accounts of what happened to our eldermothers were lies; you couldn't very well say that a witch appeared as they neared death and they both chuckled merrily as they vanished, now could they?

"I tell you all this, my friend, because you have joined our clan and you can be trusted with the secret. Also, I sense that you may have your own request to make of me, a need to save someone from the woman-hatred of her time. Aha! I thought so; well, it won't be so difficult. Can you get me her last known coordinates and the date of her disappearance? Good. What did friends call her? Melly? Alright, then, I shall bring Melly to you tomorrow. Only you must promise to give her all the room she needs to adjust—and you must let her return cheerfully if she prefers that to being part of now.

"Yes, I would have returned my lady if she had asked it. But I think I would have gone with her, to ease the loneliness of the huge old house and that cold world. You see, I have always loved her. And I wanted to show my love from the first time I read the plea in 'My life closed twice before its close—'

"Hush, now, here comes the mother of us all. Yes, she *is* short, and quite dark, but the Greeks were in those days. Wait till you hear the verse she composed yesterday...

PETERBOROUGH

Another story still: a porch with trees
—maple and oak, sharpening younger shoots
against the screen; privileged solitude
with early sunlight pouring in a thin
wash on flat leaves like milk on a child's chin.
Light shifts and dulls. I want to love a woman
with my radical skin, reactionary im-
agination. My body is cored with hunger;
my mind is gnarled in oily knots of anger
that push back words: inelegant defeat
of female aspiration. First we're taught
men's love is what we cannot do without;
obliged to do without precisely that:
too fat, too smart, too loud, too shy, too old.
Unloved and underpaid, tonight untold
women will click our failings off, each bead
inflating to a bathysphere, our need
encapsulated in a metal skin,
which we, subaqueous monsters, cannot in-
filtrate. The middle of the road is noon.
Reactive creature with inconstant moon-
tides (no doubt amendable as near-
sightedness, but sacred to How Things Are)
my blood came down and I swarmed up a tree,
intoxicated with maturity.
Woman? Well, maybe—but I was a Grown-
Up, entitled to make up my own
mind, manners, morals myths—menses small price
to pay for midnight and my own advice.
By next September, something was revenged
on me. Muffled in sweat-soaked wool. I lunged
out of seventh-grade science lab, just quick
enough to get to the Girls' Room and be sick.
Blotched cheeks sucked to my teeth, intestines turn-
ing themselves out, hunched over a churn-
ing womb fistfing itself, not quite thirteen,
my green age turned me regularly green.
Our Jewish man G.P. to whom I carried
myself hinted sex helped; once you were married.
Those weren't days I fancied getting laid.
Feet pillowed up, belly on heating pad,
head lolled toward Russian novel on the floor,
I served my time each hour of the four
days of the week of the month for the next ten
years, during which I fucked a dozen men,

not therapeutically, and just as well.
Married to boot, each month still hurt like hell.
The sky thickens, seeps rain. I retrospective-
ly add my annals to our tribe's collective
Book of Passage Rites, and do not say
a woman gave notebook leaves to me today
whose argument was what I knew: desire,
and all the old excuses ranked, conspired:
avoid, misunderstand, procrastinate;
say you're monogamous, or celibate,
sex is too messy, better to be friends
(thirsty for draughts of amity beyond
this hesitation, which has less to do
with her than my quixotic body's too
pertinacious—*tua tam pertinax*
valetudo, neither forward nor back-
ward—malingering, I ask, or healing.)
I like her: smart, strong, sane, companionate.
I still love a man: true, but irrelevant.
Then, unavoidably, why not?
She was gone (of course) by this time; I sat
mirrored, eye-to-eye, cornered between
two scalp-high windows framing persistent rain.

HOW IT HAPPENS

Really, it's a co-educational
boarding-school. The big girls complain about
the boys: spotty, spoken-for. They do without
those gymnastic recreational
pastimes, compensate in the dining-hall
with Scrabble and lime fizz. One gawky sweet
long-limbed math whiz and one dour Semit-
ic Latin grind are keeping their council
on the topic, trudge in the woods in the rain
instead, get giddy at intramural
events, slope off, slanting, before the bell.
Doors wedged shut in a pink-wallpapered room
they prime their adolescent epicene
genius on specialized curriculum.

BEGINNINGS

A Story

Beginnings: where did it start, then? Before consciousness, with Nana braiding my hair (the envy of Rumpelstiltskin, she assured me), breathing love and need into my neck as she combed, telling me I was her golden girl, her pearl beyond price? Or much later, with Maureen seducing my scruples at the Chicago MLA? With her silver flash, winking away a world as she cast it in that silent noon-day forest ten years ago?

It is a tradition in my trade (when I had a trade; when I had something to trade) to begin, like all good narrators, *in media res*. I opt instead to begin with my beginning, that free-flying point I have scooped and caught and taught to be my thirty-three year old perception of the truth and where it started.

In the beginning, then.

In 1960, I was a sophomore in college. Yes, indeed. At Thanksgiving in my sophomore year I drove to San Diego to eat dinner with two of my mother's old friends from World War II working days. Dorothy and Jean had retired as Lieutenant-Commanders out of Point Magu and headed, like true Navy lemmings, for San Diego. They had written my mother imploring (so she said) that dear Virginia's daughter spend the holiday with them.

I drove skeptically down the San Diego Freeway from Immaculate Heart and up into the hills above the harbor. There was a turkey waiting for me in the oven. There were two Scotties and a Siamese waiting for me in the living room. And of course there were Dorie and Jean. Their eyes crinkled at the edges (years of gazing out to sea?), they both chain-smoked and they wore good tailored clothes. Their house was filled with flowers.

We sat out on their patio; the railings and light were blinding white looking down to the sea. Pink and purple petunias ("Imagine that! at Thanksgiving!" Jean enthused) and ice-plant grew in mounds, marred only by brown scars where the male Scottie lifted his habitual leg. We drank daiquiris.

We laughed and guzzled through the afternoon and I was near delight at talking for the first time on a parity with people my mother's age, people who had seen the world, for with a child's casual cruelty, I had expelled my mother from that earthly paradise for the simple crime of answering to my own demands, sure sign of her essential frivolity.

We joked about Jean's tan, acquired through ritual daily sunning on the beach below, and I admired the scarabs she wore on a chain around her brown neck. I remember the necklace, my library-white hand holding the limp gold away from Jean's neck as I marveled at how lean and unlined she was compared to my mother.

The turkey dinner was not like later holidays' meagre Swanson's fare: we had three kinds of stuffing and cranberry sherbet and four pies. We drank wine, fed the Scotties and Siamese immoderate amounts of turkey skin and later we drank Cointreau in the living room as the lights over San Diego harbor glided out of the fog. As *coup de grace*, Dorie and Jean took the kid for a drive around the harbor, where they pointed out different kinds of navy ships, a friend's ketch, an old clipper-ship, all with proprietary pride. We drove home laughing and singing and I fell asleep surprised and happy that I had taken up my mother's suggestion. Two such likeable ladies . . .

Next morning, the unsuspecting heart trod out into the living room. Dorie was emptying ash trays, pulling open the drapes overlooking the harbor. "Morning," she said; "How's the beach sound?"

"Fine." A little awkwardness there; in daylight, behind nothing but a hangover and near-sobriety, friendship with two middle-aged women struck me as improbable and futureless. I wondered if they were doing this out of loyalty towards my mother, if she had implored them to take me on as a cause to get me out of the library and into what she sanguinely referred to as "life."

Dorie gave me a clap on the back and looked me straight in the eye. "Come on," she said. "Let's see what kind of a breakfast we can throw together out of that bird before Jean staggers out."

We made turkey egg foo yung. Dorie drank a beer while she made sweet-and-sour sauce and whistled "The Washington Post." Her silence was companionable, accessible, and I fell into ease. Her life seemed plausible, attainable and happy; I wondered what had kept her from marrying.

Jean emerged with a Scottie. Her hair was wrapped in a towel and she wore a terry robe with a monogram on the breast-pocket. From the pocket she drew a pack of Camels. She lit one. "Whew," she said. She sat down and smoked the cigarette in silence.

Dorie smiled at her, one of those direct eye smiles. "Coffee?"

"For sure."

"You eating?"

Jean eyed our meal. "You're going to tell me we're applying ourselves to that damned bird again. I can see it. What is that shit?"

"Turkey egg foo yung."

"I'll pass. Any cranberry sauce left?"

We ate in silence. After finishing her cranberry sauce, Jean lit another cigarette and clapped her hands together. They were tan and lean like the rest of her, like her neck, and they made a dry sound as she rubbed them together. "Well. Anyone for the beach?"

I looked over, watching her rub her dry hands together. Then I saw her neck.

It was covered with fresh little bites.

They hadn't been made by a Scottie.

I stared, I felt I could never drag my guilty eyes from Jean's neck. I don't know how long I looked; time dropped away, we all stopped, the three of us frozen in tableau. I tried to drag my eyes from there, turning to look casually at Dorie, but I only swivelled my stare to her neck.

Clean.

Back to Jean's.

Nobody moved. Nobody said anything.

I felt a horror rising, a dulled recognition, a feeling of having been co-opted, duped, trapped into someone else's game. I began replaying the previous day in my head, trying to find hints in what we'd done or said that would have led ineluctably to this moment: glances, phrases, insinuations . . . It was like a drug-field: time imploded, outward correspondences dropped away. I do not know how long we sat there while dull Toad Ellen struggled to sort out what had happened and what my relation to it was.

With the vindictiveness of the ambushed, I almost hoped one of them would try to explain it away so that I could return some snappy, vicious rejoinder, proof that I was nobody to fool around with.

Instead Dorie said to me, "Yeah—I'm vicious."

Jean just sat and looked stricken.

Dorie began to clear the table. "Jean. Wake up. You want a beer?"

Jean swam out of her daze. "Theodora," she began to me.

Dorie cut in. "For christssake, babe, it's not the first time the kid's seen a monkey bite. Or do they call them something else these days?"

"No . . . Monkey bites," I said, trying to be helpful. "Although sometimes I've heard, oh, some people call them *hickies*, PB's . . ." Chartless, this was a chartless sea.

"What's a PB?" Dorie asked, all alert for new topics.

"Passion bite."

"Oh." Silence, as all tred in fathomless waters.

Jean surfaced. "Does anyone want a cigarette?" she asked; there was such urgency in her voice that I took one just to distract her.

"I didn't know you smoked," she whispered.

"I don't. I thought maybe I could learn," I said. "It seems as good a time as any."

Jean smiled. "Maybe you're going just a bit too fast, Theodora," she said. Her smile wobbled, but she kept urging it up.

"You don't want to start smoking," Dorie yelled. "Christ! Talk about perverted habits—you'll die an old dyke like me." She grinned, marshalling a sinister theatricality. She added, "You will please notice that I have now broken the ice."

But the graceless Toad Ellen didn't choose to tread on it; after seconds of silence in which the aura of disaster dissipated, I loaded the dishwasher and walked out of the kitchen with stagey promises of taking a long shower and washing my hair.

I figured that would give them time enough to hold a conference and get a plausible front together . . .

I stood in the shower, washing away my outrage with a half-tube of Prell, working its green jelly through my hair again and again. I cowered under the spout: could I stay here until they both went away, hide years under the tap as they aged and died, were buried in each other's arms, dust and monograms,

terry robes and all, in the house's other rooms?

Someone tried the bathroom door; I shrank against the body-warm tile. Would they actually pursue me into the shower to present their case, rip open the glass door to plead for understanding and forgiveness?

Perhaps they proselytized for their cause . . .

I stayed through water hot to warm to cold and blue. When it ran wholly cold and hard, I sighed and stopped, using the black towels with new suspicion (*black . . . ?*).

Back in the living room, Dorie and Jean were assembled formally along one edge of the couch. I stalked in, my head a malt resisting thought or feeling.

Dorie got up after fixing me with an elliptical stare. "I'm going to put on some Duke Ellington," she announced. "You mind Duke Ellington, kid?"

"I don't know," I said. "I think my parents listen to him." *Dumb, dumb, you are so dumb, Theodora.*

Dorie laughed. "Yeah, your mother—she always loved jazz. I remember when we were all stationed together at Magu during the War—"

"*Dorie,*" Jean said.

"For christssake, *Jean,* you're not my moral monitor . . . Let me finish what I was going to say: your mother, Theodora, *your mother* used to go to service clubs alone and sit in the corner with a bourbon and water and get so wrapped up in the music that she became invisible. You couldn't see her. Her whole soul was caught up in it; there wasn't room for normal human conversation with her at all. She'd sit with her mouth open, transfixed . . . Servicemen didn't bother her; no one ever went near her. This little girl in brown with her whole heart pouring out into the band . . ."

I sat, mute witness to my mother's past, Dorie shiny-eyed and inward as she told her tale.

"Dorie was very fond of your mother," Jean translated.

Dorie pulled out of her fix to stare at Jean. "Boy," she said finally. "That was brilliant. A brilliant conclusion."

"How fond?" I wondered.

Dorie stared back at me from twenty-five years ago, distantly. "Fond."

Swept away. First the maiden totems of my childhood unmasked as old Navy dykes, then my mother revealed for a jazz fiend pursued by (at least) one of the naval inverters. I stood picking the lint from my (mother-made) robe while edges of my mind tried to crawl, lichen-like, across the opening sutures.

Jean got up, flapping in her terry, and squirreled through the drawers of their walnut secretary. "Here, Theodora," she said. "Maybe you should read about us. I'm sure this is a shock for you, but it's not all that unusual. There are a lot of books we've collected over the years," and she began spilling paperbacks, hardbacks onto the floor, peering nearsightedly at their titles, tossing them over the couch back at me.

"Here, this one's good; it was written a long time ago," and *The Well of Loneliness* flew in my direction.

"What about that study, hon? The one where he talked to every dyke in the land?" Dorie asked, watching Jean, smiling at her, her absorption, her activity.

I turned away; I could not witness her terrible tenderness.

"Oh, yeah, *The Grapevine*, that's a good one," and a paperback sailed across the room.

More books flew, their covers racy or sinister, titles a welter of despair and damnation: women embracing in shiny black slips and curling red hair, whip-brandishers and caressers of net-stockinged legs. Red lips, cutting eyes, *pecador, pecador*.

When it was over, Dorie and Jean stood smiling together, Tweedledum and Tweedledee in their monogrammed robes. "Maybe you'll learn a little about the whole thing, Theodora," they said, and exited, stage left, leaving me with their dreaded wares.

Or merely dreadful. From my afternoon's reading, that dizzy deoxygenated spin through the unfamiliar coils of nicotine and sapphism, I surmised that damnation was certain, if painfully enjoyable; that women who were *that way* came in two shapes (crypto-cock and cunt); and that (let's hear it again) *The Tale of the Young Invert* is an unhappy one. Much gin-drinking (fatal prophesy), much apartment and bar-hopping, an edema of consciousness.

I smoked, gagged and read, my eyes a fundement of tears. Was this what Dorie and Jean's (my mother's?) lives meant?

When the light cut too low for reading, Dorie materialized on cue from the back of the house. "How's tricks, kid?" she asked, her old snappy self again.

I had long since sunk below depression, realizing my own life-course in the grim tracts I'd read.

"How can you go on?" I wept.

She stared back humorously. "Go on? Why not? Want a drink?" She patted my shoulder, lingeringly.

"And the drinking," I cried.

"Shit, you probably do more drinking with your little college boys. It's no worse for me to have a drink than it is for a fraternity kid. Drinkers—you know what they have in common? Drinking."

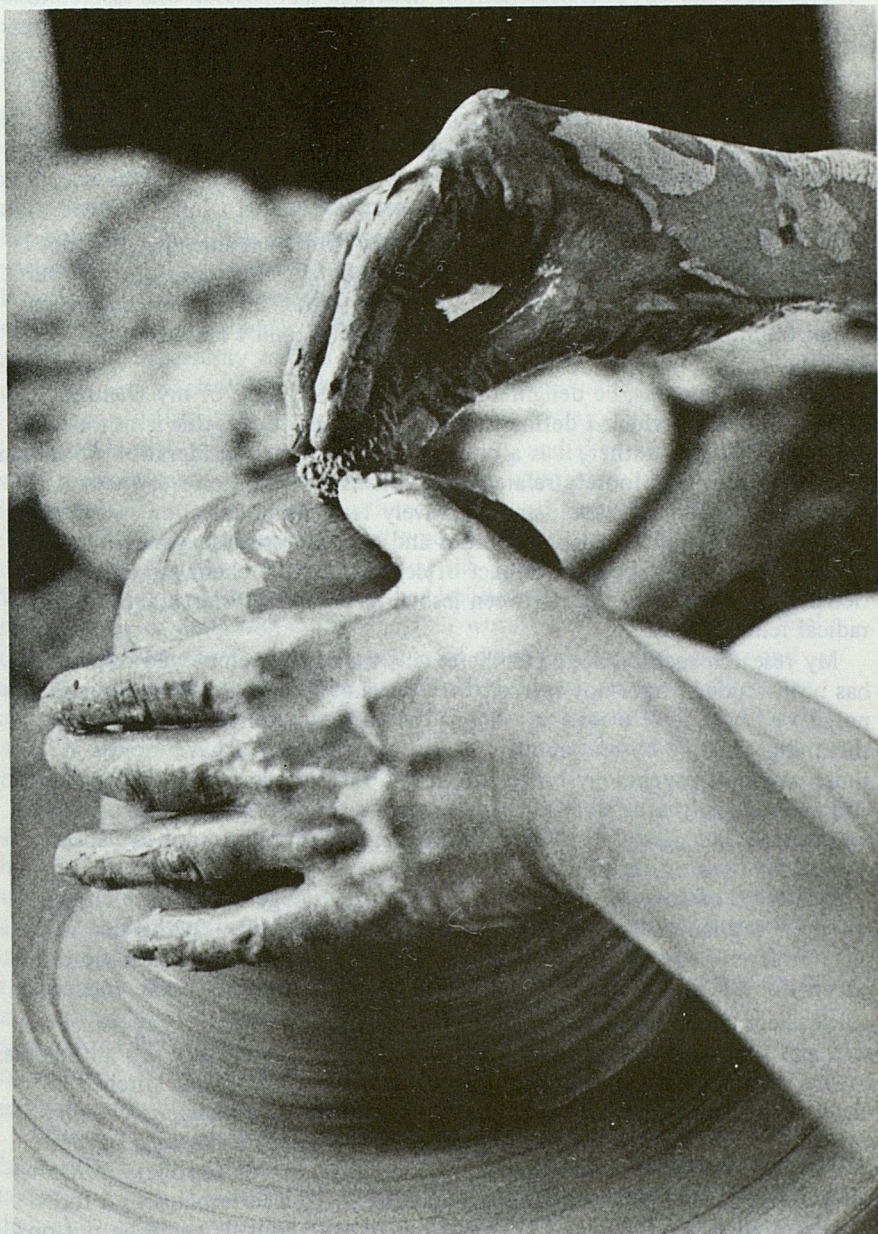
She put her blue terry arm around me. "Hey. Nobody writes books about happy people, right? They wouldn't sell."

I honked and wheezed, uncontrollable before my great recognition. Loneliness and waste: I could feel them sucking me out of that brave pure and white tower at Immaculate Heart where only two days before I had cavorted in happy unconsciousness with Matthew Arnold, Thomas Carlyle, Gerard Manley Hopkins and the boys.

"I don't want to go, I don't want to go," I cried, and threw myself in Dorie's lap like a hatchet.

She bent to my neck and kissed it softly, running her flat dry palm down to the cleft in my back. "My dear, my dear, it's not so very bad in here," she said.

THEORY



photograph by Lynda Koolish

LESBIAN CELIBACY

"Lesbian Celibacy" was a paper given to the Sixth Annual National Conference on Feminist Psychology held in March 1979 in Dallas, Texas.

I do not know exactly why I'm here today, but I am sure that it is not without anxiety. I am not a "woman in psychology," but I am one of your clients—formerly a very frequent one, but now rather infrequent. By professional training, I am a teacher of Women's Studies, and I am also a celibate lesbian.

You will, however, be delighted to know that, in spite of my clienthood and my celibacy (which I define to include masturbation), this is not a "confessional" paper.¹ Rather, it is a brief and preliminary consideration of lesbian celibacy² from four loosely related perspectives: (1) the non-treatment it is receiving in readily accessible and putatively feminist books about women's psychology, (2) some social difficulties and political criticisms encountered by celibates, (3) the possible impact of celibacy on the client-therapist relationship, and (4) the nexus between lesbian celibacy, self-nurturance, and radical feminism.

My research methodology (to the extent that I have employed one at all) has been crude: I have not worked with psychological abstracts or journals, nor have I bothered to read any library books about celibacy, for most of them appear to be by and about religious men. Instead, I have looked at those women's psychology books which are both intellectually challenging and economically accessible to many laywomen, and to many lesbians who are puzzled and mystified by what professionals say and do not say about us and the lives of our minds.

Primarily, of course, authors of women's psychology books have chosen to ignore lesbianism entirely, and not since Phyllis Chesler gave us one whole chapter seven years ago has anyone ever again given us one whole chapter, except for Charlotte Wolff, who gave us one whole dreadful book. Indeed, a quick check of several indexes and tables of contents of books long since read and shelved reveals that Jean Baker Miller's and Jean Strouse's anthologies got no further than a man's ideas about bisexuality, that Juliet Mitchell mentioned lesbianism only three times in the course of *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, that Baker Miller once again ignored lesbians in *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, as did Jungian Irene Claremont de Castillejo in *Knowing Woman*. Most recently, Dorothy Dinnerstein reduced lesbians to a footnote, and all of what Nancy Chodorow has to say about us could be put on one page. Needless to say, none of these books mentions celibacy, either

lesbian or non-lesbian. Interestingly, some earlier women psychologists gave more attention to lesbianism, although none to celibacy. *On Women*, a selection of Clara Thompson's work edited and prefaced and foreworded by men, contains two "pieces" about lesbianism, both of which reflect Thompson's pathological and heterosexist approach to homosexuality—an approach also apparent in the works of Karen Horney in the collection entitled *Feminine Psychology*.

Obviously, this dual underrepresentation of both lesbianism and celibacy in popular books about women's psychology is discouraging, for there is virtually no printed word to help us toward self-understanding. And self-understanding is what we greatly need, for a consciously celibate lesbian is most assuredly embattled on at least three borders—those of her womanness, her lesbianism, and her celibacy—and the fear of being deeply violated by the perpetual thrusting of this oversexed yet undereroticized phallocentric culture is very hard to still, especially without books and words to comfort and encourage.³ Lesbian celibacy, then, asserts itself as a particularly female-identified erotic style, necessarily and acutely counterpoised against all other permutations of active and inactive heterosexualities and homosexualities.

This is a difficult position to maintain, both socially and politically. Even other lesbians sometimes react with incredulity and skepticism tinged, perhaps, with some resentment and reproach toward a woman who is so completely in control of her own life. Still others say nothing directly, but subtly imply that celibacy is symptomatic of extreme emotional shriveled-upness—that the celibate is so "totally into herself" that she is unable to give and receive love. What is not perceived, however, is that lesbian celibacy is, as Mary Daly would say, a "state of Self-possession." In other words, our celibacy is not merely or simply a *reaction* to a culture which so daily and brutally insults and assaults our lesbian aesthetics and sensibilities. Rather, it is an affirmative *action*—a woman's moving toward her self and her center—and, as such, it is worthy of strong social and therapeutic support, if not occasional recommendation.

Lesbian celibacy can also be targeted for political criticism, *e.g.*, that it is an "individual solution" and therefore impermissible. Such pejorative labeling however, is based on false consciousness from any feminist political perspective. From a lesbian separatist point of view, celibacy should be endorsed as an act of deeply authentic separatism. From a radical feminist viewpoint, celibacy must be respected as a paradigm of self-empowerment and of the taking back of one's body. And even from a mainstream feminist perspective, a celibate should be seen as a healthy role model for female independence⁴ and for the liberation of personal energy towards political work in the women's movement. As Dana Densmore once wrote, "Erotic energy is just life energy and is quickly worked off if you are doing interesting, absorbing things."⁵

Moreover, lesbians who politically condemn celibates on the basis of such facile slogans as "an army of lovers cannot fail" not only implicitly adopt the saying of a man (Oscar Wilde) and his explicitly naive military mentality, but they also contribute to the replication of those male and heterosexual patterns of promiscuity which dominate present culture. The message is clear: in order not to be a straggling failure, one must enlist in the army of lovers. Lesbians,

however, must guard against cooptation by catchy phrases, cultivate and value our ability to be self-loving women, and know that revolutionary potential is only as strong as the individual woman. To paraphrase Adrienne Rich, each woman must constantly expand the meaning of her love for herself as a woman,⁶ but in the process of doing so, we must also resist the label of narcissism, for the protagonist of that mighty myth was a male.

Which somehow brings me to the topic of therapy. With regard to the potential effects of lesbian celibacy on the client-therapist⁷ relationship, I would suggest that it might lead to some distancing or pulling away by the client, for celibacy often seems like an unspeakably private⁸ affair, never had by many people in this culture, and, consequently, not well enough understood to risk talking about in depth. In addition to withdrawal by the client, however, there has surely been a failure by therapists to treat lesbian celibacy's radical finding of the female self⁹ as the welcome realization and end of what the best of feminist therapy is all about—bringing a client to love and have high regard for herself as an individual woman¹⁰ to become compassionate¹¹ and affectionate with herself, to be so empowered as a radical female that she is strong, competent, and self-centered in the woman-defined meaning of the term. In other words, lesbian celibacy could be viewed as a healthy breaking away from dependence on therapy, and a therapist of high consciousness and integrity¹² might want to raise the question of whether or not it is time for the formal therapeutic relationship to end.

If it is not, then the therapist can help the client focus on the special insights being gotten through this rare and valuable closeness to the self. Additionally, celibacy might lead to disentanglement of some of the more troubling aspects of the ongoing transference process, and, freed from many distractions, the client could thus be enabled to work especially productively and effectively in therapy, and to approach the inside of her psychic self more easily.

Finally, I want to speak of the connection between lesbian celibacy, self-nurturance, and radical feminism. For the purpose of this paper, I will adopt Jane Flax's definition of nurturance, as articulated in her recent article in *Feminist Studies*: “[Nurturance is] the expression of love that conveys a deep concern for the well-being of the person receiving it, without requiring that the person prove herself worthy or fulfill the nurturer's own needs, fantasies and so forth as the condition of receiving such care. Nurturance also has a sensual aspect as well because the care extends to the recipient's body as well as her psyche.”¹³ Fortunately, some of our best lesbian word artists—Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Mary Daly, Monique Wittig—have begun to talk to us (as have some women in psychology) about the intricacies and intimacies of all types of relationships between and among women. Rich speaks of our eroticism with each other, and of our shared perception of danger,¹⁴ while Lorde talks of self-definition and bonding among Black women.¹⁵ In her new book, *Gyn/Ecology*, Daly describes radical female friends, sisters, and lovers; and in the novel *Les Guèrillères*, Wittig conjures up a mythically strong vision of an unconstrained society of females who protect and care for and work with each other as they live close to the earth.

Without naming it celibacy, Mary Daly refers to the ability to be radically alone as a requisite for the ability to be a friend to another woman, and she also states that radical friendship between women means “loving our own freedom, loving/encouraging the freedom of the other, the friend, and therefore loving freely.” Furthermore, a woman who is a friend to herself possesses an inherent and highly individualized strength upon which the best of female-identified bonding is based. Because she knows that only she can judge herself, and because she has a strong sense of her own worth, she has the courage to accept her self, and is thus neither self-sacrificing nor demanding of self-sacrifice from her sisters. Wittig has also caught some of the rising exuberance and revolutionary potential of celibacy, as evidenced in the middle stanza of the frontispiece poem for *Les Guerilleres*:

CONSPIRACIES REVOLUTIONS
FERVOUR FOR THE STRUGGLE
INTENSE HEAT DEATH AND HAPPINESS
IN THE BREASTED TORSOS
THE PHOENIXES THE PHOENIXES
FREE CELIBATE GOLDEN
THEIR OUTSPREAD WINGS ARE HEARD

And the connection among all these female things? First, on a very material level, by consciously becoming celibate a lesbian takes back her body in the most fundamental form of physical reclamation possible. She has thus effected a condition of aloneness which is extremely radical within the context of an actively heterosexual male culture. Within her radical aloneness, she learns to nurture herself uncritically—that is, she develops concern for her own well-being, gives to herself without requiring proof of worthiness, cares for her lesbian body and its sexual health and pleasure of expression. In the process of learning and practicing self-nurturance, the celibate lesbian also replaces self-destructive behavior and anti-woman indoctrination with female life-givingness to herself. As she begins to center and sustain herself, her energy escalates, and, rising free of cultural and sexual expectations and entanglements, she is able to love and work with other women in supportive and unencumbered ways.

In conclusion, then, lesbian celibacy is a physical and psychic condition which has not received sufficient therapeutic attention or support. Although it is a unique opportunity for a woman to experience self-strengthening aloneness, it is nevertheless a socially and politically uncomfortable position, and intelligent, sensitive feminist therapy will recognize feelings both of isolation and of strength, and the often difficult emotional dialectic which they produce.

It is exceedingly special to choose one's self as friend, as sister, as lover. Certainly, celibacy is a new space for lesbians to build in, where our outspread wings will be heard.

NOTES

1. See Julia Penelope Stanley and Susan J. Wolfe (Robbins), "Toward a Feminist Aesthetic," *Chrysalis* 6, pp. 57, 58.
2. For the purpose of this paper, "celibacy" is defined as the voluntary and conscious abstinence, unfactored by religious vows, from sexual relations with other women.
3. I write this word this way in respectful imitation of Mary Daly and her "A-mazing" way of enriching words by breaking them down and up.
4. See Barbara Love, "A Case for Lesbians as Role Models for Healthy Adult Women" (paper presented at the meetings of the American Psychological Association, Chicago, 1975).
5. "On Celibacy" (heterosexual context only), in *Voices from Women's Liberation* (Signet, 1970, ed. by Leslie B. Tanner), pp. 264-65.
6. "The Meaning of Our Love for Women Is What We Have Constantly to Expand" (speech at New York Lesbian Pride Rally, June 26, 1977), Out and Out Books, Pamphlet No. 1, 1977.
7. For the purpose of this paper, the therapist is presumed to be a woman.
8. Janice Raymond has enlightened me about the difference between the personal and the private.
9. Again, Mary Daly's influence in this phrase.
10. Sometime early, Eileen spoke to me of seeing the self as "very precious."
11. Judith has spoken to me recently about this.
12. Janice Raymond has multiplied the meaning of this word for me a thousandfold.
13. "The Conflict between Nurturance and Autonomy in Mother-Daughter Relationships and within Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 4, pp. 171, 187-88 (n. 4).
14. Elly Bulkin, "An Interview with Adrienne Rich," *Conditions: Two* (October 1977), pp. 53, 57.
15. "Scratching the Surface: Some Notes on Barriers to Women and Loving," *The Black Scholar* (April 1978), pp. 31-35.

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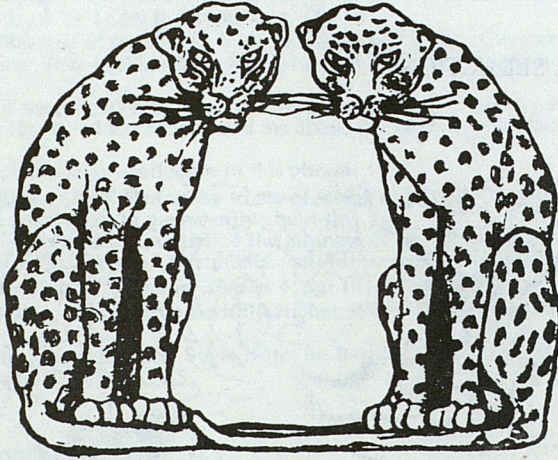
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SUBLIMINAL SEDUCTION



SRC 9-79

pen and ink by Sarah Clark



RANDOM THOUGHTS ON VICTIMIZATION

"Victimization" was a speech given at the April 8, 1979 rally held to protest Boston College's harassment of Mary Daly.

You know that scientists are investigating "solutions" to the problems they have created through modern technology. All over the world, their drawing boards are littered with blueprints that further remove the human race from its roots in nature. Men have always shown a profound alienation from nature, but it is more obvious today as both overpopulation and the tools of technology threaten life on this planet with destruction that is as painful as it is complete. In their re-combinated world, nature as we know it no longer exists: they plan an environment fit only for the humanoids they are hard at work designing, frighteningly artificial and sterile. This raises a number of questions. When the frame of reference that served to define our humanity no longer exists, is it appropriate to continue to call the species *human*? Or perhaps *human* is the right word, as the etymologies I'm going to sketch will suggest. In which case it is an insult, and we need to invent another word for ourselves.

Another question: How did this all happen?

Since the scientists who engineer the human future do all their basic research on animals, I wanted to start with the area of animal experimentation as one of the ways to approach this question. Why animals? What does that say about their attitude to life, to nature, to pain? I think a great deal about these things, and today I will try to relate some of my thoughts to the oppression of women in general, hags in particular.

I said I was going to sketch some etymologies. It is very significant that the words we use to designate the non-human world are closely related to the life principle and the process of growth. *Animal* is formed directly on the Latin *anima*, meaning "soul," "breath of life." *Vegetable* derives from a Latin verb (*vegetare*) meaning "to grow, rouse, excite," which is the same root that gives "to wake," in the sense of being watchful and aware. *Nature* itself comes from a Latin participle meaning "born" (*natus*). In Greek, *zoion* ("animal") and *physis* ("nature") have the same connotations of soul and birth. As for *grain* and *corn*, they both derive from a Greek word meaning "old age," which refers to the goddess Demeter—who also gives the word *cereal* through her Latin name, Ceres. *Legume* means "that which is gathered" and is related to the Greek *logos*, meaning "speech, word, reason." And *fruit* is something that simply means "to enjoy."

By contrast, neither Greek nor Latin have kept the identification with these vital processes in their word for "man." Men formed both *anthropos* and *homo* (*homo* and its derivatives *human*, *humanity*, etc.) in opposition to these processes, with the clear intention of differentiating themselves from nature, of becoming non-divine, non-mythical, non-animal, non-mother, non-natural (*natural* being taken to mean "irrational—that is, not subject to man's reason). Only the word *mother* retains its identification with the creative energy that characterizes non-human life forms. It comes from the Greek *meter*, as in Demeter, and gives many interesting derivatives. *Metropolis*, for instance. I like that. Metropolis: Mother-city. As for *father* all it means is "chief" in Greek. *Patriarchy* is formed on that word meaning chief. The true counterpart of "chief," the one that corresponds to the social reality that gave birth to these words, is queen, *gyn*.

These etymologies I think explain much about the stress the fathers have placed on the earth, about the classification of life into superior/inferior categories (as in higher and lower animals), and about the fact that nature, animals, and women have a parallel history and suffer similar treatment. From the beginning of "human" life (I wish I had another word), women celebrated animals, nature, and themselves as equal manifestations of power. Then, as man invades the metropolis, he cannot identify with what is going on in them because he is predator (he hunts animals), rapist (he subdues women through rape), and above all he does not create life. In the beginning was the Universal Egg, Plato said. Which divided by itself, he said. So man names himself basically from a position of deficiency. History, in the sense of patriarchal forging of values and ethical systems, is the story of his search to compensate for this lack by enforcing as immutable law the supremacy of that one attribute he claims distinguishes him: rationality, reason. I think it is this perception of himself that conditions the curious ambivalence with which he has treated nature, animals, and women. There is, there has always been, a split between his self-image as benevolent nature-loving man and the

actuality of his behavior as agent of destruction. His *need* of her has led him abstractly to worship her while his *fear* and *envy* of her independent power have led him concretely to degrade, dominate, and violate the core of her being, her integrity. In addition, his envy placed him in a competitive position with respect to Mother/woman/Nature. He will out-do her by “prying open her secrets” (these are his words), by eliminating her “imperfections” and “improving” what has worked best for him. In this frame of mind he is trying to manufacture his idea of what life is about. The sole purpose of the genetic engineers, the thing for which they rationalize the sacrifice of thousands of animals every day, is the re-designing of life and the complete monitoring of all its functions. Since I’m not bound by their scientific code that prevents them from making value judgments, I call this immoral.

When you criticize the immorality of patriarchal values (the damage they cause, the directions they take), when you criticize them from a radical feminist perspective you become very dangerous. It is then that your differentness is most obvious. You are making it difficult for him to pretend that you are his intellectual clone, which is how he understands the notion of equality. “Those who are not with me are against me,” said the Lord. The patriarchal way of dealing with differentness is through punishment, and he has many ways to punish. If he can’t “harness” this differentness—that means exploiting it to his advantage—he can try various tactics to silence it: torture, death, isolation, etc. Radical feminism intrudes upon the false sense of security they achieve and maintain through uniformity of thought patterns and behavior (*homo* also means sameness); it intrudes upon their consciousness in a way that threatens the survival of their homogeneous humanity. They react as if they had just stepped on an electric eel.

To go to the roots of things, which is what *radical* means, is dangerous only to those who will not leave the surface. I suppose the word *radical* evokes images of cutting vital parts, judging from how they use it: radical mastectomies, radical hysterectomies, the eradication of animal species and the uprooting of trees and people. Animals and trees don’t need to go to the root of things, they are already there. Nature and animals and women—if only we could be left alone—don’t need to “harness the keys to Paradise,” we *are* Paradise. (I’m using the title of a recent Nova program here: “Will we harness the keys to Paradise?”) Anyway—for all intents and human purposes, nature and animals have been made utterly powerless; they are forced to live in Hell and to die in Hell.

To get back to the idea that radical feminists are perceived as dangerous. You know how commonplace it is to say that animals are dangerous to man. In their programs on animal conservation, animal behaviorists and ethnologists are always portrayed as heroes who expose their lives by confronting the so-called dangerous wolves, bears, lions, etc. in their natural habitat. In reality, it is man who is, and has always been, dangerous to animals. Animals are dangerous to man only when man has cornered them and the animals fight back. They talk about dangerous women, too: the femme fatale, the vamp, the witch, the castrating bitch, the vagina dentata . . . Perhaps there lingers in the collective memory of men a vague sense of once having been offered as sacrifice to the Great Goddess. The sacrificial king, as he was called, was con-

sort to the goddess for only one year, at the end of which he was killed ritualistically. Animal sacrifice is said to have replaced this human sacrifice. It is said to be a cultural advance. Artemis is credited with this change, but we don't really know at what time in patriarchal history this accreditation was made.

I want to read a paragraph from a book review of something called *By Reason of Insanity*, by Shane Stevens. The review is from the New York Times book review section, by a man called Jack Sullivan, who shows no awareness of the paradox in the title. *By reason of insanity??* (He himself has written a book called *Elegant Nightmares*). The name of the main character in *Insanity* is Thomas Bishop, introduced as "the most resourceful mass murderer of modern times." He is being pursued by a "power-obsessed reporter who states the novel's theme when he insists that Bishop is 'still the child living the horror and doing whatever the terrified beast in his nature can do to survive . . . When pushed for survival we all revert to animality, you know.' The world is a jungle best described with crude animal metaphors: 'Where else could he find anything like New York, with all its women and places to hide? . . . For what he was hunting, New York was the biggest national game preserve there was.'" Bishop. A child living whose horror? We revert. Crude animal metaphors. Women/game. The reviewer tells us that "Mr. Stevens wants very much for us to take *By Reason of Insanity* seriously." The title of the review is "Chopping Up Women." This reminds me of a bumper sticker I once saw while I was driving. It said: "Do it in the woods with a bow." It had an inset of a deer's head in a corner. Mr. Stevens might as well have said: Do it in New York with a bow, since that is what the sticker implies, even though it refers to the deer-hunting season in which bow and arrow are allowed. While I am on this gruesome theme, I will mention one more parallel since the seal-hunting season is open in Canada. I don't see much difference really between the fantasy-image of cavemen who clobber women and drag them by the hair back to their dens and the clobbering of flawless white-skinned baby seals that end up in people's houses in the form of coats and trinkets. There is a connection, too, between these images/practices and the dredging of the ocean floor.

I mentioned earlier that man is split between his self-image as benevolent lover of nature/animal/woman and the actuality of his behavior as agent of destruction that so often verges on sadism. A leading British physiologist recommends and licenses the use of living animals in medical research. He himself has performed many experiments, often on dogs. He talks about how he loves dogs. He loves them so much that he and his wife go to dogshows regularly with their own beloved pets. This picture of a scientist is very common. I myself know a she-biophysicist who fits it to a T. They believe that a dog is man's best friend. But when they go to the laboratory every morning, this knowledge vanishes as if by magic. The lab attendants have done the preliminary work: they strap the dog to the experiment table and remove its vocal cords so the scientist can perform his "experiment" and not be disturbed by the dog's cries of pain. What happens to a woman who doesn't play man's helpmate and insists on being herself is similar to what happens to the dog, although the means they use to silence her, real and painful as they may be, are not that extreme. They invade her privacy, violate her integrity, and use

degrading ways in an attempt to silence her. They want to continue to preach the catholicity of their gospel undisturbed by the woman's voice. To grab a dog and force it to suffer pain within the inner space of its psyche without allowing it to defend itself or seek relief in howling is as immoral as to invade a teacher's classroom and try to silence her through binding statements, isolation, and demeaning harassment. But still, the woman is far better off than the dog. She is not the Total Victim because she is able to fight back.

I'd like to go back a little to the idea that the antithesis of animal is intellectual, logical, rational. According to Aristotle, who lumps women and squid together (tentacles?), non-men are all instinct and intuition and, in addition, women suffer from impaired judgment because of our tendency to get lost in our feelings. Lower animals are like inferior women when rational man uses himself as standard of comparison. The ape didn't come into its own as higher animal until Darwin tried to show that man descends from the ape. More recently, dolphins have been found to have a sophisticated sound system they say "qualifies" as language: like apes, dolphins are "higher" because they can be taught to speak humanese, which is seen as a sign and measure of their intelligence. Personally, I would be far more impressed if a human learned to speak dolphinese. I think the Cretan women knew the ways of dolphins when they drew them—as they did so many animals—far more intimately, far more intelligently, than any of these re-searchers can ever hope to know them.

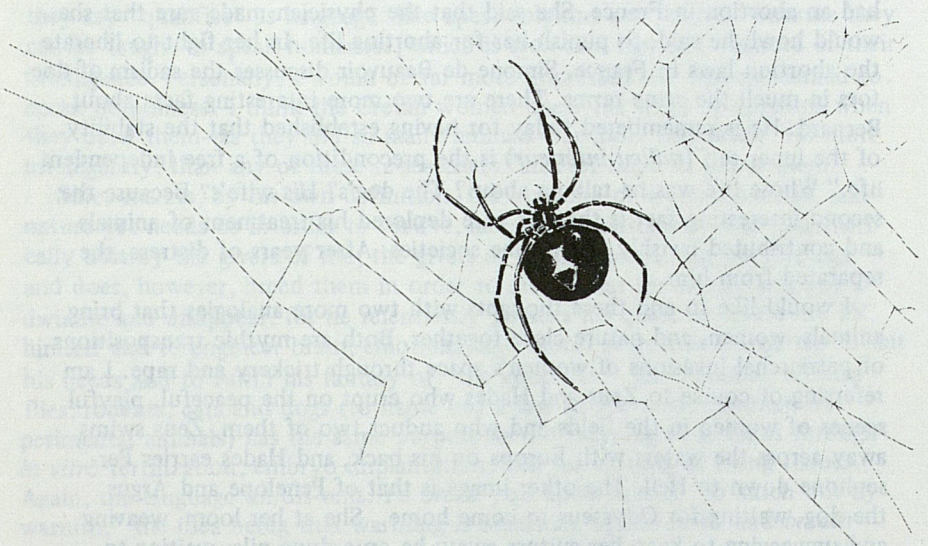
Since man is, by his own definition, the opposite of woman, animal, and nature yet needs us in order to survive, he cannot consciously and systematically destroy the givers of life, the givers of food. That is, not yet. He can and does, however, breed them in order to insure that his supply will not dwindle and disappear, for he relentlessly pursues his quest to create life by himself and to engineer brain, emotions, and motor responses the better to suit his needs and to fulfill his fantasy of "the good life." The breeding of fruit flies, rodents, cats and dogs (to name but a few of the most common experimental animals) has the same purpose as the breeding of humans through *in vitro* fertilization, embryo implantation, and the cloning of living tissues. Again, the language un/dis-veils. *To breed* you know means "to hatch out by warmth," the idea being that warming is breathing upon (*breed* and *breath* being etymologically related). What could be further from warming than the cold sterility of artificially manufactured life, of artificially manufactured environment, and the uses to which this "life" is destined to "live"? Whether for human consumption, scientific experimentation or as professional wombs, these breeds can at best be left to brood over the loss of their original shape and inherent characteristics. Does a featherless chicken brood over her lost feathers, her nakedness? I believe she does, in her own silent way, miss the well-being of her feathers that regulate her body temperature and protect her from outside discomforts. With respect to human breeding and/or cloning, the object is eventually to reduce the female population to a desirable twenty per cent, according to a team of scientists working in Chicago. These broods of female bodies will be programmed, much more so than we are, to carry out man's intended use of them. Furthermore, they supposedly won't miss a thing, as techniques to alter memory are well developed—and so are the means to control moods, emotions, and pain.

Talking about pain, Descartes, who flaunts his Latin when it suits him (*cogito, ergo sum*), must have been struck with selective amnesia when he came to the word *animal*. (You remember that *anima* means "soul," or "mind," as in *psyche*, the Greek equivalent of *anima*). He states categorically that animals cannot feel pain because they have no mind/soul. You can imagine what a boon this was to the then budding physical sciences. Their practitioners could slit open a live animal's body and believe that the animal did not suffer pain. They didn't use anaesthesia on animals until the last few decades, and even now they claim that, in some cases, anaesthesia would hamper their re-research. Descartes' decree must have helped the 19th-century French physiologist Claude Bernard, who is called the first biochemist because of his work on the chemistry of the liver. He is described by a visitor as follows: "In a narrow, damp corridor . . . he stood before his animal table . . . his fingers in the abdomen of a large dog which was howling mournfully." When I read this, I flashed back to a conversation I had with a French friend of mine who had an abortion in France. She said that the physician made sure that she would howl, he said, to punish her for aborting life. In her fight to liberate the abortion laws in France, Simone de Beauvoir discusses the sadism of doctors in much the same terms. There are two more interesting facts about Bernard. He is remembered today for having established that the stability of the inner self (*milieu intérieur*) is the precondition of a free independent life." Whose life was he talking about? The dog's? His wife's? Because the second interesting fact is that his wife deplored his treatment of animals and contributed lavishly to humane societies. After years of distress, she separated from him.

I would like to end these thoughts with two more analogies that bring animals, women, and nature close together. Both are mythic transpositions of patriarchal invasions of women's space through trickery and rape. I am referring of course to Zeus and Hades who erupt on the peaceful, playful scenes of women in the fields and who abduct two of them. Zeus swims away across the waters with Europa on his back, and Hades carries Persephone down to Hell. The other image is that of Penelope and Argus the dog, waiting for Odysseus to come home. She at her loom, weaving and unweaving to keep her suitors away; he on a dung pile, waiting to see his master before letting himself die. I wanted to connect the image of Zeus in the shape of a bull and the bulldozing of the earth—also, the idea of Hades, whose Latin name is Pluto, with the element plutonium and the recent "accident" at Three Mile Island. But I can only mention them because I'm running out of time.

It is really important to remember these images and not spend our lifetime spinning and unspinning in this sterile way but rather to un-spin their deadly fabric as we spin, in Mary Daly's words, "our own cosmic tapestries." It is important not to keep sitting on their dung pile, but to fight back and re-member flowers and animals even as we re-member our selves, to set free our creative spark and re-member the squid, the dove, the deer, the dog, the frog, the cat, the rat, the rabbit, the mouse, the horse, the cow, the

goat, the sheep, the hen, the leopard, the tiger, the lion, the sea-urchin, the fruit-fly, the owl, the duck, the dolphin, the ant, the whale, the seal, the snake . . . and the spider.



STILLNESS AND MOTION

A STUDY OF RELATIONSHIP AND FILM

Stillness. Together. I spent an entire day in complete and total relaxation with my lover in a space where we were together yet separate, she reading hers and me reading mine, our legs and feet touching across the bed. A trust. A commitment. To being there. The picnic, the baseball, the social grouping and cocktail-like party did not disrupt the continuity of our stillness. Across a throng of noisy people we were there in our togetherness and separateness like boulders lying under a passing stream. So *there* that in an instance of harmony we could go from quiet reading to walking out the front door to see a movie as if we were simultaneously moved to action.

Stillness. Heightened by premenstrual sensitivity, vulnerability, huggability, touchiness; the time, she said, when I clung, the only time of the cycle when I held on. The quality of the time was sameness. Although we might be engaged in different activities—eating, reading, hiking, loving—time hung like an evenly strung necklace of mandalas encircling us. The spaces were even, the balance weighted perfectly. No disruption, no disharmony, no ups or downs, but continuity. That must be the serene blessing of a longlasting relationship I think, that stretching on and on of even time.

Motion. Abrupt. I move the luxurious quiet to a precipice, daring motion, so unused to periods of stillness am I, unable to accept my inner peace and so the world's. If you don't jump, I will. I introduce into our tranquility, judgment.

She is too such and such. Instead of accepting the wonderful time we spend. I get scared that this might mean an end to my search for the perfect lover, and I introduce criticism, prompting my withdrawal. Not content with stillness for any length of time, afraid it might mean I am not growing, I disrupt. The motion produced is like a little whirlwind going nowhere. A still disruption. Frenetic activity as I try and succeed at befuddling myself. You aren't good enough for me in this way or that, I challenge, and we go around and around in a little dance discharging and recharging without evolution. Revolution without evolution—so that the motion is meaningless, does not produce change. Negative motion. For naught.

To the adolescent, commitment by choice means the end of possibilities. The closure of a world. If I were to accept the peace and harmony I found here, if I were to accept my lover, I would be putting a stop to

my possibilities. A foreclosure on the adventures of life. Actually, I was closing off to the adventuring with commitment, within a frame. The bounding ego, boundless, shall know no home and always be seeking. The adventure is determined as much by the question asked as any thing. At the moment I was fooled. I thought I had adventure only in the patterned way of new lover after new lover; but this format which seemed like change to me was an illusion, for the habit was as rigid as a nun's. Change and adventure for me now would become experiencing a "longterm relationship" (would that there were some new words to replace these prison-sentence-like terms!).

There was a moment recently when many of my past relationships seemed merged into the present. A sense of *deja vu*. Time played backwards. When life seemed a rerun and stood still. The sense of repetition, of having been here before, gives a sense of stillness.

The experience of *deja vu* came from a phone call from my love. She said she had presents for me and would give them to me on Saturday. The day she called was Monday. As I lay on my cushion listening to her, my studio seemed to change from a place where I was engaged in the present, moving from moment to moment, to a frozen tableau. The table and rug were the same, but my experience of them changed. Instead of my taking them for granted, they became solid, unmoving, unchanging objects of my past, and I felt caught and stolen away to this ice-cube scene of the past. Sometime before I had been promised presents on a Saturday, presents that never came.

Time moves slowly when we do similar things and moves rapidly when we are in new situations with unfamiliar stimuli. A new relationship can seem like one of years, and an old established one that varies little in habits can make days seem like weeks. In my case of *deja vu*, time was still because a similar event/situation from the past reconnected with a present one and gave the sense of an ellipsis of time, as if nothing had happened inbetween.

From a study of physics we know that space and time cannot be separated but are coordinates in a relationship. Time stood still and space was frozen in a recall from the past. In the presence of new love time flies, and space is charged by objects and people who take on a glow of special significance. Space and time exist only in relation to a particularizing consciousness. The stillness of a plateau in a relationship is tantamount to a peaceful rest or stifling boredom, depending on who is experiencing it. Recently my lover and I experience stillness in motion, plateaus in our relationships, in two different ways.

She experienced me cutting her out of my life. This reminded her of early feelings of abandonment, and she went in a deep spiral down into herself where the ultimate emptiness and stillness of loneliness lay like an unending hole. Her therapist recommended she feel this utterly painful sense of nothingness and aloneness, the stillness that is so still and quiet like death that it frightens, rather than find distraction in placebo motions of business, filling her life with events and people to evade this stillness.

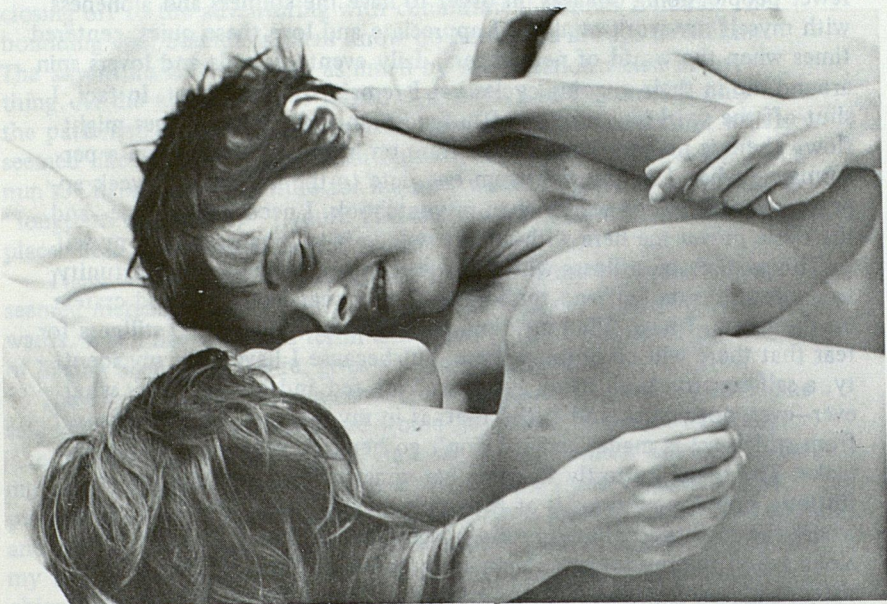
I experienced shutting off to motion naturally and willingly, seeing fewer people, going out less, in order to have the stillness and aloneness with myself my work requires. I appreciate and love these quiet, centered times when the world of newspapers, daily events, friends and lovers spin around me in their ongoing cycles yet I remain still and quiet. In fact, I shut off the swirl like turning off a faucet, that my inner images might flow. There is no way I can concentrate on a film, or writing, on a performance when I am moving from one date to the next so the week appears a veritable long weekend in my datebook. I need at this time—and the cycle moves me here without my willing it—a long date with myself.

This plateau of stillness where I exist alone gives me the opportunity to concentrate on Self and the images that appear like rocks and craters on the moon. I have filled my time with motion to avoid the stillness for fear that there will be nothing there, but because I have built my identity, a self-construct, on being an artist, I am fed and nourished by whatever—even nothing should I find that—is in my stillness. This is the stuff from which art is made; and if I don't go here, then I have nothing to make. The social butterfly flapping her wings living years in a day with fluttery, hopping motions is at the opposite side from the still cocoon where the meditation harbors, the images form and grow. In stillness alone I find the motion for the moving images in film. It's like the persistence of vision where series of still photographs stopped in the film gate of projected light for a short moment, 1/24th of a second, appear as motion. Owing to memory—our memory of the image that precedes—and the continuous present that changes the moment we see it, the still photographs appear to move.

In the stillness of my center, images come one after the other with the appearance of motion, of fluidity, of continuance. There is this flow, this continuity, this progressing which eventually makes the work, but it is all contained in the stillness and cannot be without it.

My lover who enters her stillness afraid of a terrifying loneliness, even she, claims that she would not do away with these periods, for she always brings away new understanding. After we have an intimate sharing time with another, it is an inner voice that demands we give attention to our private selves. The voice says, "pay attention to me," "reflect on what I am telling you." Each of us has an inner voice (or several) which guides us in taking care of ourselves. If we don't listen and follow that voice, we miss out on a relationship with our very self. In that case we could go for days without knowing how we are really feeling, what it is we want to do, what we need. By practicing a following of the spirit, of the intuition, of inner suggestion, a balance will take place, and a circle of flow without practice will eventually establish itself. At first it will take constant and attentive listening to the voice; later it will be second nature (truly the first and primary nature), and one action or contemplation will naturally follow another.

This morning I awoke from a deep and dreamful sleep wanting to be alone. I had spent hours of the day before in intense and wonderfully intimate relating with my lover; much of the time was exceptional. This morning I needed to reflect, to let the unconscious surface if she would.



photographs by Lynda Koolish

I told my lover and she felt the same way; she needed time to herself as well. A time of stillness so that the intensities of the day before could settle themselves, find an interior home. We took our separate rooms.

Yesterday on the couch I was fallen in her arms, sunk into her body in restful giving as I can find in me when I need to, can find in me because she's there for me to lie upon and be held by. As I lay upon her I needed to reveal myself, reveal the mind/body split that tossed me, restless with insomnia, night after night. I told her I was fearing an impending conflict between my love for her and for another. That my love for her was a physical and emotional one, that my body loved her, and that my love for the other was an intellectual, ambitious head. Neither love was so clearly defined, but to make the distinction and understand the conflict I let the division grow. I told her this and she heard without reaction or moral judgment, and my telling and her hearing released an incredible and first-felt surge of surrender in me. I don't have better words for it now and it deserves better, but it was as if I gave up my ego-strength, my power of being, my holding back, my resistances—and when I gave up those boundaries of the self, I experienced a very deep soul-felt release and acceptance. I had given up my definition of myself and was still loved and accepted. I experienced a sense of relief at being able to let go.

This was not an easy letting go. I felt frightened and warmed simultaneously. Frightened that if I let go of my self, she might dominate me in a way that would not be good for me. At the same time I wanted to be dominated, just a little bit. *Dominate* is not the right word. I wanted her to be as strong, as powerful as I experienced myself—and that was quite powerful; hence, the strong sense in giving it up. I decided then not to make judgments about myself but to experience my emotion without condemnation.

When we were in bed that evening and she began the delicious massage of my back which led to her lying her full body weight on mine, and after she began a movement with her buttocks and vulva pushing against mine trying to get in over and over in a rhythm I couldn't and didn't want to stop I began to make a judgment again. A judgment that this was heterosexual physical movement in our loveplay. And then I let that go, let the whole left side of the brain go, and felt good because I wanted to. I wanted her apushing and abeating on me like that, and I wanted her fiercely and was beginning to wonder if I would come just from the slight crumple of the sheet under me that would lightly brush my clitoris in our mutual thrusting movements. Her hand slid down my hips, down to my fur, her finger reaching, and she went for me. She went for me with all her intensity and push and I was there but not carried away, not carried away to climax, and when I felt her extended and expended and she pulled back, rolled off and over, belly up to me, wide breasts falling, white globes in the candlelight, I didn't care that I hadn't come and that too was new. The stillness came in with her loving me when we were moving in unison. In our movement there was stillness at the center of the ride.

That evening everytime we kissed we were unable to pull away, and one kiss led to another or lasted itself a very long time. We danced and discoed and I got wet pants and could have come with just a little more of her

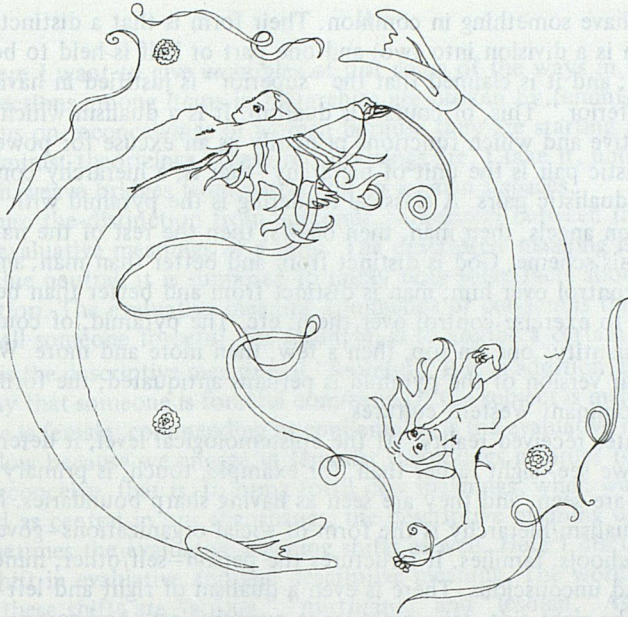
right then and there but for the interruptions: the closing of the door, the washing of parts that might be open to love licking later, the undressing, the pulling back of the blankets. Another type of stillness. A cutting off, our habit of stopping where we were to make the setting more perfect. Not the stillness at the center of motion, but the stillness that comes from a knife slice, a scissors cut, a snap. However and besides, we did move beyond that stop to our riding passion movement, and she rolled off now all white and bellyside up like a porpoise in play, a live animal exposed. I couldn't help it, I couldn't consider, I went for her breasts, sucking and pulling and getting a sweet sweat I wanted to drink and bullying and tossing them and rubbing them circular with my hard-pressed mouth all over her chest and atugging I went. She was the animal. I was the animal. We were deer lost in the woods to our fancy, and she'd be lost and I'd be lost and we gave ourselves permission together to be lost and nonjudgmental and to do what we wanted lost and most to find ourselves through our very lostness.

It happened everytime we made love. She, more and more aroused, would give a sign, a signal, a cry of surrender that would heighten my passion, my wanting her, my surrender to my own passions that would become more intense by the surrender until only her cry of come would stop me, and I too could roll belly over and up to her again.

No wonder this morning we needed our separate stills away from motion together, away from relationship, away from the comes and goes between us; we needed the stillness and quiet inside each one of us. To listen to that still lake, that still quiet lake of come of the self.

As the eye retains the image seen, I retain the image of the "other" during periods of absence in the mind's eye or memory to give the sense of continuity. Persistence of vision, the time that the eye retains the image just seen, varies among individuals. I may need to see my lover/other every day or have verbal connection with her to continue the sense of continuity. Someone else can have an ongoing sense of relationship from weekend meetings. Still others carry a still image in wallets or prop them on their desk in their workplace to recall a chain of images, a sense of flow and continuance in the present from this frozen image of the past.

The continuity of flow or motion we bring to a still photograph is not an illusion; since we experience the continuance rather than the short, jagged, cut-off events of the actual time/space spent with the loved one. If we fashion a continuance, a persistence of vision, subjectively then it exists; and as our regulating body organs continue and are the basic sense of life to us, so does the ongoing quality of relationship give us a sense of meaning. I saw her this morning; I hugged her and was stroked; she is gone and I won't see her for two days. But the sense of her is with me in the present from the visual and tactile memory I keep.



pen and ink by Sarah Clark

CONCEIVING WOMEN: Notes on the Logic of Feminism by Joyce Trebilcock

Feminism is not just a matter of reordering what exists, of, say, moving women from one "place" to another; feminism involves, rather, changes in the very nature of things. In this paper I want first to explicate one reason why feminism requires ontological change and then to give some examples of ways in which these changes are taking place in our redefinings of women.

I

If we begin with the assumption that women should not be mutilated, violated, locked up, exploited, restricted—dominated, because we are women, we have the basis for feminism in a narrow sense, a feminism that would concern itself only with the mistreatments of women which arise out of perceptions of us as female. But to be a feminist is to care about women, and it is arbitrary to limit our concern to just those aspects of our sufferings and limitations which arise from a particular cause; so feminism, it seems to me, must be concerned with all of the harm done to women, regardless of its source. This means that because women are oppressed not only because we are women but also because we are Black or Hispanic or Jewish, because we are Lesbian, because we are poor or handicapped or fat or young or old or ignorant or (fill in the blanks), we must, as feminists, seek to identify, understand, and eliminate all these oppressions.

They all have something in common. Their form is that a distinction is made, which is a division into two; and one part or half is held to be superior to the other; and it is claimed that the "superior" is justified in having power over the "inferior." This, of course, is dualism. It is a dualism which is essentially evaluative and which functions primarily as an excuse for power over.

The dualistic pair is the unit of hierarchy—that is, a hierarchy consists of overlapping dualistic pairs. A classical rendering is the pyramid with God at the apex, then angels, then man, then beasts, then the rest of the natural world. On this scheme, God is distinct from and better than man, and entitled to exercise control over him; man is distinct from and better than beasts, and entitled to exercise control over them; etc. The pyramid, of course, represents quantity: one on top, then a few, then more and more. While this particular version of the pyramid is perhaps antiquated, the form itself permeates dominant Western cultures.

It permeates received reality. At the epistemological level, it determines perception: we see—sight rather than, for example, touch, is primary—it is objects that are seen, and they are seen as having sharp boundaries. More obviously, dualism/hierarchy is the form of social organizations—governments, businesses, schools, families. It structures the person—self/other, mind/body, conscious and unconscious. There is even a dualism of right and left—the right hand, the right side, take precedence over the left. And so on.

In feminism, there is movement toward the elimination of all dualism, not just of those manifestations of it which oppress women as women or as members of other groups. One reason for this movement is the belief that only by getting rid of dualism in all of its manifestations can oppressions such as sexism, racism, and classism be permanently and thoroughly eradicated. Another reason is the sense that dualism as a form is discordant with women's values: even if no "inferior" category included women, dualism would block the flowering of women's modes.

The elimination of dualism—of either a specific manifestation of it or all of it—requires change in the nature of entities which are related to one another in dualistic/hierarchical orderings. This is because the nature of the entities is determined at least in part by their participation in the orderings. In academic terms, the relations among them are internal rather than external. An example of an external relation is the distance between two cups on a table; a change in the distance does not alter the nature of the cups. A change in an internal relation, however, does alter the nature of the things related. A nurse, for instance, cares for the sick by assisting and following the orders of doctors; if we eliminate her subordinate relationship to doctors, we change the meaning of the word "nurse." Similarly, what it is to be a worker, an Indian, a wife—or, of course, a woman—is determined in part by relations between these and other concepts in hierarchical orderings. Because the relationships among items in dualistic/hierarchical orderings are internal, then, feminism, insofar as it is committed to the elimination of dualism/hierarchy, is committed to changing the nature of things.

II

Here I want to give examples of just some of the ways in which internal connections among items in hierarchies are broken by feminist reconceivings. I focus on reconceivings of women because they are starting points and centers of feminist theorizings. These reconceivings are, I take it, political strategies which weave bridges from patriarchy to women's spaces.

I use the distinction from academic philosophy between the descriptive and evaluative meanings of a term. The descriptive meaning is characterized as value neutral; it is supposed to imply only some facts about the thing in question. The evaluative meaning commends or condemns the facts described. To call someone forceful, for example, is to ascribe a certain style of behavior; this is the descriptive meaning of "forceful." But in addition, in most contexts, to say that someone is forceful commends if the subject is male and condemns if she is female; commending or condemning is the evaluative meaning of "forceful."

Now because we engage in feminist theorizings in order to re-experience, to reconceive, that is, to bring forth new meanings, when we use a conventional word as central in our theorizings, the descriptive meaning of that word shifts. Sometimes the evaluative meaning shifts as well. Here I discuss three patterns of shift in evaluative and descriptive meaning. The words used to exemplify these shifts are "strong," "nurturant," and "lesbian." As these words, which are used by feminists to describe women, are given new meanings, the meaning of "woman" changes too—and the conceptual bonds which hold us in our traditional places in dualistic/hierarchical orderings are frayed.

1. *Descriptive meaning changes, evaluative meaning remains the same:*
Strength. In patriarchy, a strong man is one who deals with difficulty calmly, quietly, unobtrusively. According to the cliché, he is the strong silent type—paradigmatically, the John Wayne character.

The patriarchal strong woman, like the strong man, handles or endures difficulties quietly, without disturbing others. But in other respects she differs from him. In particular, in accordance with the patriarchal practice of defining women in terms of our relationships to men and of our sexuality, the strong woman is typically one who both lacks a heterosexual partner and is thought to be sexually unattractive to men. She has no husband or mate (or, if she has, he is absent from the situation in which she is called strong) because if an appropriate male is present it is presumed that he takes care of and protects her, not that she does this for herself, and so the term "strong" is reserved for him. But even if she has no man, she can't be strong unless she is heterosexually unattractive—usually she is imaged as old—because if she is attractive she should or might have a man, and again the term "strong" is reserved, this time not for an actual but for a possible man. In patriarchy, then, we generally must be both unattached to a man and unattractive to men in order to qualify for strength.

The feminist concept of the strong woman preserves the notion of strength as dealing well with adversity—this is the common thread by virtue of which the same term, "strength," is used in both contexts. But of course the heterosexist limitations of women's strength drop out. A feminist strong woman may have a man—in many cases her strength is manifested primarily in her

struggle against a husband or lover. And she need not be unattractive to men—we know that there are many young and conventionally beautiful women who are strong indeed.

Further, in feminism the idea of strength as quietly, privately, unobtrusively dealing with difficulty drops out. The feminist strong woman is likely to be noisy, even loud; she is inclined to protest, to complain, to call attention to her difficulty. This difference of course is based on the political difference between patriarchy's interest in preserving present systems and feminism's interest in changing them.

Thus, while the evaluative meaning of the expression "a strong woman" is the same in patriarchy and in feminism—it is positive in both contexts—the descriptive meaning shifts: *what* is valued changes. This change is the basis for a partial redefinition of the concept of woman. Whereas in patriarchy, strength in women is an anomaly, in feminism there is a tendency to understand it as essential, as an element in the definition of woman: all women are potentially strong. But this move breaks one link in the internal connection between the concepts of woman and man. In patriarchy, women are weak as compared to men; therefore women are inferior; therefore women may justifiably be dominated by men. But if women are by nature strong, the syllogism fails.

2. *Descriptive meaning changes, evaluative meaning changes: Nurturance.*

The term "nurturance," whose root idea, of course, is that of a mother nursing her child, is being given both new descriptive and new evaluative meaning by feminists. Barbara Love and Elizabeth Shanklin, in their article, "The Answer is Matriarchy," provide an account of a feminist definition of nurturance which clearly differs from patriarchal ones.¹ To nurture a child, they say, is to support "the unique will of the child to grow into its full potential as a self-regulating individual": again, to nurture is to strengthen "the unique will of each individual to form open, trusting, creative bonds with others" (184).

This concept of nurturing retains the connection with the mother-child relationships, but otherwise contrasts sharply with patriarchal views of nurturance. In patriarchy, the aim of childrearing is not to strengthen the child's will, but to direct and control it, to dominate it. In patriarchy, the aim of the "training" of children is not to enable them to think for themselves, but rather to prepare them to take their places in existing institutions. Barbara and Elizabeth note that "in capitalism the child's will is directed toward serving the interests of corporations; in socialism it is directed toward serving the state" (184). Their concept of nurturing as supporting the unique will of each individual to develop as self-regulating and self-realizing constitutes, then, a clear shift in the descriptive meaning of "nurturance."

Evaluatively, nurturance is viewed positively in patriarchy, but as second-rate. Nurturing is a good thing for women to do, but not good enough for men. In matriarchal theory, however, the value of nurturing is expanded. The nurturant mother-child relationship is to serve as the model of all relationships, and all social institutions are to be designed so as to support nurturing. Here, nurturing, a women's value, becomes the primary value.

But from a feminist perspective it is probably a mistake to say that matri-

archal theories make nurturing primary, for feminists tend not to be concerned to order values hierarchically. We may say, then, that what matriarchal theory does is to horizontally expand the range of nurturance. Traditionally, only women are supposed to be nurturant, we are expected to nurture men and children but not one another or ourselves, and nurturing is supposed to take place only privately, in the home. But a matriarchal society is one in which nurturing is valued for everyone, in all contexts. Thus, matriarchal theory not only gives nurturing a new descriptive meaning, it also radically expands its sphere as a value. And if nurturing is not second-rate, then women are not in this respect inferior to men, and one of the struts holding up the patriarchal hierarchy is toppled.

3. *Descriptive meaning changes, evaluative meaning is reversed: Lesbian.*

Another way in which patriarchal evaluative meanings are altered in feminism is by simply reversing them. The patriarchal intention to keep us in line by calling us dykes or bitches or hags is blocked when we describe ourselves in these terms with pride and pleasure. We break out of secondary status, out of hierarchy, by flipping their evaluations over, by gladly acknowledging that we are what they condemn.

This reversal of value is based on a reconceptualizing of the descriptive meaning of the term in question. While patriarchal concepts of lesbianism focus on women "having sex" with women—and on men (lesbians are women who can't get men, who need men, who hate men, etc.)—feminist conceptions retain only the emphasis on women, and transform it. Here are some samples. From the Radicalesbians: "A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion."² From Ti-Grace Atkinson: Lesbianism is the "commitment, by choice, full-time, of one woman to others of her class."³ From Sally Miller Gearhart: "A lesbian is a woman who seeks her own self-nurturance."⁴ Such ways of understanding lesbianism depart from the patriarchal concept in description and reverse it in evaluation. And they not only move lesbians out of our patriarchal places as inferior to heterosexuals and to men, they also have implications for the concept of woman: if some women—lesbians—are not dependent on and inferior to men, then no women need be.

III

I have so far talked about ways feminists recreate ourselves by giving new meanings to words which are used in both patriarchy and feminism to describe women. But not everything we need to say about ourselves can be expressed in this way. So feminists also describe women in terms not conventionally used to describe women at all. I have chosen three examples here. One is "together," an adverb in standard English, an adjective in slang, and a feminist adjective in the work of Inez Smith Reid. A different sort of example is a new combination of ordinary words: "woman-identified." The third case is a materially new word, a word formed by combining parts of standard words—"gynergy." These are terms we have appropriated or invented for ourselves. One might say that, unlike the words I discussed earlier, they are not old words given new meanings, but rather new words; they are, anyway, new descriptions of women. So to understand them as contributing to feminist conceptions of ourselves is not to trace shifts in their meanings from patriarchy

to feminism—"gynergy," for example, has no meaning in patriarchy at all; it is, rather, just to understand why we need these new words, what they mean.

"Together" is used by Inez Smith Reid in her book *"Together" Black Women* to describe politically conscious Black women. Many of these women do not define themselves as feminists, but in their struggle against racism as a hierarchy of power they are clearly sisters of feminists. Inez's account of how she came to use the word "together" in thinking about these women helps to illuminate one sort of politically-based conceptual shift.

Inez began her project with the intention of studying militant Black women and so she selected her subjects on the basis of their "reputation in the community for militancy." One of the questions the women were asked was to define militancy. Among the responses: "To be militant you have to be aware . . ."; "Militancy is when you can actually analyze . . ."; "a militant person is, for Black people, anybody who decides it's time for White folks to stop kicking my ass. It's just anybody who's tired of being messed over" (17, 18).

But most importantly, many of the responses carry a sense of dissatisfaction with the term "militant" itself. This sense is perhaps best expressed by the woman who says: "I really feel it's just a name that the White people gave to the Black people. They call them that name because they speak the right things for the race . . . I don't think there's such a word as that" (20). *There is no such word as that*. This woman not merely refuses to accept a characterization imposed on her by the dominant group, she denies the very existence of the word.

As Inez listened to the women she was studying and began to appreciate their tendency to reject the standard concept of militancy, she herself moved away from this notion and came to think of these women not as militant, but as "together." She cites the definition of "together" from the *Dictionary of Afro-American Slang*: "to have one's mind free of confusion; to be positive; functional; to emerge as a whole person." Inez adds that in her work, "together" has "a more collective connotation," it is "characterized by a spiritual closeness in a common endeavor—that of a singular or peculiar commitment to . . . erase oppression." Further, the term "denotes a refusal to take on, uncritically, the total value structure of the White community" (29). So here we have the discovery of the negative evaluative meaning of a term and its replacement with a new word, that is, with a word which in the standard language of the dominant culture is not used to describe persons at all.

The description of some women as "together" has, of course, implications for the concept of woman. Inez Smith Reid's work suggests that all women can be "together"—that is, free of confusion, whole, and sharing commitment; insofar as this conception of women is inconsistent with patriarchal ideas of women as scattered, incomplete, and at odds with one another, it tends toward transforming the concept of woman and so breaking the bonds which hold us in our traditional places in hierarchical orderings.

Another approach to reconceiving ourselves is to make up terms. The expression "woman-identified woman," introduced in the Radicalesbians' 1970 paper, names a woman who creates her identity in relation to women rather than in relation to men and who makes women her primary commitment:

“... we must be available and supportive to one another, give our commitment and our love, give the emotional support necessary to sustain this movement. Our energies must flow toward our sisters, not backward toward our oppressors” (215). The paper provides a new, positive description of the lesbian feminist, along with a new name for her: woman-identified.

The meaning of the expression “woman-identified woman” has shifted somewhat within feminism. The expression has been used widely since its introduction, with the understanding that while not all lesbians are woman-identified, all women-identified women are perceived by patriarchy as lesbians. But then at the 1978 founding convention of the National Lesbian Feminist Organization, a resolution was adopted which specified that membership in the new organization is open to “all lesbians and/or woman-identified women who agree with the purposes of this organization.” “Woman-identified woman” was included partly to make space for lesbians who cannot publicly say they are lesbians. But it was understood also that this provision would admit to membership women who in patriarchal terms are not lesbians.

So the concept of the woman-identified woman has taken on a life of its own. Arising out of the rejection of the male practice of defining women in narrowly sexual terms, and specifically out of the rejection of the narrowly sexual patriarchal definition of lesbianism, the new concept at first simply added to the sexual: a woman-identified woman was a lesbian who lived primarily with and for women. But then the term was used in such a way that the sexual criterion dropped out entirely. Thus our reconceivings of women change.

Another new word invented by feminists is “gynergy.” Like “woman-identified woman,” it has become a regular part of the vocabulary of many feminists. (The women I know pronounce it with a soft “g.”) Janice Raymond describes gynergy as “the woman power/spirit/strength that is building up in ‘woman identified women’” and as both individual and social: “. . . it proceeds not only from an individual woman’s realization of her own power of being but from a collective consciousness, i.e., a feminist collective consciousness.”⁶

Unlike the other concepts discussed here, gynergy is not an attribute of individual women; we do not speak of a “gynergetic woman.” Gynergy is something we as individuals feel ourselves participating in. I can think of no patriarchal concept which works in the same way—that is, which expresses something personal (not merely an atmosphere) which is at the same time not an attribute of persons. It may happen, of course, that we will come to say things like “Sybil has great gynergy.” Then the term “gynergy” would be rather like “spirit.” But for now, it appears that gynergy is not only a new concept, but a new kind of concept. And it too is part of our redefinings of “woman.”

IV

These are just some of the ways in which we are reconceiving ourselves: taking on conventionally positive characteristics like strength, and changing them; redescribing and reevaluating aspects of ourselves like nurturance and lesbianism; and using words not conventionally used to describe women to express our becoming. These shifts all break internal definitional connections

which exist in patriarchal systems between concepts of women and other concepts, particularly between concepts of women and of men. By breaking away from definitional connections which determine women's place in patriarchal conceptual systems and so in "the world," we move out of traditional dualistic/hierarchical orderings.

From a patriarchal perspective, all the concepts of women discussed here would be said to carry positive evaluative force, or to establish new ideals for women. But this account misrepresents the spirit in which these ideas are set forth. It is men who have invented the concepts of good and bad and for whom the making of value judgments is a major occupation. Feminists make vigorous value judgments about the patriarchy, but in our own worlds our concern tends to be more one of understanding and making space for processes than of evaluating persons and acts. Feminists are highly sensitive to the needs of women to create ourselves out of our own experiences, to our needs not to be told what we should do or be. The concepts of women I have discussed here then are not ideals or models, but gifts from some women to others, to be modified, transformed, abandoned, as each woman feels.

These conceivings of women are exercises of power: the power of naming ourselves, and the power in our new names. This is not different from "real" power. Although I have written here of words and concepts, the shifts I have sketched are also ontological; they are shifts from being women in patriarchy to becoming women in our own times and spaces. What patriarchy might see as logic, feminism understands as political strategy.

NOTES

1. In *Our Right to Love: A Lesbian Resource Book* edited by Ginny Vida (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978).
2. "The Woman Identified Woman" in *Radical Feminism* edited by Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., 1973), p. 240.
3. *Amazon Odyssey* (New York: Links Books, 1974), p. 132.
4. "The Spiritual Dimension: Death and Resurrection of a Hallelujah Dyke" in *Our Right to Love*, p. 187.
5. "Together" *Black Women* (New York: Emerson Hall Publishers, 1972).
6. "The Illusion of Androgyny" in *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly*, Vol. II, No. 1, Summer 1975, pp. 64, 65.

RESPONSE

Dear Women:

The following paragraph is taken from an untitled essay written by Martha Yates, which appeared in *Sinister Wisdom* 8:

Recently in Boston women organized "Women take back the night." Along the way, there were small groups of men, each man with his hands around a thin candle, about seven inches high, lit, which he held slightly below his waist. It seems they think they must still bring us their light (so that we can see in the dark), and women are still letting them in so many different ways: semen, the seed of enlightenment, their word. . ."

I am outraged by Ms. Yates' paragraph, which I have quoted here, in full. I was present at this "Women Take Back the Night" March and I would like to comment on Ms. Yates' remarks and the men she has mentioned.

Men were urged *not* to participate in the march itself, which occurred on August 26, 1978. However, they were encouraged to attend the rally that followed afterwards. In my article "The History of Take Back the Night," which appeared in the *Gay Community News*, Vol. 6, No. 6, August 26, 1978, I briefly commented on the proposed route of the Boston march. Here is a terse quote from my article: "The march will proceed through a section of the Fens, dimly-lit tree-shrouded parks which, ironically enough, have been the site of many attacks on gay men."

Now, Boston is a city known for its violence that stems from racism. What is lesser known is the fact that Boston also has a rampant brand of homophobic violence. In the years that I have been out as a lesbian, I have been bombarded with (true) horror stories of gay men being beaten, stabbed, gassed and strangled. Gay men know all too well the brunt of violence.

Mid-way through the Boston "Take Back the Night" march, my eyes beheld a sight that was so wondrously beautiful, I almost wept. The march was approaching the Symphony subway stop. There, perched and standing near the subway entrance, was a group of men holding single white candles of support. Propped against a wall was a placard that signified them as: "Men Against Violence Against Women." (For documentation of this scene, may I refer you to the actual photograph of these men from this event which appears on the cover of the Boston-produced "Walls to Roses" album.)

These men were faggots from the *Gay Community News* (GCN)—gay men that I knew personally. (I had no idea they planned to show up during the march.) They stood in silent support, smiling and waving at familiar faces among the thousands of women that marched past them. I was so proud that immediately upon seeing them, I shouted, "Those men are from GCN!" Then I cheered and applauded them. The women marchers around me responded with warmth and appreciation. They understood the solidarity of the faggot presence—no women were offended that these gay men stood on the sidelines.

I am quite angry with Ms. Yates for taking this beautifully memorable incident (omitting some *very serious* facts) and twisting it to apply to her

vague, poorly-written essay. (Another group of men *and women*, standing further along the route holding candles, were campaign workers for Rep. Mel King, a black man who is currently running for Mayor of Boston.) Furthermore, I am amused by Ms. Yates' phallic paranoia. The faggots (as well as the campaigners) who held candles did so as a sign of support—if there is any symbolism in this, it is the (genuinely concerned) warmth of the flame, and not an oppressive, male-oriented “light” as Ms. Yates suggests. If Ms. Yates objects to the actual phallic shape of candles, I suggest that she vent her anger at the people who manufacture candles and not the men who hold them.

I am furious that Ms. Yates misconstrued this incident to fit her rambling prose. If Ms. Yates honestly perceived the incident as she reported it (threatening, rather than supportive), then I am very sorry that Ms. Yates is incapable of identifying true allies when she sees them. For all the lesbians who read your periodical, particularly those who have political faggot allies, I hope you will publish this letter in its entirety. I will also deliver a copy of this letter to the editors of the *Gay Community News*. Thank you for your attention.

—Pat M. Kuras

Martha Yates replies:

In the footnote that Pat Kuras refers to I meant to convey a quick, not particularly solemn impression. I was working on an essay uncovering the ideology of light and sight which runs through Western and some Eastern philosophical and religious traditions. Knowing how the physical and philosophical properties of light/sight can disguise a very patriarchal and oppressive consciousness and, then, at the same time, encountering men holding up their candles at the “Women Take Back the Night” march made for a very ironic and ludicrous sight. I was amused—I still am.

The part of Pat Kuras' letter which interested me was her description of men as allies. This implies shared fears, shared risks, a shared and common cause. What, really, is common between men and women? In the light, in the daytime, there *seem* to be mutualities. For instance, men and women seem to share a so-called “human body.” In the dark, on city streets, women have found out how false this is. The “human body” is an illusion, ideological at its roots.

I also doubt whether women and gay men share the same attackers or their attackers the same motives. My feeling is that those who are trying to move beyond what is given find that they do not genuinely share anything with men, anything, that is, which is critical and at the edge of a radical understanding.

The word *alien* is more descriptive of men. No one should be tricked into thinking that all of us, so-called “members of the human species,” come from the same place. Aliens *can* be dependent upon one another and can even converse easily with each other, as James Triptree, the science fiction author, has suggested in her short story “The Haploid Heart.”

Of course, I didn't write all of this in the footnote. For it was just that—a footnote to a complex and difficult subject, the meeting with an abyss in language, an abyss within thought itself.

Catherine & Harriet: I want to send this poem to Catherine in reference to her "deafness" queries. My own problem, being the one who listens too closely, has been illuminated by SW 8, Catherine's questions and others' responses . . . Martha Courtot

LISTEN

i have listened
as a slave listens
leaning my ear into the wind

as if the world could be a seashell
and my ear the only one
to hear the roar of the ocean
and what it insists on telling

i have held lives to my ear
and taken their hollow sounds inside me
and made of myself a fluted hollow sound
and i have sung these songs back to the world

if you saw me with my ear to the rail
hands clawing the dirt
and i told you the train of your life
was coming you would have believed me
packed your bags and left
forgetting to wave good-bye

i am trying to tell you something
can you hear me?
or is my voice like the sound of traffic
sage and steady a murmuring a lullaby
to drift off to sleep by

listen:

i want you now to open
to be open to me as an ear is open

to open like the womb opens
when it wants to surround life

i want you to listen to hear me
as if i too were a crucial note

you must invent

—Martha Courtot

The following letter is in response to two articles in *Sinister Wisdom* 9: Bertha Harris's "Melancholia, and Why It Feels Good" and Irena Klepfisz's "Lesbian Literature and Criticism."

Dear *Sinister Wisdom*,

Someone ought to step between Irena Klepfisz and Bertha Harris. Bertha is being outrageous, as usual, and she rather deserves the Response, but Bertha is—in her indirect, dramatized way—right too, especially in one throw-away line: "the onerous inhibitions lesbian-feminist politics seek to place on the writer of genuine talent."

Bertha Harris is the author of a very fine book, the best Lesbian novel I've ever read and possibly the best novel of the last thirty years, *Lover*. *Lover* has been mostly ignored in the women's press and when it hasn't, it's been called Politically Incorrect (to my knowledge) though a *Feminist Review* of Books reviewer recently rediscovered it.

Why?

Most artistic and literary criticism in the women's press is very bad. It reacts to having its P.C. buttons pushed. Much of it is practiced by refugees from the misuse of the high culture tradition in high schools and colleges to bully and stupidify the young—this is largely class warfare, owing most of its virulence to the teachers' own insecure class position and their defensiveness about it, teaching having become (since high schools and colleges lost their elite character some time in this century) a road to upward mobility for children of the lower middle class. There is also the problem of the compensatory Instant Junk Food commercial culture which pretends to be a popular alternative to the poisoned (and often poisonous) high culture, and the consequent false split between "art" and "entertainment." And of course the priggishness of certain revolutionaries who really wish to escape from individual personality, individual voice, idiosyncrasy, and any interpretation of life that demands all three. Women (as Phyllis Chesler once said) have a real terror of difference.

What Bertha is trying to defend, in her exasperated, flamboyantly offensive, Southern Gothic fashion is (I think) her right to her own artistic obsessions and her own sense of fantasy—that is, she's defending in a deliberately nasty way (because attacked and exasperated) what every artist must defend: the absolutely inescapable, crucial fact that *expression is logically and chronologically absolutely prior to analysis*.

Bertha Harris has given much of her life to feminist publishing, has finally cut her ties to a self-sacrificing job in women's studies which was extremely harassing and energy-draining, and has been either ignored or belittled by the very women's community she's been trying so hard to serve, and has had to watch the stupidest sort of mediocrity praised far above her work. (I'm *not* talking about Irena Klepfisz.) I'm not surprised that she exploded—and knowing Bertha, that she did so elliptically, cryptically, and as angrily as possible.

Every few weeks someone sends me some incredibly clunky artifact of women's culture which falls helplessly on my desk and instantly expires of

sheer unworthiness to live. In between the lousy poems and the excruciatingly dull fairy tales, some singer who can't stay on key and whose untrained voice can't sustain a note for more than two seconds arises and proclaims: *Wooh-mun/Will be far-ree-hee-hee!* wrenching her diction, choosing the wrong vowels for her words, letting air escape uncontrollably past her glottis, and radiantly telling interviewers she is "self-taught" and therefore innocent of sexism. This isn't a new, woman's style, it's not a blues style, it's not any style. It's simply incompetent.

Incompetence—praised incompetence, revered incompetence—has (I suspect) driven Bertha Harris mad.

It drives *me* mad.

Do I want therefore to suppress such efforts? Not at all. They're absolutely necessary. (Irena Klepfisz is not talking from the point of view of incompetence, of course. She's talking as someone who's absorbed everything The Boys teach as "art" and is busy throwing much of it out, in an extremely sophisticated and analytical fashion.)

But The Boys are still, by and large, custodians of the most technically rich and adroit literary culture that exists in English, even though it isn't the only literary culture (they pretend it is) and it has no monopoly on all the other virtues. (They pretend it does.)

Books aren't bad because they include long words and subtle literary devices. (Surely a classless world will include education in *all* literary traditions, even the one now called "high culture.") They also aren't—quite obviously—bad because they don't.

I'm speaking from Harris's corner and to Klepfisz because the latter is being rationally persuasive, I agree with her, and Bertha, instead of arguing, simply went Stomp Smash Crash Blonk and walked out.

We must try to exercise some sense of where people are coming from and what they really mean instead of fastening on each individual statement and walloping it. The latter leads to nothing but aggravated tempers, hurt feelings, and increased insecurity for everyone. I'm not suggesting a meaningless "toleration"—only that language is a very imprecise medium and that 85% of most statements are in a code that really means *I want, I need, I feel, my situation is...* To consider these as positive, precise statements of a considered political position is male-style linear thinking. And how much more politically incorrect than that can you get?

Different needs aren't betrayals. Incompletenesses (Mary Daly's lack of awareness of economics, Ellen Moers' white solipsism) are not deliberate betrayals, either. Though if we handle them that way long enough, we may produce plenty of real betrayals. And a large lack of women left to demonstrate any kind of solidarity with.

Bertha, come home. We love you. A dozen long-stemmed American Beauty roses await you. The intelligent, rationally persuasive, brilliantly talented Irena Klepfisz is favorably reviewing *Lover*. The entire membership of The Oppressed Lesbian Mothers' Grim Denim Bikeathon and Deprivation Society has donned elegant riding habits and mounted chestnut mares and is exquisitely dashing about the *bois*, calling your romantic name. Come home!

All is forgiven.

The two following responses are portions of letters that Ann Allen Shockley received after a short story of hers appeared in SW 8 (Spring 1979). That story, "A Meeting of the Sapphic Daughters," is an account of Lettie and Patrice's reactions to the behavior of white lesbians at a meeting in which they are the only black lesbians present. With the permission of all concerned, we're printing these letters—which were not written for publication—as a first step toward sharing information in SW about how racism manifests itself among lesbians—what it looks like, what it feels like, where it comes from, how to stop it.

1. "Patrice applied lipstick. . ." My first reaction was that in 1979 you won't find any Lesbian caught dead wearing makeup. Then I remembered a new bar that Cheryl and I went to recently. I thought I had stepped backward in time. It was mainly black and Latina and strictly butch/femme, complete with superfly outfits, sheer disco dresses, and the makeup.

Another thought: in 1970 at my first and only DOB meeting, I deliberately wore a dress to let any prospects know that I wasn't butch. Even then I rejected the role-playing bit; but, forced to make a choice, the "butchy" woman was more attractive to me than the simpering, dependent female. At that time only feminists were in combat boots and lumber jackets, and they were all white and straight.

2. The location of the meeting is perfect! My first contact with DOB was in New York: a dance in a loft, in the warehouse district. Your description is absolutely photographic.

3. ". . . large husky woman with hostile face. . ." Yes, I still see that face, distorted with the distaste of a racist. I used to see it in all the bars and the streets of Provincetown. I see it in bars now, and yes at Mountain Moving, though rarely. I'd long ago stopped allowing that face to get to me. In the past, B.C. (Before Cheryl), it was affirmation of my fears that a particular place among Lesbians would not offer me a source of finding a woman—that place would therefore become even more inhospitable than straight places, where my mind was at ease with the acceptance of there being no possibility.

4. Patrice and Lettie were lucky; the DOBers in Boston wouldn't even look at me (" . . . gazing at them from behind cold masks . . ."). That's what I remember most—the collective consent not to recognize my presence, not to acknowledge my existence. And I, like Patrice, still stupid enough to think that my non-negro, college-educated accent would make them welcome me. Ann, I never did find out how you became aware of this phenomenon. Did you experience this personally?

5. Oh yes, those dreadful potluck suppers. How I hated them. One or two were plenty for me. Heavy, starchy, tasteless food of questionable quality and so-called Lesbians everywhere but all unapproachable.

6. Trollope's "mannish appearance." This is the image I would have had of the type of Lesbian you describe but in terms I would *not* let myself use to describe her. What I'm expressing is an ambiguity/conflict within myself:

a refusal to accept the definition of a Lesbian as an imitation man; along with a refusal to adopt the Lesbian costume of the 50s or the once-feminist-now-Lesbian/feminist-and-even-ordinary-population garb for wemyn of the 70s (simply because I reject the idea of a uniform and have always hated to dress to prove a point and have always hated anything that smacks of playacting or pretense); along with an uneasiness about dressing in a “feminine” manner that might indicate a fear of being identified as a Dyke, which I certainly do not have (I really do dress just from what appeals to my eye; then what’s comfortable—only); along with always liking to see Lesbians in “Dyke garb”—it having great sensual appeal to me, probably stemming from it being a mark of identification. This conflict was demonstrated recently on the Donahue show when a Lesbian complained of society’s bigoted stereotyping, and Donahue asked why then did she wear a man’s shirt, tie, and vest. His question silenced her; and a response came from a faggot whose feeble retort was, “When Diane Keaton wears the same outfit, it’s called fashionable.”

I’ve asked myself the same question: If you reject prickness and prickdom, why adopt the clothes/characteristics of pricks? I personally feel that I dress in a way that rejects the male ideal and standards set for womon’s dress by my not adopting the dress of prickdom, which to me is the dress of whores, stripteasers, and men in drag. I wear no heels, but I also wear no combat boots. Anyway, I think I just answered the question recently. The description of the mannish dress—compared to what? Compared to prick definitions of what is male and female, with separate sets of everything according to his standards. Well, why not take a vest and a tie and short hair and call it not mannish but Lesbian? Man has set the standards, created all the definitions, established all the opinions. My answer involved my right (our right as wemyn) to set our own standards, make our own definitions, etc. If we want to wear a tie and say it’s proper to us, then “abracadabra” it’s proper to us. I understand now how artificial and manufactured are definitions of masculinity and femininity and how we are unwillingly and unconsciously caught up in them. At one time I could only call a Lesbian such as Trollope “mannish.” I had no other image or words, but I always felt guilty about it. Now I know there’s no such thing as “mannish” or “effeminate” except for the pricks who use those terms as a means of controlling thought and social development. So, that expression of the “mannish” Dyke is offensive to me because I hate to associate anything of man with womon (including his designation of himself), and I reject the idea that the “Dyke garb” is mannish because there is no such thing as mannish. There’s no such thing as male vs. female characteristics, but only human characteristics. An aggressive woman is not mannish but strong, determined, independent. A Dyke in a tie is not wearing man’s clothes—just clothes. In other words I am choosing to make my own definitions, which have got to be better than his. I become the authority, the “bearer of standards.” I’ll set the tone, and he can accept or go to hell—it’s immaterial. (This too is my reason for rejecting the spellings *woman/women*.) Thus had I written that description, I would have left out the word “mannish.” Also in that sentence is an indication that her voice was that of a womon despite her clothes being that of a man. Again, I’ve come to see this as meaning that a womon’s voice should be of a certain quality only or else she’s mannish, while the opposite would be true for the “effeminate” man—and I reject these definitions. It’s

also saying that a woman is less a woman to the degree that she's aggressive, bold, determined, strong, assured, etc. I do not see a laughable contradiction in a woman who wears what someone called "Dyke schlep" but may have a high-pitched voice—this is because I do not accept prickdom's definitions of what is proper to man and not to woman.

7. May I say that I find this story as something I certainly could have dictated *just* as you have written it, at a time B.C. Then I was so hungry and so vulnerable, I rejoiced to find myself among Lesbians only to find myself attacked because I was black. This story expresses all the rage and venom I then felt, and still remember, as I looked at their racism and then in vengeance proceeded to condemn everything about those damned white dykes—their appearance, manner, speech, philosophy, politics, ideas, books, togetherness, emotion—all I saw. Like Jesus in the temple, this story rises in an all-consuming anger, sweeping the tables clean, scattering their symbols, rejecting all, ridiculing all. Being kept from having any part of it I would destroy it all. I say this because now, from a secure position, I am *sometimes* able to look upon such a scene with feelings of sharing and love. Thus at this point in time my first reaction to your story was: "But she is ridiculing and deriding." But an instant later I took a different and maybe unique reaction, a reaction I don't know whether or not you had any intention of drawing. I find validity in the story, including your terms and characterizations, with one purpose in mind—a chance to get some "gitback." A chance for me to use these written, tangible lines of derision and ridicule to fight back, to get even, to take delight in punishing "them" for what I've suffered from them. In other words the story for me is a cussing at them, a chance to rant and rave at all those white dykes, past and present and future who have looked at me with racist eyes. It's saying, "This is what I think of you, and if it hurts your feelings, good! This is what I want to do—hurt you back." I can laugh at racism from the white man; it is negligible, no matter the genocide, compared to what I feel in the face of racism from Latinos, Native Americans, Lesbians—all those who should know better. So I say more power to you, Ann, for giving me, through your words, my chance at a delayed scream, a running amok at a DOB meeting, potluck, bar, etc.—even though I doubt you wrote toward this end. Everything communicated by one means something different to each hearer.

8. I still have problems with "Lesbian community," too. I still feel that the concept is a bunch of bull, just as I feel the concept of black community is a bunch of bull. And I have no life to waste addressing what is to me pie-in-the-sky nonsense. Cheryl and I together, plus whatever wemyn we can from time to time spend some time with, are plenty community for me.

9. Movements of resistance always drop off the edge of the opposite extreme, and those movers always bounce back toward the middle in later years with egg on their faces, looking stupid. I refuse to let myself go so far out on a tangent that I can't get back on the road with my dignity still on straight. I will not jump on anyone's bandwagon.

10. Your depiction of J. L. is all too accurate. The first bar I went to was at the invitation of some wemyn I met at a DOB softball game. It took a phenomenal amount of courage to finally ask one to dance—oh the distaste

and revulsion in her eyes as she said, "Let's wait for a fast one." Conversation, or rather her notification, during the "dance" was an unsolicited, "Not too many black lesbians come here. I don't know how to advise you where to find some." Translation: get this straight, nigger, none of us wants the likes of you. Some poetic justice a year or two later. I ran into this woman, same bar, on a date with a woman I had gone to bed with and who just days prior to that I had refused to see. In effect she wound up with my cast-offs.

11. Unfortunately, you will undoubtedly pick up a lot of denials from white Lesbians; a lot of "But it's not like that anymore"; and a lot of zeroing in on criticism of details, like I started with "mannish"; and a lot of "But the time is here for solidarity," etc. However, I'd be surprised if your reaction from black Lesbians is not one of knowing head shakes and gratitude. There'll also be criticism (and I can see this point, except that I have no solutions I really want to offer—I mean, Lesbians or no, if a racist, I'd rather see them dead than reformed) saying that the story gave no message in terms of how to approach it or what to do about it: no hope on the part of Patrice and Lettie that things would change, but rather a retreat toward a wish for a black Lesbian community (witness notices of such in the literature, and I just found out about all-black Lesbian bars in D.C. that refuse admittance to white wemyn). But again, for me, it is complete as a simple and accurate statement of what for me personally has been a devastating reality, and I really don't give a damn as to whether or not anything is done about it. It does not resolve itself in the story because it isn't resolved now—and won't be. That's the way it is, and I offer only condemnation, not solution. Your story is purely an "In case you didn't know—this is what goes on." My final reaction to "Sapphic Daughters" is very strong, but that is my nature. This is precisely why I don't jump on bandwagons—I tend to be dictatorial and fanatic, and I might find myself being just stupid enough to die for something or other. So I keep on a tight rein. I've taken note of the pathetic Eldridge Cleaver, the silenced Angela Davis, the pimpin' Huey Newton, and the mousy Andrew Young—I will not follow them. I'll just stay on the outside and grin a lot.

—Eleanor

Dear Ann,

. . . Your short story in *Sinister Wisdom* was, of course, excellent writing, but more than that, I finished reading it full of anger and annoyance. Memories of 1960's Daughters of Bilitis meetings in San Francisco came back to haunt me—none of them so hostile or so blatantly open in their racism, but surely uncomfortable for any black, chicana, or Chinese lesbians who came to the meetings or dances. I remember wondering why they never came back to a second meeting, the constant questioning by the group, "How can we make our organization more attractive to third world women?" No one ever thought to ask the women themselves about what we could do to make them want to stay. I wondered how it felt to be isolated not only in terms of sexual preference, but also within a white world when that wasn't your own skin

shade. We made bad jokes, my one black friend and I, about summer tans and how nice it would be if one day everyone woke up and were shaded like cats, some with stripes, spots, patches of this color and that. Sometimes it all seemed so senseless, and often for long periods the whole subject of racism wouldn't come up—until the next time two or three (seldom one woman by herself) black or brown women came to a meeting. Black lesbians had their own bar, I remember being told. It never occurred to most of us to go there. We “won't feel welcome.” The rumor was out that a woman we sort of knew had gone there and been beaten up. Who knew or asked why? Who was excluding who from what, we asked? Several women I worked with in the factory were very open in their fear and hatred of any women not completely like themselves in background, color, religion, etc. We who considered ourselves liberal before we learned to be ashamed of that word simply avoided them as much as possible. I need to examine that time and experience more. Bells went off in my head while reading your story in terms of similar incidents where I felt people were avoiding me or didn't want me around because I wasn't college educated at the time, or they saw me as “different,” “crippled,” or whatever went on in their sick little brains. The anger just eats you up whenever that happens. It's a wonder more people don't let it out in violent ways. Even now, I sometimes wonder whether some people are only friendly with me because I'm writing things that they like, not because I'm personally their type at all. Will we ever get past all the garbage in our heads we grew up hearing and unthinkingly incorporating into our beliefs? A very thought-provoking, strong story, Ann.

—Judith Schwarz

conditions: five the black women's issue

Available August, 1979

Conditions is a magazine of women's writing with an emphasis on writing by lesbians. *Conditions: Five* is an issue devoted entirely to writing by Black women, guest edited by Lorraine Bethel and Barbara Smith.

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Notes on the Etymology and Usage of "Dyke"

The following is in addition to my article, "In America They Call Us Dykes: Notes on the Etymology and Usage of 'Dyke,'" which appeared in *Sinister Wisdom* 9. Feedback from my friend and associate, Chris Czernik, made me aware of my tendency to oversimplify complex historical processes. I would like to say more about the changes which transformed women's roles in the late nineteenth century, and may have led to the demise of the nineteenth century female culture identified and described by Smith-Rosenberg, and thereon to the development of strong taboos in the twentieth century against women's relationships with each other. It was during this period of change that the meaning of *dike* also appears to have changed, as did the meanings of *gay* and *Lesbian*—they took on homosexual connotations.

Researchers are only beginning to unravel how and why women's intimate and close relationships with one another, once commonly accepted as a way of life in nineteenth century middle class America, became so taboo in the twentieth century. This complex social change can only be briefly and tentatively stated here with reference to other researchers' work.¹ The nineteenth century female networks, which were based on mother-daughter relationships and extended kinship and friendship systems, seem to have gradually disappeared by the first quarter of the twentieth century. It was within the context of these networks that women's close, intimate and long-lived relationships had existed. Echols speculates that these networks died out due to changes in family structure and function, and in women's sexual, social, and economic roles resulting from industrialization. As the factory displaced the home as the economic center of productivity, the roles of middle-class women became more based on their economically dependent position in the nuclear family as wife, mother, and homemaker. Women as a group became a source of cheap, temporary labor whose work outside the home was not valued. Women could be exploited along with minority groups, children, and the working class generally. Thus, it was increasingly profitable in an industrial capitalist patriarchy for women to be tied to men where they not only served as unpaid domestics but also as underpaid laborers.

Echols also demonstrates the increasing push towards male/female relationships for women, whereas in the nineteenth century there seems to have been a considerable social and emotional gulf between the sexes. The trend away from positive same-sex relationships during the first quarter of the twentieth century was aided and abetted by the medical/psychiatric system, and was likewise reflected in magazine literature for adults as well as children.²

No doubt during the nineteenth century, when women's close relationships with one another were more or less the norm, there probably were some relationships which were overt, carrying over into the sexual. Still, although a certain amount of physical interaction was permissible, there probably was



photograph by Katherine A. Bouton

a point beyond which such overtness would *not* have been acceptable. However, these relationships wouldn't have been so noticeable because the "norm" acted, in a sense, to camouflage or hide them, somewhat like an immense "closet." But as the female networks disappeared and the taboo against women's intimate relationships with one another developed, these lesbian women would have become more noticeable, with society attempting to define and label those women who did not "fit" for one reason or another: radical feminists, lesbians, women who sought alternatives to traditional family structures, women who refused society's dress codes, those who desired careers, education, and independence from structures such as marriage and motherhood. Such "deviants" were often seen as "masculine" since there was no *female* role model which they represented. It was feared that women's emancipation would turn women into men. According to Faderman, this was one of the greatest fears of the twentieth century. It was also at this time that medical and psychiatric science were labelling love between women as "unnatural," "degenerate," and "sick." "Masculine" characteristics of both a biological and psychological nature were attributed to lesbian women, as well as to other women who deviated from male-defined norms. Thus, the word *dike*, which in the nineteenth century had meant a "well-dressed male," or "the full set of male clothing itself," could have evolved into a twentieth century slang term used to describe lesbians and other women who dressed in "male clothing," passed as men, or who acted and appeared "masculine" in other ways, i.e. being assertive, independent, and self-defining. The changing definitions of *dike* and *lesbian* probably reflect the changing ideas and conceptions about women's roles and lesbianism.

I am interested in hearing from readers and researchers who might come across the word *dike* being used to describe a "masculine" woman or lesbian in 1930s and pre-1930s literature. Please send citations c/o *Sinister Wisdom*.

Endnotes

¹Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth Century America," *Signs* 1:1 (Autumn 1975), 1-24; Alice Echols, "The Demise of Female Intimacy in the Nineteenth Century or 'There wasn't a Dyke in the Land'," unpublished paper, n.d.; Janet Cooper, "Female Crushes, Affections, and Friendships in Children's Literature: or, Covert Feminism in the Children's Book Industry," unpublished paper, April 1977; Lillian Faderman, "Lesbian Magazine Fiction in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Popular Culture* XI:4 (Spring 1978), 800-17.

²See Cooper and Faderman.



We dont care if we do. 1910

Dear Harriet & Catherine,

Enclosed is a submission for the "dyke research" feature in *SW*. It is from my Lesbian Things collection, and is of particular interest to me/us because of the original inscription and date. It is probably midwestern, possibly Iowa, in locale, as it was found in an Iowa junk shop.

—Tracy Moore

Dear Sinister Wisdom,

I was impressed and educated by *SW* 9. I particularly liked the article on the etymology of the word *dyke*. Last May I wrote and directed a play at the University of California at Berkeley entitled *The Roaring Girl*. It was an all-woman infiltration of a classical male text. There was a scene about the word *dyke* I would like to draw to your attention and that of JR Roberts, who has done much good work on the subject already.

ANN: Did you hear the rumors about Gillian and Alexandra?

LOUISE: What?

ANN: That they're Lesbians.

LOUISE: (laughs) Oh, that old word.

ANN: What's wrong with it?

LOUISE: It's not specific enough—it could refer to anyone on the entire island of Lesbos.

ANN: So I'll say "gay," is that better?

LOUISE: No, say Dyke.

ANN: *Dyke*? I thought that was kind of like "nigger."

LOUISE: No, it comes from Sappho—she had a lover named Mnasidica and she called her *Dike*. (Quotes Sappho)

Although clumsy
Mnasidica has a more
shapely figure than
our gentle Gyrinno

ANN: It's a little artsy-fartsy, don't you think? I hate it when people defend sex by making it so . . . Greek.

LOUISE: (quoting Sappho again)

Tomorrow you had better
Use your soft hands
Dica, to tear off
dill shoots, to cap
your lovely curls
She who wears flowers
attracts the happy
Graces: they turn
back from a bare head.

The scene continues, but turns away from this subject. Of course, I invented this etymology, but it is possible and worth claiming for our own—it is certainly a use of the word closer to our own than "one who wore men's clothing." So let's add it to our lexicon . . .

I will be in Berlin most of next year and want to show your journal to the Lesbian feminists there (of which there are many).

We will all keep up the good something together.

—Sue-Ellen Case



photograph by JEB

REVIEWS

Dear Readers:

With this issue of *Sinister Wisdom* I have become the Book Review Editor, and wanted to begin my work in this capacity by describing for you my reasons for believing that it is an important task and the purpose I hope our book reviews will serve. First, and most obviously, books are an indispensable medium in our lives at this time. If they weren't important to us, none of us would be writing them and none of us would be reading them. The print medium provides all of us with a means of transmitting our ideas and images to each other across space and time; it enables us to share in the creation of our culture whether or not we've met each other or know each other's name. Because print transcends both spatial and temporal distances, it is also the means by which we will transmit ourselves and the news of our lives to those Lesbians of the future who seek us. A book review is one way of celebrating the appearance of yet another document and telling other wimmin of its existence; it is a way of connecting us and acknowledging the work that wimmin are doing for all of us.

I choose to work with *Sinister Wisdom* because I believe that this magazine is one of the connecting links in a network of vision, and it is that vision that I hope our book reviews will serve. Since I offered to handle the work involved with soliciting and accepting reviews, I have thought about how I conceive the function of the critic with respect to our lives and the culture we are creating together. I believe that all of us are working in our own ways to make real our vision of a Lesbian culture. Some of us work with wood, some with words, some with microscopes, others with metal, electricity, the soil, animals, stone, relationships. All of these activities are integral to our lives because Lesbians are doing them, and each of us pursues her chosen work within the context of our vision. As I see it, it is the function of the critic to articulate the place of a given book in the context of our lives and our vision, to tell us what it brings to us, whether it's new insights, new connections, or explorations. Such a definition assumes that the Lesbian critic brings to her understanding of a book its relationship to the many facets of our experience and our culture, and her judgments of the worth of a book will grow out of the connections it makes possible in our lives. In some way that I haven't yet articulated for myself, a book "fails" to the extent that it fails to enlarge or clarify our lives. If it "succeeds," it is because it is the medium of the author's participation with us in the daily struggle to maintain our vision and deepen our grasp of the bonds we are weaving in these days. I hope that the book reviews that appear in *Sinister Wisdom* will be yet one more link in our bonding together.

--Julia Penelope

67



photograph by JEB

A review of *Eye to Eye: Portraits of Lesbians* by JEB; includes a herstory of lesbian photography by Judith Schwarz; Foreword by Joan Nestle. Glad Hag Books, P.O. Box 2934, Washington, D.C. 20013. \$8.95. Distributed by Persephone Press and Naiad Press.

During the second wave of feminism Lesbians have been emerging from closets, becoming visible not only to an unwilling world, but more importantly to ourselves who have been straining to see. *Eye to Eye: Portraits of Lesbians* is an important and necessary volume. It makes our seeing easier.

With this collection of thirty-nine photographic images, JEB has given us a bold yet tender portrait of our Lesbian community. As a photojournalist, she has looked at our culture from the inside out, capturing our dignity and integrity. We are a diverse group with a collective spirit shining through our individuality, and JEB has visually portrayed this.

As both Lesbian and photographer, I love looking at Lesbians, and am aware of our need for visual images. Through the lens of a Lesbian photographer, we can touch our laughter and tears. We can trace the contours of our bodies and the hollows and wrinkles of our faces. We can feel the serene beauty of a naked body in candle light or be mesmerized by the mutual love of mother and daughter in the soft glow of a morning light. Most importantly, we can be moved to open our eyes and see into the spirit and pulse of a movement.

I wish there were more images and fewer words. There needs to be trust in the strength of visual images, and here is JEB's major weakness. When I look at Chris, Spotts, Connie, Priscella and Regina, Darquita and Denyeta, I do not need words to guide or influence my thoughts. In fact, I often found the corresponding text distracting. Such is the case with the image of Mara and the excerpt from *Mothers and Amazons*. Looking at Mara, I am taken into the flow and tranquility of an internal exploration; that flow is interrupted when I read an academic interpretation of the egg. In other cases, the words may complement the image, but they are still extraneous, as with the image of Priscella and Regina adjacent to Audre Lorde's "Woman." The composition, the understanding and use of light, and the subject work together to make a powerfully poetic statement. I am in awe of the beauty of these two women: the fullness of their lips, the warmth of their skin, the trust with which they lay in each other's arms. This image needs no words just as the poem needs no picture.

Eye to Eye: Portraits of Lesbians is a pioneering work. The strength of the cover will draw you in. Let yourself be drawn—the volume is a special treat.

—Deborah Snow

***Editor's Note: Although the topic is briefly dealt with here, Deborah Snow's review raises the aesthetic question of what relationship there is/can/should be between visual and verbal reflections of our culture. We are aware, as Deborah is, of the complexity of the arguments on both sides of the issue, and hope that our readers will offer us their opinions on the subject in future issues of Sinister Wisdom.*



photographs by JEB

IMAGINING OUR FUTURE: VISION AND REVISION

A review of *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women* by Sally Gearhart, Persephone Press, P.O. Box 7222, Watertown, Mass. 02172, 196 pp., \$5.00.

Those of us who still find pleasure in reading books, especially those written by and about wimmin, have many reasons for doing so, all of them connected to our needs and determined by a complex of situational variables, including current physical, emotional, and intellectual states and the external context in which our struggle to survive is going on. Our reasons for reading may be labeled "good" or "bad," but only in some immediately subjective fashion. Thus, some of us read for "pleasure," an adjective that covers a wide range of experiences, while others take to reading in order to "escape" from a harrowing or humdrum existence. Others read to learn something new (and possibly useful), to pass the time waiting for _____ (fill in the blank with whatever seems to be missing from your life these days), to find out something about one's self (usually a secondary, purely fortuitous result, but one that earns a book the description "good"), to gain insight into one's situation in the world, to acquire a better understanding of our struggle, not only to survive in the most basic senses, but to perpetuate ourselves as a movement, as the bearers of a vision. All of the above are possible reasons for reading a book; none of them are mutually exclusive, and there are more besides.

Rarely, however, do we manage to find a book that manages to satisfy all of the expectations that most of us bring to the printed page. Sally Gearhart's *The Wanderground* is such a book. It has, to be sure, its flaws, its loose ends, discontinuities, inconsistencies, its typos. It is not a "perfect" book. Who cares? It's the second book in my life that I've read *slowly*, only because it brought such pleasure to me, lingering over each sentence, each story, because I didn't want it to end. (The first book I didn't want to end was Isabel Miller's *Patience and Sarah*, which, in spite of the roles that the two wimmin use to define their relationship, delighted me with the clarity of their mutual honesty and their successful struggle to be together. It was my first fictional experience of a Lesbian relationship that wasn't sordid, except, perhaps, for *The Price of Salt*.) Let me blurt out the awful cliché immediately and get it out of my system: I couldn't put *The Wanderground* down! Now I have to tell you why.

The Wanderground is unique in that it serves those purposes that justify the publication of a book: its stories give immense pleasure, and its vision of the future is a welcome "escape" from the boring (and often unpleasant) details of our lives; but the tensions that hold the stories together are drawn from the world of struggle that we all know too well, and it was from these tensions, and the confrontation of them, that I learned new things about myself and what I want to live for and how I want to live.

It is a deceptively “easy” book, by which I mean I found myself savoring the experience of *windriding*, getting in touch with my *lonth*, enjoying the facility of mind-to-mind communication with its demand for honesty, craving the ability to communicate with other animals, to sing with cats, to talk to trees, and have them talk, too. In a very important sense, the stories of the hill wimmin fed my fantasies, something I needed to have nourished. I find it hard to keep my fantasies alive; sometimes I even forget them, a dangerous loss in my life. But beneath and within the pleasure of playing with the possibilities of our as yet largely unclaimed powers of being, there is the tension of the painful struggle to survive on a world where men still hold some measure of power, and it is the complications of survival that weave these stories together.

Bit by bit, we learn that the several groups of hill wimmin are largely descendants of the wimmin who escaped from the cities when the New Witch Trials began. The story is fragmented; we learn only what the wimmin themselves have been able to re-cover and piece together in the Remember Rooms of the Kochlias, or from the memories of wimmin who survived and are still living. The individual tales of horror and escape are real enough; we hear and read about their contemporary versions every day. Sometime after the New Witch Trials had begun (some states passed laws requiring every woman to be married, polygyny was sanctioned, “freaky-looking” wimmin were rounded up and “rehabilitated,” many were killed, or raped and killed), the Earth herself rebelled against her own rape and destruction. Male engines of power, their guns, their penises, their bulldozers, ceased to function outside their cities. Rape, war, the mining of the Earth’s resources became impossible. The cities were now clearly the bastions of male arrogance and privilege, and only within the cities were wimmin still the sexual and domestic slaves of men.

Within the city, men still nurture their love of destruction; without, the enconcernments of the hill wimmin endeavor to re-claim the Earth for all beings that cherish life. The lines are more clearly drawn and there is less ambiguity, but it is our world, perhaps only a few years in the future. Linking the two cultures is an espionage network of those wimmin willing (and able to “pass” as men) to rotate in and out of the cities, and a few men, the “gentles,” who help the wimmin maintain their cover. But unpleasant things start to happen that indicate that the men may be regaining some of their power beyond the confines of the city: wimmin are raped outside the city; a few miles up the river, some men get a factory to run for a few months; farm machinery is started up again. The “gentles” are disturbed; they contact the hill wimmin, requesting a meeting.

The four quarters (the Quarterfold) are called together for the first Gatherstretch; all of the wimmin will gather their collective energies together for the first time to deliberate the wisdom of meeting with the gentles. Nothing is decided. A few wimmin volunteer to meet with the gentles as their own representatives; it will be clear that they do not speak for all the hill wimmin. The meeting is not an unqualified success. The gentles have noticed that the numbers of wimmin working in the cities have been lower than usual. When the numbers of wimmin in the city are too low, the gentles hypothesize, the men become potent beyond the city’s limits. They want the hill

wimmin to insure that there are always sufficient wimmin in the cities to keep the men in check.

Is the story beginning to sound familiar? The first collective gathering of womonpower occurs at the request of the gentles. Some wimmin must be willing to endure the hazards of the city in order to insure that male power cannot extend itself and thereby threaten the rest of the earth. As Evona says at the meeting: "Why does it have to be the women? Always the women!" (Well said, sister!) There is no easy answer to that question, and Sally Gearhart doesn't attempt one. But the meeting with the gentles is not kind; even the so-called "gentles" are still banging fists on tables, roaring, and mocking the autonomy of wimmin. We are reminded that even those men who claim to be our allies do so with an intense ego investment, as Andros (one of the gentles—aptly named) reminds Evona: "We're not just your protectors anymore. ...You have to trust us now, lady." Who hasn't heard that particular combination of scorn, pride, and wheedling from the lips of a man?

Those words must still be echoing somewhere in the mazes of the Kochlias. We should never forget them, or the hatred they betray, for it is that hatred and its consequences with which the hill wimmin, all of us, must live. Like them, we cannot be satisfied with what we have salvaged from the past or maintained into the present; our strategies must insure our survival into the future that *The Wanderground* foretells. Just as there are no easy solutions, there are no simple compromises with the enemy. For those of us who are torn by the compromises and contradictions of our lives, Sally Gearhart's stories of the hill wimmin is a rare gift. Speaking only for myself, she reminded me of my own vision of a world of wimmin, made it real for me, made it possible for me once more, at a time in my life when I had begun to forget why I do the things I do; I didn't even realize how hungry I was for an affirmation of that vision, and I need that vision to sustain me.

FRONTIERS A Journal of Women Studies

For the past four years FRONTIERS has been a unique journal which has aimed itself at bridging the gap between community and academic women: Each issue features a cluster on one topic plus other articles, including creative work. Two recent issues:

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Subscriptions are \$9 (3 issues) a year, \$15 for institutions. Single copies are \$3.25. Write: FRONTIERS Women Studies Program, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309

PHOTOGRAPHS OF ENERGY AND COLOR

A Story

Maline Corliss, twenty-eight year old lesbian and feminist, felt a need to leave San Francisco. First of all, she was tired of typing insurance policies. Second of all, she was tired of arguing about separatism, art, class, the politics of shoplifting and the authenticity of astral travel. Third of all, she had just broken up with her lover, Kathleen, and could not bear to see her anywhere.

Fortunately, there was somewhere to go. Maline's sister Iris and Iris's husband Alan owned a small but sleek second home on the shores of a Northern California lake. Maline had money enough for an extended vacation—say, six months if the food stamp program proved cooperative. It did. Maline turned the bar into a darkroom and settled down to solitary bliss. It was there at the lake that she met Carol Pine, thirty-four, married, no children.

Carol was the most talked about woman in the small winter lakeside community. The men thought that she was a bitch, and half the women agreed unequivocally. The other half of the women agreed but loved her in spite of her outrageous bluntness and quick, catty tongue. Carol knew that she was controversial, and felt both proud and hurt because of it. She knew that she was strong (armored). She also knew—and hid from the community, yet felt injured that her friends did not realize it—that she was hopelessly dependent upon her husband, Kent. The community thought he was hen-pecked. He *was* hen-pecked. Carol demanded a thousand tiny services from him in order to make up for the fact that she needed him more than he needed her. She needed his constancy, and she needed his money—he was in construction. She drew her strength from the high-beamed house that Kent built, from the blue lake glinting through thermal glass in the living room. Microwave oven, crock-pot, the freedom to read *Newsweek* and *Sunset* and *Gourmet* magazines in peace.

They had decided, six years back, not to have children (Carol had a tubal ligation). She thought children were like kittens, marvelous to watch, but a nuisance after awhile. Cats were different. The Pine household was always full of them; remarkably colored, aloof, almost hostile animals; variations on their tense, dignified mistress. When Carol went into the bedroom and shut the door, they cried until she let them in.

The lakefront was crowded with houses (long panes of glass, multi-layered redwood decks) but when Maline arrived, shortly before the first of the year, she counted only twelve occupied houses in the two-mile stretch between the market and her new home. The other houses stood hollow and elegant, and Maline experienced a rich, satisfying feeling of solitude. New Year's Eve she spent mixing screwdrivers in the darkroom/bar and carrying them over

to the couch, where she sat with her feet on the coffee table, gazing into the fire before her (she was rather proud of it; it glowed bright orange in the midst of dark ash, and, when she poked it, splintered obediently into yellow flame) or at the dark plate glass to her left. There she could see her round white face reflected, and a faint, shadowy movement of needled branches settling. At eleven she wrote her New Year's Resolutions. There were two of them.

1. I resolve to explore the issues of political pressure and political responsibility, and their relationship to each other in my life.

2. I resolve to discover and understand the true reason that Kathleen broke up with me.

"Because you never let me alone!" Kathleen cried in one of their last arguments. "Even now, you keep *pushing* me!"

"I've been pushing you for two years! That's the way I *am*, that's what you value about me! Why should it suddenly be so terrible? Because of Paula?"

"Yes, because she's helped me to see that it's not what I need after all. I need space." Kathleen was crying. "Please see that. Loving you has made me less and less myself. It's made me shrink instead of grow, I'm only half a person."

At two in the morning she called Kathleen. She called to say: Are you growing, Kathleen? Are you bigger, taller, fatter? What are your measurements? Have you become an Amazon yet? She called to say: You talk about wanting your own space but what you mean is that you don't want to have to look at yourself, at who you are and how you are in a relationship. *That's* what I push you to do, and you can't face it.

When the phone rang, Paula answered, sounding sleepy. Pain shot through Maline's body, comprehensive. Propriety and territory. Paula had answered the phone.

"Are you living there now?" she asked.

"What? Who is this?" Paula demanded angrily.

Maline hung up, humiliated, wondering if Paula had been able to recognize her voice.

A week later the landscape was magnificently leveled by a record-breaking snowfall. Maline used snowshoes to reach the top of the driveway where the Volkswagen sat half buried; she swung her legs in large, stiff circles, gathering fuzzy clumps of snow around the ankles of her Levis. For mail and groceries, she hiked to the market, carrying a canvas pack on her back. The ploughs had scraped the snow into a tall, clean crust on either side of the road, and she felt as if she were walking through a tunnel.

The market was owned and managed by Roy and Nancy Dock—Maline had met them previously when vacationing with Iris. When Maline entered the store Nancy was at the counter, looking friendly and efficient, with her grey hair smoothed and sprayed behind her head. They exchanged exclamations about the storm while Nancy got Maline's mail from the postal window (a letter from her friend Jill, nothing from Kathleen). Maline bought stamps.

Then she prowled the aisles of the little store, gathering together vegetables and red winter apples, Cream of Wheat, bread, milk, and liverwurst.

Carol Pine came in, wearing a burnt orange sweater. Maline was attracted at once to the fullness and bluntness of Carol's body, and to her rich coloring. . . tight dark skin, glistening black hair and brows, shoulders that drooped forward and breasts that slumped comfortably against her chest. Nancy introduced them.

"Carol lives just beyond you, where the road goes up to the golf course. I'm sure she'd be glad to give you a ride home."

"Oh, did you walk? That's why your cheeks are so red!" Carol said.

Maline reached automatically to feel her cold nose, hot cheek. "Yes. It's not so bad a hike, really. Invigorating." She made her voice put quotes around the word.

Carol drove a copper colored van. "Four-wheel drive," she explained as Maline climbed in beside her and lifted in her pack full of groceries. "I wouldn't live up there without a van."

Maline told Carol that she was a free-lance photographer. She had never even tried to sell or publish a photograph, but she needed an identity and wanted to represent something independent and artistic.

"How interesting," Carol said. "People have told me that I'd make a good photographer's model, because of my coloring, but I don't know. . . what do you think?"

"Yes, it occurred to me right away," Maline agreed. "Unfortunately, I haven't got the equipment for developing color photos. But of course, even black and white portraits would reflect the. . ." she faltered, nervous. "Individuality of your face," she finished at last, glancing sideways at the curve of Carol's large, soft ear.

"I'd love to have my picture taken. I don't think I've seen a picture of myself since my wedding, and Kent is always saying I should have a studio portrait done. How much do you charge?"

"Actually, I wasn't meaning to fish—"

"Oh, I know that," Carol assured her. "But I'm interested, really."

"Well, why don't you look at some of my work, and if you like it I'll try a couple of pictures for you at cost."

Carol didn't want to come in with Maline to see the photos. She had frozen foods to put away, and besides, no snowshoes. "Can't you drop off your groceries and grab some pictures, and we'll have coffee at my place?" she suggested. "I'll be glad to take you home afterwards." She waited in the van with the engine running while Maline, wanting to hurry but unable, labored on snowshoes over the deep reservoir of snow.

Inside the house she ran to her bedroom and began untacking photographs from the walls. Pictures of the ocean and the park, of women hugging each other on Gay Pride Day, of Jill, of Kathleen, and Kathleen's dog, and Kathleen's back yard. Carol looked at them one by one as they sat at her glossy wooden dining table. Maline looked from the photos to the white mist over the lake and back again.

"That's my friend Jill," she said. "And that's my friend Kathleen." Kathleen naked, Kathleen in overalls with a paintbrush (the day they re-did the kitchen in yellow), Kathleen crying, her face dark and shrivelled and wet. Maline looked at the photo, remembering the odd, painful argument during which she had taken it, in cold revenge, while Kathleen in vulnerable anguish had faced her through the separating, magnifying lens.

Carol glanced at the picture of two women hugging and put it aside without comment. The tension in Maline's stomach (the lake is not San Francisco, she thought) eased.

They made a date to take photos, and Maline walked home after all, wanting the cold, stiff air as a conductor for her energy and excitement. She liked the strength Carol seemed to infuse into conventionality.

At home she read Jill's letter, detailing the political struggles of a food co-op, arguments about fundraising, Jill's personal economic problems of the moment—and hi from Kathleen. She glanced around at the blue and blond living room, at the bar, the knick-knacks on the mantle, trying to pin down affluence. The true wealth was the lake, of course: the mist darkening over it, shadows sliding across it, bordered by a row of silver icicles and a redwood window-sill.

Carol and Maline became friends. Maline took pictures of Carol in slacks and sweater, or in a hostess gown slit to the knee. Pictures of her holding a cat, stirring a soup, looking out at the lake—stern, blunt-chinned. Maline told her to look contemplative, but she could not. Carol was built of conviction without a gap.

Maline came out.

"I thought you might be," Carol said.

"Did you think I was attracted to you?"

"Well, I certainly hope so. I think *you're* attractive."

"Yes, but finding someone attractive is a matter of aesthetics, *being* attracted to someone is a sexual thing."

"Oh, I see what you mean. I hadn't thought about it like that—are you?"

Maline grinned. "Oh, my appreciation is mainly aesthetic," she said. "So far."

"Terrific," Carol said. "From now on I'll think of myself as a work of art."

"What about me?" Maline said, hating herself for asking.

"Oh, you're a work of art too," Carol assured her.

Maline hesitated. "How do you feel about my being a lesbian?" she asked finally.

"Well, all right. I mean, I can understand women sleeping together. You know the way men are at cocktail parties, always leering." She shrugged and got up to let one of the cats in.

But Carol was not a feminist. She had no sympathy for women who, unlike herself, were trapped in unhappy marriages, or stuffy kitchens, or waiting on tables. "I chose my life and it's what I want," she said. "They should have done the same."

"Not everyone has the same choices," Maline insisted.

"That's not my problem. I mean, I believe in equal pay for equal work and all that, but don't expect me to think all women are wonderful because most of them are very silly. You take Violet Jackson—I play bridge with her. She's always fluttering about Kent's marvelous blue eyes and talking about sex like it was the be-all and end-all of existence. I mean, I like sex too, but I try not to be adolescent about it. She thinks I'm a bitch—I know because Nancy Dock told me. But she won't say it to my face. That's one thing no one can accuse *me* of, everything I'm saying to you I've said to her."

Maline was scandalized and half-envious of Carol's dismissiveness, her refusal to take responsibility at any level for the oppression of other women. She tried to make Carol see, pushed her to see the ways women are oppressed, and to recognize the limits of her own life.

"Frankly," she said finally, "I don't see how you can find this life fulfilling. You're removed from reality, isolated with your toys. Bridge, cooking, television. Don't you want something more?" She expected to shock Carol, to offend her. But Carol was neither yielding nor resistant.

"No," she said, shrugging. "I have everything I want."

And for a moment, Maline could see it. Lakeside beauty, idle fulfillment, and Kent. The three of them had dinner together one evening at the Pine House, and Maline found him likeable. He was mildly witty, easily gratified, affectionate. Maline analyzed rapidly: Kent thrived on Carol's power, Carol on Kent's playfulness.

One morning in March (while the snow was peeling away from the manzanita under the sun's pressure, leaving twiggy little holes) Maline received a letter from Kathleen.

Now that we have had time and distance, and can write without anger, perhaps we can exchange helpful feedback about our relationship and where it failed. I know that I closed myself off to you a lot, and that you pushed me too hard—those two things. But what else? How did we fail to connect so often, why were the missed connections so electrical, so painful?

Maline wanted to write: We never failed, it was you who failed—faltered—could not endure (a suitably dramatic reply). Or to quote: "The unexamined life is not worth living." But she was beginning not to believe in those answers. She thought of writing instead: The guilt that we collectively impose upon ourselves as individuals when we insist upon political responsibility killed our love. But that did not seem true either.

Finally she wrote:

How can I answer you? You've gone on to a new part of your life, and are looking back in peaceful, intellectual consideration. I am still trying to encompass my solitude, to believe in the fact of our separation, to understand the truth that you no longer love me (as you see, I am unchanged—still frankly vulnerable).

Adding: P.S. We failed because you were too yielding and too resistant.

Maline began to want rather badly to become lovers with Carol, so that she could feel herself superior, a conqueror, a seducer, and so that she would not be alone anymore. And so that she could write Kathleen: I have a new lover. Or better yet: I am having an affair with a married woman. She knew all this (continually self-challenging, continually self-critical) and was ashamed, but not closed off to the actualization of her shabby needs if it proved possible. And it was—because Carol was flattered and curious, and perhaps, in spite of what she said, a little bored with her life. And, finally, in this stew of unromantic motives—because they were attractive to each other: Maline’s energy, Carol’s color.

So they became lovers, invariably making love in Carol and Kent’s big bed, throwing aside the deep blue bedspread. Carol did not consider herself unfaithful to Kent because Maline was not a man, but did not tell him about the relationship “because of his prejudices.” Maline gave up trying to pierce the solidity of Carol’s vision. She allowed herself to feel politically superior to Carol and gave up arguing with her. Instead, she lavished all her energy—nervous energy, artistic energy, political energy—upon the appreciation of Carol’s body. She let her camera savor Carol’s brown flesh as well, took pictures of Carol lying on the bed, naked; holding a cat, naked. But Carol was uncomfortable. “My clothes give me confidence,” she said. “Even now I’m being more vulnerable with you than I’ve ever been with anyone—even Kent.”

Maline could hardly believe this. “You don’t seem vulnerable,” she said. “Maybe you’re insensitive.”

“I don’t think so,” Maline said, angry but controlled. “Maybe you’re just so used to keeping things in, being repressed, that even when you want to you can’t let loose, can’t express the vulnerability you feel inside.”

“Who wants to?” Carol said, shrugging her naked shoulders. Maline watched her breasts roll against her chest.

“Why don’t you ever come to my house?”

“Same reason.”

“Carol—don’t you think you’re being awfully insecure? Maybe you’d find you don’t need the trappings you think you need.”

“Maybe I’d find you and your rhetoric ahead of me at every turn if I dared to set foot outside my—domain.”

“I don’t think I’m as awful as all that,” Maline said, beginning to feel miserable, as though everything were spoiled. “Look, Carol—” knowing it was a ploy “—you seem awfully defensive. Maybe you’d be more comfortable—maybe it would be wiser for both of us, if we just quit now—called it off?” Feeling Carol’s flesh still beside her, and then:

“No. . . let’s not do that.”

And so they continued being lovers into the spring, now that Maline had the evidence, verbal: No, let’s don’t do that.

She wrote to Jill: She is casually competent, lazily creative, shrewdly intent on power, and absolutely without guilt. This last, of course, is the real attraction. Being with her eases me. And at least now I know it’s not just me.

She did not write to Kathleen. It seemed unnecessary; she would hear it from Jill.

The hours that Maline spent with Carol were dictated by Kent's schedule. Maline expected to be infuriated by this but wasn't. She was anxious for her hours alone, they were what she had come for. She photographed landscapes, read volumes of women's autobiographical writings, and began an autobiography of her own, synthesizing and enlarging journals kept for over five years.

When Maline and Carol were together they shared meals, watched TV, played cards, went (after the snow melted) on photographic expeditions, and once rented a boat, taking it out to the middle of the lake where they drifted, swam, ate a picnic lunch, cuddled and caressed, wet then hot—

Carol drove the boat. Maline watched her at the propeller, watched her bare arms on the steering wheel. She admired Carol's competence; remembered Carol in her kitchen or in the copper colored van. At the dock Carol made quick loops and knots with nylon cord, then repeated them slowly, so Maline could watch and learn.

Carol paid for the boat rental, and Maline began to think about money seriously. "Another month is all I have funds for," she told Carol. "What do you think—should I look for a job in town?"

"I don't know," Carol said. "Do you want to?" She was sitting in a lawn chair on the deck, looking dreamily out at the lake. Maline stood behind, playing with the long dark fabric of Carol's hair.

"I don't know," Maline returned. "How do you feel about it?" *Do we love each other, or are we just playing, killing time? Shall I go back and face the community now—untangle the political issues I keep tripping over when I fall in love. . . shall I learn to be like you, Carol, closed, calm, at peace?*

"Ever think of leaving Kent and moving with me to San Francisco?" she inquired of Carol finally.

"I thought of it, yes. I mean, it occurred to me. I would never do it, of course."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I like it here." Carol waved a hand at the flat blue water before them. A boat buzzed and skimmed at its center. "The city's so dirty," she said.

Maline was quiet, hurt by the casualness of Carol's reply. She let go the hair; it fell down the back of the chair.

It was spring. Chains of carpenter ants wound their black, glistening way through both houses, and the cats brought home mice and shrews. There was a bird's nest in Carol's mailbox, so she and Maline walked to the store daily to get their mail. It was a ritual, a way of fabricating a little of the routine of marriage for themselves.

Maline got a job in a restaurant in town that was taking on extra help for the tourist season. She wore a dress and white apron, and flowers in her hair. It was part of the restaurant's motif. She hated it, but smiled politely at jovial men and their irritable wives, scooped the tips into her apron pockets.

One evening Carol and Kent came to the restaurant with Roy and Nancy Dock. Maline saw the hostess seat them, and her stomach sent up ribbons of

protesting acid: anger and humiliation that Carol should bring affluence and convention to mock her. She took their order sullen-faced.

"What's the matter, Maline? You look like you have a toothache!" Kent teased.

"My feet hurt," she said, giving him a slight, obedient smile.

"Ah, that's the working life. What'll it be, Sweetheart?"

Maline looked steadily at Carol, who looked calmly from the menu to her lover/waitress. "The veal scallopini, I think," she said. Maline chatted with the Docks, and promised to send their regards to Iris.

The next day at Carol's, sitting cross-legged before the fireplace while the wind played the evergreens like pipes outdoors, Carol said, "I tried to talk them into another restaurant, but they were determined. I didn't want to be obvious."

"How could you just sit there as though I were nobody?"

"What did you want? Did you want me to throw you tragic, romantic glances?"

"Oh, I suppose so." Maline gave a tired smile. The fire's heat was giving her a headache. Her anger felt forced; months of hurt, desire, and energy seemed artificial.

"Don't look like that," Carol said. "You know I love you." She said it confidently, complacently.

"Do you?"

"Yes," Carol said, rolling across the rug to where Maline sat, reaching her head up like a snake to kiss Maline's forehead, lips, breasts underneath Maline's polo shirt. They made love, Maline passive under Carol's slow hands and tongue.

Two weeks later Maline got a letter from Kathleen. Carol was with her at the store the day she got it, and when they were outside she said, "What does Kathleen have to say?"

Maline, who had read aloud to Carol letters from Jill and Iris, slipped the envelope into her back pants pocket, saying "I think I'll read it later." Carol raised her heavy brows, then tossed her head (the long hair skittered on her back) and began to talk about summer vacation: she and Kent were going to Los Angeles to see Kent's parents.

Maline did not read the letter until she got home from work that night. It said:

Paula and I have broken up. I'll always be glad she came along, because of what I learned from her about what I need in my life. In my next relationship, I think I'll be able to stand firmer, more solidly for what I need, and not let myself be bullied by my lovers ...like you, like Paula.

Sometimes I get sad, think of you and me and how we can never get back to what we had—the finest of what we had was the finest I've ever had. I don't think anyone will ever mean as much to either of us as we've meant to each other (correct me if I'm already wrong!). But I know we can never go back.

I hope, though, that when you come back to San Francisco (you haven't settled there permanently, have you?) we'll be able to see each other in new ways, relate to each other with more health and more strength.

She signed it love.

Maline called her up immediately. "Do you have any idea of how manipulative the letter you sent me is?" she asked.

"Yes," Kathleen said. "But there are no lies in it."

"The whole *letter* is a lie," Maline said.

"No it's not. Are you going to come back?"

"I don't know," Maline said stubbornly, knowing that she would.

She told Carol the next morning, while they sat with coffee at the dining table. "I'm going back to San Francisco," she said gently. "I have to."

Carol stared into her coffee cup, then out over the water, choppy today, blotted and mottled blue and grey. "I've been expecting it," she said steadily, "But I really don't know why you're going."

"Because I need the culture, the support...and total commitment instead of a piece of someone's life." *And because I still love Kathleen and she and Paula have broken up.*

Carol pushed her chair back but did not get up. She looked down at her knees—blue slacks—and closed her eyes.

"You have Kent," Maline said.

"I *hate* Kent," Carol said, childish for the first time, and began to make a sound, a high wailing, with an abandonment of which she was incapable, scarring her peace, the glass, the lake...a skinny tortoise-shell came bounding across the room to Carol's feet then stood, round-eyed and tense...Maline put her arms around Carol's broad shoulders and comforted. "And it's too late for me to come with you, isn't it?" Carol sobbed.

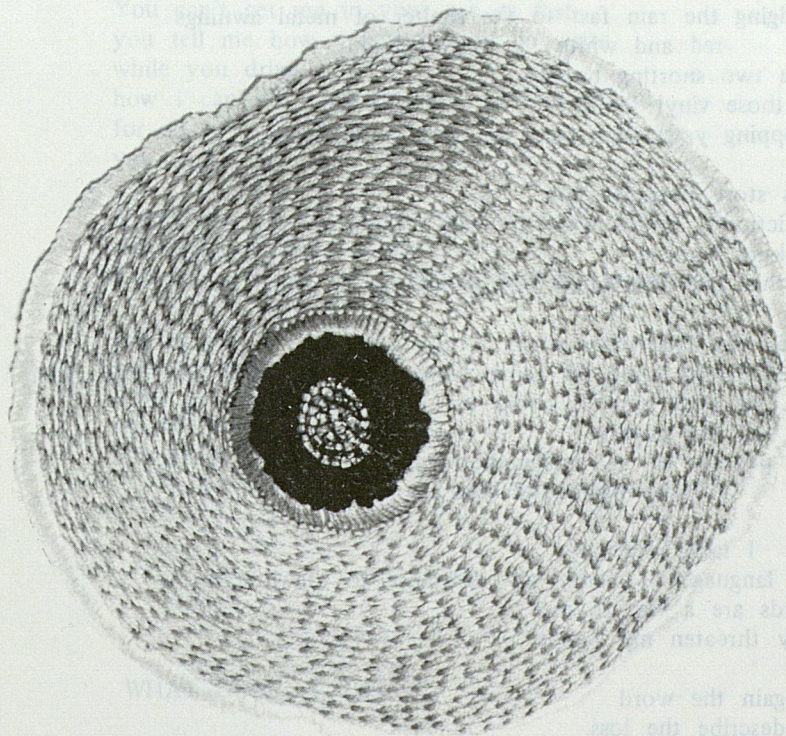
A wave of shocked blood rocked through Maline: a chain of disbelief, desire, fear. She thought of Kathleen and her dog, the two of them in Golden Gate Park, and of Kathleen singing around the house. Of Carol's hostess gowns—then felt their breasts together and Carol's tears on her neck, and said, "No, it's not too late."

"Yes it is, yes it is." Her sobs were coming chunky now, softer, final. The cat jumped up to the table, and Carol pushed Maline away to take the cat into her lap. "Hello furry-purry," she crooned. The cat purred as she cuddled it to her chest. "Will you love me forever?" Carol asked it.

They said their last goodbyes, for Maline planned to leave the following morning. Maline presented Carol with a dozen beautiful photographs of herself, and went back to Iris's to pack.

At midnight that night, in a final moment of panic, Carol left Kent drowsing over Johnny Carson and hurried through the blackness to Iris's house. She found it dark, and the Volkswagen gone. Maline had become restless, and by that time was miles down the Feather River Canyon, going home, feeling guilt-burnt, but as strong as she had ever been.

POETRY



“Embroidered Breast” by Quimetta Perle

embroidery, beading
6" x 6" x 4"

photograph by Vicky Johnson

IT'S THE POVERTY

for Kim

you say to me
"take a drive with me up the coast, babe
and bring your typewriter"

all the way down the coast
you and she stopped at motels
your typewriters tucked under your free arm
dodging the rain fast to the shelter of metal awnings
red and white I imagine them
you two snorting brandy
in those vinyl rooms
propping your each machine onto an endtable

this story becomes you
a fiction I invent with my ears
evoking heroism
in the first description of the weather

I say my typewriter sticks in the wet
I have been using the same ribbon over and over and over again
yes, we both agree I could use a new ribbon
but it's the poverty
the poverty of my imagination we agree
I lack imagination you say

No. I lack language
the language to clarify my resistance to the literate
words are a war to me
they threaten my family

to gain the word
to describe the loss
I risk losing everything

I may create a monster
the word's length and body
swelling up colorful and thrilling
looming over my mother, characterized
her voice in the distance
unintelligible
illiterate
these are the monster's words

understand
my family is poor
poor
I can't afford a new ribbon
the risk of this one
is enough to keep me moving
through it accountable
the repetition like my mother's stories re-told
each time reveals more particulars
gains more familiarity

You can't get me in your car so fast
you tell me how you've learned to write
while you drive
how I can leave my droning machine behind
for all
you care

I say not so fast not so fast
the drone, a chant to my ears
a common blend of histories repeatedly inarticulate

not so fast
I am poorer than you
from my experience
fictions are for hearing
not living

—Cher'rie Moraga Lawrence

WHAT DOES IT TAKE?

*for Sally Gearhart
upon the death of Harvey Milk*

I
the martyrs they give us
have all been men
my friend she traces her life
through them a series of assassinations
but not one not
one making her bleed

this is not the death of my mother
but my father
the kind one/the provider
pressed into newsprint
in honest
good will

If they took you I would take to the streets
scream
bloody murder

but the deaths of our mothers
are never that public
they have happened before
and we were not informed
women do not coagulate into one hero's death
we bleed out of many pores
so constant
that it has come to be seen as the way things are

2
my mother's death
was not eventful
expecting it
I put a hole in my arm
no TNT blast
but a slow excavation
my nails
 in silent opposition
digging down to the raw part
inside the elbow

If they took you I would take to the streets
scream
bloody murder

what does it take
to move me?
(your death that I have ignored
in the deaths of other women)

Isn't the possibility of your dying
enough?

—Cher'rie Moraga Lawrence

MOVING OUT

*"You are not going to see the promised land, sisters
and brothers, you are not. But you better get
your ass out into the desert because if you don't
start on this journey, nobody'll see the promised land."*

—Rita Mae Brown

I can't imagine dying
out here, not seeing trees
or tasting water, tongue thick
from silence these years
Our packs grown to our spines
we hobble like hunchbacks,
our holy robes
as yet only ghostly costumes
flapping at thin wrists and ankles.
This air like every stinging word
thrown at our faces
we have lived in this desert
even unaware, our love
flattened like these dunes,
distorted, brushed aside.
No footprints, no guide but the sun
heat of shame newly turned to anger
We protect ourselves like cactus
grow sharp and hard, drawing rain
from an earth closed against us.
Still, reaching
across glaring stretches of sand
toward some land where rain makes music
night comes, not to hide
but to bless.

—Jan Hardy

THE HOUSEWIFE

the spoon sweeping
the pot's tin,
the bottom,
in smooth circles
sweeping again and a
gain and
the pudding thickens in
the spoon's swirl
ing, the pudding
hot and heavy
and turning, the spoon's
trail,
the diamond of the
ring fogged and the gold
hot and heavy,
turning on the skin
as the pudding hardens
on the pan's side,
the spoon sweeping arc
after arc af
ter arc,
the hand
sweeping again and a
gain and the radio
crackling
the top ten
ten times each spin
of the hand
turning again and a
gain and the bubbles
beginning
as the spoon spins
scraping the tin
as the hand tells three
and the books fall
and the t.v. turns on,
and channels one after one after
turning while the
pudding burns
and the spoon
strikes the pot's tin again and
again and
again

—Janice Maiman

THE DIRT ON THE SIDES

thighs, in stirrups, brown, my mother's legs, six feet, cold, and bones, my lover's spine, in the walls, mud, deeper, winter's reign, numb space, deaf,	(in a box, a pencil, plunging, my mother's hole, the wood, thighs unsettled, the legs kick, my mother's legs, dirt on the sides, lumps hard, and flexing, head first, the mud, my mother's womb, like a fish, full moon eyed, limp, plunging, my mother's hole, the wood, stones, and bone, my grandmother's, in the walls, fragments, my mother's womb, numb space, hollow, and deaf)	my mother's legs, the muscles move, flexing, her vagina, dark, rocks, my grandmother's hip, fragments, my mother's womb, yesterday's rain, frozen walls, my mother's womb, hollow.
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—Janice Maiman

MELVIN MILLS

Clouds muffle the moon:
only the river carries conviction.

In your woods deer must be moving,
their antlers confounded with branches,
like a reflection.

The river's arrangements are tangled in ice;
Let such knots be unraveled,
and moonlight break free,
and I'm up and away from that house like a witch.

My bones are as clean and as cold
as the ridges I cross, to where you are
breathing in darkness.

Still under quilts, you are little expecting
My body to slide in beside you,
Unsettling your sleeping,
and clearing the air, like a frost.

PHILADELPHIA, 4 A.M.

She woke up from a dream
of two strict aunts in Colorado;
she was shaken by it, grooved
into the agony of childhood;
I tried to reach her there, but
"back off," she said, "leave me alone."

So I got up, in that strange expensive
town apartment, and, standing by the window,
felt my spirit spread away from me,
across the rooftops of the downtown city.
I told myself, oh yes, and, naked,
I made tea.

I watched the jasmine flowers open,
and float slowly on the surface
of the cup; pale and bloodless,
they spread themselves, like me.

Oh yes, I thought, all these grey
hairs, these long used muscles, bones,
and tissues, are dissolving, and
every sad truth is coming home:
oh yes, I am a woman taking in her washing
at long last, stained by the rain.

—Elizabeth Alexander

SONG OF THE MOLE MOTHER

for Alice

These soft, dark places are mine,
the wet, black heart of earth
here under the porch where moss
grows hair roots for mushrooms
gliding by pearl-white spiders
of tentative plans who wait
ominously under their caps.

The tender shoots are not hard to find
and we follow them awhile
and reach the embryo of snakeroots
and onions gleaming like eggs
suspended in dark water.

One day the sun will not rise
and a blind green fish from the
deepest crevice will call us to grasp
her tail and follow her to a warm center
where we will touch in whispers
and give birth to love children
with no eyes.

—Teresa Anderson

SMALLNESS, SHARON

smallness scares me
smallness, sharon

yours. all gathered in
arms around your knees,
chin tucked under
compact.

this once
I wanted to reach across
to you
bridge this crazy canyon of sizes.

but I cringe from diminutives

and return to my house tonight
because I fit
because no one there is smaller than I
because
(smallness scares me)
paula was small.

—Becky BIRTHA

Sun-up, second of November
6:15 a.m. cold
wind ripples
the morning a starched white curtain

You in the
frayed blue coat faded
kerchief black stockings kick
round the corner back
up Camac
street all to yourself about
wide as your wide-stretched arms
clog mark hard on the
cobblestones echo up the
hollow, ring out the high brick walls

Come from your lover
you running your morning home
rose sky in your eyes and her
kisses all over your face.

GHOST STORY

II

(for my father)

I feel you
crawling through my rear passageways
returning through doors marked
one way,
this way out, and exit only
your persistent footfalls
echo along my narrow corridors
constricting,
drawing in my center.

I feel you
stumbling through my nightmares
a blind vagrant who returns to me
because your cane remembers the way
and there is no place else to go.

I hear the splinter of wood,
the clatter of falling hinges
as you assault doors that open into yesterday
seeking sunlit rooms
in which I used to call you daddy.

—Julie Blackwomon

CAROL

she is clearly the lioness the golden sun ruby fire goddess, the
flame, the spark she is truly new in her learning she is truly
free in her giving

in the cage. she paces back . forth . back . forth . face
creased by the effort to hold onto what she knows she could remember
if only the bars would lift, the glass shatter, the doors spring open
and fall away. pacing. eyes watchful, narrowed at those who
observe her: caged symbol of roaring and blazing.

clearly the chariot, pulled by winged lions, angel lions, clearly
the bringer of light, the gleaming trail across a darkened universe
announcing rebirth delight magic

pulled down. the angels bear incisions where their wings should be/
deep slices. looking into those crevices we can read the history of
removal. hope chest opens to reveal the remnants of bloodied down,
dripping scarlet feathers. now they are fans, creased by the effort
to remember flight.

clearly the free flier the golden space dreamer the power raiser
the sunlit dancer the radiant mover the sweeper the spinner
the runner the leaper

walls disrupt her. she watches crumbling, decay. walls, ceiling,
structure cave in, collapse. she remembers this, loving dissolution.
glowing orange against the rubble, the dying framework

she is essence escaping

light/heat
light/heat
light/heat

—Terry Wolverton

for iva

the woman who is cat

whose brown fur sparkles/who crouches and watches slit eyes green
and knowing/who hides under the bed when the doorbell rings/who
crawls into your lap, snuggles down, stretches, kneads/who grrrrrrrs
into your ear, deep down humming moaning whiskers sigh/who curls up,
stays home, waits and rubs against your memory

encircles satin pillows velvet skins/who will not settle for less
than what she wants and expects nothing/who delights in licking
herself clean/who cannot be coaxed into the street/gazes amethyst
through windows drinking the flight of birds leaves snow/whose lean
muscles ease across the floor but tightly-coiled, springing

the woman who cries for food or the stroke of a finger across her
throat/who would sink her teeth in to get away but always comes back
for milk or a bite of fish

woman who crinkles her face into mirrors and does not see her
reflection.

—Terry Wolverton

"I AM FRIGHTENED BY THE SORROW"

The thing that hit me was her eyes, wild and sharp, ready first to flee and then in terror to lash out. She was afraid to strike or stay. Four months of this in hiding was too long; locked from any men but jailors, those with guns, you grow away from life, turning into lynx or hare but always in a cage. When I stepped in, she spread her claws. She saw me something different and shrank back, then chancing all, she ran into my arms. "I'll get you out of here," I said, "You just hold on. Fight me hard where they can see. I'll get you out." I held her close a moment and then held her off, telling those outside to put her in my car, telling them my orders were to take her north, telling them to do it and to do it fast. They listened, dragging her and kicking at her legs, tying tight her hands and feet, shoving her still wrestling them onto the floor in front.

*

I started up the Ford and we moved out. Knelt below the seat she shook with tears. "We'll get away from here," I said, "Are you alright?" She nodded and I watched the road. I tried to stop and bring her from her knees but she said, "no" and I drove on, struggling with anger and within her pain, till finally I pulled aside and lifted her and opened ropes and rubbed the burns with carefulness and love. Her limbs were hurt less badly than her heart. She shivered small against me, her head on my lap, silently and tense. We travelled hours into darkness waiting out the miles, and halting only once for drive-in burgers, and a bathroom, and to fill the tank.

*

That night I picked a dim motel, and asking single space, we chose the furthest from the path. The diner there was open through till dawn. "I'm so dirty," she said, "and so tired. I look a mess." I washed her gently in the shower, she too beaten now to protest or resist, then half walked, half carried her onto the double bed. "My clothes will fit you," I said, "We'll throw these out. What happened to your own?" She only knew that they were gone. The bruises on her back and ribs were new; I touched them; she started to relax. "Where will you take me?" she said. "Anywhere you want to go. North first, as far from here till they can't find us, then I'll take you home." She slept, her fingers clutched in mine, and I slid in beside. In dream she cried and woke. "Diane," she said, "I have no home." "You have a home," I said, "as long as I'm alive."

*

In the next hotel at evening we sat together as I soothed a cream into her skin. She was stiff and sore, and thinner than a child. "Di," she said, "What if I don't want to stay with you?" "Then you can go," I said, "I'll help you get to anywhere you want." "Now?" she said. I asked her, "Can you do it now?" "No. . . ." She looked at me. "Di," she said, "I want to stay with you. Do you still want me?" "You know I do," I said, and kissed her hair, and held her as she fell asleep. Later waking her was hard. She startled, lost, and was too weak to rise. "We won't go so far today," I said. "Tonight we'll be in Washington, and we can stay there till you get some rest." "But," she said, "they'll find us and they'll take me back." I said, "Over my dead body!" "Yes," she said, and stroked my cheek, "I think you would!" I felt her staring as we rode, felt her try to talk to me and hold it down. I brought her water in a cup I

filled in Maryland where we stopped for gas. "I trust you, Di," she said, "I want to stay with you. We won't be lonely anymore."

*

She was too frightened yet to let me bring her into downtown noise. "I know they're hunting us," she said, "I can't go back." I said, "They haven't found us until this, they'll let us go." "I know they'll find us. Please," she said, and when we reached the cut off lane I took the one away. "This takes us to Bethesda and to Pennsylvania," I said. "You're too fatigued to go much further, and we ought to stop. I'm getting punchy watching guardrails, too." "I don't know how you've gone this far," she said. I slipped an arm around her and we took an exit to a grey old town of cottages to choose a room. "Five more hours driving time will take us home," I said. I brought our suitcase in. She said, "How did you find me?" I said that "I just knew. And I just had to try." She said, "I had no hope. I can't believe its true." "I promise you it is," I said, "and that you're safe."

*

We stayed there four more days, just loafing under blankets at the inn. First I brought her meals in bed from someone's Home Cooked Kitchen up the way. We slept and woke and slept again and talked and went for walks. One day she asked to go alone. I put two twenties in her pocket and a paper with my own address. "In case we separate," I said. She saw my apprehension and she grinned: "I have to see if I can do it, but I won't go far." She came back minutes late with an ice cream cone and flowers from somebody's yard. "It's been four months," she said. I knew I had to show her she could really go, but still she seemed content, and didn't want to leave, and seemed a bit upset if I was gone from her too long.

Sometimes she went herself to bring our food, but mostly she stayed with me, and she grew less nervous and with less of nightmares and of fear. She held her head up higher. And she bloomed.

*

The final lap to Pittsburgh was a happiness we shared. More calm than I had seen her, she was stronger and her timidness was halfly gone. We took the turnpike easily, with often halts to try the shops or just to wait and sit there and enjoy the view. Only among people would she sometimes flinch, and then the ache that I once saw as part of her would draw against her face. She retreated to a shell then, though a word from me would bring her out, and she would need me to be near. We reached the limits of the city in mid-afternoon and stopped again for groceries for bringing home. "Just don't expect my place to be too much," I said. She said, "It doesn't have to be if you'll be there." She moved to lean against me when we drove the streets, and at the house I had to keep beside her or she wouldn't come. Her eyes were watching mine as I unlocked our door. We climbed the stairs together, holding hands.

—Diane Stein
for judy

[Author's note: The title is a quote by James Wright, *In the Face of Hatred.*]

ANNOUNCEMENTS

SOLICITING MANUSCRIPTS:

Linda McDonnell and Toni McNaron, two lesbian/feminists, are soliciting manuscripts for a collection of women's poems and prose focusing on our experiences with incest. We are interested in all types of incest: overt, covert, same sex, different sex, physical, emotional. We don't want sociological or political tracts; or interviews. Aside from these limitations, we are open to all forms—letters, short stories, poetry, journal entries, prose-poems. As incest victims we have conceived this project out of our own and other women's work. We believe breaking silence around this taboo is both transformational and healing. We have been co-editors of *So's Your Old Lady*, a lesbian/feminist journal, for the past three years.

Please send manuscripts to: Linda McDonnell, 2533 Lyndale Ave. South, Minneapolis, MN 55405. If you wish your copy returned, enclose a SASE. Because we want to print soon, our deadline is February 1, 1980.

We are planning an anthology of writings on the subject of child molestation. We are seeking first-person writing: stories, poems, journal entries, and excerpts from longer works, by people who have been molested as children. We are also interested in writing by other family members, from their own point of view. And, with the idea that this anthology might be useful for young people in schools, we are open to writing by children as well. All material should be true, although you may change names or use a pen-name. Material may be published or unpublished (let us know about permission to reprint). Please type, if possible, and enclose a SASE if you want your manuscript returned. Mail as soon as possible to Ellen Bass, 240 Day Valley Road, Aptos, CA95003.

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FOR HANDICAPPED READERS:

Sinister Wisdom in conjunction with FEMINIST TAPING FOR HANDICAPPED READERS is making periodicals and books available to handicapped readers. At present the project consists of ten women volunteers who tape *Sinister Wisdom*, *Off Our Backs*, and *Feminary*. Since we would like to make these tapes available for no more than the cover price of the book or periodical itself, we are asking women to help us by donating some money (any amount) that could be used to subsidize this undertaking. Or to donate the equipment needed to do the tape processing ourselves: a cassette-to-cassette high speed duplicator, cassette records, and 90-minute cassette tapes.

If you know anyone who would like access to the journals we are taping, and is a handicapped reader—please tell them about FTHR. Donations should be made out to Susan Wood-Thompson and sent to her at FEMINIST TAPING FOR HANDICAPPED READERS, Box 6516, T Street Station, Washington, DC 20009.

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SW 15 — LESBIANS AND PORNOGRAPHY. Guest edited by

Julia Penelope. We are seeking poems, articles, and short stories that deal with any of the issues of pornography and violence and the ways in which these facets of patriarchal culture affect Lesbian lives, the way we define ourselves, our sexuality, our relationships with other women, racism and pornography, classism and pornography, incest as a specific form of sexual violence in the lives of Lesbians, the "compromise" distinction between "pornography" and "erotica," the use of pseudo-Lesbian imagery in advertising (to whom do such ads appeal?). Also of interest, in contrast, would be articles and fiction that explore Lesbian sensuality as it is evolving now.

Address all correspondence and manuscripts (include an SASE) to

Julia Penelope
box 30541
Lincoln, NE 68503

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CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

Elizabeth Alexander is a poet from Concord, New Hampshire.

Teresa Anderson is a poet from Oklahoma.

Becky Birtha. "Thirty years old, I'm a member of a lesbian writers' workshop here in Philadelphia, and do public readings whenever I have an opportunity. My poetry has appeared in the special Black Women's issue of *Conditions*, and one of my short stories is included in *A Woman's Touch*, an anthology exploring lesbian sensuality and eroticism, available from Amazon Reality.

Julie Blackwomon is a poet living in Philadelphia.

Katherine A. Bouton lives in Santa Cruz, California.

Andrée Collard is writing a book on the patriarchal treatment of nature, animals, and women, to be published by Beacon Press.

J. Z. Grover is a writer living in Sacramento who photographs her friends as an avocation.

Marilyn Hacker is the author of *Separations* (Knopf, 1976) and *Presentation Piece* (Viking, 1974), which received the National Book Award for poetry in 1975. She lives in New York City with her daughter, Iva.

Barbara Hammer. "I am a lesbian/feminist/ poetic filmmaker and writer currently working on a symbolic quest film of an aging heroine who encounters her crone counterparts of seductress, guardian angel of consciousness, and wise woman of pain and suffering in her backpack journey around San Francisco Bay. I self-distribute my films through Goddess Films, P.O. Box 2446, Berkeley, CA 94702.

Jan Hardy. "I'm active in a lesbian-feminist theater/poetry/propaganda group in Pittsburgh and trying to use separatism to stay sane in all this missionary work."

Beth Hodges lives in Cambridge, Mass., where she has taught writing workshops for women and is now studying book design. She has been active in lesbian feminist publishing since 1975.

JEB (Joan E. Biren) is a left-handed glad hag photographer. She's been photographing lesbians for nine years.

Meg Jochild is a Texan dyke who has moved to San Francisco so she can be homesick with more style. This is her first time to be published.

Lynda Koolish is a poet and photographer. She is writing a book on contemporary women poets.

Cherrié Moraga Lawrence is an L.A.-turned-Bay-Area poet who waits tables for a living. She is presently involved in editing an anthology of essays by Radical Third World Feminists along with other Bay Area women.

Janice Maiman is a poet living in Virginia.

Tracy Moore is a dyke trying like many others to live in California and Iowa at the same time. Someday her writing may appear in *Better Homes & Dykes*.

Julia Penelope is dropping her patronymic, Stanley. The name Julia Penelope has been handed down on the maternal side of her family every other generation since her great-great aunt Julia Penelope defied General Sherman by chewing and swallowing the map which showed where her husband was hidden with his confederate troops. More recently, she has created herself as a buttercup, a dragonfly, a boa constrictor, and a bumblebee. Not all at the same time, though. She also, on occasion, appears as the Winter Solstice Elf, so be sure to leave out granola bars for her on December 21.

Quimetta Perle. "I am an artist living and working in Minneapolis. I think of my work as sewing a silk purse from a sow's ear. It is the process of transforming the raw material from my guts into beautiful, rich and complex images.

Deborah Snow is a co-publisher of Persephone Press.

Diane Stein. "I am 31 years of age, holding a Master's Degree in English Literature, and working at minimum wage as a file clerk. My writing is my life. I have been writing since high school, publishing for the last 10 years."

Katherine Sturtevant studied creative writing at San Francisco State. She is currently living in Portland, Oregon.

Joyce Trebilcot teaches women's studies and feminist philosophy at Washington University in St. Louis.

Sinister Wisdom issues 6 through 11 are now on cassette tape. The recordings are made in the style of Recordings for the Blind, with the donated labor of Susan Wood-Thompson; she reads the text, describes the graphics, etc., for women who cannot read the print copies. Each taped issue costs \$3, and a year's subscription costs \$12. Make check payable to Susan Wood-Thompson and mail your order to Susan Wood-Thompson, Box 6516, T Street Station, Washington, DC 20009.

SINISTER WISDOM POSTER STILL AVAILABLE

In the spring of 1977, a Tee Corinne solarized photograph of two women making love appeared on the cover of *Sinister Wisdom* 3, followed by a deluge of requests for a poster. The poster was printed in the summer of 1977: a duplicate of that cover, black on gray, 17" x 22". You can have your own for a contribution of \$3.00 toward the survival of *Sinister Wisdom* plus 50 cents to cover mailing costs. (They make nice gifts for friends, too; bulk rates available.)

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Sinister Wisdom welcomes unsolicited manuscripts and art work. Please type (double-spaced) all written work. Reviews should be no longer than 3500 words; articles no longer than 5000 words. Enclose self-addressed, stamped envelope and a 2-3 line description of yourself. At this time, we can pay only with copies of the issue in which your work appears. Send all manuscripts except poetry to *SW*, Box 30541, Lincoln, Nebraska 68503.

Sinister Wisdom will not be accepting poetry manuscripts again until after March 1, 1980. After that time, send poetry to Susan Leigh Star, poetry editor, 52 Mars Street, San Francisco, California 94114.

BACK ISSUES, WHILE THEY LAST

Issue 4 (Fall 1977): stories of mothers and daughters and witches and lovers; Joanna Russ's tale for the girlchild in all of us; Lesbian separatism from the inside; photo-essay; interview; reviews, letters and poetry. 96 pp., \$2.25.

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Issue 6 (Summer 1978): Julia Stanley, Mary Daly, Audre Lorde, Judith McDaniel, Adrienne Rich on language and silence; Marilyn Frye on separatism and power; fiction by Sandy Boucher, Thyme Seagull; poetry; interviews; essays by Sarah Hoagland and Peggy Holland; drawings and photos. 104 pp., \$2.50.

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no. 11 fall 1979

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