

SINISTER WISDOM





SINISTER WISDOM 24

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Contents

- 3 Notes for a Magazine: Adrienne Rich, Michelle Cliff
-

- 9 prologue #1: Moving Day, a poem by Michelle Parkerson
11 Main Street: 1953, narrative by Joanna Russ
14 Cognate, a poem by Jean Swallow
22 Lesbians Have Immortal Children, a poem by Marnie Mahoney
24 Daydreams on a Subway Train, a poem by Patricia Fagan
25 Reading Maps, a poem by Minnie Bruce Pratt
-

- 33 I Ching: To Kat, narrative by Cheiron Sariko McMahill
36 Class Acts, a poem by Sherry Sylvester
41 Rediscovering the Heart, dialogue between Sue Dove Gambill
and Rachel deVries
56 Two drawings by Karen Sjöholm
-

- 58 Censorship, a poem by Karen Brodine
62 The Deception, a poem by Kathy Eberly
64 Re-membering: The Colors of Silence, a poem by
Kelly Anne Munger
65 When We Pry Our Eyes Open, a poem by Martha Courtot
67 Black Against a Clear Sky, a poem by Theresa Barry
69 Growing Up? *and* Spring/Song, two poems by Susan Sherman
-

- 72 The Swashbuckler, narrative by Lee Lynch
89 Of Althea and Flaxie *and* Gail, two poems by Cheryl Clarke
92 To the Very Young Woman, a poem by Valerie Olson
94 Photographs by Jan Phillips
-

- 96 Almost Aubade, a poem by Marilyn Hacker
97 My mother is an orphan, a poem by Patricia Jones
99 Insect Is an Anagram, a poem by Roseann Lloyd
103 Aunt Pat, a poem by Rebecca Ellis
105 from Natural Birth, prose poems by Toi Derricotte

-
- 110 Fine Ligament of Sympathy, a poem by Susan Wood-Thompson
114 from Communicating, a poem by Jacqueline Lapidus
116 Small Infidelities, a poem by Rebecca Ellis
117 Two Journeys, a poem by Melissa Cannon
120 Rain So Thick It Looks Like Snow, poems by Beverly A. Smith
123 Heartshed, A Hard Rain, and The Blood-Letting, three poems by Joy Harjo
-

- 127 Just to Go On, a poem by Marilyn Hadfield
129 Changing Skin, a poem by Catherine Risingflame Moirai
133 The Anthropologist, a poem by Martha Courtot
135 Waulking Song, a poem by Minnie Bruce Pratt
-

Reviews

- 143 Cherríe Moraga on *Fight Back!*
151 Judith Barrington on *Annapurna: A Woman's Place*
157 Joy Harjo on Audre Lorde's *Chosen Poems*
163 Gloria I. Joseph on *Zami*
168 Myra Glazer on *Keeper of Accounts*
175 Joan Nestle on *Nice Jewish Girls*
-

- 186 Notes on Contributors
188 Announcements
-

Notes for a Magazine

In January 1981, when Michelle Cliff and I assumed full and equal responsibility for *Sinister Wisdom*, we made a pact with each other: that we would pass on the life of the magazine before we ourselves became burnt-out, both for its sake and ours. We saw it from the first as an absorbing, but temporary, commitment. During the ensuing two and a half years or more, we have published eight issues, making visible work of which we are proud, both by women already known in the movement and outside, and by writers and artists whose first publication was in these pages. One double issue—"A Gathering of Spirit"—was entirely organized and edited by Beth Brant; we remained responsible for production and basic distribution.

At the time we took on *SW*—a well-known lesbian/feminist journal already four years old—other changes were taking place in our lives and around us. The military budget was skyrocketing, basic public services undercut, the political climate was becoming more repressive. Female poverty in particular was deepening. Within the political hierarchy and the mainstream media there has been clear license for heightened anti-feminism, racism, anti-Semitism, and scapegoating of "others"—among them, lesbians, welfare mothers, women outside the nuclear family. From the first, there was an urgency to our work, since we wanted *SW* to be part of the counter-pressure against those forces.

During this period I went through an escalation of the rheumatoid arthritis I have lived with for thirty-three years. Within two and a half years I had orthopedic surgery twice, and began learning both to live in a new relationship to disability, and to meet pain and attrition with a wide variety of healing approaches; finally, to stabilize my health. During much of the time we have edited *SW* I have been slowed down by physical pain and its impact on the spirit. Michelle has carried, with unhesitating sense of purpose, far more than her share in the running of the magazine. We both worked through and remained jointly responsible for all substantive decisions,

but essentially, she became the managing and sustaining editor, whose dedication, skill and energy kept the body and soul of *SW* together. (It has therefore seemed truly ironic that some correspondents and contributors chose to assume that I was the "real" editor, or the only one.)

One of our real resources was that each of us knew of the other that she was not a quitter, that she would continue to do her utmost. Another was the support of members of the local women's community, without whose work and spirit we simply could not have gone on. I want to mention here especially Janet Aalfs, Liza Deep Moss, Paulla Ebron, Angela Giudice, Victoria Redel, Crane Willemse—who took time from other political work, jobs, school, and sometimes personal problems, to come and help us. This has been a time of constraint and instability for small businesses (and a lesbian/feminist journal may be art, spirit, vision, politics, but it is also, unless privately supported and given away free, a small business)—and of slashed Federal and state funding for the arts as well as for human services. *SW* received two grants from the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines, matched by volunteer labor and contributions, and they were crucial in helping us hold our own at a time of steadily rising costs.

All along we've known the frustrations of editing a magazine of 112 pages, in which from the beginning controversial issues have been aired, and in which we wanted to "encourage dialogue among women across all assumed/existing boundaries." We have always felt the sense of time-lag, impatience, and the choices needing to be made between new work and responses to work already published. We've sat together late at night after counting characters in every piece of writing for a forthcoming issue, trying to decide how our limited space could be apportioned, what could go into another issue. Our contributors have sometimes and justifiably grown impatient, but we have been impatient too.

Publishing *SW* has been an extremely labor-intensive process. We could not reorganize the distribution system, or do extensive fund-raising, given my physical limits especially, and still do the work we wanted to do as editors—not just soliciting and selecting material, but working with contributors and also corresponding about work we didn't publish. A computer terminal and hardware would have vastly simplified our mailing system and record-keeping.

Opening the magazine to a collective would have reduced the number of woman-hours for each of us. However, we believe that *SW* has a long future, and that the new editors will make new decisions based on their own skills and visions. The two women to whom we now hand on the magazine are well equipped to carry her on. Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz and Michaela Uccella are long-time activists, organizers, teachers and creators of possibility for women. Both have contributed to *SW* in the past. We feel confident that she will thrive in their hands.

I sense, from many pieces of correspondence that *SW* has received, that the last few years have been a period of deepening and expanding politics for many North American lesbians. Fear and anger about "fragmentation" in the women's movement—as if a developing political consciousness could or should possess instant unity—can be seen giving way to a thoughtful rejection of false unity, a reclamation of difference as a source of deeper insight rather than as mere in-fighting: recognition of our class, ethnic, racial and other historical perspectives within our identities as women. Living in a nation increasingly bent on the destruction of its citizens and of all life everywhere, it feels increasingly that personal survival by itself is not survival. What do we mean by liberation? On whose liberation does our own depend? Pinned between the urgency of nuclear danger and the need to build for a long future, much is asked of all of us who care.

Michelle Cliff

Notes for a Magazine

I have learned a lot while working on *Sinister Wisdom* over the past few years—about myself and about the magazine. For the most part it has been a good experience, although a complicated one. About myself I have learned that I have an affinity for numbers—and get a rush when I balance the checkbook or ledger the first time around. (I must mention here that Linda Shear, superb accountant and composer and musician, helped and supported us through the process of learning bookkeeping and set up a sensible and clear system of financial management for the magazine.)

I have also learned that even after going to the *SW* mailbox approximately 800 times over the past three years—and getting hit by a car once en route—I still get excited by what might be waiting for us in the box. We have been given wonderful surprises through that mailbox: the work of women whose names we did not know (like Mary Moran, Ursula Kavanagh, Celeste Tibbets, Diana Bickston, Sudie Rakusin); donations from women to help cover free subscriptions, printing costs; notes on renewal forms telling us we were doing a good job; and letters from women in prison—sometimes telling us about having seen a copy sent to another woman, but the prison has a rule against “sharing,” so could we send another subscription. Since we announced with issue 17 that *SW* would be available free of charge to women in prisons and mental institutions, we have received approximately 300 requests from women in prison. But we have never received a request from a woman in a mental institution; and I wonder about our sisters in those places and what we must do to reach them. (I would urge those of you who are concerned about women in prisons and mental institutions to support *No More Cages*, a publication which is devoted to ending the oppression of sisters in those places, and which consistently reports the *active* opposition by women in those institutions, to those institutions. Subscriptions are \$6 per year; send to: Women Free Women in Prison, P.O. Box 90, Brooklyn, NY 11215.)

What else have I learned? That the bottom line is very powerful and that we must address the economics of this movement and how we can survive. My first job out of college was as a researcher at *Life* magazine (I was assigned to the "moon-landing"); later I was a production editor in a publishing house in New York. I brought from these jobs a certain practical experience to *Simister Wisdom*, as well as a Third World/Black/lesbian/feminist perspective. I also brought a firsthand knowledge of the enormous amounts of capital with which white men are able to convey their view of the world, to the world. As long as we exist under capitalism, what we are able—as Black women, Third World women, lesbians, feminists—to do may well come down to capital, after all. A gloomy thought, but one to consider. These are bad times, but have there ever been really good times for enterprises that want to change the way in which the world is viewed? Of course not.

We have certainly felt the limits imposed by not-enough-money. So much so that when we were preparing this issue for the typesetter we had to cut some very fine work, work which we had already accepted, because we could not afford to include it in this issue. As we have had to cut work from other issues as well. These were very difficult decisions to make; and the fact that they had to be made solely on the grounds of money was bitter indeed.

What can we do about this? I can only say that we need to continue to support women's enterprises that we believe in. I would recommend to women who are thinking of starting journals or newspapers or publishing houses, that you obtain non-profit, tax-exempt status—there are free-of-charge lawyers for the arts in many states who can help you do this. With this status, you will be eligible for grants and tax-deductible donations. If you do not want to try for non-profit, tax-exempt status, many states have umbrella organizations which will take you under their aegis—the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines in New York is one such organization. I would encourage women who are involved in printing, typesetting, retail, or manufacturing enterprises to incorporate and sell stock. Above all, I would ask women who have it to give extra capital to women's enterprises, or to invest it in these enterprises. Finally, we need more institutions of our own making—more outlets for our words and thoughts, more battered women's shelters, soup kitchens

for poor or unemployed women, food cooperatives, places to meet and organize—don't be afraid of starting them.

As I write this I think about the Marxist dialectic: thesis, antithesis, synthesis. Thesis = feminism/lesbian-feminism/belief in collective empowerment; antithesis = a dependence on capitalist modes to create a financial base which will underwrite a revolution; synthesis = the revolution in which resources will be shared equally and our various enterprises will be assured of survival. For me, the only way to traverse the antithesis is to keep sight of the synthesis; that is, we cannot believe that when women inhabit the space shuttle or the Supreme Court, any real advance has been made. This may be obvious; but I want to say it anyway.

We must give of our time and our money (those of us who have it is always understood) to those institutions we care about, or else this movement will become only a pastime for women who can afford it, and not something geared to make radical change in the lives of sisters everywhere.

I want to thank Harriet Desmoines (Ellenberger) and Catherine Nicholson, who typeset and pasted up issues 17-21; Judith Pendleton of Annie Graham Co., who designed and typeset and pasted up issues 22/23 and 24; the Iowa City Women's Press, who printed issues 20-24; and A Fine Bind, who bound issues 20-24. These are all women's enterprises, lesbian/feminist enterprises, without which publishing *Sinister Wisdom* would not have been the positive experience it was.

prologue #1: Moving Day

Miss Tubman's train
knew no tracks
just a North Star shining
Freedom
". . . can't tote no boxes,
can't take no packs—"
Miss Moses said,
"Move on . . ."

Through Southern summers
of our discontent,
Freedom Riders shook
this land
Sojourner's Harvest moved
for justice
Never knew no turnin' back

A woman makes her path
some Angola mornings
over African earth
no mercenaries fathom—
Her moving smooth:
a trigger / a child
strapped taut beneath
her breasts
Each dawn renews the promise:
Liberation

my father says
i move a lot—
after packing 8th time
this year

over boxes,

 this man
 meets his daughter's eyes
 and
 finds a nomad
 dancing
 my road/a fever
 my feet pursue the undertow

It's Moving Day:

 chipped dishes, ragged books, and lost romance

i've packed Miss Harriet's starlight,
 snatched songs from Selma church nights,
 taken birth from unmarked bush graves –

 on this moving day

 I hold my power
 by the hand

 and

 let it walk me home

Main Street: 1953

Who's Elaine Beach?

Just the one you'd expect. The shy one. The sandy-haired one with freckles. The unhappy one who isn't good-looking. The one who came back to town after a two weeks' absence, claiming she'd been to Chicago and had a baby. The one who's always listening to something else. The one who, on autumn nights, looks as though she can hear something else. The one who hates parties. The one who won't talk about it.

The one to whom supernatural adventures ought to happen.

In a car, coming slowly home from the Christmas dance in a blizzard, being driven by a boy she didn't like. The prairie stretching iron-grey and iron-hard for miles. In her lavender-organdie dress, sitting as far away from him as she can, in her fake-fur coat, in her dyed lavender pumps, her short hair fluffed up in the cold, her fingers drawing roses and daisies on the fog of the car window.

Didn't say anything.

At a cross-roads, got out of the car and ran away. The snow so thick she could hardly see the Stop sign. A great, blowing white. She's in it, stumbling across the iron-hard furrows of the field. Nature lies dead. Into a small fringe of trees standing alone on the prairie, she's dreamlike and hurting. Numb feet, snow blowing up the sleeves and down the neck of her coat, stinging pellets hitting her face and blowing in whirls and spirals past the dim dead branches.

The trees don't stop.

Somewhere, lost among the confusion of dead twigs and piled frozen rubbish is the place where the shape changes. Or something changes: the murmuring in one's head, the outline of things, there's an abstract difference, the dream as it wakes up. The sand picture.

And she does make it. Right into Broceliande. She's the same but being the same doesn't make the world the same; that's the difference. She's erased. Sobbing with relief in her heavy coat under the May-bloom, under the infinite milky light, delicate grey blossom

against delicate grey sky and the round moon rising, colored like the inside of a peach. Broad, ivory-tinted rivers catch the first slash of pink light. To be able to walk farther and farther under the dropping trees, carelessly dragging her coat across daisies and fallen May petals, her skin dewing, all around her the loud sound of thawing water.

To be the same but to be perfect. Wandering in her stockings from one pale creamy heap of flowers to another in the beginnings of dawn. To know it goes on forever. To know that nothing changes.

To know there is not time passing.

There's cloth of gold and cloth of silver. Architecture like glass or ice. Living on snow-water that turns to wine as the sun hits it. Banners of all colors. The terrible, terrible temptation of spirit so intense and fiery that forms can scarcely contain it: bilberries and dewberries and cupcakes of music, living on music, metal-foil music, shapes of dazzling white, so sad and so gay. Music like cut glass. Daggers of music that enter the soul, sharp and unhuman in this forest of Broceliande that has barely five trees together but she made it; she got into it anyway.

Even faces.

She came back.

She said she'd been to Chicago and had a baby but shut up if anyone asked her about the details.

Got her old job back.

Stopped watching television except for the news, gets newspapers from all the big cities now: Chicago, San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles, Boston, Cincinnati.

Has taken down all the pictures in her furnished room and keeps instead old rocks she found out on the prairie or in town, pebbles ditto, old match-books, sticks and dried leaves, weeds, flowers, old tin cans.

She hints at important "theories" about current events but won't tell them.

Won't wear make-up, won't go out, won't buy new clothes, won't get married (that's too much like You Know Where, she says, at least the way they talk about it).

She says scornfully that she doesn't hear voices; that's just gossip.

She works well and quickly, filing things, and almost for nothing
(in their back room) so they don't fire her.

She never goes to church now.

She says sometimes that she had a baby whose name was Elaine
Beach.

If you get there—

If you come back—

Angrily kicking holes in the clay of the train depot in spring, in
summer intently measuring how far grasshoppers jump, with an
old tape measure she keeps always in the pocket of her shabby plaid
skirt; she says she'll never go back. Moving farther out on the prairie
(but she won't ever get in a car), eating snow greedily in winter and
laughing, but never never ever going there again. That's final, she
says.

She didn't come back to a long illness or to old age or some family
tragedy, nothing bad.

But from Broceliande?

Cognate

I. *Where did you come from?*

1.

I fell from a cold sky
plummeted into a field of winter
wheat and stood still
upright,
bones shattered to the hip.

Brittled bones from years
of not knowing if
there was to be a time
when my memories would make sense,
when the earth could receive my screams,
roll me between the sun and herself
and let me heal.

2.

Well, none of us are from here.
Nebraska, Mississippi, the Carolinas:
not a memory but
a fragrant taste just at the tip
a sign sweeping through us
and lying in wait
inside.

Listen, where I come from
the honeysuckle wraps herself
through the windows in a
sweat-tossed tangle—
caressing the small of your back
touching each soft hair
when you lie down naked, waiting
for the summer rain.

Where I come from
it rains every evening
to cool us and
to bathe and feed the green.
After, the air
tastes fresh made.
The greenness is thick and dancing
day lilies splash and float in orange
and ribbon the roads like candy.

I don't know if
Carolina is still like this.
I'm not sure she was ever like this.
But I wish I could go home.
It feels like the ache
where a lover's hand used to rest,
it feels like your parents' house,
when you are grown.

The dream of home
so urgent
like most lies, with a truth inside
like sugar on the bottom of iced tea,
never mixed, never to be mixed
like sugar, like alcohol
the body remembers
the dreams start a craving
hungry, hungry
I could starve for the want of it
for the need

for the dream to be true.
But it never was.

3.

Margaret said she walked out of
Mississippi with Meredith
walked to Montgomery
in 98° heat.

The white folks along the way
turned off all the water
there was no water
for fifteen miles they marched
around to the courthouse
and the young white boy
standing sentry there
his rifle ready, his uniform new
spat in Margaret's face
and then whispered
goddamn white nigger.

She was evicted from her home
they all knew where she had been
just as they knew who among them
had killed Till and who would be silent
she wouldn't get out
but she couldn't move just then
she was in the hospital
for a week, dehydration,
no water
it didn't rain for them
that day.

Would you go home, Margaret, I asked.
Well, there was nothing for me there
haven't been back since
she talks slowly now.
I'm sort of a coward you know.

But I don't believe this.
I don't believe we are cowards
to leave when
for whatever reason they need
they would choke us if we stayed.
It's only the dream that chokes us now.

II. *Where you going?*

1.

Don't drink around me, I said.
It's okay for you, Marian said,
you have your lover here, but I'm
new, I need to meet people
I want to be around
other lesbians she said to me holding
her hands as she cried.

I know this one
I have been in the dyke
bar myself in tears
just wanting to be safe
with other queers
wanting not to have to be
anything but what I was, am
queer
but they wanted
I wanted
me to drink too.
Where else can we go,
she asked me.
I'm lonely.

2.

Whenever we could
we would go driving.
I would drive, Cindy would work
the radio, feed us berries
open the wine
or pour the whiskey.
The soft warm air
reached underneath my hair and
cooled my wet skin.
We laughed and talked;
it was always easier to talk
when we didn't have to look at each other.
She was the most beautiful woman
I had ever seen.

Crystal glasses of burgundy
translucent, dark and shimmering
in the sunlight;
sometimes we took it with us
walking, drifting through the
fallen leaves in a tobacco town.
The sun streamed in her
round kitchen window when we went back
to get more.

It seemed to me then
we might never have to move
I felt so happy, so safe
so loved, I thought
the alcohol was buying me time
stopped time
stopped me from remembering
that I wasn't home
that I wasn't safe that
I was a lesbian.

3.

On certain days, the whiskey comes
whispering, remember how safe,
come with me, soft in my ears
sliding down to my throat,
Come With Me
tightening around my neck,
COME WITH ME.

I can still taste it.
The dragon tells me in wonder
alcohol travels in water
dissolves in a gulp and then
sucked into each cell, hiding.
Only after six to eight months
can our bodies separate out
the last of the poison
and push it out.
But I can still taste it.
It has been almost a year.

My body remembers lies.
It's a shell game
what's real, who's not
queers aren't they said
but Cat says I know
we drank because we didn't stop.
I hold on to this lesson,
our lesson, not a birthright
but clawed out of the air
with our fingernails, raw.

But this was private,
I thought, bleeding
I did not want to force
others, I do not want
to force any woman
but I will not watch.

I will not watch women
betray themselves again
for the want of a safe place.

I am learning how
to make other places to be
with women, I intend to
keep my clear vision I am making
my own sobriety whether I am
safe or not.
You don't think I can?
You just
watch me.

III. *When are you leaving?*

1.

Dragon and me left
in the center of summer
left Carolina for Mecca and
drove straight through to the
other side of the country
and still found no home.

We drank whiskey and vodka
smoked reefer until we could not
remember how we had been robbed
how we had left
been run out of our dreams,
our lesbian house
silent, each of us wondering
why we never had a chance
to fight, except with each other.

How astonished I have been
and grief-ridden for the ones lost

Helen and 'Nor
and only fights with Cindy
for over a year bewildering
the other voices still whisper
can't you just relax
let it go have a good time
for once?

Mab says, go toward the fear
towards it and through it.
I think to myself
don't stop now, not now.
I can hold this
and not be confused.
I can dream my own dreams.

2.

And this is where I can start to fight
knowing all of this at once
not either or.
I lift my head,
see all the others:
Margaret, dragon, Marian
sober now and fighting still
Cat on the farm, fighting, not alone
and cognate, we know each other
recognize each other's dreams, we know
it has not, will not, will not be easy
but we are not finished yet
this is where we start.

Marnie Mahoney

Lesbians Have Immortal Children

—for Laura

The room was dark and soft
and filled up with the forms of sleepy people
where we watched each other cautiously,
passed the pipe and tried to figure
— strange city during long time on the road —
if we could do it here,
beside four sleeping men,
if we could do it.

The first time I made love with a woman
there was something I had been very afraid of
(what was it, then?) as we lay
all night, when we couldn't wait any more,
and finally turned to each other,
but couldn't decide

where to put our arms . . .

The first time, the first time except
for the dreams, except
for the long, careful fantasies I set myself
in clinical detail and with a pounding heart
— could I think it?

then I could do it.

This is the same body
that lay with you that night
in a corner seat on the bus here
dreaming now of us after you've left me:
you in some new adventure,
some other woman,
and me starving but strong.
It's the same one, all right,
now fat, now thin, now tired,
older now.

I'd hardly know it—the same body
as my baggy blue jean naked crash pad
body was then,
wrapped up in stockings and sandals with heels,
delivering myself to the door of the office,
picking myself up at five,
eyes almost open to faces
I almost know and then forget
who blink between the bus windows . . .

It's a long ride home
to nakedness and a doubtful telephone
that might or might not lead me
to your body still as maddening to the fingertip,
as tender to the mouth,
that's grown a little tougher
but hasn't changed a bit,
that holds a heart I barely know
and I want to wait for me but doesn't wait,

that maybe would turn over on the couch,
hold out that same arm and take me to you
and really what we began then
whether or not we control it
if it grows with us
one way or the other
it lives.

Daydreams on a Subway Train

Draw me a hibiscus, sweet darling,
make it red and opened.
draw me the flamboyant in blossom;
the palms tall and grand.
draw me the old black woman selling tarts and
soursops on her head.
I need to see ole Mrs. Proudfoot on her donkey;
we used to say hello every morning.
draw me the hands of the steel drum player
their roughness banging out calypso.
draw me old Mr. Pete, beads of sweat run down his
black face as he takes his cows to pasture.
And how about the time we got caught teefing fruit,
lord, those soursops were sweet. And
don't forget Rafie, the town drunk, drinking rum
and throwing the empties at the
tourists while cursing.
draw me the black women squatting, as they fry fish
on their coal pots.
draw me home;
I can walk barefoot up the hill, see the morning
sun and forget this subway train.

Minnie Bruce Pratt

Reading Maps

for Elly

Yesterday Nettie in my office talked about summer school, her geography course, how before she hadn't really known where she was, whether she went east or south to get to the beach, didn't know how to read a map, Ezra always did that. She said, *I never had any need to read a map, every place I go it's already charted.*

I drive to work down the boulevard. The way does not lead through trees, no dark crossed limbs sprouting green flesh. Over my head a grey net hangs, suspended, lines from Duke Power wired from pole to pole. *I have learned what to expect at every turn.* The morning headlines again have read **WOMAN KILLED**: wild chase across town, her car forced off the road by a truck, her husband, a sergeant from the army base, with a rifle. She ran into the woods. He followed and shot her in the head, walked back to his pickup, drove away.

I want to drive away from this town. At my back to the north men fall from the sky. Parachutes burst open like nylon morning glories. In the webbing men jerk at lines to float closer to their targets. *If I had an M-16 I could go shoot them down.*

To my left
the Putt-Putt course is open. On zig-zags
of green indoor-outdoor carpet, young men
demonstrate their skill to girlfriends: how to hit
a small ball into a hole curbed by painted brick.
I think of my lovers who have been raped. *I could castrate
each man with his club.*

On my right, women
shop at the Winn-Dixie between walls of stacked cans.
G.I. wives stand in the cash register line
with ladies from Lakeshore Drive who will not speak.
*If I drove the car through the window they would
speak, open mouths, stare at nothing*
left of the plate glass but a corner of webbed cracks.

Two miles ahead, at the corner where the boulevard runs
into Hay Street, is a church, empty now. *With spare gas
in a jug, rags, I could roll a ball of fire
under the porch.* Tomorrow there might be no pulpit, no door for
women to enter, to turn down the aisle
toward narrow pew.

But at that corner other women
still walk for a living, down where I have sat stopped
at a red light, seen a woman step to the double
yellow line, straighten the black seam of a stocking,
pull her skirt, purple silk parachute, up
over her head. *I thought she hid in her hand
a grenade, ready to blow up the man and herself.*
Then the light changed; the street looked the same.

I will not drive downtown today. I am afraid
there has been no change, that my anger and despair
may ignite like a mass of oiled rags. *I might
walk into an intersection and burst into flames.*

I turn left after A & H Cleaners,
rebuilt from the bombing five years back,
first business owned by a black man on the avenue.
Behind the red sign, gold letters, promises
of one-hour service, black women press
knife-sharp creases into army fatigues.
White men I despise already have been here with fire.
I see their image in my rear-view mirror,
see my own burning, the will to violence.

I want us all to change; yet I drive to work
the same way every morning, doors locked,
windows rolled up, afraid. *I want to roll my anger*
like a tank over terrain I do not control.
I forget that I have resisted, that I have imagined
how to travel a different way.

I turn left
at Filter Plant Road, past the telephone pole
with kudzu snaking green up its guy wires.

When I get to work, the papers on my desk lie
ruled by thin blue lines, scrawled over
with tendrils of pencil and ink: *I had to get this job*
to leave my husband. For weeks I could not think
what to put in the white spaces on the application blank,
years of never knowing where I was,

years of marriage when he drove and I tried to read the map, to see my body in relation to the space around me, to find it on the diagram: green boundaries for grassland, forest, parks, yellow for cities, red for Indian reservation or military base, red lines for scenic routes, grey for time zones. *I had no belief that I could get myself from here to there.*

I would say left for right until at some intersection in Colorado or Georgia he would reach over and take the map. I did not try to take it back. I did not know I was angry

until I began to talk to other women, get directions from them on how to meet. They called me: voices traveled over the phone, spiraled into the labyrinth, my inner ear that sat like a snail, listening. They repeated turns and streets. I wrote their words down, then propped the sheet of paper on the seat beside me as I drove,

once for hours on Bragg Boulevard to find Johnson Road by the cleaners in Bonnie Doone. At a red light I stopped short of a carload of men: paratroopers out on the town could slash lines finer than wrinkles on a woman's face, or fasten her genitals with copper wire to their battery. *I had to locate women friends.*

I began to guess at turns. Landmarks blurred, perhaps remembered by my guide in a different pattern, perhaps not clearly seen by me in the rain, yellow light from massage parlors streaking the windshield. I slowed down to read my map under moving streetlights. I was determined to find the house where women met to tell our secrets, pieces of life torn out, hidden, or almost thrown away. *If I could find them, they might show me the way out.*

That night

I refused to be lost and got to Denise's apartment.
The words on my scrap of paper matched the address
on the door: *Grand Prix Drive, 2105-C*.
Inside six women sat in a maze of chrome and plexiglass.
They looked like me; I didn't trust them.
As we talked, the windows rattled: not thunder but artillery.
The woman across from me looked directly at me;
blue shadows painted around her eyes did not hide
her glance; her jaw tensed under its camouflage of rouge.
She opened her mouth and began to speak.

The room shifted around me to other places
as we hunted our fragments scattered on the scorched earth,
men's land, as we gathered the bones of memory:
how her mother forgot the five years before electroshock,
how she moved out and her boyfriend burned
her clothes and books in the front yard, how the rapist
held a lighter to her hair, how my husband chopped
up the kitchen chairs with an axe and burned them.
I saw the ashes in the back yard when I got home,
what was left of three red chairs; I was glad
it wasn't the remains of me and the children.

In the narrow kitchen I told him I did not want
the place he gave me in the world as it was.
He spoke of change, of going from here to there
with me. *I did not want to leave him behind;*
I did not want to be in the same room when he spoke
with the mouth I had loved for nine years, with the voice
I had hated when it cracked like bones breaking from anger.
He was the same man who shared two small boys, the laundry,
dishes, the man who smashed a bowl on the counter
beside me, left a fist of blue fragments on red tile,
the man who leaned with me against the yellow wall
and cried, his tears streaking my cheek, the same man,
smiling in a three-piece suit, who asked
about the revolution while I fixed a mimeograph machine
on the kitchen table

*I wanted to slash his face
with the bread knife. I did not raise my voice.
My hand kept on turning the crank. Sheets
of cheap paper stared up from the floor, lines
slightly blurred, stubborn, black as charcoal:
"Marriage Equality Act 1976,"
"Joanne Little Acquitted," "New book:
Mama Doesn't Live Here Any More," "Lesbian
film: Jan Oxenberg's Home Movie."*

When I finally yelled and he shoved me against the stove,
out the door, it was like any of our drives together,
like sex: one minute I was in my own body, the next,
outside myself, displaced, while he took control.
After I hit the floor of the back porch, I saw
my family at the far end of the kitchen, looking
at me as if I were at the wrong end of a telescope,
he rigid as a granite marker at a boundary,
the children crying, flesh of my flesh, their faces
not yet hardened, looking at me flat on my back
in the geography of power. I felt the grab of his hands on
my arm, the hands that had rubbed my aching back.

The porch cement was cool under my bleeding arm;
I thought I might just lie there on the quiet slab.
I could smell the back yard, the dusty smell
of sasanquas, the rotting leaves gone to earth,
smell of the memory: all living things
change themselves. *He could be different,
but he wasn't. I would be.*
I got to my feet. Behind me the back steps
led into the night, into terror and unknown ventures.

I moved out when, fingers sweated around
a ball-point pen, I made myself real
enough on paper to get this job and leave them.
Now I live alone just off the boulevard.
Early in the morning I watch the shadow of pine
needles brush fine lines over my bedroom wall.
I wonder about my charred and smoking heart:
what grows in a burned-over forest. Sometimes I sleep
with a lover, my bed an island in the water of night.
With my hand between her breasts, near her heart,
I dream of a place green, flourishing, where we
live safe. At meetings I look for women
who look at me. Our glances catch, like the wind
and seed poised in the open milkweed pod.

Tonight as I leave work, as streetlights arc
pink over the boulevard, I hardly remember the dream.
The evening headlines read *WOMAN'S CHARRED*
BODY SHOVED INSIDE INCINERATOR. I pass a white woman
driving a Continental, a black woman in the backseat.
I meet my neighbor Sheila on her way to third shift.
To feed herself and three children she delivers
pizza, can pass between barracks lined up like tanks,
balance herself between rows of soldiers saying
Baby come on and *Don't talk that way to a lady.*
She's never liked the way the place is laid out
but she knows how to get around. *But I want to go*

outside this landscape, drive right off the map.
I don't know the next turn. The street
looks the same as any other day I wanted to change it,
on my right, the cement block building marked
topless, stenciled with naked women. A man
in khaki enters; in ten years, he may turn
and show me the face of one of my sons.
And what will I do then? What then, what now?

except resist: resist the need to destroy
that spreads anger and despair heavy as asphalt
through my veins, makes me a road driven over by violence,
makes me a map of someone else's world.
I will remember that I have learned to travel
in a different way.

Five years ago I was afraid
to cross town; tonight I drive down the boulevard
to a room where snakeplants grow from the wall,
where I eat green-fleshed avocado, and I talk
to women who sketch quick lines over the paper
ridges of a napkin. Our faces have begun to wrinkle,
our eyes are webbed in lines. We trace the anger
flying through our bodies back to its point of origin.
We locate forbidden places, the kind marked *dangerous
swamp, unknown territory* on the old charts.
We plot change. We love one another.
Our bodies become lodestones to the future. *We imagine
a place not marked yet on any map.* Between us
words tremble and veer, like the iron needle
of a compass, a guide to what we are making real.

I Ching

To Kat

Eight years together within the confines of Seattle's Asian ghetto; from the perspective of childhood, our lives were of the same limits and potential. As ragged tomboys, we shared the impulse to escape. First designing spaceships, then dreaming of Red China; when other girls wore make-up, we wore Mao caps. You often complained to me in the secrecy of pidgin Chinese (gleaned from your father) about the rudeness of some White or another. But it was always clear your words did not indict me, but rather invited me to share in your experience of pain. And anyway, I didn't see myself reflected in the occasional White face. At least on the inside, I was woven into the living Yellow web that stretched from Chinatown to Beacon Hill, down to the dirty shores of Rainier Beach. You and I were bound together, apart from the White Outside, in our mutual feeling of displacement: like a throwing of the I Ching, a moment's chance had decided the shared circumference of our lives.

Within the reaches of that community we staked out the domain of our friendship. Taking its larger form as an outline, we gave time our own personal texture; traditions evolved out of all the time we spent waiting for some change. Sitting at your kitchen table, we let our imaginations fly. I can still feel the afternoon shadows grow around us as we talked, sauces from last night's dinner filling the air with their mysterious and comforting smells. Around six your mother would drag home from a long day's work, greeting you in a Japanese you could only answer with English. I would stay until your sister turned on the burners and began to wield her long cooking chopsticks.

Later, at night, we might slip away from both our households, dropping in at some "hot spot" like the dances in the Buddhist Church gym. If we did go dancing, we insisted on taking center floor—together. With our jerky, monster-like movements, we took our imitations of the boys around us to ever new heights of satire. Only the pain of too much laughter could force us to drop our game.

But at the center of all our times was the Seward Park Loop, where we ran for miles unconcerned with family, friends, or school. Bursting away from the taunting whistles of young men polishing their cars, we felt the forest wind cool our sweat as we kept pace with each other. You would move along effortlessly on your strong, athletic legs, while I remember how I would always finish out of breath. Sometimes speaking, often silent, we looked out across Lake Washington's stretch of blue, the pine trees leaning out over the water, the seagulls turning and coasting in the sky.

Even in school we managed to have some fun, though mostly we aimed only for endurance. With its poor administration, lack of funds, and class and racial tensions, our education consisted of little academics and a lot of learning how to get along with our frequently bitter, angry classmates. Uniformed guards stood ready to break up major battles, but when I was punched or called names in class I could only hope to make it to the bathroom before I started to cry. Then I'd eagerly wait 'til Japanese class to tell you all about it—you said to hit them back, and you were right, but I couldn't bring myself to do it.

Was that when I began to push harder against the frustration that was tightening around me? When the name-calling became more threatening and the cliques that would always exclude me began to form? By chance someone told my mom about a private school. I applied and won a scholarship. Even then, still barely sensing the possible results of my choice, I felt my old ways snap within me like so many yarrow sticks. Like the yarrow sticks we used to tell the fortunes of our lives; miraculous but terrifying, it seemed I had outwitted a long foretold destiny. Or perhaps for me the sticks could be thrown twice.

With difficulty, but in time, I adapted to the new school environment. But you were still like a tree bending over to touch me, your branches connecting me to my neighborhood and my past. During the morning commute I prepared one attitude for my White, wealthy classmates; during the ride home I got ready for volleyball practice with you. You caught me up on the gossip, the new songs and the slang, and we planned trips to Hawaii we both knew we'd never be able to afford. I don't know exactly when I realized I couldn't split myself in two that way forever. But I remember how you sobbed one night, filled with a sudden self-hatred, after I had persuaded

you to come to a party of my new schoolmates. You hadn't spoken the whole evening, and helplessly I resolved never to ask you to share that part of my life again.

I also know that at some point I found myself testing the waters of a White river; a strong current that was "going places," murmuring to me of a fate more powerful than I had ever dreamed. Voices of teachers and counselors echoed with my importance to society! the nation! the world! While at our neighborhood high school, they urged you all to be practical: "Look into vocational training."

I gave up our trip to the moon, but I went East for college; I never stood with you in the Great Hall of the People, but alone I saw the Seine. While you hung ever tighter onto the lifelines of a community that had closed soundlessly around my absence. As if it had known all along I would be leaving, while you would not.

For so long though, we did not seem fated to this separation. When we would draw up plans for our circular house on Mars, a house of true interdependence where ours and our friends' rooms would converge on the same courtyard. I wish we had believed we could build that house right here on Earth—maybe then we would have escaped our limitations together.

As it is, I freed part, but not all of myself. Part of me is still with you, though I can look at that part of me now only from the outside. I want to forget about it, leave it behind, but the pull of you and what you mean to me still divides me. I fantasize about coming back as a teacher or a social worker, but know that role would not be honest: because it's also me I must return to heal and you I come to ask for help.

The last time I came to visit, we went out for our ritual of Dim Sum lunch. But you were inaccessible to me in your silence. We have yet to become the once-possible: destinies crossing the same center. I want to remember with you how we once imagined it could be.

Sherry Sylvester

Class Acts: Shooting Script of a Poor White Experience

“What you feel has a lot to do with your economics.”

– Rita Mae Brown

Ready camera one

I've been noticing myself
sitting on the couch at one in the morning
saying what I didn't say
all day

I've been noticing myself
saying
what I didn't say

scene two

camera pans crowded suburban movie house
many viewers are crying

I am watching a movie
where a 16 year old kid
gets 400 dollars a month for therapy
and is living in a huge house
where all the plates match
and nobody mentions money
not once in two hours

I am watching the ending
and hearing a friend say
that these are
ordinary people

scene three
impromptu on the street

well, one of the reasons that I have money is that I keep tabs on it
CUT

you know they've made a study and if you took all the money in the
world

and divided it equally

CUT

the same people who have it now would get it again

CUT

STOCK FOOTAGE OF NEWSPAPERS ROLLING OFF PRESSES

Willamette Week lauds Labor Players for presenting working class
characters who are literate and articulate

women who think like men

blacks who act like whites

mexicans with perfect english

gays who aren't blatant

Camera pans kitchen washed in white light, coke cans on table with
half empty loaf of wonderbread. A large, 21 inch, imitation color
t.v. is on in the next room. Speaking from the screen, a sympathetic
character seated on something soft:

Actually, I understand exactly what you mean. My grandfather, on
my mother's side, he was working class. I get most of my values
from him. Like saving money. I get so afraid if I don't have
money in the bank.

scene six

I am at a party
40 dykes drinking apple juice
talking about comfrey
she puts her hand gently on my solar plexus
which according to her radiates a green aura
then she says
you are too articulate
to be working class

frame freeze fade to red

a bicentennial-like minute

the middle class is the buffer between the ruling class and the workers. From the middle class we get schizophrenia, literary criticism and television diction. Psychotherapy was invented by and for the middle class. No group is more homogenized than the middle class.

Workers build everything, produce everything, pick all the food and wash all the dishes. No group is more diversified than the working class.

The middle class talks for a living and feels reverent about the killing of oneself.

The working class learns not to talk back and are much more likely to kill one another. In fact, John Burlington, Burlington railroad, said I can hire half the working class to kill the other half.

Camera moves in slowly on panel discussion already underway

if you work hard and get an education you will succeed. If you do not succeed, you are not working hard enough, or you have squandered your money.

The Left speaks: if you are white and you work hard and get an education you will succeed. If you do not succeed, you are not working hard enough or you have squandered your money. You should not care if you succeed as long as you have a good stereo.

The Women's Movement speaks: The lives of poor women are too terrible to imagine. We must get Virginia Woolf in paperback.

The Voice from the otherside: Poor people have chosen their poor karma before they were born. It upsets their psychic to listen to them.

The middle class speaks: Everyone has problems. Of course, some people have more money than others, but that just means they have a different set of problems. I was miserable because I had braces at boarding school, I was lonely in Europe and I never made friends at Vassar.

VOICE OVER

Middle class people consistently deny that any other experience is more than superficially different from their own.

Closing scene:

I am at center stage saying what I didn't say

don't tell me that I overreact

don't tell me how you're working class 'cause you have a waitress job when you also have a law degree

don't explain to me how it's cheaper to buy than to rent

and don't tell me you're broke when you're forced to live on your savings

and never assume
that we think alike
never assume
we see the world alike
never assume
that we are alike

FREEZE FRAME UNDER ROLLING CREDITS

the reviews call it tacky. they call it overstatement. they go on for four paragraphs without once mentioning the content.

the middle class talks for a living

and denies that any experience is more than superficially different than its own.

Sue Dove Gambill
Rachel deVries

Rediscovering the Heart

This article initially grew out of “playing trailer.” The two of us were getting together once a week to watch tv, hang out, eat junk food—something we really enjoy because it reminds us so much of our families.

Rachel: When we first thought about writing an article on class, our impulse was to figure out the angle from which we’d approach that big issue. Then, we assumed, we’d grapple with the “idea,” and “assign” each other particular elements about which we’d each write. What happened was much more organic, much closer to the sources we both come from. In one of our initial discussions, we realized that the real material was in the ease of our conversations, an ease we both felt distanced from when we attempted to write. We began taping our talks, and amid the laughter, the sounds of eating and the telephone and unexpected visitors, we did in fact re-discover our hearts, our true language, our own idiom that is clearly working-class in origin: the merging of emotion and intelligence, the closeness to the heart that precipitates the clearest thinking.

This is a beginning point: We have not attempted a review of all the writing that exists about class, nor have we tried to view the idea of class through any lens but our own understanding. What we have done, and will continue to do, is explore the ways we understand the machinations of class in our lives, as two white women of working-class origins, educated away from our families and our natural voices, and begin to tow the lines back in, back where they belong, to the heart of the matter, to the re-discovery of the passion that pushes us toward understanding.

Dove: It’s fascinating with this working-class stuff—my consciousness is starting to peel back layers and there’s parts where I know I

*Transcribing and editing by Sue Dove Gambill

can't leap yet. I start to grasp something and it goes away. I'm starting to understand, but I'm not quite there yet.

Rachel: You know when you started? I know exactly when you started because I knew then where I was. With you I feel like being working-class is a real basis for our friendship. I don't quite know why. It surprises me that you and I have so much in common because you're not ethnic and you're from the Midwest, so I would think you wouldn't have any idea about "anything" because most of the women who look like you are not working-class. It's like I brought a bunch of stereotypes about white women who said they were working-class who really weren't.

Dove: I know what you mean because I feel that on the inside. I remember driving down to the Women in Print Conference and you and Aletícia saying, "Oh, you're not like a typical WASP," and I remember feeling, that's right. But I needed someone else to tell me because I don't know many people like myself.

Rachel: So, you said in class one day last year, "How did I escape? How did I come away from that life?" And since then you and I have had a lot of conversations about that. But I realized I had passed that point because I knew the answer to that in some way.

Dove: I'm still trying to learn what that is.

Rachel: I think that's where you started to question being working-class from an emotional place as opposed to a rhetorical place. Not that your heart wasn't in it before, but that you began to learn a different language, like the emotional truth all by itself, not made more comfortable by an understanding with words like class structure.

Dove: That's like what Barbara and Beverly Smith were saying in this interview I was reading where they talk about class and race, that we need to understand it from the heart sense instead of the theory.*

Rachel: That's when it seemed to me that you began to change. You used to talk so much about your background. You'd give that little working-class introduction to yourself over and over again. It's almost as though you had to hear it and then suddenly it hit your heart. It must have been what you needed to do . . . you know, keep on claiming it with words.

* "Across the Kitchen Table," Barbara and Beverly Smith, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa.

Dove: And there's still so much there. I know writing this essay maybe will bring it together because still this morning I feel like I'm just starting to get some understanding, for example, around that whole issue of escape. Sometimes I feel like there are two worlds in my life but that I've escaped from one of them, or that I'm trying to escape from the narrowness and prejudice. But still there is a big part of me that is connected there, that needs that connection. My family gives me what people from other backgrounds can't give me.

Dove: This morning my Mom called and I said, "Mom, *Sinister Wisdom* asked me to write an article and I want you to know that's important to me." I had to explain it to her but still she didn't really know. But she said, "I'm really glad." You know, she is glad.

Rachel: But she doesn't know for what.

Dove: Right. So, now I'm starting to understand that, but still there's a part of me that feels like I've escaped.

Rachel: What we've escaped from, it seems to me, is the patriarchal value system, but sometimes we confuse it with having deserted the family.

Dove: And when I say I've escaped it's like being judgmental, like saying my life is better. For me it is better, it's what I want. But I need to understand how I've had more opportunities than my Mom. Once I did an interview with her and I asked, "Did you ever want to be something you didn't become?" She said, "I always wanted to be an airline stewardess so I could see the world." And why didn't she? Because she was the oldest girl in a family of seven; she married into a family 'cause my father already had a kid, and she raised her own family of five kids, and now she's raising two grandchildren. Someone could look at that and say, well, she could have not gotten married. But I'm not sure. There probably wasn't even any way for her to know how to be an airline stewardess.

Rachel: What we do in these conversations is like what's happening in my novel. What I like so much about my novel is that I've found that voice, that working-class voice. When I write poetry it's such a different language to me, it's a language all by itself, but when I would write fiction I was always trying to write like someone I was not, the "educated person."

Dove: It was a different language.

Rachel: Yeah, I was trying to write the way I thought an educated person would write fiction as opposed to writing in my own natural voice and when I started writing the novel what I found was my own voice. That probably helped me in going down to see my family this last time because I'd started the novel beforehand so that I was already, in some way, remembering my own idiom.

So, when I write the novel I can come back to the world where I spend most of my time now, which is not a working-class Italian world. But when I'm down there in Florida it's like I don't have that, I can't find that person Rachel because nobody knows her there. I become Marilyn who is their working-class daughter. Sometimes I have things I want to talk about and I can't talk about in that idiom anymore. This is how I start to realize it: My mother says to me, "Sometimes I go to bed and I just lay there and I think, what have I done?" She has no need to step beyond and do that psychological jargon. Like you or I or somebody who speaks in that jargon might say if we're depressed and couldn't go to sleep, "I'm really re-evaluating the place my life is in. Sometimes I question if this is the right space for me to be in and I don't know if I feel comfortable in what I'm doing or if I should make some changes and I'm trying to process that and deal with all that." That's the way middle-class people talk and we're around that. What I'm saying is that in my mother's language she talks simply from the emotion she feels. But the other way, the way with jargon, all that extra language is used to objectify the emotion, control it; it reinforces emotional distancing. And both statements say the same thing; one is just more honest and finally more responsible.

When I'm at my parents' it's difficult for me to verify that this person that I am (Rachel) also exists. Like now I can be Marilyn in Rachel, but I can't be Rachel in Marilyn. For example, as we're sitting here talking I feel like if I could get into my Italian, that's what I call that Marilyn person, I could be very comfortable speaking in that idiom and making jokes from that place of a sense of humor, which is very different. That's a way I use Marilyn all the time in this life. My sense of humor is in Marilyn Rappise, and the articulation and integration of that sense of humor is in Rachel deVries. So that way I can use my Italian part here in my life as a writer and a teacher and a person with an education. But when I go back to

Florida to see my family there's no way I can find to use Rachel because they don't know her. Rachel is a person that even Marilyn doesn't know at all. I mean in Marilyn's mind there's no such thing as Rachel.

Dove: D. came over one morning and we were talking. It was so great, and I thought how I don't often get to hang out with working-class women and talk like this about our lives. So, D. was talking and I was feeling really good about it. Then she said, "I was terrified to come here. On the ride I was getting more and more angry." And I said, "Why?" And she said, "Because it's such a rich town." And I looked at her. It surprised me. I mean there are rich people here and that might make me uncomfortable sometimes, like when I was cleaning one of those big houses on the lake and hating it. But also I know how important the lesbian community here is to me. Then I began to see some differences between D. and I. She isn't college-educated and I started to think how much being part of college, which is a middle-class institution, has given me this sort of adaptability, a certain kind of mobility in different situations. It's literally knowing how to speak another way, a middle-class way. Sometimes that can be good, sometimes it makes me too accepting, or too compromising; other times I realize that my mobility is not as far-reaching as I might have thought. Like after working in the university for a couple of years I found the atmosphere of diplomacy very stifling to my more direct and expressive way of being.

The important connection I feel with you, Rachel, is that you're not only working-class but you're college-educated and that we've both chosen art as our life. Both of us make bridges between those two worlds, what was our past and what we live now.

Dove: As I talk with more working-class women about our backgrounds I realize there are so many aspects of our lives that we need to take into account. We cannot just say we are working-class and think that automatically means a similarity in our lives and an understanding. Such differences as educational opportunities, ethnicity, race, religion, geographical region of birth and growing up, age, parents' employment, etc., have each to be explored in order to understand how our working-class lives are expressed differently, as well as the similarities.

Another example is this woman, V., who was born near to where I lived. She was born in West Virginia and I was born in eastern Kentucky. I couldn't wait to meet her, but when I did it shocked me because, see, she's a woman who lived in the mountains until she was about twenty. She is a mountain woman. I have certain things about me that are mountain, but I'm not them. So, I'm an Appalachian person, but a city Appalachian because I moved out at about three years old. Also, I really have made an enormous break with the culture in Cincinnati, that Midwestern culture. Now it's not just that I made a break, but I'm those different people in me, and I'm also that woman who lived in Portugal for two years. So where do I meet someone who is that same way? To me it's real exciting talking with you, it's knowing college and having this certain exposure to the world, certain experiences, it's what's different for us, but we know the other world too. Exposure to me is an important word. Like with your father, he didn't know to go and get that operation in his hometown, he had to fly to another state 'cause he didn't know.

Rachel: It's like you saying you were always afraid people were going to ask you about classical music. I mean middle-class people, it seems, are exposed to that in a kind of way.

Dove: And if they're not it's not embarrassing. Like the other night, it was incredible for me to play Scrabble. My heart was on the edge of fear the whole time, it really was. It was a big breakthrough for me 'cause the game always makes me feel stupid. And remember, R. kept saying to me, "Oh, you want me to show you how to do it?" And I said, "No, don't. It's really scary for me to be doing this," and at a certain point you looked up across the table and I felt such strength from you sitting there because I knew you would know what that meant. It's just like knowing . . . I mean I don't know if this is a common experience, I think it is, that in a working-class education you're taught that you're ignorant. This may be affected depending on if you're Catholic and went to a Catholic school or if you're Jewish and education was put as important.

I remember once talking to this other friend of mine who is working-class and we realized that our economic position was a little different and also that she was Catholic and me a WASP, so anyway, her family said definitely go to college and my family never did. And even now, when I went home the last time I was talking to my brother about my nieces, who are all real good in sports and I asked him, "So

you thinking about scholarships for the girls, you checking that out for sports?" And I think he felt that he doesn't want them to go to college. I wonder if they feel that college took me away from them. College became the way where I talk different. So maybe he is scared that his kids will leave him like I left my family.

Rachel: Yeah, that's a big thing, especially 'cause it does do that.

Rachel: Where I think some people don't understand is that emotional thing, emotional truth. I don't know how to talk about it without making it sound judgmental. I don't mean that people are liars or something.

Dove: You mean being your most real self. As soon as a person goes theoretical she has the possibility to step back and analyze. And as long as we go to our minds and think what do we want to be or what do we wish for we're not at emotional truth because we're not living the moment. . . .

Rachel: Got it.

Dove: As I'm typing this a part of me is saying, you better explain how working-class language is more direct, active, immediate, while middle-class language is more analytical, reflective, passive. At the same time another part of me is saying, stop thinking so analytically!

Dove: And so you're not really at emotional truth, you're analyzing, you're standing outside of yourself, looking at your reality and when you're in the midst of emotional truth you are most who you are. It's like that's where truth is. It's not that there's a lie, but you're not being reality.

Rachel: It's sort of like ignorance.

Dove: Say what you mean.

Rachel: It's just like you're ignorant of the truth.

Dove: Because you're outside your body trying to figure out something.

Dove: It's like trying to write this article and how trying to write about it is different than "playing trailer," different than living our lives. It's like writing the article is middle-class, living is working-class and "playing trailer" is that in-between that we are! 'Cause we're doing it but we have to call it something, we have to name it! I mean, a working-class person hanging out watching tv and munching out is not going to say they're "playing trailer."

This morning I was starting to write and just say who I am—I say I'm Appalachian, my father worked in this job, my mother worked in that job, I did this, etc. I describe who I am as Suesie and who I am as Dove, who I am in those two worlds. And as I describe it I realized that I kept thinking there was a dichotomy, but I know there are moments when I am just Dove and moments when I am just Suesie, but I'm also someone in between and that is where the lattice-work is, I mean, within my whole emotional dynamic between those two worlds I've created my identity. That who I am is between those two worlds. So I never escaped.

Rachel: And that you're figuring out the way to be able to be in both worlds and speak the same language maybe?

Dove: Maybe I'm not even at that stage yet, but that I'm beginning to get insights into myself that will allow me to speak Dove into the world of Suesie, into a language that my Mom can hear who I am here. She can hear, she wants to hear and if I can only find the way to speak. But I get angry, impatient; I get resentful of that other world.

Dove: I begin to realize that I am bi-lingual *within* the English language, and that emotionally, psychically, physically and culturally I am living the life of a second generation immigrant, of sorts.

And so I think about Barbara and Beverly Smith [and their interview mentioned earlier]—they were able to help each other in the truth of their lives, which is really the concreteness, it's having your feet on the ground—because they as Black women were able to talk about that quality, that essence, that familiarity, and that is what I seek with other white working-class women.

This all feels so dense to me, there are just so many elements. I know if I keep talking about it I'm going to make a leap of understanding. Now, I got those pictures of me. I have that one from the third grade with me in the Brownie uniform and I look at it and I think, that little kid was me.

Rachel: Do you remember you then?

Dove: I remember back to kindergarten, like: When I was five years old we lived in this housing project, it was two bedrooms and at one point there was my two brothers and me and my Mom and Dad. Then my other brother and his wife came and she stayed for six months with a little baby.

Rachel: In this two-bedroom?

Dove: In this two-bedroom and my little sister was born and we all lived there. And I never remember that that was anything. It just was. And I was thinking, where are the remembrances about class? Was there things that I was feeling or did I just feel like everybody else 'cause everyone around me was the same and that was life? But then I remembered I would go to this certain section where all the garbage cans were, there were nine or ten garbage cans and I would crawl in there and get between the garbage cans and there would be this little space and I loved it, nobody else was around, it was just me. That was my space, and so I was experiencing class, you know?

Rachel: Yeah, because of the need for your own space.

Rachel: When you go to conferences don't you make the assumption that everybody else is . . .

Dove: Middle-class?

Rachel: No, not middle-class, but I always feel inferior because of my background. That's part of what I have to work through to be able to write theory because I come from a non-academic background or a non-middle-class background where education was not at all valued. There was no push to that or to getting a better sense of what was going on in the world. Until recently I would always think I can't speak at these conferences because obviously all these people know how to say things much better. Sometimes I have to stop and remind myself that I read as much feminist theory as I can get my hands on, and that I can talk about it.

Dove: When I talk about having "escaped" from my family background, I did do that through school. My family never really talked much. I felt a kind of emotional/intellectual starvation there, like they didn't know how to say, "What did you do in school today?" So, school became my whole avenue for getting what I needed. I became very outspoken and a leader very young. Part of it was compensation for things I felt like I was missing. So, I developed very young those things you said are still kind of difficult for you.

Rachel: But when I was in nursing school I had all these positions of leadership. I never felt inferior then because everyone in nursing school was from primarily working-class backgrounds. But when I

was married and my husband was at Harvard, his friends would come over for dinner and I would just be real quiet. I could never dare to talk because I thought they're smart and I'm stupid. I'm just a nurse from New Jersey and here I am sitting at dinner with all these people from Harvard.

Dove: Did they talk big words or something?

Rachel: I think it was because it was the first time I was around so many WASPs. I didn't understand the lack of emotionality. I mean all my growing up, till the day I got married, was around Italian families or my nursing school friends who were for the most part either Irish or Italian working-class. And Paterson, N.J., was like ethnic city, every place you looked there was nothing but ethnics around. And when I got married I hadn't really been anywhere. Then all of a sudden I got up to Harvard and there were all these WASPs around and everything was very different. There was all this emphasis on how the table was set and everything was toned down, and they were always talking about things like Freud and classical music or art. I was terrified. I mean I was twenty-one years old and I'd never been to a museum in my life and I didn't know classical music for anything. My insecurity around those people began to change when I got involved in anti-war stuff. I mean I didn't know how to talk about classical music or Freud or anything, but I knew I was against the war . . . a common denominator. So, through that I began to be more comfortable, but initially I would wake up crying all the time. I didn't know what was wrong with me. I felt inferior. I was afraid to talk to any of my husband's friends because they would immediately see I was stupid, and so I was just entirely quiet.

Dove: So, what else brought you to begin to be Rachel instead of Marilyn? Like for me, going to Portugal was a big step.

Rachel: One was the anti-war movement, which interestingly made my husband and I removed from our friends back home because they weren't doing that. Our friends in New Jersey had all gone to local colleges and the first thing you knew they were getting married real fast and became very suburban. They weren't at all involved with anti-war and they thought we were very weird, that we were hippies. When I got married I lived at Harvard and I felt myself to be inferior. Then I knew from my gut there was class difference. And it was terrifying to me. Until then I had lived in a fairly homogeneous society.

Then there was traveling. I have so few clear memories of traveling through Europe, like I remember nothing about going to the Louvre or places like that. But one of the biggest memories I have is being in Verona, Italy, at the outdoor opera. We were sitting in this stadium and there were blue-collar workers, not well-dressed, looked like they just come from work, and people in suits, well-groomed, nice haircuts, real nice clothes, all together singing the words to the opera. And I thought, "My God, I come from this country and here there are people that look so different, sitting together singing this song! What's in me that feels this moment?" It was the first time that I saw people of different classes together singing, they were literally in harmony. And it was the first time I felt I was aware of being Italian. Before that being Italian was all I thought and knew, and I never thought about what that meant.

Dove: You had to go to Harvard, you had to come out and be in this other world to understand. That's a key thing, because if you just stay there you're just there. Like I was thinking, how come it's only now I know I'm working-class?

Rachel: Maybe if we'd grown up in integrated neighborhoods we would have had a certain kind of awareness. Maybe we couldn't have articulated it very clearly but we probably would have had an awareness of difference.

Dove: I think my parents tried to keep it from us when we were bad off with money, trying to hide the embarrassment around that. And then there was the myth of upward mobility, and so there was always the chance of getting out, and our life did improve over a period of about ten years. I think these things helped to hide awareness of class.

Dove: My family knows me as Suesie and I've been thinking all this time that they couldn't know me as Dove. I was convinced. And you started saying to me, listen to them. Like the story about coming out to your Mom, she can hear you, but we have to learn to listen.

Rachel: Yeah, she could hear me. I told her, "I'm a lesbian. How do you feel about it?" I was talking from Rachel. So my mother says, "So you're with a woman, okay, first it bothered me and I thought about it all night and I had the blues and I couldn't sleep and finally in the morning it got light and I said to myself, why does this upset you so much? And I couldn't come up with one good reason." And then she looked at me and she said, "I want to ask you something.

You live with B., right?" She said, "Can you talk to her? Like this, if you're driving and some bastard cuts you off the road and it really upsets you, can you go home and tell B.?" And I said, "Yeah, of course." "Will she listen to you and try to make you feel better?" And I said, "Yeah." And she shrugged her shoulders, and opened her hands. She was saying, "Well then?", telling me what her concern really was.

So I'm talking from Rachel, I say I'm a lesbian and I've known this woman for a long time and that's why I had to leave my husband, etc. And I'm talking from a place sort of non-emotion. I'm being descriptive as opposed to being real; telling her as opposed to showing her. So she looks at me and asks me a series of questions that have only to do with the heart. She's not concerned with this description, "lesbian," or that I have this relationship with a woman I really like and blah, blah, blah. All she's concerned about is the heart.

Dove: Emotional truth.

Rachel: Right, and that's language. It doesn't matter how we dress it up. And that's why I keep saying if there really was understanding between people there wouldn't be more than one verbal language because there is only one language. Transculturally we can read each other, by the tones our voices take, by the gesture, by the face and whether or not you can see the light that comes out of a person when they speak truth or whether a person seems made out of a dense thing.

Dove: When I'm with my family that's the level we operate on. And coming into this world (where I live now) sometimes I get really confused with people because I'm operating in the other world. And that's why working at the university was really hard for me because I would be working this certain way and I'd be on the language of the body, being direct, from the heart and I wasn't supposed to be doing that. I was supposed to be diplomatic, being from the mind.

Rachel: Controlled, describing. It's all form and no content. And when you feel like you can tell people are lying it's because you can tell that they're trying to squash this content into a form it doesn't belong in, so they squash it into a thing which is labeled "no heart," and then it feels bad and so the voice changes and the body looks funny. It all comes back to the same thing. And that's why, as working-class kids, we're still afraid to go home because we don't know if

the content is still going to fit in that form, and that form is not particularly flexible. We go home with some new content and we don't know how to be in that form and that's all our family wants to see because that's all they know us as.

Dove: But sometimes I don't give them the credit that they can understand my other self too.

Rachel: But what I'm saying is that they can understand it, but they have to understand it in terms of their own language. That's why the thing about my mother asking me the questions about being queer is so revealing to me. We have to remember the natural language. We think because we have a new way of expressing things that we can't talk to them anymore, and that means we've forgotten the heart.

It's like this. One summer I was seeing both P. and M. and I was confused about what I should do. I was talking to my mother about it and I was saying things like, "I don't know what to do because I still have a lot of feelings for P. and now she's sober and we're getting along better, but then again there's this other person, M., and she really cares about me." I'm giving this whole thing and I'm not saying anything about my heart. So my mother listens to me patiently, and when I got all done she says, "You mean you're trying to think about that? You mean you're trying to make a decision by thinking about it?" And I said, "Yeah." She said, "Don't be silly. You can't think about something like emotions. You just get up and you do what you got to do every day and one day you're going to get up and know what to do." I felt like such an asshole because she was absolutely right, and I knew it in that moment, but there I was dressing it all up with jargon, trying to talk proper and make sense, you know.

Dove: Trying to keep control.

Rachel: Yeah, form. I think that split happens when we go home because . . . part of it is probably because we're still embarrassed by being inarticulate at times or not sounding smart or watching too much tv or something. Like "playing trailer"—we both really like to do that but probably we're a little embarrassed what other people will think, that's probably why we call it "playing trailer," sort of making fun of it. But when I'm down in Florida that's what we do—we sit around, we eat food out of the freezer that goes into the microwave oven, we watch tv, we smoke a lot of cigarettes, we get a little loaded, or whatever we want to do, there's no analyzing of it,

it's just in the moment that's what we're doing.

Dove: I suddenly understand why it is difficult for me to just be in the moment. I always feel like I'm stepping back to analyze, to understand what I'm living. It can be very exhausting and alienating always standing out and looking. But I am afraid to really let go and be fully in the moment because maybe then I'll lose this world of Dove and fall back completely into the world of Suesie, a world where I felt I didn't have power to create my life, where I couldn't express myself well. (That's probably that WASP culture. Being working-class was different than middle-class WASP, but still there's a certain sterility of expression!) This is the work I am doing in creating this article—to work through this fear so I can be better balanced with my body and mind instead of allowing fear to keep me running back to my intellect as a refuge.

And eating, we're always eating something. And as soon as we get done with dinner we move into the place where the tv is, like that's what you and I do when we're doing this together, we're always cooking or munching. 'Cause it's always coming out of the skin, we're living in the sensual. That's what I mean when I said I got up to Harvard and everyone was such a WASP, there was nobody yelling and screaming, and there were small portions of food. The biggest surprise of my life came when I went to a non-Italian wedding and they served chicken fricassee and in these puny little portions! That would be something we'd only eat as a leftover and that was the dinner at the wedding! And there was no hooaha, no fanfare . . .

Dove: You know what's great, since we started hanging out and doing this thing I've had an appetite like you wouldn't believe.

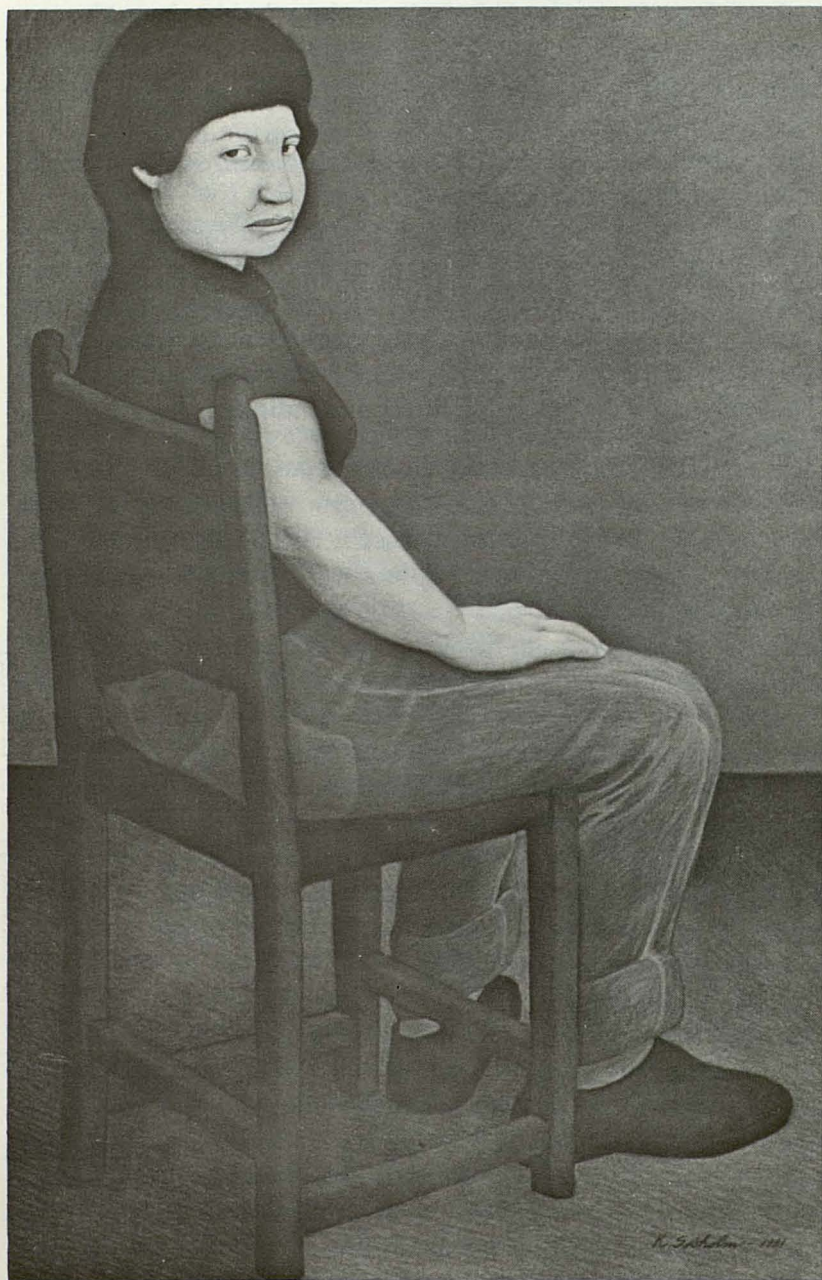
Rachel: One of the things I also noticed about class and I think it has to do with ethnicity is that when I started as a nurse taking care of some of these rich people that live out here on the lake, and they have a lot of money and they have these big houses . . . But you go in there, with these people with all this money and you make coffee in the morning and all they have is instant coffee and margarine. And I could not understand that because when I was growing up, no matter how little money we had there was always butter and real coffee. I mean I was drinking coffee when I was eight years old—my mother, me and my sister—we'd drink coffee in the morning, and eat minute rice and butter for breakfast. And there was always butter and real coffee, even if we didn't have meat. What

that has to do with, and why you're having an appetite, is I think that the place we come from is really rooted in the sensual, the passionate. I mean, your story about remembering that all those people were squashed in those two little rooms is like we're not afraid of proximity, of loudness, of emotion.

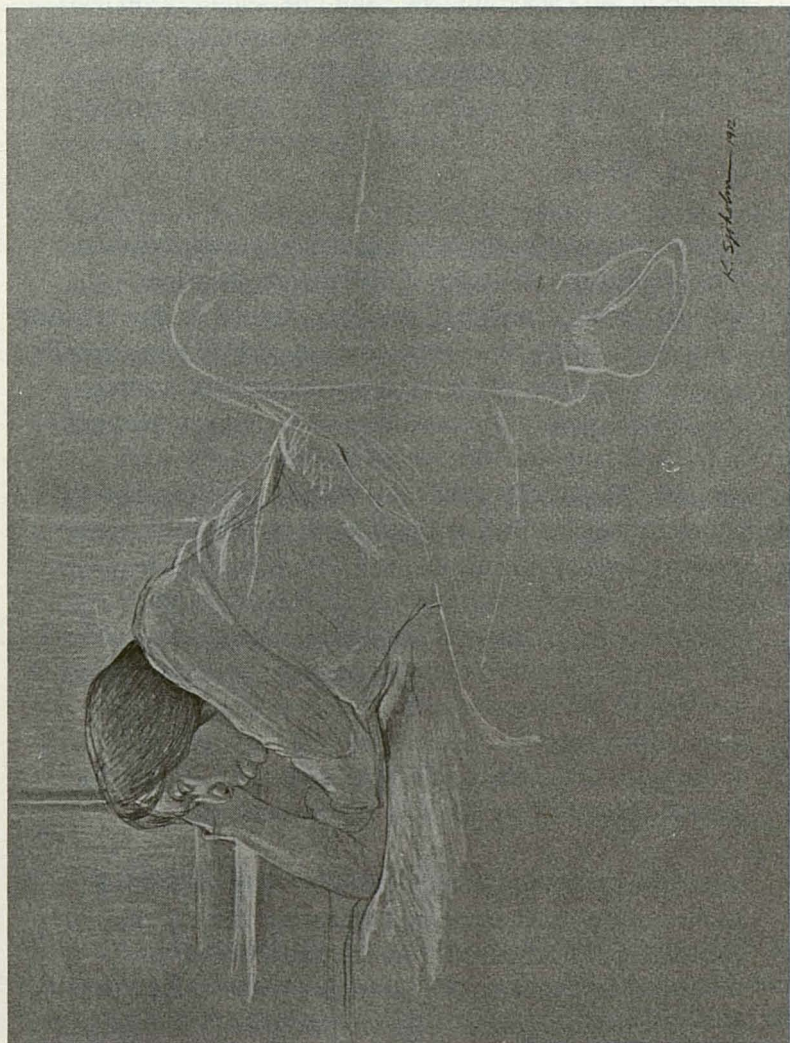
Dove: I remember last year one of my best pleasures was when you and I started yelling with each other.

Rachel: It was pure, it was honest, it was right there. You didn't have to worry about what somebody meant when they were doing what they said they weren't doing. So many of these middle-class people, they say something and you don't trust it because they're not rooted in the sensual, they're rooted in form, not in themselves. The difference between being direct and indirect, taking risks and apologizing.

Karen Sjöholm



"Veronica" (pastel, 40 x 60 in., 1981)



"Kitty" (charcoal, 19 x 25 in., 1982)

Censorship

1. The Words

All my life, the urgency to speak, the pull toward silence. Embodied in the two sides of the family: like a tree without a mouth, my Swedish father, bottled up and bursting out in mean words, or averting his eyes unable to say goodbye; he goes back in the house, he shuts the door, he wants to feed us berries and fish and things he has grown, he watches us talk and laugh and our joy is reflected briefly in his eyes, but he can only watch as if we are a painting, beautiful, but out of reach. And my mother and grandmother, Jewish, overflowing with words, loving to talk about people, never can I rival their stories of people's foibles, to laugh with but never at, the amazing quirks of neighbors and friends. Me with one ear tuned to the strungtight wires of my father's hands as he picks raspberries. We are singing, "I'll take the high road and you take the low road" he rolls the berries of the tall bushes into a coffee can, while I eat the berries from the lower vines. We sing but we don't talk.

Inside the house, in the cool, intimate, wisteria-shaded kitchen, my mother and grandmother are talking, they have been talking all afternoon, I hunch under the table, scratching my name on the bare wood with a stubby pencil. They are laughing and a chair scrapes and a cup clinks as my mother pours more coffee. I love the talk of my two women parents, but I know how often it crosses the border between relaxation and direction: Karen, help your mother a little once in a while, Karen go get me a good head of lettuce from the garden, so I listen, but I hide under the table to listen in peace.

As to my own talking, this will take a while; no one could rival my grandma, so I must wait until she's out of earshot to hear myself think. But my mother and me, we talk and we listen, we go back and forth, and from her I learn the company of words, the clarity of faces turned together in interest, focused through speech.

And when I see her words muffled or stopped mid-sentence or slapped back in her face with derision, or simply not even begun, I know the first rule of censorship, that it goes with sadness, with someone wronged, or stopped, the shades drawn, the expression dropping down into bitterness, so for years I ask her anxiously out of the blue, "What's the matter? What's the matter?" And she will never tell me but I know.

The first rule of censorship is a woman cramped in the grid of economy and house, family and duty, powerless, held in, stopped short. And the second rule is that in a hundred small ways, she resists and then all at once when I am eighteen, she bursts out to live alone, to say whatever she wants. So I learn to follow her way and speak out too.

2. Smuggling Books Across the Border

This time the censorship was a cop car floating along the Oregon coastroad. We didn't have much room and stuffed coats and sleeping bags on the back shelf which blocked our view and besides it didn't look like a cop car, anyway, incognito colors and just blinking its parking lights slowly. So we were laughing and talking and that cop followed us for four miles and kept adding up and inventing mistakes till they came to 94 dollars. We were all quiet and nervous, he barricaded our car in the driveway with his, for three of us being Asian, and he said 94 dollars to be paid in seven days.

The ghost of that car followed us down the road all the way home. In the unemployment office they are teaching people in groups now how to be unemployed and if you fill out the form wrong your check won't come. It will take almost two employment checks to pay that ticket, and just glad the cop didn't look in the trunk where the socialist books were packed.

A long time ago my mother put socialist books in the trunk, and someone called on the phone to tell me, then five years old, "We're going to come and get you because your parents are commies." I hung around my dad all day, silent and scared because I thought if I SAID someone had called, then it would come true, they would get me then. I know my grandma had just lost a job for the fifth time, shadowed by agents from hotel to hotel telling her bosses, "Harriet Pierce is a red."

Clara sits late at night talking about censorship in the '50s and sneaking pamphlets across the Canadian border in her baby's blankets. "That was the fattest baby you ever saw!" In that same era, my mother was sitting in the kitchen, saying things under her breath, afraid my father would explode.

When my own marriage was dissolving, I began to write in earnest, because I've always known that writing it, saying it, makes it true. And as I turned toward women, their faces, their bodies blurred as under water, then coming up toward me, solid, close, when I could write *she*, *she* is the one I want . . . only when the word defined the page, when I could write the word *lesbian*, did I put my hands on her shoulders.

Dream of a courtroom, packed with audience, a huge noisy hall, a trial. A man had been racist. No one would put the clues together, I had evidence. The bored judge wore a big brim hat. I was scared but I said look here's the gun and here's the stick he beat people with. Then I was wading thru deep snow scooping up handfuls, near my mother's house and a bowl of white flowers on the table turned into a black shiny typewriter, poised there, waiting, the old-fashioned kind.

They are banning more books now than during the Cold War, while they print stereotypes of our lives. We watch caricatures vaguely resembling ourselves giggle and simper on the screen.

But no matter how anyone tries, they can't shut us up. Memory drags out of us kicking and screaming, bursting like pomegranate seeds, tart and succinct. At work, we stack slabs of dynamite, wrapped in butcher paper. Holding our breath, we hoist each slab up delicately, while the boss watches from a distance; the paper around the explosive unfolds into a cloth we could soar with, a sheet against the wind, a plait of hair braided into a basket to float down the stream in, all these words to live in, swim in, that snap like alligator teeth.

Now we are a coil, a circle, a group of people protesting the Fu Manchu film, no theater in sight, but outdoors and in rough terrain, a coil of shouting, chanting people moving in a continuous circle, sturdy, unending, pulling us in holding us up covering the ground.

On the picket line the women's voices are the strongest. One Chicana's voice rises, a tough wire in the wind, leading the changes.

The Deception

is when you say you're only
going to have a couple and
you end up having a quart's
worth and what started out
to be a quiet evening
with your lover has turned
unexplainably into a bitter
confrontation that slams the
door on her way out and
calls you worthless leaves
you leaning against
the kitchen window looking
out watching her wondering
why you've failed and
tearfully breaking
your glass against the wall
is covered with the stains
of *this is not new*
to blame yourself hate yourself
slowly pick up the
shattered glass cutting
into your small finger
watching the blood run, but
this is not new.

staggering to bed you say
i'm not that drunk this doesn't
happen as often as she's just
looking for excuses to hurt me
it all leaves a bad taste in your
mouth like the truths you must call
lies because
you can't stop drinking
and
you hate her for asking the one thing
you will not ask
of yourself.

Kelly Anne Munger

Re-membering: The Colors of Silence

Indiana struggles to breathe;
there are no lesbians in the midwest.

Summer dangles like green ties from an apron.
My footsteps are thick on white-edged tile,
I hear music with no rhythm
clotting inside the walls.

Grease on both sides of my forehead,
amber paste like the sludge I once cleaned
from a '64 Buick's wheel bearings.

I bite down on plastic,
taste metal,
try to lift my head.
Wires of light, a tetragrammaton of silence,
connect – I feel my teeth shouting
but hear no voices.

Someday I must remember:
there are no lesbians in the midwest.

When We Pry Our Eyes Open

i have seen the gray dormitories
at dawn peeled back reveal themselves
as a great mouth ravenous
for our small and private lives

and i have heard from men
that women are the sleepers
the sleepwalkers
they say our hands dip down deep
in the night blood
they say if we awaken the day will rip apart

they tell us our nature is to sleep
to drift off quietly no fuss
into the dark oven into the dark unmirrored mouth

they whisper in safe soft voices
voices crumbling from ages without pity
sleep sleep they say
and our heads become heavy on our thinned out necks
our faces want to surrender to anything tender

but when we pry our eyes open
sometimes inserting steel bits
between the lids
they threaten us earthquakes! volcanoes!
tidal waves!

cracks in the earth's seams! fault lines!
they say this is our work
and show us our singed faces

they tell us if we wake up
the earth will die from so much rising power

o my dreamers my long sleepers
arise now leave off from lying sleep

o women look at your hands innocent of blood
feel the quakes on your insides

now arise
we must move quickly to waken the dead

Theresa Barry

Black Against a Clear Sky

When I had been caught at it again

my mother would swear

I never lied to you
where do you get this lying from

but I'd remember her telling me

Don't tell your father

when she'd spend money, I'd remember
times when she did lie to me and around me
and I'd wonder did I remember right because she was
so pure in her anger as Mother and Truth.

At eight I lied steadily for a year
I never knew why, I had to, I surprised myself
I knew it would be easier to tell the truth but I couldn't stop I'd lie
awake wondering why I lied all the time.

In a year I stopped, or at least became more devious
then each of my five younger brothers
passed through the same age of eight and lying.
And I stood in the dark hall
witnessing the cycle of anger and confusion.

I tried to tell my mother about this once.
I see the same surprise and disapproval now
on faces when I say that I've reclaimed lies and stories.
They see truth a bare windswept mountain
black against a clear sky. The real, the direct, the true is a jungle
that rolls each clearing as we make it
tight again in a green fist there is
no ending to the telling of truths and lies.

Susan Sherman

Growing Up?

Why does one suddenly
become embarrassed
cut out
parts of sentences
re-write
years
replace them as if they were awkward
words
in a line of
verse

What is the necessity that guides us
makes us turn our backs
on parts of our own lives
our own memories

One year a cut here
another there
with one person this
another that

Until finally nothing is left whole
No meaning is clear

Susan Sherman

Spring/Song

Let's put it another way
The street breaks with ice
It is cold tonight quiet
This first day of spring

Burdened with clothes
I would shed them My coat
long blue wraps me into
myself
Holds me together

How much we are lied to
Lie to ourselves
How much we hide How many things
are hidden
in these layers
of cotton wool rayon
skin

I am startled by differences
a lack of correspondence
As I was before by what
binds us

But things change
Ten years twenty thirty
Some drop away others grow
stronger

Faces change
& names
I change remain
What makes us unique

This first day of spring
alone I wrote
 this poem
patched a coat of words
stitched a song
Tried to find out what is beneath it
what it means
At the end of it
 finally
what I would want
to say

This woman tried to grasp life
balance her days
 the worlds
 that sprang
from her hands
broke from her lips
She was burdened as we all are
by ends and beginnings
But she never turned away

Lee Lynch

The Swashbuckler

for Joan Nestle

Frenchy, jaw thrust forward, legs pumping to the beat of a rock and roll song in her mind, shoulders dipping left and right with every step, disappeared into a candy store when she left the subway at 14th St. A moment later she emerged into the blueness and bustle of a Saturday night, flicking a speck of nothing from the shoulder of her black denim jacket, and rolling its collar up behind her neck. She stripped the cellophane from her pack of Marlboros, hit the base of the pack against her fist and drew the cigarette she'd struck from the pack out with her mouth. Though the summer breeze was slight, she stopped in a doorway, tapped the cigarette against her fist and used her Zippo to light it. Back on 5th Ave. she lengthened the stride of her short, purposely bowed legs and found her rhythm again, diddy-bopping downtown.

"I'm sorry, so sorry, please accept my apologies," she sang silently as she walked, eyeing the people around her on the street as she settled more into her walk. She knew it made people angry, provoked merciless taunts and threats, but it was her own natural walk and she would walk as she wanted on Saturday nights. The hell with them all, she thought and straightened proudly. Yeah, she walked like a man, she thought proudly, dragging on her cigarette, or better still, she walked like a butch, lighter and more graceful than a man. All 4'11" of her was in the tough, bouncing walk. It said who she was to the world. When the guys on the street menaced her, she just got cooler, throwing herself into it more, dipping and weaving and practically dancing down the street. Yeah, she was a bulldyke, and every Saturday night she was a bulldyke in a bulldyke's world. She loved the walk from 14th St. down into the Village where she could survey her turf and ease her way into the gay world. Saturday night was the one night of the week she could be herself.

A breeze ruffled her pompadour and she smoothed it back. She stopped to look into the plate glass window of a store and pulled a long black comb out of her rear pocket. Combing back her hair she

whistled, "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow." When she was satisfied that her jet black hair slid neatly back into a D.A. she started downtown again. "Tonight you're mine completely," she sang, "you give your love so sweetly . . ." Frenchy felt good. She was twenty-one, good looking, and wearing her best clothes: the black denim jeans and jacket, light blue button-down shirt, and her sharply pointed, black, ankle-high boots. She felt the edge of her garrison belt buckle and smugly enjoyed having a weapon for which she couldn't be busted, even if it was really a femme weapon. Those knife-carrying butches were real dumb, she thought. Her belt was nearly as sharp as their knives, but she wouldn't be arrested in a bar raid for concealing a weapon. So far she had not had to use it, but she was ready if any of those old diesel-dykes crossed her, tried to take a woman from her.

"Tonight, the light of love is in your eyes . . ." Frenchy continued to sing as she entered the last block before Campy Corner, the drugstore where everyone hung out until nightfall came and darkness, or the cops, pushed them into the bars. Would she stay at the Corner tonight or visit a few places before she went to the bar? The grand excitement of Saturday swept over her, half anxiety and fear, and she slowed to savor it. Here in her own world she was handsome and funny. Women liked her, wanted to dance with her, wanted to make out with her. The other butches, those not too busy protecting their femmes, joked with her, talked baseball with her. It made six days of standing behind a checkout counter melt away. Her straight clothes, her meekness before the boss and shyness with the other girls, were all bearable because down here she was a prince, a sharp dancer, a big tipper. She saw the Women's House of Detention on the corner of 6th and Greenwich and she knew she was home. The sounds and smells and sights of the Village filled her small chest. "So fine . . ." she sang to herself, "So fine. So fine, yeah, my baby so doggone fine . . ."

A few early fags stood against the drugstore window. They weren't hustlers; she'd seen them before in the bars. They just wanted to find boyfriends for the night to take them drinking and dancing, then home. Wallflowers, she thought. The only place I've ever seen the guys be the wallflowers. A butch and her femme came out of the drugstore and Frenchy nodded to the butch, avoiding the femme's eyes. They had seen each other a few times, Frenchy and

the femme, and the femme probably wouldn't want to let on to her new girlfriend. Frenchy tried to remember her name. "Hey, Frenchy," she heard a bass voice call from the curb.

"Hey, Jessie, how you doing?"

"Okay. I'm doing okay."

"Where's Pat?"

Jessie shook her head. The big soft face seemed to sag with sadness. "We broke up, Frenchy. She found somebody else."

"Hell, Jess. And you were together a long time."

"We were going to go for Chinese dinner on our six-month anniversary. I swear," Jessie said, her hands in her chino pockets, a light summer jacket open over an unironed plaid men's sport shirt, and her roughly cut brown hair combed wetly back from her forehead in a wave, "I thought this was it. I thought we had it made, that me and Pat would last forever. But," she sighed, "I guess it's like that song, 'It's All in the Game.'"

"Yeah, love is some game," Frenchy agreed. "I'm sorry it had to happen, Jess, but lookit, you and me can have a good time tonight, how about it? Want to go to the bars with me?"

"Sure. I was hoping I'd see you around. You're not meeting no one?"

"Maybe. It's hard to tell. I said I'd be down here, but I don't know if Donna's going to cooperate, you know what I mean? We haven't been getting along any too good."

"You ready to split up with this one too, you Romeo?"

"I really love her a lot, Jess. I don't know. She wants to get a place together. Or stay at a hotel Saturday nights. You know I don't go for that."

"Still don't want to settle down? Boy, if I could just find a girl who would," Jessie sighed again, watching a group of women round the corner.

"I'd get itchy feet. No, I don't want that. And you know I'd like to spend the night with her, but I can't get away with that. And if I did it once she'd be expecting it every week."

"I know. You're not made like that. Better to keep it light."

Frenchy smiled, a large winning smile, and leaned back against the plate glass window. Hooking her thumbs into her belt she mused, "That's how I like it, Jess, light. A new girl every week would suit me fine."

Jessie poked at her lightly with her elbow, chuckling and nodding. "That's you, Frenchy."

"Where do you want to go tonight?" Frenchy asked.

"It's kind of early. How about PamPam's?"

"Yeah, I could use some coffee. I worked all day." They started walking across 6th Ave.

"You still at the A&P up in the Bronx?"

"Sure thing," Frenchy said, stopping outside the Women's House of Detention to run the comb through her hair again. "How about you? Still typing for that insurance company?"

"Yeah," Jessie replied, making a face as she borrowed Frenchy's comb to prop up her wave and flatten the hair cut straight across her thick neck. "Still sitting all day typing forms. Wish I could get a job loading trucks or something. All I do is listen to the girls gossip. Talk about getting itchy, I can't take it much longer."

"I know what you mean. The other cashiers never shut up. There's a cute new girl, though. A little blonde. Wears these tight black sweaters. Winks at me," Frenchy confided to Jessie. "Wish I could make her," she grinned lasciviously.

Jessie put her arm across Frenchy's shoulders. "Listen, Frenchy, if I didn't know you're called Frenchy from that long French name of yours, I'd say it fits you anyways. You never think of nothing else, you know that?"

Frenchy looked smug as they entered PamPam's and looked for a booth. She stopped and narrowed her eyes as she looked around, half-posing, half-looking at the women scattered among the gay men. They found seats at the counter. "Sometimes I want to break my own rule."

"About mixing work and pleasure?"

"Yeah. She's really something else. Something special. I dream about her all day." She broke into a smile again and sang, ". . . only trouble is, gee whiz, I'm dreaming my life away . . ."

"And you count money like that? With your head in the clouds?" The door opened and they looked stealthily in the mirror at the women who entered. "Nobody," whispered Jessie.

"Yeah, I've got to make the right change so's I can teach the little blonde. The boss gives her to me to teach because I'm the best he's got," Frenchy boasted. "And believe me, she needs all the help she can get," she laughed, pointing to her head. "She may be cute, but she's got confetti for brains."

"If she's that dumb, maybe she thinks you're a guy."

"Not the way I dress at work."

"So ask her out already. Since when are you shy?"

"I don't want to lose my job. And I don't like to fool with girls in my own neighborhood. You know that. But I sure am in love," Frenchy sighed, glancing at herself in the tarnished mirror behind the counter and pressing her pompadour higher. Suddenly she stopped, hand in the air. A new look came on her face, an almost sultry expression that narrowed one dark eye and lifted one side of her upper lip off her teeth. She made a clicking sound in the corner of her cheek and nudged Jessie. "Donna's here. And look at what she brought you."

Jessie looked into the mirror to see Frenchy's current girlfriend walk in with another woman. They could have been twins, both with teased hair piled high on their heads, tight black pants and tiny white pointed sneakers. Donna was wearing a chartreuse angora sweater with a high neck and her friend had a lavender cardigan buttoned low. "What a body," Jessie said admiringly to Frenchy as they swung in unison and stepped off their stools.

Donna quickly kissed Frenchy on the cheek, one eye on the man behind the counter who was ever vigilant about affection between queers in his place. "How you doing, chickie?" Frenchy asked. "Who's your friend?"

"What do you want to know for?" Donna teased, unsmiling, snapping her gum at Frenchy. "This here's Marie, my cousin. The one I was telling you about?"

"Yeah, from the Island, right, Marie?" Frenchy bowed slightly to her and winked.

Marie was at least 5'7" and looked down at Frenchy and Donna. "You didn't tell me how cute she was, Donny."

Donna laughed, finally. "I didn't want you to know. This one's mine," she said, sliding her arm possessively under Frenchy's.

"Okay, girls, that's enough," the counterman said. "Order or have your meeting outside, understand?"

"Sure, Charley," Frenchy sneered. "Anything you say." She shrugged to her friends. "Let's get out of here and go someplace nicer, huh, Marie?"

Marie dropped her eyelids half shut and began to snap her fingers and sway. "Where there's dancing? I just turned twenty-one, you know."

"That's why I never brought her down here before, Frenchy. She was too young. And too scared to fake it."

"Well, I'm glad you finally got to twenty-one. I've been waiting for you all my life," Jessie interjected, butting with her blunt body into the closed group the three had made, an embarrassed smile on her face.

"Oh, hey, Jess. Marie, this is my best friend, Jessie."

"Pleased to meet you," Marie said, then giggled.

"I'm really glad to meet you too, Marie," Jessie said with a glance at the open cardigan. She stepped back and took out her Marlboros. "Would you like one?" she offered to Marie, then to Donna and Frenchy.

They each took one and turned to go outside. On 6th Ave. Frenchy turned to light Marie's cigarette, but Jessie was already there so she lit Donna's and her own. Their eyes met and Donna cupped her hand around Frenchy's to shield the flame. She was just slightly taller than Frenchy and leaned very close to her. "Going to take me dancing, lover?" she asked Frenchy.

"Sure thing, baby doll," Frenchy answered, still touching Donna's hand and holding the unlit Zippo.

"You sure are looking handsome."

Frenchy allowed a smug expression to pass across her face. "So are you, angel baby. Real pretty. I like that sweater," she said, touching it lightly on Donna's breast.

"Hey," Donna objected, pulling back. "You want us to get arrested?"

"I wouldn't mind a night locked up with you, beautiful," Frenchy smirked.

"In there, bigshot?" Donna asked, pointing over her shoulder with her thumb at the Women's House of Detention. "The House of D ain't my idea of a good time. How about it tonight, though? You got a place we can go?"

Frenchy smoothly took a drag on her cigarette. "No, I couldn't come up with anyplace."

"Did you try?" Donna asked sarcastically.

"Sure I did, babe."

"Well, *I did*," Donna said proudly, patting her hair back where the warm night breeze had pushed it. She raised her penciled eyebrows. "What do you say, lover?"

"Where is it?" Frenchy asked, coughing on her smoke, her poise shaken.

"Marie's got a friend with an apartment in the city. He's out of town. All we got to do is make sure Marie's got a date. And it looks like you made sure of that when you brought Jess along."

Frenchy silently cursed Jessie for breaking up with her girl. "Donna," she started, leading their way along the sidewalk in the direction of the bar, glancing back to make sure Jessie and Marie were following. "Donna, I can't tonight."

"How many times are you going to give me that?" Donna whispered angrily at her. "I finally got us a place, something you say you can't do. It don't cost any money. It's private and away from our neighborhoods and you're going to say you *can't*?"

"Donna, honey, you know I love you," Frenchy said, tossing away her cigarette and laying a hand on Donna's arm. "I just didn't know. How could I know you would have a place tonight?"

"Sometimes I swear to god you got another girl, Frenchy. I don't know why the hell I bother with you if you do."

"I don't, Donna, you got to believe me." Frenchy's eyes had the look of a trapped animal and her brow was creased with pleading. "Come on, girl, you can believe me," she said, shaking Donna's arm.

"Stop it, Frenchy, don't make a scene. I brought Marie down here for a good time. She's never been with girls before. Except me when we were kids."

"You two? That's a laugh. You're both femme!"

"Hey, we were only kids. It was a few years ago. We were experimenting, you know? We both liked it, but we were scared to talk about it till a few months ago. Then when we did I told her I'm gay and she wanted to do it again. I told her how I'm femme and all. Besides, we're cousins, you know? It wouldn't be right for us to do it together again."

"No," Frenchy agreed. "It wouldn't be." She glanced around at Marie who smiled brilliantly toward her. Frenchy turned back and hitched up her jeans again, bowing her legs more and swaggering.

"You got your eye on her?" Donna asked suspiciously.

"No, angel. What are you so jumpy about? I'm just making sure Jess is showing her a good time." Frenchy was thinking about how sexy Donna's tall cousin was, though. She really ought to bring her out, not Jessie. There was something clumsy about her friend

that made her wonder what women saw in her. She was a great pal, but still, if it was the girl's first time out with a butch, someone more skilled ought to do it. Fooling around with Donna didn't count. They hadn't known what they were doing. She needed an expert, someone with a lot of experience. Somebody talented like one of the girls had told Frenchy she was. I don't know what Donna's complaining about, thought Frenchy. I give her a good time even if we can't stay together all night. She's probably ugly in the morning, anyway, she thought, remembering how her mother looked making breakfast all those years, her hair still in rollers, no pencil on her eyebrows yet, her shapeless nightgown hanging sloppily on her body. No, she preferred her girls all spiffed up on a Saturday night, looking their best for Frenchy. She remembered to put more spring in her diddy-bop. Marie might be watching her.

"Hey, coming in?" Donna asked, stopping.

"Sure, I was thinking."

"I thought I heard wood burning," Jessie quipped as she halted next to Donna and Frenchy.

Marie laughed and looked excitedly at the door to the bar. "I've never been in a gay bar before."

"Don't worry, beautiful, we'll protect you, right, Jess?"

"I'll protect you from Frenchy, is more like it, ain't it, Donna?"

"Hey, I thought you were my friend," Frenchy playfully punched Jessie as they turned to go inside.

Frenchy held the door for Donna, then turned it over to Jessie. They paid the bouncer and walked the length of the bar. Frenchy wished she was sitting at the bar cruising all the women who went by. If she wasn't with Donna and wasn't Jessie's friend, she wouldn't have to keep her hands off Marie. I'm falling in love, she thought, then smiled over at Donna as they reached the back room. It was just getting crowded and they sat at the next to last empty table. Frenchy looked around. She waved at a few women and nodded to the man who sat with his arm around his bleached blonde girlfriend. The blonde looked like a lot of the femmes, and he wasn't taking any chances that his woman would enjoy the sights. They were there for his pleasure, not hers. Potbellied and middle-aged, he was an owner or a friend of the owners, come in to see the bulldykes dance. "Pervert," Frenchy hissed low, wishing she didn't have to dance in front of him.

"Okay, girls," the waitress said as she approached them. "What'll it be? How you doing, Frenchy? Still got the shackles on Donna, huh? Let me know when you're free, Donna," she winked.

"You live around here?" Donna asked the waitress while Frenchy turned to look at her, scowling.

"Over on the East Side, hon. Got my own place. You come up anytime at all." She turned to Frenchy. "Just kidding, lover. I wouldn't touch her."

Frenchy eyed the waitress's slicked-back hair and the white turtleneck she wore under her black shirt. She was competition, Frenchy decided. "Give me a seven and seven," she ordered sullenly, throwing a five-dollar bill on the table.

"Jealous?" Donna asked.

"Let's dance," Frenchy said roughly, pulling Donna from the booth with her. Little Anthony and the Imperials sang "Tears on My Pillow." She walked bowlegged onto the floor, holding Donna's hand and scowling at the waitress's back and the owner's friend. "I don't want you fooling around like that," she told Donna harshly.

"Why not? It's a free country."

"Yeah, but you're my girl."

"Not hardly," Donna yanked herself away from Frenchy, her anger flaring.

Frenchy pulled her back. "Keep your voice down." Frenchy looked around and took her jacket off, still moving to the music. She leaned off the dance floor to lay it neatly on the back of her chair, humming, "... pain in my heart, over you . . ." Then she returned to Donna and looked into her eyes. "You don't want to be my woman anymore?" She neatly rolled her blue sleeves up toward the elbows and took Donna in her arms to dance more. "Don't you remember the good times we've been having?" She knew she sounded half-hearted. It was her uncertainty about wanting Donna in her voice. Especially if she was going to give Frenchy a hard time. Better to get out now. Another woman caught her eye. She had long blonde hair in a flip and was wearing a straight light green skirt and a silky white blouse, the collar of which lay wide open and flat against her throat. She has pretty blue eyes, Frenchy thought as she brought herself back to Donna.

"I want someone who'll hold me all night, Frenchy. Don't you understand that I want a woman who'll take me home?"

"You want a woman who'll *keep* you home. You want a husband," Frenchy accused.

Donna's dark eyes flashed their anger again and she pulled away to stand still. Frenchy grabbed at her arm to dance again, looking around to see if anyone had noticed. The other couples were either pressed against one another, dancing, sweatily erotic in the dim, smoky light, or stared unseeingly at the dancers from their crowded, tiny tables. "And what's wrong with wanting that?" Donna asked loudly. "I'm twenty-three. I want to settle down. I thought . . ." her voice broke and she chewed her gum for a moment as she let Frenchy lead her into the dance again. "Tears on my pillow," Little Anthony sang. She picked up her head and looked wistfully at Frenchy. "I thought you might want to settle down too. I mean, you got a steady job, but you got no place of your own. I thought maybe we could get together."

"I ain't the marrying kind," Frenchy said, remembering briefly the dream she'd once had also of having a woman to come home to. But she'd never quite figured out how to do it. How to hide her gayness and live with a lover. How to be a butch and look the way she needed to when she was with her femme, yet pass for straight otherwise. How to figure out a dozen other details about her split lives. "No," she shook her head. "You were wrong. I'll never settle down. I like the gay life, the bars. I like having a good time."

"I'm tired of it!" Donna half-yelled, pushing Frenchy aside and struggling through the crowd to her seat for her purse. Frenchy watched her, a sadness welling up in her. She was going to miss Donna. Whispering something to Marie, Donna walked around the dancing couples and out of the back room. Frenchy finished rolling up her sleeves. "Easy come, easy go," she shrugged when she reached the table. She picked up her drink and swallowed it in three gulps, grinning down at Marie.

"You drink *fast*," Marie said, impressed. "Doesn't that get you drunk?"

"I can hold my liquor," Frenchy bragged, slipping her hands in her pockets, feeling the hot alcohol press down on her sadness. She shrugged again. "How are you two doing? You look like you're getting along like a house on fire."

Jessie blushed to the roots of her wave. Then she smiled toward Marie. "Want to dance?" Marie grinned across at her and gave her

hand to Jessie. Frenchy could see their excitement about each other. "What happened to Donna?" Jessie asked Frenchy.

"It's over."

Jessie looked sad. "Tough break."

"Love 'em and leave 'em," Frenchy said, standing. "You two have a good dance. I'm going to see who's here."

"She always bounces back fast," Jessie explained as she and Marie began to dance. She watched her little friend move from table to table, greeting almost half the women in the back room. By the time Jessie and Marie danced their third slow dance, to "Exodus," bumping and grinding as close as the bar owners would allow, Frenchy was dancing too—with the blue-eyed woman. She held the woman loosely and they talked as they danced. "Please let my people go . . ." Frenchy sang as they pushed their way to the table. "This is Edie," Frenchy said to Jessie and Marie.

"Hiya, Edie," Jessie smiled, admiring the way Edie looked at Frenchy. She was glowing at her, obviously ready to fall in love. Jessie shook her head and winked at Frenchy, who winked back. The two couples separated for the night soon after that.

"I ought to be getting home pretty soon, Edie," Frenchy said as they walked hand in hand along Greenwich Ave.

Edie was staring at the male hustlers who milled about on the sidewalk or leaned against the storefronts. "Do you? So soon? It's only midnight."

"By the time I take you home and go back up to the Bronx it'll be a lot later."

Edie's face brightened again. "You're going to take me home?"

"At least as far as the subway goes. You think I'd let a beautiful woman like you walk the streets of the City alone at this time of night?"

"That's sweet of you. Somehow I imagined that if I could ever meet a woman my first try tonight that we'd go back to her place or I'd go home alone. I never thought of getting escorted home, like on a real date."

"Queers are just like anybody else, baby. Got respect for a woman, treat them politely. Why," Frenchy drew herself up to her full height, "it wouldn't be gentlemanly of me to let you go all the way out to Queens alone." She was proud of the way she had skirted the issue of spending the night with Edie. "Just like I'd never ask a

woman to—you know—go against her principles the first night.”

Eddie laughed affectionately as they descended the subway stairs. “I just never imagined,” she said when Frenchy insisted on putting a token of her own in the turnstile.

“And I never imagined I’d have such a good time with a college girl. Or that a college girl would ever be interested in me,” Frenchy said modestly.

“Why wouldn’t I be interested in you? You’re so cute. And sexy.”

Frenchy led Eddie down the empty platform. “You think so?” she asked.

“I never went out with a *boy* as cute as you are.”

Frenchy saw her reflection over Eddie’s shoulder in a mirror on a gum machine. She smiled and took Eddie’s hand. “I’m just glad I got to you on your first night downtown before someone else did. You must have been nervous, coming to a gay bar all by yourself.”

Eddie flushed. “I was,” she said, her blue eyes searching Frenchy’s for sympathy and comfort. “Thank goodness you rescued me.”

“How’d you know where to go?” Frenchy asked, moving slightly closer to the woman.

Giggling as if she was still nervous, Eddie stepped back a bit and replied, “My aunt is gay. She lives in the Midwest, but I wrote her a letter because I hoped she could find out where I could go to see if I am gay. She said there used to be a place—that one—and told me where to find it. She wished me luck. I guess her wish came true.”

Eddie had become breathless with talking. Her eyes glittered. Frenchy leaned up and kissed her, a fugitive kiss taken in fear that someone would come through the turnstile, but Eddie relaxed into Frenchy’s arms as if in relief. When they leaned back to look at one another Frenchy knew Eddie had found her answer. Eddie grabbed her and returned the kiss, knocking Frenchy slightly off balance. “Hold it, hold it,” Frenchy said, gently gaining control. “Somebody might come,” she whispered against Eddie’s lips.

Eddie didn’t seem to care. “I’ve waited years for this night,” she said, tossing her hair back over her shoulders and straightening the white cardigan that hung around her on a sweater clasp. “Isn’t there somewhere we could go?”

As she joyously sang, “. . . tonight with words unspoken, you way that I’m the only one . . .” in her head, Frenchy looked toward the women’s bathroom. Eddie was not the sort of girl who would

want to make out in a bathroom, she thought. But Edie saw where she was looking and tugged at her until Frenchy led her inside. The floor was littered and the tiny room smelled strongly of disinfectant. They leaned against a stall, kissing each other lightly, then more and more hungrily pressing their lips together until Frenchy began to pass her hands across Edie's body, creating sparks on her silky blouse. Their breathing was so loud in the silence of the white tiled room that they barely heard the train in time to catch it. Aboard, they leaned on each other breathlessly, laughing and straightening their clothes in the empty car. "You're pretty wonderful," Frenchy said, squeezing Edie's hand one last time as they pulled into 23rd St. and other passengers filed sleepily on.

When they changed trains at Grand Central they stared into one another's eyes as they waited under the stairs and Frenchy was glad she had broken up with Donna. The excitement had pretty much left that relationship and Frenchy had almost forgotten how exhilarating it was to start a new affair. Especially when she was bringing someone out. "This magic moment. . ." she almost sang out loud. Her heart pounded until it seemed as if her whole body must pulsate with it. Her hands were ice cold, and she shook inside. She was as excited as a kid going to a party, at moments so excited she was almost overcome by a wave of nausea and a cold sweat broke out all over her body. This was living. This was the gay life. This was what made it all so worthwhile. It was a high better than any liquor could bring. The woman she was with became a thousand movie stars rolled into one and the most beautiful woman in the world. The subway became the most romantic of places, with its trains rushing to distant parts of the city, its passengers mysterious in their Saturday night finery, its promise of new destinations and new women. Frenchy's life became adventurous and she was—swash-buckling. She stood tall in her black pointed boots and gazed romantically at Edie as she felt herself melt in Edie's adoring, desiring gaze. Each of them smiled until her lips and cheeks felt brittle. When the train came they huddled on a double seat at the end of a car and grinned at everybody who stared at them because they'd grown embarrassed at grinning at each other. Frenchy wasn't afraid of anything. She remembered once riding out to the end of the Flushing line with another woman and stopping at Willets Point; it had

been big and empty. She pulled Edie off the train there and led her to a high-backed wooden bench with seats on both sides. They went around to the side that faced the express tracks, empty this time of night.

"I love you, Edie," Frenchy breathed as they sat. "I don't want to leave you yet."

"Let's just sit here a while."

Frenchy kissed Edie's hair and held her close. She could feel a wave of warmth rise through her body and began again to tremble. "Are you cold?" Edie asked.

"No," Frenchy answered in her deepest, husky voice. "I just want you so bad." With that they began to kiss again, overwhelmed by their desire and reckless of being in the open. The summer air seemed to sit around them still as a wall and they could see stars, the moon over the track. The pillars and roof of the station hovered protectively over them and the wooden bench curved around them like an old gray hand.

Frenchy made love to Edie as if they were sitting on a living room couch, except that she went under her clothing instead of removing it. She was protective against possible discomforts for Edie to the point of painful discomfort for herself. When she touched Edie's breast she knew they would finish right there on the subway platform, college girl or no college girl. "Edie, Edie," Frenchy sighed as she spread her little hand across the flesh inside Edie's thigh.

"Frenchy," Edie said breathlessly, digging her fingers into her shoulders. "I don't know why it took me so long to do this," she whispered.

"To come out?"

"Is that what you call it?" Edie asked between kisses.

"Yeah," Frenchy said, "and this is how you do it." Her hand reached under Edie's nylon panties. They were bikinis and she imagined them black and sexy against the white of Edie's skin. Then she felt the matted pubic hairs, parted them with her fingertips, kneaded the soft flesh beneath and slipped to the cavity of the panties' crotch. She felt Edie's wetness where it had soaked through the nylon against her knuckles. She felt her own vagina tighten and loosen involuntarily and reached for Edie's softer, pinker parts as if to find release for herself.

"Ohh," Edie moaned, twisting against Frenchy's slowly stroking thumb. She let her legs fall more widely apart as her skirt rode up her legs. Frenchy parted her inner lips with her index and middle fingers and stroked her swelling clitoris. "Baby," Edie breathed, tightening. Frenchy began to kiss her face, tiny loving kisses all over, when the train she'd barely been aware of thrust a hot gust of wind against them and stopped behind their bench.

They held onto one another, not breathing, afraid someone would get off the train and come to their side of the bench. The train pulled out. Footsteps descended the steps at the end of the platform. They breathed in relief, looking at one another, falling onto each other's lips, desperate to retrieve their passion.

Although they went through the motions again, Frenchy could tell their lovemaking had a pallid end for Edie. Disappointed, they waited for the next train, Frenchy still touching Edie with passion.

"Will you be at the bar next Saturday?" Frenchy asked, her mouth nibbling on Edie's neck.

"If you will," Edie replied coyly.

"I got no reason to be there if I can't see you, sweetheart."

"There are plenty of other girls there, Frenchy," Edie giggled, pulling away to pat her hair down. "Now stop kissing me and let me fix myself. I might know somebody on the train!"

Frenchy stepped back, grinning. "Sorry, angel baby. I just can't keep my hands off you."

"No kidding," Edie smiled back, combing her hair and renewing her lipstick. "Why don't you come pick me up next week?"

"Come all the way out here?"

"Aren't I worth it?"

"Sure, baby doll, but think of all the time we'd waste traveling when we could be together downtown."

"You just won't go out of your way for me," Edie pouted.

"No, Edie. I'd go around the world for you. Sure," Frenchy said, already missing her walk downtown, "I'll pick you up. Tell me how to get to your house."

"Take me there tonight and I'll show you," Edie lured Frenchy. "Maybe no one will be awake."

Frenchy looked eagerly at Edie's hips, thrust forward with her hands splayed on them. "I can't," she shook her head. "I just can't tonight."

"Why, do you have another girlfriend waiting for you in the Bronx?"

"No, Edie, no way. I only got eyes for you, honest. I wouldn't two-time you. I just got to get home. It's late already," she almost shouted as Edie's train came in. "Tell me where you live!"

"Never mind. I'll see you at the bar. What's your phone number?" Edie asked as she stepped onto the train.

Frenchy hesitated. She didn't want to lose Edie, but she couldn't have her calling her house. "I don't have one," she shouted into the train's closing door.

Frenchy pulled her jean jacket tighter across her chest and buttoned it. The night was cool now. She crossed to the other platform, aware of the huge dark sky over her, over the whole city that was settling for the night. She whistled a bar of "In the Still of the Night." At the edge of the platform she breathed deeply, lifting her chin, admiring the stars. The magic had not yet left the night. Wasn't she, Frenchy, still out on a Saturday night? Wasn't she beloved of Edie who would soon be dreaming of her in the single bed in her parents' apartment? Couldn't she go right back downtown and find another girl, give her just as much? She thought briefly of Donna at the waitress's apartment. She bet it wouldn't be as good as if Donna had stayed with her. Yes, Donna would miss her. She glanced up at the stars once more, hitched up her jeans and threw her cigarette to the platform where she ground it hard under her heel as the train stopped and opened its doors to her. The long ride to the Bronx began and it was with an effort that she kept the spring in her diddy-bop as she changed trains.

By the Yankee Stadium stop Frenchy had unbuttoned her jean jacket and checked her shirt for lipstick. She pulled a locket out from under her shirt and buttoned the shirt's top button, settling the necklace outside it. She rolled the collar of her jacket and flattened it. At 167th St. she removed her pinky ring and ID bracelet. At 170th she slid her Marlboro box, almost empty, under the seat, glancing around to make sure no one noticed, then took out a stick of Juicy Fruit gum and stuffed it into her mouth. Her face changed as she chewed, from the brassy, arrogant look she had worn all night, to a wary expression. She seemed to clench her jaw and looked, above the tightly buttoned collar and locket, almost old maidish, like a girl who's never had a date and goes to church regularly to pray for one.

At her stop Frenchy got off the train demurely, remembering the time she met her next-door neighbors coming home from their evening at Radio City Music Hall. She walked up the subway steps, pulling the comb from her back pocket. The cigar shop on the corner was still open, selling Sunday papers, and she used their window to take the point out of her DA and to dismantle her pompadour. She whistled softly, "I'm sorry, so sorry, please accept my apologies . . ." into the window as she wound small spicurls in front of her ears. She walked past her building and glanced up, relieved that there was no one at the window. How often she wished their apartment was at the back. Behind the stairs on the first floor was a cubbyhole, a small hiding place she discovered years ago, just low enough for her to reach. Her heart raced with the anxiety she always felt here, afraid someone might have taken her plain brown slippers, but they had not and she squeezed her black boots into their space, patting them goodbye for a week.

Then, Sunday paper in hand, she flattened her hair one last time, chewed her gum more vigorously before throwing it out, and ascended the stairs, key in hand. She did not want to be heard, yet each step creaked beneath her feet. The four-story walk-up needed repairs. Even the banisters creaked. There was no way, it seemed, not to make noise. Still, at the third floor, there was no one at her door and she opened it quietly. The little hallway was empty except for the light left burning for her. She slipped quickly out of her jean jacket and headed for her room. She was almost there when she jumped—it was her mother calling. "Is that you, dear? You're very late tonight. I guess the girls wanted to play rummy all night this week?"

Frenchy stood frozen, remembering that she still smelled like Edie. "Yes, Maman, I'll be in to say goodnight in a jiffy. I need to use the little girl's room." She heard nothing more from her mother's room and slipped into her own. She walked to her dresser. The Frenchy in the mirror was plain, dull, sullen-looking. She had nothing of the attraction that brought girls into her arms. She hated that image in the mirror and the tiny woman who made her look like that. But the least she could do for her mother was to stay with her and act like a daughter. "Dear," her mother called as Frenchy slipped off the remnants of her self.

I thank Carol Lynn for her assistance on rock and roll research.

Of Althea and Flaxie

In 1943 Althea was a welder
very dark
very butch
and very proud
loved to cook, sew, and drive a car
and did not care who knew she kept company with a woman
who met her every day after work
in a tight dress and high heels
light-skinned and high-cheekboned
who loved to shoot, fish, play poker
and did not give a damn who knew her "man" was a woman.

Althea was gay and strong in 1945
and could sing a good song
from underneath her welder's mask
and did not care who heard her sing her song to a woman.

Flaxie was careful and faithful
mindful of her Southern upbringing
watchful of her tutored grace
long as they treated her like a lady
she did not give a damn who called her a "bulldagger."

In 1950 Althea wore suits and ties
Flaxie's favorite colors were pink and blue
People openly challenged their flamboyance
but neither cared a fig who thought them "queer" or "funny."

When the girls bragged over break of their sundry loves,
Flaxie blithely told them her old lady Althea took her dancing
every weekend
and did not give a damn who knew she clung to a woman.

When the boys on her shift complained of their wives,
Althea boasted of how smart her "stuff" Flaxie was
and did not care who knew she loved the mind of a woman.

In 1955 when Flaxie got pregnant
and Althea lost her job
Flaxie got herself on relief
and did not care how many caseworkers
threatened midnite raids.

Althea was set up and went to jail
for writing numbers in 1958.
Flaxie visited her every week with gifts
and hungered openly for her thru the bars
and did not give a damn who knew she waited for a woman.

When her mother died in 1965 in New Orleans
Flaxie demanded that Althea walk beside her in the funeral procession
and did not care how many aunts and uncles knew she slept with a woman.

When she died in 1970
Flaxie fought Althea's proper family not to have her laid out in lace
and dressed the body herself
and did not care who knew she'd made her way with a woman.

Gail

Gail

Chicago nightingale
bred on blues and Bigger Thomas
and extreme weather.
Lover of cocaine and marijuana
on tropical and early mornings in summer
and one hundred years of solitude in winter.

Gail

toucan and nightingale.
Sitting reading Jung in a Newark food stamp office
and speaking in dreams of atavistic masks.

Gail

girl mother.
Brushing, braiding other women's daughters' hair between your thighs
before that marauding time of womb-swelling, scraping, and pillage.

Gail

plumèd amazon.
Tearing up diary pages filed in boxes and drawers crowded with
scents and sachets
singing r&b in Spanish
beating out a latin two-step
with your fist.

Gail

midwest nightingale in an eastbound flight.

Valerie A. Olson

To the Very Young Woman Waiting Outside Our Lady of Fatima School

Volcano hair; very still; hands tied to your sides

(I never saw your face)

You waited for someone; something;

As you will the rest of your life.

I can imagine your face, though:

brutalized into what men would deem patience

obsidian eyes cut by the words denied your fear-soldered mouth

ears lying deaf in the merciful wimple of your hair.

I take up the labyris for you

o younger sister

(for we both are Maidens) (how old? 18. does it matter? no.)

and it is heavy, and it aches when it hangs

down

my

back

thudding upon my spine as I ride ride ride

As I swing it

flash flash flash cut

o around my bleached corn head

I know as it falls that:

I will have to clean the blood from my own hands.

I will have to sharpen my own edge with spit & stone.

I will hold it poised until my own strength is a memory.

I will wait as my own sentinel in the shadows & snow.

I will bind my own wounds in each muddy dawn.

Yet, one night
when I can no longer lift my blunted blade
and your hair is as white as your teeth
we shall meet as virgins in the crook of the crescent moon

And you will know
that I
am what you waited for.

Jan Phillips



Oregon Threshold, 1981



Untitled

Almost Aubade

for Cathy

The little hours: two lovers herd upstairs
two children, one of whom is one of theirs.
Past them, two of the other sex lope down,
dressed for mid-winter cruising bars in brown
bomber-jackets – their lives as uncluttered
as their pink shaven cheeks, one of us muttered,
fumbling with keys. Yes, they did look alike.
Hooking their scarves and parkas on the bike,
the seven-year-old women shuck a heap
of velvet jeans and Mary Janes. They sleep
diagonal, instantly, across the top
bunk, while their exhausted elders drop,
not to the bliss breasts melt to against breasts
yet, but to kitchen chairs. One interests
herself in omelets, listening anyhow.
It's certain that fine women pick at food.
A loaf of bread, a jug of wine, and thou
shalt piecemeal total both, gripped in that mood
whose hunger makes a contrapuntal stutter
across connectives. Unwrap cheese, find butter,
dip bread crusts in a bowl of pasta sauce
saved from the children's supper. Tired because
of all we should stay up to say, we keep
awake together often as we sleep
together. I'll clear the plates. Leave your cup.
Lie in my arms until the kids get up.

My mother is an orphan

My mother is an orphan

I am childless

There are memories of oncreatures
hovering in my mind like the notion of
Jesus or science

My brother, too, is childless
We are artists and therefore, selfish

We have stored up our energies in
music, projects, dusty ideas of
mortality transcended. We are fools
too and know it

Our blood is useless, now
and latent

My mother is an orphan
and singular in this world

And I too am singular
in this world and hungry

But there is no more feeding at my mother's breasts
And no more charity in these idle streets where
heartstuff costs so very little, and fetches even
less on the ever expanding open market

When my sister gave birth, there was celebration
Her blood was useful and she rallied to the singing

But I have chosen the alternate route, the one that
poets sang about and find my self angry, wondering
at the notion of commitment and necessity, weary
of these men who tease and taste and leave me
Weary of the notion of carrying no children ever to
their glory into the sunlight, into the darkness.

Insect Is an Anagram for Incest

1

hands spider their way
 under the covers silky
secretions spin out
 webs in all the bright
 and shadowed corners

 hands quiet as silverfish
burrow the night and day
 startle the leather-bound books
 sleeping in the attic

 glassy eyes twitch after footfalls
especially those that amble
 towards the wicker couch
 flowering in the basement
 hunch-back beetles
 peer out
 the fruit cellar
 the motionless blue jars

2

No room in the house is safe.
Not any nook nor cranny.
Not the dusty closet under the eaves
cozy as summer woods.
Not the cave under the bed
surrounded
by the spread's soft tassles.
Not the cushioned window seat
on the second-story
landing. Not the bay window
with its paisley satin pillows
and one thousand peacock
eyes opening
to the neighboring fields.

There are skitters everywhere
and footsteps, fingers, breath across
the back of the neck.

The burrows under the snowball bushes
that lead to the cool dark
under the large and rambling porch
look lovely as grandmother's lap.

Skitters, whispers, harsh
breath across
the back
of the neck.

3

What can be done to rid the house of fear?

Scrub down the floors

Burn the curtains and drapes

Fumigate

Air the books on the sunny grass lawn

Sweep the ceilings with the rag-covered broom

Mothballs in the cupboards and eaves

FRESH PAINT FRESH

PAIN surely white

enamel allows nothing to hide

Cobwebs spin out

from the glistening corners Eggs

bubble up from under the surface

shen and the anagram tiles

face down

in their drawer spell out

the insect names over and over

4

Even though the bathroom tiles

have been scrubbed with lysol

Even though the dishes are stacked in order

Even though the beds

are stripped and changed and the toys

sorted and put away

The tinker toys standing at attention

in their cardboard tower

twist and flap their hands

The bride doll locked in her train case

with the net and sequin trousseau

scratches at her face

The diamond blocks
arranged in their patterned box
perfect as the perfect pattern on the lid
grind chips of paint
off their wooden sides

And in the box that pictures maple trees and cloudless sky
the tiny men in red shirts
crackle their guns
like matchsticks struck
by curious children

In the drawer of the dining room buffet
the anagram tiles
click out
the secret letters once again

5

My father's fingers skip spider feet
across my skin my mother
was eaten alive the paper on my desk crumbles
under the nub of the pen and the child
in my home hunches over she
starts at every approach outside
my window the wet sheets
rise up from the line billow
wild—monster crawdads
springing on the wind

Aunt Pat

Another midwest winter surrounds me.
Nearing thirty, getting tired, I have not escaped
my unfinished life. You follow me,
even where the hard edge of the wind shovels
snow across flat fields, all night piling arcs
that leap halfway to nowhere, abrupt white waves
frozen the instant before impact. The irresolute
bluntness of the snow drives me inside—

I pull out a thin album, snapshots
of your early 20s. A grin, your thin shoulders
folded snugly inside the gift
of your brother's old wool jacket, your hands
shoved into the wide pockets.
Or a winter shot: you, alone
behind the house, feet hidden
in a garden of deepening snow.
Between pages, a negative slips out—in reverse tones
at the camera flash, your eyes fix
on your lover, her angular body
edging out of the picture.

Your father gave you a year, two years
of side glances and not much talk.
He worked late, came home to dinners
cold as a shadow. One night, at a table
of half-emptied plates, he sat down, said nothing,
and then: "What do you *do*
when you get together?"

The lost frames –

a table caught as a plate dropped
from its edge, an overturned chair,
a slammed back door, hands lowering
spoons and forks, frozen mid-air

– while you disappeared,
you, and a woman you loved, escaped
the thin cheap silver on the back
of shuttered eyes. Now the winter moon
swells above the silenced fields, lugging its baggage
of cropped shadows. You still walk
through these same snowbanks, the weather trapped
in its tiny grooves, a broken record. Snow collects
on your dark head, a covering of cold fireflies
or powdered glass. You are somewhere in this yard
I shovel through, clearing a narrow aisle
in the blunted landscape. At the end of the path,
I sprinkle salt from my pockets, handful after handful.
In the kitchen, the teapot busy on the stove,
I go back to the album again. I fill in the spaces
between pictures with stories I remember,
the thick white ink soaking deep
into the black paper. By the one picture
of your lover, I write only her name: Alice.
Next time the family story is told –
for my children, and yours – you will both be in it.

from Natural Birth

in my ninth month, i entered holy cross hospital, a maternity ward set up for the care of unwed girls and women

HOLY CROSS HOSPITAL

couldn't stand to see these new young faces, these children swollen as myself. my roommate, snotty, bragging about how she didn't give a damn about the kid and was going back to her boyfriend and be a cheerleader in high school. *could we ever "go back"?* *would our bodies be the same?* *could we hide among the childless?* she always reminded me of a lady at the bridge club in her mother's shoes, playing her mother's hand.

i tried to get along, be silent, stay in my own corner. i only had a month to go—too short to get to know them. but being drawn to the room down the hall, the t.v. room where, at night, we sat in our cuddly cotton robes and fleece-lined slippers—like college freshmen, joking about the nuns and laughing about due dates: jailbirds waiting to be sprung . . .

one girl, taller and older, 26 or 27, kept to herself, talked with a funny accent. the pain on her face seemed worse than ours . . .

and a lovely, gentle girl with flat small bones. the great round hump seemed to carry *her* around! she never said an unkind word to anyone, went to church every morning with her rosary and prayed each night alone in her room.

she was 17, diabetic, fearful that she or the baby or both would die in childbirth. she wanted the baby, yet knew that to keep it would be wrong. but what if the child did live? what if she gave it up and could never have another?

i couldn't believe the fear, the knowledge she had of death walking with her. i never felt stronger, eating right, doing my exercises. i was holding on to the core, the center of strength; death seemed remote, i could not imagine it walking in our midst, death in the midst of all that blooming. she seemed sincere, but maybe she was lying . . .

she went down two weeks late. induced. she had decided to keep the baby. the night i went down, she had just gone into labor so the girls had two of us to cheer about. the next morning when i awoke, i went to see her. she smiled from her hospital bed with tubes in her arms. it had been a boy. her baby was dead in the womb for two weeks. i remembered she had complained *no kicking*. we had reassured her everything was fine.

meanwhile i worked in the laundry, folded the hospital fresh sheets flat three hours a day. but never alone. stepping off the elevator, going up, feeling something, a spark catch. i would put my hand there and smile with such a luminous smile, the whole world must be happy.

or out with those crazy girls, those teenagers, laughing, on a christmas shopping spree, free (the only day they let us out in two months) feet wet and cold from snow.

i felt pretty, body wide and still in black beatnik leotards, washed out at night. my shapely legs and young body like iron.

i ate well, wanted lamaze (painless childbirth)—i didn't need a husband or a trained doctor—i'd do it myself, book propped open on the floor, puffing and counting while all the 16 year old unwed children smiled like i was crazy.

one day i got a letter from my cousin, said:

*don't give your baby up—
you'll never be complete again
you'll always worry where and how it is*

she knew! the people in my family knew! nobody died of grief and shame!

i *would* keep the child. i was sturdy. would be a better mother than my mother. i would still be a doctor, study, finish school at night. when the time came, i would not hurt like all those women who screamed and took drugs. i would squat down and deliver just like the peasants in the field, shift my baby to my back, and continue . . .

when my water broke, when i saw that stain of pink blood on the toilet paper and felt the first thing i could not feel, had no control of, dripping down my leg, i heard them singing mitch miller xmas songs and came from the bathroom in my own pink song—down the long hall, down the long moment when no one knew but me. it was time.

all the girls were cheering when i went downstairs. i was the one who told them to be tough, to stop believing in their mother's pain, that poison. our minds were like telescopes looking through fear. it wouldn't hurt like we'd been told. birth was beautiful if we believed that it was beautiful and right and good!

—maternity—i had never seen inside those doors.

all night i pictured the girls up there, at first hanging out of the windows, trying to get a glimpse of me . . . when the pain was worst, i thought of their sleeping faces, like the shining faces of children in the nursery. i held onto that image of innocence like one light in the darkness.

*pain is as common as flies. if you don't see it
walking on your lip, if you can't breathe it,
don't feel it for yourself, you walk in darkness.
not knowing the price of common sunshine, common
air, the common footstep on the earth. one
moment of life must be paid for, and no one
walking in the darkness without eyes can see.*

*the child is cut off from the mother, cut off
from the blinding pain the mother sleeps
and wakes up in forever, balancing the asshole
of the universe, the abyss of god's brain, inside
that light in her forehead.*

*she is bright. so bright that everything must
turn and face her like the sun. every clock
in life must stop to let her pass. slowly,
like the regal death procession of the king.*

LEAVING

she never went back to the ward for the girls, except during the day when they were all in the laundry room, working. everything seemed anticlimactic; the tall thin one she passed in the hall spoke as if she hardly knew her.

where did those girls go after the births of their babies? what wind blew them away like ashes? those she loved well, without question; those she was taught not to believe in, the whore, where did they go when they were flat and empty, when they fit back into their old clothes?

like shamed nuns, they left the dormitory, silent. their clothes were delivered in a paper sack, and they dressed hurriedly in the dark. the papers had been signed. most had asked to be blindfolded.

downstairs, in the laundry, creatures like giant insects continued to hum and move their metal arms. the ones that were left fed them like robots.

Susan Wood-Thompson

Fine Ligament of Sympathy

*the memory of the quasi-electric touch
of Teacher's fingers upon my palm*

—Helen Keller of Annie Sullivan

The diary-smoke boiled up
the chimney, Helen, so I shouldn't
stop hearing myself by telling words that,
shapeless, haunt me anyway.
For peace between that raging out of head
and that most steady side attending density
of touch—before I know

At first I was all want, undirected want—

what I know—that spells
into your palm. To understand from somewhere
quiet in you, I pushed away the wretched
undertow of my temperament.
Bring my violet robe, please Helen,
in a moment we will sit downstairs with them
the sun flat past crimson leaves.

*Teacher kept some pigeons in a cage in her room
so that when they were let out and she chased them
I might feel the air from their wings*

I will tell you now about
Tewksbury and my little brother Jimmie
who still speaks to me at the oddest moments.
His bedclothes vanished, I found
him in the morgue—*Don't take him away from me!*—
I lay the flowers by his face; they tore me
from the room. I lost my brother, Helen.

*and know about the flight of birds
and conceive the glory of wings.*

The trustees came, I rushed
at them *I want to learn!* forgetting
shame that relatives had said *She would be so pretty
but for her eyes.* At Perkins
shamed that I'd lost Mama, Papa, homes.
Helen, my sister from the moment you threw
yourself into my arms—

*Her face was handsome with the contours
which swept down with happy grace over her whole body.*

the force of five years' silence
so long as I can tell it, this is mine.
I wish today for silence from that greedy public!
Invisible "companion" all my life.
Why did you not ask your questions before
my heart was cold, my hair gray? What does
it matter now who my father was?

*She came to me soon after the tempest
and said "Do forgive me Helen!"
What can be more moving than a wise
high-strung woman begging a child's forgiveness.*

Or my mother? Life has pierced
me in a thousand ways, but all the wounds
are dry. I think I have forgotten how
they used to bleed. You have kept
aloof, proud world, too long. Oh, Helen
to climb down again in the scale of being
isn't that awful?

*Teacher's many-colored temperament
even the wise did not always chart
the currents of her nature rightly.*

I live at one remove
underwater – not just my eyes –
can you feel this in me, can you help me
say it? As with your
writing, speeches, you tell me –
rough draft. Pioneer sending out word
from the island.

All the immensity of earth, sky, and water was ours.

You are an impassioned
reformer by temperament. We both fight
for peace like soldiers on a battlefield.
How often have I said that we
both make too much a battlefield of life!
Maybe there would be more peace in the world if we
cultivated the gentler virtues.

*On the tour we could talk, laugh, or be silent
we were far from all society
and we could dress as we liked
and indulge in daydreaming for hours together.*

Only in you have I
kept the fire of a purpose alive.
Every other dream flame has been blown
out by some interfering fool.
But the old habit of your hand and my side
as we walk. Our minds touching along
their whole lengths

*I lengthened my rope
so that I could get into deeper water
how strange everything seems without you.*

even apart, we said everything
learned everything in light of the other.
Remember me at first? Trying to teach
the rabbits to eat properly!
Fifty years ago and still embarrassed
to think of it. And what am I today. A spindle
wrapped in a rose

*My last memory of Teacher as I knew her
was an October evening when she was fully awake
sitting in an armchair with us around her.
She was laughing while Herbert told her about the rodeo*

and purple cloth,
a seashell in a bulky rag, but you
are mingled in my life and I am a shell
warmed against the wind
by the wrap of your forgiveness, humor.
The courage of what we've attempted informs
our every step and gesture

*She spelled to me all he had said
and how tenderly she fondled my hand!
Beautiful was her touch
the power of love binding me to my kind*

gives shape to every year.
Now Helen, I feel better, once again
for you. Let's go down to Polly and Herbert.
Give me your arm. I haven't
learned the stairs. A foolish woman
never wise enough to learn what she has
spent her life in teaching.

from Communicating

- I. You thought: At last,
someone to understand your silences.
Silence of the second child, the girl
after the boy, the baby who never cried.
Silence of the little doll in braids
and ruffled dresses, cross around your neck,
pierced ears. Silence of the pupil
who knew all the answers,
kept poems in a drawer, locked.
Silence hiding your bloodstained
rags, learning from the maids' chatter,
their hunger, their brutal
husbands, swollen bellies, stolen lives.
Silence of the scholar who spoke only in
foreign languages, staring down at tight shoes
as they handed you the diploma, the prize money,
the ticket to France. Silence
with the teacher who spoke only to God,
with the woman who spoke only to the wall
with the second woman who spoke theories
and would not speak of women and left you
alone with her smell on your fingers
while she went out dancing
with men. Silence with me
at meals, among friends, in my arms, silence
year after year in our silent house.
I said you did not speak enough.

II. I thought: At last,
someone to understand my talking.
Talking like talkative daddy,
telling mommy everything,
talking for attention, talking like
grownups, dinner-table arguments,
shared secrets, shouts in the schoolyard,
school plays. Talking my way
past bullies, talking in committees,
talking as the dentist wired my teeth,
talking while other girls
spun the bottle. Talk
to the psychologist,
talk to the interviewer,
telling my life onto forms and platforms,
spelling champ, quiz kid, valedictorian.
Talking in class over the clack
of knitting needles, confiding in professors'
wives in kitchens, talking poems.
Talking in bed to a turned back.
I told you my travels, my troubles, my marriage,
my men. I told you my visions,
my fears, my weakness, my
nightmares. I told you things
I never told my mother, my sister,
my diary. I told you what I saw in you,
I told you what I loved. You said
I talked too much.
When you said that, I was struck dumb.

Small Infidelities

You turn away smoothly, a key in a door,
the tumblers working as if they were oiled.
When I start to say something,
I can't. The neighbor's cat
wails for love beneath the darkened bushes,
but even for him the moon
won't rise. You turn to me, then turn away,
your hair unforgivably soft
in the midnight hollywood of the porch light.

I get in my old car alone. The dark sweep
of the dashboard throws back its spilled handful
of stars, small and easy and white
as lies. Heavy-footed, I gun the cold motor,
turning over and over what refuses
to be understood—my angry face
staring back from the rearview mirror
like a cropped mug-shot, a sullen tally
of bad tips, bad timing. As I pull away
the yellow light on the porch dies,
the black pebbled road flows out
like a braille sentence beyond the brief span
of the headlights I see your delicate fingers
other hands they will come to hold my own clumsy
interpretations of the dark

Two Journeys

1

We were eager to escape their lighted house,
alone together feel the packed-down snow
under our wheels. Others we passed were slow
or stalled in ditches; only you drove bold,
steering that slick ribbon through frozen space.

We stopped near a junction where fresh drifts unrolled
like untouched dunes. "We'll walk from here," you said,
"Look at the pure white—nobody's been this road
for days." We would find winter birds at home,
all tame by peaceful fields. Here, nothing spoiled.

It was true. From the first fence we came
to, a bird, black-bibbed, yellow and rust breast,
flared up, taking me for some tree, some nest,
brushing my shoulder with a whirr of wing.
You taught me its skull's structure and its name.

Lured on to an abandoned barn, seeking
out owls, we entered the dark loft and saw
one, ancient and tattered, its single eye
a lonely marble. Then, like a dream gone bad,
my hands held, from our own freezer, a throng

of rats thawing in their crammed tin. I laid
it on the floor, afraid they'd warm to life
and quiver under your dissecting knife.
The softened bodies slipped my forceps. You
said you'd feed the owl. I ran outside

before my gripped stomach could overflow,
but, in spite of the ice-edged air, it was too late:
the flood that filled me rose, spewed from my throat
the flesh of rats, the terrible chopped bits
splashing my skin, soiling the moonlit snow.

2

The next night, reading an electron micrograph
we studied small gray onion bulbs that bloomed
upon a field of flesh: my cancered throat.
I touched the skin outside the place and thought
of all the other times you had exhumed
disease, checked death, administered to grief.

It was a comfort, having you arrange
the tests, the doctors; I could drift behind,
wrapped in a fog of fear, as you coursed through
those sooty corridors. And once we got to
our waiting room, I wandered while you signed
the forms until I heard you, loud and strange,

spilling hot words. The cauldron of your voice
stirred up the patients – startled, they began
to twitch like torched twigs sputtering. You would
not simmer down, would not be cowed or good,
so two guards dragged you out. I sat alone,
listening to an old vet say, if he had a choice,

they never would resect his throat, he'd let
his body have its own way changing shape:
below the jaw he turned – a fist-deep cave.
At last I was escorted off by a hive
of women, stripped, and covered with a drape
as they talked shop. I wanted to admit

that I knew nothing, dreaded it would hurt;
instead, I asked the cost of medicine.
They laughed and told me no one paid that price,
besides, they'd had, with cancer, most success
from neither drugs nor knives. They rolled me then
before a huge steel-lipped machine – my heart

tripped, tachycardic. Before they left me there,
they whispered, "It is the mind that makes you well,
the aiming of the will." And I remembered
a friend who, when she lost her breasts, concurred,
felt unvoiced anger settled in each cell;
and one, through concentration, found a cure,

melting her lumps away inside her head.
But I could only focus on the glass rod
coming toward my throat. What had I never said,
what had I swallowed or falsely acknowledged?
The cold glass pressed my skin, slipped past, splintered,
and I woke up, still naked and afraid.

Beverly A. Smith

Rain So Thick It Looks Like Snow

The body grows inept from lack of use,
Always awkward, it grows older but no wiser.

I stumble towards a hug, not knowing how close to come,
How tight, how long.
(I have not practiced in years.)

A friend's hand lies on the table.
I take it and squeeze it, hoping to signal comfort,
fearing the message is garbled.
(I have no facility for languages.)

The body goes untouched for weeks
My mind makes aches for it,
Warning: It is still there,
It is still there.

November 1975

We sit together in the rainbow kitchen,
Speaking gently, our laughter glancing from the walls.
I feel calm and new.
Deep inside I am whirring softly,
With joy.

...
As if my body knew your suffering before the mind could,
I moaned and gagged, a deep continent away.
My body a witness to your pain.

March 12, 1977

Then there was the week my four best sisters/lovers/friends
(All of them in some way being each)

Flew away.

Enough sisters gone to touch the earth's far corners.

The oldest,

We began our journey before birth,

Crossed the sea for the first time,

Was in a place my voice could not reach.

The youngest,

Bound by our common skin, the color of our souls,

This one, who with affection and frustration I christen
"Peripatetic"

Was on the road again.

The smallest,

A fierce, bright presence always burning in my eyes,

Went South to join her sisters,

Struggled to regain our women's land—our woman-bodies.

The newest,

Dear sister, lover, friend,

Slipped from my hands in night's smallest hour.

Her spirit bruised, her body close to breaking,

She traveled to an alien place—

I didn't dare to follow.

They left me here alone,

In silence,

To puzzle out this life, this love.

March 16, 1977

Like the perpetual child I am, I wanted a fairy tale love.
Magic words and kisses—my own sleeping beauty.

As often happens in such tales,
My wish was granted—with a twist.

So I *have* become a princess, though I don't live happily after.
Rather, I am like the scores who were forbidden speech.
Those grim brothers weren't alone in wanting their women silent.

So since you will not hear me,
And friends have tired of listening,
I guess I'll go and tell it to the kitchen stove.

May 7, 1977

Rain so thick it looks like snow falls into this red-brick city.
Clouds grey down a harsh landscape, blur the Blue Hills.
Yesterday winter did return, though it's nearly middle-May.
White on green leaves,
Anomalous—almost—unless you're used to it.
So much for New England spring.

But summer will come,
Will come.
My hands, always brown, are browner,
Predict a transmutation of the rest,
Of all the rest.
What I must do is shut my eyes—
Tight.
Steel myself.
Hold on
Hold on
Hold out.

May 10, 1977

Heartshed

(for Lajuana)

You dream a heated chase.
Your heart pumps time through you
into lakes of fire
and I can't sleep at night
because you have found me.

You keep coming back, the one who knows
the sound they call

“in the beginning.”

It doesn't mean going backwards.

Our bones are built of spirals.

The sun
circling.

Ravens hang the walls
calling memory.
You could call it a war. It has been before.

I have killed you many times in jealousy,
beat you while you dreamed in the arms
of another lover.

You shot me down in a war
that was only our own,
my brother, my sister.
The names could be all that truly changes,
not love.

I walk into another room inside
your skin house.

I open your legs with my tongue.
The war is not over but inside you
the night is hot
and my fingers walk their way up your spine.

Your spirit rattles in your bones and yes
let's dance this all again
another beginning.

Memory is triggered
by polished stones spit up
from the center of the earth,
by ashy rock that crumbles in your hand.
Some are unborn children, others old ones
who chose to learn patience, to know currents.

You dream a solid red cliff. The sun rises again
over the eastern horizon. Saturn spins crazy
in her rings.

The names change.

Ravens call.

Lean up against me full with the words that have
kept you silent. Lean with the silence
that imagines you.

I forgive you, forgive myself
from the beginning
this heartshed.

A Hard Rain

I awaken to a sky with no sun
only clouds carrying rain
to China

not meant for here
but I am soaked, will not ripen.

It's not a seed that causes children
to bloom, or others to be sucked out
by a sterile whirlwind.

It's not blood or some strange moon
whistling hard overhead.

Fertility is the mind
signaled by the smell of yellow paint
stroked across a circle,
by a sound
that forces me up out of long silent nights.

It is a raw and wild taste that poises
at the end of my tongue
then dissolves.

Until I awaken again to swollen clouds
and your dark hand on my thigh,
the only hot sun I want to feel.

The Blood-Letting

It is the morning after
the morning after.
Your voice echoes like a broken
bottle muffled into my skin.
I won't let you do this
to myself, as for you
you can always do
what you want.

Again.

How am I to stop you with
stark words, promises
glued together with blood,
or with the smell of love
a distant memory?
Will it drive in to save us
once more? Or will the smell
be dried and baked into ribbons
against a rusty knife?
I know it was meant in beauty,
but inside there are voices
urging me on to another distance
to a place that is even more
intimate than this one.
It, too, is another morning
made of blood, but it is sunlight
on a scarlet canyon wall in
early winter.
It does not scatter the heart,
but gathers the branches tenderly
into a slender, dark woman.

Just to Go On

just to go on

when someone asks about a book
and then doesn't listen

when an important instance has taken place
that takes more than an instant to tell
and a friend's gaze wanders

when the mind is accustomed to racing
and learns to be quiet
yet not still
the emptiness of too many thoughts

just to go on

feeling
feeling one's crowded emptiness
without judging
one's death
allowing the tears to come
in utter repose

to go on

living without one's heart

instances of light and joy
read in a book
I feel by memory

the stars are in slow motion
arranging themselves for my rebirth

I am without vision

I hear the wetness of the gentle rain
and ache

just to go on

the foghorn sighs
the wind dances in my bedroom curtains
the wet streets sing under cars
and my dream for only this night is

just to go on

Changing Skin

This is the season for changing skin.
Yesterday a snake left hers
inches from the bantam's nest.
The day before, I found another
stretched up a tree, stuck
to the bark like scaly vine.
I imagined that snake rising
smooth as a magician's act:
the silent, sensuous climb and then
the grand finale of splitting husk,
easy discard of spent necessity.

This was the best illusion:
that what we are goes on forever,
only the surface changing. But I know
change begins in the cells, hidden
and unguessed. We feel it creeping
into our consciousness as a slight
discomfort a tightness in the throat
constriction at the breast. It hurts
to breathe ourselves big. Under the surface
memories twitch muscles knot
the strain of staying small.

What was etched into my cells
from the beginning was not
enough to build a life
on. Far behind my eyes
are hands in fists the shock
of a wall against my side my head
the second sharper pain. I know
nothing in the rules says I
have to survive.

Nothing in the rules says I ought
to survive. The school child knows selection
of the fittest knows the wrong color wrong
species wrong size counts you out.
Snakes eat other snakes and eggs
and if a chicken bleeds her sisters
shred her down to dust. We speak
in biological code; the animal signs
submission with voice high body low,
hopes for escape in staying small.
My muscles knot the strain my body remembers
what my mind refuses my body remembers
I forget to breathe.

Children learn stories with happy
endings bright prince to the rescue,
magic tricks to save the good.
Cinderella never had to choose
who lived or how never fought
ran away got caught. But if no
prince came, if no prince comes and she
won't die gentle according to the rules
she becomes the wicked daughter. Lock her
in the smallest room. Let her
scratch it on the walls
Be it done unto me now
and in the hour of my death.
Write it deep write
Any attempt to save yourself
is a crime punishable by law.

Five years in the country and still
I remember barbed wire
angled against imperfect children,
remember how guardians checked our letters,
how we sang mandatory hymns to locked doors.
Five years in the country and still
I dread the fencing.

Stretching the wire, I know
what I am walling out. The blue-eyed
boys live up the road and watch us
from their trucks. Gun racks grinning,
they dream of shooting pigeons one two three
just like that better than the man
at the circus. I know.
I watch them back.

Under the surface, memories knot
hands in my hair twist me down.
My throat tightens with the wire.
Barbs scratch across my wrist sign
another message to my cells.
It hurts to breathe. Here, if we survive,
it is not from habit.

This is the season for changing skin.
Five years in the country and still
I am learning what I have
to give up. This year
I've cut my hair. I worship
as I garden, by the moon.
There are no men on this land.
Five years ago a Quaker wife,
this year I am buying guns.

Early in the summer the bantam
went to nest laid her eggs
and set to defend ran off dogs
and snakes fierce in her living.
Of the dozen tiny eggs, one
hatched. I found the others,
a single hole cracked open, the chicks
still inside dry and rotting.

The second time I watched
counted days was there
to hear them calling in the eggs,
saw the first break the tiny
beak jabbing at the hole. Four times
I scratched shell away and found
wet chicks folded, crowded
in the eggs like clowns in too-small
cars saw them jerk muscles stiff from habit.
Clawing free of their protection they lurched
and tumbled crying with each breath
I saw them suddenly expand beside discarded
shells the shells streaked with blood.

The Anthropologist

she notices each intricate gesture
little intimacies
all touchings
fingers, lips, and the feet
whether they move forward or back
and what the eyes watch, and what the mouth
refrains from saying

every silence has its own geographies
of meaning

alone in the evening she dedicates herself
to the secret languages of night
she practices speaking from her belly
she talks to the masks on the wall
and precisely notes down their answers

with her own hands she has made these masks
using clay brought up from the lower valley
some say they are too raw, too animate
too much power resides in the corners of their mouths
too much rage threatens to escape the unlidded eyes

some would like to see them broken
throw them in the river!
return them to the mudmother!

as if each were a word which could be taken back
as if harm could ever be undone

she keeps them on her wall
no one will touch them
they watch everything

Her fears: they crawl into bed with her
sly and anonymous they burrow into her skin
settle themselves for a long sleep
in the tight foreboding cell

her worst fear: that she will become all ear
already the sound of women's lives crashes
around her head like a great wave
she is afraid of the tsunami which is building
gathering itself for the final word
although it is still far out at sea,
she can hear its dread rising

each day she grows more into the tree she will become
her soft heart digs its way deep
roots spreading
how silent she will be
how faithful to the sky she will become

she studies the homely gestures of women
and all the while she is longing
longing with a deep and heart splitting anguish
to take hold with them of their secret lives
fugitive and golden
under a dying sun

Waulking Song

Waulking tunes are sung by groups of Hebridean women as they work woolen cloth with their hands and feet to strengthen its weave. The women measure their task by the number of songs needed to complete the work, rather than by minutes or hours. Each waulking song has a narrative which may be altered by the lead singer, as well as a unique refrain so ancient that the meanings of its syllables have been lost; the refrains below may have been sung by women at work as much as a thousand years ago.

I

*É hó hì ura bhì,
Ho ro ho ì, o ho ro ho.*

At first she would not answer
when I asked what was wrong.

Then she told what had happened
that afternoon when she went in to work.

*Ho ro ho ì, ó ho ro ho,
É hó hì ura bhì.*

Later she gave me the shirt to mend,
a thin K-Mart cotton

with lines of yellow blue and red
running from grey to brighter plaid.

*É hó hì ura bhì,
Ho ro ho ì, o ho ro ho.*

She had worn it the winter we met.
Under the lines I felt her heart beat.

Many times I had held her and felt
her heart beating beneath that thin cloth.

*Ho ro ho ì, ó ho ro ho.
É hó hì ura bhì.*

II

*Ì u ru rù bhi u o,
Hó í abh o.*

In the summer haze she had gone to work.
The man with the knife stopped her.

He shoved her from the door to the straggling hedge.
He jerked at her shirt and ripped the seams.

*Chalain éileadh ò hi o,
Ro ho leathag.*

He cut the buttons off one by one.
He raped her and tried to cut her throat.

He tried to cut her throat. And he did.
The red of her blood crossed the plaid of her shirt.

*Ì u ru rù bhi u o,
Hó í abh o.*

He asked if she liked it.
When she would not say yes,

he glinted the knife and he laughed.
He laughed and he left. She lay in the dust,
smoked a cigarette, got up,
went home to her trailer, took a bath.

She washed the shirt, put it away,
and looked to see what else was torn.

*Chalain éileadh ò hi o,
Ro ho leathag.*

III

O ho i o hì ò,
Hao ri o hù ò.

We swore his knife would not part us,
yet fear divided us with many blades.

She did not want me to touch her,
to feel semen and dirt on her skin.

When I moved suddenly, she saw
the sun flash on the knife blade.

She wanted to know where
my hands were at all times.

When I slept with my arm around her,
she dreamed he had her pinned down
and woke night after night saying *no*
night after night saying *no*.

She feared that I would not touch her,
would not touch, and that I would.

Hao ri o hù ò,
Ro ho i o hì ò.

I wanted the red mark to peel
off her throat like a bandaid
so she would be her self
without this pain: unscarred, unchanged,
not a woman who could have been
dead behind a QuickStop store
a line of ants running from her neck
a woman her friends would not touch.

Ro ho i o hì ò,
O ho i o hì ò.

After three months we wanted her
over it, to be done with dying
while she heard her rape each time
a rock cracked under feet behind her
as she crossed an empty parking lot.
I heard her death each time
a friend spoke the word *rape*
as matter-of-fact as the evening news.

*O ho i o hì ò,
Hao ri o hù ò.*

That winter, on weekends, when we shared a bed,
we shared bad dreams. We twisted in sheets.

Some nights she heard her voice cry out
and woke herself, breath tearing her throat.

Some nights I felt her shake beside me,
caught in the hedge in December wind.

Before I touched her, I called her name
to wake her before his hand could reach.

We held hands as we talked in the dark.
The shirt lay folded, unmended, in my drawer.

*Hao ri o hù ò,
Ro ho i o hì ò.*

IV

*O ho ì ù ó,
Air fair all ill ó ho.*

It has been three years; the shirt
was mended, not thrown away.

We rise at dawn to dress for work.
I touch her bare arm. She is alive.

Her heartbeats rush under my fingers.
Her flesh is solid, not crumbled to dust.

*Air fair all ill ò ho,
Ro ho hao ri rì ó.*

Under my hands, her shoulders spread,
broad, an outcrop of limestone,
under her skin, layers of muscle,
from heft and lift, the weight of her work.

She has made herself strong, enough
to knock a man down, enough

to tell me one night what his hands
had done, the exact, secret wounds.

*Ro ho hao ri rì ó,
O ho ì ù ó.*

I wanted my hands to be rain for her
to wash away all hurt, the trace of blood.

I did what I could. I took out the shirt,
sewed the buttons back on, one by one,
sewed over each seam, twice, by hand.
He would not ruin what we had made.

*O ho ì ù ó,
Air fair all ill ó ho.*

She wore the shirt, walked alone to her job.
She would not live in tatters and shreds.

But some afternoons he got his death:
when we heard of a nurse off work, the men,
blackberry vines in an empty lot;
a woman raped at the Gulf station,
stabbed through both eyes with a screwdriver
so she would not see to find him later.

*Air fair all ill ó ho,
Ro ho hao ri rì ó.*

Then we could not bear witness to our life.
We bought beer and drank to become like stone,
no live woman or dead in our touch.
We cried out with the voice of falling rocks.
We fell asleep, dead weight, in each other's arms,
but always we swore that we would wake up.

*Ro ho hao ri rì ó,
O ho ì ù ó.*

It has been three years: I wake before dawn
in the dark. I think of the mended shirt.
It still hangs in her closet, the pattern
of red blue yellow lines seamed together.
Her scar has faded to a thin white line.
I can touch her breast. I can feel her heart beating.
He has not ruined what we have made.
At dawn we will rise to dress for work.
*O ho ì ù ó,
Air fair all ill ó ho.*

V

Hao ri o hù ò,

Ro ho i o hì ò.

When she got to work at five til 8
this morning, a woman named Millie was shot
in the parking lot as she left her car.

The man with the gun watched her blood
disappear into the asphalt. Her boss,
other women watched from a doorway.

At first she asked for help. The man
left to rape a woman in the next street.

In emergency she fought with nurses
who held her to the cart, said *Lie down.*

She said *I know I'm dying. I want
to sit up.* And she did, before she died,

while they were saying *Be quiet, you'll be better.*
She was a secretary, three months pregnant.

Ro ho i o hì ò,

O ho i o hì ò.

Do you want me to be quiet? You are tired
of the words *blood, rape, death.*

So am I. I had ended these lines
at the last refrain, but this morning I heard
about Millie. I remembered again your blood
in the dirt, your stomach exposed to the knife.

I want to keep harm from you. I want
to clothe and protect you with my arms.

I look at my hands that held needle and thread.
We resist by whatever means we can.

At work your arm has thrust, your hand
has hefted two feet of steel pipe

over a counter at the man who threatened.
You say *Next time I fight back even if I die.*

Your hands are not quiet; your voice is angry.
I love you because you have refused to die.

O ho i o hì ò,
Hao ri o hù ò.

This poem is for you, to pin to the mended shirt,
like the paper slip you find in a new pocket,

#49, but you know it's a woman,
all day folding sleeves around cardboard.

At work almost dead on her feet,
she folds the plaid thin fabrics.

She thinks of what her hands make at home.
When she leaves the line, the machines are silent.

Her steps make a poem to the rhythm of her heart,
like a poem for you, to pin to the mended shirt.

Hao ri o hù ò,
Ro ho i o hì ò.

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Words, music, and more information about waulking songs can be found in *Hebridean Folk songs: A Collection of Waulking Songs*, ed. Donald MacCormick (Oxford, 1969).

Cherríe Moraga

Until They Burn All the Books

A review of *Fight Back! Feminist Resistance to Male Violence*, edited by Frédérique Delacoste and Felice Newman. Published in 1981 by Cleis Press, P.O. Box 82181, Minneapolis, MN 55408. 398 pp. \$13.95

i tried to imagine the danger, to weigh rape against death and my muscles ached . . . to weigh rape against murder and my vagina tightened. to weigh rape against death against murder against life in pain against life in any possible shape against the taste of their blood in my teeth and my vagina tightened and i sweated and exuded the most hate i have ever hated and walked resolutely past the six of them toward the subway station clutching my keys between my fingers ready to shred skin like i'd been doing it all my life. (Mariana Romo-Carmona, p. 38)

Fight Back is a collection of articles, stories, poems, and graphics which depict and examine "Feminist Resistance to Male Violence." Besides the more than fifty selections that encompass an experiential and theoretical view of feminist resistance, *Fight Back* also serves as a resource manual, containing the how-to's of various forms of protest and self-defense, along with a national directory of resource organizations pertinent to violence against women and children.

Some of the stories in *Fight Back*, particularly the autobiographical accounts, are the most honest, heartfelt writing I have seen coming out of the feminist movement at large. The stories are grounded in each writer's struggle to reconcile the violence done her, but always with an eye toward a future that might be/that should be different.

We need to know that there are a multitude of moments in all of our lives when to continue breathing, to get up in the morning and go on fleshing out a freedom we can only dimly perceive and are often afraid of, is an act of heroism. I need to know how my mother did this. (Kate Moos, p. 42-43)

Fictionalized stories are interspersed between and among these personal narratives, bringing home the hard truth that the stories of our lives are as painfully real as fiction can be. The rapist, the child molester, the batterer is not some unknown "monster" nor merely the stuff of paperback novels and t.v. shows, but rather, as Wendy Stevens writes, he is as common as "the neighbor who pushes [your] car in the winter." This is the same man who "molests [your] children in the spring" (p. 153).

It is these stories, fact and fiction, along with the poetry and graphics, that provide the heartbeat of *Fight Back*—the blood-and-guts manifestation of the passion of women who resist male violence and live to tell about it.

My major criticism of the book is that much of the valuable material in the collection appears outside of any historical or theoretical framework. *Fight Back* contains no major introduction, has no section titles (only numbers), and provides no editorial description of each section. For readers unacquainted with the women's movement, the material lacks connection to a diverse and vital movement and history of struggle. Instead, it is left up to the reader and the breadth of her experience to draw the thread of connection between the various sections and subjects being discussed.

After an in-depth reading and re-reading of the material, I derived the following areas of concern as they appear within each section:

The book begins with the stories of women who have suffered and survived some form of male violence: rape, child abuse, incest, homophobic attack, medical and psychiatric assault. The stories represent a range of women—rural, Black, daughters of immigrants, middle-class, married, Lesbian, Asian-American, city-dwellers—giving testimony to the fact that violence against women knows no class or color boundaries nor sexual preference. The theme which reverberates throughout the entire first section is that *survival*, itself, is an act of resistance.

Section Two provides a historical and theoretical overview of the anti-rape and battered Women's Movement. It especially focuses on the political and practical issues affecting the grass-roots development of women's refuges. Major concerns are how to get funding, maintaining commitment to feminist principles while providing a social service, confronting opposition from the Right, and increasing

sensitivity to cultural differences among and toward the people being served. One form of *fighting back* is this kind of organization-building.

Of course, the most severely unsanctioned form of resistance by women is to meet violence with violence—specifically, killing in self-defense. In the third section, the stories of “women whose attackers didn’t get away with it” are told. Through trial descriptions, newspaper clippings, and correspondence, the legal and political implications of this form of resistance are examined. Some of these women are freed. Some are still in prison.

Inez Garcia. Joann Little. Yvonne Wanrow. Jennifer Patri. Claudia Thacker . . . Lenore Coons . . . Agnes Scott. Marlene Roan Eagle. Miriam Grieg. Gloria Maldonado . . . Roxanne Gay. Dessie Woods . . . (p. 161)

In the section that follows, four, *Fight Back* offers a description of a movement of women who are preparing to defend themselves *before* the crisis, in the event of a crisis—to use their hands, and bodies, and good sense as their most valuable weapon. The bottom line being that women believe themselves worth defending. This line of thinking and level of consciousness directly link these karate-kicking women with those who kill in self-defense. As Nadia Telsey writes, “The martial arts are most importantly about empowerment.”

Section Five, the longest section of the book, is devoted to empowering women by our taking control of the images that tell lies about our sexuality and, according to the contributors, encourage men to rape and batter us. The one hundred pages or so that make up this section include numerous examples of “actions” feminists have taken against the pornography industry and the pornographic-minded, e.g., defacing offensive billboards or displays of pornography in bookstores, performing symbolic rituals of feminist resistance, giving multi-media presentations to counteract the violent messages transmitted through pornography, and demonstrating at City Hall and, even, the Pentagon.

The final section of articles, six, is what I understand to be the “visionary” section, which attempts to offer some Lesbian Feminist strategies for further survival and ultimately for a future not consumed by male violence.

a change
different
no more willing victims
no more willing victims
powerless NO!
powerfully free!

Although the six sections in their entirety reflect an impressive list of concerns, *Fight Back*, for all its 400 double-columned pages, contains no mention of the reproductive rights movement, including sterilization abuse and abortion, gives only cursory treatment to the Women in Prison movement, and never once directly addresses welfare rights. Is it merely coincidence that the sectors of the feminist resistance movement that are given serious attention in *Fight Back* reflect the areas where large numbers of white middle-class women are involved (e.g., the anti-porn movement)? A thorough reading of *Fight Back* makes it clear that the editors chose to focus on the kinds of violence against women that most often combine with sexual assault, like battering, incest, rape, child abuse. It is the editors' prerogative to focus on any concerns they choose. But as feminist editors, it is essential that the intent and purpose of the book be stated very clearly from the beginning. Without this, the grossest misconceptions and ignorances about our movement are propagated. In this case, *Fight Back* ignores this responsibility.

These are difficult and important considerations for feminist editors. Clearly, Frédérique Delacoste and Felice Newman approached the compilation of *Fight Back* from an activist perspective, in that they *actively* solicited and developed articles (through correspondence, interviews, and research) that would have otherwise gone unseen. This same activist mentality should have been applied to decisions concerning how the book could be made the most accessible to women in organization, format, and price.

The bulk of the analytical articles appearing in *Fight Back* are written by women who, like the editors, are activists. In general, these writings seem to reflect two somewhat contradictory *opinions* about violence against women and to incorporate, as well, two contradictory *approaches* to feminist resistance. I will be focusing on these analytical pieces for the remainder of the review.

Quoting Ti-Grace Atkinson, Sidney Spinstler outlines the two possible approaches that are reflected in *Fight Back*: the *strategic*

and the *tactical*. According to Atkinson, *strategy* is a long-range offensive, designed to achieve certain conditions not presently in effect. *Tactics* include short-range activities, which are supportive to, but not necessarily part of, the main thrust of the strategic attack.

The women who see violence against women as existing within a "network of oppressions" tend to subscribe to the first approach, while the women who see violence against women as *the* single issue upon which all oppressions hinge usually employ the second.

Strategists confront a range of issues that may not directly affect the tactician, for they are usually concerned with establishing programs to combat violence against women that *last*, and *last* within the particular community they serve; that is, women of diverse cultural backgrounds, with varying degrees of education, economic privilege, and neighborhood and family support. Therefore, the strategists in *Fight Back* are for the most part women whose identity (Third World women) or whose political work (working in battered women's shelters and rape crisis centers) forces them to take on a range of political issues and practical concerns. Describing a kind of identity politics that is based on a multi-issued approach to political organizing, Hilda Hidalgo, a Puerto Rican Lesbian Feminist, writes:

Many social indicators document the oppression of Third World Lesbians. Personal and institutional oppression are an ever present reality in our lives. Classism, racism, sexism, and homophobia are the dominant values . . . used to impose and justify the triple or quadruple oppression imposed on Third World Lesbians.

In agreement with Hidalgo, Susan Schechter, a Battered Women's activist, states:

It is time for us to recognize that struggles for self-determination other than our own are going on and should be supported by dialoguing and listening to Third World women in our communities. (p. 97)

Renae Scott's "Doing Community Outreach to Third World Women" and Barbara Smith/The Combahee River Collective's "Twelve Black Women: Why Did They Die?" provide some concrete guidelines and examples for building broad-based community support/involvement in feminist organizing.

What became clear through my reading was that this multi-issued approach to feminist resistance was not a given to most of the white women when they first began their organizing work. But

instead, through and *because of* their work with real-life women of various backgrounds, perspectives, and means, they expanded their definition of feminism and their approach to feminist political work. In "Working in the Heart of the Monster," Karen Clark, a Minnesota state legislator, describes how *fighting back* necessitates working on all fronts—within unions, churches, in neighborhoods, in Congress—wherever women live, suffer, and die and wherever those life and death policies are made and transacted.

On the whole, the accounts of these feminist organizers are quite inspiring, depicting a grass-roots movement of women who can learn political lessons from practical situations and can translate them into further and deeper progressive action.

Conversely, I was quite disappointed and discouraged by the articles (for the most part in the anti-porn and "visionary" sections) written by women who persist in a single-issued tactical approach to feminist resistance. Contrary to Ti-Grace Atkinson's definition, these articles, which advocate zap acts as the primary means of resistance and separatism as the end-goal, do little to support building long-range strategies.

One article that especially disturbed me is a piece by Pam McAllister, "Feminist Law-Challenging Actions," in which she makes a case for feminists performing vigilante acts "in order to challenge the patriarchal law to do the job it pretends to do." She accurately describes vigilantism as an especially American phenomenon with the Ku Klux Klan emerging as its arch-representative. Although, of course, critical of the KKK, McAllister makes little attempt to analyze the dangerous implications of women operating politically in a way that might link them with right-wing reactionary forces. She gives only cursory reference to such implications when stating, for instance, that the primary argument against castrating (!) rapists as a legalized form of punishment is that such a law might discriminate against the queer, poor, and Third World. A token gesture of responsible thinking, at best! For it is the KKK that lynched Black men for merely *looking* at white women. If it were a Black man in the South who was accused of rape, let me tell you now, the KKK boys would gladly join with white feminist vigilantes in seeing the accused castrated and dead.

McAllister cites the "Temperance Ladies" of the late nineteenth century as our vigilante foremothers. Both the temperance women

and the single-issue anti-porn activists ignore the role of class as it affects the functioning of booze and porn, respectively. However dangerously these may affect women's lives, the problem will not be eliminated without an understanding of the intertwining roots of economic and sexual oppression.

How are anti-porn activists reconciling the fact that their tactics and analysis often align them with conservative reactionaries? For example, Marcia Womongold, in combatting the sexual slavery of women, suggests that we "appeal to decency, public safety, and human rights." Is it not the same right-wing "pro-family" people who try to close down shelters through "lesbian baiting" and also advocate new standards of "decency" in this country, largely through censorship, anti-abortion, and anti-gay legislation? The rhetoric of the two groups is often frighteningly similar.

D.A. Clarke rightfully acknowledges that the "power of official censorship will be used to support the privileged and silence the dissenter." Clarke claims that "feminist anti-porn actions are therefore not undertaken to advocate governmental suppression . . . rather they are committed in the tradition of civil disobedience." But these actions are for the most part symbolic and imagistic in nature, as illustrated in *Fight Back*, where contributors espouse a kind of *conceptual* feminism not grounded by actual experience with the *people* the pornography industry *directly* affects: women who work in the pornography industry, prostitutes, and (do I dare say) even the men who partake of it. A grassroots approach to anti-pornography organizing, I believe, would necessitate anti-porn activists giving up their single-minded conviction that men are inherently evil and that pornography is *the* foremost manifestation of that evil. And ultimately expanding anti-porn work beyond the conceptual would serve to more realistically, and therefore effectively, get at those aspects of this system which damages us all economically as well as psycho-sexually.

This failure to realistically examine the violent sexual exploitation of women in all its complexity parallels the neglect of race and class analysis by anti-porn activists and lesbian separatists. Women as a group are portrayed as peacefully existing in some melting-pot of female identity. But as Jane Howard states, "Just because we feel a similar pain, doesn't mean the rest of our lives are similar." She goes on to say,

The image of women as a "class," as a group of people who share the same suffering and the potential for a vibrant unity, is widespread and compelling. But it is also an image that gets fed by racism and class oppression, . . . that often obscures differences between women, denies the diversity or even the existence of various cultures, and yet assumes we are all in this together.

Exactly. So many white women fail to grasp that Third World women do not merely share *oppression* with members of our race, but also *culture*—that positive, life-giving, identity-building force which few Third World women I know re willing to give up.

A successful feminist resistance movement and, therefore, a feminist future, hinge on our embracing diversity, which women of color in the movement attest to, and broadening definitions that restrict our ultimate goals—as the anti-rape and anti-battering activists in *Fight Back* have done. Finally, it means giving up the simplistic illusion and solution of political purity. Unfortunately, *Fight Back* does not conclude with such a strategic approach. Instead it offers seemingly contradictory strategies, espousing spiritualism and gun-carrying in one breath, and Third World lesbian coalition-building and lesbian separatism in the next. I'm not really sure what final statement the editors intended to make; whether the contradictions are by conscious intent or are a sign of poor selection and organization. But one thing is for sure—if the intent of *Fight Back!* is to focus on sexually related violence against women, it seems appropriate to ask, *how do you stop the sexual exploitation without stopping the sex?* *Fight Back!* gives few clues; the visionary section offers no picture of a positive sexualized future for lesbians or heterosexual women.

What *Fight Back!* does offer, however, is very valuable. It provides the *in-print* verification that the feminist resistance movement has been alive and kicking for over a decade and has entered the eighties with some well-founded experience tucked under its belt, some hard lessons learned, and some very important work done. Until they burn all the books, *Fight Back!* will give testimony to the evolution of our movement and to some of the flesh-and-blood female reasons for it and behind it.

Not at Any Cost

A review of *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* by Arlene Blum. Published by Sierra Club Books, California, 1980. \$14.95.

In her introduction to *Annapurna A Woman's Place*, Arlene Blum, leader of the "successful" 1978 expedition by ten women, quotes a male climbing guide she once knew: "There are no good women climbers. Women climbers either aren't good climbers or they aren't real women." Although Blum claims that personal reasons motivated the women climbers as much as a need to respond to the sexism of the mountaineering world, it is a desire to prove something to the male world that emerges in this book as the main explanation for the all-women trip to Annapurna. Because of this, the book raises important questions about women achieving according to male values, and what a feminist concept of achievement might be.

The introduction documents the need for women to prove themselves to men, by describing the sickening sexism of male "heroes" such as Sir Edmund Hillary ("the problems and dissensions in multinational expeditions pale into insignificance compared with those that can be brought about by a single woman in a party") and one of his expedition members ("if you want to climb with the expedition, you ought to be willing to sleep with all the men on the team"). Described here also are the achievements of the very few women, such as Fanny Bullock Workman and Annie Peck, who defied or ignored these conditions and climbed high mountains at the beginning of the century.

Blum enters into a certain level of discussion about the situation, capabilities and aspirations of women climbers. Unfortunately, while making superficially positive statements about women's strength, she also makes many defensive statements that collude with, and reinforce, the prejudices of the male-identified part of her audience. Most of these take the form of reassurances that, despite

their extraordinary toughness, these women are perfectly "normal." The most explicit are her assurances of their "femininity," which in some cases includes their being good mothers. Less explicit, but always clearly implied, is their heterosexuality, and where "proof" (such as a husband) is just not available, a noticeable silence surrounds the personal life of the climber concerned.

In the first chapter, for example, we are introduced to the team members one at a time. The first description is of Vera Watson, "the proper lady of the group," and includes phrases like "outwardly feminine, even fluttery" and "slim and elegant in her beige traveling suit and Dior glasses." The second description begins, "Irene Miller was already writing a letter to her family," and goes on to tell us she was the only mother on the team with children still at home, while Blum's introduction of her own personal situation reads, "Leaving my boyfriend, John Percival, when the flight was called was very hard." While I have no doubt that these descriptions are accurate, the emphasis on family commitment and heterosexual relationships seems unduly prominent.

Blum's attempts to "prove" the "femininity" of these strong women sometimes verges on homophobia. Despite constant reference to the heterosexual relationships of team members, there is noticeable caution about describing emotional bonds between the women. The first time that a close tie of affection between two of the climbers is mentioned, the author explains it in relation to their husbands: "In addition to both living in Europe and being superb technical climbers, Liz and Alison were both married to renowned alpinists, with whom they usually climbed." I got the feeling that Alison Chadwick, in particular, was a problem to describe, because of her unswerving commitment to making the climb an all-woman enterprise—an attitude that provoked even greater efforts on Blum's part to establish Alison as a "true woman."

Clearly the conflict between being a good climber and a "true woman" only exists when men are allowed to define women. Similarly, the desire for "glory," the idea of "conquest," and the willingness to respond to a personal challenge with a one-in-ten chance of death, all seem to be part of a relationship to mountain climbing that has been defined exclusively by men and needs to be questioned by women. We need carefully to evaluate the reasons why we would lose our lives in a struggle to prove that we, too, can achieve that

kind of "glory." This book is, in many ways, a testament that furnishes proof of women's ability and courage, but the underlying assumptions about what constitutes success, or what deserves glory, are never questioned.

Anyone who has read Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* cannot help thinking of mountain climbing, as men have defined it, in the context of a long history of men's need to control and contain the power of nature and of women. To love a mountain is not necessarily to climb to its highest point and plant a national flag on its head, any more than to love a woman is to put a ring on her finger and say she is "yours." As things stand now, the definition of a "successful" climb revolves entirely around the question of "summitting," not around any other aspect of the experience, or its value to the participants. Feminists might consider a redefinition of "success," when two women's lives are lost and a great variety of incidents, both positive and negative, occur during the team's stay on the mountain. The attention paid to interaction between members (noticeably neglected on this trip), new skills learned, relationships with the outdoors, and personal satisfaction of all kinds, seem to be important components of overall success. The brief moment when two white women and two Sherpa men stood on the summit of Annapurna, planting their various flags, may have been what all that effort and the considerable expense was for, but I wonder how much of the women's satisfaction at that moment was a direct inheritance from the white man's imperialism in the natural world.

Another unwelcome inheritance from the white man is the uneasy relationship that Blum describes between climbers and Sherpas (who are, of course, also climbers, but are never directly identified as such). Since there was no advance questioning of the system, the team finds itself slotted into the old established routine, where visiting climbers use the labor of local people to help them in a variety of ways. Since high-altitude climbing is a regulated industry in Nepal, there are all sorts of rules and regulations that control the pay and conditions of work for both porters, who carry enormous loads from the last accessible road to the base camp, and Sherpas, who work at high altitudes, climbing and carrying loads, often to the summit itself.

The Sherpas are a tribal people of Tibetan origin, who are

physically adapted to living at high altitudes, and so are unlikely to suffer from the altitude sickness that often afflicts visitors. Although they share in the dangers, and are skilled in very difficult climbing techniques, they always have the status of servants to the team "members," and get little or no share in the "glory" of reaching the top. Like other servants, they can be rendered invisible, as when Blum describes the pleasure felt by many of the women at the "absence of men" on the expedition, right after she recounts a particularly difficult piece of climbing shared with two Sherpas.

Blum's account reveals a consistent level of discomfort with the relationships between the team of all-white women and the Sherpas. The women, who are addressed by Sherpas as "Memsahib" or "woman master," in the tradition of the British raj, express feelings ranging from pity to guilt. This guilt first shows up in relation to the porters, when Blum protests that she cannot afford to pay them extra for unloading boxes from the bus. Later that night "at dinner, Lopsang watched as most of the members ordered beer at fifteen rupees a bottle—a day's wages for a local porter. I blushed as I imagined him thinking, memsahibs have little money for porters—much for beer."

Although there are moments of companionship between "members" and Sherpas that appear to transcend the uneasy master/servant dynamic, on the whole Blum's efforts to improve the system are so tentative as to make matters worse. A prime example is her attempt to arrange, from the U.S., the inclusion of some women Sherpas in the team, who might benefit from the prestige and high pay that goes with high-altitude work. Inevitably, this plan, conceived without any understanding of the Sherpas' culture, leads to the hiring of only two women, both of whom are relatives of the head Sherpa, and who are expected to do laundry and dishwashing as well as to improve (male) Sherpa morale by their presence. When faced with this situation, the exact opposite of her intentions, Blum decides to dismiss the women, but is persuaded to take them along as far as base camp.

Later, when the team is established high on the mountain, the Sherpas go on strike, leaving the women in a storm and causing Blum to return to base camp, where she negotiates with them to stay, which they agree to do for more money. Again the liberal guilt is in evidence, as she says, "I was relieved that the Sherpas had not left, and was willing to pay them the extra money. Though

high by local standards, their daily wage of about \$2.50 did not seem so to us, considering the perilous work they do. We had already planned to give them a lot of extra pay in the form of bakshish [tips] at the end of the trip." This incident is difficult to understand, even though a whole chapter is devoted to the events surrounding it. It seems that there is a great deal of racism, in the form of cultural insensitivity on the part of the women, particularly surrounding their insistence that the Sherpas leave their sleeping bags at the various camps to avoid carrying unnecessary weight. This apparently offends the Sherpas, for reasons the women never understand, but which seem to go beyond their very American analysis that attributes the Sherpas' concern to the monetary value of the bags.

Things are further complicated by the obvious sexism of the Sherpas toward the women climbers. It is at this point of high tension in the climb that the Sherpas revert to paternalism, perhaps in an effort to redress the power balance. During the strike negotiations, the head Sherpa reveals his attitude: "Men are men and women are women. You should have men along with the first summit team. We don't want you women to disappear on the mountain." Although Blum disagrees, the problem, like so many others, is put to one side. The Sherpas temporarily take charge, ignoring Blum's plan for the next stage of the climb, and insist on leading the way themselves. Only the illness of one of the rebellious Sherpas brings this particular conflict to an end.

Despite Alison Chadwick's constant dissatisfaction at the inclusion of male Sherpas in the summit team, and Blum's own desire for the first attempt to be made only by women, the Sherpas' determination wins out. When the women finally decide to include only one Sherpa in the summit team, the Sherpas disagree, forcing the two women members to take along all three of the Sherpas who are at the high camp IV, ultimately leaving one at camp V and taking the other two to the summit. This leaves no Sherpa support at all for the second summit team, consisting of Alison Chadwick and Vera Watson. Annie Whitehouse, originally included in the second team, backs out of the attempt, insisting that it is not safe, despite strong pressure by Alison and Vera.

On October 15th, 1978, Vera Komarkova, Irene Miller, Chewang Rinjing and Mingma Twering reach the summit of Annapurna. Piro Kramar, originally part of that first team, waits at camp V, giving

up the last stretch because of a frostbitten finger, choosing, instead, to safeguard her future as a surgeon. The next day, Blum tries, over the radio, to talk Alison and Vera out of going up to the top alone, but they set off, watched from below by the film crew, until approaching darkness cuts off contact. No more is heard of them until three days later, when two Sherpas go up to look for them and find their bodies, which are never recovered.

I recently saw the film of this expedition to Annapurna and found myself, along with the rest of the audience, swept into a wave of emotion as the climbers reached the top of the mountain. Like the book, the film is full of beautiful photography, and the music adds an atmosphere in which it is easy to feel elated at the women's achievement. But later, despite understanding the appeal of "success" in a man's world, I felt cheated, as I realized how many important qualities these women had to put aside in order to "prove" their strength and courage on men's terms.

It is hard to imagine, in this world that is so inexorably male-defined, what a feminist definition of "success" might be in the context of high-altitude climbing. Certainly one component would remain the demonstration of strength and courage, measured perhaps by the willingness of each woman to push her limits and reach new personal heights, but not at any cost. I would hope, too, that success would include careful attention to group process, the willingness to say "no" to challenges that present a high danger to life, and a way of organizing the tasks of the expedition without exploiting anyone.

A Treatise on Loving Ourselves

A review of *Chosen Poems—Old and New* by Audre Lorde. Published 1982 by W. W. Norton & Company, 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10036. 115 pp. \$12.95 cloth, \$5.95 paper.

Not long ago I dreamed a woman holding fire in her hands. She cradled a volcano of rage as if it were a child, or her aging mother. The flames were intense, roaring, but she was not destroyed, as Audre and I watched.

This monumental collection of Audre Lorde's work spans thirty years. The earliest poem, "Memorial I," is dated 1950 and speaks:

If you come I will be silent
nor speak harsh words to you—
I will not ask you why, now
nor how, nor what you knew.

The poet doesn't realize her own power yet, but approaches it cautiously, begins to open into it. Contrast this with a stanza from the last poem included, "Need: A Choral of Black Women's Voices":

Borrowed hymns veil the misplaced hatred
saying you need me you need me you need me
like a broken drum
calling me black goddess black hope black strength
black mother
you touch me
and I die in the alleys of Boston
with a stomach stomped through the small of my back
a hammered-in skull in Detroit
a ceremonial knife through my grandmother's used vagina
my burned body hacked to convenience in a vacant lot
I lie in midnight blood like a rebel city
bombed into false submission
and our enemies still sit in power
and judgment
over us all.

Here the poet has claimed her own power. A transformation has progressively taken place with each poem in between. She takes her responsibility as a tribal person, a warrior woman. The silence she was taught because she was born black, born a woman, born herself has been undone, set afire. Perhaps beneath all spaces of voicelessness is a rage.

In this collection she has chosen to recognize the rage, has recognized herself. Rather than be consumed she has chosen to speak, and knows that it is not without risk. In *The Cancer Journals** Lorde says: “. . . I am afraid—you can hear it in my voice—because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation and that always seems fraught with danger.”

The rage is transformed into power, rather than an undoing. She refuses to become a victim of hatred, and also refuses to give her strength to the enemy by fighting back with the same hatred, which is often the first instinct. In the poem, “A Poem for Women in Rage,” the enemy becomes the victim of her own hatred, which she has never tried to understand, and the poet emerges victorious:

the woman with white eyes has vanished
to become her own nightmare
a french butcher blade hangs in my house
love's token

She has turned the hatred around by her own understanding, her own love. She has conquered her own fear.

Lorde's work has been a tremendous influence on my work and the work of many other writers, especially Third World women. She, like many of us, has been the embodiment of other people's fears. She is black, is a woman, is a lesbian, and throughout it all a warrior. Her voice is tribal, circular, and she has beautifully maintained it in a world that constantly feeds the illusion of separation, rather than connection between all. It is especially difficult for most Third World people to speak in a language that by its own nature is “anti-tribal,” a language that divides the world into objects, and is linear in structure. Meridel LeSueur has spoken: “*I remember the future,*” *the Indians say. This is what we must do. The linear leads straight to the bomb . . . the language of the Indians has no nouns. The*

* *The Cancer Journals*, Spinsters, Ink, RD 1, Argyle, NY 12809.

*language is based on relationships . . .** Lorde takes the language, sharpens it like a knife.

It is a struggle to be who we are in "a land where other people live," because they have given us a mirror that would have us believe a false reflection, a reflection that would whiten our bones, our very hearts, our dreams. It forces a constant war, one in which we've paid dearly with our relatives:

yet how many of our sisters' and daughters' bones
whiten in secret
whose names we have not yet spoken
whose names we have never spoken
I have never heard their names spoken.

("The Evening News")

She names them to keep them alive.

But even this war has been used to clarify her vision, rather than to destroy it. As a survivor she has developed her warrior vision. It is a circular vision, takes in all senses. The reality is rooted, rounded, like a woman. All this time we have been taught by the mirror that being a woman, black, with tribal sensibilities is a "primitive state." We were lied to. It is, rather, an evolution, as Lorde proves in this collection of poems.

The poet has a tribal consciousness which realizes that there is no separation, that all are her children, her mothers. She knows that love is the gravity. In the poem, "To My Daughter the Junkie on a Train," she speaks for "a long-legged girl with a horse in her brain." She takes the child's false dreaming into herself, takes the pain as her own blood, and ultimately, heals, connects. Pain binds us, even madness.

In the poem, "Now," she chants so that we realize the sly trick of separation:

Woman power
is
Black power
is
Human power . . .

* *We Sing Our Struggle, A Tribute to Us All*, edited by Mary McAnally, Cardinal Press, 76 North Yorktown, Tulsa, OK.

which is: woman
is not separate from
black
is not separate from
human
now.

Her own blood children are often the cadence, the rhythm, the meaning in her poems. With them, through them she talks herself into the future, knowing there is no separation. She teaches them and is taught. Especially moving lines from the poem, "For Each of You," are:

Remember
our sun
is not the most noteworthy star
only the nearest

and,

Each time you love
love as deeply
as if it were
forever
only nothing is
eternal.

Like these, other poems in this collection have an intense sensuality. Body is not a division between mind and spirit. Lorde reaffirms that woman is rich, dark, fertile, and sweet. There need be no shame between women:

Out of my flesh that hungers
and my mouth that knows
comes the shape I am seeking
for reason.
The curve of your waiting body
fits my waiting hand
your breasts warm as sunlight
your lips quick as young birds
between your thighs the sweet
sharp taste of limes.

And from "Love Poem":

Greedy as herring-gulls
or a child

I swing out over the earth
over and over
again.

One of the most important poems to speak of, and a poem that is probably the prelude to her collection, *The Black Unicorn*,* is "The Winds of Orisha." In this poem she calls forth her own tribal history. She calls forth the stories, the myths, the legends that have been a part of her often unspoken history since time immemorial, the power of which will overcome "the pages of their daily heralds."

We were not born into the struggle without weapons, without words and dreams to remember, which ancient stories, legends, evoke. We will always have a part in them, *as long as we can speak*:

This land will not always be foreign.
How many of its women ache to bear their stories
robust and screaming like the earth erupting grain
or thrash in padded chains mute as bottles
hands fluttering traces of resistance
on the backs of once lovers
half the truth
knocking in the brain like an angry steampipe
how many
long to work or split open
so bodies venting into silence
can plan the next move?

Silence is deadly when used not to balance but to cut out tongues. It is a power that would lead to our destruction, to our forgetting ourselves, and would keep us from "remembering the future." Language, stories do help recreate the world, keep it spinning:

Impatient legends speak through my flesh
changing this earth's formation

I understand that poems from *The Black Unicorn* were not gleaned and included in the collection because, in Lorde's words, "the wholeness of that sequence/conversation cannot yet be breached." Even so, I feel the exclusion is a weakness because *The Black Unicorn* is the center around which this collection revolves. Perhaps the only way to have solved it would have been to have included the *whole* book as a section in itself.

* *The Black Unicorn*, 1978, W. W. Norton Co., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10036.

Chosen Poems—Old and New is a book of centuries of courage. It is a beautiful weapon in the war against the images we, as Third World women, are taught to believe. It is the reaffirmation of our own blood, our own rage. Lorde claims herself, and by doing so gathers all of us together, denying no history, no matter how painful.

This collection could be called a treatise on loving ourselves. It speaks a scalding truth, no vision is spared. Perhaps the refrain of this collected work could be:

How much of this truth can I bear to see
and still live
unblinded?

Lorde has spoken well for many of us, and helped clear the way for many of us to speak. This collection is truly fire in her hands.

Gloria I. Joseph

"A Bridge and Field of Women"

A review of *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, by Audre Lorde. Crossing Press, Trumansburg, NY 14886. 256 pp. \$16.95 cloth, \$7.95 paper.

Zami is a biomythography—a form combining elements of history, biography and myth.

Newly coined words are often curiously intriguing in that they open new vistas; they cause us to see, appreciate and understand more than we realize we have the capacity to do. Audre Lorde's *Zami*, a product of the new form, is similarly intriguing. It provides a fruitful source which makes it possible to concretize and personify the full meaning of the terms, woman-identified woman, and relationships between Black women. Thus, it serves as a conduit for the clarification of the core of being Black and woman and surviving.

The book offers the reader an illuminating, and experientially rich literary feast. Vicariously we experience Lorde's *joie de vivre* and her painful encounters. We feel her womanness, her strength, fears and pain as she steadfastly ploughs through her childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, experiencing, perceiving, rejecting and accepting life's complexities.

The richness of the book lies in the particulars of the events in her life, the backdrops from which they emerge and the writing itself. The story of a Black woman, born in the prewar depression and growing up in Harlem, U.S.A., would be sufficient for a great book, but Lorde gives us so much more. Her superior craft and creativity highlight the triumphs, tribulations, struggles and successes.

Graphic descriptions take us through Lorde's childhood as a legally blind, non-speaking yet vocally loud, recalcitrant, yet strategically obedient youngster, ". . . My mother was pinching my ear off one bright afternoon, while I lay spread-eagled on the floor of the Children's Room [in the library] like a furious little brown toad, screaming bloody murder and embarrassing my mother to death . . . Suddenly, I looked up, and there was a library lady standing over me.

'Would you like to hear a story, little girl?' Part of my fury was because I had not been allowed to go to that secret feast called story hour because I was too young, and now here was this strange lady offering me my own story."

In this powerfully lyrical work, Lorde's beginning chapters portray the family's style of coping with ever-insidious and constant racism, coupled with the conflicts inherent in being transplanted from one culture to another. The description of the mother's role reflects the travails that so many Black mothers have suffered; with body and soul scarred, tempered and strengthened, they protect their children from what they consider the too harsh realities of being Black and young and very vulnerable to the violence and cruelties of the racist American society.

"... As a very little girl, I remember shrinking from a particular sound, a hoarsely sharp, guttural rasp, because it often meant a nasty glob of grey spittle upon my coat or shoe an instant later. My mother wiped it off with the little pieces of newspaper she always carried in her purse. Sometimes she fussed about low-class people who had no better sense nor manners to spit into the wind..." Such events are woven into the backdrop of a holistic worldview, informed by the disciplines of sociology, psychology, history, mythology and religion.

The specifics of the West Indian culture and its impact on the family life are told with verve, leaving us with lucid, lingering images of that paragon of culture—Caribbean life! Lorde describes the island where her mother was born—"Carriacou, a magic name like cinnamon, nutmeg, mace, the delectable little squares of guava jelly each lovingly wrapped in tiny bits of crazy-quilt wax paper cut precisely from bread wrappers, the long sticks of dried vanilla and the sweet-smelling tonka bean, chalky brown nuggets of pressed chocolate for cocoa-tea, all set on a bed of wild bay laurel leaves, arriving every Christmas time in a well wrapped tea tin."

With candor and clarity, the writer weaves detailed intimate aspects of everyday occurrences and behaviors. The racism in religious and educational institutions, and the young woman's initiation into sex, both heterosexual and homosexual, are depicted without sensationalism or high drama. That is not to say that the traumatic, dynamic elements are missing, nor are they belittled, but rather told in a believable and forthright manner. There is a moving and pain-

ful story of an abortion, and other experiences to which many Black girls growing up in America can relate. The white store owner with the drooling eyes, lascivious mind and lecherous fingers furtively trying to make some kind of physical contact; the Black male school-mate who threatens with violence or mind fucks if not allowed sexual liberties; and relationships with "politically enlightened" white male and female leftists.

In her biomythography, Lorde recreates her past. She delivers the message that until one acknowledges one's whole past, and dignifies it with an honest and frank examination of its nature, however painful the process, one cannot be free for a future of one's own. The author informs us that we must learn from our past and not romanticize it but have the courage, the zest to "re-live" it, to tell it like it was. For, if we move through experiences avoiding their meanings, they lurk in the unconscious and haunt us like a shadow constantly in evidence no matter where the sun.

The importance of female friends is essential to the book. Lorde's first true friend is Gennie, a Black high school chum who was, "the first person in my life that I was ever conscious of loving." The two teenagers perform with a daring that brings both laughter and sadness to the reader. The two are filled with the bravado of youth as they establish, fight, and conquer worlds of their own making. We can identify with them as they go about the business of beating the system: the institutions, the authorities, the family, parents, the school teacher, the government, officials, and civil servants. They play hooky, smoke cigarettes, sass adults with risqué words, and in their defiance feel that they have accomplished that which has never been accomplished or done before. In their outrageous dress, they parade through the streets of New York City as gypsies, hussies, Mexican princesses or witches. The relationship with Gennie is brief and cataclysmic and a thunderous dynamic in the book. Gennie meets her suicidal death at age sixteen.

At seventeen and two weeks after high school graduation, the protagonist leaves her family home. At this point in the book, life increasingly becomes a "bridge and field of women" as her Black women's socialization begins in earnest. Meeting, socializing, coping with and loving the different women she meets, Lorde learned what it meant to be young, Black, gay and lonely in the fifties. "A lot of it was fine, feeling I had the truth and the light and key, but a lot of

it was purely hell. There were no mothers, no sisters, no heroes. We had to do it alone, like our sister Amazons, the riders on the loneliest outpost of the kingdom of Dahomey."

We meet women who are critical in her definition of the social, sexual and political dimensions of gay life, beginning with Ginger. "Ginger. Snapping little dark eyes, skin the color of well-buttered caramel, and a body like the Venus of Willendorf." There are alliances with white women, and the mythic and erotic connection with Afrekete. "Afrekete. Afrekete ride me to the crossroads where we shall sleep, coated in the women's power. The sound of our bodies meeting is the prayer of all strangers and sisters that the discarded evils, abandoned at all the crossroads, will not follow us upon our journey." Afrekete (Kitty) departs abruptly from the city, but the experience leaves a strong imprint with a distinct, African mystical quality. This encounter seems to be a source from which can flow the elements necessary for the eventual spiritual, sexual and corporeal expression of Black womanness, a meeting of self, with love.

Connections with women throughout the book are crucial to the strength necessary for survival in a world hostile to both Blacks and women. As much as the reader appreciates the skillful telling of the events, the soul of the book, *Zami*, is a Carriacou name for women who work together as friends and lovers. And Carriacou women are African women, are Caribbean women, are Afro-American women. *Zami* tells about Black women relating to other women, both Black and white. The theme of Black women's relationships to society, family, friends and lovers is the potent soul of the book. Lorde takes what is most common and natural between and among Black women, the many forms of bonding, and gives it a well-deserved focus. In delineating the sexual connections between Black women, we hear the recurring refrain of strength that is gained from struggle—the fact that the rewards of struggle are intertwined with the struggle itself. Gay girls, Black and white, in the fifties "dared for connection in the name of women, and saw that as their power rather than their problem."

In the tradition of Black women, the author defies a single definition of self. In response to a question, ". . . How long you been in the life?" she responds, "For me there is only one life—my own—however I choose to live it." But as Lorde shows, however one chooses to live one's life, it is moderated by certain consequences,

one of them is sex, and another one is color. Whether lesbian, straight, married, single, professional or laborer, if you are a woman and Black, your womanness and your Blackness are permanent parts of your definition. They are marks of distinction that can distinguish you, or become power.

Zami in many ways can be viewed as a quest—for love—for identity—for the fulfillment of the soul of a Black woman of West Indian heritage. This pursuit is both complicated and enhanced by her womanness, her Blackness, her capacity as a poet, her spirituality, and her love for and of other women. An enduring quality of this book is the marvelous way in which the writer evokes the gamut of emotions. Readers may find the frankness with which the childhood and sexual episodes are described arresting, humorous, painful and sad.

Much of what Lorde writes about is not just historical. Black women, Black lesbians and Black parents still grapple with the cold realities of loneliness, hostile acts and heinous attitudes on a daily basis. Some readers may find the episodes "too raw, too harsh" and therefore too painful. Some Black women may feel threatened by the raw emotional upheaval that is provoked within themselves. Such a reaction can lead to denial, avoidance or negation of the way things really are. But it would be a serious mistake for Black women not to recognize and identify with the events in Lorde's book, or worse yet, not to have empathy or understanding.

Zami joins the ranks of classic reading about Black women by Black women, along with Toni Morrison's *Sula*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. *Zami* is a wonderfully written and very important book for Blacks, feminists, and students of Black Studies, Women's Studies and life studies—lesbian and straight.

Myra Glazer

From Xerox Machines to the Dreams of the Soul

A review of *Keeper of Accounts*, by Irena Klepfisz. Published in 1982 by Persephone Press. Distributed by Alyson Publications, 40 Plympton St., Boston, MA 02118. 96 pp. \$5.95.

Several years ago, while studying and writing about experiences of separation, I came across accounts of certain laboratory experiments that left me in silent howling. One experiment entailed separating four infant rhesus monkeys from their mother, who was kept in an adjacent cage; the infants could see, hear, but not touch her. When a transparent screen was lowered between the cages, the infants hurled themselves against it trying to reach her; they screeched and cried. In another experiment, wire-mesh "surrogate mothers" were substituted for the monkeys' real mothers; the researchers discovered that the infants rapidly lost interest in the surrogates and that infant monkeys deprived of true maternal contact grow up to be either indifferent to their offspring or, in some cases, violently abusive.*

These experiments, and others even more grotesque, have haunted me ever since I read about them. They've lived on in my mind like the memories of watching polar bears pace back and forth, back and forth, across the concrete floor of a San Diego zoo "environment" in the summer; or the lone baby elephant standing as immobile as a sculpture of Despair—but haven't we all witnessed these living emblems of forced isolation, separation, entrapment? And what do we do about them anyway?

What Irena Klepfisz does is to use images and experiences like these as a vivid, searing basis for a series of poems all of which are

*For a description of these experiments, see John Bowlby, *Separation: Anxiety and Anger* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 60-74, 132-127, and Ashley Montagu, *Touching* (New York: Harper Row, 1971, 1978), pp. 28-33.

written on the theme of entrapment, of being caged into ways of life and moral as well as historical situations that stifle love, possibility, and sometimes even the desire for life itself. The more I have read and thought about this book, the more powerful and moving an experience I've found it—tender, angry, compassionate, and so clear-voiced it has ripped me apart.

Keeper of Accounts is divided into four major sections. The first, "From the Monkey House and Other Cages," which could run the risk of a reader-alienating anthropomorphism, is instead brutally alive and wrought with such emotional authenticity it affects us on the biological level of ourselves (a Jungian might say, "archetypal," but it is more *physiologically* rooted than that term implies). The monkeys speak in their own voices:

from the beginning
she was always dry though
she'd press me close
prying open my lips:
the water warm
the fruit sour brown
apples bruised and soft.

hungry for dark i'd sit
and wait devour dreams
of plain sun and sky
large leaves trunks dark
and wet with sweet thick sap.

but morning
brought back the space
and cement her weakened
body my head against her
breast: my mouth empty.

The language works—and it continues to work throughout the series, as she describes the perversion of the mothering relation in a cage:

she showed me all
the space the changing
colors outside then
pulled me back forced me to sit with her
in a shadowy corner.

Then forced separation. Forced copulation. Pregnancy, birth, and again separation:

the male was taken:
i turned my back.
the small one was taken:
i was held to one side.

The voice of the second monkey is shot full of the price of experience:

when they first come
they screech with wildness
flinging themselves against the wall
and then again against the bars. . . .

i refuse

to have anything to do with them
till they learn to behave.

"i have heard of tortures," she says, "yet remain / strangely safe,"
though at night she is "torn" by her own dreams:

waking in early light
alone untouched
i cry over my safety.

This sequence lays the groundwork for the next, on "Different Enclosures." A different kind of animal: human. Ever since Tillie Olsen's *Silences*,* contemporary feminists have possessed an articulate testament to the price paid for *not* having a room of one's own and a reliable income as basic conditions for the creation of art. "How, I wonder, did I become what I am not?" the poet asks, and in her "Work Sonnets with Notes and a Monologue" she moves from xerox machines to the dreams of the soul, through dreams of turning into iceberg, volcano, rock and dust, back and forth between the mundane, devastating reality and the even more devastating inner life of a member of the lower echelon work force, never sentimental, never self-pitying, always harsh and sharp as a laser beam. With those caged monkeys in the background, the second sequence spreads the theme of entrapment even wider, letting even the day-to-day chatter in; you really feel the presence of a *person*, becoming aware

*Tillie Olsen, *Silences*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1978.

of the breadth and depth of the woman's personality at the very moment as you feel the constricting limit of her daily life, earning a living.

The third sequence searches for metaphors of this human condition in "Urban Flowers." The ritual of returning to the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens, of experiencing "the unsuppressed spring / in this guarded landscape"; the "Lithops," or "Living Stone" plant, that teaches the poet that

every life
has its secret longings to transcend
the daily pressing need.

Especially in the light of the poems which follow it, the final poem of this sequence, "Abutilon in Bloom" (abutilon = the flowering indoor maple), is particularly resonant and powerful. It's like Emily Dickinson discerning the dandelion, the butterfly, the spider as complicated, profound metaphors. The abutilon resisted flowering for six years: "It would not give beyond its leaves." And then one morning, pausing "before another empty day," the poet sees its "wild blooming":

It leans against the sunwarm glass
its blossoms firm on the thick stems
as if its roots
absorbed the knowledge
that there is no other place
that memory is only pain
that even here now
we must burst forth with orange flowers
with savage hues of our captivity.

The remainder of the book seems to me a profound embodiment of that final directive to *burst forth with orange flowers / with savage hues of our captivity*. And the captivity she explores now is that of her own history. Irena Klepfisz was a child of the Holocaust, a Jewish baby in war-torn Poland; she knows what hunger is, suffering, starvation, loss, death, forced abandonment, she knows their hues, and she transforms them into a poetry that encompasses the reader in her experience. When her mother leaves her after a recent visit, she writes:

... Old long-forgotten departures ...
remain active in me like instinct. The fear of being
lost and never found of losing all trace all connections
severed the thread broken. (When after two years she
came to get me from the orphanage I cried when I caught
sight of her and raised my arms to her. I was barely
three but I had not forgotten.) Of endless futile
searches for relatives long vanished or even worse
alive but not traceable.

Yes, for her, "memory is only pain," a present visit evoking the anguished abandonment of those war years. Yet I kept thinking, as I read through these poems, of the admonition I heard often during my years in Israel, "Lest we forget, lest we forget." If we remember with an almost unbearable anguish, we forget only by emperiling our souls. Remembering is excruciatingly necessary; the captivity, in every one of its details, must be recalled. And so she does, describing painstakingly the tenuousness with which she and her mother survived the war.

If *Keeper of Accounts* ended here, it would already be a book of great moral and emotional power. But Irena Klepfisz has more to say, and I need to admit that the poems which follow aroused deeply troubling memories for me, and a lot of hard thinking. I was forced to remember a conversation I had with another Irene, also born in Poland, on one stormy, thundering night in Jerusalem nearly three years ago—and remembering that conversation, I was also able to see clearly why I believe these poems to be of such importance.

I was conducting interviews for work I was doing on separations, and Irene had offered to talk with me. The two of us huddled around the small gas heater in her living room, trying to keep warm on this cold, disturbing night. We found ourselves in intense conversation. Irene had been eleven years old, she told me, when the Germans reached the Polish village she lived in and rounded up the Jews. She and her family were sent to what was supposedly a "relocation camp." She told her father that she wanted to escape, and he begged her not to. Only by "sticking together," he insisted, could the family survive. She didn't heed his warnings, and escaped from the camp at night—she later learned that he had been shot the next day. For the remainder of the war, she hid in the tiny, cramped chicken coop of a Polish peasant family, lying on her back on the straw, forbidden to

move or to utter a sound lest she arouse anyone's suspicions. A peasant woman brought her food. "I was already old when I came out," she told me. "I was so old."

For years afterward, she wandered—back to Poland to search for the remnants of her family, to Europe, to the States, and finally to Israel, where she was now a professor at a University. She was divorced, and her own children were living abroad; she felt almost doomed to be always alone. Worst of all, she felt utterly alien here, bitterly alien, in, of all places, Israel, the Jewish homeland.

And that led to the second part of our conversation. I had left Israel, after living there for ten years, to make a new life in Los Angeles. She envied me. We both agreed that living among Jews was so "stifling," that Jews were oppressively tribalistic—and we agreed, laughing, that the *goyim* were right: Jews are just not very "likeable." I pointed out that, in actual fact, none of my best friends were Jews. Irene and I were cosmopolitan internationalists at heart.

For months after that conversation, long after I returned to Los Angeles, the story of Irene's captivity possessed me, the thought of her as an eleven-year-old girl having the courage to escape the camp and of the torture of being locked up in the chicken coop for so many years. It was not until I read the title poem of *Keeper of Accounts* that the rest of our conversation came back to me.

Not until then did I realize how, deep down beyond the reaches of conscious intellect and emotion, Irene and I had both internalized the image of the Jews as a despised people. That is how we saw ourselves; we despised ourselves. I had begun to comprehend my own anxiety about being Jewish this last year or so, ever since, returned back in the Diaspora, I was faced with making decisions about my young daughter's education (did I want her to go to a *Jewish* after-school program? wasn't it more "*cultivated*" to learn French?) and also ever since I had read Letty Cottin Pogrebin's article in *Ms.* on anti-Semitism in the women's movement. Now, reading "Cherry Plain, 1981: I have become a keeper of accounts," all the lessons I had begun to learn were driven painfully home.

Coming after the poems describing her experience of the Holocaust, "I have become a keeper of accounts" hit me with the force of an earthquake. It is, once and for all, "a refusal to deny." Irene Klepfisz details, catalogues, brutally names, all that the Jews of Eastern Europe became and were accused of becoming under the

conditions of oppression: the Jew as captive. Yes, it is true, men became “shabby scholars,” “inhuman usurers,” “dusty pawnbrokers,” “old, heartless, dried up merchants whose entire lives were spent in the grubby *shtetl* streets.” Yes, it is true, our women were “keepers of button shops, milliners, seamstresses, peddlers of foul fish, of matches, of rotten apples . . .” Nothing noble here; yes; that is what they became; that is what their lives made them; that is life when life is thwarted. Irena Klepfisz refuses to deny the past, or to feel shame, or to prettify; like the oppressed Jews of the past, she, too, has become a “keeper of accounts.” She remembers. She has, as I had not, the courage to accuse.

“Who would say that I have mourned / enough?” she asks in the final section of the last sequence, called “Solitary Acts.” She has faced the pain of captivity, the pain of her own personal history and the history of her people—who would say that any of us who have faced such pain with such intensity, have mourned enough? Yet, she says simply, “I need to hope / And do,” and having gone through all the poet has taken us through, we believe in this hope, this miracle of being. She has endured the nightmare of history, evoked it with a compassionate, delicate, unwavering authenticity, allowed us to know her. Her voice will be a companion for me for a long time to come. What a Jewish poet. What a woman. Thank you for this book, Irena, *b’rucha ha’ba’ah*.

There Is Nothing Easy Here

A review of *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology*, edited by Evelyn Torton Beck. Published in 1982 by Persephone Press. Available from Inland Distributors, 22 Hemingway Ave., East Haven, CT 06512. \$8.95. 288 pp.

I cannot end without affirming as strongly as I can my deep feelings of identification and pride in being a Jew. It was Jews that first instilled in me the meaning of what oppression and its consequences are. It was Jews who first taught me about socialism, classism, racism, and about what in the fifties was called "injustice." It is from Jews that I adopted ideals that I still hold and principles that I still believe are true and must be fought for and put into practice. It was from Jews that I learned about the necessity for resistance. It was from Jews that I also learned that literature was not simply fancy words or clever metaphor, but instead it was deeply, intimately connected to life, to a life that I was part of. It is really almost impossible to compress this inheritance into a single paragraph. But I know its depth and vitality, and I know that I have absorbed it thoroughly into my consciousness.

from "Resisting and Surviving America"
by Irena Klepfisz, in *Nice Jewish Girls*

I am not the Jewish Lesbian to write this review, I have been saying to myself for the last three weeks. I am not a good enough Jew; I am too much in despair over Begin's and Sharon's war in Lebanon; I am too angry at the American Jewish establishment; I never knew my father; I never went to Yeshivah; my mother broke all the rules and taught me to beware of orthodoxy of all kinds; my mother and brother spent years on parole for survival-connected crimes, not the usual Jewish family one sees in print. But yet I knew exactly what Irena meant. Jewishness had seeped into me in a hundred different ways, not from rituals or family celebrations, but from the streets of the Bronx where I was born, from the people I met there, like Sam, the delicatessen owner, who taught me history every time he stretched across the counter to hand me a package,

the blurred blue numbers inching out of his shirtsleeve, from all the offices in the garment district where my mother worked as a book-keeper from age fourteen, and mostly from Regina Nestle herself—gambler, mistress, embezzler, mother—who found her family by picking up other early morning workers at tired coffee counters around Manhattan, who fought the bosses and the married ladies who called her whore, who wrote poetry on the back of ledger sheets and who tried to teach me love, compassion, indignation and a special combination of humility and chutzpah, along with the deepest wisdom of all—where and at whom I should direct these twin angels. The world for Regina was eternally divided between the bosses and the workers, the powerful and the powerless, and to forsake the little person was to her a major sin. So what kind of Jew am I?—not a good enough one; and perhaps this fear itself makes me more Jewish than I even know.

“Nothing is ever escaped” was the final message of a tired sick Black Baptist preacher to his doubting child,¹ and the same thought kept pounding at me as I read page after page of *Nice Jewish Girls*. This message is a hard legacy to leave for someone you love, the knowledge that all denials, all twistings and turnings will only bring you face to face with the history you thought was reserved for someone else. But the wonder and the challenge of it all is that this legacy is not a deterministic one. It does not dictate how we will live our lives though it may determine how we die. It is more like a river that flows behind us and when we turn to look over our shoulder, we see a torrent, but before us is an empty riverbed. For the twenty-six contributors to this anthology, all different and yet all part of Jewish and Lesbian history, the waters have stopped for just a moment. They turn and tell us what it is they live with, what historical memories, what contemporary contradictions, what joys of rediscovery, what terrors of exile. There is nothing easy here.

Evelyn Torton Beck, born in Vienna in 1933, has put together an anthology that educates its readers in the deepest sense; personal narratives reflecting Jewish Lesbian diversity intersect with the history of nations, with the international laws and actions of institutionalized anti-Semitism, with multi-cultural heritages and with the idea and reality of Israel. Every woman I have met who is reading the book has said that she had learned something from it, and

when I pushed for more information, the answers given were two-fold: "I learned about the factual history of anti-Semitism and I learned about my own, how myths have taken hold without my really knowing it." One Gentile woman said she could not put the book down but had to read it through all at one sitting. She spoke as if this was her first travel guide to an exotic world. For the Jewish reader, there will be revelations of a different sort: "God, she thinks that too," or "No, no, that's not what our history means," or "I didn't know I hated myself so," or "yes, yes, I had forgotten." This anthology is a conversation most of us have never had, and it is way past time for it.

In her provocative introductory essay, "Why Is This Book Different from All Other Books?" Evelyn Beck makes it clear that both anti-Semitism and homophobia are attempts to make Jews and Lesbians go away: our very existence seems to cause historical problems and whole countries have created complicated political, social and psychological schemes to make sure we stay intimidated and invisible. And just as clearly, Evi and the others in this book have refused to be good victims. But they have also done more: for the most part, they have refused to oversimplify the conditions of our survival and resistance. On one side is the haven of Lesbian feminism rocky with anti-Semitism, while on the other is a homophobic homeland. For Sephardic Jewish Lesbians there is the contradiction of being both Jewish and different from European Jews; for Josylyn Segal, who is both Black and Jewish, there are the contradictions posed by manipulated hatreds and multiple cultural cherishings. Evi states: "The new field of women's history has ignored Jewish and Lesbian experiences; lesbian history has not focused on Jews and Jewish women's history has avoided the lesbian dimension." The book is an attempt to bring awareness to both communities—the Lesbian-feminist and "the Jewish community at large," to replace ignorance with knowledge and shame with pride.

The second introductory piece, from "Bashert" by Irena Klepfisz, is a poem I will never forget; in clear real language she commemorates those who died and those who survived with equal love and wisdom. The Holocaust made neither dying or living a natural state: destiny (Jew-hating) and accident (where one was at a given time or a hundred other variables) changed small everyday actions into the history of families and of a people.²

In the first section of the anthology, "If I Am Not for Myself, Who Will Be?", Gloria Z. Greenfield, Melanie Kaye, and Irena Klepfisz recreate journeys they took to understand the full implications of being Jewish. They also present us with the historical information they recovered and a call to action to make sure the Lesbian-feminist community does not become the accomplice of a new generation of Jew-haters. In "Shedding," Gloria documents her trip through Brussels, Antwerp, West Berlin, Munich (the site of Dachau, a major extermination camp), Amsterdam and London in the fall of 1981. She travels with a raw skin, having worked to peel off "illusion, naivete and fear," and with Jewish Lesbian-feminist eyes, giving her and us a perspective that educates and burns at the same time. Her encounters in restaurants, streets and parking lots become unexpected history lessons; anti-Semitism is still an everyday occurrence because, like racism, it seems a natural thing to those who do it. The words slip out before the speaker knows it, like the exhalation of breath. This essay and Melanie Kaye's and many of the others in the anthology speak from the bared rock of the writers' historical and personal identities. There is nothing easy here.

In the next essay, "Some Notes on Jewish Lesbian Identity," Melanie carefully and passionately traces this reclaiming of both a personal Jewish identity and a historical one; she takes on the stereotypes, the lessons in self-hatred, all so familiar to me, and refuses to be scared or disinherited by them. She lists the names of the women who fought back in the ghettos and in the camps, reminding us of our history of resistance. She changes gentile history into our history. Both as Lesbians and as Jewish women we must be capable of this alchemy or we become parodies of the hater's vision. Jewish women have been caricatured as dark and sexually passionate; but this must not stop Jewish Lesbian women from talking about the actual power and complexity of their sexual selves. Both of these essays are carefully footnoted so readers can continue to educate themselves.

In the last essay of this section, "Anti-Semitism is in the Lesbian Feminist Movement," Irena, born in the Warsaw Ghetto, asks us to acknowledge that Jew-hating exists in our movement, both among Jews and non-Jews alike; that some of us have become very good girls in not drawing attention to our Jewishness for fear of earning the labels Melanie describes: pushy, loud, dominating and bossy. In a list of telling questions, Irena gives us a consciousness-raising

guide for Jewish Lesbians. I probably will spend parts of the rest of my life answering these questions, and I do not think I will be the only one.

In the next section, "Jewish Identity: A Coat of Many Colors," Josylyn C. Segal, Pauline Bart, Rachel Wahba, Adrienne Rich, Savina Teubal and Bernice Mennis show that being Jewish is not a monothematic cultural heritage. One can be an Afro-Jew, an Arabic Jew, a Gentile-Jewish Jew, an international Jew, a working-class Jew, a non-assimilated Lesbian Jew.³ Each additional cultural heritage complicates the authors' lives, makes more sorting out necessary, demands more holding of the lines against insidious denigrations or seductive courtings that lead to cultural betrayals. Once again the issue of passing becomes central here, a way of surviving and of dying that closely links the Jewish and Lesbian worlds. Adrienne, in her essay "Split at the Root," makes clear the difficulty of self-confrontation she had to endure in writing about this part of herself and the lesson it taught her:

Sometimes I feel that I have seen too long from too many disconnected angles: white, Jewish, anti-Semite, racist, anti-racist, once married, Lesbian, middle-class, feminist, exmatriate Southerner, *split at the root*; that I will never bring them whole. . . . And sometimes I feel the history of denial within me like an injury, a scar—for assimilation has affected *my* perceptions. Those early lapses in meaning, those blanks, are still with me. My ignorance can be dangerous to me and to others.

Yet we can't wait for the undamaged to make our connections for us; we can't wait to speak until we are wholly clear and righteous. There is no purity and, in our lifetime, no end to this process.

And if we did find the pure voice, if there is such a thing, what would it teach us; the writings I learned most from in this work were the most conflicted, the least self-righteous, not because I am in love with victimization, but like a climber who needs a pitted wall to adhere to so she may climb higher, I fall off the face of sheer resolved cliffs.

In "If I Am Only for Myself, What Am I?" Irena Klepfisz, Melanie Kaye and Aliza Maggid make the connections that everything in our Jewish history tells us must be made. It is in this section that I found the most compelling essay of the collection. Irena's "Resisting and Surviving America" is a cry of the heart and mind, an expression of Irena's horror at watching the Holocaust become a

primetime TV special while her whole being shouts *this is not how you tell the story of what happened in little streets.*

The holocaust was not an event that ended in 1945, at least not for the survivors, not for me. It continued on in the struggle of extreme poverty that we experienced in the early years in this country. It continued on and on, coloring every thought I had, every decision I made. It continued on in the Bronx on ordinary streets, at the kitchen table. It continued on invisible.

Irena's anguish is a fierce eye that will not accept stunted historical visions. "Jews have made the mistake of thinking that we all must experience exactly the same thing; in doing so they've severed themselves from many other people's suffering and so I become angry because, of course, I want Jews to know better, feel they should know better and am repeatedly disappointed when the evidence shows they are just like most people—they don't learn from the experience of history." Our struggle to make sense of our history both as Lesbians and as Jews grows and changes with the decades. The Israel of the 1980s is not the Israel of the forties; Lesbian resistance in the 1980s is not the same as it was in the fifties, but Irena has given me the mixture of emotions and ideas that I need to do my living and my analysis—never again the shame, never the unquestioned acceptance of prevailing ideas, whether they be my people's or the establishment's—a fierce love for what both my heritages have given me, and a living sense of the dangers surrounding both. Because Irena writes both about her Jewishness and her Lesbianism, she is always risking loss. Her courage is her refusal to oversimplify.

At that moment [when her Lesbian poems are read by the straight Jewish community] I am an outsider, a lesbian, a shiksa. The Jewish community is not my community. But as a Jew—as a Jew in a Christian, anti-Semitic society—the Jewish community is, and will always remain, my community. Enemy and ally.

This is the confusion. Being Jewish. Being a Lesbian. Being an American. It all converges. It is hard to separate out. It is like feelings about one's parents. Love and embarrassment. The painful realization that they are not perfect.

In Melanie's poem "Notes of an Immigrant Daughter: Atlanta," racism and anti-Semitism bring the same awareness: deaths and dying have been and still are the legacy of people who are different in this white American world. Native Americans, Afro-Americans,

poor Americans must run for their lives. The Klan has new life; Black children die in the streets; swastikas appear on doors. The cross burns, calling for the deaths of the different.

All over the nation
our children are watching
to see
who we become.

I am Jewish and my memory is long. I remember the middle passage of slavery, the forced marches across this country's open plains, the plane flying heavy over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the smoke of burning Jewish bodies, the guns of Sharpeville and the dying cries of a Black man on a Brooklyn street corner. A long memory is a promise of resistance.

The next section of the anthology is a series of photographs by JEB (Joan E. Biren), visual comings out as Jewish Lesbians. The women pictured, JEB, Maxine Feldman, Matile Poor, Sapphire, Penny Dachinger, Josylyn C. Segal, Rachel Wahba and Lillian, make brief explanatory statements that once again show the variety of our styles and the different places we have been. The section's title, "That's Funny, You Don't Look Like a Jewish Lesbian," reflects Evi's use of humor to defuse stereotypes of both Jews and women.

In "Family Secrets," Ruth Geller, Martha Shelley, Elana Dykewomon, Susan J. Wolfe, Dovidia Ishatova and Harriet Malinowitz use the narrative form both in essays and poems to tell the stories of their predicaments: the coming-out to sisters, to brothers, the challenge of raising sons in a Lesbian world, the struggle to be seen and heard when your life gives you a different set of rituals, the ordeal of going crazy because you love and desire the aunt you are supposed to follow into marriage and childbirth, the ordeal of being queer in a Jewish family that wants you to be safe. It is in these narratives that the personal costs of being both a Lesbian and a Jew, a queer and a Jew, become most clear. And not only the costs, but the dedication of trying to preserve connections while at the same time not betray either heritage. For some this struggle brings reconciliation. In a moving poem Dovidia Ishatova reaches out to her mother, a survivor of Auschwitz, exposing the fear that kept them separate and the understanding that brought them home.

Henia
Woman of deep melancholy eyes
How afraid I was of your pain
How much you needed me
I was life to you
I was joy to you
I was proof of your victory over Hitler
I was afraid
I was so afraid
of you
and how much you looked to me for nourishment
I was just a little baby
and your hunger went far beyond anything I could do
You needed to love and be loved with a
desperation that suffocated me

This is what history really means, events of huge proportions that live in our daily lives as terrors, demands, fears, separations, creating relationships that must bear the brunt of the past. The huge movement of forces comes down at times to whom we can love and whom we cannot.

For Elana Dykewomon, the struggle brings separation, with a commitment to build a world where Lesbian women can explore all parts of themselves, including their Jewishness, without the intrusion of male power. In her essay, "The Fourth Daughter's Four Hundred Questions," Elana writes with an intensity of self-revelation that makes her pain and her choices brilliantly clear. I do not mean to slight any author in this collection by not mentioning her work specifically; every essay, every poem proved to me how much I needed to listen. As Elana says, "when jews together joke about being jewish, they are finding out what each other knows, not self-denigration, but exploration. When we joke about where we came from with someone who came from a similar place, we are finding out what to take with us." Every person who reads this anthology will go through a similar process and will decide what to take away with them.

"Next Year in Jerusalem," the next section of the book, addresses the joy and the dilemma that Israel poses for the Jewish Lesbian. Evelyn Torton Beck, Shelley Horowitz, Andrea Lowenstein, Marcia Freedman, Maida Tilchen and Helen D. Weinstock speak from a variety of experiences. Evi, in a brief introductory essay, reminds

us that Israel is a country of many opinions, where feminists struggle against militarism, homophobia, racism and classism. I think it is appropriate here that the reader know my perspective. I am not a Zionist. I mistrust all religious nation-states. I despair over Israel's selling of guns to South Africa and to dictatorships all over the world. I do not believe that the way for the Jewish people to survive is through the eradication of other peoples. And I say all this knowing that America, France, Britain, Italy and Germany do the same thing on the world market, that I am not a Jew born in Europe, that I did not see my mother rounded up by the SS. But whatever my own feelings are, I learned from these reports from the Jewish frontline. The essays range from the Zionism of Shelley, who made an *aliyah* (Jewish immigration to Israel) and now considers herself an Israeli, "the fate of the Jewish people is tied to Israel. Zionism is the national liberation movement of the Jewish people"—to Andrea's diary entries written during a 1979 visit, a trip which highlighted the difficulties of being the kind of woman she was in this new country:

I thank you for your kindness, but chose a clear
stream running alongside.
Your unmarried daughter with her white breasts
joined me there.
You could not understand my poem—
as I could not live in your country.
But I thank you for your kindness—
And for this new vision. . . .

Marcia, one of the founders of the Israeli women's movement and one-time member of the Knesset, writes from the perspective of a fourteen-year stay in Israel. "Lesbian in the Promised Land" is a history of organized feminism in Israel, a coming-out story, a sensual description of the interplay between the beauty of an old land and a newly discovered way of loving. Marcia writes with love for her adopted country, with an understanding of the history that created it, with an appreciation for the courage of the women who remain there and with the sad realization that the promise of the promised land does not extend to queers. There is nothing easy here.

In the final selection of this section, Maida brings worlds together. "Letters from My Aunt" is an exchange of letters by Helen, a sixty-two-year-old Lesbian who now lives in Israel, and Maida, a

Lesbian of the seventies. Helen's letters describe her coming-out in the 1930s, touching on the DOB period of the fifties, Greenwich village of the forties, her years as a young butch Lesbian and her growing commitment to Zionism. The letters embody the carefulness, the respect, the joy and the love these two women experienced in their courageous attempt to break down generational isolation. Each letter is a gift-giving, both to themselves and to us as a community.

In "Cast a Critical Eye," Evi Beck, Judith Plaskow and Annette Daum use their insights as Jewish feminists to critique bodies of work that are either misogynist or anti-Semitic. Evi takes on the work of I. B. Singer, a darling of the traditional Jewish literary establishment, while Judith Plaskow and Annette Daum examine the Jew-hating inherent in "blaming the Jews for the birth of patriarchy and the death of the Goddess." Since many Lesbians are attracted to Goddess-worship, these essays serve as good reminders that along with our redemption of the Goddess and the matriarchy can come very old fears and hatreds.

The anthology ends with a wonderful glossary of Yiddish and Hebrew terms used throughout the anthology. It immediately set me to making up my own list of remembered Yiddish words that my mother used and I had to face the discovery that the word *mensch* still means a hell of a lot to me.⁴ The editor also includes an extensive bibliography for further reading. My only addition here is that anyone doing work on Jewish Lesbians should contact the numerous Lesbian archives around the country: many unpublished papers, rituals, records of conferences, and letters are now available. I would also humbly like to add my own work to the list of writers who deal with the interconnection between Jewishness and Lesbianism.⁵

In any anthology, each of us will find voices that teach us, move us, make us lift our heads in recognition; each of us will also find passages that grate on our own vision of life. I needed the words of Martha Shelley, for example, in the poem "Affair with a Married Woman," in which she tries to explain the long history of gay oppression. "Yes, you know gay / but I need to teach you queer." Yes. Yes. Queer and Jew. For me equal. I was saddened by the several references to Lesbian S/M as being anti-Semitic. I do not agree. I find more potential fascism in the statements and actions of women who oppose this and other forms of sexual exploration than I do in

those who actively discuss and explore issues of lust and power. I also believe that the fate of the Jewish people is as connected to the fate of the Lebanese people, of the Black Africans, of the Arabic people as it is to Israel. As a Jewish writer, I do not accept the suggestion Evi quotes in her introduction, that “unflattering descriptions of Jews or Jewish life in literature or other artistic creations” should be avoided. Oppression and historical insecurity as well as personal psychology do sad and complicated things to people; if anti-Semitism, like anti-Lesbianism, forces me into silence about what I have seen in life, then I have no inner life left. My people—both Jews and Lesbians—cannot run scared and still be able to know deeply who we are. This does not mean that anti-Semitism in any art form should not be scourged, but neither will I dwell in the desert of the fear of the gentile eye.

Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology made several important things very clear to me, as it did to every woman I know who has read it. These hard clear pieces of insight may be different for each of us, but for Jewish Lesbians one clear warning rings out: “. . . if you had been there, you would not have been saved” (Elana Dyke-womon). We will always wear the pink triangle in our psyches and each will decide what actions, what dreams keep the most faith with the courage that has gone before and erect the most powerful barricades against the forces of historical hatreds. There is nothing easy here, but oh how essential it all is.

NOTES

1. James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), p. 113.
2. The complete text of “Bashert” was published in *SW* #21, and is included in Irena Klepfisz, *Keeper of Accounts* (see p. 168).
3. One note on language here. I cannot stand to hear a gentile use the word “Jew”; I have seldom heard one of them use it without hatred or puzzlement, and yet I want to use it myself. It fits the sound of other words I have come to love and fight for—fem, butch, Jew.
4. *Mensch*: a person! acting with dignity both for self and others, but does not mean phony decorum. (My definition. Deborah Edel is a perfect example of what I mean.)
5. See, e.g., Joan Nestle’s story, “A Restricted Country,” in *SW* #20. (Eds.)

Notes on Contributors

Judith Barrington is a white lesbian/feminist who writes and teaches in Portland, Oregon.

Theresa Barry makes dances in Richmond, Virginia.

Karen Brodine is a typesetter in San Francisco. She is widely published in the feminist, gay and left press. Her third book of poetry, *Illegal Assembly*, was published by Hanging Loose Press. She is a member of Radical Women and the Freedom Socialist Party.

Melissa Cannon has been writing for twenty-five years and is interested in combining lesbian/feminist consciousness and formal poetic structures. She is co-editor of the poetry journal CAT'S EYE. Her chapbook *Sister Fly Goes to Market* was published in 1980 by Truedog Press.

Cheryl Clarke self-published *Narratives: poems in the tradition of black women*, from which the two poems published herein are excerpted. *Narratives* can be ordered for \$5.00 (postage incl.) from Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, Box 592 Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, NY 11215. She publishes regularly in *Conditions* and is a member of the collective.

Martha Courtot is a poet, a fat woman, a lesbian mother and an activist who lives in Santa Rosa, California.

Toi Derricotte lives in New Jersey. Her first book was *Empress of the Death House* (Lotus Press, 1978). Her poems have appeared in *Chrysalis*, *13th Moon*, *Iowa Review* and *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983). "Natural Birth" is excerpted from her book of the same title, published in 1983 by Crossing Press, Trumansburg, NY 14886.

Rachel deVries is a poet and recently completed a novel, *Tender Warriors*, about a working-class Italian family.

Kathy Eberly has published poetry and fiction in *Focus*, *off our backs*, *Day Tonight/Night Today*, and *Second Wave*. She has a chapbook, *Purgatory*, in the Watch City Poetry Series.

Rebecca Ellis is part of the St. Louis Poetry Workshop, and helps out on the staff of Naiad Press.

Patricia Fagan is working on a play, taking graduate courses at Wesleyan University, working and being mother to a 13-year-old son.

Sue Dove Gambill is a writer, presently making her living as a dishwasher in Provincetown, Mass.

Myra Glazer is the editor of *Burning Air and a Clear Mind: Contemporary Israeli Women Poets* (Ohio University Press, 1981). She lives in Venice, California, where she is writing a novel.

Marilyn Hacker's most recent collection of poetry is *Taking Notice*. She edited *Woman Poet: The East* and, in 1982, became editor of *13th Moon*.

Marilyn Hadfield, a transplanted 47-year-old Easterner, works in a law office in San Francisco to make money.

Joy Harjo, Creek, is living in New Mexico and working on a play, *They Went for the Dreamers First*. Her third book of poetry, *She Had Some Horses*, is published by Thunder's Mouth Press.

Patricia Jones is a poet born in Arkansas and living in New York City. She was co-editor of the anthology *Ordinary Women* and has a chapbook, *Mythologizing Always*.

Gloria I. Joseph is a Black revolutionary-spirited feminist of West Indian parents, who views the world from a Black perspective with a socialist base. She teaches half the year at Hampshire College and the rest of the year in St. Croix, U.S.V.I.

Jacqueline Lapidus lives in Paris and works full-time as a translator. She collaborated with Tee Corinne on *Yantras of Womanlove*, and has a new book of poems, *Ultimate Conspiracy*.

Roseann Lloyd's work has appeared in *13th Moon*, *Dark Horse*, *Contact II*, *Greenfield Review*. Besides poems, she makes collages, quilts, gardens, and co-edits *Sing Heavenly Muse! Women's Poetry and Prose*.

Lee Lynch is a former contributor to *Ladder*. "The Swashbuckler" has grown into a novel, to be published in 1985 by Naiad Press. *Toothpick House*, Lee's first novel, is now available from Naiad, and *Old Dyke Tales*, a collection of short stories, will be out in 1984.

Cheiron Sariko McMahon grew up in Seattle and majored in Japanese at Georgetown University. She is now in Japan, assisting English teachers in secondary schools as an English Fellow of the Japanese Board of Education.

Marnie Mahoney grew up in New York and has lived in New Orleans for eight years. She has been an organizer in non-union garment plants and is now a graduate student in history at Tulane.

Catherine Risingflame Moirai lives on a farm in Tennessee.

Cherrie Moraga is presently living in Brooklyn, New York, where she works with Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press. She is the co-editor, with Gloria Anzaldúa, of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*.

Kelly Anne Munger is a student at Drake University, Iowa, where she founded the Drake Gay and Lesbian Community and has been vice-president of the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Iowa.

Joan Nestle is co-founder of the Lesbian Herstory Archives/Lesbian Herstory Educational Foundation, Inc., and a teacher of writing in the SEEK program at Queens College, New York.

Valerie Olson is a twenty-year-old lesbian/feminist. She is a student at the University of California, Davis, involved in feminist Wicce and rides a motorcycle named Molly B. Harley.

Michelle Parkerson is a television engineer in Washington, D.C. Her poetry has appeared in *The Black Scholar*, *Essence*, *Conditions #5*, *Callaloo* and *Feminary*. She has recently made a film on Betty Carter, and is completing a video documentary on "Sweet Honey in the Rock."

Jan Phillips is a wandering photographer whose work appears in *The Blatant Image*, a magazine of feminist photography. She has recently returned to her roots in up-state New York.

Minnie Bruce Pratt is a member of the collective that edits *Feminary: A Feminist Journal for the South*. Her first book of poetry, *The Sound of One Fork*, is available through Crossing Press, Trumansburg, NY 14886. She is working on a second book, *Walking Back Up Depot Street*.

Joanna Russ teaches creative writing at the University of Washington. Her books include *We Who Are About To, On Strike Against God*, *The Female Man*, *Kittatinny: A Tale of Magic*, and *The Two of Them*.

Susan Sherman is editor and founder of IKON magazine. Her most recent books are *Women Poems Love Poems* and *With Anger/With Love*. She has just completed a new volume of poetry, *Freeing the Balance*, and is working on a non-fiction book, *Creativity and Change*.

Karen Sjöholm has exhibited her work since 1979 in galleries of Northern California and the San Francisco Bay Area. "My intent is to depict the journeys taken by women toward self-definition and to give visual expression to the bonds between women."

Beverly A. Smith is generally optimistic living in a world not made for her, on an earth that was. She believes in the power of words, but even more in what is beyond them.

Jean Swallow works as a secretary in San Francisco, writing in snippets when the boss is away. She grew up working at a Southern newspaper, and has been published in many newspapers, in *Women: A Journal of Liberation*, *WIN* magazine, and *Feminary*.

Sherry Sylvester grew up in the Oklahoma oilfields and currently manages a neighborhood program for the city of Portland. She is chair of the Oregon Coalition Against the Reagan Immigration Plan.

Susan Wood-Thompson grew up in Texas and now lives in New York. Her book of poems, *Crazy Quilt*, is distributed by Crossing Press, Trumansburg, NY 14886.

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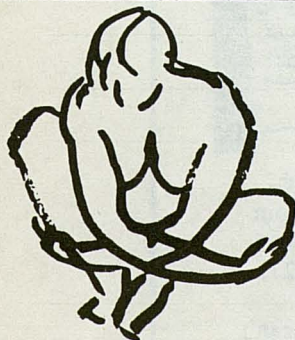
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We are concerned that women's/lesbian publications have often failed to reflect the experiences and viewpoints of Third World, working-class, and older women. We want *CONDITIONS* to include work in a variety of styles by both published and unpublished writers of many different backgrounds. We welcome submissions from all women who feel a commitment to women is an integral part of their lives.

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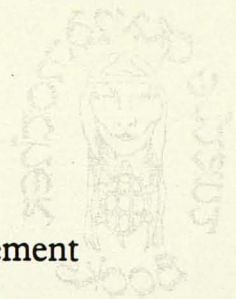
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Announcement

With this issue, **SINISTER WISDOM** will again change hands. Michelle Cliff and Adrienne Rich, who took on the magazine in 1981, will be passing it on to Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz and Michaele Uccella, the new editors.

New Address: P.O. Box 1023, Rockland, Maine 04841.

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