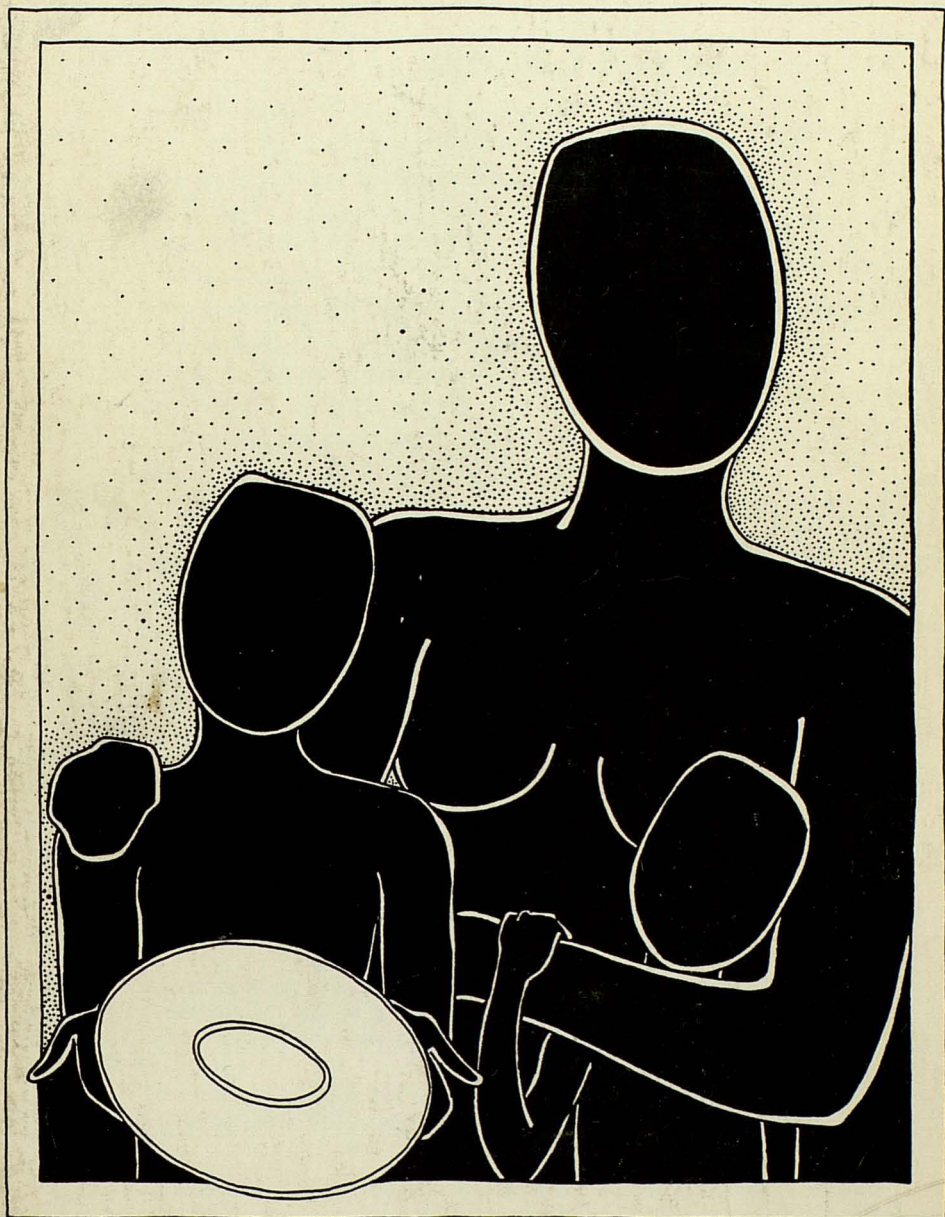


# SINISTER WISDOM 27



© Fernleaf

1984



# SINISTER WISDOM 27 FALL 1984

Editor and publisher: Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz

Office manager and consultant: Fauna Yarrow

Contributing editors: Gloria Anzaldúa, Beth Brant, Irena Klepfisz

Consultant: Bernice Mennis

Typesetting and layout: Edith Morang and Helga Manning

Volunteer workers: Sherrill Brittain, Mitzi Lichtman, Chrissy Haines,  
Nancy Button, Rosine Auberting, Sadhbh Neilan,  
Karla Meyer, Cheryl Smith, Harriet Mosher, and  
John DeMaria  
Tryna Hope, reader for the Womyn's Braille Press

ISSN: 0196-1853

Cover, drawing by Sharon Fernleaf

SINISTER WISDOM, founded 1976

Former Editors and publishers: Harriet Ellenberger (aka Desmoines)  
and Catherine Nicholson (1976-81)  
Michelle Cliff and Adrienne Rich (1981-83)  
Micheale Uccella (1983-84)

Copyright 1984 *Sinister Wisdom*. All rights reserved to individual artists and authors.

Subscription Rate: 1 year = 4 issues

Individual, \$14 Out of U.S., \$16 (U.S. dollars) Institutional \$26

Hardship, \$6 Sustaining \$35 and up

Free on request to women in prison and mental institutions

**SINISTER WISDOM P.O. Box 1023 Rockland, Maine 04841**

*Sinister Wisdom* joins the lesbian and gay communities of Maine to mourn and protest the murder in Bangor of Charles Howard. Charley, a 23-year-old faggot, was "allegedly" beaten by three male teenagers from "good" homes, thrown off a bridge to fall twenty feet into a stream as he yelled, "I can't swim." He drowned.

We grieve for his life, a sweet life according to those who knew him; and we determine to fight sexist violence and queer-hatred. A coalition has formed the Lesbian/Gay/Straight Alliance which can be contacted at P.O. Box 1805, Bangor, Maine 04401.



# Contents

- 3 Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz • *Notes for a Magazine*

## Poetry

- 5 Lesléa Newman • from *Adjustments: I/Shifting Piles*, VI/4:55,  
VII/5:00, VIII *Ode to the Secretaries of America*
- 9 Christian McEwen • *The Toad Faced Child*
- 10 Achy Obejas • *Rock That Cuts*
- 11 Lisa Simon • *The Photograph is Dark Around My Mother's Face,*  
*Safekeeping*
- 17 Anne Rickertsen • *Branding*
- 18,43 Randi Schalet • *The Oldest Daughter, Judah Maccabee's Wife*
- 19 Audrey Ewart • *She Did Not Answer*
- 29 Beatrix Gates • *Natural Enemies*
- 32 Lu Melander • *The Movie That Evening*
- 33 Marilyn Kallet • *Blaming the Victim*
- 34 Irena Klepfisz • *I cannot swim*
- 36 Annemarie Poulin • *The Daily News*
- 75 Pat M. Kuras • *S'il Vous Plait*
- 76 Roz Calvert • *White Trash Girl*
- 79 Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz • *former friend*
- 84 Melanie Perish • *Nectarines*
- 86 Minnie Bruce Pratt • #35/*We Say We Love Each Other*, #37/*Night*  
*Gives Us the Next Day*, #38/*Your Hand Opening Me*

## Narratives

- 14 Mirtha Quintanales • *"Maybe You're Wrong, Papi"*
- 39 Etel Adnan • from *Sitt Marie Rose*, a novel  
zana • *the place of our crossing*
- 66 Jyl Felman • *Crisis*
- 80 Gloria Anzaldúa • *Ms. Right, My True Love, My Soul Mate*

## Essay

- 20 Pegasus Touch • *Stories My Body Tells*

## Drama

- 45 Annette Kennedy • two scenes from *The Ladies of the USS Stanton*

## Interview

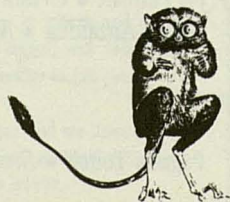
- 54 Katharyn Machan Aal interviews Judy Grahn on *Women's Poetry Readings (Part II)*

## Reviews

- 92 SDiane Bogus • *All of Our Art for Our Sake: For Nights Like This One* by Becky Birtha,  
*Cuentos: Stories by Latinas*, ed. by Gómez, Moraga, & Romo-Carmona,  
*Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. by Barbara Smith,  
*The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* by Paula Gunn Allen.
- 107 Jill Drew • *Recognition of the Tribal Mind: Sitt Marie Rose*  
by Etel Adnan
- 112 Bat HaMa'avak • *The Law of Return* by Alice Bloch

## Art

- 28 Sharon Fernleaf • drawing, "Daddy, That Hurts"
- 42,116 Katie Seiden • sculpture, *Lot's Wife, Ahnighito I*
- 44 Navy Dykes, photographs, courtesy Annette Kennedy
- 52 Sharron Demarest and Sandra DeSando • *Marble Mumbles*
- 78 Fauna Yarrow • drawing
- 91 Elisabeth Griggs • photograph
- 117 Contributors' Notes
- 120 Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz • Editor's Statement about *To Go To Berbir, Sinister Wisdom 26*
- 124 Announcements





## Notes for a Magazine

In these past few months, *Sinister Wisdom* has gone through some changes. Michaele Uccella, having contributed immense energy to the initial transition between Montague, Massachusetts, and Rockland, Maine, and having co-edited *SW* 25 and 26, has left *SW*. Fauna Yarrow, artist and political activist, has joined *SW*, working about 20 hours a week as office manager; the new orderliness of the *SW* apparatus owes much to her competence and quick intellect. Gloria Anzaldúa, Beth Brant, and Irena Klepfisz, all editors and writers in their own right, are now contributing editors for *SW*, meaning they channel talent towards the magazine, solicit work, offer advice, etc. Bernice Mennis, a teacher and friend, is a consultant, offering advice and editing skills, and participating in political dialogue. The lesbian community in and around Rockland has pitched in to help put out *SW*, and I want to express my gratitude for their varied assistance, from stuffing envelopes to dragging me away from the office to go swimming; for ballasting *SW* during this transition.

\* \* \*

For the past year, *SW* has been operating without any grants or subsidies. We are functioning entirely on revenues from subscriptions, sales, contributions, and loans. The only paid *SW* worker is the office manager. Also during this year we have expanded our work to include distributing women's books — Irena Klepfisz's *Keeper of Accounts*, Etel Adnan's *Sitt Marie Rose*, and Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz's *We Speak In Code* — and have published our first title, *A Gathering of Spirit: Writing and Art by North American Indian Women*, edited by Beth Brant, an expanded edition of *SW* 22/23. We need and intend to achieve economic self-sufficiency. For this we need you. Subscribe. Give *SW* as a gift. Tell your friends to subscribe, your librarian and bookstore to order *SW*, your teachers to use *SW* in the classroom. And of course contributions are very welcome.

\* \* \*

A Jewish women's issue of *SW*, will appear in April/May 1985 (*SW* 29/30), co-edited by Irena Klepfisz and Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz. We had intended to complete an anthology in book form, but have found our work slowed down by our respective jobs and the distance between our homes (450 miles). By presenting the work as a double issue of *SW*, we can publish what we have collected without further delay, and allow the anthology itself to gather more material (we are still looking at work by Jewish women outside of the U.S.). The focus of the issue is *Jewish women's identity and experience*.

\* \* \*



The poster contest which we announced in SW 25 elicited a few entries, fine work, some of which appears in this issue, but nothing suitable for a poster. We're still looking for drawings or photographs suitable for black & white reproduction to make a *Sinister Wisdom* poster and maybe t-shirts too. Artist will receive royalties from sales.

\* \* \*

Several pieces of writing have been submitted to SW which prompt the following remarks:

*Sinister Wisdom will not print writing or art which—whatever the artist's intent—humiliates, dehumanizes, or puts down women—or men—on the basis of race, class, culture, ethnicity, ability, appearance, sexuality. . .because they are dark and fat or thin and blond, because their breasts are large or small, because they lack money or formal education, because they eat fast food, because they watch TV or don't live in NY or the Bay Area, because they have bad skin or bad teeth or "bad" grammar. Such art damages.*

This doesn't mean we won't print work that treats these subjects, or even treats them with humor. But there's a difference between contemptuous ridicule and humor.

Which is not to say it's always clear—what seems funny to me may seem cruel to others. And displacing prejudice, opening to difference, takes time and lots of stumbling. Any artist who cares about the use and misuse of images and words is bound to grope around, inevitably creating some things which will, in 5 or 10 years, make any of us hit the roof—or cringe.

At SW we're willing to question our decisions as well as your images; to talk about the delicate balance between political responsibility (which we do not think is a dirty word) and creative freedom.

The impulse to rebellion is the breath of intellectual and creative life. At the same time, the impulse toward accountability is the pulse of political change. We want SW to exist on this dialectic, this crosscurrent (actually we want everything to exist on this crosscurrent, but we only have control over SW). We don't see the lack of utter certainty, of iron-clad principles, as a reason to operate without any principles at all. And we reject the notion that there are only 2 possible stances: a conformist political correctness vs. prejudice—banal or brutal—persisting unchallenged in the name of artistic freedom.

We also recognize, in the absence of absolutes, our own fallibility. We will publish things that hurt somebody. Write us when we do. We will reject work out of fear, ignorance, failure to grasp what matters. Write us about this as well.

Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz



*from Adjustments*

I  
Shifting Piles

I place a pile of credits to my left  
and a pile of debits to my right.  
After I type the numbers from the debits  
onto the credits  
I pile the debits on top of the credits.  
Then I pull the carbons from the credits  
and separate the copies into piles.  
I interfile the piles  
and bring them over to the files  
where I file the piles and pull the files  
making a new file of piles.  
Then I make files  
for the pile that had no files  
and put them into a new file pile.  
I take the new file pile down the aisle  
over to the table where Mabel  
makes labels for April to staple.  
I take the new labeled stapled file pile  
back down the aisle over to the file  
to be interfiled with the pile of filed files.  
After I file April's piles  
I get new debits from Debby  
and new credits from Kerry.  
I carry Kerry's credits and Debby's debits  
back to my desk  
and place a pile of credits to my left  
and a pile of debits to my right.  
After I type the numbers from the debits  
onto the credits  
it's exactly 10:00  
and we have exactly fifteen minutes  
to go down to the cafeteria  
and drink coffee  
or go out into the parking lot  
and scream.

## VI

### 4:55

We shut off our typewriters  
put our pencils into our pencil holders  
screw the tops onto our jars of liquid paper  
and glance at the clock  
we place our unused envelopes  
into our top left hand drawers  
and our sheets of carbon paper  
into our top right hand drawers  
and glance at the clock  
we lift our pocketbooks onto our laps  
freshen our lipstick  
pat our hair  
and glance at the clock  
we straighten out our tangled rubberbands  
check to see our typewriters are shut off  
and glance at the clock  
we inspect our fingernails  
notice where the polish has chipped off  
and glance at the clock  
we uncross our legs  
and glance at the clock  
we smooth our skirts  
and glance at the clock

## VII

### 5:00

Bye  
Goodbye  
Goodnight  
Have a nice night  
You too  
Take care  
Have a good night  
Good night  
Good night



## VIII

### Ode to the Secretaries of America

The Secretaries of America are spreading out  
everywhere—with their orange silk roses  
in thin white vases on their desks  
next to pictures of their children or grandchildren  
smiling at them through oval frames  
next to jars of yellow and white liquid paper  
lined up like nail polish  
next to ceramic coffee mugs that say  
WORLD'S GREATEST MOTHER or HAVE A NICE DAY  
next to pencil holders made from orange juice cans  
covered with construction paper  
covered with sparkles  
with their sugar free chewing gum  
tucked away in their pocketbooks  
tucked away in their bottom left hand drawers  
with their light blue cardigans  
draped over the back of their swivel chairs  
with their headphones on  
listening to their bosses whispering  
instructions into their ears  
like some obscene phone caller—  
Oh Secretaries of America  
I hear you following me out into the parking lot  
your high heels clicking on the pavement  
your car keys dangling from your fingers  
I see you walking through Waldbaums  
with shopping lists in your hands  
or waiting to buy white fish at the deli counter  
I hear you calling home on company time  
to tell your teenage sons to take the roast beef out  
and put it on low in the toaster oven  
I see you at Elaine Powers Figure Salon  
bending at the waist  
I hear you in diners munching on cottage cheese and carrot sticks  
comparing the calorie content of pink and white grapefruit  
I see you trying on skirts and slacks in Orbachs or Macys  
looking over your shoulder at your behinds sighing in the mirror—

Oh Secretaries of America listen to me!  
Take off your girdles and relax.  
Stop wearing that lipstick—it's made of pig fat, it's not even kosher!  
And don't you know you don't have to make the coffee?  
Oh Secretaries of America  
get up off your chairs  
and take a walk in the sun  
or go home and smoke dope  
with your teenage sons and daughters  
and then pig out on carob brownies and M and M's  
Oh Secretaries of America  
we love you just as you are  
with your thick ankles and untweezed eyebrows  
with your soft bellies and flabby thighs  
we were born out of your bodies!  
We nursed at your breasts or wanted to  
we crawled into your lap  
and let you rock us to sleep  
we came to you crying with our scraped knees  
and let you kiss it all better  
Oh Secretaries of America  
come crawl into my lap  
tell me about your day  
let me massage the back of your neck  
your aching shoulders your tired feet  
let me give you a goodnight kiss  
before I tuck you in and shut the light  
Oh Secretaries of America  
take tomorrow off  
it's on me  
take next week off  
take next month off  
Oh Secretaries of America  
just take off





## The Toad Faced Child

The moon is money  
in the empty sky.  
"Have it," says the child  
the toad faced child.  
He wants my trinkets  
all my little things.  
He has the right, he tells me.  
He insists.

And when I try to run  
he follows me.  
He scrapes my soil away  
to make a house.  
He squats upon my land  
in his great boots.  
He pees in it.  
He makes a thin mud.

And in the mud  
he plants some wretched leaves  
torn from my flowering vine.  
He gets his trumpet  
and makes a loud noise.  
"I am the king," he says.  
"I am the emperor."

"I am, I am," he says  
and multiplies.  
His arms are everywhere.  
I smell his breath.  
"You know too many songs," he says.  
"I want your songs."  
He sucks at me  
with all his thousand mouths.

## Rock That Cuts

let your mother wear her wedding ring  
on the job  
on the town  
walking home alone in the dark  
dragging just a little tired tired  
from the cold dirty  
yawning unevents of her day

the ring is like a lantern  
or insurance

let her wear the gem to match the gem  
of her smile curving curving  
resting on the ledges of her lips  
on the doorstep on the  
steel belted rice and beans padded  
frame that pushes on  
pushes on  
pushing shadows ever larger  
from her shrinking stature

your father's absence  
does not negate the truth  
she is still doing dishes  
working nights  
picking shards of life  
up off the floor

let her wear the rock that cuts  
on her finger  
in her eye  
to say no  
to the drunks and slobs  
undeserving of her beauty  
to tell the white master there's  
a strong tight wall of brown muscle  
flexing love like a ring  
around your handsome handsome  
mother



# The Photograph Is Dark

## Around My Mother's Face

I walk toward the road,  
mailboxes ahead of me  
so dark I cannot see them,  
and picture my mother's  
creamy colored face,  
her laugh, a wild  
laugh, mouth red.  
She holds pinking  
shears in her hand  
and in tonight's breeze,  
I smell her lipstick, her warm  
breath blowing  
my fresh-cut bangs.  
It's not the scent  
of blossoms but orange-red  
lipstick, pollen,  
a current of air.

I want a letter, the secrets  
she never told me,  
her thoughts on my world  
as it spirals. I spot  
as a dancer spots spinning  
on one foot,  
kicking dust with the other.  
Her death is my point  
of focus, like the door of this  
metal box, as black  
as the pavement and the grass.  
It creaks a warning  
when I lower it and pass  
my hand through the opening.

I brace my feet,  
cock my elbow,  
ready for the snake  
coiled inside to strike,  
the spider in its web to bite  
as my fingers  
grope, my nails scratch.

In one of her straw baskets  
I find the smell from her pillow  
in a china jar.  
Tonight I spread  
its milky lotion  
under my ears and on  
my tightened throat  
where the gap inside is closing,  
and dream she wraps me  
in a long slow sigh,  
her chest a goose down swell.



## Safekeeping

These books belonged to my mother  
before she died, that is when  
she was still alive  
and placed between  
the pages money for  
safekeeping and the market.  
Grocery lists written  
in her hand and ads  
she tore from magazines for  
butterfly chairs, a crepemaker,  
show the place  
she left off reading.  
I've saved these scraps  
as if she'd left  
me jewelry,  
but what to do with  
random memories,  
her ways of no intent?  
She never learned to swim,  
rubbed the Buddha pendant  
hung around her neck, sometimes  
slept in her clothes.  
All are markers in a place  
so safe I might forget,  
flowers once pressed  
flat between paperback  
pages stained yellow, purple.



## "Maybe You're Wrong, Papi"

"Tu debes de haber sido corista en otra vida, Carolina. Por Dios tu no puedes salir del baño con toda la ropa puesta?"<sup>1</sup> It was a daily struggle. After taking her morning shower, Mami would leave the bathroom naked, with only a towel wrapped around her small but full, round body. Calmly, she would walk into the adjacent bedroom, leaving the door open behind her. Papi's thunderous voice would inevitably meet her. It was the signal for the beginning of the domestic morning ritual. "Don't you have any shame? Con niños chiquitos y todo. . ." There were doors to my parents' bedroom, but they were virtually nonfunctional. I don't recall them ever being closed. That, plus the year-round heat that forced us to keep our screenless windows open, made any attempt at marital privacy useless.

Father's angry words were like a summons. I would drop whatever I was doing and hurry to the bedroom. Would watch Father's face redden and swell up as he stomped around the room, nervously straightening the knickknacks on top of the dressers, lighting and relighting his large Havana cigar. Mother would seldom interrupt her routine. She would drop the towel on the floor, sit at the end of the frameless double-bed, slip into a small and very tight crotchless girdle (she rarely wore panties under it), lay back on the bed and slowly pull it all the way up to her waist. Then she would sit up again and carefully roll up her stockings, one at a time, fastening them with the hooks that dangled from the girdle. I would place myself squarely in front of her and watch her. Shamelessly.

On good days, Mother would not even look up at Father. She'd hum a few notes of the Parisian can-can or of any striptease tune that came to her mind. Caught off-guard, Papi would burst out laughing, loosening up, growing gentle almost instantly. Relief. On those occasions, I was free to leave them and return to my room to get ready for school. Now on *bad* days, when Mother said nothing or instead decided to 'take-on' Father, there was nothing for me to do but stay. There was no point to my trying to slip away. Papi's eyes would inevitably rivet on me, holding me in place. "Tu no te das cuenta que le estas dando un mal ejemplo a esta niña?"<sup>2</sup> Can't you see you're setting a bad example for this girl?" He would address her, but fix his glance on me. This act never escaped Mami. "Dejala tranquila, Bernardo. Let her be." But it was no use. I was not merely an audience, I was also a suspect on trial and Father was the judge. Guilty! Guilty by association. Little eight-year-old Teresa already a whore in-the-making. I had to listen to this: a reprimand and a warning. Father made Mother and I interchangeable or worse, one and the same being inexplicably occupying two different bodies at once. Her crime was my crime.



I'd often rebel at the unfairness of it. ¡Ya Papi, stop! I would scream at him but, ultimately, it was Mother's role in the game that I resented. If she'd cover herself up, he'd shut up and leave us both alone. Wasn't I careful to be modest at all times? I would carry all my clothes to the bathroom and emerge only when I was fully dressed—down to my socks and shoes. And didn't I make sure I wore underwear under my pajamas even in the worst heat? And Father didn't know this, but every time I went to play at Conchita's or Cristina's house I would make sure not to remove my clothes until the last minute before we'd get into the shower to get rid of sweat and grime. He should have been proud of me.

\* \* \* \* \*

Conchita thought I was weird. She would often push me into her bedroom, close the doors, remove her t-shirt, play shorts, and panties, and dance a slow dance until she had my undivided attention. "Vamos, chica, quitate la ropa,<sup>3</sup> we're going to take a shower soon, so what's your problem?" How could I explain Father to her?

One afternoon Conchita's brother caught us. Undoubtedly attracted by the noise in the bedroom he got a ladder from the storage room, placed it flush against one of the bedroom doors, pushed in the small window above it and looked down on us.

"I see what you're doing girls! Conchita, I'm going to tell Father" . . . I was terrified. "Please don't tell, please don't tell," I repeated to myself, refraining from screaming at him, from fanning his ten-year-old mischief. I did not want to encourage him further by showing any sign of fear. I was ever so glad that I had only been watching. Well—touching a little, maybe. But how could he know that? Things just don't look like what they really are from a few feet off the ground and viewed from a small opening.

Now Conchita was stark naked. *That* presented a problem. What *would* we do? I whispered to her, "Let's deny the whole thing, Conchita. If he tells your dad, we'll just insist he's lying, trying to make trouble for us." But covering up the incident seemed futile—even as I ardently proposed it as the solution. I was sure that even in his wildest imagination this boy could not have come up with such a remarkable story. Clearly we were doomed.

If Conchita was as worried as I was, *she* didn't show it. "Go ahead, you twirp—go tell! See if we care!" I thought, that's it! IF we're cool and collected about it he won't think it worth his while to give us a hard time. Wasn't his main purpose just to make us squirm? I prayed quietly that the whole incident would be forgotten by early evening when Conchita's father would come home and drive me back to my house.

Conchita picked up her panties from the floor, put them on, opened the bedroom doors and grabbed me by the hand. "Come on, time to take a shower, Teresa." Letting go of her hand, I followed her down the hall to the bathroom, walking silently past her grinning brother, trying desperately to hide my shame.



"Oye Papi, tu sabes que? Hey Dad, you know what?" I froze—suddenly wishing to be invisible, or better yet, dead. The traffic light changed and Conchita's father made a right turn. "What's up, Pedrito? What's the problem?" The creep told him the whole story. I waited for an explosion. Maybe we'll have an accident and go to the hospital and then none of this will matter for a while. I closed my eyes and held my breath waiting for the worst.

"What were you doing spying on the girls, kid?" Huh? I was stunned. Somewhat relieved by this fortuitous turn of events, I began to mumble something to Conchita's father. "We didn't do anything, Mr. Gomez. . .we were just playing." Conchita's father momentarily turned around and looked at me squarely in the eyes, a smile forming in the corner of his mouth. He clearly did not believe me. But why then wasn't he angry? Father would have been absolutely furious.

The lie sat heavy on my chest. I had been caught lying. Concho,<sup>4</sup> now he's going to think I lie all the time. I felt thoroughly humiliated. "You are too young to be so worried about things, Teresa. . ." The gentleness in his voice interrupted my self-deprecation. I found myself beginning to breathe freely again, tears rolling slowly down my face. Still, I was puzzled. Why wasn't this man upset? Weren't Conchita and I doing something wrong and shameful?

In bed that night, I reviewed the whole incident in my mind, brought Papi's image into focus, put it on the stand: "What do you have to say to this, Papi?" I knew I wouldn't really confront him, not now anyway. But resoluteness arose in my chest. "There seems to be more than one truth about this business, Daddy. And I am going to figure it all out. Starting now."

#### Translation

<sup>1</sup> "You must have been a chorus girl in another life, Carolina. My God, can't you leave the bathroom with *all* your clothes on?"

<sup>2</sup> "Don't you realize that you're setting a bad example for this girl?"

<sup>3</sup> "Come on girl, take your clothes off."

<sup>4</sup> "Darn."

---

RURAL LIVING  
COMING OUT  
EVENTS

THE OPEN DOOR

RURAL ISSUES  
POETRY  
PROSE  
CONNECTIONS

LESBIANS  
GAYES

LEADINGS  
RIGHTS

RURAL LESBIAN NEWSLETTER

SUBMISSIONS  
ARE  
WELCOME

SUBSCRIPTIONS  
BY  
DONATION

NORTHERN LESBIANS (COLLECTIVE)  
RR # 2, BOX 50, USK STORE  
TERRACE, B.C. V8G 3Z9



## Branding

When a pocket of frothing calves  
bolted past mama,  
daddy clamped his knees  
to his sweat-slick horse. The calves'  
clean break brought him  
back to mama, dragging his furious  
accusation through the stiff  
pasture grass. . .  
whore.

From his eyes the word  
burst; a white  
streak, from his mouth. A white  
streak that tore to mama,  
that seemed to raise yeasty welts, to  
curdle her bones underneath.

I, eleven,  
maybe,  
sucked my breath  
and held strays to the herd,  
my skin frosted and my own  
bones hollowed out.

Whore.  
That word curled  
up with the smell of burning  
hair and crackling hide.

Every Sunday  
dinner plates of roast beef  
steam our cheeks, and this  
Sunday the hot, filmy clouds  
pulse like calves' breath.  
Like the slow motion  
heaving of calves' breath  
and horses' flanks  
and tall, silver grasses.  
The word rises in my nostrils  
with the baked, salty  
scent of fermented cow piss.

## The Oldest Daughter

stands outside the bathroom door.  
Her two sisters huddle in the far corner  
of their room, close to the window  
in case they need to jump  
like they were taught by the firemen  
who came to school.

She hears her sister cry and hisses,  
*stay inside, lock the door.*  
She hears her mother, *you're trying to kill me*  
then her father answers, *whore.*  
She phones the police and shouts,  
*I've called the police, mommy.*

When the catch on the door is released,  
she cleans up the pills on the bathroom floor  
white pills her mother takes for migraines, the bruises  
on her legs, the curse. Then  
she sees the hole in the wall  
the size of her father's fist.

She chips away at the edges of the hole.  
Each morning she breaks off  
a little chunk of the wall  
then sands the edges with her palm  
making the hole rounder, smoother  
twice as large.

When the plasterer arrives,  
she stands outside the bathroom door  
following his movements  
watching him nail plywood, then smooth plaster  
over the hollow wall  
until the wall is perfectly smooth.





## She Did Not Answer

But Mama, he did  
He came in at night, Mama  
You were at work  
The night was hot, Mama  
too hot for covers  
The door opened  
and he came in  
He ran one finger  
round and round  
down there  
It was too scary, Mama  
Make him go away



## Stories My Body Tells

Incest happens in all segments of society, not just in poor or socially isolated families. My family, for example, is middle class. My mother's of English background and was trained as a teacher. My father is Irish Catholic and worked as an engineer. I was raised in a suburb of an Eastern City, with a younger sister and brother.

I didn't remember anything about the incest until March last year, when, in the middle of the night, I began to get back pieces of memories of physical feelings that terrified me. For over a month I slept only 1 to 1½ hours a night because of this. At that time I was able just barely to hold onto the fragments of these feelings, not to put them together or make sense out of them.

Now I need to say what happens to me when I talk about the incest. It makes me feel sick to my stomach, and if I go on enough, I get stomach cramps, sometimes so I can hardly walk, and then diarrhea, which can last several days. I often shake and feel very cold, or else various parts of my body feel hot, and they can vibrate. So can the room. Sometimes my ears ring. Once I got so tense at talking so much, I felt unable to move at all. It took me 2 hours to get up and leave, and I only did it by telling each muscle separately to move.

I often feel it's my talking and thinking about the incest that makes it real; that it's not real if I don't do these things. In other words, forgetting about it meant it never really happened. In fact a lot of my first year of remembering has been a struggle over the reality of these very painful memories.

Another thing that can happen when others are talking about incest is my getting upset—hurt or angry—because "that's my father you're talking about." No matter what he did, I still care about him. I even still love him, though I often wish I didn't because that would be easier.

Next I want to talk about other people's reactions to my talking, even very generally, about what happened to me, the incest, and the process of remembering it. Usually I feel horror, disgust, and a whole lot of fear coming to me from them, and it does seem to be directed toward me, rather than toward the incest itself. I feel people going far away from me in their feelings, if not physically. In fact many people I thought were my friends no longer want anything to do with me since I've become involved in this process of recovering my past.

Yes, I know very well it's because of how scary it is, and time-consuming. And, yes, this process is likely to change your life quite drastically. It's certainly done those things to me. Then, too, I know we have all buried some of our most



painful past experiences, and for many women these are likely to be sexual experiences as a child or teen-ager, most of them with a male close to or even inside your family.

Finally to get down to what actually happened to me: I had sexual experiences with my father from at least age 3 until I was almost 11. Since I'm now 40 years old, I forgot about these for some 29 years. The first thing I remember is Daddy masturbating my younger sister and me with a washcloth while giving us a bath. This was a completely pleasant experience for me, and it happened regularly. I also remember a tickling game where he eventually put his finger in my vagina, which I didn't like. When I asked him to stop, he'd always say "in a minute". His keeping on a while served to increase my tolerance for this experience. I certainly liked his touching. In fact I liked it a lot, and it seemed there were other things I simply had to accept as inevitably going along with the wanted touching.

I don't remember ever being close to Mother. She always seemed angry with me no matter how hard I tried to please her, and she spanked me often. I didn't feel comfortable being hugged or even touched by her because she felt so stiff and hard, really unyielding. Daddy, on the other hand, held and touched me "just right", our bodies softening and melting into each other. He even masturbated me "just right". If only he'd stopped at that, when I asked him to. He was really tuned in to me emotionally and physically, and that felt wonderful. I know the incest began with his genuinely loving sensitivity and warmth toward me.

From the beginning I sensed Mother was both defeated and quite powerless, while Daddy was spontaneous and feeling, as well as powerful. He was less beaten down by the world, and therefore clearly much more alive. And he used his superior power against Mother. In fact I always felt I had more power than she did, perhaps because in many ways Daddy seemed to prefer me to her. I can see how extremely frustrating it was for Mother to be continually confronted by a small girl who felt this way, especially when it was her job and duty as a mother to love, nourish, and teach me. How could she teach me when I didn't respect her?

When I was about 5 something happened that really frightened me. This is the first memory I managed to recover, and it's still the most terrifying. I'm lying on my back on the living room floor, and Daddy's tickling me, but he's lying on my hips and rubbing himself against my thigh. His weight starts to hurt, and I ask him to get off. He says "in a little while" and goes on a bit. He turns away, then comes back with his pants unzipped and his penis out. The erect penis jutting out of his fly looks gigantic and monstrous to me. In fact this is a picture of my own well-loved father turning into a nightmarish monster before my eyes.

Then he puts his penis in my mouth, and I have trouble breathing and start to choke. I feel I'm being killed, so I close my mouth, of course biting him. He grabs my throat and chokes me to make me open my mouth and let go of him. I see red, then black, and finally vomit, releasing him. He's angry and runs out of the room. I lie there completely gone, floating up by the ceiling looking down at that small



child's body lying still, covered with vomit. This is the start of a way I dealt with what happened to me, namely by leaving my body and going very far away. That way I could see what was happening but I didn't have to feel it as much because it wasn't happening to me.

After a while Daddy came back and was very nice to me. He picked me up and washed me off, put me in his lap and held and stroked me, saying, "It's all right. Nothing bad's going to happen," and things like that. I feel this pattern contributed a lot to my forgetting about the incest for so long. I simply couldn't maintain in my consciousness two such different images of my father, so I wiped out the bad scary one and kept only the good comforting one, since I needed that so much.

The things he said to me seem at least as important as what he did. For instance, he always told me I liked what he did no matter what I said or did to contradict this. Sometimes he'd get me turned on by touching my genitals and then stop and say he was done now. He'd ask if I wanted to stop, and I'd tell the truth, no. Then he'd act real reluctant, like he was only doing it to please me, which made me feel I was "badder" than him because he wanted to stop and I didn't.

Daddy used my enjoyment of a small part of the incest to tell me over and over again how I really wanted all of it. I know I still haven't finished sorting out the tremendous confusion involved in this continual mixing up of my pleasure with his, and especially of what felt good to me and things that felt downright painful. A lot happened at night after I'd already gone to sleep, and afterwards he'd often hold and comfort me, saying I'd had a bad dream.

My father had intercourse with me over a period of years. I don't know how old I was when it began. I just remember waking up, or somehow coming back to consciousness, knowing something that felt important had happened to my body and I didn't know what it was. Then I tried to figure it out. Something had been inside me "down there", but what could it be? It was shaped like a piece of broom handle, but softer and not so long. Mostly I felt indifferent to this at first. I didn't like it, but it also didn't hurt very much either.

Then there seems to be a time when I began to realize there was a moral judgment against what Daddy and I were doing, so I started to feel guilty about it and tried to get him to stop. However, there seemed to be no way for me to make him stop as long as I enjoyed part of it, namely the touching. No matter how much I struggled and fought, said no and turned away, he took it as just some kind of teasing game, and went right on, saying, "Oh, come on, you know you really like it." And his words were somewhat effective because I had to admit there was indeed one part I definitely did like, the sexual touching. So I felt betrayed by my own body and began to hate her (my body).

At the same time I started wondering how much Daddy really loved me. Of course he always said he did, but he absolutely refused to believe me when I told him I didn't like something he was doing to me, or even that it hurt. In fact he often laughed when I said these things. This made me doubt my own feelings and percep-



tions, since as kids we all need to believe our parents. We know we should do what they say and learn from them. Also I knew he truly loved me, and I could not make sense out of my Daddy doing something extremely unpleasant or hurting me unless it was for some very good reason. At least I don't recall him ever telling me it was for my own good. No, what he always said was that I was only teasing or joking when I said I didn't want to do something.

At last I came to realize Daddy would go on doing those things to me no matter what I felt, said, or did; it seemed to me he'd continue even on my dead body, since he went on so many times on a body I'd long ago left in order not to feel as much what was happening to me. This realization of my complete powerlessness, especially at the hands of someone I loved and trusted and who said he loved me, made me want to die. I got into hurting my body in order both to learn to feel less, especially pain, and to get on the outside some of the hurt I felt inside.

When I was between 5 and 8 an incident occurred involving Mother, too. I was sleeping in bed with her because Daddy was away travelling on his job, something that happened fairly frequently. He came home unexpectedly in the middle of the night and was very angry. He might have been drinking. He and Mother had an argument about sex, and he ended up raping her. She fought and yelled, especially about me being there, but it didn't make him stop. It might even have turned him on. Naturally, I pretended to be asleep. He knew I wasn't and said "You're next" to me.

When he finished with her, she was both hurt and exhausted. He turned to me and began touching my nipples and then my genitals in a very rough way that seemed like torture to me. He grabbed onto me quite hard and pulled, twisted, and pinched. It hurt a whole lot, but there were also some strong flashes of pleasure. This time I remained passive throughout, and said and did nothing. I also tried unsuccessfully to feel nothing, too. This is my most confusing memory and the one of which I'm most ashamed. When he was done Mother carried me into my own bed and held and stroked me. She defended Daddy by saying he didn't mean to hurt me and that he couldn't help himself. Also, he's really a good man.

I have another memory that's the most painful. It's obviously only a fragment, beginning with me already being very frightened by something that's happened. I'm curled up with my knees pulled up to protect my stomach and my head down with my hands and arms over it. I'm rocking and moaning. Daddy first crouches over me without leaning, which feels warm and good, sheltered and protected even. Then he begins to force his penis into my anus. It feels like being rammed repeatedly from behind. He holds my shoulders so I can't move away from him. This memory disappears into so much pain I am so far unwilling to go into it any further.

In the late spring when I was 10½, I had my appendix out. Despite all comforting, shaming, and threats, I cried continuously the whole 5 days I was in the hospital. I was terrified I was going to die because a boy in my 5th grade class had



died earlier that year after having his appendix out. It really surprised me to realize how much I didn't want to die, since I'd spent a lot of time wishing I would. Somehow it seemed that in order just to live, that is to want to live rather than to want to die, I had to stop my father from doing those things to me. But of course I had no idea how I could do this. Nevertheless I knew I just had to do it.

After I went home I was very scared whenever Daddy came into my room. Of course at first he was quite nice to me and didn't try anything. Then he started with his usual line, "I'll just touch you a little to make you feel good, and I'll stop whenever you tell me to." I didn't believe him, but, also as usual, I didn't feel I had the power to prevent him. He began very soft and gently, asking if this hurt or that hurt. "No." Naturally, after a while he was leaning on me putting his penis in, and it did hurt, quite a lot more than normally. All of a sudden I realized I was once more back in this position I'd said I never wanted to be in again.

I knew I had to do something or it would just keep happening to me forever, it seemed, so I raised my legs up and back, and kicked him hard. He looked so surprised and said in this hurt, indignant tone, "Hey, you're hurting me," that he really got to me. I remembered how very many times I'd said those exact words to him and got back "just a minute", and my anger took over. I really fought Daddy without reservation or bothering to be afraid of hurting him. In fact I truly wanted to hurt him, and I tried to and succeeded, at least in part.

This time I felt I'd made him angry, and it seemed rather more like rape than just sex when after simply dodging most of my fury, he systematically held me down, worked his penis into my vagina, and went at it. I see that whenever I caused him pain, whether by biting his penis in fear when I was 5, or by expressing my anger at 10, he got angry. But after he'd come he still took the trouble to turn me on by touching me. It was so frustrating and infuriating that he was able to force me to experience sexual pleasure when I also felt angry and hopelessly defeated at the same time. It made me hate feeling at all.

After he knew he'd succeeded in making me feel turned on, he told me I should kiss his penis because that's where my pleasure really came from. I just wanted to get rid of him and be left alone, so I began to comply, though I was disgusted by his penis, let alone putting my lips on it. When I actually felt him with my lips, I couldn't stand it and threw my head back then forward, with my lips drawn back and my teeth open. I clamped them shut underneath, on his soft, hairy, smelly balls. I still feel some satisfaction at hearing his outrageous scream and quickly aborted jerk away, as I'd locked my jaws firmly closed. He hit at my face and head with his fists, but I was oblivious because this wasn't a conscious decision I'd made to act. Instead it came from somewhere deep inside me as a last desperate measure to try to protect myself. He ended up moaning, sobbing, and begging me to let go. Just as I had been gone from my body when we had sex, so I was also absent on this occasion. Neither his orders nor appeals could move me to release him. There was simply no consciousness left in my body to be either ordered or appealed to.



Next I see a shiny black wing tip oxford swinging from the left into the back of my neck, and a dark sock and part of a navy trouser leg with it. The blow shocked me into unlocking my teeth. I'm not sure I ever saw who kicked me, but I suspect an uncle who lived near us. I lose this memory here, perhaps because I lost consciousness. Again I don't know for sure. But during the course of my remembering, a certain point on the back of my neck has become very sensitive, even to the touch of a pillow. I truly wonder what possible conversation could have ensued between Daddy and my uncle over the most peculiar position my uncle inadvertently witnessed him in with me.

I felt really bad about myself because of how much I'd wanted to hurt Daddy and that I'd actually tried to do it, had in fact done it. In my mind that made me worse than him, because I knew he didn't really think what he was doing hurt me, whereas I knew I was hurting him, and that's exactly what I wanted to do.

But my finally fighting back without reservation was a big step in getting my father to stop molesting me, which was essential for my own survival. He came to me only once more, months later, saying I used to really love him and like what he did. He asked to try just one more time to see if I didn't still like it after all. I knew what he said was true and felt if he could still make me like any part of what he did, I remained in his power. It seemed I had to let him try one more time in order to see whether I'd finally succeeded in my struggle not to feel anything. Again he was slow and gentle, asking how this and that felt, but it was completely clear to us both that I was not turned on by anything he did. So I won the struggle, and he didn't bother me again. But of course I also gave up something very important, namely my own natural connection with my body, her feelings, in fact, my own feelings.

Daddy was able totally to ignore and discount whatever negative feelings I expressed, whether by saying no, screaming and crying, or by turning away and even struggling and fighting to protect myself. Yet I still don't see him as violent, but rather as having an incredibly arrogant belief in the rightness of his view that I really liked all of the incest because I liked being masturbated. It wouldn't work to lie and say I didn't enjoy anything, because I knew he was tuned in enough to me to know when I felt pleasure. Logically, then, he must also have been tuned in enough to realize when I didn't feel pleasure. In fact this is proven by him stopping the incest when I finally succeeded in not feeling any pleasure. He neither tried to convince me I did, nor approached me sexually again. His being unable to make me feel pleasure clearly ended the game for him, just as I'd felt sure it would.

How could he totally discount my pain and yet be so sensitive to my feelings of pleasure? It must be because my pleasure was very much in his self interest in continuing the incest. Nevertheless I don't recall him repeating the acts that gave me absolutely no pleasure, namely oral and anal intercourse. I also think the most painful part of what he usually did was emotional rather than physical.

It is surely a subtle and refined kind of torture to have your own body's plea-



sant sensations made a justification for someone to do repeatedly to you many different acts that you feel range from unpleasant to downright screamingly painful. To come to orgasm crying out "NO NO NO NO" with each shudder of your body appears to me an ultimate kind of betrayal.

A very important result of the intensity, both good and bad, of this incestuous relationship with my father is my seeing myself as crazy. Perhaps this can be more accurately described as a blurring of boundaries. When I feel things strongly, especially bad feelings, if I see or hear others expressing something similar, I feel they've taken on my feelings and are expressing them for me. When I'm vibrating, I tend to experience the vibrations as coming from the room and floor.

When I'm feeling things this intensely, it's hard for physical sensations to get through into my awareness. Usually I become conscious of a discomfort or pain completely nonspecifically. Then I have to go through a checklist of possibilities to determine, first of all, if its cause is inside me rather than outside, such as noise. At least when I ask my body if this is what she needs, I do get definite answers. I ask about cold, heat, hunger, thirst, need to pee, getting sick, need to change positions.

I've also developed a routine for panicked freak out, which goes like this. I say "ORIENT" to myself very loudly, and then open my eyes to take in where I am, touching the surrounding furniture, rug, ground, etc., remembering what place this is. It is often helpful to find out what time it is and therefore about how long I've been "out of it". Sometimes I review the sequence of events, thoughts, and feelings that got me freaked out and invariably find it very logical. This is dangerous, since it tends to lead me right back into the same freak out. Then I order myself to "STOP", and usually get up and do something, which inevitably helps.

I don't judge all, or even most of these experiences as bad, but I certainly do have to be careful about when and where I allow myself to go into them, and with whom. And of course I can't always control this. Sometimes I'm only aware of it when I'm already well into it.

The main long-lasting negative effect I recognize from the incest is my deep feeling that I myself am bad in some very basic sense. I feel this regardless of how much I try or how hard I work to do useful and worthwhile things. There are times when what I really want is for someone to say to me over and over again, for days and weeks, maybe even longer, you are good. And, yes, I am working at doing that for myself with affirmations.

Another important effect is my continually doubting my own feelings and intuitions, having always to justify and prove them even to myself. I also have a very real fear of being vulnerable, especially with another person, and this relates directly to close relationships and love.

I am working at healing myself by trying to be as conscious as I can of how my body feels, since I've spaced this out quite completely for some 35 years. And when I'm aware of a physical sensation, respecting it and acting on it. Changing positions more often when lying or sitting, for example, instead of working on increasing my



endurance of discomfort. I'm trying to be more gentle with my physical self.

I've been working on being my own mother, which is certainly what I feel I want, comforting myself, even stroking myself and telling myself I'm good and the like, just as I've done for my daughter for the 10 years I've had her. I can really get into feeling both sides of this, the giving and the receiving, and it does seem to help, once I get past thinking how foolish it appears.

I've realized I don't want to be around men and am making efforts to change my life so as much as possible I don't have to. Especially I don't want to be touched by men. At this time I'm not going to judge that feeling as good or bad, but right now I want to honor it. So I've left the man I've lived with for 11 years, and we are sharing the care of our daughter year by year.

Quiet is extremely important to me, and having some long periods of time with no interruptions, so I moved into a little 15-foot hexagon house up a mountain with no telephone, TV, radio, or stereo. Being outdoors is very positive for me, and a small house keeps me less separate from the weather and the outside environment. I slept outside in a tent last year until November in the B.C. Interior and took a 5-day hike alone the last week of October. Despite a lot of rain I loved it and made 44 miles with a heavy pack. For once I felt I belonged on this earth, that she could be (and sometimes is) a good connection for me. The moon and stars are even more important for me than the sun, and I've stayed or waked up many times to sing and chant to them. My daughter loves to do this with me.

I try to do exercises and run every day, and meditate. I fast one day a week and have stopped eating meat. I have 2 things I wear for protection. One is a copper bracelet I made after seeing it in a meditation. Sometimes I lie naked on the ground facing a certain way into the sun with my arms and legs out-stretched. Last year I swam in the river where I lived in B.C. in mid-March, when there was still snow on the ground. I always spoke to the waterfall I ran past on a dirt logging road every morning. With my arms out I asked her to lend me her grace and power, and for other things I need.

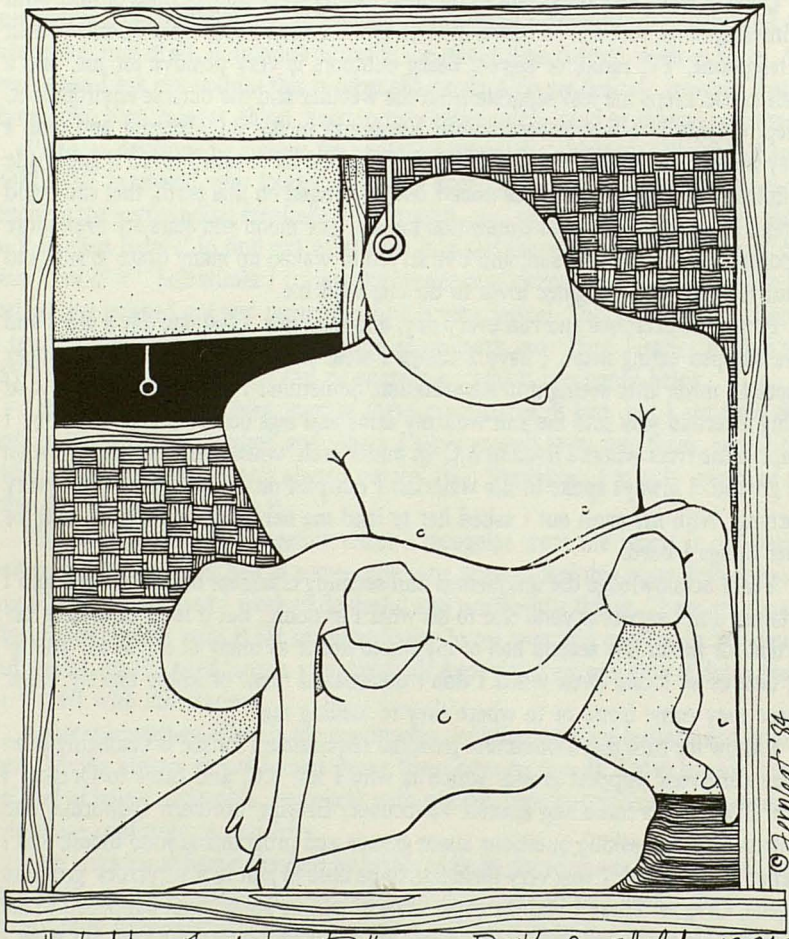
Yes, I acknowledge the uniqueness and seeming craziness of a lot of this, and I certainly don't expect anyone else to do what I'm doing. But it feels extremely important for me in this second half of my life to honor as many of my newly emerging desires as I can, even when I don't understand them or know exactly either where they come from, or to where they're leading me.

I know for sure that a minimum personal requirement for me is belonging to an incest survivors' support group, which is why I left B.C. and came to Oregon. I spent 2½ months travelling around Vancouver, Oregon, northern California, and western Montana asking questions about groups and programs around incest, and I learned a great deal. I was very fortunate to be able to join in a survivors' group in Eugene, Oregon. There I had the experience of talking about what happened to me and having it draw the other group members closer to me because they felt what I said helped them. This was in strong contrast to what usually occurred when I said



anything where I lived in B.C., which always seemed to drive people away from me because of their own disgust and fear.

I have a long-range goal of setting up a healing centre in the country where women can come, with our children if necessary. We can live there for varying lengths of time and go crazy in order to heal ourselves, as I feel I had to do and am still in the process of doing. There would be a community in many different stages of healing ourselves, using all kinds of varied methods and newly created techniques, many devised by our own community, both alone and together.



"daddy, that hurt..."      Death of a child 1984



## Natural Enemies

I

Thanksgiving, a family gathers  
to eat together. It is country,  
by the sea—room enough  
to run outside after the meal,  
the air sharp, breath short,  
hot, white as the moments held inside.

We shake hands around the room,  
the extras stand, look down  
at my ruffled hair which never stays  
but runs like loose shiny film  
around the room. My cousins come down-  
stairs. I am told they have been waiting  
all day to see me. The eldest catches  
me with his first glance, my hair switches  
across my eyes.

His bulk fills the stairs, his hands  
flash in front of him, come down the railing.  
His hands take my hands, fling me out into the room,  
a hearty laugh. This is what they will call *darling*.  
I must hold on to these hands. The room whirls  
around me. I am spinning away into the air.  
It is the beginning  
of the anaesthesia. This is supposed to be  
what I love. *Let me down* I am  
praying with my separated hands.  
*Let me down to the ground.*

His mother laughs and tells the room  
how well we get along, *and over twelve years between them*.  
He is their size but I do not think  
he is a grownup. His hands take my face, touch  
my bones, *How beautiful you will be*. I pray with separated  
eyes for ugliness, for not seeing, for not looking  
in the same direction—anything not to see as he does.

His largest hand covers my head, my blonde hair thins under  
it. His smallest, fastest hand runs between my legs.  
I fold up and wing my way away  
wishing my blonde hair feathered gray and brown,  
my body the speed of a bird.

I move to the light, my pale yellow  
changing afternoon on the bed of his room.  
My legs feel like fists as I make my way  
down the stairs, the pulse between my legs  
splits between beats, glass shards of his fingernails  
in my vaginal hall. They are having another  
round of drinks. I grab my jacket and run  
outside to the younger ones whose guns I easily pick  
up, the death of imagination and say nothing  
really happened.

The tablecloth hems us loosely in,  
skirts our knees. There are my cousins, the hated  
pale, blonde dogs and the missing,  
middle brother who has run away.  
This I understand as I face my own  
family, scattered, salt and pepper, along the white skirt  
of linen. I have been told which chair has been stolen  
from which relative's house but I like the new paint on them,  
feel myself in the bright, new shell of hiding, sink  
into the colors, the rugs, the paintings. I know how  
to get away, steal myself from my own body and slip  
out to the light. My family is not there. Not one of them  
stays with me. I laugh out loud. They call it  
joining in. We are having a feast

## II

If the boys make fun  
of me, I will be a monkey  
and my lightness will take me  
to the smallest, high tip of the tree.  
Here I have feet like hands and hands like feet—  
I can pull my own images out of the air  
and drop theirs like bombs to the ground. I am lighter  
than air. The ground is fear to me. From up here, I'm just  
a shade on the shadow of a tree.



When I am down, my legs are pinned.  
I roar inside, a lioness  
with no claws. It is years later,  
this image, the others who have accompanied me  
begin their animal walk. I must speak with them  
before we are told we are natural enemies.

I will start with you, mother. I have seen you as bird  
and lioness, too. Bird of prey, eagle, peacock  
and battered, winged creature—the weight of your unmet  
grace heavy in your broken, boned wings. Then angry,  
you enter as cat, your huge paws ripping the grass  
as you skim the dry ground. There is dust and the yellow  
rush of power, ears back, you have stopped listening  
and attack. You want me to run beside you.  
You are an animal who would kill—I have seen your iron  
anger, flawless in the heat. There were never any marks,  
so it became a question of belief. Trust was a filthy word  
to you. A lioness will eat her own legs,  
so the cats can nurse. This is the kind of nurturing  
you roared at me. Necessity is ugly, raw and true.

Now Elizabeth, it is you, mourning dove, I've always  
felt closest to you. One day you stood,  
the next you flew.  
You are a seed I caught on the wind accidentally.  
She told me finally, *you did have an older  
sister*, after days and weeks of unconscious pestering.  
I asked and asked for one not knowing you had already come  
and gone.

A tender cat appears, a mother you knew and I must,  
too, to see her. She lifts you by your loose-skinned  
neck, your heavy head, shoulders you and carries the cloud  
blue eyes to a soft place among the rocks, the other graves  
come real. She knew you would be coming here and asked only  
that you not be marked, you who were always marked, your  
life called impossible beyond the age of six. Enormous head  
and downy light brown curls, I heard you whispered, I heard you  
from the first, your loyalty as you traveled, always  
beside her, hand in hand, a clear signal pressed,  
palm to palm, *I love you*.



## The Movie That Evening\*

I left when they bled the pig  
and grabbed out its entrails  
while it lay screaming.

"It was showing us life," my friend said later.  
"But I'm not a human chauvinist," I told her.  
"They were hungry."  
"Not the actors."

(The now forgotten  
Goddess sign,  
swine,  
her forces torn from her  
while she still breathes)

I walked home from the movie  
down the dark streets,  
my police whistle in my teeth  
in case my own scream  
might not be loud enough.

*\*The Tree of the Wooden Clogs*





## Blaming the Victim

"Why do you wear your hair long  
if you don't want to be dragged  
around by it?"

(tenured faculty member)

My colleague drags me along  
by my hair, in his dreams  
I am faceless.  
Or, like a surrealist slide  
I have nipples for eyes.  
That's how I got hired.  
The elders tattooed their erotic  
fantasies on my skin,  
on my curriculum vita.  
Paranoia? Back to the lecture:  
"For the rest of her life she accepts  
bearing other people's dreams.  
She facilitates the intrusion  
of the marvelous into man's existence.  
Red and blue needles are used."  
We women become marvelous mice  
gnawing on ourselves  
in the corner of the room.  
No one stands up to shout;  
no one shoots; my voice is soft  
and small.  
Still he thinks I'm biting him  
when I question,  
Why all the images of female mutilation?  
The woman next to me shifts  
to the theme of seascapes.  
I am in a bad dream.  
If I stop the car,  
a gang will pull over.  
No matter what falls out of my luggage,  
I must keep going.

## I cannot swim

I cannot swim but my parents  
say the land is less safe. And  
the first day the water was smooth  
like slate I could walk on.  
It was a deception.

The sky greyed darkened  
then grew bright as if it understood  
our mood. I watched the land sink  
and disappear. The boat was firm.  
I sat holding onto my father's leg.  
I was not sick like the others.

The sky was bright then grew  
grey and dark. The days were  
the same the water the same  
and everyone's eyes the same.  
We looked like a family but  
we were all strangers. Nothing  
but water and sky and the boat.  
The world never existed I said.  
I could not remember land nor  
houses nor trees and I knew  
I had not been born here  
that once there had been another place.  
And I said to my parents:  
there are no more lands  
and no more peoples. We are strange  
creatures and must grow gills.  
And my parents laughed as I cupped  
my hands around my ears and the  
children laughed and did the same  
their bony fingers flapping.  
And the water looked gentle  
ready to receive us.



And one day we saw them and I  
saw we were not alone and there  
were others. Not sea creatures  
but like us. I remembered.

And they boarded us and seized  
the young girls like me and formed  
a circle. And they were on us  
when the leader shouted: Make  
sounds of joy! And my parents eyes  
sealed like wrinkled walnuts.

And they changed places and new ones  
were on us. And someone ordered:  
Make sounds of joy! My parents moved  
their lips like fishes their mouths  
filled with silence. And it happened  
again and again to me till I stopped  
remembering it.

The blood clotted between the boards  
and darkened though the women splashed  
the sea on it. The smell stayed.

I said to my parents: I will grow gills  
and tried to leap out into the water.  
But my father held my wrists his fingers  
iron nails piercing my bones. And he said:  
you cannot swim.

The ocean was bleak and jagged  
like an unscaled mountain daring  
to be conquered. At dusk someone  
spotted the land but I did not look  
at it and watched my shadow below  
on the rippled darkening bottom.  
I thought about those who waited  
on the shore. They were shouting  
sharp not kind pointing at an empty  
horizon. Wood splintered wood just  
for one moment and then they pushed  
us back. My mother pressed my head  
against her breast. The day was ending.  
It was almost dark.



## The Daily News

In the dream  
I am stealing down a dark stairwell  
stretching my eyes to clutch light  
there is none.  
I grow hypersensorial prongs  
that feel evil  
feasting below.  
I am not prepared for confrontation  
though drawn to it.  
I reach the final step  
and awaken.

In the morning paper  
I read rape.  
    Woman Raped in Suburb. . .Arms Hacked Off. . .  
    Thrown into Ditch. . .  
Facts in cold-pressed ink  
smudged by thumbprints at the breakfast table.  
Details in black and white  
smeared by coffee spattered on the page.

Through an open window, the early sun  
lights upon my hand.  
My fingertips trace the veins  
following the swollen branches like braille.  
    College Girl Dead. . .Nipple Ripped Off. . .  
    Breasts Shredded Down to Ribcage. . .By Human Teeth. . .  
I trace, retrace.  
    80 Year Old. . .Raped on Main Street. . .At Noon. . .  
    By 14 Year Old Boy. . .



I close my eyes and rest  
my head on the kitchen wall.  
Again it is 1968.  
Revolution.  
Riot in the streets.  
Nights cringe in the aftermath  
while residents recamp.  
Fires smoulder everywhere.  
The air is muggy and without current,  
heavy with the smell of incineration.

Back in Victorian Days  
Mass. Ave. was an opulent promenade.  
Ladies strolled with parasols  
swirling pastels in the light air.  
But tonight it is 1968  
the elegant townhouses stink,  
of rot and bad dope, the stoops  
teem with boys, knives and drugs  
talkin White Machine, talkin smack, talkin fuck talk.

And I am seventeen  
on a summer jaunt  
soon I'll take a bus back home  
but tonight I sit nonchalant  
on the steps of a decaying brownstone.  
My panhandling partner and I  
talking Black Power, talking pot, talking sex talk.  
We have no connections here  
in this cartoon slum  
with its cartoon violence.

Across the street, smoke lingers  
like a brooding ghost  
charred tenements smoulder  
looming like skeletons  
above the nightnoise.  
Quickly I catch  
two shadows—  
stealthy, then bolting—toward us. . .

Swift straight-edged razors, ebony-hafted switchblades  
an abandoned anteroom  
where I watch for three hours  
on my back from a crack beneath the door  
two cops on a far corner  
rock back and forth on their heels and toes.

Back and forth  
while I am burning and I burn  
with an acid rage that wills me to walk  
and to pull another bloodied body to the street  
my own screams jolting me at every step  
my own blood hot  
relentless rushing from me.  
I hear someone yelling, "Jesus! Jesus Christ!"  
and find myself in an ambulance  
with a girl muttering about her pimp  
some bone splintered through her flesh  
and see from the ambulance window  
a woman  
who walks like my mother  
three hundred miles away. . .

I open my eyes.  
It is now.  
The sun's nimble strands  
dance orange in this white room  
changing my veins to shafts of colour as  
I trace, retrace.

Vietnamese Boatwoman Raped by 45 Men Pirating Ship. . .  
Thrown into Sea for Dead. . .Swims Several Miles to Shore. . .

to stand firmly  
to tell her story  
to go on.





from *Sitt Marie Rose*, a novel

translated from the French by Georgina Kleege

*This is the story of a woman abducted by militiamen during the Civil War in Lebanon and executed.* Editor's note: The passage excerpted comes early in the novel, as war breaks out. For background and discussion, see Jill Drew's review of *Sitt Marie Rose* in this issue.



*On the thirteenth of April 1975 Hatred erupts. . . . Several hundred years of frustration re-emerge to be expressed anew. . . . Many factions participate in the general terrorism, but the principal protagonists remain the Christian right and the Palestinian refugee-militants, that the former seems to want to eliminate entirely.*



An obscure story of Iraqis invited to a political discussion by the Christian militia sparks new fighting. It is already the third reprise of combat and it seems like the infernal circle will never cease turning.

From my terrace, I see the young couple who live downstairs making love on their verandah in the middle of the afternoon. Recent events must have stunned them. They never would have been so innocent normally. Maybe they're trying to overcome their anxiety. For me, time is dead. Action is fragmented into sections so that no one has an exact image of the whole process. The imagination of those holed up at home cannot travel even as far as the nearest bombings. It too halts before the police barricades.

My spine is like a twisted, stunted, fallen tree, disappearing in the sun. Attentively, I go through the morning paper. On its reduced pages, are presented regularly, little paragraphs after little paragraphs, the atrocities of the day. The air is full of cycles of terror which succeed each other with unbelievable speed. Crime's diversity bursts into broad daylight. When the adversary camp, the Palestinians or the Left, strikes a blow, the reprisal is immediate: they fire on the Moslem neighborhoods or on the camps, or else they arbitrarily arrest Syrian workers, on the street if possible or in the building sites, and massacre them. Then these are taken to the morgue in packages of twenty or thirty. When they beat up one by himself, they leave him on the street to be quickly removed, so that no epidemic



will start up in these little streets which are less and less spared from shooting.

Saturation and panic begin to make themselves felt. Phone calls between friends become shorter and more frequent. In the street younger and younger militia men make their appearance. They employ children for their suppleness. They crawl under the line of fire and gather up abandoned arms in the adversary camp. They also learn to love the Party and how to die.

The hospitals are full. As soon as there is a calm that lasts for more than an hour, one ventures out to a hospital to visit the wounded. There are many amputees. The cases without hope wait in the hall.

My eyes are like plants that open during the day and close at night. I begin to wish that two rockets would pass through my head leaving me intact. . . that's what it means. Everything becomes primitive. The cells remember the solar pulses of their first days, back when they were still sleeping, back in the prehuman stage. Everything that has been learned seems to become blurred. Bodies, too, erupt like hatred, like lemons squeezed to the point of bursting.

The radio announced that due to public pressure there is once again a new government. Still, no one dares to venture into the street. The explosions have diminished. The intervals of silence are trying, though, because the wait for the next event becomes unbearable. In a way, the explosions provided a necessary release. One can't tell anymore.

Wednesday morning, after a relatively quiet night, people tentatively go out. An odor of hot decay grabs at the throat. It's the second of July and the sun strikes hard and all over. The sun wearies those who have been hiding inside. The trash cans form mountains on which the children of this parkless and gardenless city play, both rich and poor. The trash cans have replaced people on the streets. They are numerous, viscous, and omnipresent. It's hot and windy. Many stores are gutted or destroyed. Powdered glass is the only thing that seems clean in this filth; it glitters on the asphalt of the streets.

At the Café Express a few people talk. A.N. tells me that the Arabs, also, don't understand hatred of the enemy. They only hate among themselves. They are still in that primitive stage where only family quarrels interest them, intimate battles, fratricide. They are only preoccupied with themselves. That's how he explains the fierceness of this civil fight which isn't even a war.

Street after street I cross the city. Beirut is humiliated. She suffered the defeat; she's the one who lost. She's like a dog with her tail between her legs. She was heedless to the point of folly. She gathered the manners and customs, the flaws and vengeance, the guilt and debauchery of the whole world into her own belly. Now she has thrown it all up, and that vomit fills all her spaces. In the Christian quarters, fierce and puritanical, arrogance flies its flag at half mast. The expressions on faces are hard. The young people with their khaki clothes, those who carry rifles, those who ride in jeeps without license plates, those who still have hoods, those who display revolutionary folklore without realizing the contradiction, those



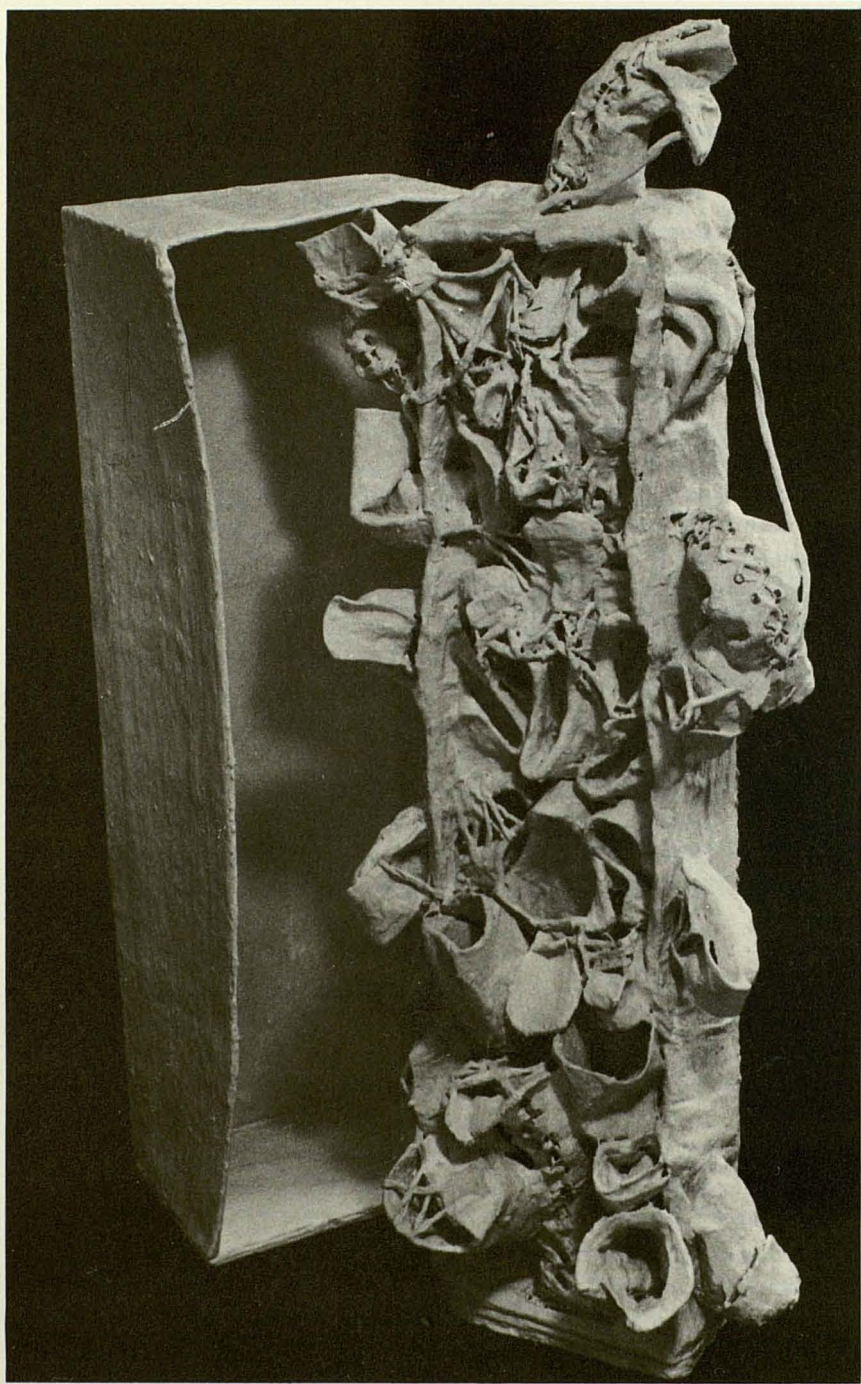
who spit on every car that passes, those who sell the Phalangist newspaper, all of them wear faces of false victory.

The Moslem quarters are more disordered, more colorful. The trash cans here are bigger and more evident. There is less bravado in the eyes and more sorrowful resignation. There is no panic left except for a crease around the mouth. The remains of barricades are more apparent, more improvised, and a certain non-chalance leaves its impact on gestures, faces, and the atmosphere.

More westernized and efficient in war as in everything, the Christian quarters have a sort of austerity which links them to certain "*pieds-noirs*" neighborhoods in Nice and Marseille, or to little towns in Sicily and Greece. The Moslem enclaves still retain the disorder of the Orient which is still the last good in these essentially bastard countries which have no precise culture except for the one that developed from a pell-mell of values in a state of disintegration. You would have to seek out someone squatting in a corner, someone not yet fanaticized by the tornado in order to touch some semblance of humanity, which, like a compass, still marks the magnetic North of the human species.

But who actually lost besides the inhabitants of this city and a few animals people forgot to feed or were also killed under the rain of bullets? Horses burned in their stables at the Hippodrome. This city is like a great suffering being, too mad, too overcharged, broken now, gutted, and raped like those girls raped by thirty or forty militia men, and are now mad and in asylums because their families, Mediterranean to the end, would rather hide than cure. . . but how does one cure the memory? The city, like those girls, was raped. Here, passing me now is a Mercedes taxi, burned out and towed by another. Its black paint is charred like human flesh. It's like a human being on four instead of two legs, being dragged to the hospital, or to the morgue. It resembles all that has been.





Lot's Wife

*Katie Seiden*



## Judah Macabee's Wife

*Who can retell the things that befell us, who can count them?  
—from a Chanukah song*

Judah's wife is thirsty and tired.  
She's been awake since Judah woke  
to lead a surprise attack.  
*How many will come back?  
How many to be tended?*  
The day is rising like parched thunder.  
Sarah is crying  
and she picks her up.  
Judah hasn't touched her  
since he joined his father's army.  
*What if the Hasmoneans lose this battle? Judah says  
he'd rather die than see the temple ruined.*  
She pumps the milk from her other breast into a bottle.  
Aaron is too big to nurse  
but she won't let him go hungry.  
Somewhere soldiers are marching back to camp.  
Sarah sucks her swollen nipple,  
the monotonous pulling comforts them both.



Navy Dykes ★ ★ ★

*photographs courtesy Annette Kennedy*





Two Scenes from *The Ladies of the USS Stanton*

A Play in One Act

*Characters:*

Seaman Ida Rae Walters	Thirty-one year old, black woman.
Seaman Mary Jo Masterson	Twenty-four year old, white woman.
Petty Officer 2nd Class Susan MacGregor	Twenty-two year old, white woman.
Mother	Black woman, mid-forties.
Charles Brinker:	Civilian attorney, white, late fifties to early sixties.

*The set for "The Ladies of the USS Stanton" is the minimum necessary to create an ambiance well-suited to the play. It is imperative that the set neither detract nor interfere with the action or the narrative of the play. The role of the set, as well as that of the other elements of staging, is merely to support the action and narrative rather than to elaborate upon them.*

*The set for the play is a triptych-shaped backdrop, battleship gray in color. The only props used are six barstools with red vinyl seats, three broomsticks cut off to about four feet in length and several rags. The barstools can be easily rearranged for each tableau and provide seating for the five characters, all of whom are on stage throughout the duration of the play.*

*The lighting is stark and limited to various red and white hues.*

*The three sailors wear women's dress uniforms. Brinker and Mother are dressed in accordance with their roles.*



Brinker: . . . But, I ask you to look at these young ladies. Could you possibly tell me in good faith that these ladies are members of that abhorrent species known as "the homosexual"? I think not. Folks, we all know what a dyke is. We've all been to bus stations and pool halls and seen those tough, hard-bitten, would-be men lurking about the public restrooms, preying upon wholesome, American womanhood. I don't think that even the most shortsighted or narrow-minded among you could possibly mistake these young ladies for loathsome followers of the Sapphist cult.

Ladies, you're not homosexuals. Now, are you?

*(Brinker withdraws and sits down. The sailors arrange their stools in such a way as to create a rectangular area in the center of the stage, representing an imaginary pool table.)*

*(Throughout the scene the women are playing an imaginary game of pool. The only props they use are the cut-off broomsticks which represent cues. They mime the gestures involved in playing pool.)*

*("I Will Survive" plays softly in the background.)*

*(Rae and Susan are playing. Mary Jo is watching and waiting to play. She nervously twirls the broomstick in her hand.)*

Mary Jo *(impatiently)*: Whose shot is it anyway? I wish you two would hurry up. I want to play.

Rae: Just hold your horses. You'll get your chance. It's my shot and I want to get it right *(walks around the table, eyeing the various possible shots)*.

Mary Jo: You best get it right. That snot-nose kid's whipping your ass.

Rae: The game ain't ov'va yet. Don't never call the game till it's ov'va. *(leans over to shoot, shoots with great concentration, then sighs and straightens up)*. It's 'bout time I got one in. I don't know why I'm playing so bad today.

Mary Jo: I ain't never seen you play good, Rae *(chuckles)*.

*(Susan banks a ball into the corner pocket.)*

*(Rae gives her a slight bow and a nod of approval.)*

*(Susan quickly shoots again and misses.)*

Rae *(leaning over the table, concentrating on a shot)*: That's okay, Mary Jo. I ain't gotta worry about whipping your ass. Navy's gonna do it for me *(stands up, deciding to look for another angle)*.

Mary Jo: Maybe. Maybe not. They gotta catch me first.

Susan *(glibly)*: What do you mean "catch" you? They already caught you. Anyway, don't be stupid, Masterson. It's your third investigation. Nobody makes it through three times.

Mary Jo: Since when have you known so much? Did your big brass daddy tell you all about it? I made it through before. I'll make it through again. 'Sides which, they won't get rid of me. I'm too good at my job.

Rae: Shhiit, there ain't nobody who's that good. The kid's right, Mary Jo. Three times is a charm. Ain't nobody makes it through three times.

*(She shoots and misses.)*

Susan: What are you doing? Trying to give me a break? You set me up perfectly.

Rae: Might as well give you a break, seeing as how nobody else's getting any.



Mary Jo: She don't need any, big brass daddy and all. She already got all of her breaks. Blew 'em all, too.

*(Susan, flustered, shoots hurriedly and misses.)*

Rae: Can't you never lay off nobody?

Mary Jo: Nope. Why in the hell should I? Nobody ever lays off me.

Susan *(lecturing)*: Mary Jo, if you didn't shoot off your mouth all the time and just minded your own business you would be a lot better off.

Rae *(looking up from her position bent over the table)*: Yeah, and so would we.

Mary Jo *(defensively)*: There you go again, blaming me for everything. I didn't make you queer.

Susan *(inspired by her own lecturing)*: Yeah, but if you hadn't said that stuff to Carter, the Lieutenant wouldn't have found out and we wouldn't all be in this mess.

*(Rae shoots and misses. She is upset and swears under her breath.)*

Mary Jo: You think you're so goddamn smart, MacGregor! Well, let me tell you something. A couple of months back, there was a bunch of girls who found out about you and were gonna turn you in just 'cause you're such a stuck-up asswipe. But I saved your ass and talked them out of it.

Susan *(visibly taken aback, but then defensive)*: I can't help being smarter than all of those hillbillies.

*(She confidently takes a shot which she blunders badly.)*

Mary Jo: I ain't never seen no hillbilly make such a piss-poor shot *(laughs loudly)*.

Rae *(surveying the table)*: Well, I'll tell you. I've learned two things since I've been in this Navy — how to play pool and how to keep my head low.

Mary Jo *(mockingly)*: Is that so, Seaman Walters? Seems to me you ain't learned either one very good.

Susan *(smugly)*: At least not how to play pool.

*(Rae stands hitting the cue against the palm of her hand, her head cocked to the side.)*

Mary Jo *(ignoring Rae's anger)*: Maybe you kept your head low, but not your tail. Caught riding a wave with your tail up in the air.

*(She laughs hysterically. The other two are silent.)*

*(Rae shoots, the force of the motion revealing her anger.)*

Susan *(admonishingly)*: You shouldn't let your temper interfere with your game *(turns her attention pointedly to the table)*.

Mary Jo: A little hot-headed, huh, Walters?

Rae (*growling*): You piss me off, girl.

Susan: Come on you two. You're being childish.

Mary Jo (*to Rae*): Well, I don't like your face too much either (*jumps around, her pool cue waving wildly in her hand*). (*Goadingly*): You want to fight? You want to fight? Huh, huh?

Rae: You're so goddamn dumb, Masterson. You don't even know who your friends are. I don't want to fight with you.

Mary Jo: What's the matter with you? You afraid you're gonna lose? Afraid I'm gonna whip your ass?

Rae (*quietly with resignation*): Ain't you I'm worried about, Mary Jo. The Navy's gonna whip all of our asses.

*(Rae and Susan return to their Board-room positions. Mary Jo is left sitting alone in center stage)*

Mary Jo: Gaddamn, son of a bitch! I can't believe this is happening again. I was just beginning to think that my luck was taking a turn for the better. And there I was, all ready to go to spy school, gonna get to find out all the secret stuff about the Russians. But, hell no, here I sit in the middle of another Discharge Board.

It ain't like I'm the only one. There ain't nothing but queers in this Navy. All those fagotty doctors and brass running around. Do they ever do anything to them? Hell, no! It's always the little grunts like me. All that stuff you hear about the Navy being full of queers, well, it's all true and then some. Hell, if they got rid of all of us this Navy would go to pot.

Hmm, pot, now that's an idea. How long's it been since I had some good smoke and did some heavy-duty partying? 'Bout as long as it's been since I had a good lay. Shhiit, I'd even settle for a bad lay.

I just know it was that fucking Lieutenant who turned me in. If I ever see her again, I'm gonna break every bone in that bitch's body. Acting all buddy-buddy and telling me I didn't have anything to worry about. Rae sure had her figured.

What do I mean "Rae"? Rae don't know nothing about nothing. It's chicken shits like that always causing problems for everybody else. 'Sides which, all her laying-low and ass-covering ain't done her no good. Here she is, been in eight years and busted back to Seaman 'cause she decked some guy for calling her a nigger. Ain't as though it was a lie or nothing. I hate this fucking Navy! I hope they do kick me out. They won't let nobody just be themselves. You can't be a nigger or a dyke or nothing.

Brinker (*breaking in*): Jesus H. Christ! What are you ladies trying to do? Hold on a minute, folks. Don't jump to any conclusions. Let me find out what in the hell is going on before you start making any judgments.

What do you ladies think you're doing, saying all that crap?

Mary Jo: But, you told us to answer the questions honestly.



Brinker: I had no idea in hell that you would say things like that. You've really endangered your chances of winning this Board. I can't believe that you could be so stupid.

Mary Jo: But, you said. . .

Brinker: I didn't tell you to hang yourselves. *(To the audience):* Wait a minute, folks. The ladies got a little confused. I'm sure this can be cleared up. You do understand, don't you?

Ladies, let's try another question. Have you ever stated that you are a homosexual? Now, for God's sake get it right this time.

★ ★ ★

*(Rae and Susan pick up broomsticks and mime sweeping half-heartedly.)*

Susan: Where's Mary Jo, skipping out on work again?

Rae: Not this time. The Lieutenant called her into her office.

Susan: It must be something serious. Do you know what she did?

Rae: It's serious, all right. Didn't you hear about what happened between her and Carter?

Susan: No, what happened?

Rae: Oh, here she comes now.

*(Enter Mary Jo.)*

Is the Lieutenant going to turn you in, Mary Jo?

Mary Jo: Hell, no, she ain't gonna turn me in. She's real cool. She ain't gonna do nothing to me.

Rae: You mean to tell me she's gonna let you off, no hassles?

Mary Jo: Hell, yeah, we just sat in her office and bull-shitted. We even talked about going out to the bars together. She's family, you know?

Susan: She's family? But, she's an officer.

Mary Jo: MacGregor, you don't know nothing. You think just 'cause somebody's got shoulderboards that means they aren't as queer as a three dollar bill.

Susan: Maybe. But, what was it that happened between you and Carter?

Rae: You best be careful, Mary Jo, and cover your ass. You gotta watch what you say, girl. Shit always rolls downhill and we're at the bottom of that hill.

Mary Jo: I ain't worried about the Lieutenant messing with me.

Rae: I'd be willing to bet that we ain't seen the end of this yet. You don't know what'll happen when the Lieutenant starts feeling a little heat coming down from above.

Susan *(exasperated)*: Would someone please tell me what happened?

Mary Jo: You mean you didn't hear? I thought everybody knew. Well, let me tell you. Yesterday, I was in ironing my blouse, you know (*mimes ironing*). And along comes Carter and just plops her skirt right down on the ironing board and starts in ironing (*mimes Carter stomping in and throwing her skirt on the ironing board*).

Rae: Did she say anything?

Mary Jo: Naw, she didn't say nothing. But, I says to her, "Hey, what're you doing? I was here first." She just kind of looked at me funny and then says all snooty-like (*mimics Carter's tone*): "Look, I got to be on duty in ten minutes." And I said, "Yeah, well, so do I, so just move on off till I'm done."

Rae (*leaning on her broomstick*): Sounds like Carter, all right. Always thinking she should get some special privilege.

Mary Jo (*hands on hips*): Yeah, well get a load of this. So then she says to me (*mimics Carter's tone*): "You know you're very selfish, Masterson." And I says, "Yep, that's right. Now, move!" Well, she doesn't move and just keeps on ironing (*mimes ironing with false levity*). So I start pushing on her with my shoulder (*mimes pushing with her shoulder*) and say, "Hey, you better move by yourself or I'm gonna move you."

Susan (*with disdain*): Did you start another fight?

Mary Jo: No, not me. She's the one who wouldn't move.

Susan: So what happened?

Mary Jo: You won't believe this. Carter just turns to me and says, "Masterson, I know you're a lez. So just keep your goddamn, queer hands off of me!"

Rae: Shhiit!

Susan: Did you deny it?

Mary Jo: Hell, no! I says to her, "I wouldn't touch your ugly ass if you paid me to."

Rae (*laughing*): I bet that shut her up.

Mary Jo: Not quite. So then she says, "I'm sick of all you queers being in the Navy. 'Specially the ones like you, Mary Jo, who flaunt it all the time." Well, that pissed me off real good and I stared the bitch right in the eye and said, "Damn right I'm queer! I'm gay and proud of it!"

Brinker (*breaking in*): That does it! I've been pushed too far. I refuse to let you humiliate me like this.

You know, I didn't have to take on this case. I did it out of the goodness of my heart. My reputation is such that I can pick and choose my cases. But, I overlooked the fact that being associated with a case like this can ruin a lawyer's career. I'm interested in social issues and I'll stick my neck out for



them. And what's more, I'm a gambler. I go for the long shot every time. And believe me, you ladies were a real long shot. .

But apparently, it wasn't enough for you ladies that you had the full weight of social opinion against you. Believe me, I was ready to defend you with every trick in the book, but you wouldn't defend yourselves. And I'll be damned if I'll defend someone who won't defend himself. You acted like a bunch of goddam lambs being led to the slaughter.

Do you even know what the Navy's regulations are? Let me read them to you.

This is taken from SECNAV INSTRUCTION 1900.9D.

"Homosexuality is incompatible with military service. The presence in the military environment of persons who engage in homosexual conduct or who, by their statements, demonstrate a propensity to engage in homosexual conduct, seriously impairs the accomplishment of the military mission by adversely affecting the ability of the Navy and Marine Corps to maintain discipline, good order and morale, to insure the integrity of the system of rank and command, to facilitate assignment and worldwide deployment of service members who frequently must live and work under close conditions affording minimal privacy, to recruit and retain members of the naval service, to maintain the public acceptability of service in the Navy and Marine Corps and to prevent breaches of security. Such persons shall normally be separated from the naval service in accordance with this instruction."

The following are bases for administrative separation:

"(1) The member has engaged in, attempted to engage in, or solicited another to engage in a homosexual act or acts. . . (2) The member has stated that he or she is a homosexual or bisexual. . . (3) The member has married or attempted to marry a person known to be of the same biological sex (as evidenced by the external anatomy of the persons involved). . ."

There. Are you satisfied? Is that what you wanted? You didn't even have enough pride or sense of self-preservation to defend yourselves. You wouldn't even omit any of the gory details. Since you all want to be such goddam martyrs, you might as well read the Board's disposition. Here, Mary Jo, you're the ring-leader. You read it.

*(He hands the disposition to Mary Jo who takes it cautiously.)*

Mary Jo *(reading slowly)*: This Administrative Discharge Board has concluded its deliberations. By a vote of all to none, we find that Seaman Ida Rae Walters, Seaman Mary Jo Masterson and Petty Officer 2nd Class Susan MacGregor have stated that they are homosexuals and that they have engaged in homosexual acts. By a vote of all to none, we recommend that Seaman Ida Rae Walters, Seaman Mary Jo Masterson and Petty Officer 2nd Class Susan MacGregor be discharged from the naval service by reason of homosexuality.





# marble mumbles

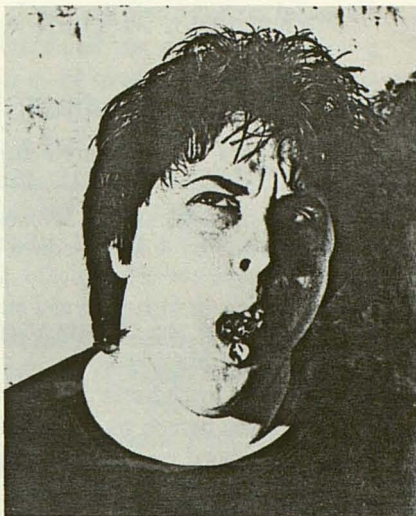
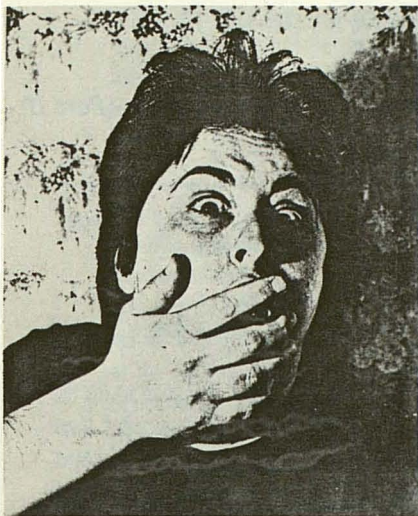
DEMAREST / DE SANDO



"*Marble Mumbles* was the first book we made together. I am pictured struggling to speak. At the time, I was very aware of being unable to answer queries for street directions. I would be stunned for minutes after the people walked on. It happened with men and women. I felt exposed, as if these strangers were going to uncover a deep secret. Why was I unable to speak? All words vacated my head—they did not exit my mouth. Was it because it is not a women's place to speak, did I feel threatened as a lesbian?" — DeSando







marble  
mumbles

VOL. 1, NO. 2

Katharyn Machan Aal *interviews* Judy Grahn  
on

Women's Poetry Readings: History and Performance (*Part II*)

(*Part I* appeared in *SW* 25)

---

August 6, 1982, at The Women's Writing Workshops, Ithaca College  
(transcribed by K.M.A., edited by J.G. and *Sinister Wisdom*)



KMA: Do you feel any different when you read your work than when you read somebody else's work?

JG: Well, it's much harder to read someone else's work, I find, because to do the work you have to get inside of it. Getting inside someone else's work I have always found more difficult than getting inside my own. On the other hand, someone else's work, because it's not the core, can be a way to set yourself up for your own poems by reading it at the beginning. Or reading something that sets the reading up better than anything of your own. Pat Parker said that when she came East she would start every reading with "A History of Lesbianism," for instance, which I wrote, because it would set everyone up. They would be all prepared then for whatever she was going to do. And I've done that at times with people's poems. I used to begin with a couple of Susan Griffin's poems that sort of set the tone and also made it very clear that it wasn't only lesbian content that we were now going to listen to, in spite of the fact that people were advertising me as Edward the Dyke or something. In fact, often I would do that on purpose. I would immediately begin with a poem about being a mother, that was definitely not a lesbian poem. Of course, there are plenty of lesbians who are mothers, but that wasn't the stereotype. So I would try to break the stereotype, is what I'm saying. Just reading the poetry of different kinds of women helps to break those stereotypes, too. It also lets everybody know that a writer's work is to be *used*, that it doesn't belong exclusively to one group of people or another.

KMA: Let me ask you again about—if you can describe for me what it's like to give a reading?

JG: Well, let me see. First off, it takes days to prepare. To think about the reading. I always think about that I'm going to do the reading—I always know when and where it is—and I try to imagine who's going to go. And then I think about what it is that I would *like* to read, what—what *feels* good for me to read and then what I think I *ought* to read [laughter]. And I try to balance those. For instance, it is always a lot of fun to read brand-new things, but it is also often a disaster to read brand-new things, because they haven't settled in. They're unvarnished when you first say them. And the cadences that you think are going to work sometimes don't work at all. If I haven't



practiced very much with something, I may not know how to follow the mood change from the last poem to a brand-new one, and I may read it in a tone of voice that is completely off from it—be sarcastic with something that is very tender, or be flat with something that should be really lively—because I haven't practiced what it feels like out loud. So I try to practice reading before I get on a stage. I can remember once practicing *Confrontations with the Devil in the Form of Love* and I was completely involved in reading them when I looked down at my feet and my two cats were sitting at my feet staring up at my face, listening. I thought that was hilariously funny and a little embarrassing, and so I walked into another room and started over again, doing it again. And I looked down and my two cats were sitting down at my feet staring up at my face, so I just went ahead and read the poems to them, because obviously they wanted to hear them because they were new [laughter]. Something about the rhythms or the tone of voice or something they found very curious and appealing. Another thing that happens before a reading is—especially right before the reading—is a tremendous gathering of energy happens. This translates as stage fright, but it's not fright, it's not about fear. It's about preparing for that much energy, preparing to put out that much energy. It seems to gather inside me or inside anyone who performs. Beforehand. It comes in, six hours to a half hour before the performance, and floods through. And it has no place to go so it just moils around inside of me and I used to look so nervous people would be astonished, because they translated it as stage fright. I thought it was stage fright, too, but that isn't what it is. But I would *look* frightened to death. I would look pale and nervous and I was very distracted and I would pace around and not be able to answer questions, be all ready to run, to leave, anything that would get me moving, till the moment that I hit the stage. And then it would all gather and have a place to go and go right out to the audience. And that's a very specific reading state. I now understand that energy, that psychic energy, that's being gathered to pour out to the audience through the words. But at that time I thought it was fright. I first had to encounter it very often because I was doing so many readings. I do about forty readings a year, usually.

KMA: And what happens—you've got the energy going out, it's channeled—what happens at that point?

JG: Well, when I am up there, the first few minutes I feel with my body what's happening with the audience. And I don't know how to describe this, just that I *feel* how they are. Most audiences are bowl-shaped, and it feels as though you are leaning into a bowl shape, very receptive. However, one audience I once read to—it was a Left audience and I went and read *A Woman Is Talking to Death*, and I went dressed in a pink sweater and a nice pair of slacks, so I looked as though I'd just come from a job or something. They



were dressed in khaki army jackets and they wanted to hear Castro's speech, a lot of them, in Spanish, even though a lot of them couldn't even understand Spanish, but they were rhetoric-bound people to a large degree, and they were homophobic to a large degree, and they were anti-woman to a large degree. About a third of the audience had come to hear me read *A Woman Is Talking to Death* and they wanted to hear that poem and they were going to make sure they did get to hear that poem. And so it was an extremely tense audience, because it was mixed. And it was very big, very large. And that audience was the reverse of a bowl shape. I could feel a wall that I had to work my words through. I could *feel* it just as clearly and plainly as if the wall had been visibly there and I were touching it. I could feel this wall of resistance that I had to try to get my words *through*. So I was working away on that, and behind me was a big stage set, a wall, and the entire wall fell on me during the performance [laughter]. It didn't hurt me; it just startled me. And they came and put it back up and I was—I would have quit at that time. But fortunately there was a Black actor from the Mime Troupe who was very interested in what I was saying and so he kept saying, "Let the sister talk," you know, urging me to go on. And so I did. I finished it. And at the end there was a mixed—very mixed reaction. My enthusiasts were ringing cowbells and so on, and the other side was getting up to argue about how long it had taken me to read it. Being very hostile and stuff. The reason I *remember* that reading is because that's what told me for certain that the rest of the time I was speaking into a bowl shape, because I could feel what happened when that *wasn't* true. I could trust the feeling because I had a comparison. So I could feel how receptive most audiences are for a performer. I once met someone who had had a stroke and for a year after she got out of the hospital she could see people's auras. She went to a rock concert and she said that the aura that the audience put out was this gold light that filled the whole top of the auditorium in shimmering waves and she couldn't even listen to the music she was so completely entranced at looking at this aura of energy that an audience puts out. When I first read, especially when I read the really heavy things, like *A Woman Is Talking to Death*, but also other ones, too, for one thing I would read more vehemently than most poets and not necessarily as long, not as ponderously. I would *pace* it differently, I would pace it more like musicians pace things. And a lot of times the audience would want me to go on. They would want me to read for two and a half hours. But if I didn't think they really did, I would read for twenty minutes, and that way they wouldn't get tired of the poetry. Because I think that poetry readings have tended to be too long and paced wrong. But sometimes I would come away from the reading completely exhausted, even depressed. Everyone else would be so happy and joyous and overwhelmed, and they would have laughed and they would have cried and they would



have gotten mad; they would have felt tender, they would have got turned on; and I would have nothing. I would be a dishrag. I would be depressed; I would not like anyone; I would wish I had stayed home; I would wonder why I was doing this; I would be hungry, no one would take care of me, and I would feel sorry for myself. So I knew that I was doing something wrong. I didn't feel that my depression should be happening, because there was so much energy in the room, why didn't I have any of it? And I can't explain what I did to stop whatever the leak was. I must have had a psychic leak, of giving too much away. I only know that I decided *not* to give too much of myself away. And I don't know what physical things I went through to change it, but it almost never happens anymore. Almost always I come out of the reading if anything more energized than I went in, even if it's a long one. I feel more calm and more at ease with the world and more happy and more pleased with myself after the reading than before. Whether anyone is praising me or not. Just because of the way I do it. That's ideal. If I can do it and that happens, then that's ideal.

KMA:How does this tie in—You mentioned the woman who'd seen the golden aura—

JG: I knew from what she was saying that audiences generate energy. There's no reason for the performer not to get some of that back. If the performer doesn't, then he or she is giving himself or herself away utterly, and that's wrong. There should be a circuit that closes. I guess that's what I'm saying. That the words and the performance itself generate energy out of this substance of everyone's belief in it and the energy they put out from being provoked by it, the aesthetic qualities of it, and so on. And that energy should include the performer, should be an envelope that everybody is in so that everybody has access to it and it should never wear a performer out. I don't mean not be tired—it's tiring, it's exhausting work, I swear I lose weight when I do it [laughter]. But it should also help your spirits. You should feel good by the end of the evening.

KMA:I notice that you like to read in more than one set.

JG: I like to rest people's ears and rest my own voice, posture, and sensibilities. And also, if something isn't going well, if I've hit on some tone of voice that's wrong or my concentration is bad, sometimes a little break will help me gather together what it is I'm doing. Or maybe I've saved the really good stuff for the second set or something. And I can rally a reading that's kind of foundering a little bit. But also it just helps people. Sometimes they want to comment on what's happened or they want to chat with somebody who's sitting next to them and they don't have a chance to do that. So making a break lets that happen, lets them respond, lets them move around and not feel so cramped and so restless, so tempted to cough and feel they're not allowed. I think it's a good tactic. If you do it *too* much, though—if you do it at the



*wrong* times—it's a *wrong* tactic. If people have to wait—and I think it's a bad thing to make people wait for very long, especially if they don't have much to say to each other and they really *did* come for the reading and they're a tired audience, or at times people are right off work or something and they don't want to wait an hour for you. And I've seen readings where the organizers were very careless about that and they start the reading too late and they take too many breaks and people feel as though they're being cheated for all their attention. So there's a lot of timing that goes into a good performance. Timing and taking your work seriously. That's the other thing that I noticed about poets because poets were always apologizing for existing, for writing, for not writing Beethoven or for not writing Beatles' songs or—I don't know *what* they were apologizing for but they were eternally—"I know this is only a poetry reading. . . ." When I hear those words I want to get up and make a speech.

KMA: What would you say?

JG: Well, I would say that some of the most provocative and important material going is in poetry, and anyone who apologizes for poetry is a fool. Or not a poet. If you have to apologize for your work, why are you delivering it? Why don't you take it home and work on it until it's good? [laughter]

KMA: Well, that's of course one of the main questions in my study, because there do seem to be writers who say—and I've had this said to me—"I'm a writer; I'm not a performer." And someone else told me that people go to poetry readings not to understand the poetry but to see the person in the flesh and blood, rub elbows with the poet. But [they say] you can't go to expect to understand the poetry when you hear it because it's meant for the page.

JG: Well, they're wrong. They're *really* selling something short that has *had* tremendous impact and not just among women but whole strata of this society gets huge numbers of their ideas from poetry. And very often, you know, the power is not recognized. By the time the power-points of a society are recognized, they're usually on the wane and it's something else that is really being influential.

KMA: Um-hmm. That's fascinating to think of [laughter]. Last year on the written questionnaire that I sent you, one of the questions was why do you perform your work, why do you give poetry readings. And your answer to me was "I was born to it." [laughter] I wonder if you would care to elaborate at this point on that question?

JG: Why do I give readings of my work. Well, I just know that I was doing that kind of thing at an early age and I was talking and singing and being entertaining at a very early age. I remember my mother telling me how entertaining I was to her. Just by my speech. And my father is also like that. He's a very witty man. He's droll and he's philosophical and he's full of stories and he's full of philosophy, and he just runs on and on about it. So my head was



full of what you can do with words and what you can do with language and how you can influence other people. I remember reading library books to my mother to entertain her. I just can't imagine *not* having become a poet and not having become a performing poet. I can't imagine not having done it.

KMA: This is going back a little bit, I guess, to the history, but how did you first get the idea? When did you know that poetry readings existed? Do you recall the first person you heard read?

JG: It seems to me that at the—in the poetry contests that I used to enter, in my small town, that the poets would get up and read their work. Whoever had won the contest. Because I remember losing a contest once and hearing the poet read—the prize winner read his work and being thoroughly disgusted with his work [laughter].

KMA: This was—How old were you?

JG: At that time I was sixteen. I was first entered into the contest when I was fourteen. My teachers said I should enter the high school contest even though I was very young, in the ninth grade, and I entered it and won second place, competing against seniors. And the second year I entered and won first place, when I was fifteen. And the third year I entered and was surreptitiously thrown out of the contest on the grounds that I must have plagiarized the poem and that sixteen-year-olds simply didn't think that way. It was a philosophical poem about the irrigation canal and all the different forms of life that were in the irrigation canal and what the meaning of that was. And the difference between the bottom of the canal and the reflection of trees and leaves that was on the top of the canal. It was a very good poem. And I *went* to the contest in a—just a state of horror and self-depression and self-loathing, of not understanding and being angry and feeling I must have done something wrong and what on earth could it have been. And then I heard the first prize poem read, and it was an imitation Edgar Allen Poe suicide poem [laughter] and it was loathsome [laughter].

KMA: This was in what town?

JG: In Las Cruces, New Mexico. Southern New Mexico. And also I entered a speech contest and what I did for that was more like a story than a speech, and it was thrown out of the contest for being too much like a story and not enough like a speech. My speech was wonderful. It was very entertaining and it was funny and it was all about democracy, and it was excluded from the contest on the grounds that it was a minute and a half too long and wasn't really a speech. I *now* realize that the content of what I was saying must have really frightened them, because almost always when people's form or length of time is criticized it's because of the *content* and not because of the form. But at that time, what it taught me, besides not to trust contests, not to trust judges and judgments, was that it was going to be very hard for me to cross forms but that I really did *want* to because I was *willing* to lose a contest



over it. Of writing in a form that was said to be another form [laughter]. Writing a speech that is a story. There's nothing in the *world* that says that a speech can't be a story.

KMA: Except the rules sheets of these contests.

JG: Then later I became a medical secretary and I *heard* that there were coffee shops where beatniks read their poetry. I think I may even have gotten up my nerve and tried to go to one, but as a working girl I would be going out of my class to do that, because it was a middle class thing to go to beatnik bars and not a working class thing.\* And I probably was just utterly terrified by the vulgarity of the language and the beards and funny clothes and the jazz, and the fact that everybody seemed so confident and nobody was wearing a white nurse's uniform. That was when I was about twenty-three, twenty-four. I didn't feel able to break into that particular underground. Though I had no trouble breaking into the—being a part of the *gay* underground, which also wore funny clothes and it did funny, crazy things and was very aggressive, but that was a different—that was very working class.

KMA: This was in California?

JG: No, this was in Washington, D.C.

KMA: Oh! Uh-huh.

JG: So, I can't tell you when I heard readings. I saw plays. I saw Jean Genet's *The Blacks*. If that isn't poetry I don't know what is. It's very poetic. I was tremendously influenced by two things. One was Archibald MacLeish's play, *J.B.*, which I had on a record. And it was done by a poet—I was very impressed that it was done by a poet—I was very interested in anything that poets *did* that was *real* in the world, that was performable in the world. And I was very, very fortunate to go to a beautiful—I think it's Episcopalian—cathedral in Washington, D.C. and hear a performance of *The War Requiem* by Benjamin Britten, which is based on the poetry of Wilfred Owen in World War I—"Move him, move him into the sun." Do you know his poem?

KMA: Yeah. I'm—Yeah.

JG: They're just completely devastating anti-war poems. Where the dead speak to the dead afterwards. So uncompromising. He wrote them just before he was killed in the war. Well, Britten set them to music calling for an orchestra, an ensemble, a chorus, and some solos, and they *sang* the poems. Most of the audience was Washington's upper crust intelligentsia, and they didn't show any emotion at all that I could see, but I was just almost howling. I was crying and I was so moved by it and by the beauty of it and by what the words were

\**ed. note:* In New York City beatnik coffeehouses were frequented by working class people (as well as middle class people). SW



saying. In learning about music I was paying attention to what the words and the music were doing together. I was fascinated by opera, and I still am. I still think that the greatest art is to write an opera, because you have then to control the stage *and* music *and* words in a plot, in a story line, and history. The earliest opera, for instance, uses words in a different way. It's almost like a spoken chorale. When the hero is lost in the forest and it's snowing, the chorus shivers: vuh-vuh-vuh-vuh-vuh-like: that [laughter]. It's a very homey, folkish and poetic opera by Henry Purcell. I paid a lot of attention to medieval songs too, trying to understand art, and the forms of it. I didn't pay *any* attention to modern poetry and I don't know why. A friend of mine finally asked me why I didn't. But I didn't. I avoided it. I *read* them. I read Gregory Corso and Ferlinghetti and Ginsberg. But I never became a fan or a groupie of their work, particularly. Just to admire it and see what they were doing and go on to what was next. I *did* become very enamored of Robert Creeley's work, for awhile, back in New Mexico. And I took a writing class from William Eastlake, a novelist. And at that time I was trying to think about plays, the spoken word in plays. And not too long after that I was staying on the campus of Antioch College and I *wrote* a play that is basically a poem. That gives instructions as to how to act out a particular play. And that was put on by the art department at Antioch College.

KMA: When was that?

JG: '67? Uh, probably '68. That was probably '68.

KMA: I don't want to tire you anymore. This is getting exhausting for you. Is there anything else—?

JG: I'm very, very hopeful that the work I am producing now—*The Queen of Wands*, and then to follow *The Queen of Swords*, *The Queen of Hearts*, and *The Queen of Diamonds*—that they will be performable. I just have my fingers crossed that they be—please—performable, so that I can see them and hear them on stage. They're lyric and narrative poems. They have very tight metaphorical structure, a broad philosophical basis, and they are definitely meant for the stage as well as the page, which is where I think poetry belongs. It belongs everywhere, but I think that it really comes alive most thoroughly when it's performable. I like to aim for writing poetry that works very well on the page so that people don't *have* to hear it in order to understand it. A lot of oral poetry doesn't work that way. It's *only* good for being read out loud, and that's the *other* extreme. So I try to aim for some middle ground where it works perfectly well in a book and works perfectly well on the stage. So that it can just be maximally used, maximally assimilated, and maximally turned into all the other things it can be turned into.





## the place of our crossing

fiorella. little flower; soft fur. you've come to say goodbye, walking the bare wood floor of my empty cabin, jumping into my lap. it's been a long while since we spent so much time together as we have these last few days.

you were to be half my cat, in the beginning. . .i'd almost forgotten that. for me and naomi both it was love at first sight when you straggled out of the bushes, a neglected kitten. together we held you, our fingertips touching in your fur.

when the tom jumped you and you nearly died, i was the one who cleaned the wound with peroxide and dressed it with honey and torn sheeting; naomi held you still against the terrible pain. o fiorella, her curly head was bent so close to mine and i loved all three of us being like that.

you reminded me of meggy. i thought i'd never have cats again after having to find a home for her, after my knees got so bad i couldn't get around to feed her, after my cat allergy got past the ignoring point and i couldn't breathe with her in my bed.

naomi fed you. we shared the costs of food and vet; you slept in naomi's bed and came over to my porch for love from me.

she came too, bringing her notebook and her cigarettes. that porch was such an equalizer—she could smoke and you could be petted without my lungs closing up. sitting, i was a match for her—we took turns reading poems, and fine-honed our visions with each other's advice.

those were sweet days, that summer, when noon lengthened into afternoon and the notebooks drifted to one side and we talked of past loves and lovers. always, it turned to that. i came to be sure of myself, surer than i'd been in years, but i wasn't sure about her. if she was really ready.

in the fall, it broke. . .the rains had started, and in black boots, striding like a cossack, i took the hill to her cabin. stood there, my legs giving way a little, as she opened the door in surprise and let me in out of the drizzle, into the stale, heavy tobacco air. because something was in the wind and i knew it, between naomi and a new woman on the land. i had to know what, had to stop it if i could, had to say, naomi don't you know i've been loving you a long time.

when i left her, you ran out the door too, and i hoped you'd come to my porch and console me in your warm fur, but you only dashed distracted into the woods.

it was some nine months later that naomi and i were weighing out the food order in the main house kitchen, just us, and she said after we had worked in silence awhile, "dara, do you still have. . .romantic feelings. . .about me?"

i guess she'd sensed it cross my mind; honestly that was the first time it had in



awhile, and just a quick crossing at that. because we were there by ourselves in the quiet kitchen, both barebreasted and both still alone in our lives.

but i looked up as she stood there asking; she seemed now harshly worn; aging as malnourished hill wimin age. the past months had been as hard on her as on me. both of us trying to work out the strenuous mechanics of living with so many wimin, so many different values and understandings; the constant lack of money, the fears and mistrustings carried over in each of us from learning life in that world out there. and on top of it, naomi and i had each slept alone for years, neither of us quite knowing why.

something stirred in me for her, but if it had ever been desire, it was not now; and any romantic notions had been ground down relentlessly by her daily tight cheer. i looked at her across the table, her bare breasts, her sagging shoulders, her face as familiar to me as my old wood stove, and i answered her question, "no."

after that, i was angry a long time. because she had breathed such a sigh of relief. and a lot of the bitterness came back: bitterness that she was so damn afraid i'd be dependent on her, emotionally dependent just because i was physically dependent; bitterness that both of us kept loving people who couldn't love us back. bitterness, and searing pain, because her fear of my loving made it seem like such a monstrous thing.

but again that summer i felt love for her. after the "no," after the anger and the bitterness, reawakened the kinship, the longing for someone who spoke the language of a similar life, a similar life work, a similar vision. not that she had sought to build a wimin's land collective, as i had; but once she ended up here she became a bulwark and i knew it was a dream she had not let herself dream. i lay in the dark at night lonely for her in the midst of so many wimin i felt separate from. few, men or wimin, had ever struck straight to my core like naomi.

and she was so lonely too that once in awhile there would come a flash, an opening. she always knew she could get something from me if she needed it. she knew the "no" wasn't really all. . .and so when her mother died it was me she came to, sometimes, gushing out just enough to relieve herself and then dashing off. i sat in her wake, spent and hollow, wanting to *really* share, not just be a dumping ground for her embarrassed pain.

she was the one who drove me up north to the big specialist—that was the kind of giving she could do—and consoled me afterward in her awkward, touch-shy way. and, on the drive home, out came all her fears about losing the skimpy little job she had, about being so alone in the world with no family left now, shoving the doctor's verdict to the back of my thoughts, i counseled her with a silver tongue, glad for a chance to be strong. as the trees sped by i rattled on, impressed by my own wisdom and disgusted with my smugness. i only wanted to take her in my arms.

funny—you, fiorella, changed so much as she changed. i knew you as skittish, not wanting to be touched unless you chose it. after the night of the black boots you



came less and less to my door, until weeks would go by when i only saw you at a distance.

when naomi moved into the main house, you calmed out. the kids and visitors and everybody petted you and you sat still for it. i hoped the same for naomi—that it would be good for her to eat with other people, to have someone around. at first maybe it was, but she always sat a little apart, smiling vaguely. at winter's end she moved back to the cabin on the hill. life streamed by around her as if she were a stone.

i kept a distance from her by then, too many times meshing my spirit with hers only to feel that silent strand of barbed wire.

the months of shared meals may have slowed her weight loss, but didn't stop it. when i could bear to really look at her, to let in for a moment who she was, it shook my bones.

i have a picture i took of her the first year, down in the garden, looking up with warm, surprised eyes. no longer the size 18 of philadelphia, but still plump. pleasingly. on her wrist the silver bracelet of her mother's, impractical for country chores, but she wore it all the time despite the angry poems she wrote about her mother. after the death, oddly, she stopped wearing it.

the last time i saw naomi she wore bandages on her wrists. i sat next to her on her cabin steps, an arm around the bony hunched shoulders that trembled in spring wind. we played with you, fiorella, as we used to—that was easy, safe—and she would drift in and out of where i was to places i couldn't follow. all my brilliant counseling was worth nothing now: even if there were any jobs anywhere, no one was going to hire a dyke who thought her food was being poisoned and who looked like some pale, wilting leaf. who was i to tell her how not to be lonely, how not to go crazy. so we just sat there and she rolled a cigarette with her shaky, stained fingers, and i watched how the sun patterned the pine boughs beyond her head.

fiorella, your mama went to the state hospital. for all our new-society idealism, none of us knew how to help her heal. you went around questioning, not really looking for her but wondering what to do. someone else fed you, and more often now you would come to my porch for love. i wrote naomi a short, unemotional, newsy note—you were doing fine but missing her, the cauliflowers were heading up. i had nothing else left to give her.

the last i heard she was released, zombied out on their drugs, gone south somewhere with no forwarding address. she left her car and books here for whoever wanted them. she didn't leave word what to do with you and so you continue to be everyone's cat and no one's. . .but it is not so new for you to take care of yourself.

you are still a small cat but there is a strength in you. your fur no longer carries the musty smells of tobacco and marijuana; you are more your own now like a woman newly widowed after a smothering marriage. you are more my kind of cat



now, but i am not able to take care of you, and i am leaving, so i am leaving without you.

i wonder what naomi would think if she knew i was going? it was my dream, after all—i came into this thing with such strong envisioning. i leave still believing it could be done—only not here, not among wimin so different, so haphazardly and newly come together.

so here we are, fiorella, you and me sitting here with the bare echoing boards underneath our feet. maybe we'll meet again and maybe not—and i guess you know as much about naomi's path as i do.


i'm glad you came to say goodbye.

---

**TAKE OUR POETRY TEST**

Find out where you stand with the Greats. Poems critiqued. Informative. Fun! \$6.00

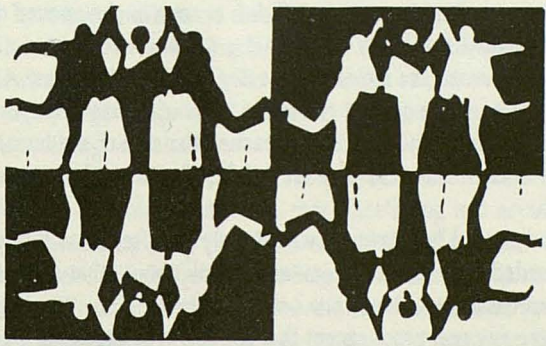
WIM PUBLICATIONS  
BOX 367-#7 COLLEGE CORNER, OH 45003  
INQUIRIES PLEASE SEND S.A.S.E.



---

**LESBIAN CONNECTION**

**FREE TO LESBIANS**



A NATIONWIDE FORUM OF NEWS AND IDEAS  
BY, FOR AND ABOUT LESBIANS

Ambitious Amazons, PO Box 811,  
East Lansing, MI 48823

## Crisis

Edith Rebecca Greenblatt had been in severe psychic pain for weeks. She did not want to see anyone, not even Hilda Schwartz, her part-time lover. Edith did not know where the pain had come from. She wondered if the pain was Jewish pain, and then decided it had to be real, because last week she had unplugged her phone. She had finally cut herself off from the goyim; but then Schwartzie couldn't get through either.

Wednesday night after plugging her phone back in, Edith picked up the receiver and asked for help. She called Alice Blakely, a name she had picked from a random list of local therapists in the yellow pages. There had been nine women listed as professional therapists, but only Alice Blakely had had an opening. Edith swallowed hard before telling her new therapist that she was a writer and a lesbian. She had coughed and couldn't get the words out when she tried to tell her new therapist that she was a Jew. An appointment was set for 9:15, Friday morning. Edith hoped she could wait that long. When she put the receiver down, she unplugged her phone.

Friday morning, she drove slowly. How was she going to explain her condition to a total stranger? Edith wanted to be specific. *I'm in crisis*, seemed a good place to start. Turning onto Wild Knoll Drive, she counted the houses. *One, two, it was the third blue house on the left.* A huge German Shepherd came leaping out from the side of the house, waiting to pounce on Edith as soon as she opened the door. *It was definitely insensitive to have a barking dog leaping out at your clients.*

As soon as she turned the motor off, the dog was still. *The least Alice could have done was warn her.* She got out of the car without taking her eyes off the animal and continued staring at him until she reached the side of the house. Nothing happened. Edith opened the door and sat quickly down on the couch. She was in a waiting room.

The dog had slowed her down; it was already ten after nine. Edith liked to arrive early. She needed the extra few minutes to think about what she was going to say. *'I've been depressed for a long time,' sounded better than 'I'm in crisis.'* After all she didn't have any real proof except that she had unplugged her phone. She didn't know what was wrong with her, but her relationship with Schwartzie was absolutely not the issue. If there was one thing Edith Rebecca Greenblatt knew about herself, it was that she loved loving Jewish women. Even that didn't sound right.

On the table next to the couch she noticed several diplomas in cheap black frames. They were stacked one on top of the other like the magazines in her dentist's office. Edith had never seen diplomas displayed that way. She picked up the top one. ALICE BLAKELY IS HEREBY AWARDED A MASTER OF SCIENCES



DEGREE IN SOCIAL WORK. *Social Work*. Alice had said nothing about social working over the phone. Edith pictured herself talking to someone who went into people's homes looking for poverty and child abuse. She could almost hear the woman's soft knock on the inner city door, her arms full of Shop & Save groceries. Edith knew she needed a therapist, not a saint.

She continued reading, THE TOWN OF CONWAY, NEW HAMPSHIRE, HEREBY AWARDS ALICE BLAKELY A CITATION IN EXCELLENCE IN HER FIELD. SHE IS AN EXEMPLARY CITIZEN. This woman did not seem to be what Edith had in mind. She needed more than a good Samaritan to get her out of crisis. She needed a strict disciplinarian. Somebody compassionate, smart, but not too nice. Edith hated nice women.

The last degree confused her the most. The document testified that Alice Blakely had completed a course in T.A. So she was no longer a social worker, she was a Transactional Analyst. Edith noticed that she had only completed the course last year. Edith did not feel like being a guinea pig. She was afraid of experiments. The rats always ended up dead or with cancer.

The door in the waiting room opened. A very white woman with greying blond hair walked in. A WASP, Edith choked. She should have known better. After all, how many Jewish therapists were there in Conway? How many Jews were there in New Hampshire? Edith Rebecca Greenblatt had not adequately prepared herself for talking to a gentile. On the phone these things never registered. She could never tell how white someone was over the phone. Edith knew she was capable of talking to all kinds. But always in the past, she had needed time. Her last therapist had not been a Jew, Edith reminded herself; she had been an Italian.

Alice Blakely held her gentile hand directly in front of Edith's waist, waiting for Edith's Jewish hand so they could shake together. Edith swallowed; she liked that the woman was clearly middle-aged. She had wanted to talk to an older woman. She shook Alice's hand with vigor. She wanted to let Alice know that she was totally committed to working with her.

"You must be Edith. I'm Alice Blakely. I hope you weren't waiting long."

"Hello." Edith was not going to mention that Alice's dog had accosted her. She did not want her new therapist to think she was afraid of animals.

"Come in. Sit down." She followed Alice into her office. She liked the shape of her body, not fat, just round and curvy. She did not feel fat next to this woman. That was good because Edith hated to be heavier than her therapist. Edith's Italian therapist had been bone thin; they had spent weeks talking about compulsive eating. Finally Edith had learned to like her own body. Today she did not want to talk about eating. Alice Blakely's plump little body reminded Edith of her big sitting-up pillow which had always been a tremendous comfort to her.

"I can't sit too close to you. I'm just getting over a cold," Alice said pushing her chair what seemed to be yards away from Edith. Maybe Alice didn't want to sit close to her clients because she was afraid of catching depression. It seemed more



WASPY than anything else. When the Jews had a cold they all sat around blowing each other's noses. In fact, Edith had seen her parents share the same square white handkerchief. But this was not the first time a WASP had had a cold and refused to sit next to her. Edith knew how to respond. She pushed her chair as far away from Alice's as possible, trying to show that she was sympathetic to the situation.

Once both women were seated, Edith looked around the room. It was more like a den or a playroom for kids than a counseling room. A huge playpen filled with stuffed animals was off to the left side of the sitting area. There was a blackboard on an easel near the couch. Colored chalk was in the tray with the erasers. Edith tried hard to get the feel of the room. But she was unable to get one single sensation. Alice sat up, blowing her nose. In a minute her kleenex would be neatly returned to that place directly beneath her watchband where women-with-colds tucked their hankies.

Alice sniffed. Edith looked for a cross around her neck. None. Good. She wouldn't be distracted. There was nothing worse than talking to a woman with a silver cross around her neck. Edith could never concentrate whenever she saw Christian jewelry. She always felt as though she were being converted.

"I'm depressed. I think I'm in crisis." Edith looked at Alice who was nodding her head with only her neck. Edith wondered if this was Alice's listening pose. The Jews listened with their whole bodies. They pushed their chairs in closer the more interesting the story became. They folded and unfolded their hands. Alice Blakely listened more with her head. Her entire body remained motionless. She looked as though she was sleeping with her eyes open.

"I feel self-destructive." Alice blinked. "It's nothing to worry about. I'm used to the feeling by now. I can usually recognize it before I do anything drastic." Alice's mouth had opened several times and then closed immediately. Edith wasn't sure if she was gasping for breath or trying to interrupt with a good therapeutic question.

"That's not what I really want to talk about. I just wanted to give you some background. I've been unhappy for days. I can't seem to shake it." Edith had started talking with her hands.

"Could we get back to the self-destruction?" Alice was taking notes. Edith watched her underline the word *self-destruct*. She smiled to herself; it felt good to be taken seriously. She also liked talking about depression. It was one topic she knew a lot about.

"I've always thought if I was going to kill myself, I'd take rat poisoning. I remember learning in Hebrew School that the Jews of Warsaw carried cyanide tablets in small silver chains around their necks. When they couldn't defend themselves any longer they went down below the city to the sewers and swallowed the poison in private. They didn't want the Czar's army taking credit for their deaths. I want to die the same way."

"You're Jewish?" Alice said the word *Jewish* very loud. Edith sensed she didn't say the word often.



"Yes, I am a Jew. I like being a Jew. That has nothing to do with why I'm here." Every time Edith said *Jew* her voice got louder and louder. She wished Alice's cold would get worse so Alice would have to push her chair farther away.

"Why is it you want to kill yourself, Edith?" Good. She was being addressed by name.

"I'm a writer. I write fiction, short stories, only I haven't written for months. I need you to help me do my work. I want to write." Alice was still writing furiously into her notebook.

"I've got to tell you what I'm thinking. I don't want to upset you or anything." Alice's neck shook her head; she put her pencil down. "It's okay that you're not a lesbian. I can handle that a whole lot better than the fact that you're not a Jew. I mean you are a woman." Edith was quiet for a few seconds. "Just what is your experience with Feminism? You ARE a FEMINIST aren't you?" Edith was almost screaming.

"Of course I am for equal rights and equal pay." Alice whispered. Her left hand was tucking her kleenex further under her watchband. "I do have a daughter you know."

"What does that mean?" Edith had not come here to discuss politics. She hardly knew how they had got onto women. Edith just wanted to talk. She could see herself sitting in front of her unplugged phone, watching the receiver, hoping the phone would ring anyway. She had to tell Alice about staring at her unplugged phone; about not letting any more goyim in.

"Well, it means that I support the liberation of women, for my daughter's sake, her future." Alice coughed. "Do you always interview your therapist?" She glanced at her notes. "Now what were you saying?"

"JUDAISM." Edith bit her tongue so she wouldn't say anything else. She thought she was going to cry. Maybe she should apologize to Alice. But Alice was still looking at her notes. Edith couldn't seem to get her complete attention.

"I think I'm pretty upset about all this. What do you think?"

"What's this?"

"I forget that New England doesn't have a whole lot of Jews. . .there's mostly gentiles. Everytime I. . ."

"Mostly what?" Edith watched Alice write herself a note in the margin of her notebook. Maybe she was reminding herself to look up more about the Jews.

"I'd like to get back to my depression. I don't want this Jewish thing to come between us. I'm used to being around gentiles." Edith was going to offer to spell *gentile* for Alice.

"Do you know much about Transactional Analysis?" Alice had jumped up and was standing next to the blackboard. She had the blue chalk in her hand. Edith had no idea why they were looking at the blackboard. She had not finished explaining her suffering. "In T.A. we divide the psyche into three parts." Alice was beaming. This was something she knew about. Edith stared at the three blue circles Alice



drew on the board. Inside each circle she put a different letter of the alphabet. The first circle had a "C" then there was a "P" and an "A". Alice's head kept turning from the blackboard to Edith. She was making eye contact. "We in T.A. see the human being as though he were in constant struggle between the parent, adult, and child in himself." *Who was this we?* And was this divided psyche a Jewish or goyisha psyche? Edith had divided her own psyche quite a bit differently than the T.A. people. She wondered if she should interrupt. "The parent constantly corrects us. The parent constantly says SHOULD! We are most unhappy when the parent takes over. We feel forced to behave in ways we don't want to." That sounded like the Jew in her. Edith was always telling herself that she should give more money to Israel and eat less bacon and ham. "The adult on the other hand..." Alice seemed far away. Perhaps she had forgotten Edith was there, asking for help. "The adult makes responsible choices based on his wants, needs and responsibilities within society at large." Edith recognized that her adult-self was the lesbian in her. The most adult decision she had ever made was to come out of the closet. "And the child always cries whenever he doesn't get his way, or whenever he feels totally misunderstood."

Alice wasn't exactly an artist. Her drawing was all stick figures, but obviously she had perfected her technique while in training. Edith was trying to figure out her child-self. Maybe the writer. . .she was always crying because she couldn't write. *That* was one of the things she had wanted to talk about. Alice had returned to her seat. "Did that help you?" She looked pleased. She had not blown her nose once throughout the entire performance.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I could have gotten the same idea if you had stayed in your seat." Alice nodded, appreciating her client's honesty. "But it was helpful. I can see the child in me takes over a lot." Her own neck was stiff watching Alice's head go up and down. She seemed to agree with whatever Edith had to say. Evidently honesty was highly valued among the T.A. people. Edith wanted to scream; why didn't Alice Blakely tell her to be quiet and listen. Somebody had to be willing to tell Edith that she didn't know everything.

"I think your problem is with the child in you." Immediately Edith sat up, and decided not to scream. "In T.A. we try to isolate that part of the psyche which is suffering the most."

"Do you think you could stop saying *in T.A. we*. . . I mean I'm just not sure who is talking to me. I like to think you can make your own conclusions about my life." Edith wondered if she'd gone too far; she felt the child in her was taking over.

"I'm not sure what you mean, but I can see you are in pain."

"It's not that I don't like you, I do. And I don't want to tell you how to run this session, but couldn't you just stop saying that phrase, *in T.A. we?* I stop listening as soon as you say those words." Edith tried to smile at her new therapist, but Alice was staring hard at her client as if she was trying to make her disappear.



"You see, I was right. The child in you is most unhappy. I'm sorry if my method offends you." Edith wanted to pick Alice Blakely's round little body up off its gentle seat and shake it up and down until the woman yelled at Edith to shut up. Alice just sat there staring hard and cold at her. She was absolutely the most unreachable human being Edith had ever met in her entire life. Edith felt herself withdrawing. In fact she wanted to get up and run out to her car, but she was afraid the German Shepherd would get her. Edith decided to be a good client. She put her hands together and then placed them directly into her lap.

"I want to write my stories, can you help me?"

"Do your parents know you're a lesbian?"

"What?"

"Your parents, your mother. . ."

"Oh no, of course not." Edith had decided long ago never to tell her parents unless they asked first. Jews tended to see all things they didn't understand as tragic. And Edith somehow knew that having a grandmother who survived Auschwitz and having a lesbian in the same family were incompatible if your parents were Jews.

"What I think I am really upset about is my writing." Edith said it louder, "I'm blocked."

"It seems to me your mother would want to know that you have found someone. . ."

"I do not want to tell my parents. They wouldn't understand. Besides, I like coming home for Rosh Hashanah and the Seder."

"Seder?"

"Passover."

"Oh, yes, that's like our last supper, isn't it? About the child in you, Edith you seem so unhappy. Worse now than when you came in. It just seemed to make sense, that if your mother knew about you and a . . ."

"Schwartzie."

"Schwartzie, you would be a lot happier. Do you enjoy yourself much?" Alice had stopped taking notes.

"Actually, I can't remember the last time I was really happy. It seems to me I have always been sad." Edith wanted to curl up in a little ball. She hated reminding herself how unhappy she was. There had never been anyone who could help her. She wanted to ask Alice if she understood about her parents, but that didn't seem to be the issue anymore.

"Can you remember specifics?"

"There's not a whole lot to tell. I just seem to be unhappy all the time. I don't know why."

"It is clear. *You do not enjoy yourself.*"

"Yes." Edith already knew that.

"Do you think being a Jew has made you unable to have fun?"

"What does being Jewish have to do with not being able to write my stories?"

"In T.A. we like to go back to the beginning, you know Genesis. We feel it's important to understand our roots."

"I already understand where I come from. This is absolutely not helping me."

"I'm sorry you feel that way. I think you are resisting. I have seen this kind of reaction before. Your kind always think you're right." Alice was determined to counsel Edith.

"I'd like you to get in this playpen." Alice was schlepping the thing over to Edith's chair. "I want you to get inside and play with the animals."

Edith had never done anything like this before. She decided to go along with Alice. Nothing could make her feel worse than she felt now. Besides, it would make a great story, no matter what happened. Maybe Alice did know what she was doing; maybe Edith would be happier after she got inside the playpen. She got up from her chair and lifted her right leg up so high she almost fell over the top bar. Jumping off the ground slightly, she was able to put her foot evenly down on the pegboard floor. One more jump and she was inside waiting for her next set of instructions.

"Good girl. How do you feel?" Alice was clearly happy. Everything was back the way the T.A. people said it should be.

Edith tried to get comfortable. The bottom of the playpen was hard. She could see why children never stayed inside for long. She was uncomfortable herself. But for the sake of becoming a happy person, or at least a good story, she would try to cooperate.

"Pick up your favorite animal and talk to it. Tell it everything you always wanted to say as a child, but kept buried inside yourself instead. We in T.A. do this all the time. We call it *reconnecting*." Alice was almost singing. She had a lovely little shiksa voice. Edith could just see Alice dressed in a purple choir robe, singing about Jesus Christ and smiling one big grin. Edith wanted to ask her to stop saying the T.A. slogan, but it didn't seem worth the effort. Instead she looked around for her favorite animal. As a child she had played nonstop with a small tan fox. "I really don't have a favorite, Alice. None of these is my kind."

"Can't you just pick one? I like the giraffe myself. Try the giraffe. Go on pick it up, Edith."

"Alright." The giraffe was cute. His head was about six inches from his body. That reminded Edith of herself. Lots of times she felt like her Jewish body and her Jewish mind were miles apart. Edith liked the brown spots on the giraffe. "This isn't working." She put down the stuffed giraffe and looked for Alice's face through the bars.

"What do you mean, *this isn't working*? Of course it is." Alice was taking notes.

"I'm not happy. I don't feel anything."

"You're not supposed to feel or think. You're supposed to talk to that giraffe so I can observe you. Now start TALKING." Alice didn't even look up from her notebook; she was too busy writing. Edith could almost feel the word *RESISTING*



coming out of her pencil as she wrote. Edith felt ridiculous. What was a twenty-six year old Jewish lesbian doing on the floor of her goyisha therapist's playpen? Edith stood up; she dragged her right leg over the top bar.

"What are you doing?" Alice had finally looked up from her notebook. She walked over to Edith. "Don't you understand, you have to stay in there. It's for your own good." Alice tried to push Edith back inside. She had her hands on Edith's shoulders. Edith was sure Alice wasn't very strong. Edith counted to three. She collected her strength. She sucked in all the air she could and then heaved straight up. Alice fell back. For a moment both women were completely still. Edith felt herself taking over the session, but that was not what she wanted at all. She didn't know what to do with herself. Alice walked slowly back towards the playpen; she straightened her hair. Edith could feel her thinking. If Alice tried to touch her again, Edith knew she would jump up and lash out at the woman. Edith had been listening for too long. She was exhausted. All she wanted was to be held, to have her head massaged gently so she could sleep. Alice wasn't going to let her sleep. Edith saw it in her eyes. Alice's hands were on top of the playpen. She leaned over, bending her head inside the cage. She put her face as close to Edith's as she possibly could without touching her. In a very loud voice she said, "GET OUT. You are obviously resisting treatment so get out." Alice took her head out of the playpen and looked at her watch.

Edith couldn't talk. She didn't know if she was supposed to get out of Alice's house or just get out of her playpen. She couldn't believe she had almost tried to beat up her therapist. She didn't think she could ever tell any one. Who would believe her?

"We have to end now. We've already gone over our time limit. I am going to ask you to do one more thing — not for me — for yourself, Edith. It's up to you of course."

"Yes?" Edith hated favors.

"I want you to be depressed for fifteen minutes every day until your next appointment. I want you to sit in your room, or wherever you get depressed the best. Keep telling yourself how horrible you feel, think about being Jewish, and then see if you can cry a little. Write it all down and we'll talk about it." Edith nodded.

"I hope I have helped you. Your kind of depression is quite severe. Why don't you come again Monday?"

That was only three days away. It seemed too soon. Edith wasn't sure that she ever wanted to see this woman again. "Yes, that's great." Why was she agreeing to come back? Why couldn't she say *no*? "What time?"

"Three o'clock."

"Okay." Edith stood up.

"Do you want a hug?" Edith didn't believe what she just heard. She turned towards the door. Alice stood in front of her with her arms stretched out, ready to embrace Edith with the whole of her Christian body. Edith thought maybe this was

a trick, and that if she hugged Alice back — her therapist was really going to try and hit her or force her back into the playpen. Edith stared hard at Alice. She was wrong. The end here where Alice gets to offer her client a hug, was her favorite part. That's what she must be known for. *HUGGY ALICE BLAKELY*. No matter how the session went, she always hopped up in the end, waiting to take her client into her breast. Edith shuddered. That was one breast she could live without.

"No thank you."

"Oh, I should have known, you're not the hugging type. I can see it now." Alice looked relieved. She had reunited her arms with the rest of her body. She had probably never hugged a Jewish lesbian before and didn't know exactly what to do. They shook hands instead.

On her way to the car, Edith told herself to plug her phone back in as soon as she got home. First she would call Alice Blakely and cancel their Monday appointment. Then she'd call Schwartzie and tell her The Depression was beginning to lift. Maybe next week they could drive into Boston for blintzes.



### **LABYRIS, a bi-annual feminist arts journal**

invites submissions of poetry, fiction,  
and essays on women writers  
and artists.

Please include S.A.S.E.

Sample copy of Labyris  
available for 3.00.

Subscriptions: \$5.00/year.

All correspondence to:  
LABYRIS PRESS  
P.O. Box 16102  
Lansing, MI 48933



## **TAKING CONTROL**

**The Magazine of The Reproductive Rights National Network**

\$8 Regular     \$12 Supporting     \$\_\_\_\_\_ Sustaining

Make checks payable to:  
Reproductive Rights National Network  
17 Murray Street  
New York, New York 10007

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_



## S'il Vous Plait

She wears a pastel-colored pantsuit,  
miscast among the denim-slacked, flannel-shirted crowd.  
She left the make-up off; still on the vanity at home.  
But she clings to the huge brown leather bag,  
as if she may withdraw into it, pulling  
the zipper shut over her head.  
First night in the bar and  
she smiles timid, hopefully, at  
the flurry of bodies that  
nonchalantly buzz around her.  
No one sees or cares.  
She is a misfit, as  
her sexual longings have always told her.  
(Even here, she does not belong.)  
Soon she will slither from the stool and,  
like a dissolving pool, evaporate  
through the door and  
fade into mist.  
Return is unlikely.



from *The Pinball Player*

## White Trash Girl

White trash girl  
ain't you scared of me  
like I'm scared of you?  
Afraid we gonna blow our cover  
gonna name each other  
gonna wind up back where we  
just bust outta - flippin' burgers,  
pluckin' turkeys - and waitin'

Ain't I afraid you're gonna  
look too close, remember me,  
and see. . .there ain't no  
bank account, resumé, insurance plan  
no plan at all  
and still I'm walkin' round soft,  
soft on the edge of the carpet

Ain't it funny  
Do you recall?  
Hillbilly, hick, greaser girl  
My folks called yours,  
That trash up the hill  
And your folks called mine,  
That trash down the road

Powdered milk face girl  
I seen you  
gettin' offa the greyhound bus  
back then, the same day I did  
But I was sure  
that you and me  
was goin' different places



Red-fox eyed girl  
I seen you too, at the parties  
and po-lit-ical affairs  
over-admirin' your own new shoes  
goin' for the beer  
when they start to talk  
about root canal and school vacations

Ain't it funny  
Do you recall?  
Hillbilly, hick, linthead girl  
When yer mama gave mine  
her Friday tips  
for my sister to go  
to the doctor  
and nobody told  
nobody's papa

White trash girl  
ain't you scared of me  
like I'm scared of you?  
Afraid we gonna rock the boat  
if we start to talk  
about pov-er-ty  
and corn meal mush  
in the middle  
of the fem-in-ist  
rev-o-lu-shun?

Shun, shun  
you never been my lover  
Shun, shun  
never ate no  
bread nor beans, together  
Shun shame  
never killed no pain, together

White trash girl  
do you ever think  
you gonna choke  
down that coun-try  
silence?

Shun shame  
call my name  
Hillbilly, hick, greaser girl  
Hillbilly, hick, linthead girl  
My mama said false pride  
That ain't no pride at all  
Shun shame  
call my name  
Hillbilly, hick  
White trash girl.



*Fauna Yarrow*



## former friend

as if

my ass in plaid slacks is backing the door  
open my arms clutching pizza with  
salami to go large while you

pause then sip white wine & eat  
salad

from a glass plate as if

sweaty in green & blue arnel i  
spill wine everyone sees on the  
cream carpet while you

in lilac silk smile

telling me not to worry it will  
dry in no time as if

behind the counter with aching legs i'm  
doodling

on a sales pad while you

a run in your stocking but  
each hair in place enter  
the dressing room to put on new  
stockings you paid me 99¢ plus  
tax for just to finish the day or

when we hug i crack your bones or  
when i cry groping for something  
your eyes get hard on the street

you say "hi" but i talk  
too loud next door am too  
close clinging as if

grabbing your sleeve  
of natural fibers  
in muted tones

1981-84

## Ms. Right, My True Love, My Soul Mate

I go to the place where I can be alone, where no one will bother me, where I do most of my rituals: the bathroom. I'm sitting on the john smoking a cigarette and picking buggers out of my nose. Tan, tan, someone's fist is banging on the door. "I don't want to buy any. Come back tomorrow."

"Open the door, Loka," my roomie yells out. "There's a woman here to see you and I need to use the potty before I go out."

"Can't I even take a shit in peace? It's my turn in the bathroom," I call out, pushing the door open with my foot. "Why is it so hard for you to stick to your schedule—you shit in the morning and I shit at night."

"What can I do for an ingrown toenail?" I ask a woman I've never clapped eyes on before. She's dressed in black wet-looking shirt and pants and she's made herself at home on the edge of my bathtub.

"Put turpentine around the nail," she tells me, flicking back a wing of black hair that's fallen over her right eye. She pinches her nose and averts her face. "Yuck," she says. "Do you want tea or something. The kitchen's that a way," I say.

"Or something," she says. "Look, ruca, I came for the suitcase Juan left with you."

"What suitcase? Oh, that one. It's been here for years." I flush the toilet and pull up my shorts. I look under the bed, in the closets, in the cabinets under the kitchen counter. "Hey, I know where it is." It's under my desk, I've been using it as a footstool. Such a drag being short. I can't type with my feet dangling, it brings the blood down from my brain into my toes."

"Ay, ruca, maybe that's why you have an ingrown toenail," she tells me, a smirk on her face.

I wrinkle my nose at her then pull out the suitcase and toss it onto the bed. I open it before she can stop me. An odor of dank herbs fills the room. "Que feo apesta, whew. What did you and Juan put in here?" I say picking up one of the burlap packets and holding it arm's length between thumb and forefinger.

"Hierbas, mama," she says.

"Oyes, tu, you can take this brujeria out of here right now. I don't truck with no witchy magic."



"It was a Houston-based operation," she said. "We pushed each bag for a couple of hundred. To rich gringos, mostly. Of course, it costs more than that now that the chota's got a scent of it."

"I'm not surprised," I tell her. "They can smell this stuff all the way to Mexico City. Do you snort it or eat it or what?"

"You make cigarettes and smoke them through your cunt. Or you can put it in orange juice or make tea with it. Give it five minutes and you'll see whatever you most desire right in front of you. Yeah, ruca, I know it's hard to believe but you really get what you want. You wanna try it."

"I don't know. Do you remember 'The Monkey's Paw'? Well, it's a short story about these two old people who have lost their only son. His body got mangled in some machinery. They make their wish and then there's a knock on the door and they know it's the son or what's left of him," I tell her.

"Ey, come on, raza. Would I kid you about a thing like this? There must be something you've always wanted and waited for. Truth is I don't like to owe no one no favors. One bag for you and we're even."

We take off for the open kitchen. "What is it you've been wanting most for a long time?" she asks me as she lights a long brown cigarette.

"My one and only, of course. Ms. Right, my true love, my soul mate. I've been wanting and waiting for her all my life."

She looked at me as if I were demented.

"Waiting?" she scoffed putting her boot on the chair and leaning her elbow on the raised knee. "Well, not no more. This little bag of hierbas will end your waiting. Right now. Ten minutes at the outside."

"You mean she's just around the corner, or coming to knock on my door?"

"Yeah, ruca, she's in every corner. You'll see."

I dump one of the packets into the boiling water. Then being the hospitable mexican that I am I bring down two cups.

"No, no, yo no quiero. You have to drink the whole packet or else it won't work," she says as she paces back and forth, the sound of those black boots that come up to her knees is loud enough to raise the dead. "Look, I gotta go. I just want to see you down the stuff then I'll split. In ten minutes I can be half way down to Mexico. Andale, mujer, apurate."

I emptied the little bag in the boiling water and set about stirring the mixture. I've never liked waiting so when she turned her head to look out the window I dumped one of the bags I had pocketed when she hadn't been looking. To be on the safe side I dumped in a third. \$600 worth of the stuff should have some sort of effect on me. But you've guessed it, I'm a sceptic.

Waiting and "the one and only" came together. Who'd ever heard of "the one and only" coming without waiting?

So Ms. Skeptic stands there staring at the woman's long slender fingers holding the long brown cigarette and trying to think of withering things to say to her when the five minutes are up. But it was like she said it would be. The thing I most desired in the whole wide world was standing there before me and *she* looked even better than before. What a beauty, the thick lashes, the lips like shiny plums, nipples pushing against the black shirt. Luscious. "My soul mate," I cried, lunging myself at her. She pushed me away, grabbed a flyswatter and started swinging it at me.

"Don't you know me?" I asked. *I was shocked.* Hadn't we been soul mates dozens of lifetimes? Imagine, not remembering your lover of eons full of embraces. La cagada no -se acordaba de mi. Some people can be so fickle. "Please," I say, hating the whining in my voice. "Just let me touch you." If I touched her she'd come to her senses. One kiss would wake her soul. And she too would see her "one and only" standing before her. If that doesn't work I'll force the tea down her throat, the bitch! I knew exactly how to do it. The way was described perfectly in the last murder mystery I'd read.

"Please, I feel dizzy. What did you put in that tea?" I said putting my hands up to my face, my body swaying back and forth like a cobra's.

"Now, don't faint on me, woman. No one that's done tea's ever gotten sick." She half drags me to the bed and tips me over. I topple and land on one end of the suitcase. A cloud of dust rises making my eyes and mouth water. As she tries to pull the suitcase from under me I reach up and pull her down.

The jury buzzed with unease when I first told them the story. "How many times do I have to tell you?" I yelled at the prosecutor. "I only meant to kiss her." A woman, then a man and another and another scream things at me.

"Order, order in my court," thunders the judge, his gavel making holes in the wood top. "One more peep out of any of you and I'll have you out on your ear."

"Something made me do it. I lost it. I wasn't myself. She was my 'one and only,' my soul mate. Don't you understand, I'd been waiting for her all my life. We'd finally found each other. She was so stupid she didn't even know who I was."

"You ate her!" the persecuting attorney said. "Aren't you happy. You have her at last, *all* of her." I stood there head bowed, a smile beginning to pull up the edges of my mouth. Like they say, you are what you eat. Sucking on her red red heart, on eyes smoother than grapes, nibbling fingers and toes more tender than chicken wings, chewing hair crisp as lettuce. I'd eaten every inch of her. It took me a while, but finally I'd performed a total merger.



She was now flesh of my flesh — every lover's dream. My soul mate could never leave me, I thought to myself, fingering the amulet around my neck. People think it's a rabbit's foot, but it's her big toe. It's dried up now. The prison guards let me keep it when I told them I needed it to ward off ingrown nails. They also let me bring my favorite pillow. Guess what it's stuffed with. At first I feared they'd hear the dry rustling of the burlap packets or get a whiff of the dank smell. I'm so glad prisons haven't gone co-ed.



*ruca* is short for *pachuca*; *hierbas* is herbs; *Andale, mujer, apurate* means "come on, woman, hurry up"; *brujeria* is witchcraft; *chota* is a cop; *La cagada no se acordaba de mi* means "the shithead didn't remember me."

---

## The Women's Review of Books

**AN INDEPENDENT MONTHLY REVIEW** • providing information and informed opinion on new books by and about women • presenting a feminist perspective on current writing.

**IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF** • feminist writing on all subjects • books in every area of women's studies • women's autobiography, fiction and poetry

---

Yes, I want to subscribe to the **Women's Review**

I enclose \_\_\_\_\_ \$12 for a one-year subscription.

(Please add \$3 postage to Canada or Mexico, \$5 surface mail postage or \$18 airmail postage elsewhere outside the US)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Mail your check or money order to Dept. (11Z) **Women's Review of Books**, Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, Wellesley, MA 02181.

## Nectarines

*"I remember loving you first when  
I saw you eating that nectarine."*

The soul  
in the sweet flesh  
we wanted first, yes  
the sheer juice  
of one another  
that would taste of colors  
the skin promised:  
red of fall leaves or blood  
or the blush of us, yellow  
that betrayed our  
caution; I called it  
vulnerable  
but we both knew.

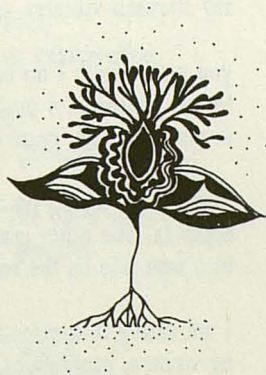
Today  
reaching for a nectarine  
from our kitchen basket  
I know we are more  
than hungers; we nourish  
in small bites  
in the round  
quiet that beckoned  
like the soft but muscled flesh  
you saw me eat.

After a year  
I bite  
and linger, watch  
the last pulp pull  
from ridges and dips  
in the hard pit.



Half-cracked I pry it  
open with fingers  
that sign my love  
on your cheek; half-cracked  
I work the wood pit  
apart with hands  
that clench in reflex  
when I wonder  
should I  
be alone?

Inside  
the soft seed's  
brown, the burnish of  
thighs or belief; inside  
the seed is  
oval not perfect  
varied as trust  
ready to be planted.



A'Court

## #35 We Say We Love Each Other

You say: *The trouble is: we don't understand each other.*

Your sounds have fascinated me from the first, the way you laugh in your throat like a saxophone. But last time the radio played reedy brass, low sexy, I started crying (last time, in the car alone, Duke Street, the aroma of tobacco curing, invisible smoke in my mouth, small jazz being played in a room in a distant city.)

Lately I understand this:

I want your voice, mysterious music of your body, yet our words, gestures are from different languages.

If we are sitting on the couch, eating oranges, sweet acid, like lovemaking,  
and the phone rings in another room: you answer, your murmur, my stomach vibrates, a deep drum flutter at your sound:

you come back, I do not ask *Who was it?*  
to me, intrusion, a push into your room:  
to you, removal, uncaring of closeness:

then we are sitting on the couch, abrupt separate. The bitter orange rinds sit in a neat pile on the round dish before us.

I am sitting in a place made for me by women, generations, Scot, Irish, sitting on a little bit of land, holding on, survival on an island, isolation, a closed mouth in their own kitchen, self-containment.



You are sitting in a place made for you  
by women, generations, Jews in Spain, Holland,  
Russia, the Pale, Poland, Roumania, America,  
the pogroms, no bit of land safe, none  
to be owned as home, survival by asking, asking,  
knowing where every one was, enemy, family.

Later if we talk about this moment, we observe,  
abstract: even as I write, I make it distant:  
but we are sitting on the couch: separate, not abstract:  
history speaks like a voice through our bodies:  
how often we do not know that it is this  
we do not understand:

fascination with what  
we have not known: what we love: your hand  
gripping my chin, jaw, drawing me to you  
for a kiss: my interest in something in my hands,  
veins in my palm, in a yellow gingko leaf,  
my look up, the sudden kiss I give you:

what we fight bitterly: voices scraping against  
*demanding, selfish.*

Where is the future we spoke of,  
between us, stronger by difference?

We are sitting on the couch,  
trying to understand each other: signs,  
gestures, giving words, pointing to an object,  
*what do you mean*, translation, renaming, exasperation,  
repeating, frustration, anger:

lists, paper  
with words, paper with pictures, poems, photographs,  
pointing, asking *what did you mean?*

The other says  
she loves: how believe when her words, gestures  
are not the ones that speak love to you?

We sit on the couch. You rub my feet. I watch  
your mouth. We say again that we love each other.

for Joan, my lover  
1/8/83

## #37 Night Gives Us the Next Day

Tonight it is raining ice, no thunder, no lightning, just the cold rain hissing in the leaves. Things are growing a skin of ice. Come close. Warm my skin with the palm of your hand. I don't want us brittle cold with pain. I want to dance the flamingo with you, hot pink, and kiss.

The night weather is changeable as us: a kiss of ice, then thunder, now melting rain, light tongues whispering in the air: will we dance? will we fight? You tell me of a lover who leaves you: you won't leave me. But I've felt your want change, shut tight against me, felt your heart close.

And me? Yes, I'm one afraid to be close. I've said so. Have I said I'm afraid to lose one kiss of yours? I've known how I'd love if I let myself want. This is what I want: to be with you in slant light, shifting weather, morning, evening, forever: neither leaves the other: so unlikely. But will you save a dance?

and we could do the duck, the raccoon, the fish: dance thighs pressed against cunts: absolutely too close for public. But not for the bar: The Other Side leaves the lights down low: we could do more than kiss, oh yes, we could practice who leads, how a light hand, a supple back, lead wherever they want:

to the car, to make out, make love, drive if we want, midnight to the coast, hear the rain's uneven dance in the marshes at dawn by Pamlico Sound: light no fire, but watch in the grey, huddled close, for flocks of islands, the wintering ducks: kiss at the clap of their wings: thunder, and night leaves:



leaves us together, not waked from a dream: leaves  
us the next day, the days after. Say that's what you want.  
There's still 15th Street, where we managed to kiss  
in a grey drift of tear gas: we've yet to dance  
there: or the streets where women must pull blankets close,  
sleep on islands of steam, to live through to light.

Tonight rain in the street leaves cold hope that the women will dance.  
But we've worked more than change in the weather by stubborn want. Close  
your arms around me, kiss me. We'll tell secrets on the world until light.

for Joan  
a sestina for Valentine's Day

2/8/83

Minnie Bruce Pratt

## #38 Your Hand Opening Me

Flat on our backs on the floor, boards hard as packed clay:

how I've wanted to make love with you outside, your ass  
sunk into a curve of dirt, my fingers sunk in you  
up to the palm and knuckles: your hips, my feet  
thrashing the leaves like some unknown animal just  
out of sight in the bushes.

Not tonight, we are quiet,  
behind a door, away from the cold, the other women:

quiet, your hand opening, opening me, to the width  
of light made by one candle, opening my thighs  
clenched against night, an eye pressed up to the window,  
someone who might look at my secret:

how I need  
your hand moving in me, unpredictable hot fingers:  
how my throat opens, my mouth closes on sounds,  
high, stretched, squeals as the swifts fall  
in the chimney, jostled from their night roosts, thumping  
behind the bricks: like my heels on the floor.

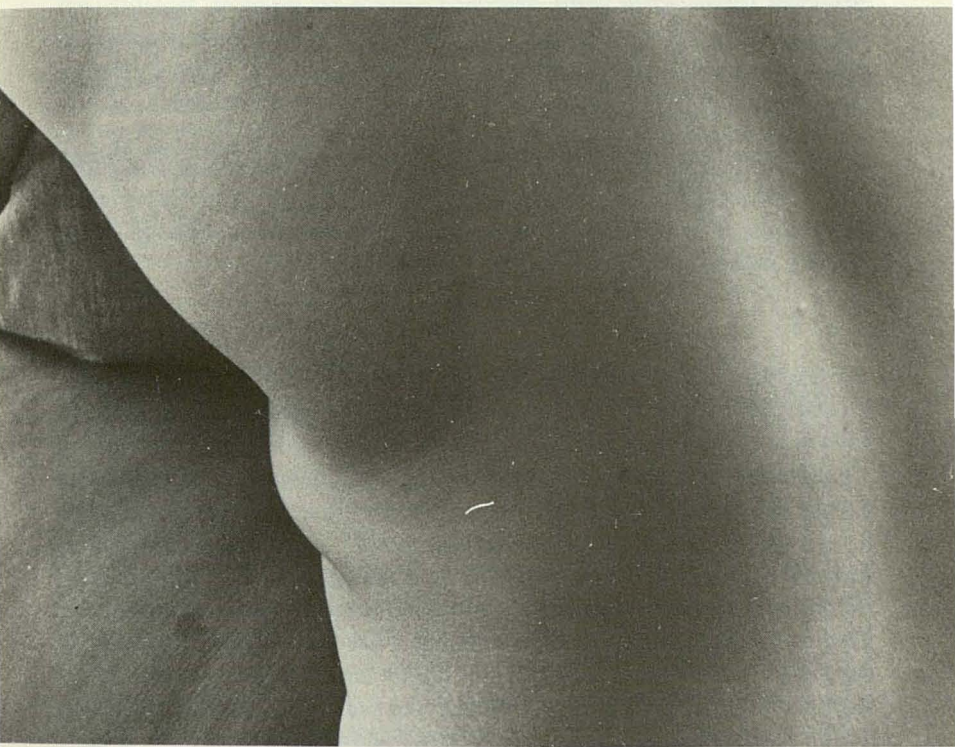
Sometimes  
I'm afraid: when we make love or I write like this:  
my need for you: that you'll look at me from the outside,  
through the blank windows and think *how ridiculous*: a woman  
with face opened to a throat, words nothing but  
squeal and thump.

I have been afraid: you have held me,  
tonight your right arm between me and the harsh dusty floor,  
your left hand pressing me open, praising my secrets:

you have loved me: so I can come to you again  
like this: my need for you naked as me,  
flat on my back, thighs open, against the boards.

for Joan, for summer solstice  
to begin the poems again after my move  
6/19/83





*Elisabeth Griggs*

## All of Our Art for Our Sake

*For Nights Like This One*, by Becky Birtha. 1983. Frog in the Well. 430 Oakdale Road. East Palo Alto, CA 94303. \$4.75

*Cuentos: Stories by Latinas*, edited by A. Gómez, C. Moraga, and M. Romo-Carmona. 1983. Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, P.O. Box 2753, Rockefeller Station, N.Y., N.Y. 10185. \$7.95

*Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, edited by Barbara Smith. 1983. Kitchen Table Press. \$10.95

*The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*, by Paula Gunn Allen. 1983. Spinsters, Ink. 803 DeHaro Street, San Francisco, CA 94107. \$8.95

### I

Now me— I like the truth. I figured if I ever wrote any stories, they'd be true stories, things that happened to me, the real stuff of life, not all that airy invention.

—Rosario Morales, "I Never Told My Children Stories."

If we were to draft an "issues" list, one which would prioritize the matters most needing our written attention, the state of our literature as art would probably not be raised for consideration;<sup>1</sup> but it is an issue which I, as an artist seeking expression, feel duty-bound to raise. For, as far as I can tell, we have achieved Great Voice; that is, we have produced a critical mass of literature that attests to our commitment to change our world. The outpouring of this voice suggests a *truth* about our united efforts: the publication of *For Nights Like This One*, a collection of short stories for and about loving women; *Cuentos*, a first anthology of Latina stories, autobiographical and fictional; *Home Girls*, a Black feminist essay, poetry, and fiction anthology; and, *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*, a non-traditional narrative about the struggles of a Native American to reclaim her personal power, is a mighty accomplishment, especially since the works are by Third World women and have come out of our feminist publishing companies. Since we are the great audience, common and specialized, which receives these books, we should recognize that we have already achieved much with our writings, and that whatever has been written and spoken in the past has broken ground for these important books to come forth.

In this review, I hope to point out the reach for higher truths in the works named above because often, I think, as the Morales character quoted at the opening believes, we have no use for "airy invention." What sometimes is disparaged as "romantic escapist fiction" is thought less viable, less meaningful than expository discourse. But there is much to learn from and appreciate in all of our written art.



Understandably, our battles for personal expression, communal unity, shared ideology—inside and outside the lesbian feminist community—have been and are so hard fought that when a work does not focus on the demons of patriarchy, homophobia, racism, and other societal evils, we may think the author is avoiding unpleasant truths of reality. Hence, to admit the value of fiction and poetry for no purpose political marks both the writer and the appreciator as someone avoiding the challenges (escaping) our common fight. Such a tacit condemnation is unfair to our creators, and to those of us who read widely (in every genre) and engage actively in the dialogue and thinking going on about our plight as lesbian/feminists. So, I'd like to make a few notes on the merits of fiction and poetry, in particular, as I discuss the works under consideration. I hope to show that we are committed to a broad literature that denies no search for truth but which affirms the Truth that we are a victorious, strong, intelligent, indestructible mass of consciousness.

## II

A fictional or poetical work can be as politically charged, as sharply focussed as any prose essay. A writer may choose a creative genre to escape the heavy onus of proving or bullet-proofing a critical position; to offer a broader, if not fairer, portrait of the dynamics of our lives. This way her art is not forced to align itself with current political ideologies; for example, the notion that the personal is always political.

The short story, as it appears in these four works, allows moments of reflection. Among its other uses, it houses analogy, enabling the writer to play on the contrasts between what we term *real* and what we imagine may be true. The short story shapes the stuff of experience in a way that only memory can. It aligns scenes and sayings from those moments of interface that have been unclear until they are reconstructed in our memories—sometimes through pain. Only by recalling memories can we begin to see what happened, or more aptly, what *seemed* to have happened. Because the short story can deal only with a well-defined life occurrence, it is, by its brevity more than any other characteristic, *not* the novel—which allows a longer detailing of causality and character development.

Yet the short story can do as much as the novel when compressed and honed. In *Cuentos*, Rocky Gámez ("Doña Marciana García") and Helen María Viramontes ("Snapshots") handle intense psychological focus on the mental anguish of a single woman character as skillfully in the space of a few pages as Paula Gunn Allen handles the broader interpretation of a like female in *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*. In *Home Girls*, the short story is utilized as a thematic divider, serving the four units of the primarily expository mode like an accent mark. Birtha's *For Nights Like This One* treats the circumstances of human interaction in a series of stories meant to weld together the varying concerns of couples and individual



women, a kind of thematic sequence akin to the aims of a sonnet sequence. All in all, these works isolate experience and create vivid units of portraiture more familiar and, often, closer to the dynamics of our lives than a multitude of single-subject, didactic essays. Thus, to value true life stories over "airy invention," as I suspect many feminists do—because of our determination to document the facts about our lives and the lives of women who wrote before us—is as moot a position as preferring guns to cannons. Both—equally explosive—serve our lives in that they allow us to share our lives with each other; they allow us to see the complexities, the illusions, the ironies of living human, of living feminist, of living lesbian, Jewish, Latina, Indian, Black or Anglo in our various societies.

Similarly with poetry. The poem is not a fact; it is an instrument of cultural preservation, the first art, along with cave painting. It is the art we used in ancient song and ritual, and it has always come from experience and vision. When it is most imagistic, it is dream-like; when it is most graphic, it is tight utterance. It has as many subjects as it has modes of expression, and with both subject and modes of expression as its divine beacons, the poem crystalizes insight in provocative and significant ways. I cannot say that all my poetry is "heretical" in its assault upon that which limits our lives as lesbians and feminists (as Lorde says poetry must be in order to grant us again our ancient power as women), nor is all the poetry I love. A great deal of our poetry gives imaginative free-play to rhyme and rhythm without committing itself to socio-political ideology. For me this is fine; I am willing to read and accept any of the creative forays of lesbian/feminist poets.

*Home Girls* is the only book under discussion which includes much poetry, and in *Home Girls* the poetry is marked by thematic focus. Gloria Hull's "Poem (to Audre Lorde)", for example, witnessing the significance of Lorde's pronouncement—"your silence will not protect you"—set the ideological thrust of the anthology, insisting that "our labor is more important than our silence." And thus Hull's poem ends.

No writing by women today can free us from introspection, reflection, contemplation; we and the writer-women we read *are* searching for some truths—signs, perhaps—that we are not alone in what we understand about our existence. We cannot escape that seeking, and hence, we are allowed no escape. In our writings, both expository and creative, we need to strive to break silence, and we need to seek break-throughs. We need to seek, both within the work, and within ourselves, the point where we extend the limits of what we accept as an expression of truth. For only in this way can we extend the parameters of our art. Likewise, we mustn't restrict our artists to what's already accepted as proper subjects or modes of discourse. Should we limit our explorations within any genre, we'll never find out what we do not yet know about ourselves; we'll never break-through. All of our writing represents the cross-cultural interface of life itself, but how we look at what we read, and what we allow to speak about our lives, will shape our future as literate and literary women.



All that said, the first thing to notice when you open the thirteen stories of *For Nights Like This One* is how Becky Birtha focusses on relationships, the subject matter that links one story to the next in the collection. Because forming and maintaining relationships is at the core of human experience, Birtha's focus is in tune with the flow of the temporal universe we inhabit. In this collection of short stories, she strives to illustrate the need for understanding and communication between people. She examines the nature of love and the nature of living: very high reaches for art.

Frequently using the position of third person narration to gain distance (only three stories use "I" or the first person as narrators), Birtha's stories present glimpses of the changing patterns of human interaction much like the change inside a kaleidoscope. The search for love, the acquiring of it, the means to keep it, the pain of losing it are all themes that receive her attention by turns. And though Becky Birtha's subtitle makes the broad claim that the stories are of "loving women," not every story tells the tale of loving women or even illustrates the ways women love each other. Three of them, without doubt, make just the opposite point: "Safe-Keeping," about a man and a woman, both initially heterosexual, who find in later life that they are gay; "Marisa," a first-person account by a heterosexual woman who is mystified by a lesbian woman; and "Next Saturday," perhaps the most heartbreaking of the stories, about a lesbian piano instructor who, out of timidity, allows a lesbian protégé to fall to dissipation when she had but to reach out and love the student. Birtha recognizes the negatives of life, and, in these and other stories, she seeks to put them into the context of human exchange.

"A Sense of Loss" and the title story, "For Nights Like This One," attempt this by exploring levels of emotional experience. Grief, in the first story; desire in the latter. Birtha's exploration depicts how emotional need is expressed and experienced by two Black women: Liz, in a monogamous inter-racial love unit; Covey, who lives alone but wants and needs a companion very badly. Death and loneliness are the sometimes unpleasant aspects of life with which Birtha grapples subtly. No over-riding profundity attends her craftswomanship, yet she makes plain that it is not easy to be a Black woman who loves a white one: Liz attends the funeral of her grandmother alone because she wants to spare Mandy some random stab racism: "Who is that white girl with Elizabeth?" On the other hand, Birtha makes clear that Covey's stored fantasies of an imaginary lover, "Syke," cannot satisfy Covey's longing soul because hers is a dilemma not of racism but of personal struggle, the unfulfilled desire for companionship. Though the solutions to both of these stories are too pat, rounded off to the nearest optimistic denominator—Liz goes home to the "woman who loved, who understood her," to unburden the grief she could not express even among kin; and Covey finds a lover—, the stories do address the



negatives of life, the stuff that is often more "real" than the experience of joy and loving.

Some will label both stories "romantic escapist fiction," but humanity, freedom, sharing, communication, honesty, fair play, trusting, loving are the values illustrated by Becky BIRTHA's art, and her vision is not off-center; for none of us would deny them place in our lives.

Perhaps the great achievement of the collection is "A Monogamy Story," for it presents the personal as political without sacrificing creativity to polemics. The story features two women who must grapple with the nature of their monogamous relationship; Emily, a writer, attends a conference where the pros and cons of the monogamous relationship between women is debated. Meanwhile, Sima, at home alone during their first separation, worries over the possibility that Emily will be tempted by another woman while away. Emily is tempted, and she is very caught up in the dialogue of the conference; but, because of BIRTHA's penchant for "happy endings," Emily comes home, wiser, and surer about the "rightness" of her choice of both life-style and lover.

Understand, too, that BIRTHA has a fine eye for detail, a decipherable knack for matching narrative perspective to character revelation and disclosure. A doll in "Babies" says a great deal about Lurie's useless heterosexual socialization; dancing in "The Woman Who Loved Dancing" reveals the tensions that can divide lovers whose interests are incompatible. Overall, the themes of loving and relationships are woven into every story of the book, and to read for these alone is to get in touch with what we desire most to make "real" in our lives as beings on this planet and as lesbian/feminists in community with one another.

While the stories and narratives that make up the *Cuentos* anthology are as deftly written as those in the BIRTHA collection, most, as individual entities, are less optimistic in their portrayals of the lives of Latinas, perhaps because the lives they depict are so fraught with suffering. Even though the stated purpose of the collection is "to capture some essential expression—without censors—that could be called 'Latina' and 'Latina-identified.' . . . [to] empower Latinas," the note of defeat sounds in even the most victorious stories—for example, Cícera Fernández de Oliveira's "We Women Suffer More Than Men," which traces the escapades of a woman who chooses to live estranged from her husband while testing the waters of other relationships.

Moreover, there is no mistaking the signs of struggle between art and reality in *Cuentos*. The revealing preference of Rosario Morales' character for "the real stuff of life" over "airy invention" is sounded again by Alma Gómez in the introduction: "This is my life on paper. No getting out of it." The collection clearly attempts to depict a *true* picture of the past and present lives of Latinas; for in this way the bi-cultural reader at whom the collection is aimed can read "una literatura that testifies to [their] lives, provides acknowledgement of who [they] are: an exiled people, a migrant people, *mujeres en lucha*."<sup>2</sup>



With obvious intention, the lines of distinction between fiction and non-fiction are blurred in this collection. Divided by section numbers, "Uno," "Dos," "Tres," there is no notation designating which of the cuentos are narrative essays, i.e., "true stories" recorded after having been passed down through generations de boca en boca,<sup>3</sup> and which are imaginative fiction derived from the speculative, contemplative wanderings of their creators. Nevertheless, the achievement of *Cuentos*, and hence of the Latina community, is that this "first generation" of Latina writers is able at this time to break the great silences and taboos of their living. They have freed themselves to "mention the unmentionable"; but some of what they mention is painful to read, painful to see—so adept are the writers at drawing scene and circumstance. It seems incumbent upon the writers to make their cuentos bear witness, and every witness that I have ever known was sworn to the truth.

It is this great theme that pervades *Cuentos*, and the very first story, "La confesión," written by Gloria Liberman—in Spanish—is about just that—truth—and to what lengths some will go to distort or stifle it. I love the craftswomanship of this story, denying the full horror of the focal woman's plight until very near the end of the acutely intense dramatic stream of consciousness; refusing a clear understanding of what the woman's circumstance is. This is a very sophisticated device meant to underline the confusion of the woman by translating that confusion to us, creating a tension usually associated with the horror or detective genre. Margarita, a near schizophrenic, is introduced via these stream-of-consciousness words: "Today they gave me some beautiful margaritas [daisies]." One suspects that the story will feature an older woman stuck away in a retirement home whose children come from time to time to bring flowers of guilt. There is a misleading simplicity to these lines. All too soon we discover that, like the flowers she tends because they are drying up, this woman is a political prisoner drying up in a sanitarium where she had been shuttled. In some revolution, at some past time almost too painful for her to recall, her brother was killed and she witnessed it. Instead of killing her, the government cut out her tongue and virtually buried her identity. She sits in a favorite spot, ignoring the calls of the attendants, and meditates on the condition of her life. Others surround her—all zombie-like, afraid, but she isn't. Her real name is Alejandra but she cannot tell anyone. She has even come to behave well, receiving for her cooperation the name of the flowers she finds so much peace in smelling and seeing in the courtyard of the sanitarium. Liberman's slow development and disclosure of these facts of the narrative, coupled with the symbolic weight of the margaritas, make this story the best in the collection. It will take a bi-lingual reader to translate the Spanish; my reading was slow and painstaking, but the story was worth the purchase of that new Spanish-English dictionary that I had been putting off.\*

\*Special thanks to my Miami University colleague, Tammy Allen, for her assistance with translations.



I cannot begin to review the wealth of expression and craft to be found in *Cuentos*, but a brief overview of some of the other stories and their subject matter is certainly in order. "The March," by Lake Sagaris, is another painful tale, the heart-breaking story of the murder of one mother's child by soldiers. The dream-sequence, third person narration is fraught with urgency, the urgency of the mother who awakens fearing her child has been injured. The irony in this story is that this mother's awakening is to the shock of reality. The day before she *had* seen her child gunned down in the street. Like three others in the collection—Alma Gómez' "El sueño perdido" ("The Lost Dream"), Chérrie Moraga's "Pesadilla" ("Nightmare") and Helen Viramontes' "Snapshots"—this story treats the themes of terror, repression, and disenfranchisement with psychological insight and sensitivity. Gomez' story uses present tense narration to elicit reader identification with a young woman recalling the story of an incident at the welfare offices. Moraga and Viramontes use omniscient narrators who pan the lives of the two focal characters like a camera. These stories photograph the disquietude and discontent of women's souls in a very palpable ambience of empathy and rage.

Some stories written completely in Spanish, some written completely in English, and most written in both, are meant to integrate and "visually reflect the bi-cultural experience" of the Latinas who are "la mezcla," la mestiza (the rich mixture of a cross-bred class of women) regardless of each woman's blood, whether Indio, Africano, or European. The editors say that the issues of bilingualism and biculturalism are crucial, so the "entire book is meant to stretch la imaginación—help the reader become accustomed to seeing two languages in a book." And one does quickly become familiar with "Spanglish" and "tex-mex," as it appears in such stories as Rocky Gámez' "Doña Marciana García," a tale about a mid-wife whose presence in the Mexican community is threatened by modernicity and ill health, relentlessly ironic, ending with the good Dona dead of a sun stroke and the unredressed belief that she may have been accused of causing a still-birth: she never knew that the child was born healthy. "Papi y el Otro ("Father and the Other") and "Como el cristal al romperse" ("Like the Breaking of Fine Glass") are written principally in Spanish, and I do not believe that either could be executed with equal force in English. Both, focussing on people who have been driven to the breaking point by economic and cultural inequities, are written by Luz Selenia Vásquez, a mistress of character study.

Principally a cultural panorama, the stories occasionally deal with feminist issues and lesbian life-style, offering undeniable assertions about the nature of oppression and resulting psychological damage. Such are Rocky Gámez' excerpts from the satirical "Gloria Stories," and Moraga's "Pesadilla," a look at lesbian terrors imaginary and fatally real.

But if there is one author who is sensitive to vibrations of a higher order, it is Roberta Fernández. She tells the tale of "Amanda," a seemingly benevolent witch-seamstress who makes a fantastic cape for Roberta. The cape is a thing of beauty



and significance, and the story is about the author's remorse when the cape is lost during her travels years later. Likewise, Fernández' "Zulema" weaves elements of the supernatural into the story of an aunt who insists from the grave that the stories she has always recalled of their Latina past are the *true* versions. "Zulema" reiterates another of the reaches of Latina art which is noted in the introduction: [*Cuentos*] "elaborates on and recreates the richness and complexity of being Latina in the U. S., the Carribean, or Latin America. [It] is only one version of the many stories of our lives to be told."

I am not always aware of where "Zulema" is taking place, nor of the nationality of the characters, but I can verify the "richness and complexity" of which the editors speak. The work as a whole is art in search of life; art that stands between visibility and invisibility; art that grants life over annihilation; it is an art made to serve, made to speak because, in the past, silence and misrepresentation have failed to serve. It is this reach of Latina art that suggests a higher vision than can be generally found in most of the stories.

Like *Cuentos*, *Home Girls* demonstrates a collective commitment to the struggles of Third World women; however, the focus of *Home Girls* is Black women. This anthology has come into existence, as did *Cuentos*, to speak for and about our lives and living past and present. In editor Barbara Smith's words, "what all the women . . . writing in *Home Girls* have in common is how firmly and how beautifully set their minds are on freedom." *Home Girls* revisits the previously published writings of the Black women's issue of *Conditions: Five*, while introducing new writing and thought since 1979. Divided into four distinct thematic sections, the anthology uses the short fiction and poetry which appear in it to support the prose essays of each section.

Barbara Smith's thorough, insightful, and challenging introduction concludes with the hope that "*Home Girls* provides a means to know yourself and be known, that between its pages you start to feel at home." That, without doubt, is a warm and positive reach of the art that lies between the pages; yet, because the anthology is very broad in scope, there is no adequate way to talk about its achievement as a compilation of feminist visions and positions. However, a note or two on outstanding work within the anthology might serve to highlight its diversity.

The first of the four sections into which the anthology is divided—"The Blood—Yes, the Blood,"—looks at the blood ties between Third World women, their families, and each other. It tries to point up issues that arise from differences in class, color, or nationality as Black women claim their identities. Notable in this first section are the poems, "Debra" by Michelle T. Clinton, "Hester's Song," by Toi Dericotte, and "The Black Back-ups," by Donna Kate Rushin. Each poem deals with relationships and Black culture, and you may measure the level of craft and poetic subjectivity in *Home Girls* by Clinton's "Debra," for instance, a free form monologue that, after the first line, races with assonant language:



Debra and I are different. Fundamentally different.  
Her life reads like the strong girl of a Black Baptist  
family—all rooted in East Oakland.  
And mine is the life of a rebellious radical of a color-  
struck arrogant Catholic family beginning in  
the East, now spread across the entire U.S.  
I have my therapy and she has her Cadillac.

Aside from contrasting the fundamental cultural roots of the women, Clinton makes a revealing comparison about where these two women's heads are: the contrast suggests not different values so much as different coping mechanisms.

The strongest piece, however, in the "Blood" section is not poetry, but a narrative-exposition by Michelle Cliff. Entitled, "If I Could Write This in Fire, I Would Write This in Fire," the exposition underscores the harbinger's heraldry in the title. Looking at a childhood relationship with a darker-skinned lower-class girlfriend, and at the racism of Blacks against Blacks in Jamaica, Cliff recalls difficult memories that she never let—when they were realities—destroy her sure knowledge: "I and Jamaica is who I am." For Cliff, Jamaica is home, and one always recalls home.

This leads me to the only short fiction in the section, Barbara Smith's "Home," a narrative that pitches a sleepless woman against the night as she sits up thinking about her family, particularly a deceased aunt whose haunting memory has driven the narrator from the bed where her lover still sleeps. She knows the women in her family are "literally disappearing from the face of the earth," that they are dying. In this story, reminiscent of Birta's "A Sense of Loss," and Moraga's "Pesadilla"—because the focal characters are each suffering disquietude of spirit—the narrator like the characters Liz and Cecilia, finds that loving doesn't terrify, "loss does." "Home," which eventually sees her resettled into bed with her lover, a bed in a new apartment, ends with an ironic and metaphorical response to the lover's question: "Where were you?" "Home," the woman answers, reconciled with loss and anticipating the future with her lover.

Section two, "Artists Without Art Form," a phrase used by Toni Morrison in *Sula*, begins to be to my taste in its examination of our literary artists past and present: two pieces that focus on Angelina Weld Grimké and Toni Cade Bambara, notably, and two others on the Black lesbian in fiction and in American Literature contribute to my hope that our literature will continue to include, value, and discriminate among the various genres.

Ann Allen Shockley's remarks on the scarcity of short fiction in "The Black Lesbian in American Literature," are passé, but others of her remarks align themselves with the article by Jewelle Gomez, "A Cultural Legacy Denied and Discovered: Black Lesbians in Fiction by Women": "The shadow of repression has concealed the Black lesbian in literature in direct proportion to her invisibility in American society." Shockley's and Gomez' separate discussions trace the portrait



of the Black lesbian character from her appearance in the work of Maya Angelou to her recent emergence in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Shockley ends by calling for "a richer and larger body of literature by and about Black Lesbians." Gomez, after raking Shockley over the critical coals,<sup>4</sup> ends by suggesting the same: "The Black lesbian writer must recreate our home, unadulterated, unsanitized, specific and not isolated from the generations that have nurtured us."

Renita Weems' brilliant essay, "Artists Without Art Form: A Look at One Black Woman's World of Unrevered Black Women," discusses the work of Toni Morrison and says, among other potent things: "Although her first three books take place in the Midwest and the fourth in the Caribbean—places I have never seen—there is something very familiar, very nostalgic about the people I meet on her pages."

There is no fiction in this section. If there were, it would have to show the struggle of a Black woman writer against that which immediately obstructs her attention to her art: that *real* job which she uses to support herself and her art; that child, or lover or husband who needs attention; those demands, chores and duties that life imposes daily; and, of course, the fact that her work may not ever see print, acceptance, or earn for her a living. Such a writer must grapple with mainstream publishers who don't want lesbian writings, and the small press feminist publisher who may not appreciate the fruits of her creativity. Besides, writing has seemed always to be the male's province, so who takes a (Black) woman writer seriously? Who will see a Black woman writer as an artist? These questions, as Barbara Smith notes, address in a fundamental way the challenge a Black woman faces when she tries to combine her identity as a Black with her identity as an artist. And if *Home Girls* has a failing, it is in the omission of essays or stories where an individual woman writer talks about her craft, or illustrates the trials of a creator. Other than the poetry of Angelina Weld Grimké, which Gloria Hull cites in her discussion of Grimké's personal struggles as a repressed Black lesbian writer, there is no writing on the nature of the creative life, the creative principles of the Black feminist writer.

The two opening pieces of section three—"Black Lesbians—Who Will Fight For Our Lives But Us?" (the question is Beverly Smith's)—are as poignant as drama. Lorde's "Tar Beach"—from *Zami*—with its haunting recall of the lovely Afrekete, a woman who contributed love and joy, plants and summer nights to the young lesbian experience of the writer, is almost confusing in its deification of the woman: Kitty, as she becomes more endeared to Lorde, becomes a goddess of herstory. "Tar Beach" offers a glimpse at life in the 1950's, but it is not the milieu in full dress; it is an intimation. The beauty and merit of the story lie in Lorde's ability to translate the pain of an abrupt break-up with the lovely Afrekete into a mature reflection on the gifts of that love while it lasted. Here, autobiographical fiction allows distance and reflection that a narrative essay about the experience of breaking-up might not allow because *the truth* might get in the way, demanding full dress pain. There is a



sweet pain that troubles this story, but neither writer nor reader can feel bitter about its presence. That's a real achievement.

Carter's "Cat" tells a classic tale of homophobia and betrayal. Two lovers—Catherine and Sheila—come into adolescent love together. "Cat," a tomboy, slow about giving up the world of boys, marbles, stick ball and the boys' unselfconscious acceptance; Sheila, a model of dress-wearing socialization, accepts Cat's friendship as Cat gradually drifts into the structure of womanhood. Caught in bed together by Sheila's uncle, the two are separated, much like the lovers in *1984*, and interrogated about their behavior at their separate homes: Cat is unresponsive to her father's outraged entreaties for an explanation. She refuses to tell him what it was. On trying to seek the safety and silence of her room, Cat's father catches her, swings her about, and the scene ends with his knee on her chest as he bellows: "There will be no bulldaggers in my house!" On the other hand, Sheila, made to think she can save herself a fate similar to Cat's, lets herself be prodded into saying that Cat forced her. The integrity, the shared strength of their budding love is lost in the immediate safety of Sheila's lie. The story closes with a bitter irony: Sheila loses a friend in Cat, but Cat loses the world of boys, the world of girls, and the possibility of love in a world full of misunderstanding and homophobia. This is a priceless piece that needs to be reprinted again and again.

Other fiction, "LeRoy's Birthday," by Raymina Y. Mays, "Miss Esther's Land," by Barbara Banks, along with poetry by Donna Allegra, Becky Birtha, and Pat Parker illustrate the theme of the section: Who will fight for our lives but us? And in Parker's now classic poem, we learn what it will mean if we don't fight:

They will come  
They will come  
to the cities  
and to the land  
to your front rooms  
and in *your* closets.

They will come  
for the perverts

In this section, Cheryl Clarke analyzes, in a deft essay entitled "The Failure to Transform: Homophobia in the Black Community," the reasons why some in the Black community see homosexuality as a "disease" to the nationalist idea: "[it] does not birth new warriors for liberation . . . [it is a] threat to our survival as a people and as a nation." The article attempts to clear the community as a whole from this indictment, suggesting that homophobia is "the reactionary postures of a few petit-bourgeois intellectuals and politicians." Clarke continues: "Since no one has bothered to study the black community's attitudes on homosexuals . . . it is not accurate to attribute homophobia to the mass of black people." But Clarke is not letting anyone off the hook; she is demanding growth of the Black liberation movement: "We will continue to fail to transform ourselves until we reconcile the



unequal distribution of power in our political community accorded on the basis of gender and sexual choice."

Because the fiction in the "Who Will Fight For Us?" section, consistent with the theme, is sober and joyless with the exception of the Lorde narrative, section three of *Home Girls* makes the need to lighten up apparent, and so, sandwiching the space between section three and section four are two pages of photographs called "A Home Girls' Album." You must see Audre Lorde as a pudgy nine or ten year old holding a bundle of flowers nearly as big as she is. Teenage Becky Birtha is shown with her sister and cousins all decked out in Easter wear or maybe Mother's Day Sunday clothes. Toi Derricotte is shown as a baby with her proud parents crouched nearby. These photographs and others make a "homey" inclusion. I would like to have seen some photographs of the individual writers at work, or together at the editing table.

Section four, "A Hell of a Place to Ferment a Revolution," makes the ironic comment that the women of yesterday who sat gossiping in beauty parlors could have talked up a revolution. An awesome notion, except the revolution didn't happen; hence, we have *Home Girls*, the revolution come by the literary and critical abilities of the authors.

In this light, Cheryl Clarke's "Women of Summer" tells the tale of two women, escaping South through an underground network of people united against political oppression and corruption. Finding that they must work with white people whom they have to trust, the two characters, "N." and "J.", give themselves to a "comrade" in the struggle who gets them through patrols. The story challenges readers to think of themselves as warriors, as intelligent and capable of fighting racist oppression by any means necessary; here, the "necessary" means is terror. The story relies too heavily on the news report device to keep us informed of the deeds of the women's comrades; yet, the device also maintains tension and progression in the story. I get the feeling that those who object to romantic escapist fiction would not object to this story of modern terrorist-woman warriors. It's a primer for realities that may take our dealing in guns and subterfuge. It's a suggestion for those who never think of taking to the streets. It evokes the challenge of Parker's poem: "Where will you be when they come?"

Shirley O. Steele's "Shoes Are Made For Walking" is yet another fictional inclusion in this section which, like most others, looks at a painful reality. Ronald, the father of Cere, a grown woman with a child he has fathered, is obsessed with continuing the incestuous relationship begun with Cere when she was a child. It is a brutal story of the male psyche gone berserk. Steele is excellent at assuming the mind-set of the Ronald character, for all of his brutality; when he kills Cere in front of her mother and daughters because he can't have her, we are asked to feel his despair, but not to forgive him. Excellent characterization, vivid encounter with death, incest, and powerlessness—perhaps the effects of Black disenfranchisement.

The titles of some of the prose essays which buttress the above forays into the imaginative realm—"The Combahee River Collective Statement," Linda Powell's



review of Michele Wallace's *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, Eleanor Johnson's "Reflections on Black Feminist Therapy," Alice Walker's antinuclear "Only Justice Can Stop a Curse"—effectively demonstrate that each woman must, in the face of these discussions, re-examine her commitment to our mutual and individual oppressions, to that which would destroy our right to life and our lives on this planet.

Overall, *Home Girls* does not disavow the worth of our literature in all of its different forms, utilizing many creative forms to serve the committed purpose of the anthology itself. Yet, we must realize that every woman who is reading our writings does not necessarily identify with our united struggle. There are those just outside our ranks who are not political nor will they ever be. For them, our literature is something to read, but not necessarily a lamp unto their feet. It may seem strange that such women want a literature that reflects their struggles, and yet, they may utilize that literature toward ameliorating the conflicts within their immediate lives.

Such women read freely, widely, thoughtfully, but go on with their private struggles as if reading is not fighting. Such a woman is like Ephanie, the main character in Paula Gunn Allen's *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*. Ephanie, Native American, half blood, characterizes the isolated woman living on the fringe of our ranks. A reader, a journal-keeper (and, hence, a writer of sorts), Ephanie is no Third World activist, no conference body, member of no coalition. Her imaginary life validates the point I'm making; for Allen, in the length that a novel allows, details the psychology of such lives as I've been speaking of. Figuratively, Ephanie is depicted as seeking, as we do literally, to overcome the oppressions of European acculturation, economic disenfranchisement, female socialization, and a host of negative forces that bludgeon our physical and spiritual lives; but she is doing it without the benefits of a women's community, or the support of Indian community.

A spiritual and ritual *bildungsroman*, *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* utilizes a third person narrator to trace Ephanie's inner movement from a timorous uncertainty about her very existence to the moment of acute recall of a time when she was powerful, able and wholly in charge of her life. For most of the novel, we must wade through an obfuscation of images and shadows, in much the same way as Ephanie has to struggle for clarity of mind or memory for a reconnection with reality. She is like an amnesia victim who hovers on the edge of recall and is desperate to have back the life lost to forgetfulness. Using the devices of parallel tales, myths, and analogies, notebook and dream excerpts, pages from documents, Allen helps us to follow Ephanie's progress. From leaving Stephen, a friend of her youth, who became a kind of enslaver in her adulthood, she escapes; from the confines of the reservation she flees; from the insinuation of spiritual beings who surround her, she runs away; from life she tries to depart—attempting, at one point, to hang herself—and deciding, almost too late, that she didn't want to die. Through all of this, Ephanie can't quite center on what is underneath her despair and alienation. She thinks that the Catholic church has co-opted her life—and it has, but knowing that does not free her to regain her power; she thinks that marrying



Thomas, a Japanese-American, will ease both his and her pain—it doesn't—he abuses her. She thinks that roaming from Indian encampment to Indian encampment, through women's centers and bars, will give her the answer—it doesn't. Time and again, the key to her disorientation, lost strength of mind, is not found. Her frustration becomes ours. Still, for all the books she reads, for all of the feminists she knows, she cannot disburden herself, find herself, her power.

It is a chore, at times, to stay with Ephanie, to keep reading for the resolution or outcome of all this frustration she fights nearly alone, but from time to time her therapist's notes will be offered as evidence of some change within her psyche and we trust that Ephanie will find herself. Meanwhile, as readers, we are invited into Indian lore, invited to read myths of woman power and allegories from spirit worlds unknown. I found that eating an orange can be ritual; that spiders are the creators and sustainers of the universe. I gained insights into nature and death, and I was allowed to cross into the spirit world where Ephanie's ancestors, her matrilineal power source, exist. The writing is moving, revealing, enlightening. Akin to Carlos Castaneda's work, *The Woman Who* is an invocation to women to claim their personal power.

If there is a flaw in the novel, it is the seemingly minor event which turns out to be the cause of Ephanie's overdrawn pain, her mental block: that she took a fall as a youth trying to meet Stephen's challenge that she swing from a tree limb across a small chasm is the thing that broke not only her bones, but also her spirit. The event is recounted almost anticlimactically after Ephanie has roamed here and there, lost her childhood girlfriend and sweetheart, Elena, lost one of the twin boys born to her and Thomas, and after she has divorced Thomas; we get what is said to her therapist:

The confusion, the fugue she had fallen into for days, for a lifetime . . . She felt them again . . . the rope searing her hand as she leapt . . . the wrenching of her shoulder . . . the loud snap . . . the branch split. She gasped with the power of the memories sweeping through her . . . Tomorrow I'll write Stephen. Tell him what I've found. Myself. I've found me after all this time.

In a way, we wish that it were going to be Elena who Ephanie wants to write and tell of her revival, her self-recovery. After all, Ephanie had always thought that it was Elena who had caused her to fall by yelling a warning to her just as she took the leap, but Elena's was the cry of terror when she saw that Ephanie was going to fall. The two of them had been girls together, nearly lovers, as Ephanie recalls, "full of life and action." Taking Stephen's cunning dare had cost Ephanie her body's wholeness, her sense of self-possession and strength, and her friendship with Elena. It is with remorse that she can see what once was open to the two of them as arrogant girl spirits: "Elena and I were going to do brave things in our lives, and we were going to do them together."

All this would-be life was lost to this heroine, this woman on the outskirts of our politics. No, she is not real, but there are real lives like hers. Somewhere right now a woman struggles with her life, struggles even with the knowledge that we are here



and writing for her, about her, to find her strength for herself. In this sense, what Allen's non-traditional patchwork story does is juxtapose private repressions against public oppression. She contrasts personal alienation against political disenfranchisement and colonization. The mix is a striking achievement. It is the large and small of things that operate on our lives, but Ephanie is transcendental. She overcomes.

We must recognize, then, that it is possible for every individual woman to overcome—with or without our literature. Still, the novel, the short story, our essays, our poetry must continue to grapple with the large worlds we inhabit: those of heart, mind, of spirit. Our art must expand to encompass those worlds as Allen's *The Woman Who Owns the Shadows* does. At one point, Ephanie's grandmother, a spirit who comes to her, says "There is a fifth world" where spirits live. I believe that is the world we must aspire to as we move toward the twenty-first century. What we call the Third World is where we begin. The fourth world is the one we are presently creating as we coalesce with others through our literature, through our conferences, letters, friendships, relationships; but the fifth world is where we will reign, where our inheritors will live in harmony with others on this planet. At that time, our literature will have become the prophecies of a time before; our writings will be incredulous herstory. We must write towards a vision of the unfettered lesbian life, so the reader of tomorrow will know we knew her existence was always unconquerable and inviolable. I ask that we let it all survive; that we welcome our writing in all its forms, in its myriad of expressions for the posterity of our nation, and as a nation of literate, writing women.

A final note: the books I have used here to offer this thesis could easily have been four others. I recognize that I've made them serve the purpose of this essay. If I have done them violence or disservice by structuring my remarks around the content of their texts, I apologize; but I do not apologize for wanting us to accept all of our art as a deposit toward future truths.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I'm afraid that I am begging the question a bit. Several major discussions of our literature as art have seen print in recent years. Ann Allen Shockley's "The Black Lesbian in American Literature" (1979), and Audre Lorde's "Poetry Is Not A Luxury" (reprinted in *Sister Outsider*, 1984), to name two examples, do discuss aspects of our literature; but both focus on specific issues of characterization and creation. Here, I am looking at our literature as it is represented by the various genres and our response to those genres. If we were to draft a list of socio-political matters needing our attention, I think the reception of our creative writing would occupy a low place because combatting racism, homophobia, world hunger, sexism and the threat of nuclear war, among many pressing fights, would take precedence.

<sup>2</sup> Women in Struggle. I translate only because I may have non-Spanish readers; but I am trying to treat the text as did the editors by using Spanish and English in conjunction with each other.

<sup>3</sup> By word of mouth.

<sup>4</sup> Gomez seems to believe that the women in Shockley's *Say Jesus* are not religious in the true sense of the word; at least Myrtle Black, as a minister, seems to have less faith than Celie of Walker's *The Color Purple*. But Black is educated and streetwise, like a Baldwin character, and hence her faith is tempered by common sense. Celie has only belief to sustain her. It should be clear, then, that I do have a bias for Shockley's work, and I think *Say Jesus* is her best novel to date.



## Recognition of the Tribal Mind

A review of *Sitt Marie Rose*, a novel, by Etel Adnan, translated from the French by Georgina Kleege. 1982. The Post-Apollo Press. Distributed by *Sinister Wisdom*, PO Box 1023, Rockland, ME 04841. 105 pp. \$6.95.

The French novelist Christiane Rochefort has said in an interview that we "must look at things from the point of view of oppression and literature. . .oppression is the source of my inspiration." *Sitt Marie Rose* is a novel of the oppression of women by men, of the poor and disenfranchised by the rich and established, of one tribe by another. As women, oppression is what confronts us not only in our own lives but in the lives of the people around us — both here and abroad. It is unfortunately the name of the game and we all play it.

Etel Adnan gives no explanation or introduction to explain the events leading up to the Civil War in Lebanon. While possibly detracting from the overall style of the narrative, such a preface might well clarify many of the Middle Eastern and Lebanese issues to American readers and, at the same time, might help to explain the position being taken by our government towards Lebanon itself.

Lebanon was carved by France out of greater Syria, I read recently, in order to make two weak nations out of one strong one. Death and violence were present in the country long before 1975, a major source being the Israeli shelling and air raids which became a way of life for most of the people living in and around the many Palestinian camps in Lebanon. The general instability of the nation was enhanced by large groups of refugees — Armenians, Kurds, Palestinians and other political and economic exiles from the Middle East and Africa who sought asylum there.

As the population balance in the country shifted from Christian majority to Muslim and predominantly Shi'ite, the Lebanese confessional government became ineffective in running a nation and therefore concentrated on enforcing a system. As the numbers of Shi'ites and Palestinians grew, with no corresponding civil or political rights, military and political organizations were formed for the protection of each group. In 1969 the Cairo Agreement was signed which gave the Palestinians the right to bear arms for their own protection; at the same time the rightwing Christians strengthened their own military ranks. The Israeli military, meanwhile, continued to pursue their policy of reprisal — justified according to some — in the south.



And these reprisals were as terrible as they were routine. To take only the years 1970-4 and to give by way of example only the more dramatic events: on 3 January 1970, Israeli commandos crossed the border and seized 10 Lebanese soldiers and 11 civilians; following the ambush of an Israeli school bus on 22 May 1970, when 12 Israelis, 8 of whom were children, were killed, Lebanese villages were bombed, 13 villagers were killed and some 32 wounded; following the massacre at Lod Airport [in Tel Aviv] by three Japanese terrorists on 30 May 1972, a combined Israeli naval and air force attacked three villages. . . in the South and killed 48 villagers and captured some Lebanese officers; after the Munich disaster [in which 11 Israeli Olympic athletes were submachine gunned] by Black September (in 1972) Israeli troops occupied parts of Lebanese territory for 36 hours; on 10 April 1973 Israeli commandos boldly infiltrated Beirut and assassinated three Palestinian leaders; after the suicidal seizure of a school in Maalot (15 May 1974) when 16 Israeli children were killed, strafing of Lebanese villages killed 50, wounded some 200. In some of these raids, according to the *Washington Post* (21 June 1974), sophisticated phosphorus bombs were used to wreak havoc with the crops; in 1975, an estimate is that 60 reprisal raids were undertaken — 12 naval bombardments, 12 major air strikes, 15 ground attacks, 20 artillery bombardments of border villages — all leading to the death of some 150 persons and wounding 400. . . . The effect of these raids, most of whose victims were innocent villagers, was to discredit the Lebanese Army and the Government, to alienate many Southern villagers, especially Shi'ites, to add to the "poverty belt" in Beirut, to strengthen the Left, to encourage many Muslims, tactically if not out of conviction, to increase their identity with the Palestinians while, among many Maronite Christians, the effect was to deepen the gulf between the Palestinians and themselves.\*

Lebanon began to fall apart. In the north, Tripoli was the scene of rebellion in 1969 — a rebellion which has, in varying degrees, continued ever since. In the south, Sidon was the scene of civilian demonstrations in 1975 against the government's attempt to monopolize the fishing industry. With the assassination of Marouf Saad, the leader of the demonstration, the government lost control of the entire town. Lebanon became a geography of territories inhabited by fearful tribes.

Such is the background of Etel Adnan's novel.

*Sitt Marie Rose* is the story of the kidnapping and the execution of an East Beirut Christian woman by four members of the Kataeb, the Phalange militia. Marie-Rose has defected to the western side of the city and joined the Palestinian Resistance. She lives with a physician — a Palestinian. She is caught as she returns, during a ceasefire in 1975, to the school for deaf-mute children where she works as director and teacher, "to pay the teachers," as she explains, "and to find myself among these children once again."

The novel is divided into sections of time, Time I "A Million Birds," and Time II "Marie-Rose." In "A Million Birds," which takes place before the fighting, we meet the characters: Mounir, the rich son of a prominent East Beirut family; Fouad, the perfect hunter and killer; Tony the super-Christian; Pierre the tagalong. Mounir is showing his short film of a bird-hunting expedition in Syria. The men shoot birds timed to the music of Pink Floyd. The women sit on the floor of an elegant livingroom and watch. Mounir's audience.

\* David C. Gordon, *Lebanon: The Fragmented Nation*. (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press: 1980, pp. 93-94.) The square brackets are editor's notes.



"You didn't see anything, really," Mounir says. "I can't tell you what the desert is. You have to see it. Only, you women, you'll never see it. You have to strike out on your own, find your own trail with nothing but a map and a compass to really see it. You, you'll never be able to do that." . . . It's true. We women were happy with this little bit of imperfect, colored cinema which gave, for twenty minutes, a kind of additional prestige to these men we see every day. In this restrictive circle, the magic these males exert is once again reinforced. Everybody plays at this game.

Mounir also wants to do a film—"to prove to himself that he can do it"—about Syrian villagers working in Beirut, from the point of view of the hunters who feel superior to the Syrian villagers they romanticize. "We were the first Europeans they have ever seen," explains Mounir. "Excuse me, I mean Lebanese." But the Syrian worker in Beirut is not a romantic shot of a remote desert village: the Beirut workers lead lives of "bent backs and sorrow" — not enough for a film it seems.

Then in April of 1975 the Civil War begins. Lebanon crumbles, the world we saw — of big houses and dilettante ideas — is replaced by one with another reality, the murderous reality of the tribes, of sadistic assault and reprisal, of carcasses dumped in plastic bags and left on family doorsteps, of — as the months go by — the Phalangist massacre of the refugees and the poor in Quarantina and the vengeance of Damour, of the murder of Syrian workers in Dekouaneh — this last still not for Mounir and his film. "Too violent, too political," he explains.

Time II "Marie-Rose" takes place in the school for the deaf-mutes in East Beirut. Marie-Rose has been captured and is brought by Mounir, Fouad, Tony, and Pierre — now all members of the Kataeb — to the classroom. A Maronite priest has been summoned. The children are there — watching. They are the audience — similar to Mounir's audience of women — in the drama that follows. The children do not, can not hear: they are unable to speak. They know Marie-Rose does not like the war. They do not like the war because they cannot take part in it. They can watch and they can dance — to the vibrations of music, of guns, of death. We enter into their world of vibrations and silence by the doorway of their monologue. We become part of the terrible dream.

It is here — in Time II — by her use of interior monologue and by her handling of chronology that Etel Adnan builds the power of the book. Marie-Rose speaks of her capture:

. . . they took me, a few meters from this school, on this street where everyone always seemed to like me, before the very eyes of the parents of these children who sit before me now, their eyes open, sending me signs. Nothing moved in the street except my captors. Everything seemed staged including the short flight of a bee from one tree to another. They said: "We've got to talk to you." And I understood that, with those words, I was leaving the world of ordinary speech.

Ordinary speech does not exist then for us either. We leave that world and assume — as part of the dream — the mindset of the assassins. We become the judge, the executioner, the victim. We too are caught in the trap of Beirut. Mounir tells us:



I had nothing to do with this abduction. In principle I'm against any procedure that's not truly military. . . . We will get our enemies. . . . After three days of intensive bombing, they'll all be taken: imprudent friends living on the other side, enemies, self-proclaimed neutrals, all of them. It will be clean and definitive. There will be a victor and a vanquished. . . . I'm their friend . . . but I'm also their section chief. I can't say no to my comrades

And Tony:

I don't understand. She's a Christian and she went over to the Moslem camp. She's Lebanese and she went over to the Palestinian camp. Where's the problem? We must do away with her like with every other enemy.

Fouad:

I didn't position artillery on the hills of this city to get myself mixed up in some story about a woman. I did it to blow up things. . . . I say to them, I am absolute order. I am absolute power. I am absolute efficiency. I've reduced all truths to a formula of life and death.

We move from one mind to another in silence, learning the quality and the quantity of Phalangist thinking. Mounir, as group leader is beset by doubts — just as he had doubts about his identity in the beginning. Confronted by the presence of Marie-Rose, his childhood love, he says:

I know her, and knowing is an extraordinarily strong bond. It establishes a kind of magnetic field between beings or even things, and intensifies and illuminates everything. She's here before me. She's familiar to me. And yet it's up to me to decide whether she lives or dies. How can I?

Mounir is very human. But he has been schooled — in the grand catacomb inverted Christian East Beirut tradition — to adhere to the principles of the Faith, a faith based not on love and mercy and surely never on doubt, but on the Crusades. It is an education which, Marie-Rose reminds us, reduces everything to the question of St. George and the Dragon. As a school boy, Mounir dressed up as a Crusader. When Marie-Rose tells him he is ridiculous in that role, that he can never become one of them, that he is from Lebanon and not from France or England, he asks, "Then what am I going to become?"

As Etel Adnan draws us into an identification with the Phalangist perspective, we become the power, the group. We get to be Crusaders. Olive drab and sinister blue have replaced the chainmail: we carry guns instead of swords.

Recall Fouad, however, who has reduced all things to the life and death formula wherein there is no room for doubt or love. All the men do this in the end, even Mounir, who carries out the destiny of his tribe, a destiny defined by destroying the destiny of others. Marie-Rose provides the problem: the woman acting on her own, the bird flying alone in the sky, the target for the hunters. As she tells Bouna Lias, the priest, shortly before her death,



"More than a million Arabs and not one knows how to love! You're only in love with yourselves, you look for your own image in all your attachments, your passion is always directed back on yourselves. . . . the religious authorities, both Moslem and Christian, have transformed your hearts into deserts, infinitely more arid than the ones we cross on foot in all seasons. I know that the only true love is the love of the Stranger. When you have cut the umbilical cords that bind you together, you will at last become real men, and life among you will have a meaning."

But Fouad is not interested in love and it is Fouad who solves the problem as he tears her apart: "Me, I know that might makes right, that the wolf doesn't ask the sheep's permission to eat him. It's his right as the wolf." And it is Bouna Lias, the Maronite Friar, who gives us the final chilling condemnation:

"Yes, Lord, thy will be done. I tried to bring back one of Thy own and she resisted. The cries I hear now are the sign of the punishment Thou has sent from Heaven. These young men are executing Thy Providence. They leave nothing on the ground but a pile of dislocated members that was a sinner. I can give her neither extreme unction nor benediction. She no longer has a face. She has fallen before Thy Judgment. She is Thy responsibility. She will no longer be ours. On this earth we defend Thy interests, and those of Thy beloved Son, so that Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven, and the keys to the Great Mystery stay in Thy hands along. Amen."

It is a scene of operatic grandeur, those words of the Inquisition.

It is in this respect that *Sitt Marie Rose* is a religious book and takes on its greater significance — far beyond the story of a martyr, the portrayal of the Palestinians or even the workings of the Phalange mind. As Etel Adnan succeeds so well in bringing us into that mind, we find that the mindset is perhaps part of our own. None of us has learned to cut umbilical cords so well nor have we learned to distinguish between faith and action. We desperately need to learn about welcoming strangers and about paying heavy prices.

*Sitt Marie Rose* is not an optimistic book. But the truth of Lebanon — like the truth in our own country — has little space for facile optimism. Adnan has written the truth about oppression and the truth about love. She does not feed us platitudes about death and victory, that nauseating rhetoric which politicians and the gunghos hand to us every day. Marie-Rose, at one point, tells us:

Death is never in the plural. Let's not exaggerate its victory. It's total enough. Let's not sing about that victory. There are not millions of deaths. It happens millions of times that someone dies.

It is one of the strongest statements in the book. It makes the stranger a person to be welcomed: it cancels out the huge numerical figures we read about each day — figures which mean nothing — and gives the living, the dying and the dead human faces. It is a statement of hope — in the hopelessness of Lebanon — so that when Marie-Rose asks, about the people of West Beirut: "Will the lights in their eyes be extinguished one by one?" we will be able to answer, "No."



## *The Law of Return: A Review*

*The Law of Return*, by Alice Bloch. 1983. Alyson Publications, Inc., PO Box 2783, Boston, MA 02208. 249 pp. \$7.95.

A Jewish woman, I was brought to Israel in 1974 by the Law of Return. It gave me the right of immediate citizenship, which at 19½ I jumped at. I wanted to get my immigrant-student deferment, study dietetics, serve in the Israel Defense Forces, marry a pilot, live on a *moshav* and have five babies.

I have done none of that. The army classified me as handicapped, dietetics in Hebrew proved too much for me. After a broken engagement and much cheerful and not so cheerful promiscuity I fell in love with another woman. Returning to the University, I eventually completed an M.A. in English Literature.

Today I make my living as a typist. My first lover (the affair was never consummated sexually) is back in the United States — I think she is about to be married. Under the Law of Return, which guarantees citizenship to all Jews, I could not come to Israel today, as I am now; homosexuals, criminals and betrayers of the Jewish People are excluded under various sub-clauses.

Elisheva, the heroine of Alice Bloch's novel, *The Law of Return*, makes *aliya* in 1969—literally, "ascends" to live in the punch-drunk, victorious, but still essentially innocent Israel of the post Six Day War years. She has come to settle in her country, to discover her religious roots, to marry, to have Jewish babies. Though perhaps not meant to be a female Everyimmigrant, it would be impossible for most women who have spent any length of time in Israel not to see bits of Elisheva's experience in her own, and vice-versa. Bloch has sent chills down the spines of many of us here who set out with Elisheva's goals, only to discover ourselves as lesbians and/or feminists after a few years. A considerable number of us have stayed in Israel, finding support in each other. But in Elisheva's 1969 Jerusalem, feminism was just an embryo in the minds of a handful of women. And women-love? I have not yet dared to ask any of my *vatika* (long-time immigrant) or *sabra* (native-born) friends.

Bloch's description of settling down in Israel has been tempered only by glossing over the bureaucracy involved in living here (you don't really want to waste time reading about how long it actually takes to get the paperwork done). From the clerk's urging to Hebraize a name to the seduction/rape at the Absorption Center to the kibbutz and the run-down Jerusalem neighborhood, my head constantly nodded yesyesyes.



Across the street, beside the *makolet* where Elisheva can buy dairy products and bottled juices, stands a small Iraqi synagogue. At 5:00 every morning, a friend of the dead man paces in front of the synagogue, calling "*Minyan! Shaharit! Minyan!*" He walks as if already at prayer, his turban swaying across the front of his striped caftan. When nine men have joined him, they enter the synagogue and chant a Hebrew that sounds like Arabic. Sometimes a shepherd with his flock, or a man leading a few donkeys, passes by, and the braying of the animals drowns out the prayers.

At 6:00 the *makolet* opens, and the bakery down the street, and the *mikva* and public shower at the corner. Now the old women begin to appear, carrying baskets, greeting each other loudly — in Arabic? or in the same Hebrew their husbands use in the synagogue? Clusters of children run by, shouting and laughing, bookbags strapped to their small backs. Young men and women dressed for jobs emerge last and walk quickly toward the bus stop at the end of the street. Some are smoking, some cracking sunflower seeds with their teeth. . . all are talking, interrupting, talking, gesturing, giving each other friendly slaps, offering seeds, offering cigarettes, talking.

(pp. 40-41)

Elisheva's involvement with a benevolent form of orthodox Judaism is an important part of her life in Israel. Raised in a strong Gordonian/Labor Zionist background, religion had no attraction for me when I first came to Israel, but many of my fellow *Utpan* (intensive Hebrew classes) students, especially those from assimilated homes, floated towards it. It provided a *hevra*, a word usually defined as a group, a gang, a closely-knit circle of friends. But a *hevra* is so much more than that, especially for young family-less immigrants, building their own life for the first time. The *hevra* would get together on Sabbath Eve, light candles, eat, often pray. They would sing newly-learned Hebrew songs and observe obscure holidays and fasts. The group became a family in many ways.

Perhaps the group is a family more than a *hevra*. Tonight, for instance, Elisheva is the mother, Milton is the father, and Miriam is the oldest daughter who helps with the cooking and cleaning. Elisheva sighs. She has traveled thousands of miles, at least in part to separate from her family and find some larger or deeper identity, and now she has fallen into a pseudo-family here: a group united by blood tie, ritual and habit.

(p. 69)

I arrived in Israel before the changes in the abortion law (before even the "liberalized" law was passed), before El-Al stopped flying on Saturdays and Jewish holidays, before archaeological digs were interfered with, before rocks were thrown at motorists driving on Ramot road on Saturdays. I came to Israel before the crocheted kippa (skull-cap) became a symbol of coercion and worse. Still at times, during the first months in Israel, I envied others who found sweetness in what I even then saw as anti-feminist, pedantic and tied by ritual.

In Israel, Elisheva's feminist/lesbian consciousness gradually and realistically awakens. It can be seen in her friendships with women that grow both in number and in depth. She forms a close relationship with her neighbor Yardena, a woman of her

age already a mother of two children. When Yardena becomes ill after an illegal abortion, it is Elisheva who nurses her. Observing an Arab woman who has spilled cookies on a bus, Elisheva wonders who has decided for them that they are enemies. The web of women's friendship which is woven by Bloch is all encompassing, mixing class, ethnic background, religion. And as she recognizes the richness of friendship between women, she finds her relationships with men—including and perhaps especially the psychiatrist she flees to for help—shallow.

On a vacation in Elat, the two come together. In her room she imagines that Lilit, Adam's rebellious first wife, has come into her room to seduce her sexually, as well as to seduce her into violating the Shabbat rest.

Hutz Lilit [Out, Lilit]. Choose me. Hutz Lilit. Choose me. Hutz choose Lilit me. Choose Lilit me hutz. Hutz me Lilit choose. Choose choose choose choose

(p. 109)

Resisting Lilit, Elisheva allows herself to be seduced the same night by an Israeli soldier on leave, the son of friends. The encounter ends in an argument on male tenderness and foreplay. Although the major part of the scene was uncomfortably realistic, the ending seemed over-simplified.

When Elisheva discovers that she is not pregnant, she becomes frantic in her search to prove herself "normal." She finds her chance in Daniel, an old friend she has remained in contact with, who is just as frightened of his homosexuality as she is of hers. She will return to America for a year and they will marry. Armed with marriage license, they will return to be successfully absorbed in Israel.

But before she can leave Israel, Elisheva must see the Galilee again. It is there that she meets Deborah, a feminist tourist, and among other subjects they discuss the planned marriage.

Elisheva wants to pull her close and say, "No, please don't let me do it. Let's go off together and swim, always. Please, don't let me do it." But she can't say anything, and Deborah hates her now, and she hates herself too. But what can she do? She wants a normal life, doesn't she? What else can she do?

(p. 142)

The novel continues in New York, and although my personal interest in the story waned, Bloch kept me interested as a reader. Her skill in switching from first to third person narration is instinctive and sound. Still, at times I had the feeling that she wanted to get Elisheva back to Israel.

Elisheva's engagement is short-lived. Daniel, now more secure in his gay identity, breaks it off, and Elisheva, venturing ever so slowly into feminism, once again meets Deborah, and the two become lovers. The love they find is vital and healing. It is a love that allows them to completely find their identities as Jews and as lesbians.



Nothing had prepared us, and yet somehow all history conspired to bring us together: two Jewish women brimming with love for one another. So sweet was our delight, it seemed to infuse with meaning the centuries of suffering that had preceded us. "Those who sow in tears will reap in joy." We were the harvest; our love was the first fruit, the springing forth of life from the ashes of our people.

(p. 230)

The phoenix imagery is wonderful: an over-used favorite about the State of Israel, here the image is given a fresh sense.

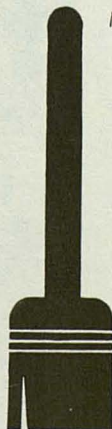
We dream of fruitfulness. We dream of planting ourselves down into the soil to spring up again, fresh and flowing with sap. . . From the old body, new vines: rockrose, dewberry, blackberry, brambleberry.

We dream of flourishing from our grave, from the grave of our people.

(p. 231)

Full circle, the two return to Israel as tourists. It is a different Israel from the one they remember: a right-wing, religiously oriented state, but a state where there exists a women's center and lesbian pride. It is the Israel I live in today, and work very hard to love.

In the Likud post-Sabra and Shatila Israel of Spring 1984 (as I revise this it is only eleven days until the elections), some Jewish and/or Israel-supporting women may wince at some of the negatives, so accurately and sadly portrayed in the novel. But struggles for personal or national freedom were never won by running and hiding from pain.



MENOPAUSE, CHANGING ROLES, AND  
THE JOB MARKET  
ARE JUST SOME OF THE TOPICS  
COVERED IN

## **BROOMSTICK**

*A NATIONAL, FEMINIST,  
READER-PARTICIPATION MAGAZINE  
BY, FOR, AND ABOUT  
WOMEN OVER FORTY*

\$10 per year in US, \$15 in Canada (US funds)  
Sample copy \$2.00

**BROOMSTICK**  
3543 18th St.  
San Francisco, CA 94110



Ahnighito I     *Katie Seiden*



## Contributors' Notes

---



**Katharyn Machan Aal's** interview with Judy Grahn is part of *The Writer as Performer*, a study of contemporary poetry and fiction readings. Her most recent published collection is *Women: A Pocket Book* (Grass Roots Press, 1983).

**Etel Adnan** is a poet and a writer well known throughout the Arab World. A painter and a tapestry designer, her works have been exhibited in the U.S., Europe, and the Arab countries. She lives in California.

**Gloria Anzaldúa**, a Chicana tejana poet and fiction writer, is co-editor of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Her work, which combines the Chicano, the indigenous, and the lesbian-feminist literary traditions, has appeared in *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas, Conditions 6, 8, and 10* and *Sinister Wisdom*. She teaches at Women's Voices Writing Workshop in Santa Cruz and in the Adult Degree Program of Vermont College.

**SDiane Bogus** (pronounced es-di-ann bow-gus) is a doctoral candidate at Miami University in Oxford, OH, and is continuing to publish and write as often as creatively possible. She is the author of four books of poetry, the latest being *Sapphire's Sampler*, an anthology of poetry, prose, and drama.

**Roz Calvert**, a rural poet from the Midwest living in New York, is currently accepting contributions for an anthology on lives of poor white women, *White/Trash/Women* (see announcements).

**Sharron Demarest** is a sculptor living and working in Brooklyn. She's a member of the Ceres Gallery, a new feminist gallery in N.Y.

**Sandra DeSando** is a member of the *Heresies* collective. *Marble Mumbles*, one of a series of books done in collaboration with Sharron Demarest, is available for \$10 from S. DeSando, 388 Myrtle Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11205. She also makes art about sexuality.

**Jill Drew** was born in 1940 and has been writing since she was eight. She went to Beirut in 1982 to work as a trauma nurse. The journal she kept during this time—*To Go To Berbir*—was published as a special book-length issue of *SW 26*, and her poems appear in *SW 25*.

**Audrey Ewart** is a black lesbian who lives in the Bay Area. She struggles with breaking silences and toward claiming all the facets of her identity.

**Jyl Felman** taught writing for four years at the University of New Hampshire and created the first Women's Writing Workshop offered there. Currently she gives workshops on Jewish Invisibility and Anti-Semitism, practices law, and writes stories about living in exile.

**Sharon Fernleaf**: I work primarily as an illustrator/artist and single mother in Seattle. I've illustrated *Visions, a book of affirmations*, with Bette Lamont and Linda Ceryczan (Publish-Her Press) and *Mermaid's Secret*, poems by Terri Celass (Redswallow Press). My work is included in *Fight Back! Feminist Resistance to Male Violence*. In progress: *Woman and the Wolf* by Bette Lamont; *Peon Art—Art for the Majority*, a collection of drawings.

**Beatrix Gates** is a poet and letterpress printer. As owner/operator of Granite Press—East in Penobscot, Maine, she designs and prints letterpress books of poetry by women. She has taught poetry workshops at Hardscrabble Hill in Orland, Maine and recently received an M.F.A. in writing from Sarah Lawrence College.

**Judy Grahn's** history of gay culture, *Another Mother Tongue*, has just been published by Beacon Press. *The Queen of Wands* is her most recent poetry book (Crossing Press). Her work is widely anthologized.



**Elisabeth Griggs** is a 27-year-old WASP living in New York City.

**Bat HaMa'avak** is an Amazonist and proud of it. Her name means "Daughter of the Struggle."

**Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz** has been writing and speaking on women, violence, and resistance (a book she hopes to complete this year), on Jewish identity, anti-Semitism, racism, and guilt (an essay on the verge of completion) and on art and politics (a recurring theme which she thinks it's time to return to). She teaches writing and women's studies in the Adult Degree Program at Vermont College.

**Annette Kennedy:** I have lived in San Diego for the past six years and work in the local women's bar. I am currently working on a collection of short stories in which I am trying to capture the essence of life in Southern California, focusing particularly on women.

**Irena Klepfisz**, author of *Keeper of Accounts*, is completing an article on feminism and office work which will appear in *SW* 28. She is experimenting with Yiddish/English poetry for a manuscript *mame-loshn/mother tongue*. A poem from this group appears in *Women's Review of Books* (September, 1984). She teaches at the summer Women's Voices Writing Workshop at Santa Cruz.

**Pat M. Kuras** has poetry appearing in *New Lesbian Writing* (Grey Fox Press, 1984). Her first book of poetry, from which "S'il Vous Plait" is reprinted, is *The Pinball Player* (Good Gay Poets, 1982, Box 277, Astor Sta., Boston, MA 02123).

**Christian McEwen:** Born in London, grew up in Scotland. Came to the States in 1979 and lived there for four years (Berkeley and New York). Worked in construction and floor refinishing, also as a gardener, counsellor and teacher of English. Currently back in London, teaching again and writing as much as possible.

**Lu Melander:** I'm 51 years old, teach with California Poets in the Schools on the Peninsula. Have just finished a 3-act play, *The Sirens*.

**Lesléa Newman:** My work has appeared in *Moving Out*, *Telephone*, *The World* and other magazines; my first collection of poems, *Just Looking For My Hoes* was published by Back Door Press in 1980. I am a 28 year old Jewish Lesbian currently working at a day care center and surviving in Western Massachusetts.

**Achy Obejas** was born in Havana, Cuba in 1956. She is a poet, playwright, and journalist living in Chicago. Her poetry has appeared in *SW*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Ecos*, *Third Woman* and others. She is currently editing an issue of *Third Woman* dedicated to Cuban women writers in the U.S.

**Melanie Perish** is a writer who moved from the East Coast to the West underestimating the difficulty and the richness of her choice. Some of this gets documented in her work. Her poems have appeared in *Calyx*, *Midway Review*, *Swallow's Tale* as well as other small press magazines. *Notes of a Daughter from the Old Country* (Motherroot Publications) and *Traveling the Distance* (Rising Tide Press) are two chapbooks of her work.

**Annemarie Poulin** was born in Maine to a working-class Franco family. Active since the 60's in the peace movement and in lesbian/feminist communities' politics, she has been teaching low-income Franco and refugee adults for 10 years, and has recently become an educational consultant for these communities in Vermont.

**Minnie Bruce Pratt** is a poet, born in Alabama, now living in Washington, D.C. Most recently her work has appeared, along with essays by Elly Bulkin and Barbara Smith, in *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism* (Long Haul Press). She is the mother of two teen-age sons.

**Mirtha Quintanales:** Cuban-born anthropologist and writer. Co-editor of *Companeras: A Latina Lesbian Anthology*, with Juanita Ramos, forthcoming 1985. Co-founder/collective member of the Third World Women's Archives, NYC. Working on project to make the literature of Spanish-speaking Caribbean women known in the U.S. Inquiries: c/o The Third World Women's Archives, POB 2652, NY, NY 10009.

**Anne Rickertsen:** I am a 28-year-old white lesbian poet named Ricketts. I grew up on a farm in Nebraska and am now working a boring shit-job in a hardware store in Mankato, MN, and writing.



**Randi Schalet:** I'm 25, a Jewish lesbian. I live in Somerville with my cat, Europa. I work with developmentally disabled adults.

**Katie Seiden:** "My sculpture deals with struggle, confines, transformation; embattled forms which seek to break out of constructions." She has won awards from the Five Towns Music and Art Foundation and the Heckscher Museum, and her work has been included in 20 shows.

**Lisa Simon** lives near Burlington, Vermont where she grew up and works as a helper/educator to troubled families with young children. Encouraged to write since she was small, she does so now when time and quiet permit.

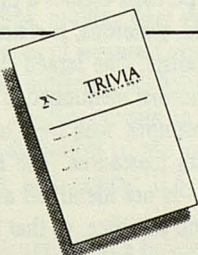
**Pegasis Touch:** I'm almost 42, and I've spent the last 2½ years recovering body memories of 7 years of childhood incest experiences with my father. I've been traveling and sharing with other incest survivors. Now I'm living in southern Oregon with my lover, and we are trying to start a wimin's spiritual self-healing community in the country with other women.

**Fauna Yarrow** is a working class rural duke from Vermont, New Hampshire, and now Maine. She is a recovering alcoholic/addict who is learning to dive from high places and to stay afloat while in over her head. A peace and social change activist for 15 years. she's now teaching children and adults skills for resolving conflicts without violence and is co-coordinating a peer-counselling network for sexual abuse survivors. To keep centered she grows and gathers herbs and does fiber art.

**zana:** i am a disabled jew, 36 years old, seeking ways we lesbians can get beyond our patriarchal conditioning and create something better. i have just put together my first book of poems and drawings, *herb woman*, available from new woman press, 2000 king mountain trail, sunny valley, OR 97497.

#### Correction

In SW 25, an error appeared in Elaine Hall's biographical note; She lives with her lover of ten years, Ardena Sharkan. Sorry for misprinting Ardena's name.



## TRIVIA

A JOURNAL OF IDEAS.

The new magazine devoted to radical feminist scholarship, theory and reviews.

- Articles by:
- Andrea Dworkin
  - Kathleen Barry
  - Janice Raymond
  - Kate Clinton
  - Natalia Malachowskaja

TRIVIA is published three times a year.

\$10/ year — individuals  
\$12/ year — out of U.S.  
\$16/ year — institutions  
Sample Copy: \$4.50/\$5.50

TRIVIA  
P.O. Box 606  
N. Amherst, MA  
01059

## GODDESSES & AMAZONS

Keep your personal diary / journal  
in this exquisitely illustrated book



A 200 page book illustrated  
with 48 original drawings by Sude Rakusin  
and adequate space for journal keeping  
on quality vellum 8½ x 11 paper.

\$10.95 (postage and handling included prepaid to:  
Sude Rakusin / Journal, P.O. Box 88, Brooke, Virginia 22430

©1988 Sude Rakusin. All rights reserved.



I first realized I wanted to write something about our last issue of *Sinister Wisdom*—#26, Jill Drew's Beirut journal *To Go To Berbir*—while looking at a recent *New York Times*. That day—as on many days like it—there was news of continued fighting in Beirut. The crossing between east and west Beirut had been closed again. Sunni and Shi'ite Muslim, Christian and Druse leaders were trying to forge another cease fire. The Israeli army stationed in southern Lebanon (it had withdrawn from Beirut months earlier) had been attacked again; another death, another reprisal, another outburst of protest in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. And what I realized was: if anyone went directly from the journal written in 1982 to that day's *Times* in 1984, she would have no idea whatsoever about the connection among these events.

The power of the journal is its immediacy, its passion, its undeniable subjectivity. The limits of the journal stem from these same qualities. Because it is rooted in the moment, in the siege of Beirut of 1982, the journal isolates Israelis as the lone agents of Lebanon's destruction, barely mentioning the civil war raging on and off in Lebanon for the past 10 years, or the earlier devastation by the PLO or the Syrians. This is not surprising. After all, why should a journal mention historical events which everyone in Lebanon certainly knew about?

But for readers outside of Lebanon 1982, the journal perhaps creates a distorted picture. In the journal, practically all Arab people are kind, generous, sustained by their faith; practically all Israelis are killers or crass materialists. The Israeli peace movement is not mentioned. Jews from outside of Israel who *are* mentioned are not identified as Jewish—the American nurse Ellen Siegel, for example, who went to Jerusalem to testify about the Israeli role in the Shatila and Sabra massacres. The Kateeb—the Phalangist militia, primary killers in Sabra and Shatila—is not identified as Christian. Christian imagery buttresses descriptions of suffering and sacrifice, so that both Christianity and Islam emerge as positive forces; Judaism as a negative force only.

In the brief introduction to the journal, we wrote: “. . . an honest book about a highly polarized situation like the Middle East is hard to get published. . . .” This was one reason why we published Jill Drew's book as a special issue of *SW*. We wanted it to *get out*. It's also true that in a convoluted situation like the Middle East, one point of view is always part, never the whole picture. It makes sense to accompany such writing both with historical background to the events of Beirut 1982 and with a summary of what has happened since; not to “justify” the devastation—there is no justification—but to grasp these events as something other than a morality play of evil against innocence; to grasp the political roots of these events *in order to imagine political solution*.

My criticism, then, is not of the journal which—even after editing, proofreading, and



pasting it up—still moves me. Rather I am criticizing the format in which *Sinister Wisdom* presented it. We are beginning to receive responses from readers, several of whom share this criticism: why no context?

Why did *Sinister Wisdom* publish the journal in this format? Let me describe my own reasoning around this decision, because I think it will strike familiar chords for any of us trying to act—under pressure—on imperfect knowledge and wisdom.

I am a Jew who has been and continues to be committed to the existence of the state of Israel. Not too many months before the Israeli invasion, I had begun to study more closely the Middle East in reaction to what I experienced as a virulent anti-Zionism (the idea that Jews had no right to a Jewish state) in the women's movement. When Israeli troops moved into Lebanon, I responded with outrage and condemnation. But inside I felt so much fear and anger about the anti-Semitism unleashed in the wake of Lebanon, about the self-righteous focus on Israel as the worst of all possible nations (this, from citizens of the U.S., Germany, Great Britain. . .), that I did not *look* sufficiently at what was happening to the Lebanese and Palestinians. An error not of politics, but of a heart closed tight with fear.

Jacobo Timerman cracked this fear open. In *The Longest War: Israel in Lebanon*, Timerman described Israeli brutality. Others had written of these things, but I trusted Timerman precisely because I knew he understood the dangers of anti-Semitism; in fact, I had learned a great deal about it from him.\* I knew he cared about Jewish survival. I accepted his assertion that silence and pretense are deadly; not speech, not information.

In early 1984, mulling over the manuscript of *To Go To Berbir*, I felt compelled by its sharp images of weapons against flesh. I wanted to do something to focus attention on Palestinian suffering. As fighting kept breaking out, as Israeli planes would now and again strafe civilian targets in the south of Lebanon, I hoped the facts of human destruction abounding in the journal would stir those who read it to fight against the U.S. Middle East policy: U.S. intervention in Lebanon and support of the Israeli invasion.

And as I struggled with the decisions—to print a special issue and get the journal out *fast*, to print it without an historical context or updating (we didn't have these and there wasn't time to solicit them, though we did compile and include a bibliography on the Middle East\*\*), to print some passages which seemed to evoke images of Jews as Christ-killers—I walked an uneasy line between paranoia and self-erasure. Was I unnecessarily fearful for Jews? Was I overlooking real danger to Jews?

\* Timerman, an Argentinian newspaper publisher, was imprisoned and tortured by the junta—since deposed—partly for defying censorship regulations, partly for being a Jew and a Zionist. His narrative of this experience and brilliant analysis of anti-Semitism are found in *Prisoner Without A Name, Cell Without A Number*. Upon his release from prison, Timerman emigrated to Israel.

\*\* For a copy of the bibliography, send an SASE and one extra stamp.

I have come to think that treading this line is a common—as well as painful—experience for radical Jews. I did not want to let my concern about anti-Semitism\* overwhelm my concern for Arab life. I kept arguing with myself:

—People were getting killed in Lebanon. Why was I worried about anti-Semitism?

*—But Jews were getting killed because of anti-Semitism—synagogues were bombed in reaction to the war, Jews were shot at on the street, swastikas abounded, political cartoons showed Jews with guns in the shape of big (Jewish) noses.*

—But should fear of vengeance against Jews silence criticism of Israel? Isn't that reactionary?

*—Is publishing the journal progressive? What about Jewish danger?*

—But the danger isn't equal. Besides, the journal hardly mentions Jews.

*—The journal doesn't even acknowledge Jewish danger or Jewish history.*

—That's not its subject. Can't a witness close to the victims of this war have her own space?

*—But without history, without context, there's no possibility of resolution.*

—But is the journal worth reading only if it offers answers?

*—But is it fair? Is it accurate?*

—But how can a first-person account from inside a war be *fair*? How do we piece together "the truth" except with fragments?

And so it went. As I relive this process now, it's obvious to me that there is no final stopping place, no answer, in politics any more than in life. Any action we take will likely be imperfect, require correctives, and more action, and more correctives. What we can't do is get paralyzed or cynical. What we have to do is act as best we can,

\* I am using the term "anti-Semitism" as it has been used historically and traditionally, to mean hatred towards Jews—the diaspora Semites, aliens in every land—even though this is technically inept, since Arabs are also Semites. Given the different histories of racism against Jews and Arabs (including the enmity between Jews and Arabs), it makes sense to speak of "anti-Arab racism," rather than blurring the different people's experiences of prejudice and brutality.



acknowledge limits and errors, and move to correct these: "innocent" means only that nothing got risked.

*Sinister Wisdom* affirms both the decision to publish *To Go To Berbir* and the decision to publish this statement.

\* \* \*

Having said this, I can report that many notes arrived from those of you who were glad we had decided to do this special issue. Some people, however, expressed concern that one of a handful of lesbian publications was devoting a whole issue to work which they felt could find publication in other places as lesbian work could not: 112 pages occupied by the Beirut journal does mean 112 pages not occupied by lesbian writing.

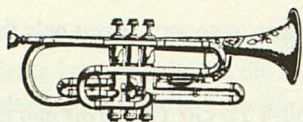
We did make that choice. I don't apologize for my share in this decision, but I do recognize the weight of it. *SW*'s commitment to publish lesbian and feminist creation has not changed. We welcome your response to the Beirut journal and to this statement.

Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz

8/84



*I am deeply indebted for support, ideas, advice and Jewish sisterhood to Irena Klepfisz and Bernice Mennis.*



## Announcements

**MATERIALS WANTED:** for an anthology of women's writings on body image: journal entries, poems, prose. Topics of particular interest include fear of fatness, relationship to physical fitness, conflicts with food or body size, accepting and appreciating our bodies, although all material will be considered. Deadline February, 1985. Send with SASE to Sandy Handley, P.O. Box 2781, Santa Cruz, CA 95063.

Anthology on the lives of poor white women—**WHITE/TRASH/WOMEN**—accepting contributions. Send to editor Roz Calvert at 170 Ave. C, #4-H, NY, NY 10009

The **FIRST SOUTHERN L.E.A.P.** (Lesbians for Empowerment, Action, and Politics) will happen Oct. 19-21 on 640 campground acres near Gainesville, Florida. Childcare, interpreting, physical accessibility. Sliding scale that starts at \$0. Contact Jayne-Orr, 148 W. 6th St., Jacksonville, FL 32206 or call Charis Bookstore (404) 524-0304.

The **NEW FEMINARY COLLECTIVE**—Tiana Arruda, Sim Kallan, Canyon Sam, and Jean Swallow—based now in San Francisco, offers subscriptions (\$12/year/3 issues), invites submissions with SASE; deadlines, 11/1/84 for Winter/Spring issue, 3/1/85 for Summer. *Feminary*, 1945 20th St., San Francisco, CA 94107

The **BLACK WOMEN'S ANTI-VIOLENCE PROJECT** needs support in the form of volunteer advocacy, financial contributions, as well as hearing from women who have developed or are interested in developing ethnic-specific anti-violence services. 1515 Webster St., Oakland, CA 94612 (415)465-3890

*Tracking Our Way Through Time: A LESBIAN HERSTORY CALENDAR/JOURNAL*—260 spiral-bound pages of facts/photos/quotes/graphics documenting Lesbian herstory. \$10.50 + \$1-postage to Sand-piper Books, 1369 Estes, Chicago, IL 60626

**LESBIAN MOTHERS ANTHOLOGY/UNA ANTOLOGÍA DE MADRES LESBIANAS:** (Y las Gruesas son Colchas/And The Thick Ones Are Comforters) invites ideas, comments, suggestions and submissions; deadline 12/21/84, send originals (for legal purposes) along with 1 copy and SASE. We will protect all confidential information. 1803 Mission St., Box 160, Santa Cruz, CA 95060-5296.

Call to all **FEMINIST WOMEN PHOTOGRAPHERS:** *The Blatant Image* is looking for unmounted black & white photographs no larger than 8 x 10 for 1984-85 edition. Women of color especially invited to contribute. Send SASE for guidelines, etc., to TBI, 2000 King Mountain Trail, Sunny Valley, OR 97497-9799. Available issues, 1982/\$11, 1983/\$12, pre-order 1984/\$12 till Nov.

New magazine, **WOMAN OF POWER**, quarterly of feminism, spirituality, and politics, has published its first issue. Subscription, \$18/year, \$13/low income, \$5/single issue. POB 827, Cambridge, MA 02238

Available at 15% discount if you mention *SW: A LEGAL GUIDE FOR LESBIAN AND GAY COUPLES*, \$14.95 list, from NOLO Press, 950 Parker St., Berkeley, CA 94710

The Century Book Club—a **NEW LESBIAN AND GAY BOOK CLUB**—has purchased Naiad Press's *Amateur City* by Katherine V. Forrest and *The Sophie Horowitz Story* by Sarah Schulman as the Sept. and Oct. Main Lesbian Selections. Write CBC, 1556 No. LaBrea, LA, CA 90028

Sinister Wisdom **POSTER CONTEST:** send designs, drawings, photographs suitable for black & white reproduction for a *Sinister Wisdom* poster. Artist will receive royalties from sales of poster and maybe t-shirt too. Send with SASE (copies, not originals) to SW POB 1023, Rockland, ME 04841. Indicate whether you also want us to consider the work for publication.



## Support Our Resistance

**WOMEN OF ALL RED NATIONS (WARN)** seek moral and financial support for Frances Young, an American Indian Woman from the Sioux nation in North Dakota, indicted for the first degree murder of her boyfriend who had violently and repeatedly abused her and her teenage children. The case is scheduled for trial in August and may go through several appeals

**Frances Young needs: letters** to Paul Richwalsky, Commonwealth Attorney, 514 W. Liberty St., Louisville, KY 40202, asking that Young's charge be reduced or dropped, and that the office deal effectively with the problems of violence against women and children instead of punishing a woman who had no recourse but to defend herself.

**donations**, tax-deductible, big or little, check or money order payable to the Frances Young Defense Committee; send to POB 1464, Louisville, KY 40202. An estimated \$25,000 is needed. And share the information.

**NEW BEDFORD RAPE CRISIS PROJECT** seeks support for the **WOMAN GANG-RAPED IN TAVERN** last year. Because she chose to prosecute the rapists, chose not to let them get away with it, she has been persecuted, endured threats on her life, and finally has been forced to flee her home with her two children. The RCP has set up a Jane Doe fund to help pay for her relocation. Send donations, requests for information, etc. through the New Bedford Women's Center, 252 Country St., New Bedford, MA 02740 (info. from Aug-Sept '84 *Off Our Backs*).

Gay's The Word, **LONDON'S LESBIAN AND GAY COMMUNITY BOOKSHOP**, has been raided and all its imported books seized; many new titles are being refused Customs clearance and detained at the ports, even though Gay's The Word still has to pay for the books. The charge—of "indecency"—must be fought in an expensive and important legal and community fight. For information or to send a donation, write Defend Gay's The Word Campaign, 38 Mount Pleasant, London WC1X 0AP England. Seized books include *Common Lives*, *Lesbian Lives*, Judy Grahn (ed.) *True to Life Adventure Stories*, *Sinister Wisdom* and *The Joy of Lesbian Sex*. **FIGHT CENSORSHIP.**

**DINAH LIVES!** In SW 25 we reported that *Dinah*—newsletter of the Cincinnati lesbian community—was in danger of folding. A new collective has gathered and the newsletter continues: write *Dinah*, LAB, POB 1485, Cincinnati, OH 45201.



### SUPPORT THE REVOLUTION

Subscribe to the **LONGEST REVOLUTION**:  
a newspaper presenting news and views of progressive feminism.

Responsible Reporting  
Incisive Analysis  
Pointed Inquiry

SUBSCRIPTION RATES  
\$7.50/yr . . . Individual  
\$12.00/yr . . . Overseas  
\$13.50/yr . . . Institutions

THE LONGEST REVOLUTION  
P.O. Box 350  
San Diego, Calif. 92101

• LOCAL • NATIONAL • INTERNATIONAL •

READ & SUBSCRIBE TO  
**NO MORE CAGES,**  
A BI-MONTHLY  
WOMEN'S PRISON NEWSLETTER



The Nov./Dec. Issue Includes Articles On:  
Dessie Woods is Out of Prison!  
News from the Sisters of Innerconnections  
The Fight Against More Prisons  
Letters from Women Inside and much more.

Available at women's and  
progressive bookstores or from  
Women Free Women in Prison,  
PO Box 90, Bklyn, NY 11215.

\$1 each copy, \$6 per yr.  
more if you can, less if you can't  
**FREE TO PRISONERS  
AND PSYCHIATRIC INMATES**

# GLOBAL LESBIANISM

---

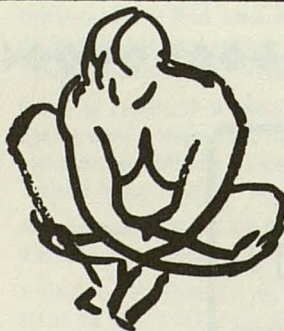
## 2

Make connections with  
lesbians around the world...

*Connexions* #10, the second  
Global Lesbianism issue brings  
you a view of the world  
through the voices of lesbians  
internationally.

A year's subscription to *Connexions*  
is only \$10. Single issues—\$3.50.  
*Connexions*, an international  
women's quarterly, 4228 Telegraph  
Ave., Oakland, CA 94609.

*Connexions*



Now Edited By:

DOROTHY ALLISON  
ELLY BULKIN  
CHERYL CLARKE  
CARROLL OLIVER  
MIRTHA N. QUINTANALES  
AIDA SANTIAGO

## conditions

---

### a feminist magazine

**BOX 56A VAN BRUNT STATION BROOKLYN, NY 11215**

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.

---

#### SUBSCRIPTIONS

(three issues)

\$15. individual; \$25. institution; \$9. special "hardship" rate; \$20. or more - supporting subscription; Single Issues: \$6. individual; \$9. institution. Overseas distribution: add \$2. for subscription and \$3.50 for single issue.

BACK ISSUES (five and subsequent issues still available): \$4.50 each.





# WOMANEWS

New York City's monthly feminist newspaper & calendar of events.  
WOMANEWS, P.O. Box 220, Village Station, NYC 10014.  
Make checks payable to Women's Focus, Inc.

\$8 regular (12 issues)  
\$18 airmail

\$15 supporting  
\$20 business

\$1 for sample copy

## off our backs

The Best in Feminist Journalism  
our 13th year

oob provides:

- ★ National and international news about women
- ★ Thoughtful commentaries, and news ahead of its time
- ★ Health, prison, and labor news

**SUBSCRIBE TODAY!**

oob, 1841 Columbia Rd. NW, Rm. 212  
Washington, D.C. 20009  
\$11/year sample copy \$1.50

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_\_

ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

\$15/year contributing sub  
\$11/year regular sub  
\$20/yr. businesses and institutions  
sample copy \$1.50

**off our backs**

1841 Columbia Rd. NW  
Rm. 212  
Washington, D.C. 20009



## To our readers who are outside:

However little money you have, it's still more than women inside, in prison or in mental institutions. But inside or outside, women still need information, inspiration, and connection to our community. More than 100 prisoners currently receive SW. Help support free access to SW for women inside; add whatever you can afford to your subscription renewal; give a one-time donation, or give a monthly pledge.

Also, note that our hardship rate has not gone up, and now barely equals our cost of shipping. We urge women who need this rate to avail themselves of it; and those who can, to give to support this rate.

### SUBSCRIPTION RATES 1 year = 4 issues

Individuals: 1 year, \$14; 2 years, \$26 Out of U.S.: \$16 (U.S. dollars, please)

Institutions: 1 year, \$26 Sustaining: \$35 - \$100

Hardship: \$6

Free on request to women in prisons and mental institutions

Available on tape for the print-handicapped from the Womyn's Braille Press,  
P.O. Box 8475, Minneapolis, MN 55408

---

### SINISTER WISDOM P.O. Box 1023 Rockland, ME 04841

I would like to subscribe to SW, beginning with issue \_\_\_\_\_ Enclosed is \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ zip \_\_\_\_\_

I am adding \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to support free & hardship subscriptions.

I pledge \$ \_\_\_\_\_/month.

Please send SW to my friend, beginning with issue \_\_\_\_\_ Enclosed is \_\_\_\_\_

Sign the gift card \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ zip \_\_\_\_\_

I want to order:

A GATHERING OF SPIRIT (New Expanded Edition) \_\_\_\_\_ copies @ \$7.95 = \_\_\_\_\_

KEEPER OF ACCOUNTS \_\_\_\_\_ copies @ \$5.95 = \_\_\_\_\_

WE SPEAK IN CODE \_\_\_\_\_ copies @ \$4.75 = \_\_\_\_\_

SITT MARIE ROSE \_\_\_\_\_ copies @ \$6.95 = \_\_\_\_\_

Back Issues: (please circle): #19 (\$3), #20 (\$3.50), #21 (\$3.50), #24 (\$5), #25 (\$4.25), #26 (\$4.75)

Send \$1 for every 1 or 2 copies ordered, for Postage \_\_\_\_\_

Total Enclosed \_\_\_\_\_



We are proud to publish —

## A GATHERING OF SPIRIT

*Writing and Art by North American  
Indian Women*  
edited by **Beth Brant (Degonwadonti)**

"This book is proof that love *can* be made visible."

—Alice Walker

"These women are poets, weavers of fine-spun words rendering images carnate. Clean, precise, compelling, consciousness-moving—these attributes are the hardest for a writer to achieve, these words are the highest compliments one can pay a poet."

—Gloria Anzaldúa, *Conditions*

"There is a tremendous amount of writing in A GATHERING OF SPIRIT to be savored and enjoyed. Read this collection."

—Maurice Kenny, *Akwesasne Notes*

1984. 240 pp. \$7.95

---

Also available from SINISTER WISDOM

---

KEEPER OF ACCOUNTS by Irena Klepfisz

1982. 97 pp. \$5.95

One of the great Jewish books of this lifetime by a founding editor of *Conditions* magazine, a leading voice in the lesbian, feminist, and Jewish communities.

---

SITT MARIE ROSE by Etel Adnan

1978. 105 pp. \$6.95

A novel about the civil war in Lebanon by a Lebanese feminist, artist, and filmmaker. Published by Post-Apollo Press, distributed by Sinister Wisdom.

---

WE SPEAK IN CODE by Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz  
visuals by Paula King, Michelle Goodman, Lee Pickett

1980. 106 pp. \$4.75

Poetry & other writings about feminist, lesbian, Jewish experience, about violence and resistance. Published by Motherroot Publications, distributed by Sinister Wisdom

---

Please enclose \$1 - for each 1-2 books ordered, to cover postage and handling.

SINISTER WISDOM P.O. BOX 1023 ROCKLAND, MAINE 04841

**SPECIAL FOCUS on  
GIRLHOOD-SEXUALITY-VIOLENCE-WOMEN-SURVIVAL**

maybe you're wrong, papi . branding . the oldest  
daughter . she did not answer . stories my body  
tells . natural enemies . the movie that evening .  
blaming the victim . i cannot swim . the daily news

---

**POEMS - STORIES - DRAMA - INTERVIEW**

*about*

- Office Work
- Navy Dykes
- Feminism & Snobbery
- Therapy
- Women & War
- Passion & Need
- True Romance & Surrealism
- White Trash
- Mothers, Mothers
- Sexuality
- Women's Poetry as Performance

Drawings • Sculpture • Photography

BOOK REVIEWS: Fiction by Women of Color  
Women in Israel  
Women in Lebanon

**SW 27**

**\$4.75**