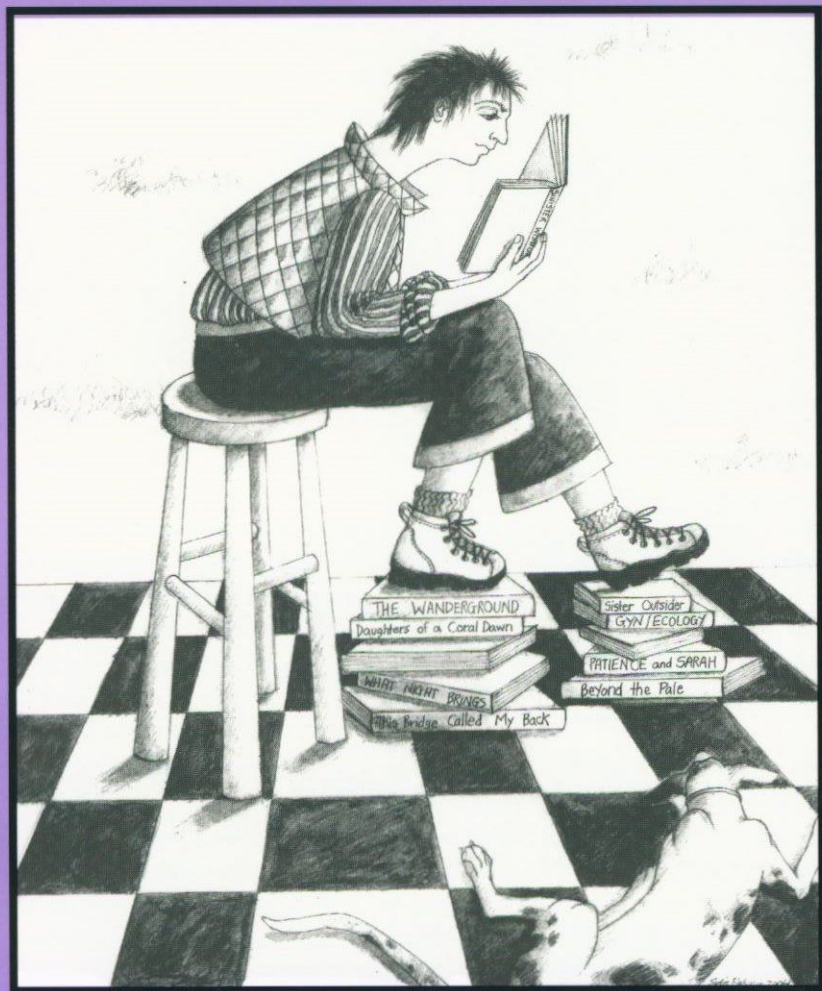


Lesbian Writers



on Writing and Reading

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This issue of *Sinister Wisdom* is dedicated to the memory of Gloria Anzaldúa (1942 - 2004).

Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa, tejana lesbian activist, poet, writer and cultural theorist, died in her Santa Cruz home on May 15, 2004, from diabetes-related complications. She was 61 years old.

Gloria gave her loving support to many social change organizations, and *Sinister Wisdom* was one of her many beneficiaries. In 1984 she became a contributing editor, and in 1987, participated in the first *Sinister Wisdom* West Coast benefit.

Her writing shaped the imagination and ethics of our generation. Three groundbreaking anthologies — *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981, with Cherríe Moraga), *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists-of-Color* (1990), and *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (2002, with AnaLouise Keating) — provided crucial space for women of color to develop theory and community. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) is a hybrid collection of poetry and prose that meshed the personal with the political in breathtaking depth. Gloria played a major role in redefining contemporary Chicana and lesbian/queer identities and in developing an inclusionary feminist movement.

Her awards include the Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award, the Lambda Lesbian Small Book Press Award, an NEA Fiction Award, the Lesbian Rights Award, the Sappho Award of Distinction, and the American Studies Association Lifetime Achievement Award.

But the measure of a life is in the illumination it brings. I have known many fierce, principled women. Gloria was the tenderest of the fierce. Her heart was always open to anyone who approached her with sincerity. She was gentle, generous, kind, funny, compassionate and brilliant — a challenging teacher, a wonderful friend. Any moment with her gave us new insight, and the courage to inhabit the “borderlands” — the thresholds of change — that she described. Those of you who knew her, personally or through her work, know what a great loss her passing is. Those of you who are just hearing of her — allow yourselves to find her work and be inspired. May we all honor her spirit by matching her commitment to honesty and love.

Elana Dykewomon



Photo by Margaret Randall

Gloria Anzaldúa 1942-2004

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A Journal by and for Lesbians

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Notes for a Magazine

This issue of Sinister Wisdom celebrates Lesbians passion for words, the magic of language, and the power of our literature to reshape the world.

As Lesbians, why do we write? Why do some of us have an urge, a compulsion, to put words on paper? How do we break silence, untangle patriarchal language, and wrestle the words onto the page?

And what do we read? How has Lesbian literature touched our hearts, minds and communities? What role has this body of work played in shaping our consciousness as individuals and as a community? What part does it play in building our culture?

Our words are precious. As Lesbians, our literature—the writing and the reading of it—is not a pastime or a hobby. It saves our lives. The Lesbians in this issue of Sinister Wisdom have written eloquently about how their writing is essential to their existence. They write about how the very act of putting words on paper nourishes them, providing refuge from the cruelties and uncertainties of the patriarchy, helping them cope with isolation, transition, and loss.

Writing our stories is a political act, a personal journey, a way to survive, a search for community. We are a beautiful and loving people and we are writing for our lives.

Reading also serves as a lifeline for many of us. Several contributors celebrate the myriad ways in which they have felt affirmed, strengthened, heartened and awakened by the powerful/tender/passionate words written by Lesbian writers. In *Books to Watch Out For* (October/November 2003) Carol Seajay writes about “keep[ing] at least one coveted and excellent book unread to see me through emergencies of the soul.” When those difficult times arise, these “insurance books” provide her with warmth, perspective, affirmation and vision.

Struggling through long dreary winters in Colorado, feeling trapped in a suffocating job, I survived by reading Lesbian fiction. I fell in love with books when I was very young but my connection with writing developed more slowly. My interest was galvanized while I was part of the *Big Mama Rag Newsjournal* collective in the 70s. I gradually discovered the joys and, yes, the angst, of writing.

Years later I started examining the writing process, what makes writers tick, why do we choose to spend our time alone hunched over a desk, muttering to ourselves, searching for that elusive word, while our friends are at the beach, or a movie? What does it all mean? Many of us keep a pad of paper on our bedside table, a notebook in our backpack, ready for that rush of words that comes unexpectedly, demanding to be recorded. Sometimes feverishly trying to get the words on paper before they vanish as mysteriously as they came. Listening to the musicality of the language, the magic of the phrases as they line up in our heads. The restless itch, the tossing and turning at night, jumping up to record a dream. Wandering alone among the paragraphs....

Sometimes I imagine breathlessly entering a magnificent library where all our Lesbian books are waiting for us, treasures, with so much to teach us about life. Where we can wander around, taking these precious volumes down from the shelves, feeling at home, no rush, no panic. And finally comprehending the significance, the profound lessons, the infinite wisdom of Lesbian literature from across the ages and around the world, we settle into the quiet and begin again the journey to ourselves...and to each other.

Fran Day
Sebastopol, California
2004





Photo by Cathy Cadre, 1996.

"Dykes On Books: Women Who Love Women Who Love Books" San Francisco Dyke March. (Left to right) Emilie L. Bergmann, Charlotte C. Rubens, Jessea Greenman, Elissa Mondschein and Virginia Sorgi. (Not present and a founding member: Kitty Cone.) This banner was brought to the march by members of a group of lesbians who've read books together for ten years, starting in 1986.

Upcoming Issues

See submission guidelines on the inside back cover.
Please help spread the word about these themes.

63 **Lesbians and Nature**

Deadline: September 1, 2004

Editor: Fran Day

We are seeking submissions for an issue exploring our connections with the earth. What work are we doing to protect our planet? What profound connections do we, as Lesbians, have with specific animal and plant species, rocks, rivers, oceans, mountains, deserts, etc. and how do these connections give us joy and sustain us during difficult times? In what ways do these connections inspire our creative work?

64 **Lesbians and Creative Arts**

Deadline: January 1, 2005

Editor: Fran Day

This issue will celebrate Lesbian music, dance, drama, and art. How has your life as a Lesbian been touched by one or all of these creative arts? How has Lesbian culture been impacted? When did you first hear Lesbian music or see a Lesbian play or art exhibit and how did that inspire you to build community? Lesbian musicians, dancers, choreographers, playwrights, actors, artists and others are invited to write about their experiences. Related interviews, photographs, and book reviews are encouraged.

Cheryl J. Moore

I Believe Poetry Saves My Life

After I left my partner and completed graduate school I got on the wrong track for seven years. In 1980 I ended up hospitalized with anxiety neurosis. A writing therapy group brought me back to my dream of writing. I had written some poems in college, but I didn't pursue my efforts even after two poems were printed in the school literary magazine. It took a psychiatric writing group to rediscover that I could write well. A fellow patient complimented a little descriptive paragraph I wrote and I said I can do that.

At home in my rented rooms I wrote my first tentative poems in 12 years. I felt a joyous sense of accomplishment with each poem. I no longer watched "All My Children" or went on aimless drives. I had found my forgotten purpose. I grew into the craft I was meant to do, but I wasn't aware yet of the extent of my motivation.

Desires deep within began to be fulfilled, and I turned to poetry easily and in readiness after learning a little failure in life. I learned I didn't want to be a professional librarian trapped in repetitive, mundane work. My heart opened to each poem I produced. I wrote, talked and thought poetry. I put my love of words and my passionate imagination on paper. Every poem is written first by hand with a blue or black pen. I believe my hand, mind and heart are melded in my creative longing. The therapy of writing made aloneness become a serious, reflective solitude.

Writing is like swimming in deep water, trusting in myself in my element. Each word is a strong stroke toward a shore of realization and artistic growth. I wrote poems about women, Yoko Ono, Marilyn Monroe, Picasso, Spain, my pain, anger and love. I wrote about trees on hills and what made me happy. I wrote images of angst. More effective than counseling, I created a body of poetry in over 23 years and changed the course of my mind. I have pages to put my own hands on and show for my time as a woman and personal artist.

Lyric and expressive poetry saved my directionless life. Alone I made a reason to live that restored my drained confidence. The evolution of direction came in looking back at a manuscript selected out of all my writing. Even without a partner all my poetry is lesbian poetry, shaping my celebratory consciousness about women and myself with a woman. And, too, I am an African-American writing my human and black spirit.

Libraries, anxiety and loneliness have receded to no loss. I became fully a poet. There is nothing like it to redeem oneself in one's work almost without realizing the written way.

Cheryl J. Moore

Evening and Dawn

*Love can be again hurt as well as
able joy - can be
so much in you
and stand you still
like a burning match.*

*Love is a question
evolving into a star
that lights you -
a room
in unbuttoned eternity.*

*Love gets ahead of you
like two meanings, both sensual,
heard at dawn.*

*Love is one, at all, ever
and be,
a deep tear,
a meadow of your soul.*

*You love in the page,
summoning heartwords kept
in script, words by your hand
meant to
enfold her,
and the theory of her
is manuscript.*

Cheryl J. Moore

For Your Eyes if You Were Free

*I found love in sorrow on your face,
Maturity of a year motioned in eyes
That danced still and, too,
Like your hands, your being
In red flowers on a lovely dress.*

*You are not vulnerable, but capable of
Craft to protect your soul;
Yet there is suffering
That could recede with my love for you,
A spontaneous love that leaped in me
Like a young colt in a field of grass.*

*A poet needs serenity
And a gentle poet needs to be free,
Not handled by rough hands.*

*You dance in a serenity of acceptance
And new wisdom. First I loved,
And loving, wanted to dance with you,
Though I am not graceful.
My eye of language is my grace,
To speak my gathered vision,
And write images that reflect you.*

*I see your pain-lighted spirit
And within you, shining like a rainy day,
Roses you hide.
In my tears I hide my silver fantasy
Of a simple rose at your door
And best, a great trust with you.*

Chrystos

Gathering Words

During my years of participation in First Nations battles for sovereignty and justice, I've lived inside war. It is a war that all Indians know but that very few others respect or recognize. It is not a "simple" (I use this term sarcastically) war of racism, which is the struggle of other Peoples of Color living here, although we also fight racism. This continent is morally and legally our land, since no treaty has been observed. In order for a government to claim a right to govern, it must have clear title. In European history, wars have consistently been waged for violation of treaties. Logically, then, we remain at war in a unique way—not for a piece of the "white pie," but because we do not agree that there is a pie at all. The government works around the clock to suppress the facts of this war (land theft, cultural & spiritual appropriations, alcoholism, theft of children, genocide) and its impact on us. War is not a metaphor. Our fight is simply not broadcast on the 5 o'clock news because an important part of our genocide is the myth that we have all vanished into cupboards or are happy somewhere selling crafts to tourists. We are not allowed designated victim status because that would admit to the worst instance of mass murder in world history. Our invisibility is woven deeply into the shame of history. We are continuously exploited in the media for images of romance, savagery, stupidity and treachery. I seek to pierce the white fog the mainstream media conjure because I believe that when our truth is fully known, we will have many allies in our war. These ideas are not "mine;" they are the result of many discussions with other First Nations warriors.

We joke that there are far more FBI's (feds) than FBI's (full-blood Indians) and they're *still* scared to death. Every struggle we have waged for dignity or treaty rights has been violently attacked, often with traitors from the government who pose as "one of us," such as Douglas Durham. One of my jobs as a writer is to break their security.

Though I hate the word "victim," which implies helplessness, we are victims—unarmed sitting ducks—before we are born into the massive and deliberate campaign of lies which constitute the history of government and its controllers, the conglomerates which I call the greedy boys. I use this name to remind myself of their immature minds, which perceive life from a tiny hole called profits. I resist the use of the word "patriarchy" because (in

true colonizer fashion) it obscures the nature of the truth. The greedy boys have only been on Turtle Island a little over 500 years. What we experience is not patriarchy, but the process of colonization, which immigrant women have profited from right along with the greedy boys. Patriarchy is only one of the many tools of colonizer mentality and is often used by women against other women.

I consciously fashion my writing as a weapon for my own survival and that of my allies. It has surprised me that my objective has often been overlooked by reviewers, who consistently reduce me to “feeling angry,” when my purpose is so blatantly to shoot back in the old way, from the trees, in sneak attacks that masquerade as strings of artfully arranged words. This book’s title, *Fire Power*, hopefully leaves no question as to my intent: I am a warrior against all forms of injustice. I intend to be one of the many hands insuring the survival of Indigenous People worldwide (by this I mean all colonized people, including Africans, whose situation has been cleverly masked so that they are not commonly referred to as Indigenous). These words are undeniably treason. I pledge nothing to a government that abuses us. A long time ago, a famous writer told me that my poem “I Walk in the History of My People” was not poetry because it was too political. I assert that poetry without politics is narcissistic and not useful to us. I also believe that everything is political—there is no neutral, safe place we can hide out in waiting for the brutality to go away.

Among the many joys of Indigenous Culture are puns and delight in multiple meanings. While English is one of the stiffer conqueror languages, I enjoy pushing it around. Thus, *Fire Power* is not only this book as a gun aimed at the “american canon,” but is also about truth as fire and as power. It is seeing my life as a First Nations Two-Spirited Lesbian as fire and as power which can help heal our mother and ourselves. Poetry is the song of the people, not the painted bird of the academic machine. My most treasured response from listeners is, “I hate poetry, but I love yours!” This means that I have attained the sacred goal of writing and relationship—to communicate. My audiences are my allies in this war, a war in which all of us are victims, as all of us are colonized, although it is much harder to feel the war when we are far from the front and comfortably watching TV nonsense after a good meal.

This book holds many pieces of my personal struggle for survival from a violent, alcoholic family, and my subsequent imprisonments in psychiatric wards over a period of 10 years. My last incarceration was in January 1975. Writing this has helped me cauterize many old wounds and I hope it

is useful to others who share this grief. I know well how common my experience has been. In sharing these dark shards, I hope to encourage others to bite open the bullet of pretense in which we live. Telling the truth is powerful medicine. It is a fire that lights the way for others. Truth has always been forbidden by governments, whose purpose is to exploit. When we speak our "Fire Power," we join a long and honored line of warriors against injustice.

Do not bother to feel guilty if your life may seem less difficult than mine. Use your ease to make the lives of others easier. As I have, as many women and men and children have, you can make your life a weapon against exploitation. It does not matter that we may not win our war to save our mother. It matters that we fight honorably for her. Those who rape her, who rape us, have no souls. In fighting them, we preserve our own. Poetry is a great force for healing, as Pat Parker first showed me many years ago. We are bombarded daily to ignore our true wounds. The mainstream media direct our focus on trivia, noise and tragedies about which we can do nothing (which cleverly increases our feeling of helplessness). My prayer is that these fragments of my battle to become whole and sane (still ongoing) will fire you to discover your power, which is often misunderstood in western syphlization. Each of us is born with innate power and purpose, a sacred direction for which we have been created. Our task is to find the place where we belong and do our work there. We struggle against a vast conspiracy designed to rob us of that power and redirect our energies into maintaining the corporate consumer state for the profits of the rich. Power is most dangerous when it is used against others; like bullets, it has a habit of ricocheting. I recommend that you give as much time as you can to being silently reflective on our brainwashing, to writing or creating your arsenal. I especially encourage other First Nations women to record their stories in honor of the grief-stricken silence of our ancestors who fought for our lives. We live in a world which continuously erases us; the process of bringing our thoughts into the material world can be an important part of self-esteem. This is how I've managed to stay alive. This cleans us of toxic trivializations and allows our spirits room to sing. These songs, like the songs of dawn birds, will begin our days well. I wish you courage and the light of love to see your way.

Reprinted with permission from the author from *Fire Power*. Press Gang, 1995

Martha Courtot

The Woman Who Lives with Owls

*the woman who lives with owls
is defiant
refuses to clean
does not invite people in
listens to the mutterings
and feathershakings of dark birds
and then writes songs*

she says she is learning their language

*she writes notes to people
on the meaning of owl-talk
she says it is deep and intricate
she studies the reason they live on night
as if it were an unresolvable hunger
she puts these notes in the mouths of owls
and they are delivered
dropped in the laps of friends and editors
and strangers
whose eyes also are hungry for night*

later, no one will look her in the eye

*they claim she writes like everyone else
on white paper and sends them through the mail*

*the woman who lives with owls
is capable of sitting for years
in one place
while the great tree which is her home
divides above her the dust gathers
and the droppings of owls form themselves
into deep silences*

*this woman who lives with owls
who lets them sit on her shoulder
who practices owl-talk in the dark
makes a witch's promise to all owl-covens
not to reveal*

*this owl woman stands herself
always on the edge of night
whispering long-vowelled secrets
into the wind*

*the notes she writes to the world
are written in the dark
surrounded by creatures which can fly
surrounded by something with a powerful
and sharp hunger*

*she will tell you her words are written on bark
pulled from the tree she lives in
she will tell you the pen she writes with
was taken from the body of a small owl
who died young*

*look at her in the light
notice the just visible pair of eyes
slit and yellow
that sit on her shoulder*

*notice the places on her body
raw of skin and empty
where once a feather might have grown*

*1978 Reprinted from The Bird Escapes,
Earthy Mama Press, 2001*

Martha Courtot

Goodgirl and Badgirl

*Goodgirl is so nice. Never wants to hurt feelings,
tell secrets, or embarrass family.
Goodgirl won't write about class privilege or sex,
betrayal among lesbians,
and likes to avoid racial tensions.*

*Badgirl pounces, sharpens her nails,
goes for the jugular.
She shouts on a street corner,
dumps out her bag full of venom
and generally displeases.
There's so much she wants to say
if Goodgirl will let her.*

*At the reading all the Goodgirls said:
you shouldn't have mentioned your rape—
it might stimulate other women's bad memories.
Badgirl jumped up and down.
But it happened to me! But it happened to us!*

*Goodgirl doesn't care if it happened.
That's not the point, silly.
The point is praise,
and doing the right thing.
What is that, the right thing, Badgirl asks.
But no one will tell her.*

*Badgirl writes on the margins
slantwise
her letters run together no punctuation
spread themselves all over the paper.*

*Goodgirl diagrams each sentence,
after she writes it,
to be sure of her parts of speech,
and she always writes in the exact center of the page*

Goodgirl and Badgirl sit down to write together.
They stare at the page.
Goodgirl writes a paragraph on women's solidarity.
Badgirl deletes it all. She writes a sentence beginning
"I learned early to trust no one . . . "
Good girl finishes the sentence . . .
"but then I began to learn how to love."

They return to staring.
How will they finish even one page?

Badgirl says to Goodgirl
Don't you have some good deed you need to do?"
Goodgirl thinks what it might be;
Badgirl begins to write.
Blood drips onto the page.
The sky darkens.
Goodgirl reads over her shoulder.
She grows afraid.
Who will want to hear this?
She tries to cross out certain weighty words.
Badgirl pushes her aside.
Nothing can stop her now.

A noise fills the room
the sound of a woman writing her way toward freedom.
Listen to what she has to say

1996 Reprinted from *The Bird Escapes*, Earthy Mama Press, 2001

Martha Courtot

This Delicate Ritual

*she imagines language as an aviary
each night she falls asleep
to the cries of imprisoned birds
screaming in her head to be let out*

*she is accused by everyone
of never being satisfied
she is ready now to admit to the charge*

*but she thinks of the birds
inside the cage escape impossible
perfection for the mad
fame for the privileged or lucky*

*why does she write poems?
why do words curl up like dying birds
inside her?*

*she feels like the miner who escapes
but must live forever with the nightmare
of birds folding in on themselves
gasping for breath which is no longer there*

*words rise within her orphaned birds
and she opens their cages one by one
and she frees something*

*never imagine she has a choice
there is no choice
only between herself and a constant stuttering pain,
this small delicate ritual*

*words on paper
to change a world*

*1983 Reprinted from The Bird Escapes, Earthy Mama
Press, 2001*



Katherine V. Forrest

The Mystery of Lesbian Mysteries

The world of lesbian fiction readers is separated into two opposing camps: those who read lesbian mystery novels and those who don't. We aren't hurling Birkenstocks across the divide, but the don'ts rigorously defend their position that our mysteries are mere entertainments with dubious subject matter.

Unfortunately for the don'ts, many of them languish in a desert of waiting for the authors they love. Among American lesbian writers working today, the majority of our literary luminaries—our Dorothy Allison, Carol Anshaws, Blanche Boyds—have thus far produced relatively slender bodies of work. Mystery aficionados, on the other hand, party hearty with their favorite mystery writers because we write lots of books. Of my own dozen novels, seven are mysteries.

Based purely on our sales numbers, we must have figured out something important about our audience. Greg Herren, editor of the *Lambda Book Report*, estimates that our books consistently account for perhaps 30 to 45% of the lesbian fiction titles sold each year. A part of that readership is “cross over”—to gay men, because our books often feature gay characters and issues relevant to our gay brothers.

Why such popularity? To add to my own sense of what we bring to this segment of our literature, I conferred with a few writer friends among my sisters in crime.

Ellen Hart, who's carted home numerous Lambda Literary Awards, offered this opinion: “The mystery novel is a strangely comforting fictional form. You come upon a world in chaos. People's lives have been turned upside down. The story may not move from tragedy to happiness, but there will be resolution.”

Claire McNab, whose work always heads best seller lists, points out an embedded psychological appeal: “Historically, lesbians have been experts in concealing the reality of their lives. It seems natural that we would be drawn to mysteries.”

These assessments lead to a deeper question. Even the mildest form of mystery, the bloodless English “cozy,” will have dastardly deeds as its primary concern. Why, given our “female nature”—we seldom are the perpetrators of violence—do we focus our gaze on a world of criminal brutality that often exceeds imagination and comprehension? Why have women flocked to explore the discovery, investigation, and aftermath of violence?

The international doyenne of contemporary women mystery writers, P.D. James, considers this question in her autobiography, *Time To Be In Earnest*, and she turns directly to that “female nature” to suggest an answer. “Perhaps it is to the women we must look for psychological subtlety and the exploration of moral choice, which for me are at the heart of even the most grittily realistic of crime fiction....And I may have needed to write detective fiction for the same reasons as aficionados enjoy the genre: the catharsis of carefully controlled terror, the bringing of order out of disorder, the reassurance that we live in a comprehensible and moral universe...”

J. M. Redmann, whose *The Intersection of Law and Desire* is one of our classics, not only agrees, but argues for the substance of our novels: “They open the door to such things as death and loss, what is justice and how do we, flawed as we are, search for it.”

Ellen Hart takes it further. “To me, mysteries have become our modern morality tales. It’s where we can discuss good and evil, convention versus morality, the power of ideas, and the vast arena of human motivation.”

Barbara Wilson, whose reputation extends well beyond the mystery genre, goes still further, assigning significant literary stature to this exploration. “I think the detective is an important figure in literature, a morally engaged protagonist who acts and is acted upon but who nevertheless stands apart from the drama as outsider, question-asker, narrator.”

To these forceful arguments that mysteries can extend far beyond mere entertainment I would add that the unsung strength of our lesbian mystery novels is their serious exploration of a range of issues. We writers bring our skills to bear on meeting the conventional requirements of a good mystery to entertain our audiences, while at the same time we address themes that matter. We write about the real concerns of our real lives.

Pervading virtually all of our mystery novels, including my own, is that central crisis of our community, the profound effects of homophobia, both external and internal; the endemic hatred of gay and lesbian people in the society at large and throughout the law enforcement agencies sworn to protect us; and the hypocrisy of organized religion, the primary legitimizing agent for intolerance of us.

How the female detective confronts this homophobia is the compelling element in our mysteries, and a framework for another fundamental attractiveness of these books: the female detective as hero. “Historically, the mystery genre has portrayed gays as either the villain or the victim,” Ellen Hart says. “Today we have lesbian heroes—or if not heroes, then at least human

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beings with integrity and intelligence.” However flawed they may be, these women are assertive, competent, courageous, even combative—images of women that lesbian readers continue to hunger for in all of our books.

A close companion issue to homophobia is the closet. In real life the closet kills, spiritually and insidiously; and in our mysteries it does so physically and viscerally. Not only are closeted lesbian and gay fictional characters cautionary models of the corrosive damage of secrets, they provide fertile territory for homicide and blackmail. The closet also can act as a conflict element within the detective herself, as her internalized homophobia does for Kate Delafield, my closeted-on-the-job LAPD homicide detective.

Our lesbian detective heroes are surely not without their flaws and foibles. Even in these marginally more accepting times, as J. M. Redmann remarks, “Crossing sexual boundaries is still a treacherous border. A character like Micky Knight gives me room as a writer to use her conflicts and blind spots in her stories.” Unlike traditional mysteries where the detective tends to be a loner and has the same predictable and comfortable characteristics from book to book, our lesbian detectives and sleuths have a life.

Do they ever.

They’re embroiled in divisive family issues, they find and lose love relationships, they have problems with alcohol, they fight with their partners, their friends, their children. While they may triumph in their pursuit of justice, they can lose miserably in the bedroom.

But they change and grow, backslide and grow again, within individual novels and in an evolutionary process over the space of a series. This resilient strength of our lesbian detectives is the hallmark of our mystery novels. The reader shakes her head over Carol Ashton and mutters that she should only be as good at relationships as she is at being a cop. We want Jane Lawless to confront and beat her drinking problem. We growl at Kate Delafield to wake up from the fallacy that she needs to be in the closet.

While current mysteries percolate with our community’s concerns, early lesbian mysteries emerged from a different if related impetus. Barbara Wilson says that her first mysteries, the Pam Nilsen books, came more directly out of her political involvement in the leftist and lesbian movements of the 1980s than the current Cassandra Reilly novels. Wilson’s 1984 *Murder in the Collective* is the first mystery novel in American literature to feature a lesbian sleuth as a series character. My own *Amateur City*, published the same year, featured the first police professional in a series, Kate Delafield.

Feminism still informs all of Wilson’s work, as it does a number of other writers who carry the torch of passionate commitment to feminist issues: Sa-

rah Dreher's atmospheric and preternatural Stoner McTavish stories; the work of Edgar Award-nominated Val McDermid; and especially the novels of activist Joan Drury, whose potent *Silent Words* was also nominated for an Edgar, the most prestigious prize in all of mystery writing.

Being writers who are lesbian has given us advantages and new slants on an old genre. With her fast paced and sharply constructed plots, Claire McNab is our Agatha Christie; but her thirteen mysteries present a non-Christie meld of story and social theme and exotic setting, and her Australia-based Detective Inspector Carol Ashton is a far more complex affair than the sexless, cerebral Hercule Poirot. Ashton too has her battles over remaining in the closet, and her headlong plunges into sexuality tend to place every relationship she values on the endangered species list.

Our mysteries go far toward dispelling a persistent rumor that lesbians are a tad anemic in the humor vein. Humor lurks in the shadows of a good many of our mystery novels, McNab being a very witty writer, as are Jaye Maiman and Sandra Scoppetone and Sarah Dreher. Ellen Hart's scenes featuring Jane's sidekick, Cordelia, are genuinely funny. Mary Wings' five mysteries, most recently *She Came in Drag*, are entertainments throughout, Emma Victor being, as one reviewer has put it, "way cool." Mabel Maney's Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys parodies are in a class by themselves. *Kiss the Girls and Make Them Spy: an Original Jane Bond Parody* is irresistible just on the basis of its delicious title.

Our mystery novels also excel in their wide variety of settings, strong sense of place, and interesting background detail. "I'm lazy when it comes to learning about guns, poisons, police procedures," Barbara Wilson confesses. "I'm much more interested in learning about the history of the bassoon, or architecture or Eastern Europe." Wilson has taken us from Seattle to Barcelona, Transylvania, and Venice. Joan Drury and Ellen Hart's novels bring to life the great lakes region of Minnesota. Lauren Wright Douglas prowls Vancouver. Maiman and Scoppetone give us hard-edged New York. My beat is Los Angeles, Redmann's is New Orleans.

So, you mystery don'ts, think about stepping across that divide just once—long enough for your own investigation of lesbian detectives, and why so many readers keep coming back for more and more. Come to our party.

Forrest's work includes the lesbian classic, *Curious Wine*.

Forthcoming: *Hancock Park*, the eighth Kate Delafield mystery.

Dianna Grayer

Why I Write

Looking back through my life, something I often do and something I encourage my clients to do, I explore and try to understand the child I was growing up. I try hard to remember me and who I was and how I felt. My childhood wasn't fun, as I felt alone, living life on my own. I definitely didn't like the things I saw and the way I was treated. Deep in my soul I knew there was a better way to live and had promised myself early on that I would find that way and live it forever. However, I never knew so clearly until I was a teenager that I would also be teaching and encouraging others to also find a better way to live.

I remember I was playing basketball one day, and after seeing so many kids mistreated by their peers, I finally took a stand. Inexperienced players ("underdogs" they were called when I was growing up), were teased and picked last or were never chosen to play on a team. I absolutely hated it. It brings tears to my eyes as I reminisce. If I felt sad being on the other side being picked and watching those not be, you can imagine how they felt not being picked. So I decided that I would prevent these kids from experiencing this unfair treatment by choosing them and treating them kindly. I also instilled in them hope that they were good people and that they could play basketball. I saw with my very eyes these children start to believe in themselves and it showed on the court, as we were the team to beat. From those many days out on the court, I realized I had a gift, a strength that was contagious and that could change lives. That I was an instrument for healing.

I continued to use my gift, as today I'm a therapist doing the work I was destined to do. Sharing my knowledge through writing started during graduate school. I was very shy, especially in groups, and thinking about public speaking was torture. I didn't like this part of myself because I always felt I wasn't being true to myself because I had a lot to say and never shared it. I would hold back my answers or suggestions and become upset for not sharing. Communicating one on one I was okay but that wasn't good enough for me. I hated the way I felt and went on a mission to change. I felt trapped and squelched, the same feeling I felt as a child. I didn't have a voice. I wasn't encouraged to speak or share who I was and what I was feeling.

I wanted so desperately to understand myself and make things right. So I spent time exploring and learning about myself and graduate school was a

great place to start on my journey. Since I was going to become a therapist I felt I should at least know how it felt to be a client. So I went to the Counseling office at Sonoma State University and signed up for therapy. I really didn't have any idea what would come from this experience but it was the beginning of my new beginning. During the process of therapy I found my voice through writing. I began to feel my body in ways I'd never felt before. Emotions were stirred up that had been tucked away and shelved for many years. I finally had someone all to myself who was interested in what I thought and what I felt. It was so unbelievable. I found myself not wanting to fully share what I was feeling with my therapist but would go home and write. I had some of my best cries writing in my journals. I didn't know I had all those feelings or that I knew all those adjectives to describe what I was feeling. For my next session I would return with pages of thoughts and feelings to share. I was prolific. Words flowed from me like water from an opened faucet and I didn't hold back but encouraged them to come forth. It felt like I was being set free. All the many times I didn't speak my feelings as a child came bursting through. So I wrote and wrote filling up spiral notebook after spiral notebook. On many nights I would wake up and write pages. Then my words started to take form and shape themselves, so I started writing poems and prose. Whatever was stirred up in my therapy or outside of therapy, I wrote about it and then created a poem. I even started seeing images and started to draw them, like my therapist holding and comforting me, something I needed so much as a child. This is when I got the idea for my first journaling book. I wanted to give others the opportunity to explore themselves through writing, poetry and art. Metaphorically, I wanted to hold and comfort them on their journeys through making their lives better.

All that I do in my life is about helping people find their true selves and to help them know and believe that they are worthy people. My writing carries that same message. I teach them to move from a self-hurting place to a place of self-helping. I give them new ideas and ways to think about their lives and their relationships. I've seen a lot of hurt and pain in my personal life, my work as a caseworker, foster parent of twenty-three children, friends, family and from the lives of all my clients. Issues that I've covered are many, like; self-esteem, LGBTI, multi-cultural, depression, anxiety, alcohol/drugs, and abuse. People need help to deal with their lives. This is why I write. This is why I am a therapist/healer. I want to offer something, a self-help tool to those who have been hurt, squelched, or trapped, to assist them in finding and freeing themselves. I'm a holder of hope. I'm here to shine the light of

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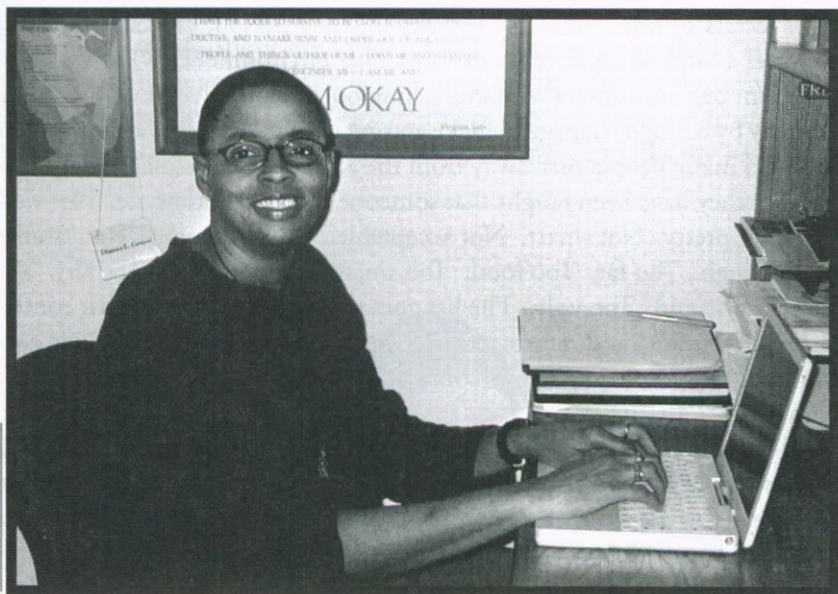


Photo by Roxanna Fiamma

Dianna Grayer

Lynn Brown

BECAUSE

Writing allows the heart to speak without fear or censorship. Writing allows the wholeness in myself to just be heard without polite editing or consideration for anything but my own needs to see what goes on inside and express what I think matters. No one needs to hear me because writing allows me to listen to myself with a familiar kind of effort. Growing up with secrets or uncomfortable feelings makes a person, especially a young girl, feel a kind of negative sensitivity to her environment. What we translate from our encounters with everything outside ourselves is colored individually by enough baggage to make getting back to ourselves a labyrinthine task. So many people turn away from the amazing vessels that they possess because they have been taught that someone else is who they are. Not worthy. Not pretty. Not smart. Not acceptable. Not becoming. Not lovable. Not enough. Too fat. Too loud. Too smart. Too talkative. Too shy. Too lazy. Too stupid. Too ugly. The list goes on and, for some, the list continues to be repeated and reformed inside our minds because the outside conditioning was too strong to overcome the intuitive beliefs that maybe shed a glimmer.

I write because of all I have denied and what others have denied me in the various names we give to our withholdings, our personal sense of righteousness. I write to express out loud what I believe. Not for anyone else to certify but just to say my truth. In the world I want, someone is listening who cares and whose thoughts resonate with mine. It started long ago when what I wanted to hear was often being spoken by a man, a male poet, but the elements that I missed were the voices of women. So I learned how to speak by reading and listening to men who left out some of the most important things that I wanted to hear. Men mostly outright rejected the sensibilities and feelings that I hungered for in literature and art and I had to live another 30 years to discover those voices and realize that they were now being taught in universities, under the invitation of Women's Studies.

I write to create visions of hope and connection for some other woman who might be navigating her universe looking for a voice, a blessing to allow her mind to be acknowledged and challenged and heard. My heart wanted affirmation in the world I entered as a young woman and I wasn't afraid of hard lessons. Believability and worthiness seemed to be concepts advanced for male consumption and not readily available for the forces which moved

women to express themselves. I write to stand upright, to correct the heritage of women whose voices were cramped and stored almost out of reach for even their own selves. I write because I love myself and before I die part of me will be given to this task of telling my story, through my dreams and living as I bear witness. I write to share my love with others in whatever form it will be eaten. Women are always telling the stories of their lives as they communicate in gatherings. These tales have been reduced and punished by institutions in the past but more of us are beginning to accept and listen to each other and to value the resonance and wisdom, the humor and pleasure, edges and creativity of our myriad selves. If there wasn't somewhere that I could speak my mind I would have to go to the ocean with more commitment to rage and bellow, to allow the arms of the universe to take my anger and let me go. As a matter of fact I go there quite often but it's a wonder how this white surface eats up the pain and fills my heart with a clear space.



Carolyn Gage

The rules of grammar have frequently posed problems for lesbian feminist writers, and many writers, like Virginia Woolf and Emily Dickinson and Gertrude Stein and Mary Daly and bell hooks, developed their own grammatical eccentricities as ways to express radical ideas using a language that was rigidly structured to preserve and replicate hierarchies of dominance. (Actually, the punctuation of Dickinson's poems was originally "corrected" for first publication. Later, thankfully, those brilliant, breathtakingly ambiguous little dashes were all restored.)

I wrote this poem as a playful protest against traditional rules of English grammar, but also in celebration of that dash, which, as opposed to the comma, allows for non-hierarchical connection between dissimilar ideas. But I also wanted to get in my lesbian licks about "tense" and the rules of capitalization.

Grammarchy

*Virginia Woolf wrote with a dash —
But only in her letters.
And Emily, she used the dash —
Corrected by her betters!*

*But Gertrude Stein
Made up her mind
Not to use punctuation at all and so she didn't and that was fine
with everybody—*

But I'm not satisfied:

*My periods don't end my thoughts —
They leak through all the plugs
And stain the page with spreading rage —
My writing's in the blood.*

My past is always present tense —
 My future never perfect,
 And if my sentence goes unserved —
 Did I approve the verdict?

The self is always capital,
 That stately pillar "I" —
 But, "you" is always little "you" —
 No need to wonder why.

The verbs are always lower case,
 Unless Daly's been around,
 And upper case (by hooks displaced!)
 Serves only proper nouns.

My clauses aren't subordinate,
 My pronouns aren't possessive —
 This grammar is about control —
 This grammar is excessive!

Punctuation punctures thought
 And flattens out the form,
 And subject-object is the split
 Of patriarchal norms.

The codes of credibility
 Are the politics of grammar —
 A writer owes it to herself
 To slobber, stutter, stammer —

To smash the syntax, and the state,
 Defying men of letters!
 Me? I've settled for the dash —
 The madder, then, the better!

Hope Cavagnaro**Reality: Survivor**

This is my life, not a TV show. I'm not competing against other contestants. I'm competing against myself: fears, expectations, the system, and numerous other foes. My prize will not be a million dollars. It will be contentment, my sanity, self-love, and self-respect.

Growing up I clung to books, music, and writing. Being an only child in an abusive, unstable home, I sought comfort in books. I would get lost in the story and tune out the whole world. I still do this today and when I pass away, I'm sure there will be a book on my bedside table.

I've always been fascinated by the power of words. I devour any literature I get a hold of: fiction, nonfiction, biography, political works, etc. However, I've not yet come across many lesbian writers.

The very society we combat, we often imitate their behaviors. Much of society condemns us for loving other women. Within our prison system, people are often put down, labeled, and assumed to have an "identity crisis" if they aren't strictly "femme" or "butch." I wonder what it will take to be open-minded and accepting, the same as we seek from others.

Writing isn't my talent but I encourage everyone with the gift to embrace it. I write for myself, when I'm in an intense emotional space. During this time in prison, I've written pages in moments of unbearable heartache and grief, as well as anger and rage. *Sinister Wisdom #61 (Women Loving Women in Prison)* couldn't have come at a better time. I found comfort in it. It reminded me that I'm not alone in the struggles and complications of loving in this environment.

I thank all of you, my sisters, for having the courage to put your hearts and souls out there onto paper. Our trials and tribulations may vary but we share common threads. We are all in this together.

Alix Dobkin

Am I Self-Centered, or Is It Just Me?

"I hate writing. I love having written." Dorothy Parker

"Thinking can be done so comfortably; writing is so troublesome."
Hannah Arendt, in a letter to Mary McCarthy

Huge creative projects are initially undertaken in ignorance, otherwise, few books would be written or babies born. These undertakings are always vastly more consuming than one intended, and take so darn much more time than one imagined.

In early 1992, thinking it would be a year – three at the most – to complete, I began such a project now with the working title, *MY RED BLOOD: A Radical Girl Takes On the Last Century*, my perspective on pivotal cultural, social and political change-points of American history in the last half of the Twentieth Century. In writing, ruminating, analyzing, finding and following the threads leading up to my work building women's communities and Lesbian culture, almost every significant force shaping our United States during the past six decades gets its due. It's become my mission to document this history and pass it on.

Fortunately, my youth aligns perfectly with major American historical events, from the 1947 Brooklyn Dodgers and the battle against Jim Crow to living in a Communist family and then joining the Party during the height of anti-communist hysteria and McCarthyism. From the advent of rock 'n' roll in 1954-5, after decades of "race music" known to few white Americans, to the folk music boom in Greenwich Village and onwards to Oklahoma City, Detroit, Baltimore, Chicago, and Florida, I'm laying it all out as I lived it.

Once again I was in the right place (New York City) at the right time (the early 1970's) when the forces of feminism and Lesbianism intersected and changed everything forever. Since this memoir ends early in 1972 after I come out, I used to tell people, "This is not a Lesbian book!" A dozen years and three drafts later, I think, "Silly me!"

It's all there, where this particular Lesbian came from, in a half-completed third revision, and at this point, completing it finally seems possible. Together with the "Minstrel Blood" columns published in *Chicago Outlines*, and then the *Windy City Times*, it can truly be said that my life has been well documented.

Polemic pieces written for several Lesbian and women's publications, published five years ago still get me in trouble. I'm not expecting trouble for this memoir, but then again, I didn't think that *MY RED BLOOD*...was going to be a Lesbian book.

However, no matter what I think, as Great Aunt Frances was heard to say, "A body never knows what a body can expect, does a body?"



Jan Couvillon

Groundwork

Reading and telling stories were a big part of my paternal grandmother's gift to me as a child. She encouraged all her grandchildren to be literary. We sat on the floor by her chair and took turns spinning yarns and playing rhyming word games. She read many stories from classical tales to us, Aesop's Fables, the Brothers Grimm, Robert Louis Stevenson, Louisa Mae Alcott, Hans Christian Anderson, Mark Twain, Alice B. Emerson to name a few and many, many fairy stories. She also gave me my first Nancy Drew mystery.

My Grandmother loved Eleanor Roosevelt, Queen Elizabeth II, Pearl S. Buck, Margaret Bourke-White and Amelia Earhart. She stressed higher education for her daughters at a time when few women went to college. She was a matriarch and an early feminist though she would never have admitted it.

When I started school in 1946 reading proved to be almost beyond my abilities. I saw words backward. My grandmother sat down with me and taught me to read with what is now a standard teaching method for children with reading problems. She was years ahead of her time. What a lucky thing for me. When I was finally able to turn words around and read by myself, books were ambrosia that tantalized the senses, stretched the mind and gave vision to far away places.

This was the soil on which I was nurtured. This was the hand pruning that brought life and shape to my thoughts and words.

For years I created stories and poems in my mind. I wrote few of them down due to what is now called dyslexia. At 59 years of age a friend insisted I learn to use a computer. The computer freed my fingers to challenge Spell Check in a Herculean manner and opened a new world of writing without having to look up every word.

B.C. (before computer) writing a short story or poem took hours or even days depending on my frustration level. Some words might well have been a hieroglyphics or a monochromatic painting. But the desire to write ran deep in my veins and drove me on.

With the aid of the computer, stories, articles and poems flow from my fingertips. Almost everything is composed in my head and words appear on the screen. It is a ribbon of rhythm that keeps my foot tapping as words come forth.

Inspiration comes from many different places, people and their situations, a blade of grass, rain, birds, emotions, the minutia of life. But the greatest inspiration came and still does come from my Grandmother Sherwood.

E. Chroinin

Leaping Out In Ireland

The first lesbian publication I held in my hands was *Beyond God the Father* by Mary Daly. Given to me by a nomadic lesbian separatist, a champion of radical feminist causes, both this book and this lesbian changed my life. They not alone changed my life but awoke and liberated my authentic self from a state of silence and isolation in which I had been slowly forgetting the very substance of my soul from the day I was born. The fact that this lesbian fearlessly named her being and her politics, both inseparable to me, beckoned a courage within me that I celebrate to this day. As I held this book to my chest and listened to this bald, bold dyke explain the premise of leaping out of patriarchy and into one's very own skin, I felt as though someone had for the very first time, welcomed me to the world. We sat on a hillside in West Cork, Ireland, while I drank in stories of lesbian literature and lesbian land culture, lesbian festivals and lesbian music, like I was the proverbial shipwrecked traveler awash and struggling on a barren island, awaiting the arrival of a passing ship to carry me home. Hearing this lesbian's words and holding in my own hands the proof that such things were written down, charged me with a life force that heralded to my hungry heart that my life's purpose and meaning had truly and finally arrived to my beckoning.

I could not hear the word lesbian enough, became giddy with delight, and grew in stature each time it was uttered. I felt like the toddler who has just discovered her sturdy footing and felt sure that the strength of the word lesbian and all it represented would carry me leaping through the rest of this lifetime.

Just as I thought on this rocky windswept hillside that no joy could ever again compare to the sacred communications I had received from this wandering Amazon warrior, she went to my little burgundy Ford Fiesta, which was parked on a grassy boithrin, placed a tape in the tape deck and turned up the volume. Suddenly the valley of Kealkil, the heather-covered mountains and hills, the grazing cows and early flowers, the dogs barking in the distance and the scattered stone houses became enriched and filled with the letters of the lesbian alphabet according to Alix Dobkin, a well known lesbian singer and songwriter. I thought I had died and gone to dyke heaven. Certain moments forever become etched within the landscape of one's memory as defining and life altering in their importance. On that day eight

years ago as we danced jig and reel, skipped in circles around my car and around the little meadow; a natural rhythm of sacred celebration and re-birth was effortlessly and profoundly evoked by the words of another lesbian, singing to the pulse of our very existence. Though I had never heard these songs before, they instantly became as precious and familiar to me as the strains of old Irish airs on which I was reared. This was a whole other culture, surely as much of my heart as the culture of the Celts and yet on that day, I marveled that I had survived this far without it.

My life to that point was profoundly enriched and inspired by Irish culture in all its wealth of story, proverb and song; in its ancestry of courage, faith and fortitude against all odds; in its tenacious clinging to language and way of life, to its people and history, despite constant occupation and indoctrination by outside influences and powers. Though I am eternally grateful to the little island in the Atlantic who marches to the sound of her own bodhran and bagpipe, I am also a product of its inherent patriarchal dictations. Though Ireland is revered in song and story as a woman to be respected, loved and protected, the actual status of the common Irish woman struggles to straddle the chasm between literature and real life. In reality we are viewed as weaker, less able and to be of service to Irishmen and marriage; to be the mothers and the grandmothers, bearing the greater of all burdens of family and faith, yet remaining unentitled, unseen and unheard in the creative vision of our own purposeful lives outside the assigned and accepted parameters of Irish Catholicism. The expectation that I would marry, bear many children, continue to teach in a small rural community preserving and passing on the language and culture so carefully handed to me, weighed heavily on a heart who loved her place and people, yet who loved the notion of herself as lesbian even more.

In receiving the gift of wise words and inspiring literature from an exemplary lesbian, as enriched by her lesbian culture as I was by my Celtic roots, I took that first step eight years ago in leaping out of patriarchy and into my own life. I learned that to follow the true source of one's joy is to create the foundation within for all that is truly important, all that will never be lost, all that will become the legacy of our one very precious lifetime.

Carla Trujillo

The Power of Words

Part 1: Writing as a Revolutionary Act

I want to begin by talking about writing as a revolutionary act. It is well known that the written word has revolutionized hearts, incited political movements, and shifted the consciousness of countless souls. So much so that governments who wish to control the minds of its people commonly attempt to control what they write, or at least what is published. Governments censor for a variety of reasons. They may fear political unrest, rebellion against religious ideology, disruption of the status quo, or the exposure of wrong doing by the country's leader.

Writers who rebel against government sanctions have been ostracized, blacklisted, imprisoned, tortured, maimed, and murdered. The renowned poet, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, for example, was forbidden to write by the Mexican male clergy who felt her words were too incendiary, intellectual, and improper. She was ordered to destroy her entire library. Heartbroken, she did what she was told. Nawal El-Saadawi was imprisoned by her government for being too outspoken about Egypt's oppression of women. Radclyffe Hall was censored in England and ostracized because she wrote about a woman's desire for another woman. Salman Rushdie had a religion-sanctioned bounty placed on his head for writing fiction that questioned Iran's religious practices. And Ken Saro-Wiwa was hanged in 1995 by the Nigerian government for speaking out about his country's duplicity in corrupt deal-making with Western petroleum companies.

The United States is not exempt. Although the U.S. consistently denigrates countries that falter on human rights, the Bush administration instigated an elaborate censorship campaign against those who spoke out against the (2003) Iraqi war. Recall how George W. Bush told Americans, in a line blatantly stolen from some B-grade movie, "you're either with us, or against us." His subsequent enactment of the "un"patriot act not only subverted our civil rights, but cultivated a climate of greater paranoia while oppressing innocent people. Bush's media machine surrounding the wars in Iraq and Afganistan, and the neo-McCarthyian attacks used against anyone who challenged his policies, was some of the most elaborately developed propaganda used in this modern age.

Words are powerful, but they can do more than instigate political movements. Words can inspire personal change of momentous depth, unleash re-

pressed sexual desire, or catalyze new ways of thinking. Look at how the writing of Barbara Smith, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, and Audre Lorde transformed perceptions of women of color and changed the consciousness of an entire feminist movement. Literature, even in our media hyped world can cross borders and boundaries, fabricated or real. Literature can save lives, save animals, and maybe even save the damn planet. Literature is powerful because the words we create *can* create change. Because of this, people both fear and exult it.

The *act* of writing can also have transformative powers. Putting thoughts on paper can clarify feelings and sublimate anger and pain. Perhaps a poem you've written catapulted you to a new level of consciousness. Or a story you composed opened your heart for the first time and enabled you to forgive. Writing, although solitary and personal, can sharpen edges, heighten passion, and alter the spirit.

Part II: Chicano/a Writing

Growing up in California during the 70's, I loved reading, and was strongly encouraged by my teachers to read as much as possible. They felt it was important, however, that I read what they referred to as "the classics." When I asked why, I was told the work of these authors was critical to my education, and that I needed to appreciate the stories they told, and how they were written. Though I read whatever I was assigned, I longed for literature that was written by and about Chicanos/as. My classmates were Black, Asian, American Indian, and Chicano/a. Yet, our teachers failed to assign a single book by any writers from these groups.

Longing for more, and slightly perturbed over having to read countless stories by White, male authors, I conducted my own private rebellion. I read what was required since I needed to get good grades, then asked my perplexed teachers for additional books to read about "other" people. Some thankfully gave me references, or at least references for books by anthropologists who studied people of color. Most, however, had little to offer, and I ended up reading books many would consider non-literary. To this day I often wonder whether the stories I write now are influenced (and God help me if they are) by the countless *Tarzan of the Apes*, or the *Hardy Boys Mystery* books I read.

"Hispanics" are now considered the largest minority group in the United States. Statistics for 2003 estimate us at 39 million, or 13% of the U.S. population. Currently, the state of publishing by and about Chicanas/os also appears to be in a period of growth. Recently, I've noticed more Chicanas/os writing and publishing. Countering this, unfortunately, are mainstream pub-

lishers who are more concerned about making a profit. This limits the number, and often the types, of books published by the major houses. These larger houses, with some notable exceptions, continually seek books they think will be commercially appealing to the growing Chicano/Latino market. Their views of what they believe Chicano/Latinos want typically originate from media driven caricatures. That is, Latinas have to be sexy, pretty, and fun. And Latinos have to be handsome, tough, and virile. A few of the larger presses, recognizing market potential have even created imprints such as Rayo from HarperCollins, which focuses on publishing Chicano/Latino writers. What will result from imprints such as these remains to be seen.

Smaller presses are still the primary vehicles for publishing work by Chicanos/as and other people of color. This is because the smaller presses often have additional motives besides profit. Small presses publish a variety of work, but typically voices mainstream presses overlook: the working class, people of color, gays and lesbians, or stories deemed commercially risky. Additionally, many Chicano/a authors currently published by the larger houses were once published by smaller presses. Some examples of Chicano/a authors who got their starts in this manner are: Sandra Cisneros (*House on Mango Street*—originally published by Arte Publico Press), Ana Castillo (*The Mixquiahuala Letters*—originally published by Bilingual Press), Luis Rodriguez (*Always Running: La Vida Loca, Gang Days in LA*—originally published by Curbstone Press), and Dagoberto Gilb, (*The Magic of Blood*—originally published by the University of New Mexico Press).

The 2003 Book Expo of America (BEA), held in Los Angeles (which is the largest booksellers convention in the U.S.), featured a panel of four Chicano/Latino writers from a variety of backgrounds whose work was published by both large and small presses. The panelists spoke on issues related to their writing and how they situate themselves in the publishing world. Two of the writers felt they should not be labeled Chicana/Latina writers, indicating instead that they are human writers and should not be ghettoized by ethnicity. A great deal of discussion ensued, which appeared to be a continuation of the ongoing topic of our positionality as people of color in the United States—a country that still orders its business in racist, sexist, classist, and homophobic terms.

Chicano/Latino writers will ultimately have to reconcile these issues on their own terms, and in their own manner. Though we may not realistically have the option of doing so for a while since publishers still retain control in how they regard, and market us. The obvious question remains: how do we regard ourselves? And how can we, despite these factors, still maintain our personal integrity?

The literary world is changing. Yet Chicanos/as still possess fewer opportunities to publish. Many writers I know have work ready but can't find a publisher. Even the majority of the now established Chicano/a writers had difficulty getting their early work in print. One can only speculate why, since their talent is extraordinary. Perhaps mainstream editors never really thought about us much. Or maybe it's *how* they thought about us. Then there were those in marketing who felt that at best, only Chicanos/as will buy Chicano books. Or, that we won't buy books at all, which is exactly the same thing they said about African Americans not too long ago, only to be "surprised" by the large number of books African Americans actually did and do buy.

But, to be fair, change *is* occurring. At the same BEA conference, a panel entitled "Chicano/Latino writers on the verge" was featured. The writers read from their newly, or about to be published work, presenting a variety of voices and cultures. The reading was indicative of a growing recognition by the publishing industry of Chicano/Latino literature. Although the timing of the reading was on a Saturday at 4pm, the room was packed and the enthusiasm for these new writers by the multi-ethnic audience was heartfelt.

In addition to this, many booksellers at the BEA appeared to be seeking new voices to feature in their stores. Booksellers, to a certain degree, represent people who buy books. Could it be that readers want something more than stories about White middle class people living in New York City? It appears that they might. While I would not have thought this several years ago, my own experience at the BEA, in addition to the positive reception I received on a recent book tour across the country, seem to support this contention. Americans of both genders and all ethnicities have received the majority of their schooling under the tutelage of White male points of view. Isn't it time we had something different?

Part 3: No More Excuses

I want to speak now about learning to write. I always thought I'd never be able to write. I grew up poor, the daughter of a father who was a factory worker in a sugar refinery and a mother who worked as a clerk in a hospital. I am the eldest of three and the only member of my family who went to college. I loved books as a child and believe, like many children growing up in difficult situations, that books were how I stayed sane.

In grade school I wrote stories about space travel, aliens from other planets, and rockets capable of doing a variety of life-threatening things. Though fun to write, these stories were simplistic and probably based on the comic book fodder I read, or the sitcoms blaring from our television each evening.

Despite writing stories and reading voraciously, I had, for some reason, a great deal of difficulty learning to write Standard English. In both high school and college I couldn't, for the life of me, write a grammatically correct sentence. I struggled tremendously with my writing, sitting for hours with my Teaching Assistants and taking extra classes in an effort to convey my thoughts in the manner I aspired to. To think that I would one day write something book length was so incomprehensible, it wasn't even a fantasy. Right now, each time I write, I still think of it as a miracle.

When people come from backgrounds where writing is considered "foreign"—something *other* people do—the problem is worse. In my family, people who write are either rich, White, locas, or some combination of the three. I told myself so many times that I couldn't do this thing called writing that I had almost grown to believe it. Thankfully, I met Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, co-editors of *This Bridge Called My Back*, who told me that it didn't matter *how* I wrote. What mattered was *that* I wrote. They said it was because we needed more words by women of color, and that our voices were important. They probably told this to countless women, but their words inspired me. And after meeting them, I went home and wrote two poems.

Since then, I have written personal essays, articles, short stories and edited two books. I wanted to write a novel but didn't think it was possible. After completing a dissertation, however, I wondered if I might be able to do it. I'd used up all my excuses and decided it was time to sit down and try.

Then came the hard part.

Graduate school trained me well. My professors did an excellent job of teaching me to write "objectively," which translates to dull and boring in the fiction writing world. My skills for writing fiction were so elementary I often felt I was in first grade learning to write again. Despite it all, I sat down and wrote. I knew my work was not up to the standards I aspired to, yet I kept writing. At first I felt I could only write autobiographically. It was easier for me since I wrote what was familiar. I gave myself permission to do this without imposing judgement. What I realized later, was that I was giving myself my first lesson. I didn't know what else to do, or how else to proceed. Later, my confidence grew. I started taking liberties with the facts and next thing I knew, I was making everything up! That's when the fun began.

Everyone has her own voice—her own way of putting words on paper. And everyone has to work on the development of her voice and how it links, or doesn't link, to her personal life. There is no magic formula. My self-taught process was to take the familiar and write about it. Then, seeking new stories and insights, I began to write about things I noticed, the way a person walks,

a particular style of speech, the smell of bad cologne, the angle of light in spring. Eventually, I took a chance and relied solely on my imagination. Each time I wrote I worried because I didn't have a plan for what I was going to do that day. I thought writers were supposed to have an outline for their novels and have everything worked out. I now know that many people work this way, but not me. I felt if I was to plan it, I'd inhibit it. Thankfully I didn't have anyone telling me to do things differently, otherwise I may never have discovered my own creative process.

I had a great deal of fun writing the novel. But it was some of the hardest work I've ever done. I spent countless hours agonizing over a page, a paragraph, or a particular cadence of speech. I read the work of those I admired such as Toni Morrison, Dorothy Allison, and Louise Erdrich, then would go back to my novel frustrated because I couldn't write like them. But I kept at it.

I was fortunate to work with Sandra Cisneros, a gifted writer and a tremendously talented teacher. She encouraged me, but more importantly, she *pushed* me to write better. In my interactions with her I had to learn to be open to criticism, which didn't come easy. I grew up in a toxic family, where exposing myself to criticism was counterproductive to my own survival. Yet in order to learn, I felt I had no choice. Thankfully I grew to trust teachers like Sandra whose goal was simply to make me a better writer. In the end, I learned that the art of writing fiction does not come naturally to most people. In my experience, hard work is what I've seen to be the best teacher.

In April 2003, my novel *What Night Brings* was published by Curbstone Press. Curbstone is a small, independent press that publishes voices rarely seen in commercial fiction. I submitted the book to Curbstone and was fortunate that they not only liked the story, but actually wanted to publish it. I still shake my head in disbelief because the entire time I was writing I never thought the novel would see the light of day. Here's why: with domestic violence threaded throughout the story, a young Chicana must learn to defy her family and God in order to find her identity, sexuality, and freedom. For reasons already mentioned, I knew I'd get no takers from the large presses. And though I knew small presses publish unusual stories, I figured this one would push the envelope too far. I am happy to say that I was wrong, and what has become most compelling are the Chicanas who tell me, that this story is *their* story.

I continue to work on improving what I write every day and in any way I can. I now consider myself a writer, but it took a great deal of effort to get to a point where I could comfortably say those words. As for whether or not I choose to identify as a Chicana writer, I state first that I am a writer. Yet my stories, like my life, reflect how I grew up in this world, which is as a Chicana.

Bethroot Gwynn

These Are the Women I Write For

These are the women I write for.

When something enormous happens in my life, I write about it; I read what I have written to these women, and the writing and the reading become enormous.

I care to craft what I write because I want to delight these women with my curls of phrase. I want to hear their deep sighs when I have finished reading. Their attention is exquisite. I am known, heard.

We are audience for one another. Every three weeks, regular as a woman who bleeds, some combination of us gathers to read and to listen, to share visual and performing art creations as well as photographs, as well as poems—songs as well as short stories. Some of us are regular, some more occasional. There is structure: 11-4, a check-in to announce our offerings for the day and how long each will take, a grand pot-luck around 12:30, a decision each meeting about who will host us next. We drive one, two, three hours to reach one another.

There are rules: No wrangles over content. When time is short, fresh material takes priority over older writing that is not being re-worked. Be on time, and be present for the entire session. Announcements not pertinent to Writers' Group happen over lunch. Any woman who comes with serious intent is welcome.

We do laugh a lot. We cry, moved by each other's presentations. We tussle freely over grammar and word choice. We give each other praise, criticism, suggestions.

These women are full of opinions about how something might be said differently.

These women are full of wonder at the power and beauty of their work.

These women encourage one another toward publication, toward daring.

These women make community based on creation.

I write, of course, to please my very own self, to pour my imagination out onto the page and marvel. But to have these women/this community available in my life as listeners, as editors, as excuse for crafting something sooner rather than later, as fans...ah, this is living among The Muses!

The Southern Oregon Women Writers' Group celebrates its 23rd year in 2004. We are an open group, most all of us lesbians and co-creators of lesbian culture. Any woman who chooses to participate enters a lesbian celebrating environment. We thrive on love of women/love of words.

zana

writers' group

the writers' group is a dream-come-true for me.

in my teens i read about the "round table" of new york's algonquin hotel during the twenties, where dorothy parker, robert sherwood, and a host of other legendary writers lunched together. except they weren't legendary when the group began.

this wasn't a writers' club in any formal sense; and yet i knew instinctively (and later, from experience) that even just hanging around with other writers can stir the creative juices. whenever i've ended up being friends with other writers, i'd always be secretly relishing the thought that "someday we'll all be famous!"

but not every gathering of writers is a mutually helpful one. most i've been to were dismal affairs of one-upping each other, showing off, giving other people just enough of your energy that they are obliged to pay a little attention to your work in return.

why is our group different?

well, first off, there are no men in it; and there's a remarkable absence of the competitiveness i've seen in mixed groups. not just because we're wimin, i think, but because our feminism is showing.

i would say we are all sincerely interested in improving our writing, and each other's. not in order to gain fame and fortune, necessarily, but so that we can share our visions effectively. often i don't even think to tell news of things i've had published. i come to writers' group to read something and get others thoughts on it, and to listen attentively to their work. although i'm glad when we do remember to announce our successes, the writing and its heart sources do—and should—come first.

i see us as being a support group. there is a difference between that and a mutual admiration society, and the difference is critical (literally!).

i'm proud of the criticism we give each other. i have always found it to be caring and thoughtful. it takes a lot of concentration to listen to someone's work with a critical ear, and i certainly feel a loving bond with the wimin who've done this for me and i for them.

How Can a Lesbian

*How can a lesbian
not write
love poems
to her beloved
who is so wondrous
opening to her like a ripe papaya
opening joyously
freely, brightly
glistening with the dew
of her sweet nectar
the sight and smell and taste
of which
drives any woman loving woman
into a wild ecstasy
that she must first celebrate
with her tongue
and later with her pen?*

February 12th, 2004

Lilith Rogers

My Poetic Journey Back to Myself

“We think back through our mothers, if we are women,” said Virginia Woolf. Though I was many years coming to them—my mothers—now that, with the help of the new wave of feminist scholars, writers, and critics, I’ve finally uncovered them, I am flooded with their/my/our thoughts. I am constantly striving to get them down, get them out. I have a poem I wrote a few years ago comparing my productivity to Emily Dickinson’s. Someone in a class I was taking towards my master’s degree was marveling at Dickinson’s out-put—“sometimes as much as a poem a day,” she said wonderingly. I wrote:

A poem a day
 is no big deal
 to me .
 I make at LEAST three-
 but so few
 get written down.
 And few of these few
 get typed
 and, of these lucky ones,
 fewer still
 get rewritten, retyped.

Though I’m not now as prolific a poet as I was then, I still write quite a few. Why do I create so many poems and what do I hope to say with them? I share Adrienne Rich’s “dream of a common language” and though my favorite writers—Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing, Martha Courtot, and Audre Lorde—are all women who share Rich’s love of complicated speech and complex images, I myself write very simply.

My rhythm, vocabulary, and tone more closely resemble those of Meg Christian—the singer, song writer—than those of Adrienne Rich, the Yale scholar.

Because of this simplicity, I sometimes fall into despair and feel that I am not a “real” poet at all, that “real” poets have to give their readers something to puzzle over, something to read three or four times before they can really get the meaning. Yet I am like Rich in that I, too, am a poet of ideas. I do not write poems just for the sake of writing them.. I am not more concerned with form than content as many male poets seem to be today. These men are skilled

poetic technicians in a way that I, perhaps, will never be. But as long as all their beautifully crafted verses continue to lack heart, lack “the drive to connect” as Rich puts it, I will never model my own work after theirs.

My anxieties about the “poetic” nature of my work are frequently alleviated by the response I get to my poems. People come up to me after I’ve read some of these not-so-polished pieces at a poetry reading or had one published in a local paper and say, “I liked that poem you wrote about your daughter at puberty. I feel that way about my daughter, too.”

Or they say, “I appreciated that poem about trying to like your body now that it’s showing age—I have that struggle, too.” Or they say, “What I like about your poems is their message that it is possible to manage work, school, love affairs and parenting. Thank you for giving me hope.” And that’s what I especially want to do with my poetry—give us all hope.

Sandra Gilbert, co-editor of the *Norton Anthology of Writings by Women* has suggested that the female poet “writes in the hope of discovering or defining a self, a certainty, a tradition.” Alice Walker has said that she writes because she has to stay sane, to stay alive. Tillie Olsen, Martha Courtot, and Adrienne Rich all say that the most important work of the woman writer is to break silence, tell secrets, expose the lies of the patriarchal viewpoint on what women’s lives are or should be like. Tillie Olsen has said that literary history and the present are full of the unnatural silences of women, “the unnatural thwarting of what struggles to come into being, but cannot.”

Tillie Olsen has stated the problem. In her poem, “Thaw,” Martha Courtot assures us the remedy, if one is brave enough to attempt it, is inevitably at hand:

No matter how long the Winter is
 Thaw comes
 season by season
 we learn this
 too slowly
 no matter how long we have spent
 wrapped in a frozen season
 no matter how deep under the snow
 the private grief lies
 one day...
 thaw comes

we are never prepared for it
 and what was once safe under our feet
 changes

water released from ice and mud and madness
 and we open our eyes to
 earth-shift, stone-change
 everything thawing
 thawing like a madness
 the earth opening
 water running
 and all of our secrets
 exposed.

In her 1979 collection of essays, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silences*, Adrienne Rich goes on to initiate a feminist poetic that responds to the problem by calling for a transformation of the literary process. She speaks of the immense importance of the shift from male to female pronouns, and of the loss that women suffered when they lived “for centuries without a poetry which spoke of women together, of women alone, of women as anything but the fantasies of men.” What a hunger this absence left in women, a hunger that is only now being filled.

The woman poet, then, must break through centuries of male-dominated tradition to establish an authentic voice. To do this, she must not only face the lonely, difficult task of writing that all poets face, she must also break through the archetypes and context, the vocabulary, style, and content of literary centuries to reveal the ordinary truth of her life. To further transformation, she must attempt to name the unnamable hunger.

Addressing these issues of style and content, Alicia Ostriker tells us in *Writing Like a Woman* that women writers in our time write about the personal—about our bodies, our relationships, our intimate secrets. We speak with a strong voice on these matters, a voice that is tired of those centuries of being silenced and shouts out loud, “Never again!”

In my own poems, I find that I frequently write about the physical in a very strong voice. Because I am writing for myself, for my own self-discovery, as well as for my readers, my poetry is usually very personal—that is, intimate. I do not keep up many barriers between myself and my audience, which is, after all, myself first and then secondly the outside world. Still my individual voice is not so unusual that other people, particularly women, cannot identify with it. As I said, it is the sense of shared experience that others appreciate in my poetry.

Naturally, I cannot claim—no poet can—to speak for every woman. Rather, I mean to join in chorus of contemporary writers (and rediscovered writers from the past) who speak for women’s experience. Some of these writ-

ers are not recognized as much for their written words as for their songs, and music is very important to me. I borrow lines and title from some of my favorites like “When You Open Up Your Life to the Living” by Cris Williamson, “She’s a Big Fat Woman” by Ida Cox, and “I Hold You Very Dear” by Meg Christian.

More than words, however, I borrow spirit from these singers—especially from black women singers. It is the spirit of survival that I find in the voices of Billie Holiday, Odetta, Nina Simone, and Bessie Smith—to name just a few of the greats available to me—and that I wish to infuse into my own writing. I strongly desire to have the power and immediacy of a group like “Sweet Honey in the Rock” touring the country and the world and singing “every woman, who ever loved a woman, you oughta stand up, and call her name.” But, at least for the present, I must be content to stay at home and send the words full of spirit out from my heart.

While I have only put a few of my poems to music—and none of those have reached Top Forty status yet—I do celebrate having found my voice. It is, generally, a very direct voice: that is, my style reflects my desire for intimacy with my audience. I do not often distance my meaning with imagistic poetic devices, like metaphor. I prefer to state my meaning in a clear straightforward manner. Occasionally though, when it makes things more, rather than less obvious or when it adds to the sensuous texture of the poem, I will use metaphor.

As Virginia Woolf did in her prose, I rely on my ear and not a dictionary to arrive at my sense of what words to choose for a poem... As Woolf says in a letter to her friend and sometimes lover Vita Sackville-West, “Style is a very simple matter; it is all rhythm.. Once you get that you can’t use the wrong words.”

Occasionally, that rhythm leads me into rhyme, as in:

“The Captive”

I am a captive of the coast.

The ocean claims me

and I am not free

to wander inland.

or:

“Of Time”

I am seldom on time

but time is always

on my mind.

Usually, as in the above poems, I use rhyme when I am in a playful mood, but occasionally it enters more serious work like:

“The Female Wrist”

The female wrist
is a vulnerable spot
girls and women
we attack it
we slash it a lot.

In this work, rhyme is used ironically—to jar the reader’s or listener’s senses in much the same way Cris Williamson sometimes takes a sad lyric and sets it to a happy tune such as “Hurts Like the Devil” from her classic *The Changer and the Changed* album.

This freedom to choose or not choose rhyme has come with my growing understanding of my craft. When I first started writing poems in the sixties, I thought they had to rhyme to be poems, and since so few English words do rhyme, I felt very restricted.

Of course, there is plenty of blank verse written by women in the past that I could have modeled on—Emily Dickinson and Elizabeth Barrett Browning come to mind now—but I had received a classic masculinity education in my undergraduate work at the University of Texas in the mid 1960’s, and had not been taught about the boldness, the innovations in content and form in the work of either of these two women.

However, as it became clear to me that I had to write and since so many of my pieces wouldn’t form themselves into what I thought of as poems or short stories, I began to compose what I termed “prose poems.” These long narratives said what I wanted to say, told a tale in the abbreviated, intenser rhythm of poetry that I heard in myself as I wrote them.

And gradually I found the women’s literary movement, the small press chapbooks and magazines in which women said what they had to say in whatever form the writing took. I was freed, then, to write poems of whatever length, rhythm, or rhyme scheme I needed at the time.

One last note on my style: most of my poems whether written on a frivolous or serious theme, have humor in them. Generally, poetry of unalleviated seriousness, like poorly kneaded bread, falls under its own weight. My humor is not the sort that gets the laugh by belittling or demeaning others. Instead, it counts on the recognition by my readers of having found themselves in similar straits.

My choice of subject matter—nature and sexuality, the beauty of the ordinary, children and child-rearing, political life—has also been influenced by the freedom of the second wave of feminist writers. Although, like Rich,

like other intellectual women educated in the fifties and sixties, I have read and studied “the book of myths” almost ad nauseum—like her, and like most other women students then and now, I was told there was no other “book” to study—I try to keep what little I learned from it out of my work. Actually, my goal is to unlearn that dreadful old “book,” which, from my feminist perspective, contains so many more lies than truths that it is more trouble than it is worth for me to try to sort them out.

What is “the book of myths?” It is not only a collection of archetypal images and traditionally moral tales that lock men and women into rigid roles. It is not only the Western pantheon of jealous and silly Greek and Latin gods, not only the Bible’s vengeful old white man with the long gray beard up in the sky.

It is also the modern myth of Freudian psychology which, combining all too well with the traditional anti-natural myths of the patriarchy, continues to rob women of their sense of beauty, wonder and pleasure in nature, in their own bodies and the bodies of others. *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, Susan Griffin’s beautiful and complex study on the generations of false assumptions and dangerous compulsions of the patriarchal rule, has helped me find my way out of this deathly combination and continue my journey back toward my whole self.

Griffin’s work and that of other women helped me celebrate the wonder, the deepest knowing that had never been quite lost to me that I was both of nature and in nature. Somehow I came through a middle-class, Protestant, Southern-white-American-fifties childhood and public education system with a sense of joy dampened—but not destroyed. Perhaps I was protected by my freedom to be alone and swim in the warm Gulf waters, to lie on a sandy beach and read or daydream. Perhaps I was made aware of my connection to the eco-system from my family’s summer fishing and food gathering activities.

Whatever the buffers were, I am grateful. My ties with nature were strengthened in my mid-twenties when I was able to spend several days each season alone in a little cabin in the Sierras. At that same time, I also began my vocation and avocation of organic landscape gardening which ties me to the earth in a very practical yet also spiritual way.

Now—through the maturing objectivity of middle age and the self-identification that I have gained by embracing my lesbianism—I have been recapturing that total sense of joy in the physical. It appears in many of my poems to myself like “When The Earth Beckons” or “When You Open Up Your Life to the Living“. It is even more apparent in my love poems such as:

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“In the Morning”

I awake
 and turn in
 to your flesh
 turn in
 to your flesh
 waiting there for me.
 Waiting there—
 for me.
 I turn in
 to your smell
 rising up to meet me.
 I turn in
 to your nipple
 rising there to meet me.
 Eyes closed,
 then opened
 to your flesh, your breasts
 your eyes
 open there to meet me.

I awake and turn.

Another damaging and pervasive idea the society has taken from the “book of myths” is that all heroines are “beautiful” and that “beautiful is defined as white, thin, and young. This leads to the patriarchy’s absurd conclusion that only women who look a certain way should have access to sexual enjoyment. If a woman isn’t “beautiful,” she just isn’t sexy and doesn’t deserve sexual attention or pleasure. All the dominant language of the culture mirrors this notion and it appears constantly in movies, TV, magazines, and most novels written by men.

The Black is Beautiful awakening which accompanied the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties began the break-down of this destructive, crippling concept of beauty and desirability. The writings of Ntozake Shange and Sonia Sanchez celebrate the beauty of black and brown women of all sizes and shades.

In my poems I frequently celebrate the beauty of ordinary bodies—my children’s, my own, and my lovers’. I take a special, mischievous delight in knowing that people who have the standard prejudices about what sensuous women look like are missing a great deal. For their own sake, and for the sake of the children under their care whose lives they help to shape, I wish they

could hear my poems and learn from them a sense of pleasure in the usual, excitement in the normal, beauty in the average:

“Appearances Can Be Deceiving”

What do you see
when you look at us?
A dumpy woman with a mustache
in rumpled clothes
and purple sneakers
sitting across from a brown-eyed
freckled-skinned fat lady?....

Do you imagine we are trading recipes
perhaps
or child-rearing tips
or that we are both so dull
we have nothing to say
and so sit waiting patiently
for our meals?
What do you see
when you look at us?

If you could truly see
you would find two women
who—until now—
had each never met another person
as passionate as herself
two women who have tried
many partners of both sexes
each seeking
another willing to fly
as high into pleasure
or to plunge as deeply
into desire
as she just knew
there was to go....
and now they have met....

And so I celebrate the ordinary looking woman who is, of course, for reasons of her own, extraordinary. I celebrate the joyous, creative, wild “being-between-women” that Mary Daly speaks of in *Gyn/Ecology*. Like Judy Grahn,

I love the common woman. As she said, "The Common Woman is as common as bread/ and she will rise." I too believe that.

I also write poems about my children, housework, and even garage sales—poems about domestic politics. Other examples of my work are more overtly political. Through the years I've written about politics in far-flung countries like Nicaragua and Cuba, about sexual politics in the universities I've attended or jobs I've held, and about local politics as it relates to the semi-rural county in which I live.

For me, poems on household and worldly themes are all woven together. There is no "over there," no distancing of place or time that makes one person's experience more or less valuable than another's, the interests of no group—whether it's the U.S. government or a real estate developer—more important than the long-range good of the people or the place that group wishes to disturb.

Actually, I view all my concerns—personal, familial, governmental, and environmental—as intrinsically political. This is something else I have learned from the women's liberation movement and its well-know slogan—"the personal is political." I agree with Frances Jaffers' statement in *Feminist Poetics*: "since feminism attempts to change the psychology of human beings at the most basic level, it is perhaps the most radical political activity of all." Or, as Barbara Deming puts it so simply and elegantly, "We are all part of one another."

What happens to one of us happens to all of us. Spider Woman, creator goddess of the Hopi cosmology, has woven us all together in this complex web and only through acting for the common good can one achieve personal happiness.

The older I get, the more I see that. The older I get, also, the more the web's pattern begins to emerge—the more I see its pattern in my own life and in the life around me. As Alice Walker writes in *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, I am seeking "the larger perspective that is always needed in the true appreciation of art or life." Or as Virginia Woolf says in *Moments of Being*, "behind the cotton wool (of everyday life) is hidden a pattern," a work of art that we are all connected to, are a part of, or not only a part of, but that we are the art itself. This art is the work of no single artist or god, it is the work of all of us, of all of nature.

I truly enjoy being a part of this work of art that is created daily. I celebrate it in my poems. And though there is no single artist, there is a pattern emerging. Just as one can see it on a global scale—an awakening, a general rising up of people, particularly women, to throw off the forces that oppress us, I can also see in my own life a continuous awakening of spirit. Constantly evolving, uncovering, reinventing myself—and examining and celebrating this reinvention in my poetry—I am born anew.

Goddess, it's so exciting!

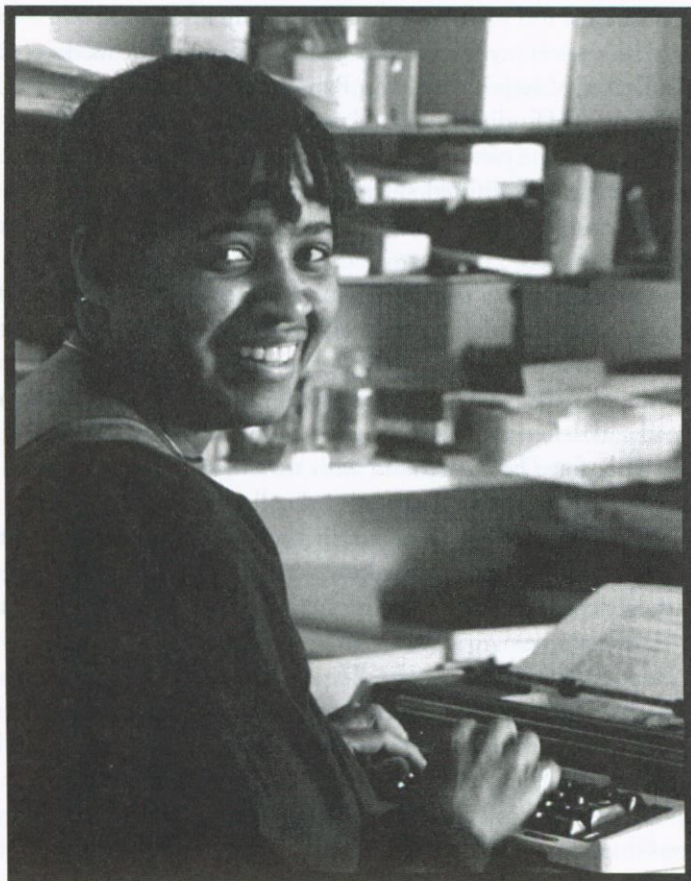


Photo by Tee Corinne

Becky BIRTHA, writer

Lee Lynch

Queer to the Bone

I've had only one lifelong dream and that's been to be a lesbian storyteller. Every step led me to where I am today. At fourteen I learned that I could write; at fifteen I came out and found my subject. I was never any good at being a child: too serious, too intense, too different. My life started when I met my destiny in the arms of my fourteen year-old lover and in the works of Radclyffe Hall, Vin Packer, Valerie Taylor, Ann Bannon and a little magazine called *The Ladder*. The thrill of finding out who I was equaled the thrill of finding lesbians in print. The supreme pleasure of reading about us, even as the characters lost their girls to men, committed suicide and got fired from their jobs — while above all, defiantly loving women—made me want to give that reading pleasure to other lesbians.

It was not just a way of making love to women, the writing, although I admit it has an element of that. It was my vision, my passion, the crusade in my heart. I was, I am, a purple knight riding my white horse into our literature. At fifteen I immediately loved being queer to the bone. I wanted to take my pride on the road and deliver it to lesbians in big chunks of words. But I couldn't! Too young to write for *The Ladder* and with no other outlets, I penned gender-vague love poetry for my high school and college literary magazines. No one knew I was adding my bit to lesbian lit because the concept of a literature, much less a publishing industry, had not yet arrived. For years, writing was my secret indulgence. That there could be an audience other than straight readers seemed a suspect dream.

At 21, I sent my first poem to *The Ladder*, fairly certain I was not good enough to write for the magazine. But it was accepted, and soon I was sending poems and stories and receiving non-fiction assignments from Gene Damon herself. Then came *Sinister Wisdom*, then *Common Lives*, *Lesbian Lives* and the lesbian publishers. My journey went into full swing as I wrote a book a year, the stories pouring out of me as if a vault of lesbian writing had come suddenly unsealed.

On my white horse, at last unhitched, I galloped along my own personal yellow brick road to rescue Lesbian Nation. I set out to create positive role models and to describe lesbian relationships that worked and lasted. I set out to create happy ending after happy ending so that gay kids could grow up with that possibility inside them. I always thank the Goddess for the stories because I've felt like a channel for what needs to be said.

It has been important to me to put my vision of lesbian lives into a format accessible to Everydyke, from the academic reading for enjoyment to the drop-out whose lover reads her lesbian stories before they go to sleep at night. It has also been my intent to capture the life of the daily dyke: the femme next door, the woman at the end of the bar, the gay nurse and the closeted schoolteacher. We are all the lesbian heroes I want to write about — baby dykes, old dykes, dykes in their prime, even our fey brothers. We all deserve to see in our fiction the vast variety of variant families.

The economics of lesbian writing have done their darnedest to stop me. I'm no crossover novelist whose books appeal to non-gays. I'm too lesbian and too proudly stubborn to even try to change — as if I could. With the mainstreaming of our literature, writers like me, who limit our scope, get left behind. A non-gay college friend found my books thirty-odd years after graduation and called to tell me she was disappointed — she'd been waiting to see my work in the *New Yorker*. I told her that my subject gave me a voice, that I wanted to write for and about my people. I never heard from her again. So I work full-time and write one day a week, sell my books on eBay and hear stories of lesbians proud to score a used *Swashbuckler* from a web seller for a handful of change plus postage. Many lesbians don't have expendable income to buy books. Making a living by writing was never a serious goal; making enough to work part-time was possible for a while. Am I a pathetic Don Quixote? Yes or no, I'm afraid there's no doubt that I'm still at my quest; it's still an honor for which I'm grateful every day.

So many stories, so little time. The women who came out in their sixties. The retired studio singer with Parkinson's. The motel handydyke and her big pickup truck. The woman who stood up to the army and won. The successful goat farmer couple. The butch mother, the femme who builds houses, the dyke who decides she's not really a man. I still want to explore the places and people we call home and how we live there. I continue to want to describe our daily heroes: the mythic butches and the fairy tale femmes.

Some days I still feel twenty-one, excited to be an American queer with a talent for words and the freedom to write my stories, uncertain I'll ever find a publisher. The world has changed since the days when every story was new. What with all this marrying and hosting talk shows and making front page news, lesbians have changed. Whether my new book finds a publisher or not, I've mounted my white steed again. This time I'm working with a troubled lesbian character not unlike the butches of the 50s, queer to the bone and uncomfortable in her own skin. The difference is that I've read my own and other lesbians' stories, and I can envision the ways she can live and thrive.

Janny MacHarg

Looking for the Word

*I like looking for the word
I like looking for the right word
Search search searching for the word that fits
The word that knits together what I say
I like listening for the tone
I like listening for the true tone
Strain strain straining til I hear the note
For the word I wrote and makes me want to play
And I write so I can bring my song to you.
So like me you'll want to sing your feelings too
I like looking for your thoughts
I like looking for your true thoughts
Reach reach reaching for the best in you
And you'll come through and we will be O.K.
Singing for a world where gentleness holds sway
And a smile is our umbrella as we dance
Along the way*

1995

Amy Schutzer

In Bali There Is No Separate Word for Art and Artist

*Here's how it went:
outside my window
lightning cracked a hole in the blackness
and when I saw
I saw in written words,
the whole blazing world:
I put that on paper and every day
I put some words down
and poems rooted
took hold of the fiber in the paper
and arched their tongues
speaking a language of cracks and wholeness.
Words.
I ask for more.
I ask for paragraphs
I ask for broken up in the repair shop words
I ask to be a mechanic
I ask to get my fingers in the dirt
to pull apart the meaning, into the engine the gasoline
the heart of the words
I ask to float in the heart of the words
I ask to tell powerful stories
I ask to understand the delicacy of words
and how they can hurt and how they can mend
I ask to say all that is in my heart
I ask for beauty and ugliness and the words
that take me inside the words
I ask for persistence and a thesaurus
I ask for time, more time, enough time
to slip into the crack of the lightning
and follow word after word*

Amy Schutzer

Pantoum For Judith Barrington

*This is the word you have given to me: writer.
The way it sounded, in your house,
across the table with the fringed red tablecloth,
a word that did not yet fit, a word I was trying on*

*the way it sounded in your house,
writer; like a wind sudden in its banging open a door,
a word that did not yet fit, a word I was trying on,
like a pair of shoes I would have to walk a hundred miles in.*

*Writer; like a wind sudden in its banging open a door.
I started to believe that to scratch ink to paper was a landscape
I could walk a hundred miles in,
sentence after sentence, poem by poem*

*I started to believe that to scratch ink to paper was a landscape
I did not want to leave,
sentence after sentence, poem by poem
and you were the map into that wilderness.*

*I did not want to leave
the shape of words; wild and hilly and immense,
you were the map into that wilderness,
a leveling and an uprising, urging me to go further*

*into the shape of words; wild and hilly and immense.
Thirteen years have passed and I see
each poem is a mountain, every story, a country,
a leveling, an uprising, urging me to go further.*

*Thirteen years have passed and I see
across this table with the fringed red tablecloth,
Judith, an audacious, open-hearted muse who has watched me fit
into the word she has given to me: writer.*



Mary Meriam

Sonnet Sequence: Upon Reading Liann Snow

1.

Liann, I write this for your hazel eyes
 Alone - are you alone? It's quiet here;
 October leaves are falling fast, like sighs
 Of lovelorn lesbians; the sky is clear,
 A merry blue; and you are on my mind.
 It's time to let you go, Liann? You seem
 To disappear. Your words to me are kind,
 Encouraging, and few. And as for green,
 It's mostly gone - there's yellow, orange, and red;
 The sun is hot; I'm wearing shorts; I walk
 The park and crunch the leaves already dead.
 Liann, you know how much I love to talk
 To you. You know I love your writing, too.
 I wonder how you feel, and what is new?

2.

Alas, my kindness is a thorny bloom
 With scents attractive to a lady's nose
 And colors that could fill an empty room;
 But hidden under leaves like any rose
 A stem of thorns awaits unwary touch.
 Too wild a rose to pluck for a bouquet
 (Although I feel I love you very much)
 The prickles and the pain get in the way.
 A rose is a rose is a rose, she wrote - am I close
 Yet to botanist's book? This field is cold -
 Oh strip my thorns! Give me the gardener's dose
 Of care and let me feel her trusting hold!
 These thorns are not my choice, I'm well aware.
 I'd like to snip my moods, lay kindness bare.

3.

My lover lifts me over humps and hurdles
 Intuits us above the spinning earth
 Until we're free of binding bras and girdles
 And floating on a cloud of blissful mirth.
 I love the words that tumble from her mouth.
 Her little kisses thrill me to my shoes.
 My lover grew up rural in the south;

The ocean waved nearby; but no one knew
 Her preference for girls who go for girls.
 Some lonely years ensued - but turn the page!
 We share a bed, a home, a life, and pearls
 Of wisdom gained from reaching middle age.
 The path may be obscure and twisted round;
 But keep your hope - your lover will be found!

4.

If words could satisfy my purple lust
 Then, love, I'd have no need for velvet nights
 Of dancing in your arms in total trust,
 Your body close to mine. Turn out the lights,
 The subtle shadows deepen our desire
 As colors of the day recede from view.
 The scents of garden, ocean, woman fire
 And melt us closer, closer, closer; two
 Now one. If words could satisfy my soul
 Then, love, I'd have no need to see the pale
 Points of dawn upon your face; I could control
 My trembling hands; and words would never fail,
 As now they do. I falter, catch my breath.
 My words protect me from a lonely death.

5.

I've spent my life both poor and powerless.
 Adrift. Alone. Not knowing what I missed,
 Not knowing how to change. I must confess
 That no one cared. I blamed myself, got pissed
 As hell, and could have died. A little word
 I wrote about my pain became a line
 I held, a mellow voice, a song I heard
 That kept me safe and warm. I was alive,
 I had my poems hidden in a book,
 My secret friends, inviolate and true.
 But words were not enough; I had to look
 For every human need, or I was through.
 By intuition, labor, luck, and grace,
 I soldiered on until I found my place.

6.

I wield my words like arrows in a quiver
 And pray that every hit is good and strong.
 Artemis saved a woman from the river,

And now I'd like to save her in a song.
 The lovely huntress, Arethusa, chased
 By lusty river god, was spared by a swift
 Goddess arrow, shot into earth. The chaste
 Arethusa surged, flowed, and melted; now lift
 Her to your lips, lovely water, and drink.
 It's best to rescue women with a word
 But arrows work, if you find her on the brink.
 We dykes descend from Amazons, I've heard;
 Our strength and anger need a pleasing form,
 Poetic shiver, strike, a story storm.

7.

Don't care, don't love, don't laugh, don't cry too hard.
 Don't offer help, don't ask for help. The world
 Don't mind if Devil wins. Just stay on guard
 And grab your dough. You'll never be uncurled
 Yeah ho! or sweetly grow - there just ain't time.
 Oh walls, four walls around me, prison walls
 Inhuman, dank, disturbing, thick with slime,
 Disease, and death - I shed it quick - it falls
 Like Jericho - yeah ho! - I'm out of here,
 I climb the sky, I breathe the blue, and who
 Among you sees me now, a flash of sheer
 Delight? And who do I remember - you
 Or you or you? I reached for you, I said
 Your name, you told me, sister, go drop dead.

8.

I'm stuck inside a sonnet - set me free!
 What year is this? I thought my time was done.
 Ask Shakespeare, Petrarch, Milton, for the key -
 I gotta drop these blasted feet and run!
 It's true my heart is beating right on time;
 I think my lungs are breathing while I write;
 But damn, I'm sick of making stupid rhyme!
 They say the sonnet form will grab you tight
 And drive you half insane until you quit.
 Oh let me go! Please let me go! Before
 Another line destroys my aching wit!
 Or worse, my reputation hits the floor!
 With whoosh and wish, I hear a goddess call;
 Her verse is free! I'm rescued after all.

Tee A. Corinne

Notes On Endings: Researching British Lesbian Craftswomen in the Early Twentieth Century

I'm in the final stage of preparing the essays for a book about lesbian artists. An acquisitions editor is interested. I comb through articles and books, looking for possible suspects. Who have I left out? Who have I missed? Suddenly a group of three women dressed like my grandmother in the 1930s jump out at me from a photograph in *A Woman's Touch: Women in Design from 1860 to the Present Day*. (1)

The women in the photograph are English. Phyllis Barron (1890-1964) and Dorothy Larcher (1894-1952) are shown shopping with a third woman in an open market in France. Barron and Larcher produce printed and dyed fabrics, originally in London, then later in Gloucestershire. I slow down, read about them more carefully and find that "Barron and Larcher were ideally suited to work together and their meeting led to a lifelong partnership." (2) They had been together for ten or fifteen years when the photograph was taken.

Reading between the lines, I find other potential lesbians in their friendship circle. Designer Enid Marx (1902-1998), who worked with them in 1925-1926, was introduced to them by potter Norah Braden (1901-2001). Braden lived and worked with another potter, Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie (1895-1985). Earlier, Pleydell-Bouverie, often described as tall and strong, had lived and worked with sculptor Ada "Peter" Mason (ca. 1885-?). Mason moved to the United States in 1927 and seems, thereafter, to have disappeared from view. The name "Peter" reminds me of the lesbian painter Gluck who was also called "Peter" in the late 19-teens and early 1920s and was the subject of Romaine Brooks' painting "Peter, A Young English Girl." I turn to the Internet to see what additional information I can locate and to find birth and death dates which are not supplied in Anscombe's book.

I learn that Enid Marx wrote at least two books on design with Margaret Lambert, but I can't find more about them or information linking them together. The lives of Braden and Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie wove around one another in such a way that I am sure they were a couple. Then, when searching on Google.com for the combination of one of their names and the word "lesbian," I find a review of *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century* by Tanya Harrod. The reviewer writes, "Because men dominated the fine arts, women got channeled into the crafts...Harrod deals sensitively with their private relationships, often lesbian." (3) I want this book.

TANYA HARROD'S BOOK

On the Net, I find a used copy of *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century* for \$45 and pray it has as much useful information as the review indicates. When it arrives a week later, I immediately check out the index. No "lesbian," "homosexual," or "gay" headings. The book is big, heavy, 496 pages. Will I have to read the whole thing? I use the index to track individuals. I look up Enid Marx and find that, along with other accomplishments, she wrote "three books on English popular art with her life's partner, the historian Margaret Lambert." (4)

Somehow, I restrain myself from racing into my lover's home-office to tell her this news. She has finally come out of a chemotherapy-induced fog and is rejoicing in getting back to her own work. Next month she will have surgery to excise small tumors from her liver. This is her time of accomplishment before more pain and recovery. It is a productive interlude for me, too. During and immediately after her surgery there will be little time for me to write. I long to finish this book, hope that I won't become discouraged.

That my book has moved along at all is primarily due to Jeanne Simington, a friend who, just after Beverly's surgery for colon cancer seven months ago, asked how she could help. "I'm working on a book," I told her, "and need help to stay focused."

It has been a remarkable collaboration. Once a week, she reads a chapter aloud to me, then says, "My, that's interesting. I didn't know anything about that." This keeps me going for another week.

When we finish, she feeds me lunch. We are joined by her husband, George, a painter with whom I talk about art. For those four hours I spend at their home, whatever else is happening in my life, I am a writer and an artist.

In checking a footnote in Tanya Harrod's book, I find a list of women couples. In addition to those I have already identified are: Barbara Allen (ca. 1909-?) and Hilary Bourne (1909-), Elizabeth Peacock (1880-1969) and Molly Stobart (ca. 1880-?), Evie Hone (1884-1955) and Mainie Jellett (1897-1944), and Joan Howson (1885-1946) and Caroline Townsend (1878-1944). The note includes the statement that "[a] list of craftswomen simply known to be unmarried would be far longer." (5)

MAINIE JELLETT AND EVIE HONE

I have kept *Mainie Jellett and the Modern Movement in Ireland*, a biography of modernist painter Mainie Jellett, for years, sure that she and stained glass artist Evie Hone were lovers, but not finding enough information in its

pages to feel comfortable with such an assertion. This time, fortified by their identification in Harrod's book, I fine-tune my reading.

Mainie Jellett grew up in Dublin and studied art there and in London where, in 1917, she met another Irish-born art student, Evie Hone. Hone, daughter of a director of the Bank of Ireland and twelve years Jellett's senior, was being treated for the effects of childhood polio. Her goal, which she reached, was to be able to walk again.

Hone studied in Paris for a few years beginning in 1920 and returned there periodically for the rest of the decade. Mainie Jellett joined Hone in Paris early in 1921. They became enamored with Cubist art, a direction in which their own work would move. In 1923, they returned to live in Dublin, where Mainie was the first artist to show purely abstract work.

During the mid-1920s, Evie Hone spent two years in a convent, then returned to painting. In the 1930s, she studied with Irish lesbian glass artist Wilhelmina Geddes (1887–1955). When in London, Geddes worked at The Glass House, an independent workshop for stained glass artists founded by Mary Lowndes, a lesbian, and her business partner Alfred Drury. I wonder if he was gay, but don't have time to try to find out.

Evie Hone and Mainie Jellett were Anglo-Irish as was bisexual designer/architect Eileen Gray (1878–1976) who had moved to Paris in 1902. Gray was less than a decade older than Hone, two decades older than Jellett, and the three were on friendly terms. Eileen Gray's friendship circle included Kate Weatherby (1879–1964), an English lesbian who had moved to France with designer Evelyn Wyld in 1907. The author writes, "Kate Weatherby was planning a six-week trip to the south of France with Eileen, and offered Evie the use of her flat in Paris" (p. 67). This is immediately preceded by a letter from Hone to Jellett signed "Miss you awfully — Yr loving Evie." (6) I think that the author, Bruce Arnold, knows that Hone and Jellett are lesbians, but can't or won't write about it in a clearer way.

JOAN HOWSON AND CAROLINE TOWNSEND

In *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists*, author Deborah Cherry mentions that Mary Lowndes and her companion, artist Barbara Forbes (ca. 1871–1946), were central to a group of women in London active in the first wave of activism for women's rights. (7) I have wondered who the lesbian women were. In Tanya Harrod's book I learn that stained glass artists Joan Howson (1885–1946) and her lover, Caroline Townsend (1878–1944), were part of Lowndes and Forbes' circle of friends and activists. (8) I am fitting the pieces of a puzzle together, watching a picture take shape.

It is late. I'm sitting up in bed with the Harrod book propped on a pillow on my lap when Beverly comes in. I'm so excited, I am not sure I will be able to sleep. "Listen to this," I say and tell her about the new information and the connections among the women. "They knew one another and supported and mentored and cross-pollinated. And I can't yet take time to follow all the references or read this book until I've finished the essay I'm working on, but it was definitely worth the \$45.00." I talk in run-on sentences, probably think in them, as well. It is arduous work to keep my writing clear and clean. I know that if I stop working on one essay and switch to another, it is especially hard to get back up to speed again with the first. I carry the Harrod book to the dining table, restrict my reading to breakfast and lunch.

INTELLECTUAL CHOCOLATE

A few days pass. I'm still working chasing down facts, reconstructing sentences, moving paragraphs around in an essay about disability issues in lesbian art. I sneak off to the Harrod book as if to a secret lover or to eating chocolate.

I know how despair can creep in at this stage, filled as it is with endless-seeming details. There's a part of me that cries out, "I'm an artist first. Let me do my art." But I also believe in the importance of what I'm doing; believe that some voices and issues and images in art will only be heard and seen if I keep going. I know that there are others who care, for whom this will make a difference. I complain to Canadian lesbian photographer and writer Cyndra MacDowall, another artist who has written about lesbian art. She responds, "Bravo the persistence ... Been that, done there—know that blur! (And the overwhelming disarray of open books, with stickies, covering the floor.)" (9)

I pore over the pictures in the Harrod book, learning to recognize the aesthetically cool ceramic ware of Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie and the bold, block printed fabric designs produced by Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher. These designs Barron and Larcher put into production at the rate of one new design a month.

Curtains by fabric artist Hilary Bourne are shown and pots by Norah Braden who is pictured holding a large vase. I find photographs of lesbian artists to be especially exciting.

There are reproductions of weavings by Elizabeth Peacock — elegant earth-toned geometries — but nothing by her lover, Molly Stobart (ca. 1880-?). The illustrations include a stained glass window by Wilhelmina Geddes and one by Evie Hone, but I could find no images of stained glass work by Joan Howson, or her lover, Caroline Townsend.

MYSTERIES

There are also mysteries hinted at in the text. Whatever happened to Frances Woolard, Phyllis Barron's partner displaced by Dorothy Larcher?

In 1916, at age thirty-six, Elizabeth Peacock, until that time a semi-invalid, left her family and became a weaver. Was Molly Stobart the cause of this leaving? Did she give Peacock encouragement and support? By 1922, Stobart's family had built them a home, called "Weavers." Elizabeth Peacock's brother built them a workshop.

Letters exist from Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie and Norah Braden to potter Bernard Leach in whose workshop the women met. According to Harrod, these letters contain "records of tiffs between women lovers, visits to exhibitions, books read and battles with material." (10) What did they fight about? Did they ever throw clay at one another? Did they ever make love fired by the passion of creativity?

I wonder what these women thought of the overt lesbianism in Radclyffe Hall's novel *The Well of Loneliness*, published in 1928 when they were between eighteen and fifty? What did they think of photographs of Gluck and of Joe Carstairs (female) published in a 1926 fashion spread publicizing berets in *Eve: The Lady's Pictorial*, a popular British women's magazine. Did they know that Sybil Cookson, one of the magazine's editors, was Gluck's lover at that time? (11) Both photographs go beyond androgenous almost to the point of male impersonation.

I wonder if it is safer to name the dead artists as lesbian than to identify who among the younger, living women artists are lovers of women, since none seem to be so named. There is a silence, also, about naming men as gay. Tanya Harrod mentions potter Emmanuel Cooper, but does not note he is gay, although he wrote one of the major texts dealing with gay men and lesbians in 19th and 20th century art, *The Sexual Perspective, Homosexuality and Art in the Last 100 Years in the West*. Nor does she mention the homosexuality of painter Francis Bacon although he had been dead for several years and many other writers have outed him.

ANOTHER BOOK

Through Tanya Harrod's book, I learn that Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher are the subjects of an essay in *The Arts and Crafts Movements in the Cotswolds* by Mary Greensted. Via the Internet, I order a copy.

When it arrives, I turn to Barley Roscoe's essay "Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher" which contains a photograph of the couple probably taken in the late 1930s. The women would have been nearing sixty years of age. In this

photograph they do not look dumpy at all. Be still my heart. What an attractive, intelligent-appearing woman Phyllis Barron was. Très butch. My kind of woman.

Roscoe quotes a description of the couple by a male friend, that “[Barron] was a tall, large, handsome, commanding figure...[Larcher] was small yet of equally strong personality. She had a rather sad, quiet voice and a serious manner, though her sense of humor was every bit as keen as Barron’s.” He describes the interior of their home, ending with the comment, “I thought, if ever there was a marriage of true minds it was here in this room.” (12)

SUPPORT

But time is running out. Many of my essays for the book have been sent off for copy editing. Late one night, I realize I can e-mail women who have completed books about lesbian art and culture. What I ask them is, “What was it like during the final weeks of finishing your book? What kept you going? What was your bulwark against despair or exhaustion?”

I go on to tell them the following, “I have exactly one month between now and the time my lover, Beverly, has surgery on the tumors in her liver. She is fine at the moment and does not need special attention from me. I teach two days a week and attend one meeting, but have much of the rest of my time free (walk the dog, winterize the house, cook, eat, exercise, bring in the house plants, prepare work for two shows, go to the dentist, make slides for a conference). If I don’t finish this stage of the book in the next month, it may be a long time before I have the luxury of concentration to do the final shaping. In the midst of these thirty days, I will have a party for my sixtieth birthday. I wake up anxious in the mornings, but sleep well at night.”

I learn that one author completed her book as her mother was dying, another as her lover was leaving her. From Australia, Elizabeth Ashburn, author of *The Power of Lesbian Art*, writes “what kept me going was the lesbians who had so generously worked with me getting the book together. I also had a wonderful publisher who was totally supportive. I was also snowed under at work which helped me to simply get up and go to work and then come home and work on the book.” (13)

U.S. photographer Carla Williams, co-author of *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History*, writes “...The very gratifying act of bundling up that stack of slides, copy prints, and a few hundred pages and making it leave my living space! I think the potential to remove all evidence of it from your daily sight with the prospect of being ‘free’ once it’s gone is a huge carrot for getting it finished!” (14)

Marian Evans, co-editor of *Spiral 7: A Collection of Lesbian Art and Writing from Aotearoa/New Zealand* and author of the essay and website *Lesbian*

Landscapes: A Little Oral History, writes "...what keeps me going is my chi gong practice...gardening, friends, love, regular movie going (NOT videos), food treats and a very quiet life." (15)

Frances Rooney in Toronto, author of *Working Light: The Wandering Life of Photographer Edith S. Watson*, writes that if "the next project is in front of me, enticing, beckoning, it's easy to finish the one in progress, if not, I drag my feet." (16)

Triage. I have to stop somewhere. I don't have time to make all the connections among these craftswomen working in Britain in the interwar years, but I know that the connections are there. If I stop now, will someone else pick up this material and fly with it? Is someone doing so already? That is my hope.

NOTES:

1. Isabelle Anscombe, *A Woman's Touch: Women in Design from 1860 to the Present Day* (New York NY: Penguin Books, 1985). The photograph of Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher on p.157 is credited to Crafts Study Center, Holburne Museum, Bath. *A Woman's Touch* includes four reproductions of printed fabrics by Barron and Larcher (two in color, two in black and white), biographical information (including that the couple were introduced to one another by embroiderer Eve Simmonds), and descriptions of their working techniques. Anscombe also documented the complex relationships among lesbian rug maker Evelyn Wyld and bisexual designers Eyre de Lanux and Eileen Gray.

2. Anscombe, *A Woman's Touch*, p.157.

3. "One Small Voice Against a Conspiracy of Rubbish" by Bevis Hillier, a book review of *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century* by Tanya Harrod, found on the Internet at <<http://www.users.dircon.co.uk/~litrev/reviews/1999/02/HARROD.html>>, October 7, 2003.

4. Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, Marx), p.50.

5. Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain*, p.471 n. 68.

6. Bruce Arnold, *Mainie Jellett and the Modern Movement in Ireland* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991).

7. Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p.48. This mention of Mary Lowndes, which names Barbara Forbes as her companion, is not listed in the index. Nor is the Lowndes entry on page 94. However, Cherry is much better about mentioning that women are in coupled relationships with other women than many other art historians.

8. Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain*, p.92. More information about Townsend can be found in "Caroline Charlotte Townsend (1878-1944)" by Sarah Harvey in *FAN: Feminist Arts News* (London: Feminist Art News, 1988, Vol. 2, No. 5).

9. Cyndra MacDowell's work is published in "Some Notes on Ending" in *Sight Specific: Lesbians and Representation*, edited by Lynne Fernie, Dinah Forbes, and Joyce Mason (Toronto: A Space, 1988) and in *Faking Death: Canadian Art Photography and the Canadian Imagination* by Penny Cousineau-Levine, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003). Her comment comes from an e-mail message, October 15, 2003.

10. Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain*, p.118. The significant letters between Norah Braden and Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie and Bernard Leach are in the Leach Papers, letters number 2420, 2422-76, 2492-520, Crafts Study Center, noted in Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain*, p. 471 n.70. There is a photograph of a tomboyish looking Norah Braden in Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain*, p. 118. See also *Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie: A Potter's Life 1895-1985* (Bath: Crafts Council, Crafts Study Center, 1986).

11. Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 98. See also Kate Summerscale, *The Queen of Whale Cay: The Eccentric Story of "Joe" Carstairs, Fastest Woman on Water* (New York: Viking, 1997).

12. Barley Roscoe, "Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher" in *The Arts and Crafts Movements in the Cotswolds* by Mary Greensted (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1993), pp.122-139, includes two photographs of Barron and Larcher. The description of Barron and Larcher and their home (pp.123-124) is from a transcript of a talk by Robin Tanner, "Phyllis Barron 1890-1964," given at The Holburne Museum and Crafts Study Centre, Bath (1 June, 1978). More information about Phyllis Barron, Dorothy Larcher, Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, and Elizabeth Peacock is to be found in the Crafts Study Center.

13. Elizabeth Ashburn, author of *Lesbian Art: An Encounter With Power* (N.S.W., Australia: Craftsman House, 1996, e-mail 20 Oct 2003).

14. Deborah Willis and Carla Williams, *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History* (Philadelphia: Temple U. Press, 2002. Williams' quote is from an e-mail message, 15 Oct 2003).

15. "Lesbian Landscapes: A Little Oral History" by Marian Evans was published in the *Women's Studies Journal*, 17:1 (2001). See also *A Women's Picture Book: 25 Women Artists of Aotearoa (New Zealand)*, edited by Marian Evans, Bridie Lonie, and Tilly Lloyd (Wellington NZ: Government Printing

Office, 1988). Lesbians in it include Heather McPherson, Allie Eagle, Jill Livestre, Sharon Alston, Barbara McDonald, Jane Zusters, Fiona Clark, Janet de Wagt, Carole (now Kanya) Stewart, Tilly Lloyd, and Marian Evans. Evans' quote is from an e-mail message, 16 Oct 2003.

16. Frances Rooney, *Working Light: The Wandering Life of Photographer Edith S. Watson* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1996). Rooney's quote is from an e-mail message, 17 Oct 2003.



Marjorie Norris

This is a Collage for all the Women Who have Written Their Lives

*After Sappho, it was Adrienne, she wrote Of Woman Born, let us know
That feelings weren't one way or the other, just real, and raising
Children might teach us everything we'd ever know about
Ambivalence and compassion, holding onto the world and letting go,
Then Phyllis wrote Women and Madness, we knew then where
Exactly we stood in the bastions of society that men had made.
It was Dorothy Allison who proudly let us into her stolen childhood
World, the one of bad dads and grounded cousins, mothers who
Gave their daughters up and dyke aunts who'd talk nature, not dirty,
To a wild-eyed niece so she'd get herself back comfortably into
The wild Rubyfruit Jungle that Rita Mae Brown wrested from her
Own heart. Elsa Gidlow was an early leader and Margaret Randall
Wrote about love and money and sex and the wages of rebellion.
It was Lee Lynch and Joan Nestle who'd write their lives in blood and
Carole Maso her novel in paint, The Woman in the Red Hat and those
incantatory poems to Frida Kahlo. Of course I loved Audre Lorde, saw her and
Adrienne in 1978 in Buffalo read their poems, with Gloria Anzaldúa from This
Bridge Called My Back, breathed Caroline Gage's meditations for Women
Leaving Patriarchy, and Emily Dickinson's poems and the wildness of Edna St.
Vincent Millay. They informed me that I was centered, a woman and
A lesbian, and pride that came from deep in my center, a pride,
That I belonged to a stronghold of tears and wisdom, muscle and
Pride. If it weren't for Alice Walker and her poems and essays,
And Rebecca Walker's memoir Black, White, and Jewish,
And everything by Carson McCullers, and Lillian Smith, and Zora
Neal Hurston we learned that Sappho was a Right-on Woman,*

Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love told us so, and Jill Johnston,
 In *Lesbian Nation*, and Kwelismkith, Becky Birtha, Cherrie Moraga,
 And May Swenson and Minnie Bruce Pratt and Alexis de Veaux,
 Paula Gunn Allen, and Olga Broumas. I wanted to write passion
 Like Marilyn Hacker and Jeanette Winterson, or be Joan Larkin. Sadly,
 We lost June Jordan, a beautiful writer and champion of civil rights.
 Muriel Rukeyser was as full of her sex as Gertrude Stein, and
 Barbara Deming loved us, and her work in *Romulus*, New York,
 At the Women's Peace Encampment. I want to know nature
 Like Mary Oliver and city-scapes like Melissa Ragona:
 Eileen Myles taught me writing in Buffalo's Hallwalls and Dorothy Allison
 At Feminist Writers' Workshop out of Ithaca, and Lesléa Newman
 Was there too, has made two mommies a part of everyone's library.
 And do you know, that Merrill Mushroom, my
 Ever-favorite, has been at the Southeast Lesbian Writers Conference
 For these last 26 years? She's a grounded, gifted earth-writer.
 And Corky Culver, writer extraordinaire and activist we love,
 Mab Segrest outraged and illumined with her incisive brain:
 How could I forget, coming out to Tee Corinne and "The Woman who loved sex"?
 Did you know that Christina Rossetti was one of us, her images
 Muted in the deep Victorian blanket she lived in under dank
 Victorian skies? And Judy Grahn, how I love her, she synthesized
 It all for us in *Another Mother Tongue*, and Paula Gunn Allen,
 And Z. Budapest. There were presses like *Shameless Hussy*
 And *Heresies* and *Lilith*, and *Spinster's Ink*.
 And Sinister Wisdom, informed me, that was the first time,
 In 1977, I knew that Sinister was Left and Left was Sinister, it
 Meant everything to me as a lesbian, twisted sister of Eve, and
 A left-wing riding left handed left-affirming woman. These women
 Have informed me, my love and my guts, the way I stand and
 What I swallow, the path of birds that fly out to all the centuries
 That follow.

Marjorie Norris

I Write to Explore the Opposites

*This is the modern way to die: sniff the river
And the chemicals that compound it, see
Its rust near factories, its waters swollen brown,
Feel your feet on the ground near the Niagara,
Know where you were born. Oh, the light
Of that river will never forsake you, it sits
On a summer evening on the residential
Shores of Canada, it quickens with
The splaying momentum of motorboats
And water skiers, it kisses the porch
Of the Chinese restaurant. Let us not
Forget the river's life. one day, walking
Near my workplace, I saw a flock of black-
Birds flying out over the cemetery, driven
In their flight, one black blanket to
The Niagara. What could compel them,
Send them soaring? Only the secrets
That you and I share: "sniff the river,
It's the modern way to die". Watch
The sun's westerly Tai Chi it slowly
Plummets into the water, a large peach
Over the charcoal waves of evening, it's
Light will never betray you, so hold it
Loosely, like a joyful moment,
In your reaching palm.*

Prophecy

Maybe it was the cry of pen on paper,
The scrape of opium on the door,
The smell of verbena when spring came,
The blast of blue that called itself sky
And crammed itself over and into
The cool melons, the guava, the hardness
Of coconut, the spyness of pineapples.
It might have been about the swirling
Of desire, a clandestine plan known
Only in other lives, an unexpected
Punctuation, a scarlet handling,
A present in a box touched by Pandora.
You'd want to warn your child about it,
To convince her she wasn't hidden
But had a voice that could rise
From even desert roots, quenched
And blooming, full of flame, the reddest
Star. I'd find her in other lives, a brush
Or pen in her hand, telling her family
Stories to whoever would listen,
To secret generations, the ones
From her one and only life, gilded
By memory and the certainty of knowing,
Heated by her tongue and her own
Assurance, the tongue I gave her
As I blessed her along the river,
On the path right under Venus, the one
Heading just over that small hill
To the next constellation.

Valarie Watersun

Thanking Gertrude Stein

“Envelope,” she said to me when I came home Monday.

Monday had been a difficult day at work. Mondays are often difficult. My job deals with problems and I stay busy. As one of a team of media troubleshooters for a large publishing firm, taking care of ‘issues’ that develop is part of what I do. Image is everything and when it comes to public relations for the company, I’m one of the ones responsible for maintaining a sterling image.

Because it had been such a rough day, my mind was still chewing leather when I arrived home. The apartment was exactly as I had left it that morning, filled with books and magazines and stacks of unopened mail. Dust had taken permanent residence. I tried to be irritated. She smiled at me however, and my thoughts slowly stopped chewing. I felt a swallowing occur on the psychic level.

She moved across the living room carpet toward me, accompanied by the subtle hum of her computer. The soothing noise is a constant in our life, part of the foundation of our relationship. I could no more picture Macie without her computer than I could picture Macie without her hands. The machine was a part of her. Not in a computer geek sort of way—I don’t think she knows an XML from a PDF—but the computer is her lifeline, the pathway to her inner muse.

Macie is a writer, author of more than twenty books, two of them bestsellers. You’d never guess this about her because she never really talks. Most of her words go into her books. The ones left for real life are rare and significant, vital snippets of communication. She avoids people because they talk too much. Not everyone understands her. I understand her.

“Envelope,” she murmured as she moved into my arms. My briefcase fell to the floor, the ugly Time Magazine review forgotten in the fragrant fog of Macie.

“Envelope?” I asked, looking into her dark green eyes.

“Envelope,” she assured me, tucking her arms under my blazer and around my waist. They felt good against the cotton of my shirt, the fabric magnifying the smooth heat of her palms. She slid these palms upward, tickling fingers tucking into the dampness of my armpits. The fingers rotated and fell in onto themselves like small half-grown hamsters vying for the best position in the nest.

Envelope was her word of the day, a word that she would use to tell me something, to express an abstract idea. It was her art.

I slid my arms around her thin waist. It always amazed me how small she felt. Her body was like that of a longhaired cat. You always assumed there would be more resistance, more substance when you held her. Macie felt fragile, her form pliable and tender. And the smell of her—peaches. Always peaches. Never the sick-sweet smell of peach schnapps but the musky, hazy, still-on-the-tree-but-ripe smell of fresh peaches. I think it was this smell that connected me to her in the beginning: I was the somnolent wasp held in the tractor-beam of her pheromone.

The museum had been unusually noisy the day we'd met. Construction on a new display sounded from an adjoining room. We both, drawn by the promise of silence, I believe, had moved into the room filled with old masters. Titian pronounced from one wall while Rembrandt enticed from another.

I noticed her blond hair first. I can't lie; I have a real thing about blondes. And the blonder the better. I even like it when the eyebrows and lashes are so pale that they are barely visible. This describes Macie perfectly. Add a heart shaped face, wide cougar eyes and an expressive mouth framing small baby teeth and this is what I saw that day. I was enchanted by the fairy tale of who she appeared to be. I felt I had to get closer, had to know this person.

And then the scent washed over me and I knew without a moment's hesitation that I was a goner. Head over heels in love and she had not even said a word.

Then she spoke. Her first word was "Macie." Her eyes caught mine and I was intrigued by her enjoyment and by her interest in me. I realized that she had spoken her name and I told her I was Carla and that I was a media coordinator, as if she cared. I knew somehow deep that she didn't care, that my own dependence on job titles and important tasks had no slot in her world. I found myself wondering about that world and about how I could fit there.

She had taken my hand in hers then laid it high across the warm slope of her breast, as Rembrandt looked on with an amused air.

"Noisy," she confided in a whisper, rolling her eyes.

"Yes," I replied, wondering what to say next. As it turned out, no further words were necessary. Hand in hand we walked among the paintings; a beautiful woman crafted by Bellini, the violence of Elsheimer, the sneaky eyes of a David work, dozens more. At each one she paused and sighed, as if this subtle beauty was, at last, what she'd been searching for. I stayed with

her for hours, always touching her in some way, our bodies dancing on an occult level. How odd we must have appeared to onlookers, my tall wiry form connected to her tiny, elfin blondeness.

Now, in the quiet home we'd shared for more than a year, I looked into her eyes and still felt the same connection. As well as the same passion she had awakened in me so long ago. The word she had spoken lingered. I could taste the sound of it.

"Shall I fold you?" I asked, kissing the dip of her neck. "Shall I lick you?"

I felt a prolonged shudder move through her and knew she had embarked on that slow journey to arousal. I pulled one hand free to work at the buttons of her shirt. Her small breasts peeked out like cautious ferrets and I moved my palm across one, pausing to hold it gently. Waves of sensation washed across me as I thought of envelopes, of putting my hand in the sleek wetness between her legs. I felt my own legs start to melt, beginning at the apex, the envelope.

The whispers started then and the sound of the words rang through me, heating my passion and my need.

"Envelope," she said.

"Fill," she said.

"Wrap," she said.

"Fold," she said, her hands rubbing across the skin of my lower back. She was savoring the whispers, morsels of writing nourishment that would sustain her for days.

"Smooth," she added as an afterthought.

I pulled back and began slowly folding the edge of her unbuttoned Oxford shirt. I started at the bottom and folded it up until she shed it like a chrysalis that had held her for too long. I looked at her bare torso, the poetry of it creating other words inside me.

All I could say aloud was "Macie."

She came to me, smiling and led me to the bedroom. We folded into a packet of primal energy, folding and opening envelopes until we lay exhausted and silent, each pondering the new words generated within.

Two days later the word was universes.

The day had been bad and I had fallen behind the team. I had begun wondering if this was the job for me. I often missed the days of working in greenhouses, surrounded by sultry air and the smell of new growth and earth. Money had called like a blonde siren however, and I had replaced earth with concrete and new growing things with a growing bank balance.

Daydreams pulled at me and I wasn't keeping up, dangerous in this business.

She met me at the door with a yellow book in her hands.

"Universes," she whispered.

"What is that you're reading," I asked, turning the small volume over. It was *Fist of Sun* by Brugnaro, a favorite of my father's.

"Universes?" she asked.

"Not tonight, Macie," I said. "I'm behind and don't have time to listen to you. I really don't. I love you but this stuff is important." I pushed my briefcase toward her, pushed it between us.

She watched me, her eyes darkening.

"Universes," she insisted.

Irritation stirred in me. Every day was the same. Words. Words. Each day I had to discern the meaning. The subjective meaning; what it meant to her. It was a sharing I was not in the mood for. I had my own words to deal with tonight. I would hear her words tomorrow.

I sighed and unbuttoned the top button of my shirt. "Look, I'm going to change. We can talk later, when I'm finished. You go write something. Work while I'm home for a change so I can work too."

She stepped back and I passed by her to the bedroom. As I undressed, I could hear the click of her fingertips on the computer keyboard and I let out the breath I hadn't realized I'd been holding.

The next afternoon I came home to an empty apartment. There was no one at the door and the air was eerily still. I realized within seconds that the computer, with its endless hum, had gone. So had Macie.

There was a single word written on the ornate living room mirror. Universes, it said.

I found her at her sister's house. Rowena was larger than Macie, with coarser features and bright burgundy hair. She had a loud house full of rowdy children. I knew Macie was like a fish out of water there. Our life was very quiet, the single words very important, not mixed helter skelter with useless verbiage. She would fade here; waste away under the onslaught of sound. I swelled with guilt knowing my harshness had brought her here.

"Carla." Rowena greeted me with a nod. She held a squirming toddler in her arms and I was amazed the child didn't fall. She held him expertly as she studied my face.

"Where is she, Ro?"

"In the back. I don't know if you can do anything. Her word was 'done'. That sounds pretty final."

“No, that can’t be.” I spread my hands in helplessness. “We’ll never be done. She belongs with me.”

“What did you do to her?” She allowed the toddler to squirm to the floor and he ran into the kitchen.

I hung my head, shamed. “I didn’t listen. I didn’t listen.”

“To the words?” Her mouth hung open in awe. Everyone listened to Macie. It was important.

I nodded, afraid I would cry if I spoke. I thought of what I’d said. Go write something. I had forgotten for a moment that the time she spent with me was her writing. It was how she created life from a void. The time she spent away from me during the day was for the mechanics, the typing to paper. When she was with me or with others close to her, she was creating.

Rowena stood watching me, her arms folded into an envelope across her chest. “She’s not like us, Carla. You know she’s a writer. She sees the world from a different place, a place of words and transient meanings. You know this. Knew this in the beginning.”

“Yes. Yes, I did. I do.”

Rowena moved aside with a sigh and shake of her head. “Go try. Good luck.”

I knew the way to the guest room because Macie and I had stayed there during the Christmas holidays. The familiar, comforting hum of her computer wafted from under the closed door. I put my hand on the knob and took a deep breath. After knocking gently, I stepped inside. Though surrounded by her reference books, her dictionaries, and her manuscripts, she was not home and appeared out-of-place, like a small child perched at a grown-up dining table.

Macie stood and her eyes stared at me from dark sockets lined by grief. I realized the extent of the damage I’d caused when I saw her. Tears welled in my eyes and my heart actually hurt in my chest.

“Macie,” I said and reached for her. She moved back, away from my arms.

“Farewell,” she said.

“Irreparable,” she added

“Macie, no. You can’t do this. I’m sorry. I really am. I forgot what it’s all about. I forgot about the words. I forgot what they mean, how important they are.”

She watched me steadily and stepped toward me. There was no welcome in her face, however, and daunted, I moved backward. Soon I was past the door frame and she gently, so gently, shut the door.

My life ended. I left Rowena's house in a stupor. I wandered the streets until fear and darkness chased me inside. The apartment was a prison cell, a place of punishment now that Macie was gone. Sleep became an icon of faith; a thing I merely believed was possible. The next day I stumbled to the office and quit my job. It felt like the right thing to do and I had an irrational dream it would make everything else fall into place.

Days folded one into the other after that. I knew I needed to work although the prospect left me cold. I walked into greenhouses seeking peace and eventually encountered a friend who commiserated and found work for me. I worked yet found no sustenance.

I ignored the knock at first, believing it was an illusion designed by a feverish brain, and continued chewing my one remaining fingernail. Nestled into the sofa, I had surrounded myself with photos of Macie. They talked to me.

The knock sounded again, hesitant and slow and I knew suddenly who waited on the other side.

"Empty," she said, pulling my hand to her chest. A warm tear fell onto the back of my hand.

I pulled her into the room and close to me, my own tears welling anew.

"Envelope," I said, my voice hoarse with longing.

"Filled," she said, a smile trembling at the corner of her mouth.

"Sealed," I added, staring into her eyes.

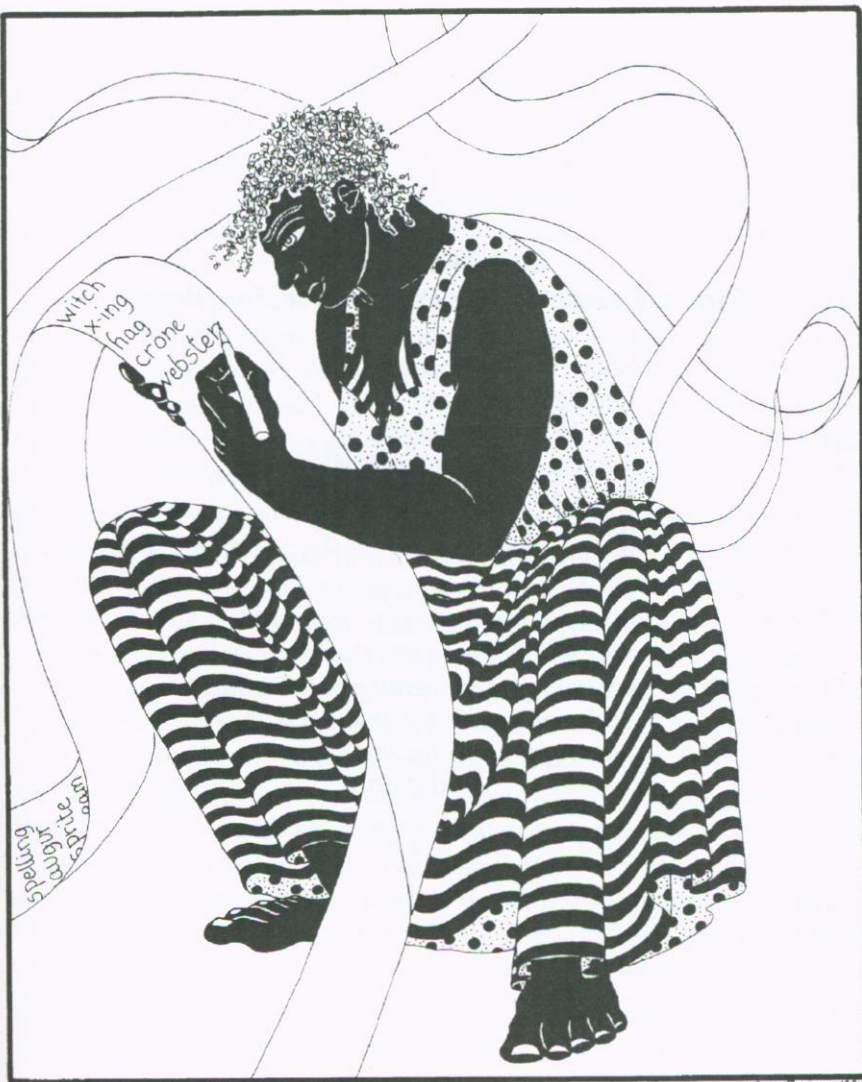
Ida VSW Red

Lesbian Feminist Analysis

*Why amass these misogynist expressions?
Retell the fairy tales
Recite the nursery rhymes
Recall the adolescent gropings
Reinforce the stereotypes
By repeating these lies?
And here, of all places, among ourselves
Now, of all times, when we have
 wounds to heal
 work to do
 lives to build*

*Understand why I deal in these images:
To recognize the sex and gender role conditioning
 that handicaps and retards our growth
To give ourselves credit for surviving it
To exorcise the enemies in our heads
To leave them behind and begin the work of
 building a new world with
 the strength of our knowledge
 the creativity of our choices*

*1981 & 1999 (Written with Mothertongue Feminist
Theater Collective for "Passing")*



Ida VSW Red

One Sentence
(Not a Cause of the Peloponnesian War)

*Sometimes a poem festers
like a fever blister
born of dysfunction
forcing full attention to a
small surface area, throbbing
where the eruption severs
the event from roots and sends
a new form on a swelling course
through sensitive skin to nerve
end and back again, this time
scattering and seeding both surface
and crater with the poem's small
pulsing pain — feeling's loss
and gain.*

1974

Emily M. Irwin

Daily Truth

I mistakenly call myself a poet and I devote an entire month in another place to being this poet. I wake up each morning with anxiety about being this and doing this. I toss between sheets and pillows, wanting to sleep but wanting to wake, and poems come in and out and stay out, and I lose them all to the bed. I get up. I get up and I make coffee and I sit on the verandah and I write about all of the anxiety. I cannot get to the truth. I cannot get to the truth, which is where all poetry comes from. Poetry embraces the world, and poetry's essence is the essence of truth and what is real. How do I feel? How do I feel? The words will not come. I cannot make them. I cannot let them. Always the wrong words come. The false words. I look at myself on the page and I see a faker, I see a girl who is in denial. A girl who walks by mirrors without looking, a girl who is scared to leave the house, a girl who feels she has no space that is hers and a girl who feels she has no space she deserves. My space is in other people, I think. My space overlaps and waves in and out and bounces back like the waves we watched at Port Royal. They were funny waves, waves I've never seen. And here I am bouncing right back into myself time and time again. Every time I sit to write I want to cry. And I do. I just cry and write and cry and write and I wonder what is wrong with me. Why am I so up and down and in and out? I can't make the space. The space I had left for home, is gone, is moving on. I still have three weeks away. Three weeks with one eye and empty space on my right and on my left, and all the little spaces in between that were full four days ago are no longer full. They are slowly being drained of presence and touches on the shoulder. And no memory is not turning to dust, of what used to fill that space. I sneeze this dust away. I sneeze this dust to America. And hold on. To what? To this declaration of myself, the poet, the artist, who feels life so deeply, yet cannot see it for herself. The truth? I once felt an earthquake that only measured 1.0 on the Richter Scale. My family thought I was making it up until the man on the radio reported it.

Jean Taylor

The Writing's the Thing!

I have been writing since I was old enough to know that by joining words on paper I could write a story like the ones I enjoyed reading. I started writing (and illustrating) my first books while I was still at primary school. Then I went through puberty. And apart from the compositions I was required to write for English classes in High School and the very odd attempt at poetry, I virtually stopped writing.

I didn't try again till I was married and my two children were about one and two years old. Feeling that I desperately needed to express myself once again, I sat down one day with a pen and a blank sheet of paper. I kept both ears out for the sounds the children were making so that I could leap up at any moment should it be necessary and concentrated on the page in front of me. After I'd been staring at the paper for a reasonable length of time, with my thoughts picking up and rejecting various sentences, while my whole being was listening out for whatever the children were doing to make sure they were okay, and not a single word transformed onto the page, I decided that it was a lost cause.

I waited till my son was in his first year of school and my daughter was in kindergarten before I picked up a pen and sat myself down with some blue-lined paper in a spring-back folder to painstakingly and ever-so-slowly write my first novel. I worked at the local library where I wouldn't be distracted by the dishes in the sink or tempted to make the beds during those first precious three hours a day I'd had to myself since the children were born.

It was difficult and I was resistant to the idea of it but I made myself write two pages every day. The main thing that kept me going through the agony of dragging those words out of my mind and putting them in order on the page was the fact that if I didn't write those two pages I felt even worse. It wasn't a matter of life or death but that's how it felt.

It took two years to finish my first novel and another year to type it up and when it wasn't accepted for publication I sat down and started writing another one. In between I wrote short stories, a bit of poetry and as I'd gone back to study they were published in the university student newspaper. I wrote a play that never saw the light of day.

It didn't matter. I just had to keep on writing. Never mind that I kept on getting rejection letters from publishing houses. The writing was the

thing and kept me going when all else failed. I wrote another novel.

In 1976 with enough rejection slips to paper a dunny (outhouse) I self-published a small book of poems. By the time I'd self-published a book of short stories then two of the novels I was no longer apologetic. I celebrated with book launches. And kept on writing more novels and short stories. I wrote plays and started a lesbian feminist performing group to put them on. I was enjoying myself no end.

Coming out as a lesbian as well as being a radical feminist moved my writing along even further. I was part of the Women's Liberation Movement, I was an activist, I was a writer, I was a lesbian. It all came together. And because I felt so much at home because this was my revolution, my liberation, this was my lesbian community, my lesbian feminist community, what else could I do but write about it.

That I wasn't always wise in my choice of lovers just meant, eventually, that I could write about the pain, get it out, be creative about it, get over the loss.

Once the kids were grown up and left home I had more time to write and I didn't need to work so much anymore so I could travel and write. In Paris in 1983 someone stole my small backpack with ten months of writing! That was a terrible thing. To fill the yawning painful gap I wrote two novels in six weeks. And came to the conclusion, as if I didn't already know it, that the writing's the thing. As long as I had a pen and paper (I was still writing the first draft in longhand in those days) I would continue to write.

Having a computer changed my writing. Much to my astonishment I found I could write directly into the computer. Then discovered I had difficulty writing directly on to the page. After all those many years of sitting up in bed, folder propped against my knees, black coffee cup to hand, to write and write, I now found joy in peering at the screen, tapping away with two fingers, black coffee cup to hand, to write and write to my heart's content.

I'm turning 60 in 2004. All I want to do is continue writing. There are many many books to be written and all being well they will be. The writing's the thing!

Michelle Wing

Reading Cixous in Translation

Promethea sits in my lap
 a book that is a woman
 covered head to foot in a sheer veil
 her beauty, her scent intoxicating
 but her skin the touch of her
 just beyond my reach.

As much as I stretch my fingers towards her
 even when I am about
 to cup her breast in my hand
 it is not her breast
 only a vision of breast defined
 by silk, made of cloth
 a weaver's interpretation.
 I hunger for her.
 I want to lick each word
 put my tongue on the nouns
 take the nipple of her poetry between my teeth
 and bite taste the salt
 close my eyes and make long slow
 mouthings of each phrase
 pressing them up against the roof of my mouth.

Michelle Wing

Body of a Woman, Cuerpo de Mujer

*I learned love translated through the words of men
lifted and positioned by large rough hands
quiet and watchful from the smallness of my body*

*I knew vulval curves, rose lips
only through their eyes
their possession
their language.*

*Here, in a bare room on a single mattress pad
amber light from the street lamp spills in
drifting through the decade of fog
soft shadowing wine-wet lips
illuminating my debut as
the one who holds
the one who touches.*

*Now I am the poet who marvels and speaks
moaning with pleasure at her softness
encircling her wrist with my fingers
breathing in her woman smell
confusing my lips with her lips
her lips with my lips
sus labios, mis labios
nuestros cuerpos.*

I found language when I embraced her.

Uncumber

Sticks and Stones...

*With whom do you believe your lot is cast?
From where does your strength come?* —Adrienne Rich in "Sources, iv"

Isak Dinesen tells the story of Pellegrina in "The Dreamer," one of the *Gothic Tales*. The singer with a beautiful voice loses her ability to sing. She wanders from place to place until one night some people believe they recognize her. They demand to know her true identity. They chase her to the edge of a cliff. They shout, Who are you? Cornered, the singer jumps to her death. When I first read this story it called to me in a way I did not understand; it haunted me for years. I did not understand this story's meaning for me until years later, after I acknowledged myself as a Lesbian and realized the depth of my fear of this discovery. Comprehension of the story's relevance to me and my life came after I began to live as an out Lesbian, write stories and poems from my heart and my experience and after I read some of the writings of Audre Lorde, especially her essay "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power." Lorde clearly explains what I recognize as the true situation for me and other women. She says, "And when we live outside ourselves, and by that I mean on external directives only, rather than from our internal knowledge and needs, when we live away from those erotic guides from within ourselves, then our lives are limited by external and alien forms, and we conform to the needs of a structure that is not based on human need, let alone an individual's. But when we begin to live from within outward, in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves, and allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us, then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense."

I have considered the truth of Lorde's analysis in my experience, having been unable to write anything but narrow academic papers for so many years until I was over 50 years old. I did attempt some stories and poems in my teen-age years but I seldom showed these efforts to anyone and I eventually threw them away.

I have also tried to think about how this use of creative powers is suppressed, particularly in my own case. In this search I have come upon several incidents that occurred when I was very young and was in the process of discovering (and suppressing) my erotic attraction to persons of my own

sex. Audre Lorde's account of her own perception of her sexual identity at an early age can be found in her beautiful book *Zami, A New Spelling Of My Name*. Her words inspired me to write about some of my early experiences with racism that frightened me and instructed me living in Paris, Arkansas in 1936. Racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia are so intertwined that lessons in one area inform another. Words used to label, to hurt, to reject are powerful words. Lorde stirred in me the desire to recapture and recount my early consciousness that words can be part of an experience pulling people to join in oppressing others and may expose another reality than the use of words to comfort and to heal.



Judith K. Witherow

Welcome to My World

I hated clothes washing day with a passion. All day would be spent fetching two ten-quart buckets of water at a time. It was too much for a child to carry, but carry it we did. Carry water and chop wood. Keep the fire going to heat the water. Keep the water coming to wash the clothes. Go to the woods and look for more kindling. Drape the clothes over the line or spread what wouldn't fit on the grass. Cut poles to prop up the lines so the clothes didn't end up in the dirt. So much for the belief that the poor are lazy. Or, its twin, "they could better themselves if they tried harder."

Imagination, that should have been my first name instead of the one Mom picked out of a women's magazine. Daydreaming was my only outlet. At school I got beat on a regular basis because of the escape routes I traveled—among other excuses. This continued through tenth grade. Any lame excuse brought about this humiliation. Sometimes it was because of having a book inside of a schoolbook. In all truthfulness, I attended school and graduated because of the books I had loving access to in the library. It was also the beginning of my desire to write about my people in a kinder, truthful way.

There are numerous times when I wish I'd paid more attention to English and Math. Then again, travel to places that didn't require an alcoholic behind the wheel wouldn't have happened. Nor would the exciting lives that others led have been accessible to me. It would definitely have been helpful to read about my kind with a glimmer of understanding.

The constant need for dishing out low blows and hard knocks should be given more thought. I can't bear to watch another generation get permanently damaged by misguided judgment. Nothing is ever as bad or as good as it might appear. Come on in and sit awhile. I don't believe in giving anyone the goat's rope.

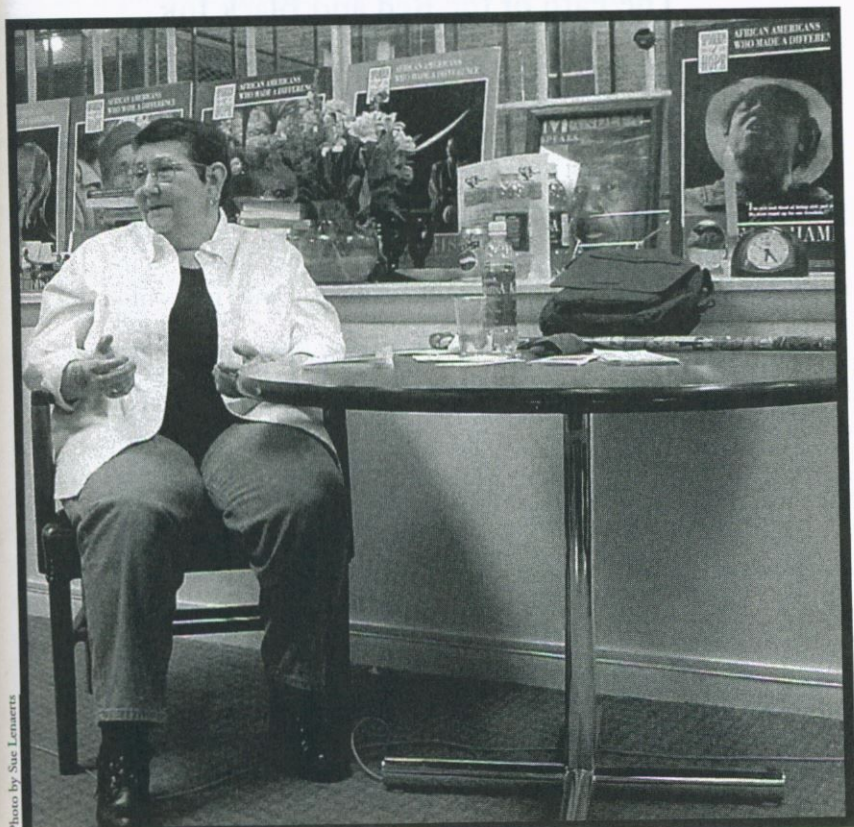


Photo by Sue Lemaertis

Judith K. Witherow reading at Sisterspace

Gloria Anzaldúa

Tlilli, Tlapalli The Path of the Red and Black Ink

*“out of poverty, poetry;
out of suffering, song.”*

—a Mexican saying

When I was seven, eight, nine, fifteen, sixteen years old, I would read in bed with a flashlight under the covers, hiding my self-imposed insomnia from my mother. I preferred the world of the imagination to the death of sleep. My sister, Hilda, who slept in the same bed with me, would threaten to tell my mother unless I told her a story.

I was familiar with *cuentos*—my grandmother told stories like the one about her getting on top of the roof while down below rabid coyotes were ravaging the place and wanting to get at her. My father told stories about a phantom giant dog that appeared out of nowhere and sped along the side of the pickup no matter how fast he was driving.

Nudge a Mexican and she or he will break out with a story. So, huddling under the covers, I made up stories for my sister night after night. After a while she wanted two stories per night. I learned to give her installments, building up the suspense with convoluted complications until the story climaxed several nights later. It must have been then that I decided to put stories on paper. It must have been then that working with images and writing became connected to night.

Invoking Art

In the ethno-poetics and performance of the shaman, my people, the Indians, did not split the artistic from the functional, the sacred from the secular, art from everyday life. The religious, social and aesthetic purposes of art were all intertwined. Before the Conquest, poets gathered to play music, dance, sing and read poetry in open-air places around the *Xochicuauhitl*, *el Árbol Florido*, Tree-in-Flower. (The *Coaxihuítl* or morning glory is called the snake plant and its seeds, known as *ololiuhqui*, are hallucinogenic.)(1) The ability of story (prose and poetry) to transform the storyteller and the listener into something or someone else is shamanistic. The writer, as shape-changer, is a *nahual*, a shaman.

In looking at this book that I'm almost finished writing, I see a mosaic pattern (Aztec-like) emerging, a weaving pattern, thin here, thick there. I

see a preoccupation with the deep structure, the underlying structure, with the gesso underpainting that is red earth, black earth. I can see the deep structure, the scaffolding. If I can get the bone structure right, then putting flesh on it proceeds without too many hitches. The problem is that the bones often do not exist prior to the flesh, but are shaped after a vague and broad shadow of its form is discerned or uncovered during beginning, middle and final stages of the writing. Numerous overlays of paint, rough surfaces, smooth surfaces make me realize I am preoccupied with texture as well. Too, I see the barely contained color threatening to spill over the boundaries of the object it represents and into other "objects" and over the borders of the frame. I see a hybridization of metaphor, different species of ideas popping up here, popping up there, full of variations and seeming contradictions, though I believe in an ordered, structured universe where all phenomena are interrelated and imbued with spirit. This almost finished product seems an assemblage, a montage, a beaded work with several leitmotifs and with a central core, now appearing, now disappearing in a crazy dance. The whole thing has had a mind of its own, escaping me and insisting on putting together the pieces of its own puzzle with minimal direction from my will. It is a rebellious, willful entity, a precocious girl-child forced to grow up too quickly, rough, unyielding, with pieces of feather sticking out here and there, fur, is angry, sad, joyful, is *Coatlícue*, dove, horse, serpent, cactus. Though it is a flawed thing—a clumsy, complex, groping blind thing—for me it is alive, infused with spirit. I talk to it; it talks to me.

I make my offerings of incense and cracked corn, light my candle. In my head I sometimes will say a prayer—an affirmation and a voicing of intent. Then I run water, wash the dishes or my underthings, take a bath, or mop the kitchen floor. This "induction" period sometimes takes a few minutes, sometimes hours. But always I go against a resistance. Something in me does not want to do this writing. Yet once I'm immersed in it, I can go fifteen to seventeen hours in one sitting and I don't want to leave it.

My "stories" are acts encapsulated in time, "enacted" every time they are spoken aloud or read silently. I like to think of them as performances and not as inert and "dead" objects (as the aesthetics of Western culture think of art works). Instead, the work has an identity; it is a "who" or a "what" and contains the presences of persons, that is, incarnations of gods or ancestors or natural and cosmic powers. The work manifests the same needs as a person, it needs to be "fed," *la tengo que bañar y vestir*.

When invoked in rite, the object/event is "present;" that is, "enacted," it is both a physical thing and the power that infuses it. It is metaphysical in

that it “spins its energies between gods and humans” and its task is to move the gods. This type of work dedicates itself to managing the universe and its energies. I’m not sure what it is when it is at rest (not in performance). It may or may not be a “work” then. A mask may only have the power of presence during a ritual dance and the rest of the time it may merely be a “thing.” Some works exist forever invoked, always in performance. I’m thinking of totem poles, cave paintings. Invoked art is communal and speaks of everyday life. It is dedicated to the validation of humans; that is, it makes people hopeful, happy, secure, and it can have negative effects as well, which propel one towards a search for validation.(2)

The aesthetic of virtuosity, art typical of Western European cultures, attempts to manage the energies of its own internal system such as conflicts, harmonies, resolutions and balances. It bears the presences of qualities and internal meanings. It is dedicated to the validation of itself. Its task is to move humans by means of achieving mastery in content, technique, feeling. Western art is always whole and always “in power.” It is individual (not communal). It is “psychological” in that it spins its energies between itself and its witness.(3)

Western cultures behave differently toward works of art than do tribal cultures. The “sacrifices” Western cultures make are in housing their art works in the best structures designed by the best architects; and in servicing them with insurance, guards to protect them, conservators to maintain them, specialists to mount and display them, and the educated and upper classes to “view” them. Tribal cultures keep art works in honored and sacred places in the home and elsewhere. They attend them by making sacrifices of blood (goat or chicken), libations of wine. They bathe, feed, and clothe them. The works are treated not just as objects, but also as persons. The “witness” is a participant in the enactment of the work in a ritual, and not a member of the privileged classes.(4)

Ethnocentrism is the tyranny of Western aesthetics. An Indian mask in an American museum is transposed into an alien aesthetic system where what is missing is the presence of power invoked through performance ritual. It has become a conquered thing, a dead “thing” separated from nature and, therefore, its power.

Modern Western painters have “borrowed,” copied, or otherwise extrapolated the art of tribal cultures and called it cubism, surrealism, symbolism. The music, the beat of the drum, the Blacks’ jive talk. All taken over. Whites, along with a good number of our own people, have cut themselves off from their spiritual roots, and they take our spiritual art objects in an

unconscious attempt to get them back. If they're going to do it, I'd like them to be aware of what they are doing and to go about doing it the right way. Let's all stop importing Greek myths and the Western Cartesian split point of view and root ourselves in the mythological soil and soul of this continent. White America has only attended to the body of the earth in order to exploit it, never to succor it or to be nurtured in it. Instead of surreptitiously ripping off the vital energy of people of color and putting it to commercial use, whites could allow themselves to share and exchange and learn from us in a respectful way. By taking up *curanderismo*, Santeria, shamanism, Taoism, Zen and otherwise delving into the spiritual life and ceremonies of multi-colored people, Anglos would perhaps lose the white sterility they have in their kitchens, bathrooms, hospitals, mortuaries and missile bases. Though in the conscious mind, black and dark may be associated with death, evil and destruction, in the subconscious mind and in our dreams, white is associated with disease, death and hopelessness. Let us hope that the left hand, that of darkness, of femaleness, of "primitiveness," can divert the indifferent, right-handed, "rational" suicidal drive that, unchecked, could blow us into acid rain in a fraction of a millisecond.

Ni cuicani: I, the Singer

For the ancient Aztecs, *tllilli*, *tlapalli*, *la tinta negra y roja de sas códices* (the black and red ink painted on codices) were the colors symbolizing *escritura y sabiduría* (writing and wisdom).(5) They believed that through metaphor and symbol, by means of poetry and truth, communication with the Divine could be attained, and topan (that which is above—the gods and spirit world) could be bridged with *mictlán* (that which is below—the underworld and the region of the dead).

Poet: she pours water from the mouth of the pump, lowers the handle then lifts it, lowers, lifts. Her hands begin to feel the pull from the entrails, the live animal resisting. A sigh rises up from the depths, the handle becomes a wild thing in her hands, the cold sweet water gushes out, splashing her face, the shock of nightlight filling the bucket.

An image is a bridge between evoked emotion and conscious knowledge; words are the cables that hold up the bridge. Images are more direct, more immediate than words, and closer to the unconscious. Picture language precedes thinking in words; the metaphorical mind precedes analytical consciousness.

The Shamanic State

When I create stories in my head, that is, allow the voices and scenes to

be projected in the inner screen of my mind, I “trance.” I used to think I was going crazy or that I was having hallucinations. But now I realize it is my job, my calling, to traffic in images. Some of these film-like narratives I write down; most are lost, forgotten. When I don’t write the images down for several days or weeks or months, I get physically ill. Because writing invokes images from my unconscious, and because some of the images are residues of trauma which I then have to reconstruct, I sometimes get sick when I *do* write. I can’t stomach it, become nauseous, or burn with fever, worsen. But, in reconstructing the traumas behind the images, I make “sense” of them, and once they have “meaning” they are changed, transformed. It is then that writing heals me, brings me great joy.

To facilitate the “movies” with soundtracks, I need to be alone, or in a sensory-deprived state. I plug up my ears with wax, put on my black cloth eye-shades, lie horizontal and unmoving, in a state between sleeping and waking, mind and body locked into my fantasy. I am held prisoner by it. My body is experiencing events. In the beginning it is like being in a movie theater, as pure spectator. Gradually I become so engrossed with the activities, the conversations, that I become a participant in the drama. I have to struggle to “disengage” or escape from my “animated story,” I have to get some sleep so I can write tomorrow. Yet I am gripped by a story which won’t let me go. Outside the frame, I am film director, screenwriter, camera operator. Inside the frame, I am the actors—male and female—I am desert sand, mountain, I am dog, mosquito. I can sustain a four- to six-hour “movie.” Once I am up, I can sustain several “shorts” of anywhere between five and thirty minutes. Usually these “narratives” are the offspring of stories acted out in my head during periods of sensory deprivation.

My “awakened dreams” are about shifts. Thought shifts, reality shifts, gender shifts: one person metamorphoses into another in a world where people fly through the air, heal from mortal wounds. I am playing with my Self, I am playing with the world’s soul, I am the dialogue between my Self and *el espíritu del mundo*. I change myself, I change the world.

Sometimes I put the imagination to a more rare use. I choose words, images, and body sensations and animate them to impress them on my consciousness, thereby making changes in my belief system and reprogramming my consciousness. This involves looking my inner demons in the face, then deciding which I want in my psyche. Those I don’t want, I starve; I feed them no words, home with them. Neglected, they leave. This is harder to do than to merely generate “stories.” I can only sustain this activity for a few minutes.

I write the myths in me, the myths I am, the myths I want to become. The word, the image and the feeling have a palatable energy, a kind of power. *Con imagenes domo mi miedo, cruzo los abismos que tengo por dentro. Con palabras me hago piedra, pájaro, puente de serpientes arrastrando a ras del suelo todo lo que soy, todo lo que algún día seré.*

Los que están mirando (leyendo),

Los que cuentan (o refieren lo que leen).

Los que vuelven ruidosamente las hojas de los códices.

Los que tienen en su poder

la tinta negra y roja (la sabiduría)

y lo pintado,

ellos nos llevan, nos guían,

nos dicen el camino.(6)

Writing Is A Sensuous Act

Tallo mi cuerpo como si estuviera lavando un trapo. Toco las saltadas venas de mis manos, mis chichis adormecidas como pájaros a la anochecer. Estoy encorbada sobre la cama. Las imagenes aleteán alrededor de mi cama como murciélagos, la sábana como que tuviese alas. El ruido de los trenes subterráneos en mi sentido como conchas. Parece que las paredes del cuarto se me arriman cada vez más cerquita.

Picking out images from my soul's eye, fishing for the right words to recreate the images. Words are blades of grass pushing past the obstacles, sprouting on the page; the spirit of the words moving in the body is as concrete as flesh and as palpable; the hunger to create is as substantial as fingers and hand.

I look at my fingers, see plumes growing there From the fingers, my feathers, black and red ink drips across the page. *Escribo con la tinta de mi sangre.* I write in red. Ink. Intimately knowing the smooth touch of paper, its speechlessness before I spill myself on the insides of trees. Daily, I battle the silence and the red. Daily, I take my throat in my hands and squeeze until the cries pour out, my larynx and soul sore from the constant struggle.

Something To Do With the Dark

Quien canta, sus males espanta.

-un dicho

The toad comes out of its hiding place inside the lobes of my brain. It's going to happen again. The ghost of the toad that betrayed me—I hold it in my hand. The toad is sipping the strength from my veins, it is sucking my

pale heart. I am a dried serpent skin, wind scuttling me across the hard ground, pieces of me scattered over the countryside. And there in the dark I meet the crippled spider crawling in the gutter, the day-old newspaper fluttering in the dirty rain water.

Musa bruja, venga. Cubrese con una sábana y espante mis demonios que a rempujones y a cachetadas me roban la pluma me rompen el sueño. Musa, ¡misericordia!

Óigarme musa bruja. ¿Porqué huye usted'en mi cara? Su grito me desarrolla de mi caracola, me sacude el alma. Vieja, quítese de aquí con sus alas de navaja. Ya no me despedaze mi cara. Vaya con sus pinche uñas que me desgarran de los ojos hasta los talones. Váyese a la tiznada. Que no me coman, le digo. Que no me cornan sus nueve dedos caníbales.

Hija negra de la noche, carnala, ¿Porqué me sacas las tripas, porqué cardas mis entrañas? Este hilvanando palabras con tripas me está rnatando. Jija de la noche ¡vete a la chingada!

Writing produces anxiety. Looking inside myself and my experience, looking at my conflicts, engenders anxiety in me. Being a writer feels very much like being a Chicana, or being queer—a lot of squirming, coming up against all sorts of walls. Or its opposite: nothing defined or definite, a boundless, floating state of limbo where I kick my heels, brood, percolate, hibernate and wait for something to happen.

Living in a state of psychic unrest, in a Borderland, is what makes poets write and artists create. It is like a cactus needle embedded in the flesh. It worries itself deeper and deeper, and I keep aggravating it by poking at it. When it begins to fester I have to do something to put an end to the aggravation and to figure out why I have it. I get deep down into the place where it's rooted in my skin and pluck away at it, playing it like a musical instrument—the fingers pressing, making the pain worse before it can get better. Then out it comes. No more discomfort, no more ambivalence. Until another needle pierces the skin. That's what writing is for me, an endless cycle of making it worse, making it better, but always making meaning out of the experience, whatever it may be.

*My flowers shall not cease to live;
my songs shall never end:
I, a singer, intone them;
they become scattered, they are spread about.*
—*Cantares mexicanos*

To write, to be a writer, I have to trust and believe in myself as a speaker, as a voice for the images. I have to believe that I can communicate with images and words and that I can do it well. A lack of belief in my creative self is a lack of belief in my total self and vice versa—I cannot separate my writing from any part of my life. It is all one.

When I write it feels like I'm carving bone. It feels like I'm creating my own face, my own heart—a Nahuatl concept. My soul makes itself through the creative act. It is constantly remaking and giving birth to itself through my body. It is this learning to live with *la Coatlicue* that transforms living in the Borderlands from a nightmare into a numinous experience. It is always a path/state to something else.

In *Xóchilt in Cuicatl* (7)

She writes while other people sleep. Something is trying to come out. She fights the words, pushes them down, down, a woman with morning sickness in the middle of the night. How much easier it would be to carry a baby for nine months and then expel it permanently. These continuous multiple pregnancies are going to kill her. She is the battlefield for the pitched fight between the inner image and the words trying to recreate it. *La musa bruja* has no manners. Doesn't she know, nights are for sleeping?

She is getting too close to the mouth of the abyss.

She is teetering on the edge, trying to balance while she makes up her mind whether to jump in or to find a safer way down. That's why she makes herself sick—to postpone having to jump blindfolded into the abyss of her own being and there in the depths confront her face, the face underneath the mask.

To be a mouth—the cost is too high—her whole life enslaved to that devouring mouth. *Todo pasaloa por esa boca, el viento, el fuego, los mares y la Tierra*. Her body, a crossroads, a fragile bridge, cannot support the eons of cargo passing through it. She wants to install 'stop' and 'go' signal lights, instigate a curfew, police Poetry. But something wants to come out.

Blocks (*Coatlicue* states) are related to my cultural identity. The painful periods of confusion that I suffer from are symptomatic of a larger creative process: cultural shifts. The stress of living with cultural ambiguity both compels me to write and blocks me. It isn't until I'm almost at the end of the blocked state that I remember and recognize it for what it is. As soon as this happens, the piercing light of awareness melts the block and I accept the deep and the darkness and I hear one of my voices saying, "I am tired of

fighting. I surrender. I give up, let go, let the walls fall. On this night of the hearing of faults, *Tlazolteotl, diosa de la cara negra*, let fall the cockroaches that live in my hair, the rats that nestle in my skull. Gouge out my lame eyes, rout my demon from its nocturnal cave. Set torch to the tiger that stalks me. Loosen the dead faces gnawing my cheekbones. I am tired of resisting. I surrender. I give up, let go, let the walls fall.”

And in descending to the depths I realize that down is up, and I rise up from and into the deep. And once again I recognize that the internal tension of oppositions can propel (if it doesn't tear apart) the mestiza writer out of the *metate* where she is being ground with corn and water, eject her out as *nahual*, an agent of transformation, able to modify and shape primordial energy and therefore able to change herself and others into turkey, coyote, tree, or human.

I sit here before my computer, *Amiguita*, my altar on top of the monitor with the *Virgen de Coatloapeuh* candle and copal incense burning. My companion, a wooden serpent staff with feathers, is to my right while I ponder the ways metaphor and symbol concretize the spirit and etherealize the body. The Writing is my whole life, it is my obsession. This vampire which is my talent does not suffer other suitors(8). Daily I court it, offer my neck to its teeth. This is the sacrifice that the act of creation requires, a blood sacrifice. For only through the body, through the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed. And for images, words, stories to have this transformative power, they must arise from the human body—flesh and bone—and from the Earth's body—stone, sky, liquid, soil. This work, these images, piercing tongue or ear lobes with cactus needle, are my offerings, are my Aztec blood sacrifices.

Notes:

1. R. Gordon Wasson, *The Wondrous Mushroom: Mycolatry in Mesoamerica* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1980), 59, 103.
2. Robert Plant Armstrong, *The Powers of Presence: Consciousness, Myth, and Affective Presence* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 11, 20.
3. Armstrong, 10.
4. Armstrong, 4.
5. Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Los Antiguos Mexicanos: A traves de sus cronicas y cantares* (Mexico, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1961), 19, 22.
6. Leon-Portilla, 12S.
7. In Xochsiti in Cuicatl is Nahuatl for flower and song, flor y canto.
8. Nietzsche, in *The Will to Power*, says that the artist lives under a curse of being vampirized by his talent.

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Rose Marcario

All My Kind Mothers: A Legacy of Lesbian Poetry

I was born in 1964, the daughter of first generation Italian immigrants, and as my lover who is twenty years older reminds me, this was a time of revolution. A self-described hippie, witch, and artist, she came out while working at the Woman's Building in Los Angeles, and left her husband and secure suburban life. I grew up in the aftermath of this revolutionary time, the beneficiary of the hard work of dykes, feminists and social rights reformers. When I see grainy video of policemen with fire hoses and attack dogs terrorizing black protestors, it seems like a hundred years ago instead of thirty. As I approach forty, I imagine my nine-year-old niece years in the future will be stunned to discover what was once the law of the land. Just as I was shocked to learn that there was a time women had no right to vote and interracial marriages were prohibited by law.

Freedoms hard fought for by others came easy to me. When I was fifteen and experimented with kissing a woman in the theatre class dressing room, it did not constitute a personal crisis. In high school when I mistakenly thought I might be pregnant, I went to Planned Parenthood and obtained a pregnancy test without parental consent. If I needed an abortion, I knew resources were available to me. When I came out as a lesbian, I freely went to gay bars and was never harassed by police or others. I did not comprehend the individual and collective struggle and sacrifice that preceded these freedoms: the work and courage of the common woman and man.

Like many parents of my generation, mine divorced by the time I was ten and this dissolution sent my fragile mother to the mental hospital for good. Words were my refuge during these times and by age eleven, I had memorized all of Edna St Vincent Millay's sonnets and the entire text of *The Merchant of Venice*. As I matured, my collection of classics grew to include the bequests of lovers, teachers and friends: Amy Lowell, Sappho, Susan Griffin, Joan Larkin, Denise Levertov, Lucile Clifton, H.D, Olga Broumas, Nikki Giovanni, Judy Grahn and many others. I memorized these poems like mantras. To me, their language possessed transformational powers and revealed the once unspoken truth of my life. As June Jordan says in the introduction to *Poetry for the People*, "you cannot write lies and write good poetry." More importantly, these writers were my surrogate mothers and

mentors. Not only did they validate my experiences, but they also shaped my identity as a lesbian and woman. Still it would take twenty years of living and reading before I could begin to synthesize the broader social context of repression, patriarchy, and racism from which these words emerged like pure light.

In Howard Zinn's, *A People's History of The United States*, he notes the surprise Native People of North America felt in encountering the laziness of white settlers. During the 2000 election fiasco, when the Supreme Court appointed the President of the United States, I was distraught. Confronted with the laziness inherent in my class and race, and the sad fact of the artificial comfort and dangerous apathy it promotes, I knew I had not done enough. I had expected someone else would handle it for me.

This crisis sparked a time of reflection, and I returned to my life long sanctuary: my books. The words of writers like Pat Parker, June Jordan, Judy Grahn and Adrienne Rich, mixed with my mind like healing alchemy. I was reminded of the simple truth: the battle is never over, we are always faced with the erosion of our liberty, and the corruption, violence and greed inherent in patriarchal culture. Right thinking people must stay engaged in the process of liberation and words are among our most powerful tools. If you have any doubt notice how important "spin" is in Washington and corporate American media. Powerful enough to send sons and daughters into an unprovoked war.

There is a lovely Buddhist meditation in which you imagine a wish granting jewel tree and on the tree are all the mentor deities. From their foreheads flow white diamond light to purify the mind; from their throats flow red ruby light to purify speech; and from their hearts shine blue sapphire light to purify the body. I appropriate this meditation to remember the great lineage of lesbian writers and to remind myself of their courage and compassion. I like to imagine them on the tree, fierce and beautiful, radiating rainbow light to my body, speech and mind.

This Thanksgiving I found myself at the hospital, feeding my seventy-year-old mother pureed food in small spoonfuls, not unlike how she must have fed me when I was baby. I was dabbing her mouth with a napkin and cooing gently to her. Paradoxically, she shares her generation with some of the greatest lesbian and feminist activists that ever lived. Daily I remind myself I am the fortunate heir of her struggle and theirs. My generation owes a solemn debt in these troubling times to confront that which is corrupt, to find our own language of liberation, and to above all, take action in

any form that moves truth and social justice forward. From one of my favorite of Pat Parker's poems, "Legacy," dedicated to her daughter:

"...I give you
a legacy of
of doers
of people who take risks
to chisel the crack wider.

Take the strength that you may
wage a long battle.
Take the pride that you can
never stand small.
Take the rage that you can
never settle for less.

These be the things I pass
to you my daughter
if this is the result of perversion
let the world stand screaming.
You will mute their voices
with your life."

Poem from "Legacy" by Pat Parker from *Jonestown and Other Madness*
© 1985 Firebrand Books, Ann Arbor, MI



Dyke Poetical

*Grahn, Broumas, Hacker, Jordan, Rich, Clarke, Parker
always they came to me this way:
passed from lover to lover*

*once at twenty I left a restaurant with
a woman I barely knew because she
wanted me to read Olga Broumas "right now"*

*we left dinner on our plates
made love all night reading poems
to each other, over and over
"beginning with O, the O-mega"*

*what comes to us by way of shared conspiracies
and sexual secrecies, by word of mouth from our lover's lips
roots deeper than instinct and upbringing
proves more precious than gold*

*it is a grace we let in like light
from a transom of shared experience
that merges with longing
and overwhelms the surrounding darkness*

Susan Hagen

Writing Myself into Being

Once upon a time there was a young girl who had no sense of who she was. Each day as she prepared to leave her pink stucco house in the small country town populated mostly by relatives, her mother called out after her, "Remember who you are!"

Remember who I am? She pondered that question as she pedaled her hand-me-down bike along the cracked cement sidewalk toward school. What she thought it must mean was that she was part of a big, respectable family, her parents' daughter; that because they were good Lutherans and good Republicans and never rocked the boat or called attention to themselves, that's who she was, too. "Follow the straight and narrow," her mother admonished when it came time for the girl to choose between this road and that. "Carry a dime in your shoe in case you need to call home!" And, almost daily, "Make your mother proud."

She obediently did these things, but all the while, the girl lived outside her own story. She could not see her own image in the mirror when she looked, nor hear her own voice when it came out of her throat. She could see the skin on her arms and legs, but could not feel herself inside it. When she thought of herself, she thought of herself flat, like the black-and-white school portraits her parents pressed beneath brittle plastic sheets in their worn leather wallets.

It wasn't until she began to write the stories of her own life that she felt herself beginning to take on physical form and substance, felt capable of self-definition. At least that's how she later came to see it. "I literally wrote myself into being," she was fond of saying as she reflected back on that time. And by that she meant writing herself into something tangible on a clean sheet of paper that she could save and savor and read again and again when she began to feel herself diminish into something less than she'd glimpsed her own potential to be.

It all began when she was ten years old, when it was incumbent upon her to write her first story. It was something called "My 4-H Story," a requirement for completing her 4-H Member's Record Book, which she turned in at the end of summer. It came back in the mail several months later, after she had forgotten clean about it, with a gold sticker on the inside cover. She had won the highest honor in her age group for her 1965 Record Book, and it was all because, the judges wrote on their jury form, of her fabulous 4-H story.

When she'd sat down to write it, she hadn't known what a 4-H story was supposed to be. All she knew was that she had to write something, because she was required to complete every page of her 4-H Member's Record Book. She left the story for last and set to work filling out all the forms about her sewing project ("I learned how to match plaids and put in a lapped zipper and how to change presser foos on the machine") and her cooking project ("I learned the hard way that too much mixing and beating makes muffins tough and flat, but will not harm the flavor") and even the calf project, which she abandoned halfway through the year after tiring of weighing grain and writing down measurements, preferring instead to saddle up the yearling and ride him around in small circles in the parking lot of her dad's feed store.

The weekend before she sat down at the red Formica table in her mother's kitchen to formulate her 4-H story, the girl had been at Mickey Grove Zoo with her parents and younger brother and sister, her big cousin Vicky, and a couple of neighbor kids. After visiting the animal cages, they'd gone off and claimed a picnic table on the vast expanse of crispy dried grass that defined ball fields and picnic grounds at the height of summer in the valley. As they sat nibbling thuringer sandwiches and quartered oranges, there came the sound of crying – terrible, mournful, soulful sobs – from some distance away.

The girl looked across the hot, flat expanse and spotted a tiny child wandering shirtless and alone. His fists were in his mouth, and around them he screamed and cried out, lost from his mother.

Although she was only ten, the girl reacted at once, racing across the hard-packed earth to close the space between the frightened child and herself. There was a feeling in her at that moment, something new, some small light illuminating her heart, showing her who she was. She felt it in the drumming blood of her temples, with each breath she drew in and released as she watched herself from somewhere outside herself, racing across the dirt in slow motion – pink rubber thongs slapping the earth, yellow culottes billowing out around skinny brown legs, pixie haircut and a sprinkling of freckles across her sunburned cheeks – saw herself in physical form for the first time ever, driven, determined, in a full-out sprint to come to the aid of another.

But more, she saw herself on the inside; saw a heart swelled with compassion, fuelled by its intricate connection to community, to humanity, to all living things. She saw what made that heart tick; felt it ticking away in her chest as she ran toward that child and swallowed him into her arms, a sweaty little boy with a sodden diaper and hot tears mixed with elephant dust, held him against her and carried him, shushing him, petting him, to the snack bar where she bought him a grape snow cone with a quarter she'd earned dusting

shelves at her dad's store, coaxed his name from purple lips and asked the lady at the cash register to put it out over the loudspeaker so his mother could come and get him.

"This is who I am," she thought as she caught her breath, and immediately feared she might lose it, feared she might forget, feared that the feeling of self, the separateness, the "something different" from family lore might diminish as the minutes wore on, as she waited for the mother to come. "Remember who you are," she said to herself over and over again, in awe now of the feeling, full of herself it might even be said; yes, so completely and utterly full of herself that she even dared to think for a moment, and dangerously so, that maybe she was something other than a good Lutheran and a good Republican — or at least that she might begin to consider the notion that she could someday be something more.

And so began the process of how she would both create and save her own life by what she later described as "writing herself into being." As she set about writing her 4-H story the following weekend, this was the story she told: of that summer's day in the park, the mournful cries of the lost boy, the heart that opened up in her and told her to run, how she saw herself for the first time in the act of helping another, how she liked the person she saw. "I've never seen a 4-H story quite like this," wrote one of the judges on her Record Book. It was the first of many rescue stories that would come to define her life.



Contributors' Notes

Gloria E. Anzaldúa, (1942-2004) writer, editor, and cultural theorist, played a pivotal role in redefining U. S. feminism, cultural studies, Chicana/o issues, ethnic studies, queer theory, and postcolonial theory. She co-edited *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* and *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*. Her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* was selected as one of the 100 best books of the century by *Hungry Mind Review* and *Utne Reader*. She also wrote two bilingual picture books for young readers: *Friends from the Other Side/Amigos del otro lado* and *Prietita and the Ghost Woman/Prietita y la Llorona*.

Lynn Brown has always been a poet and lover of language, the creation of gardens, vision and touch with the intention towards friendship and healing.

Cathy Cade has been documenting the lesbian community since the early 1970s. In addition to photography, she now offers services to people to help tell their life stories. To see more about her work and services visit www.cathycade.com.

Hope Cavagnaro: I am a 25-year-old serving a 90 month sentence in Oregon. I'm an activist for growth of all sorts: end of discrimination due to race, gender, and sexual orientation.

Chrystos, writer and Native Rights activist, won the Audre Lorde International Poetry competition in 1994 and the Sappho Award of Distinction from the Astraea National Action Foundation in 1995. Her books are available from her at Chrystos, Box 4663, Rolling Bay, WA 98061.

Tee A. Corinne's artwork has been identified with *Sinister Wisdom* since her cover and poster for issue #3 in 1977. She is the author of one novel, three collections of short stories, and several poetry chapbooks. Her most recent book of art, *Intimacies: Photos by Tee A. Corinne*, published by Last Gasp of San Francisco, was a Lambda Literary Award finalist.

Martha Courtot (1941- 2000) was an activist and a prolific poet. A native of Cincinnati, she spent twenty years in Sonoma County, California. She once wrote, "I write to keep the ghosts in the corner happy."

Jan Couvillon: An auto accident put me on the permanently disabled list and in an odd twist of fate set me down in San Francisco, where I joined

Mothertongue Feminist Readers Theater. I have written many pieces for Mothertongue, an article for Lesbians in the Visual Arts Newsletter, and many articles for the Old Lesbians Organizing for Change Newsletter.

Eanlai Ni Chroinin is an Irish and Irish speaking lesbian feminist. Her work as a child advocate and educator in Ireland, her experience as a disabled lesbian living with chronic illness, her travels within the women's land movement in the United States and abroad, all inhabit her writing.

Alix Dobkin, raised in Philadelphia, was a guitar-teenager in the 1950's. Immediately after graduating from the Tyler School of Fine Arts, Alix headed north to NYC's world-famous Gaslight Cafe, and from that rich, heady, heart of Greenwich Village culture, launched her full-time, professional folk singing career in the early 60's. Focusing during the first decade on an international and contemporary/ protest repertoire, she came out as a Lesbian in 1972 and turned to writing and singing for women in general and to building Lesbian Culture in particular. Over the last 25 years, Alix has traveled to hundreds of women's communities in the USA and abroad.

Roxanna Fiamma: I was born in Denver in 1943, Italian American, grew up working class. I came out as a Lesbian in the late 60s and as a Separatist in the mid-70s. I am a retired P. E. teacher; I recently started producing women's tea dances. I live in northern California where I enjoy birds, trees, ritual, and my home with my former lover Fran Day.

Katherine V. Forrest is the author of twelve novels. Her work includes the lesbian classic, *Curious Wine*. Her eighth Kate Delafield mystery, *Hancock Park*, is forthcoming.

Francine, born in 1957, lives on land in France. She is a plant and cat lover. She has Multiple Chemical Sensitivities. Never het, she likes connecting with other Lesbian Separatists and Lesbian Feminists.

Carolyn Gage is a white lesbian-feminist playwright, author, touring performer, and activist. She currently resides in Portland, Maine, where she produces her own work through Cauldron and Labrys, a women's theatre company that affirms the experiences of working class women, lesbians, and women of color. Her catalog of work is online at www.carolyngage.com.

Dianna Grayer, M.F.T., is a marriage and family therapist with a practice in Petaluma, California. She co-writes a monthly column with her partner of

26 years for *We the People*, a local newspaper that serves the LGBTI community. She has published two books: *Journaling: Getting to Know Yourself* and *Freedom is Your Human Right: Accepting and Honoring Yourself*. Soon to be published are *Journaling: Transforming Your Self-Esteem* and a book for children. She also has written a screenplay and is currently working on a novel based on the screenplay.

Bethroot Gwynn has been living at Fly Away Home lesbian land for 27+ years, growing food, tending road/waterline/buildings, creating theater, ritual, and writing. She is part of the Southern Oregon Women's Writers' Group, and is a special editor for the *We'Moon Datebook*. Her poems and essays have been published in *Manzanita Quarterly*, *We'Moon*, *MoonSeed*, and *The Poetry of Sex*. She self-published the chapbook *Under the Heart-Stone: Poems from a Lesbian Love Spell*. Her most recent theater work is "Women: The Longest Revolution: A Performance Documentary."

Susan Hagen is a veteran firefighter, emergency medical technician, and co-author of the post 9/11 book, *Women at Ground Zero: Stories of Courage and Compassion* (www.womenatgroundzero.com). An award-winning non-fiction writer who's been writing stories about her life since she joined 4-H at the age of ten, she is also a motivational speaker and writing teacher who helps others give voice to their own life experiences.

Emily Irwin lives and works in Oakland, California. She spent the fall of 2002 living and studying in Kingston, Jamaica, where she volunteered at a non-profit organization, attended meetings of the Women's Group (a group of lesbian women), took classes, lived with families, built close friendships with other women from the United States, and wrote poetry intensely.

Sue Lenaerts: Long time partner and favorite photographer of Judith K. Witherow. Currently a computer consultant for a government contractor and publisher of *All Things Wild* by Judith K. Witherow through Twin Spirits Publishing.

Lee Lynch's newest novel is *Sweet Creek*. She has published twelve books, the most recent of which is *Rafferty Street* from new Victoria Publishers (www.newvictoria.com). Her web address is <http://leelynch6.tripod.com/>. She lives on the Pacific Northwest coast of the U.S.

Janny MacHarg, beloved political songwriter and activist, died November 4, 2003 at age 80. Since 1940. Janny performed for an array of

causes ranging from the civil rights, labor, and peace movements to rights for women, lesbians, gays, and elders. Published in *Broomstick*, *Durable Dauntless Dykes*, and *Long Time Passing*, she was a prolific writer. Her unpublished work will be available in the Archives of the GLBT Historical Society of Northern California.

Rose Marcario is a lesbian poet and essayist. Her work has appeared in *The Pacific Review*, *Eclipse*, *Karamu*, *Calyx*, *Yellow Silk*, and *Poets Against the War*. She has been active for twenty years in lesbian theatre, and has produced and acted in many acclaimed productions, including Judy Grahn's *Queen of Swords*. She lives and works in Los Angeles.

Mary Meriam was born in New Jersey in 1955. She studied 17th Century English poetry in school, and recently had her English roots stirred up by the English lesbian author, Liann Snow. Mary credits the LOVE Diet, and a new exercise program of vigorous stair-climbing, with getting her in touch with iambic pentameter. She thanks Barbara, Freda, Julia, Shareen, Julie, and of course, Liann, for making her feel like singing and being the midwives of this poem. Mary's poems have been published in *Bay Windows*, *Lodestar Quarterly*, and *Harrington Lesbian Fiction Quarterly* among others. She can be reached at mmeriam@ipa.net.

Cheryl J. Moore: I began writing poetry in 1980 after being hospitalized for anxiety and I believe poetry saved my life. My manuscript is called "Waterpaths" and I have written three lesbian short stories, the second of which was published in *Sinister Wisdom* #49. Other publications include *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives*, *Sojourner*, *The River*, and *Sensations Magazine*. I haven't written enough yet about my black and lesbian consciousness.

Marjorie Norris is an ardent writer who belongs to two writing groups: Women of the Crooked Circle and Spiral Sirens. She was "Just Buffalo Poet-in-Residence" in 1999, and has taught creative writing at State University of Buffalo's Women's Studies Department and Chautauqua Institute, as well as participating in Feminist Women's Writing Workshop in Ithaca, New York and Southern Lesbian Writers' Conference outside Atlanta. She has been published in *Arizona Mandala Quarterly* and other national publications.

Sudie Rakusin's love and concern for the Earth and Her creatures influences all of her choices and permeates her work. Rakusin's art has been widely reproduced in newspapers, magazines, and calendars and can be found in

such books as *The Once and Future Goddess* by Elinor Gadon, *Seasons of the Witch* by Patricia Monaghan, and *Wickedary, Outercourse, and Quintessence* by Mary Daly. She lives outside Hillsborough, North Carolina, on the edge of a meadow with her Great Danes, surrounded by her gardens and a forest. View her work at www.sudierakusin.com.

Ida VSW Red migrated from the Blue Ridge Mountains to the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia before coming out and moving to San Francisco in midlife. A 71-year-old retired University of California San Francisco librarian and editor, she wrote and performed for twenty years with Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective. Now she's collecting old lesbians' oral histories and looking for the rainbow.

Lilith Rogers is a longtime writer, gardener, and lover of women—especially the latter. She has recently published a CD-Rom, paper-free book of her poems and photographs (taken by herself and Sun Bell) called *Persimmons and Other Lesbian Erotica*. To order, contact her at Lilithrogers@juno.com. She is currently working on a one-woman show about Rachel Carson.

Amy Schutzer has published poems in many literary journals and small magazines across the country. She was the recipient of an Astraea Writers Award for Fiction in 1997. Her first novel, *Undertow*, was published by Calyx Books in 2000 and was both a Lambda and Violet Quill finalist. Her second novel is looking for a home while Amy is hard at work on her third, as well as poetry, always.

Jean Taylor is a radical lesbian feminist writer and political activist who lives in Melbourne, Australia.

Carla Trujillo is the editor of *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About*, which won a Lambda Literary Award for Best Lesbian Anthology and an Out/Write Vanguard Award for Best Pioneering Contribution. She is also the editor of *Chicana Theory*, as well as the author of several short stories and various articles on identity, sexuality, and higher education. Trujillo's most recent work is *What Night Brings*, a novel that won Miguel Mármol Prize in 2003.

Uncumber: I was born in Arkansas and lived in the South until I entered graduate school at the University of Chicago in 1952. In 1957 I moved to upstate New York and have been here until now, except for two brief periods in Africa 1954 – 1956 and again 1963 – 1965. I began writing fiction, mem-

oir, and poetry when coming out as a Lesbian in the early 1980's. Women's Writing Workshops with Irene Zahava in Ithaca, NY and the Feminist Women's Writing Workshop based in the Finger Lakes Region of New York State have been inspiring and helpful in the past few years. I am a retired teacher of sociology. I met my partner 20 years ago and we have been together since that time. I have had work published in a couple of anthologies and a long poem in *Crone Chronicles*. I have an additional name, Lucinda Sangree.

Valarie Massie Watersun became a published author at age eleven with a short poem in a children's magazine. This acceptance led to a lifetime devoted to the written word. Her stories and poems, which have appeared in dozens of magazines across the United States, have won numerous awards. An editor, teacher, and reviewer, Watersun's most recent work is a novel, *The Quality of Blue*, slated for release in summer 2004.

Michelle Wing: I am an urban dyke who has spent my adult years in Seattle, Osaka, Kyoto and San Francisco, following a random and varied path that has, if nothing else, given me plenty of writing material from publishing house to tattoo parlor, law office to yoga studio. The only common thread has been my love of language and images. Somehow I landed in a small town in Napa Valley, California two years ago, where I find myself working as a reporter, writing a weekly column, and penning poems on the side. But most important, actually making a living as a writer!

Judith K. Witherow is a poet, essayist and storyteller. A mixed blood Native American raised in rural Appalachian poverty, Judith moved to Maryland in 1964. It was too late to escape the ill effects of environmental poisoning and subsequent autoimmune disease caused by abuses of coal mining companies. Although the mountains stole the better part of her health they could not erase her love for all things beautiful in nature. Her writings include poetry and essays about disability, gender, sexual orientation, race, class and poverty. More information is available at www.jkwitherow.com.

zana: I'm 57, disabled, Jewish, a long-time landdyke. I was a founding member of the southern Oregon women writers' group, Gourmet Eating Society and Chorus, now 23 years old. After moving to Arizona in 1984, I helped start another group, Wildly Original Desert Lesbians (now defunct). My writing and art have appeared in many lesbian and feminist publications.

Books Received

About the books received list: Most of the comments about the books are from the back covers of the books, the publishers' press releases, or quotes from other reviewers. We are seeking Lesbians who are interested in writing reviews for the next issue.

Against the Current: Coming Out in the 40s by Beverly Hickok. Xlibris Corporation, 2003.

This heartfelt book, based on the author's experiences, is the story of how one young woman comes to acknowledge and accept her lesbianism and find a place for herself in the world. Available at www.Xlibris.com or 1-888-795-4274,

Arroyo: A Novel by Summer Wood. Chronicle Books, 2001.

When Willie Lee Woolston lands in the mining town of Los Fuegos, New Mexico, she's on the run from her past and seeking a simpler life. A burned-out blues singer, she is one of a large cast of characters in this haunting book. Her romance with Chavela Abeyta soon threatens to burn down the walls they each build to protect themselves.

The Elegant Gathering of White Snows by Kris Radish. Spinsters Ink Books, 2002.

I Followed Close Behind Her by Darlene O'Dell. Spinsters Ink Books, 2003.

This book is about incest, loyalty, friendship, Patsy Cline, the Great Smoky Mountains, and the backgrounds of women like Susan Smith (who drove her two children into a lake and left them to drown).

Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions by María Lugones. Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.

Puerto del Sol edited by Kathleene West and others. New Mexico State University Department of English, 2003.

A semi-annual journal, includes essays, fiction, poetry, and interviews.

We'Moon '04: Gaia Rhythms for Womyn Power. Mother Tongue Ink, 2003.

A beautiful astrological moon calendar, datebook and daily guide to natural rhythms for womyn. Wall calendars and notecards are also available. Catalog available toll free 1-877-693-6666 or www.wemoon.ws.

Announcements and Classified Ads _____

Seeking lesbians who want to come together in community, or on adjoining lands, in warm, dry climate. I'm a long-time landdyke, chemically sensitive, middle-aged, peaceful, quiet solitude is vital to me; also self-aware, responsible, respectful of others' needs and boundaries, communicate well, attempt to resolve conflicts with an open heart, and live as closely as possible in harmony with nature. If you have the energy to make such a community happen, write to me about yourself and your ideas.

zana, PMB 292, 11200 S. Sierrita Mtn. Rd, Tucson, AZ 85736

§

Chrystos' books are available from her at:

Chrystos, Box 4663, Rolling Bay, WA 98061

Firepower: \$15

In Her I Am (Lesbian Erotica): \$20

Red Rollercoaster: \$10

Postal money orders should be made out to Chrystos.

(Her book *Fugitive Colors*, winner of the Audre Lorde prize, is available from Cleveland State Poetry Center for \$10. Your bookstore can order it for you.)

§

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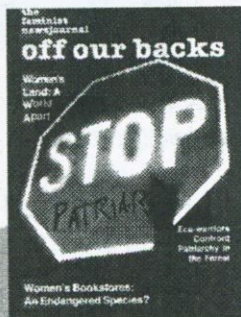
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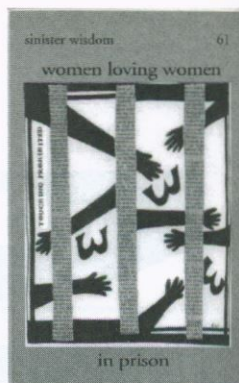
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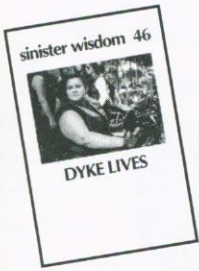
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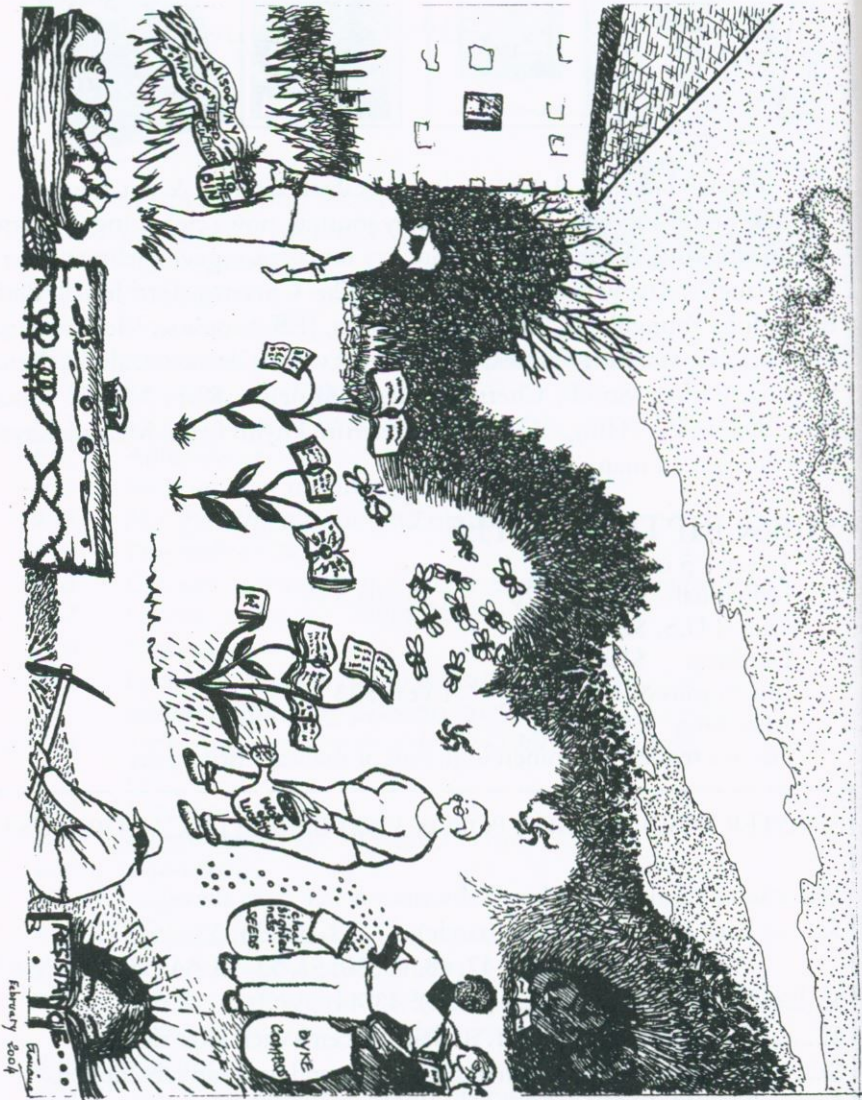
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Everything else should be sent to Sinister Wisdom, POB 3252, Berkeley, CA 94703. Check our website at www.sinisterwisdom.org.

Submission Guidelines:

Submissions may be in any style or form, or combination of forms. Maximum submission: five poems, two short stories or essays, or one longer piece of up to 3000 words. We prefer that you send your work by email in Word. If sent by mail, submissions must be mailed flat (not folded) with your name and address on each page. We prefer you type your work but short legible handwritten pieces will be considered; tapes accepted from print-impaired women. All work must be on white paper. A self-addressed stamped business-sized envelope must be enclosed. If you want acknowledgement of receipt, enclose a separate self-addressed stamped postcard. GRAPHIC ARTISTS should send B&W photos or drawings (duplicates) of their work. Let us know if we can keep artwork on file for future use. Include a short biographical sketch. Selection may take up to nine months.

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