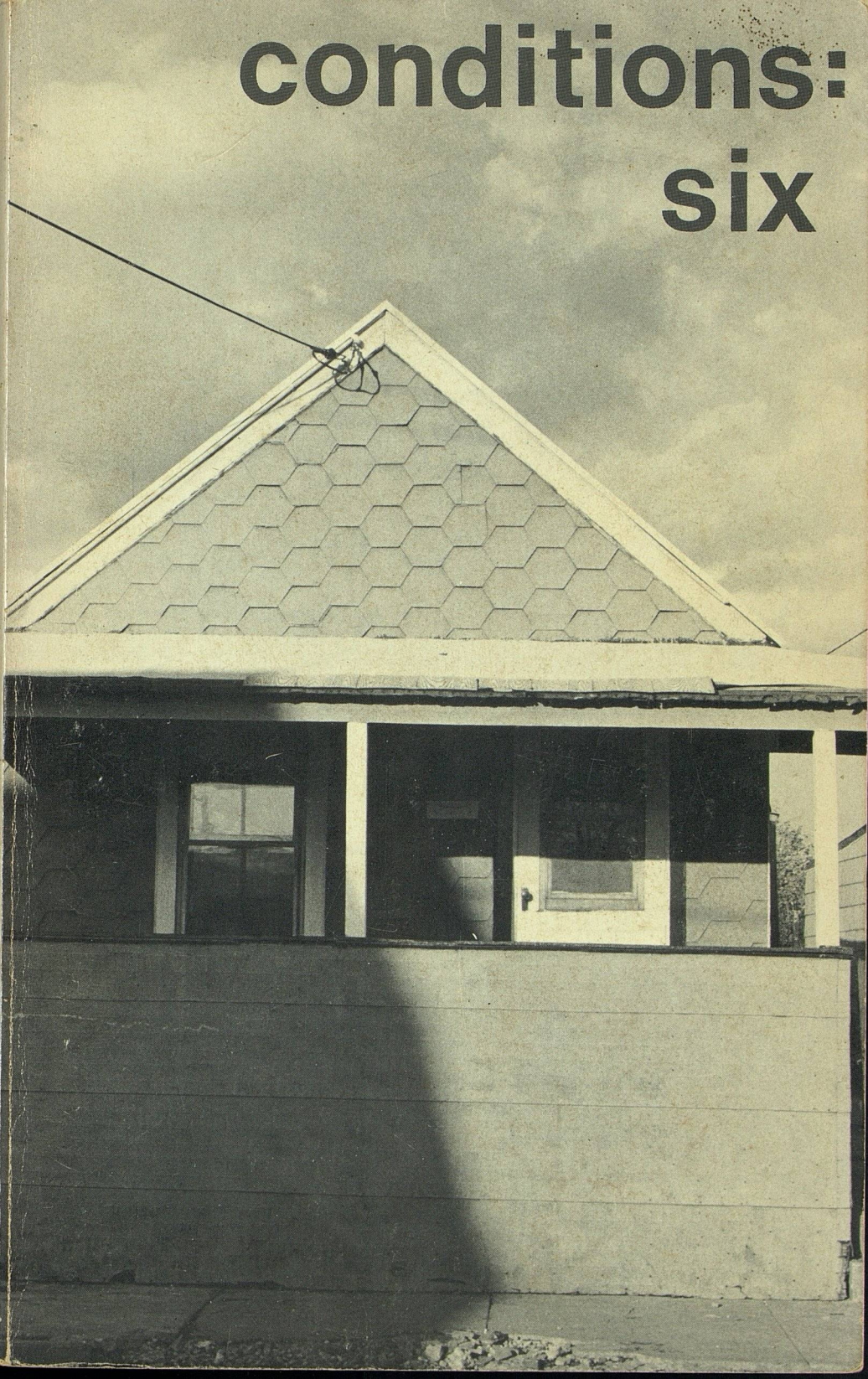
conditions: six



CONDITIONS: SIX

a magazine of writing by women

with an emphasis on writing by lesbians

Nancy

Subscription rates (three issues): $8 for individuals ($6 "hardship" rate) and $15 for institutions. Bookstore orders of 5 or more receive a 40% discount. Orders should be directed to *Conditions,* P.O. Box 56, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, New York 11215.

Conditions is free upon request to women in prisons and mental institutions.

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Conditions: Six was typeset by Gail Murray.
Distribution of _Conditions_ is coordinated by Shelley Messing.

Cover: Untitled photograph by Karyn Meyer.

Conditions *is edited by Elly Bulkin, Jan Clausen, Irena Klepfisz, and Rima Shore. We work collectively to select and edit material which will reflect women's perceptions of themselves, each other, the conditions of their lives, and of the world around them.*

This collective process is a difficult one. We have found that the four of us do not always agree or identify with viewpoints expressed by the women we publish, or with each other.

Because we do not proceed from a single conception of what Conditions *should be, we feel it is especially important to receive critical and personal reactions to the writing we publish.*

TO OUR READERS:

In keeping with our belief in the importance of ongoing communication between feminist editors and readers, we plan to inform you at regular intervals of *Conditions'* general progress and financial situation. Our last such statement appeared in *Conditions: Four.*

Our biggest news of the past year has been the overwhelming reception given *Conditions: Five–The Black Women's Issue,* guest-edited by Lorraine Bethel and Barbara Smith. Anticipating special interest in that issue, we printed 5,000 copies–twice our usual run. These sold out rapidly, and four months later we reprinted an additional 5,000. Enthusiastic reviews in *off our backs, Sojourner, Ms.,* and elsewhere have helped get the word out. The issue is already being used in a number of college courses.

Conditions: Five constitutes a unique anthology of writing by Black feminists, lesbian and not, and we expect that interest in it will continue long after *Conditions: Six* has become available. As a "small magazine," we lack access to a distribution network which could ensure that *Five* would reach anything approaching its potential audience, so we ask you to help make sure that women in your area hear about it.

When we last reported on our financial situation, we had recently received a $3,000 grant from the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines (CCLM). This grant, together with a grant of $2,022 from the New York State Council on the Arts, has enabled us to hold our own financially. (Bear in mind that "holding our own" assumes the donation, on the part of the editors, of many thousands of dollars' worth of labor annually–not to mention office and warehouse space in our overflowing apartments.) An additional grant of $2,700 from the National Endowment for the Arts, earmarked for projects to increase distribution and to provide nominal payment to contributors and editors, while welcome, did not help us meet operating costs.

To give you some idea of these costs, our cash disbursements for February 1979-February 1980 were $18,095. This included $10,555 in printing bills (printing *Five* alone cost $8,100); $821 for typesetting of one issue; $2,550 in promotion and distribution costs, including postage; $650 in authors' and editors' payments from NEA funds; and $3,519 in other expenses, among them repayment of loans taken out to start the magazine. Our income for the same period, including all grants mentioned, was $17,885. Our current bank balance will just

about cover printing, typesetting, and distribution costs for *Conditions: Six*.

Clearly, our ability thus far to meet the costs of putting out *Conditions* has been heavily contingent upon grant money. We have just been notified that we are to receive another CCLM grant of $2,700, which happily means that we need not face the immediate crisis of attempting to survive without such funds. However, we are well aware that no publication, certainly no publication with a lesbian-feminist emphasis, can take for granted the continued availability of such funding, particularly in a period of backlash and recession. In addition, we must expect to cope with continuously rising production and distribution costs, and diminished purchasing power on the part of our readers. All this means that we need to expand our audience—particularly that of our regular subscribers—if we are to reach a point where *Conditions* can truly be considered self-supporting.

A second serious problem we face is the strain of the unending volunteer work on which *Conditions'* existence is predicated. Except for $41.66 each from the NEA grant mentioned above, neither *Conditions: Five*'s guest editors nor the four ongoing editors have been paid for their work. One of us has just announced her need to take a partial leave of absence from editorial responsibilities for the next six months because of the demands of her paying job. Running a magazine in such circumstances has meant production delays, difficulties in responding as promptly and fully as we would like to the submissions we receive, and an inability to take full advantage of opportunities for increasing distribution. We are assessing ways to improve this situation; eventually, we will probably need to be able to pay ourselves or others to do at least some portion of this work.

Despite constraints, *Conditions* has continued to expand in length. We have retained our "hardship" subscription rate, and have provided copies for less to women who have told us they simply could not afford even this minimal rate. As always, *Conditions* is free to women in prisons and mental institutions. With this issue we are increasing our print run from the 2,500 copies for all issues before *Five* to 3,000. Of these, about 700 will go to individuals who currently subscribe, while another 85 will go to subscribing institutions. Most of the rest—those not given as payment to contributors, or mailed out free as review copies—will be sold on an individual basis, either by mail and at conferences and book fairs, or through the more than 80 stores which carry *Conditions*. (Bookstores

take 40% of the cover price, or $1.20 out of each $3.00 issue of *Conditions* we sell, while distributors, with whom we hope to work more in the future, generally take at least 50%.) In order to improve our financial position, we need to increase not only our total circulation but also the percentage of copies sold through subscriptions rather than bookstores.

We ask you to help us in any way you can, for instance: by subscribing if you have not already done so; by renewing your lapsed subscription promptly, and on a supporting-subscriber basis, if that is financially possible for you; by encouraging others to subscribe (particularly institutions with which you may be affiliated); by ordering copies for classroom use, if you are a teacher; by reviewing *Conditions* for local periodicals; by making sure it is available (back issues from *Three* on, too) in your local feminist, gay, radical, and small-press bookstores.

We appreciate very much the support so many of you have given, and we welcome any responses you may have to our work.

The Editors

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REVIEWS

CLASS

My mother likes to dress up. When pleased with an elegant new outfit, mine or hers, she exclaims, "Some class." Class, to my mother, is an aspiration. She doesn't see anything wrong with lifting herself out of the commonplace to a look that shows the taste (education) and the leisure to dress with care. She knows that my father liked her better and would have liked me better when/if we got ourselves up in such a way as to show we wanted to please him and others who looked on us, not sexually as women, but in a class sense as women who respected ourselves, our neighbors, and the man who earned a living for us.

He wanted to be proud. He worked hard (sloughed off only to the extent that was conventional, permitted, in fact required by his coworkers) for his wages and used them for his own comfort and ours, to enhance his own standing in the community, and ours. His sending me to college was the same kind of decision: the decision that rising in class was worth spending money on. He didn't expect, of course, that college would make me dress badly (jeans and shirts and long hair) even years after I graduated. Nor behave badly either (radical politics, peace marches, signing petitions and other intemperate behavior). He never imagined that lifting me out of his class would produce in me an allegiance to his class that *he* did not feel. He had swallowed the dream. But it's more than a dream because the books and the art that raise you from one class to another, to bourgeois life, are indeed capable of providing a better life—and also the means of critiquing that life.

Class aspiration never meant money to my mother nor to me. It did not mean household help, nor fur coats, nor holidays. It meant looking good (well-dressed, well-coiffed), like the minister's wife or Mrs. Lovejoy's daughter—the women who took pains with these things. I think that was what we admired most. People who did things with care and taste. Men who kept their cars shiny, women who kept their houses spotless, whose children showed that care had gone into their training. Men and women who raised flowers, mowed

lawns; women who set a pretty table and placed a crocheted doily on the back and armrests of the upholstered chairs.

My mother ironed my dresses to starchy crispness. My favorite teacher touched my pleated blouse and said, "Your mother must love you very much." Even now nothing pleases my mother like my fluffing her hair, pinning earrings to her soft old lobes, covering the wrinkled skin that hangs in folds about her neck and arms and thighs with fresh cloth and neat lapels. We tell her she looks like a college professor.

I AM WORKING ON MY CHARM

I am working on my charm.

The other day at a party a woman told me, "Southerners are *so* charming." She had a wine glass in one hand and a cherry tomato in the other, and she gestured with the tomato—a wide witty 'charmed' gesture I do not remember ever seeing in the South. She leaned in close to me. "We just have so much to learn from you—you know, gentility."

I had the most curious sensation of floating out of the top of my head. I seemed to look down on all the other people in that crowded room, all sipping their wine and half of them eating cherry tomatoes. I floated there, watched myself empty my third glass of wine, and heard my mother hiss in my left, my good ear, "Yankeeeeeees."

When I was young I worked counter with my mama back of a Moses Drugstore planted in the middle of a Highway 50 shopping mall. At that time I was trying to save money to go to college and ritually every night I'd pour my tips into a can in the back of my dresser. Sometimes my mama'd throw in a share of hers to encourage me, but mostly hers was spent even before we got home—at the Winn Dixie at the other end of the mall or the Maryland Fried Chicken right next to it.

Mama taught me the real skills of being a waitress—how to get an order right, get the drinks there first and the food as fast as possible so it would still be hot, and to do it all with an expression of relaxed good humor. "You don't have to smile," she said, "but it does help." "Of course," she had to add, "don't go around like a grinning fool. Just smile like you know what you're doing, and never *look* like you're in a hurry." I found it difficult to keep from looking like I was in a hurry, especially when I got out of breath from running from steam-table to counter. Worse, moving at the speed I did, I tended to sway a little and occasionally lose control of a plate.

"Never," my mama told me, "serve food someone has seen fall to the floor. It's not only bad manners, it'll get us all in trouble. Take it into the back, brush it off and return it to the steam-table." After a

while I decided I could just run to the back, count to ten, and take it back out to the customer with an apology. Since I was usually just dropping rolls, squares of cornbread and baked potatoes—the kind of stuff that would roll on a plate—I figured brushing it off was sufficient. But once, in a real rush to an impatient customer, I watched a 10 oz. T-bone slip right off the plate, flip in the air, and smack the rubber floor mat. The customers' mouths flew open and I saw my mama's eyes shoot fire. Hurriedly I picked it up by the bone and ran to the back with it. I was running water over it when mama came in the back room.

"All right," she snapped, "you are not to run, you are not to even walk fast. And," she added, "taking the meat out of my fingers and dropping it into the open waste can, "you are not, not ever to drop anything like that again." I watched smoky frost from the leaky cooler float up toward her blond curls, and I promised her tearfully that I wouldn't. I'm sure it was magic but I didn't.

The greater skill she taught me was less tangible. It had a lot to do with being as young as I was, as southern, and working by the highway that so many travelers came down. The lessons began when I was hired. Harriet was the manager and her first comment on hiring me was cryptic but to the point. "Well, sixteen," she said, "at least you'll up the ante." Mama's friend, Mabel, came over and squeezed my arm. "Don't get nervous, young one. We'll keep moving you around. We'll never leave you alone."

Mabel's voice was reassuring, if her words weren't, and I worked her station first. A family of four children, parents and a grandmother took her biggest table. She took their order with a wide smile but as she passed me going down to the ice drawer, her teeth were point on point. "Fifty cents," she snapped, and went on. Helping her clean the table thirty-five minutes later I watched her pick up the two quarters and repeat "50¢," this time in a mournfully conclusive tone.

It was a game all the waitresses played. There was a butter bowl on the back counter where the difference was kept, the difference between what you guessed and what you got. No one had to play but most of the women did, and the rules were simple. You had to make your guess at the tip *before* the order was taken. Some of the women would cheat a little, bringing the menus with the water glasses and saying, "I want ya'll to just look this over carefully. We're serving one fine lunch today." Two lines of conversation and most of them could walk away with a guess within 5¢.

However much the guess was off went into the bowl. If you said 50¢ and got 75¢, then 25¢ to the bowl. Even if you said 75¢ and got

50¢ you had to throw in that quarter, so that guessing high was as bad as guessing short. "We used to just count the short guesses," Mabel told me, "but this makes it more interesting."

Once Mabel was sure it would be a dollar and got nothing. She was so mad she counted out that dollar in nickels and pennies, and poured it into the bowl from a foot in the air. It made a very satisfying angry noise and when the people came back a few days later no one wanted to serve them. My mama stood back by the pharmacy sign smoking her Pall Mall and whispered in my direction, "Yankees." I was sure I knew just what she meant.

At the end of each week, the women playing split the butter bowl evenly.

My mama said I wasn't that good a waitress but I made up for it in eagerness. Mabel said I made up for it in "tail." "Those salesmen sure do like how you run back to that steam-table," she said with a laugh but she didn't say it where mama could hear. Mama said it was how I smiled.

"You got a heartbreaker's smile," she told me. "You make them think of when they were young."

Whatever it was, by the end of the first week I'd earned $4.00 more in tips than my mama. It was a little embarrassing. But then they turned over the butter bowl and divided it evenly between everyone but me. I stared and mama explained. "Another week and you can start adding to the pot. Then you'll get a share. For now just write down $2.00 on Mr. Aubrey's form."

"But I made a lot more than that," I told her.

"Honey, the tax people don't need to know that." Her voice was patient. "Then when you're in the pot, just report your share of the pot. That way we all report the same amount. They expect that."

"Yeah, they don't know nothing about initiative," Mabel added and she rolled her hips in illustration of her point. It made her heavy bosom move dramatically and I remembered times I'd seen her do that at the counter. It made me feel even more embarrassed and angry.

When we were alone I asked mama if she didn't think Mr. Aubrey knew that everyone's report on the tips were faked.

"He doesn't say what he knows," she replied, "and I don't imagine he's got a reason to care."

I dropped the subject and started the next week guessing on my tips.

Salesmen and truckers were always a high guess. Women who came with a group were low, while women alone were usually a fair

25¢ on a light lunch, if you were polite and brought them their coffee first. It was, after all, 1966 and a hamburger was 65¢. Tourists were more difficult. I learned that loud noisy kids meant a small tip, which seemed the highest injustice to me then. I've decided since that it was a kind of defensive arrogance that made them leave so little, as if they were saying, "Just because little Kevin gave you a headache and poured ketchup on the floor doesn't mean I owe you anything."

Early morning tourists who asked first for tomato juice, lemon, and coffee were a bonus. They were almost surely leaving the Jamaica Inn just up the road, which had a terrible restaurant but served the strongest drinks in the county. If you talked softly you never got less than a dollar, and sometimes for nothing more than juice, coffee and aspirin.

I picked it up. In three weeks I started to really catch on and started making sucker bets like the old man who ordered egg salad. Before I even carried the water glass over, I snapped out my counter rag, turned all the way around, and said, "Five." Then as I turned to the stove and the rack of menus, I mouthed, "Dollars."

My mama frowned while Mabel rolled her shoulders and said, "Ain't we growing up fast."

I just smiled my heartbreaker's smile and got the man his sandwich. When he left I snapped that five dollar bill loudly five times before I put it in my apron pocket. "MY mama didn't raise no fool," I told the other women who laughed and slapped my behind like they were glad to see me cutting up.

But mama took me with her on her break. I walked up toward the Winn Dixie where she could get her cigarettes cheaper than in the drugstore.

"How'd you know?" she asked.

"Cause that's what he always leaves," I told her.

"What do you mean *always*?"

"Every Thursday evening when I close up." I said it knowing she was going to be angry.

"He leaves you a five dollar bill every Thursday night!" Her voice sounded strange, not angry exactly but not at all pleased either.

"Always," I said and I added, "and he pretty much always has egg salad."

Mama stopped to light her last cigarette. Then she just stood there for a moment breathing deeply around the Pall Mall, and watching me while my face got redder and redder.

"You think you can get along without it," she asked finally.

"Why?" I asked her. "I don't think he's going to stop."

"Because," she said, dropping the cigarette and walking on, "you're not working any more Thursday nights."

On Sundays the counter didn't open until after church at one o'clock. But right at one, we started serving those big gravy lunches and went right on til four. People would come in prepared to sit and eat big—coffee, salad, country fried steak with potatoes and gravy or ham with red-eye gravy and carrots and peas. You'd also get a side of hog's head biscuits and a choice of three pies for dessert.

Tips were as choice as the pies, but Sunday had its trials. Always some tight-browed couple would come in at two o'clock and order breakfast—fried eggs and hash browns. When you told them we didn't serve breakfast on Sundays they'd get angry.

"Look girl," they might say, "just bring me some of that ham you're serving those people, only bring me eggs with it. You can do that." And their voices clearly added, "Even you."

It would make me mad as sin. "Sir, we don't cook on the grill on Sundays. We only have what's on that Sunday menu. When you make up your mind let me know."

"Tourists," I'd mutter to my mama.

"No, Yankees," she'd say and Mabel would nod.

Then she might go over with an offer of boiled eggs, that ham, and a biscuit. She'd talk real nice, drawling like she never did with me or friends, while she moved slower than you'd think a wide-awake person could. "Uh-huh," she'd say, and "Shore-nuf," and offer them honey for their biscuits or tell them how red-eye gravy is made, or talk about how sorry it is that we don't serve grits on Sunday morning. The couple would grin wide and start slowing their words, while the regulars would choke on their coffee. Mama never bet on the tip just put it all into the pot, and it was usually enough to provoke a round of applause after the couple was safely out the door.

Mama said nothing about it except the first time when she told me, "Yankees eat boiled eggs for breakfast," which may not sound like much now, but then had the force of a powerful insult. It was a fact that the only people we knew who ate boiled eggs in the morning were those stray tourists and people on the T.V. set who we therefore assumed had to be Yankees.

Yankees ate boiled eggs, laughed at grits but ate them in big helpings, and had plenty of money to leave outrageous tips but might leave nothing for no reason that I could figure out. It wasn't the accent that

marked Yankees. They talked "different," but all kinds of different. There seemed to be a great many varieties of them, not just northerners but westerners, Canadians, black people who talked oddly enough to show they were foreign, and occasionally strangers who didn't even speak English. All of them were Yankees, strangers, unpredictable people with an enraging attitude of superiority, who would say the rudest things as if it didn't matter.

Mabel plain hated them. Yankees didn't even look when she rolled her soft wide hips. "Son of a Bitch," she'd say when some fish-eyed, clipped-tongue stranger would look right through her and leave her less than 15¢. "He must think we get fat on the honey of his smile." Which was even funnier when you'd seen that the man hadn't smiled at all.

"But give me an inch of edge and I can handle them," she'd tell me. "Sweets, you just stretch that drawl. Talk like you're from Mississippi and they'll eat it up. For some reason Yankees have odd sentimental notions about Mississippi."

"And other things," my mama would throw in. "They think they can ask you personal questions just cause you served them a cup of coffee." Some trucker had once asked her where she got her hose with the black thread up the back and mama hadn't forgiven him yet.

But the thing everyone told me and told me again, was that you just couldn't trust yourself with them. Nobody bet on Yankee tips, they might leave anything. Once someone even left a subway token. Mama thought it a curiosity but not the equivalent of real money. Another one ordered one cup of coffee to go and twenty packs of sugar.

"They make 'road-liquor' out of it," Mabel said. "Just add an ounce of vodka and set it down by the engine exhaust for a month. It'll cook up to a bitter poison that'll knock you cross-eyed."

It sounded dangerous to me, but Mabel didn't think so. "Not that I would drink it," she'd say, "but I wouldn't fault a man who did."

They stole napkins, not one or two but a box full at a time. Before we switched to packets they'd come in, unfold two or three napkins, open them like diapers, and fill them up with sugar before they left. Then they might take the knife and spoon to go with it. Once I watched a man take out a stack of napkins I was sure he was going to walk off with. But instead he sat there for thirty minutes making notes on them, then balled them all up and threw them away when he left.

My mama was scandalized by that—"And right over there on the shelf is a notebook selling for 10¢. What's wrong with those people?"

"They're all living in the movies," Mabel said.

"Yeah, Bette Davis movies," I added.

"I don't know about the movies," threw in one of our regulars, "but they don't live in the real world with the rest of us."

"No," my mama said, "they don't."

I take a bite of cherry tomato and hear her again, "No."

The woman who was talking to me has gone off across the room to the buffet table. People are giving up nibbling and going on to more serious eating. One of the men I work with every day comes over with a full plate.

"Boy," he drawls around a big bite of cornbread, "I bet you sure can cook."

"Bet on it," I tell him with my Mississippi accent. I swallow the rest of the cherry tomato and give him my heartbreaker's smile.

THE SOUND OF ONE FORK

Through the window screen I can see an angle of grey roof
and the silence that spreads in the branches of the pecan tree
as the sun goes down. I am waiting for a lover. I am alone
in a solitude that vibrates like the cicada in hot midmorning,
that waits like the lobed sassafras leaf just before
its dark green turns into red, that waits
like the honey bee in the mouth of the purple lobelia.

While I wait, I can hear the random clink of one fork
against a plate. The woman next door is eating supper
alone. She is sixty, perhaps, and for many years
has eaten by herself the tomatoes, the corn
and okra that she grows in her backyard garden.
Her small metallic sound persists, as quiet almost
as the windless silence, persists like the steady
random click of a redbird cracking a few
more seeds before the sun gets too low.
She does not hurry, she does not linger.

Her younger neighbors think that she is lonely,
that only death keeps her company at meals.
But I know what sufficiency she may possess.
I know what can be gathered from year to year,
gathered from what is near to hand, as I do
elderberries that bend in damp thickets by the road,
gathered and preserved, jars and jars shining
in rows of claret red, made at times with help,
a friend or a lover, but consumed long after,
long after they are gone and I sit
alone at the kitchen table.

And when I sit in the last heat of Sunday
afternoons on the porch steps in the acid breath of the boxwoods,
I also know desolation and consider death as an end.
The week is over, the night that comes will not lift.
I am exhausted from making each day.
My family and children are in other states,
the women I love in other towns. I would rather be here
than with them in the old ways, but when all that's left
of the sunset is the red reflection underneath the clouds,
when I get up and come in to fix supper
in the darkened kitchen I am often lonely for them.

In the morning and the evening we are by ourselves,
the woman next door and I. Sometimes we are afraid
of the death in solitude and want someone
else to live our lives. Still we persist.
I open the drawer to get out the silverware.
She goes to her garden to pull weeds and pick
the crookneck squash that turns yellow with late summer.
I walk down to the pond in the morning to watch
and wait for the blue heron who comes at first light
to feed on minnows that swim through her shadow in the water.
She stays until the day grows so bright
that she cannot endure it and leaves with her hunger unsatisfied.
She bows her wings and slowly lifts into flight,
grey and slate blue against a paler sky.
I know she will come back. I see the light create
a russet curve of land on the farther bank
where the wild rice bends heavy and ripe
under the first blackbirds. I know
she will come back. I see the light curve
in the fall and rise of her wing.

THE ROCK COMES UP OUT OF THE GROUND

stone bounds both sides
of this old road, stone fences
run back between fields
the houses stand on stone
foundations set on bedrock
huge stone chimneys as end walls
the cellar floors are stone

the rock comes up out of the ground
pushed up in frost heaves
new stones every year
winds sweep the last dirt off
plows turn them over on the surface
suddenly, or hang up on large rocks
that must be dug and dragged out
set into the stone fence dividing fields

I dig rocks from the vegetable garden
to arrange among the flowers
pick up small stones by the creek bed
for my writing table, to consider
to turn over in my hands while I think

a house burns down
a worn out field is abandoned
and the stonework, overgrown
inside the canebrakes, falls
stone after stone unseen moss grows
on the fallen and the standing stones
debris and silt wash up around the canes
decaying, folding the rock back
into the ground

THE GARDENER IN AUTUMN

in the Indian summer
in the last warm days
the mellowed days of this year
having gathered dry brown leaves
around the strawberries and roses
makes no grand decisions

while the stray cat sleeps in leaves
where early crops are over,
while bright leaves blow from the trees
and still tomatoes redden
in this last warm sun, this garden
not yet quite entirely finished,
musing, she considers
through fine aging afternoons
how peas would prosper on the east
end with the chard, a good location for
the separated rhubarb plants, that the
chrysanthemums are late and could,
perhaps, use extra compost, next year

gathering the marigold pods gone to seed
in drying yellows, oranges and reds,
having done all that can be done,
the gardener waits for the garden's
resolution of itself one morning
in the first hard frost

ELLY BULKIN

AN OLD DYKE'S TALE: AN INTERVIEW WITH DORIS LUNDEN

Born in New Orleans in 1936, Doris Lunden came out into the French Quarter in 1953. She left New Orleans in 1957, lived briefly in Corpus Christi, and moved to New York City (where she still lives) in 1959. Since her recovery from alcoholism, she has been active in various lesbian organizations. Currently she is working with DONT (Dykes Opposed to Nuclear Technology). She is about to become a grandmother.

Cathy Cockrell assisted in editing this interview.

EB: I thought we could start with talking about your coming out and with your experiences of being a lesbian in the fifties.

DL: I started coming out when I was 13, when I fell in love with Gloria, the girl down the block. I wasn't really conscious that this was a taboo until my aunt began to react to my being so open about my feelings. It was just after that time that I heard the word "lesbian" and I went to the library to do the research that I think has been done by so many lesbians throughout history. From that time I realized that I should be quiet about my feelings. It was just after that that I found *The Well of Loneliness* at the drugstore bookracks—of course I went back to that bookrack, I haunted it, and I found other books, perhaps half a dozen. Before that time I had no inkling how many lesbians there might be. Then I did at least get the idea that there were probably some more in my city.

I was in reform school and I had a lover there. After I got out, my lover's father was in prison and when he got out of prison he used to be able to take her out on the last Sunday of the month and she'd want to come and see me. So he would take her to my house. He took us to a place called The Starlet Lounge once, which was a gay bar that I later came out into, which was in the French Quarter in New Orleans. I realize now that he knew that we were lovers and was saying it was

neat, which was really quite amazing. But then he went back to jail and that set-up ended and I went back to reform school eventually.

EB: What were you in for?

DL: The first time I was running away all the time and they kept threatening me with the House of the Good Shepherd every time they retrieved me. The House of the Good Shepherd was like a convent operated by Catholic nuns, but it was funded by the city as a reformatory for girls. It occupied a whole block in New Orleans and had a big wall around it; all the windows had shutters and it was used to scare every little girl in New Orleans into conformity. I think that one of the greatest things I ever did was that I finally accepted that I did not want to remain where I was and that I was eventually going to go to this place and I went and put myself in. I went up and I rang the bell and I said, "I don't have any place else to go," and they took me in. I hoped that it would force my father into finding someplace to live where I could live with him, and it did.

EB: Were you living with your aunt?

DL: No, I was living with a woman that I called my aunt who'd been a friend of my mother. I lived with an awful lot of people after my mother died when I was about 10. I lived primarily with my godmother, a woman who had also been a friend of my mother. Traditionally in French families godmothers really do take responsibility for the children if something happens to the mother. My godmother and I had an incredible struggle about power and control and independence and so on. So I would run away. And I used to run to my father when I was younger but he'd always bring me back, so I saw that I had to get by on my own. I guess two weeks was the most that I managed to avoid the cops. They'd find me. But once you've been in reform school it's very easy to go back. Next time I got into trouble I was sent back to reform school. We were stealing license plates from wrecked cars and selling them. It was a little racket. But because I had already been there, I just got sent back. It was in reform school that I first heard about the Goldenrod which was a lesbian bar; it was in a residential area out near the lakefront, in the suburbs.

EB: What year was that?

DL: Probably '52 or '53. I was about 16. (I was born in '36.) So I got up my courage and decided to go to this bar. It was just beautiful,

it was full of women and they were friendly and they invited me to sit at their tables, introduced themselves, introduced me around. Then I met a woman there that I liked. . . .

I guess it was a couple of weeks, it wasn't very long after and I was there with a girl I had been in reform school with. I was 16, she was 15. All of a sudden all the lights went on, the jukebox stopped, the police came in and said that it was a raid and everyone was under arrest. Poor Pat! She gave her real age and I never saw her again after that; I'm sure she was sent back to the House of the Good Shepherd. I didn't lie about my name; somehow I thought they'd know I was lying about my name so I gave them my real name and I gave them my real address, but I lied about my age—I said I was 18. They took us all to the precinct and booked us and put us in a cell. Then later that night or early in the morning the owner got us out on bond and they set the court date for the next night. Some women were saying that there'd been reporters outside and they were really scared.

The next morning I went down to the drugstore (the same one where I had found *The Well of Loneliness*) to get a cup of coffee and bought the newspaper and started looking for the police reports, where most arrests were reported in the paper. My father religiously read the police reports, so I knew he was going to find out about it if it was in the police report. It wasn't there and I was so relieved. Then I turned back to see what the news of the day was and the headline said, "64 Women, 1 Man Arrested." There were all kinds of remarks about what kind of bar it was, about the sign saying "no males allowed."

That night we had to go to court and I discovered then that they had raided every gay bar in New Orleans. It was like a big cleanup. I had never seen so many gay people in my whole life, I had no idea that there were so many gay people. It was really exciting! I almost forgot to be scared about whether I would be convicted or not. My case was dismissed, but I think that that set me free in some way.

EB: Were the other cases dismissed?

DL: I think they were. There may have been instances where people were found guilty of something; usually the charges were things like "wearing the clothes of the opposite sex" for drag queens and for butch lesbians, or "no honest, visible means of support." It was true, most of us didn't have any honest visible means of support. If you chose to dress in such a way that clearly identified you as gay, it was impossible

to get any kind of straight job, assuming you would want one. Most often all of those charges were dismissed when you came before a judge; I don't know why particularly, except that I believe the arresting was intended as a kind of harrassment—when it was intense enough it drove people away.

Some of us just didn't have any other place to go. We were just caught every time they happened to walk in when we were there. Whereas for other people, just being there in that bar was one of the riskiest things they'd ever done in their lives. If they even witnessed an arrest, even if they didn't get taken in, it was usually sufficient to scare them away for years to come. You see how this kind of stuff works to limit what kinds of risks people take. When I look back at that now, I am really amazed that people were persistent, I really wonder why I was unconscious that I was part of a resistance.

You can guess what happened to the lives of all those women as a result of that raid. Most of them were closeted, were from New Orleans, many of them living with their families and with jobs. I think they thought they were pretty safe there in that bar. It was probably shocking to them to get included in that sweep.

Back at home, I was just dismissing it by saying, well, I just went to see what kind of bar it was and it happened to be the night. My father didn't pursue it, but my brother, who was a year younger than I, was really freaked out by this. When I had gotten out of reform school he had this girlfriend whom he was really crazy about and could hardly wait to have me meet her. I did meet her and gradually she began to follow me around and to take my side in the arguments we had and stopped seeing him. What I discovered later was that everybody in the neighborhood was speculating that I was a lesbian and they literally did follow us around and peek in windows to see if we were kissing. I think he was angry about this kind of stuff when here I get arrested in this bar and it's real clear that I was a lesbian. He became hostile and we had a really bad fight in which I was hurt and that's when I left home.

I was hurt really bad and I called up this woman whom I had been seeing from the Goldenrod and told her what had happened and she said, "Take a cab and come over." I wound up living with her for a while. Actually I wound up living with her off and on for a year and a half.

But then I was free. The cat was out of the bag. I didn't have anybody that I had to worry about any more and I could go ahead and explore whatever it was I wanted to do. I didn't have any idea what I was going to do to make a living, I didn't even think about it. I had lived in a family or in a number of families where nobody was really in a profession. I guess my godfather, who was a merchant seaman, was the most in a profession of anyone that I knew. The only person that I knew who went to college was my mother—somebody famous from her hometown had put her through college. So I didn't have too many notions about what I was going to do. I always knew I wasn't going to get married, but I didn't have any plans about what I was going to do to take care of myself.

Then I began dressing up and wearing these clothes that were taboo before. I had already had short hair but now I really began to go at it and I got a crew cut and blue suede shoes like Elvis Presley was singing about.

But I had an economic problem—I was totally dependent on this woman whom I was involved with. She was living with her husband and her four children. She had her room and he had his room and she had to visit him once a week. But she was otherwise free to pursue her own interests as long as she took care of the house, and he would go to work and bring the money in. When I lived with her I lived there in her room in his house. That was very weird, considering the head I was coming from, the kind of role I imagined myself playing. Some time before the raid, I had read in *Sexology* magazine about Christine Jorgenson and sex change operations. I really started thinking that that's what it was—my *feelings* are natural so it must be my *body* that's wrong, and it's too bad they don't have an operation for me. I think at that time, before I found a community, I would have been very willing to have an operation in order to set things right. I had an awful lot of the kind of values that I thought I should have if I was a boy, that I would want to get married and support my wife and all that. That was really at odds with what was going on, which was that I was living with this woman in her husband's house. I didn't even dare say anything, I had no economic power.

We were going to all these bars and I was observing, I was learning—it was like school for me. I saw that a lot of butches had "old ladies" who were prostitutes. Some of them had several "old ladies" and that was called "sister-in-lawing"; they actually lived together,

two or three "old ladies" and a butch. That was *very* admired, that was a pimp par excellence. But I was coming from too square a place to relate to that at the time, so the only option for me was prostitution. I didn't even expect to get a job in a bar at that time, I wasn't even of age but nobody knew it.

So one night Virginia and I were at the bar and this guy propositioned me and I went with him. I'd never been in bed with a man in my life so I thought I'd find out. . . . God, it was really, really awful. But I got the $20 and I came back and I tried to buy a drink for Virginia and she wouldn't let me; a lot of people were upset because they knew I had never done anything like that before. And that was the end of it. Except that in a few months I realized that I was pregnant. Once I was pregnant I figured "I can't get any more pregnant" and I needed money so during that period, until I was too pregnant, I was a prostitute. I didn't do anything different—I didn't dress up or do anything like that—but there were plenty of people coming into those bars looking for sex and there were a lot of men who, I think, felt more like men if they could get a lesbian to go to bed with them.

EB: They thought they were going to change your life.

DL: It seemed really important to them that you said that you enjoyed it. So I just saw it as an acting job basically. Lila and I were buddies—she was a drag butch like I was. We used to do shows together and we thought this was hysterical because we were both stone butches so we would never have anything to do with each other sexually; but we would just put on these great shows that we'd make a lot of money for—and I can just remember laughing in her cunt while all these guys would think we were sexually excited.

Lila had been kicked out of college for being a lesbian. She came from a middle-class background. She, too, got pregnant. She went home to her family after the baby was born. Her parents were taking care of the baby and she came back and very shortly got pregnant again and then she went back and was finally going to get married.

Between living with Virginia and being on my own I spent the next 4 years in those bars. I went from being a prostitute to learning to be a pimp, although we didn't call them pimps. I had a lot of lovers who were strippers. Strippers make money not so much by dancing but by B-drinking. I did B-drinking too, looking to roll somebody if they were flashing a lot of money. After Linda was born, I was real

careful, I didn't want to get pregnant again. But I did a lot of other stuff like sex shows. A lot of people did.

When I came out in the bars of the French Quarter, I was coming from a place of being mad as hell that I was a girl, because clearly it was a boy's world. Later on I was falling in love with other girls and thinking of myself as a man trapped in a woman's body—I think I bought that kind of an idea for quite a long time. And when I did hit the bars, I had the right kind of build, I could pass as a boy and that was valued. It was considered really good that I had such small breasts, I didn't even have to wear a breastband. Women used to wrap their breasts, strap them down so that they wouldn't show. I didn't have to do that in order to pass. So that gave me more mobility, I could go outside into the "American Zone" (outside the French Quarter). If you were an obvious lesbian in an area where you weren't known or you didn't have friends, you could get the hell beaten out of you.

What I discovered when I hit the bars was very extreme butch and femme and that seemed to fit with my notion of having boys' feelings and so on. I was a no-touch butch. If you didn't pick a role—butch or femme—and stick with that, people thought you were mixed up and you didn't know who you were and you were laughed at and called "ki-ki"—a sort of queer of the gay world.

Butches were also vulnerable in that if you slept with a woman and let that woman touch you, she could turn around and brag about that to everybody and ridicule you publicly. This was called "flipping a butch." It was a really long time before I realized that there might have been another reason why I chose my role and that had to do with wanting to be in control. As the butch, I felt I was in control; if I wasn't letting anybody touch me sexually, I would be in control. The fear of being passive was something I never really had to confront until the women's movement. I *did* confront it from time to time because my emotions would sometimes be in conflict with what I thought was in my best interests. With a lover who wanted to make love to me too, I would feel excited, but I also felt that there were very good reasons why I shouldn't allow that to happen, because of how it might affect my privileges, how it might affect my standing in the community.

EB: Did you find that there was more flexibility when you were involved in more serious or long-term relationships?

DL: My feeling now is that most lesbians into roles cheated a whole lot more than I did. I really took all that more seriously than they did and I believe that part of the reason for that was that this other personal thing was going on—that I was really afraid of my feelings and afraid of not being in control. I never had to look at that as a personal problem to deal with until I got involved in the women's movement.

After I left home my brother found out that I hung out in The Starlet Lounge and he and his friends used to come and taunt us. There was nothing that could be done about that because that's what the bars were, that's where they made their money—with the tourists coming to look at the queers. We were only a small part of the population of the bar actually—we were the sideshow. No wonder we did all the drugs and stuff. I didn't acknowledge to myself that I was part of a sideshow and that I was on display, but that was exactly what it was.

The bars weren't integrated at all. I remember one time we went to an all-Black bar. Somebody knew somebody there. It was literally illegal for white people to go to an all-Black place, or vice versa.

EB: Was it a gay bar?

DL: It was a huge place where some gay people went, the Penguin Club.

EB: Did you have problems when you went?

DL: No, but it was a really amazing experience for me, because I grew up in New Orleans during segregation—I never went to school with any Black children. I lived in poor neighborhoods, so there were Black people in the neighborhoods. But it was as if there was some kind of invisible wall—we didn't even go to the same movie theater. That's part of how you would develop some kind of social contact between groups of people. We didn't drink out of the same water fountain, which created certain fantasies or larger-than-life feelings or ideas—I'm sure much the way that a lot of people feel about *Lesbians*—that *Black* people were completely different. I remember when I was little I was told that Black people had blue blood—and I believed it until I saw a Black man come staggering out of a bar having been stabbed in the abdomen and bleeding.

To go into this Penguin Club it was as if I were doing the *most taboo* thing to be there. They said that if the police come in to tell

them that you know the owner and that would make it OK if you were a personal friend of the owner. I don't know what the hell we'd have been charged with. I danced with this Black woman there and I remember feeling as if I were doing this really exciting, daring thing. The feeling, I think, both ways was a lot of curiosity and amusement—it was friendly, like we came from different planets and had an encounter somewhere. That's what it felt like.

Later, when I was about 4 months pregnant I went to Chicago for about a month and I was just amazed that the bars were integrated and there were Black bus drivers. It amazed me how this just happened and it didn't disrupt anything at all. I was coming from a city where the buses had a divider that said "for colored only" and whites could move the divider back and forth and all of the Black people had to sit in back of it. I had never thought to question that Black people had to sit in the back of the bus or that there were different drinking fountains. I was plenty curious about what the water tasted like in the "colored only" drinking fountain. But I never had any friends who were Black—not until New York, not until the early sixties. Eventually I was driven out of New Orleans by the police.

EB: How did they do that?

DL: The charges began to get more serious and they began to do things like break the door down and tear the whole apartment apart looking for drugs. And I was using some drugs and the chances were that sooner or later they would catch me—I wasn't any big drug dealer and I wasn't a junkie, but everybody fooled around with some drugs in that kind of situation at that time. They arrested my lover for prostitution and she was convicted and given a suspended sentence, probably because she was white and had no record. They picked her up at our house where she had brought a john. They offered to make a deal that if we'd pay them $250 they wouldn't show up at court to testify and we paid them and they showed up to testify. We knew that it was going to be really bad from there on out.

We had a chance to get out so we did. We were in Corpus Christi, Texas for a year and a half before coming to New York.

When I came to New York in the late fifties my brother had come out and he was living there with a drag queen who was working at a club on Second Avenue called the Ace of Clubs. Anyhow his lover got me a job working there—it was all female impersonators in the

New Orleans, 1956

Doris and Sunny, New Orleans, 1956

show and all lesbians wearing tuxedos or black suits and ties waiting tables. My lover Sunny stayed in Texas to find a home for the animals and then she came up. I didn't like that job at that Ace of Clubs.

I had a lot of attitudes after we got out of New Orleans about what I had been involved in and a lot of sense of shame about it. I kind of wanted to "go straight," morally speaking. That was fed into me by Sunny. It took me a long time to realize that she really thought that she was better than me—she had had a couple of years of college before she ran away, and her family had money and she'd lived in Hawaii for a while. I've had this experience a lot with middle-class lovers—I've had this sort of fatal attraction for girls from the other side of the tracks—I guess there's something fascinating about women whose lives have been different. And some pretty self-oppressive attitudes of thinking that they *were* made of finer stuff. I call this the "diamond in the rough" syndrome. Many of my lovers have seen me as a diamond in the rough and they were going to polish me up—and to some extent they have.

So Sunny met this gay man in a donut shop who was an aspiring dancer and through him we met some other people. They were all sort of intellectual; I was kind of attracted by all this but I wasn't well received by them. They loved Sunny, but they couldn't get past the way I dressed. I was dying to go to the opera and see *Carmen* and I thought I'd just wear my suit and go to the opera. But they just freaked! Someone loaned me a dress and I went to the opera and I began to accept that part of going straight. By this time I had a job in a factory and I had to wear a skirt to work. Nobody said I had to wear a skirt; in fact I think I probably looked weirder in a skirt because no matter how I dressed I would *not* give up my hair. I wore a lot of hair oil in my hair and it was a slicked back Tony Curtis type hairstyle. No matter how I modified my clothes, my hair stayed the same. Even when I thought I looked passable—everyone knows I'm a woman, they won't mistake me for a man—that was when I looked the most bizarre.

I was involved in a group that read plays. I was reading everything, I was consuming, I was soaking up culture, I was feeling excited by all this. I was in this group that read plays so I could get rid of my southern accent; I believed, and nobody disputed, that it sounded uneducated, ignorant. I made some efforts at modifying how I dressed to try to fit in with a group of people who I wanted some

kind of intellectual stimulation from. Their attitude toward me was always that I was very bright (diamond in the rough) and that nobody would ever be able to tell that I didn't have a couple of years of college. I felt *incredibly* inadequate about my ninth-grade education. They used to say if I was going to try to get a job that I should just lie and claim I'd had a couple of years of college. I couldn't do it; I felt the gaps, no matter how much I read and how much I knew, I could never be sure that there weren't these *big* gaps that were perfectly obvious.

About that time Sunny and I broke up and I began to get involved with Jeanie, who lived on the top floor and up til then had been straight. All of our friends were gay or knew lots of gay people, but were freaked out about *us*. She was also very reluctant to get involved with me because she didn't want to be a lesbian. In the midst of all this I got word about my daughter. I had given her up for adoption when she was a year old although I had a lot of guilt about it. There was an agreement that I would be able to see her and when she was older she would know that I was her mother. Instead they just disappeared after the papers were signed.

EB: You knew the people who adopted her?

DL: Yes, a guy who was the manager of one of the bars that I hung out in and his wife. In fact she took off with Linda and left him. This was some 3 years later. My godmother was calling to say that she was going to adopt my daughter, that the woman was no longer able to take care of her. By this time my life had changed enough that I felt I could take care of Linda. *Everybody* got involved. We got money together and I flew down there to get to her. There was this big scene and I got her. Nobody wanted to give her to me because I was a lesbian; I went down there pretending that I wasn't a lesbian anymore and was on the verge of getting married.

EB: So she had been legally adopted.

DL: Yes, she had. I never did get her back legally. But I got her up here and once I did I changed addresses and disappeared. She was 4½ then.

Jeanie and I moved in together and we became like this little family. I would never have made it without Jeanie. We were very isolated because none of our friends could accept that we were lovers; it made them all uncomfortable, perhaps because we were in such obvious roles.

EB: Did you know any other lesbians who had kids?

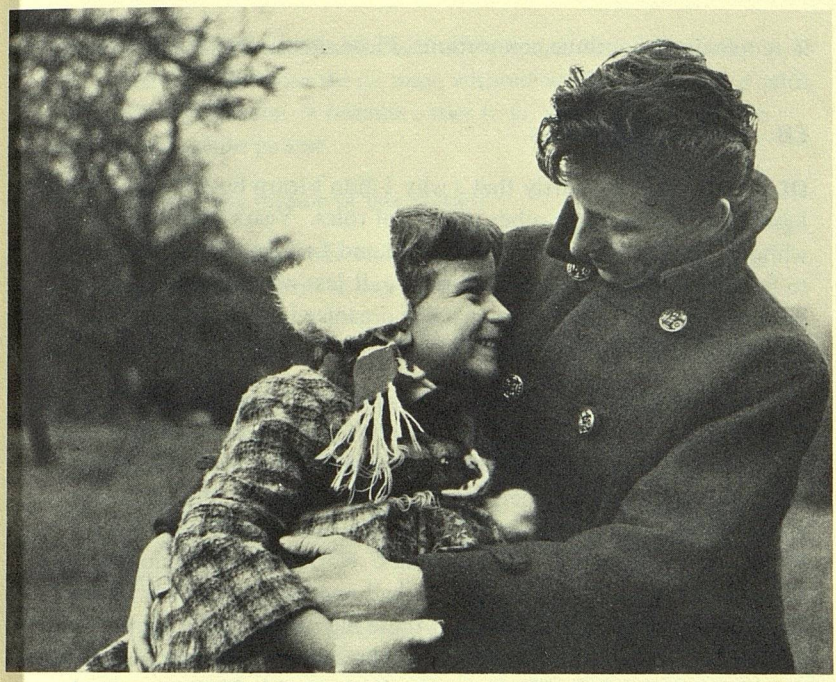
DL: No. I was very careful to keep Linda separated from my social life, so that we would only invite over trusted friends when Linda was at home. When we had a party, I would arrange for Linda to spend the night with my brother. If anybody ever made remarks about how she was really a cute kid, she'd make a nice little lesbian when she got older, I was just really upset. I guess I was pretty self-hating.

EB: Did she ask questions at all about it, when she got a little older?

DL: Not really, but she used to make remarks that would flip me out. I remember one night Jeanie and I were getting dressed to go out to a dance and she came over and said "Gee, mommy, you look so handsome"; and then she said to Jeanie something about how she "looked beautiful." I remember being amused on the one hand and a little unnerved on the other. I'd go to PTA meetings and make efforts to look as straight as possible. I always felt guilty because I didn't encourage her to bring friends home; but encouraging her to bring friends home meant such a trip for myself in order to play the role that I thought a mother was supposed to play. Because I didn't have any friends who had children, she didn't really have many kids to play with.

I guess I came out to her when she was 10 or 11. In fact, I just checked it out with her—we were talking about prejudice and I talked about prejudice against lesbians and I said, "You know, Aunt Jeanie and I were more than just friends." (By this time, Jeanie and I had split up.) She said, "Yeah, I knew that." She used to have this timing, of finding a way to quietly walk into the bedroom when we were necking or something like that. That was really difficult because I thought we shouldn't show any affection in front of her.

During that time we made friends with a Black woman named Norma Dee, who lived in our neighborhood. She and her daughter Snooky were involved with a Black lesbian social club. This club used to give these *big* dances up at the Hunts Point Ballroom, so we went up to one of those dances and we made a lot of friends. There were some interracial lesbian couples that we were friends with. I guess all the civil rights stuff was going on in the midst of this but I didn't know shit about any of that; I wasn't political. But that was the most satisfying social life I ever had. One thing I see that's happened in my life, probably because of the erratic kind of childhood I had, was that I had no skills in how to maintain friendships. I sort of bounce along and



Doris and Linda, New York, 1960

Cathy Cockrell

New York, Easter 1979

if people don't continue connections, I lose them. Jeanie played that role.

EB: Making the contacts.

DL: Right. I guess partly that's why I didn't learn how to do it too. I guess that's one of the other injuries of roles. Years later when the white lesbian community got organized and Lesbian Lifespace decided to have the "first ever" lesbian boatride, it just was a laugh to me because I had been on a lesbian boatride organized by Black lesbians *many* years before.

Norma Dee did parties too—it was how you paid the rent if you were short of money; she did sewing and that was sort of erratic. At a pay party you would pay 50¢ to get in, and there might be a coat check for a quarter, and then there'd be fried chicken dinners, salad, greens and all that for a dollar and then the drinks were 50¢. I was frequently the bartender at these affairs. Norma Dee and Snooky and Jeanie and I started a social club—we had one big event at our house but it never got off the ground. At these big dances, there weren't all lesbians that came—a lot of family members came. My impression was that the attitude of the Black community toward lesbians was not the hostile thing that I observe now. These were the only women I knew who were out to their families.

EB: And seemed accepted?

DL: Yeah. So the dances consisted of a certain percentage of men, some of them gay and some of them members of the family. There was a great variety of age—young teenage dykes all decked out in the finest threads and 50-year-old dykes who didn't come out too often but would come out for some big thing. Black lesbians had a whole network of things that would go on.

I continued to be friends with Norma Dee, but I don't know what happened to the rest of it—I lost contact. There might have been some other things going on that I wasn't thinking about too consciously, but I know that there was a young white lesbian from the bars who had been up to Harlem who got beaten up and stabbed. Also I played on a softball team called the Amerks that was mostly Black women, and we practiced on Randall's Island and then we used to come over to a bar on 125th St. to get beers after practice; they would not leave me there, they would want to wait until I was ready to leave and see that I got on

a train. They were concerned about my physical safety as a white person in Harlem. So those things may, without my being conscious of it, have had their effects. It became easier to go in places where there were mostly white people.

EB: This was the middle or late sixties?

DL: I'm sure that this was when the Black movement began to be militant. But I wasn't on to any of those things.

EB: The movement from a Civil Rights to a Black Power focus?

DL: That's probably what was going on. That just fascinates me—how our choices and what we do is not so clear to us, that we're pushed and channelled in this direction and that without knowing why. . . .

EB: . . . and looking back and seeing it in some clearer historical context. When did you start being aware that there was a women's movement?

DL: I didn't discover the women's movement until after I discovered the gay movement. I attended some of the Gay Liberation Front dances and I went to D.O.B. dances and meetings, although I was too drunk most of the time to understand the ideas being discussed. I marched in the second annual Gay Pride March in 1971, and was so drunk I could hardly stand up. I was in the last years of a twenty-year bout with alcoholism.

In early 1972, after a hospitalization and several months of sobriety, I went one Sunday to the GAA Firehouse. I had one or two friends in the Lesbian Liberation Committee of GAA who I had known pre-movement, so I had some sense that I was connected. When I got involved in the movement I was real afraid that I would be attacked by lesbian-feminists for my past role-playing. That was a hard time because I was going through a lot of that alone and in silence. My first thoughts about roles were to recognize that they were exploitative of other women and I should be ashamed of that—and I *was* properly ashamed of that. It was a lot longer before I realized the ways those roles had been oppressive to me. I did very slowly go through a whole process of change. Being around a community of women who felt really good about themselves showed me for the first time that there were all kinds of reasons why I would want to be a woman. These young amazons came along and said "We're powerful and strong, independent" and all the things I knew I had to be but didn't think I could be as a woman. To some

extent, some of the changes in the ways I behaved at first were conforming rather than actual change—conforming so as not to be rejected. One thing that's really amazing to me was to note how very little my clothing habits have changed over all these years and what an education it's been to see that the change has been other people's heads and the way they perceive me, because *I* have not changed that much but *they* have changed incredibly and I feel that about lesbian-feminists as well as everybody else.

I wonder about the changes, as much as they *seem* so profound, I wonder whether they are. I come in contact with a lot of young lesbian-feminists who are college students or college graduates. But if you go where you find women who don't relate to the movement, things aren't all that different than they used to be. That makes sense. If roleplaying, heterosexual roleplaying, is taught through propaganda and especially through the family, then the way your family plays its role can have a lot of effect on how you see yourself, how you behave in your relationships. In my instance, if I had two people to choose to identify with and I wanted to be a survivor, then I would have chosen my father—to survive. I think I must have done that and I'll spend the rest of my life finding all of that and doing something about it where it's not in my interests, or where it's exploitative of somebody else.

EB: To deal with the remnants of that socialization?

DL: Where is the young lesbian supposed to get her notions about what it can be to be a lesbian if she doesn't go to college? And I even worry about the notions that they're getting in college about what it is to be a lesbian. That brings up the whole issue of the feminist closet. It's quite possible these days for mainly middle-class lesbians to have lots of contact with other lesbians, to have a whole social life that's very public and even a political life that's also very public without ever declaring their lesbianism.

EB: You don't see that as possible for working-class lesbians?

DL: I suppose it happens for some working-class lesbians, but I just don't think that the ideas that are generated by the women's movement are getting past the universities. There was a young woman named Sandra who lived here a while ago and she met a young woman who works in a lesbian bar—a Jamaican woman from a fairly poor family, about 18. And Sandra is a young Black woman about 20 from an

Ivy League college. There was conflict between the two of them, much of it coming out of confusion about what it means to be a lesbian and roles. It's not that Tina isn't smart as a whip because she is—it's just that she's never had any contact with the ideas that Sandra is walking around with without even being conscious of it.

The Gay Pride Marches and going to Washington get reported in the newspapers and the young lesbian maybe feels a little more inclined to go to a bar and not feel the same kind of anxiety and fear. But I'm not so sure that that wasn't the case at other times too. What I'm getting from this history now is that it wasn't in a direct line that things were terrible and they've been gradually improving til the present time. I recently bought a postcard of a transvestite getting out of a police van in 1941—it's just really wonderful, he just has this *big* smile and his drag is not an anti-woman kind of drag; I don't think that that's what he was doing. It was a defiance, an insistence that he was going to be himself and find out who he is by trying out all this stuff. They arrested him, but whatever gave him the courage to do it, the inspiration to do it? Other people were doing it and some of them were getting away with it. Yet I know there were more recent times when that wasn't possible. I think there is this on-again-off-again repression. I have a lot of anxiety that that's going to happen, that we may be in the midst of it right now.

EB: That the repression will increase?

DL: Yes. We don't know our history. I know about the fifties, yet the forties are a total mystery to me. There are women alive who lived in the forties and the thirties and even the twenties who may be right in our midst and we don't find out because we're not valuing this experience enough.*

EB: What kind of feedback have you gotten when you've talked to women who came out after they had become feminists?

DL: Varied. We did a couple of nights of Old Dykes' Tales. I wasn't quite satisfied with how that went—I think it was too big a crowd. But

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*See recent interviews with Mabel Hampton in *Feminary*, Vol. X, No. 2 (1979), 7-16 and *Sinister Wisdom*, Vol. 10 (Summer 1979), pp. 19-24; Judith Schwarz' forthcoming *Close Friends and Devoted Companions: A History of Lesbian Relationships in America* and the Selected Bibliography in Lisa Duggan's "Lesbianism and American History: A Brief Source Review" in *Frontiers*, Vol. IV, No. 3 (Fall 1979), 80-85. E.B.

I feel real attracted to the oral tradition of telling stories, there's something very powerful about that. It's taken me a long time to realize that I had some talent that way and that telling a good story is a valuable thing. We were not taught to value it. I remember in my childhood wanting to know anything about the past and my family, and I remember my daughter's interest, too. I feel it's a really important thing, that this whole emphasis on literacy and education—the idea that wisdom is someplace *outside* of our community, in the hands of white, middle-class people—is dangerous. Telling stories about our experiences is our way of demonstrating that wisdom is *in* our community. So I've done these Old Dykes' Tales in that kind of a spirit—I have a fantasy that this is going to happen everywhere.

EB: What kind of a response to your talking about your own experiences have you found from women who in some cases are chronologically younger but came out after the movement, and in other cases are older than you but might have just come out a couple of years ago?

DL: There are some young women who just relate to this stuff right away—there is something about the adventure, the adventures of being a dyke in the fifties—amazon tales—that young women are just really turned on by. Clearly it strikes some fantasy in them about living in a time that seemed riskier or doing things that even now most of them won't get to do.

One thing that bothers me a lot is how women will listen to those experiences and then say, "Gee, you really went through a lot! I could never have done all of that and I'm real glad things are like they are today because I would never have been able to deal with all that." It's like somehow we're not making the jump to the realization that it's just another side of the coin.

I did meet a woman who knew that and that was just such an exciting conversation. She's in her late forties or early fifties and she's only come out recently in the last few years. We just got to talking and she wanted to know where I was coming from and I started telling her and she was saying, "Wow, that's amazing! I got married and I was a suburban housewife and I played babydoll and I played dumb" and so on. And she just *knew* that it was just the other side of the coin. Maybe it has something to do with having enough experience to look at things that way. But that's one of the reasons why I'm finding it hard to share these Old Dykes' Tales, because of people mistaking it for something else, not being able to use it.

A MOTHER THAT LOVES YOU

What's your name?

Deborah.

Deborah What?

Osgoode. Wit a "E." She sucked her teeth as best she could with her jaw resting in the palm of her hand.

Where d'ya live?

Queens.

Your address girl, look, don't gimme gas here, alright?!

The pudgy man reached into his vest pocket and pulled out a pack of cigarettes. Put the whole pack to his mouth and plucked one out with his teeth. Lit it.

Mista,

Wha? he squinted at her through smoke.

Can I git one of those?

Hell no!!

I'm old enough to smoke, I'm 14. Her voice dropped a bit— Shoot, I even know how to inhale.

You don't seem ta git the full gist of the situation here missy, I am not here to support your nicotine habit, I am here to protect Mr. Macy's property. You are a thief, a sneaking thief and you are going to jail. You will go straight to the Rock, you will not pass "Go" and you will not git two hundred bucks or a goddam stogey! He loved this part. Over the years he had worked this speech out til it was tight as the pink skin on his gut. They always got real quiet after he mentioned jail, this skinny black girl was no different. Runny nose. This one might go out and steal again but she sure wouldn't come back here, smartass. They made him sick these well dressed blacks from Queens. Always swiping quality stuff and crying the blues about how tough they had it. If they had it so bad why didn't they steal canned foods from the A&P insteada coming downtown to steal leather coats and silk shirts? Some goddamn nerve in her little pleated skirt and her knee socks, even had on a birth-stone ring. Hell, he didn't get a birthstone ring til he started working and bought one for himself. . . She straightened up in her chair and

nervously twisted a thin braid with a finger as she gave him the information about her background. He gave her his authority.

Mista, I swear, this is my first time stealing. I was just trying the coat on then the next thing I know– maybe I'm crazy, a klep–

Hold it! Hold it right there. If you say kleptomaniac I swear I'll reach across this desk and snatch your kinky head off! Tears began to shimmer in the dark eyes.

Whataya think we got here, welfare or somethin', think you can just stroll outta here with a leather coat like Princess Caroline? Huh? Don't you think us decent working people would like leather coats too? You don't see us stealing. I'm sorry kiddo, you people gotta learn that the world don't owe you guys nothin'. The girl shrank into a knot. Sniff. Sniff.

So whataya got ta say now kiddo? Silence. Scared shitless no doubt. Some cold she has, all that sniffin'. He looked at his digital watch, 4:15. He'd hold her just long enough to teach her not to fool around with Macy's, then he'd send her home. He was hungry. A solitary tear dropped directly from her eye to the tip of her shirt. She was obviously not lying about her age– with little boobs like those she couldn't be a day over 14. She buried her small head with its myriad of braids in the crook of a thin arm and wept. Her bony shoulders heaved. He grinned to himself. The thought of going to jail at 14 must be a bitch, 'specially when you're used to having dessert every night and allowance every Saturday. This was no guttersnipe he had before him, he could tell by the way she was dressed, the way she talked and carried herself. He tossed her a box of tissues. She wiped her nose and her eyes. In that order. Damn.

Look kid, it's getting late– he checked his watch again, 4:45. If I call the precinct now I'll be stuck with paperwork til midnight, not to mention court appearances. You look like a decent kid so I'm gonna trust you this time and let you go, but I swear, if I ever see your shiny face in here again I will personally kick your butt and drag you to court– got that? She nodded her head. Eyes wide and solemn.

I mean, somewhere you have a mother that loves you, it shows. You got no business getting yourself into a jam like this. He pulled some mimeographed sheets from his drawer and slid them over to her. Fill out these release sheets while I go get the camera. I gotta get your mug for our little collection– he indicated a tattered row of color snapshots of shoplifters and pickpockets on the wall above the girl's head. She swiveled around and looked up at them. Noticed they were mostly women, mostly Black, said nothing. She stared at one of the

women whose thick nappy hair was matted to her head. She had been wearing a wig before the picture was taken, the girl could see the mark its band made on the woman's forehead. She could imagine this white man staring at the woman from across the room– 'sat a wig? Yeah. Well, take it off. Jesus H. Christ! How do you people ever comb that stuff? The woman's face was bloated. The mouth turned down at the corners junkie style. The eyes were large and pretty, but empty. Like someone had turned her upside down and shook all the dreams out.

The man watched the girl as she stared at the photograph of the woman. He wondered what she was thinking, felt he had to say something profound, something she could take back to Queens with her to keep her out of trouble:

See her? Ugly right? Well, that's what you're gonna look like if you don't watch it kiddo, you'll be a shame to your race. You're lucky you got a decent home and good folks so don't fuck around. He left the room with an air of controlled divinity.

Outside his office a young woman sat at a desk near the cooler with a small radio at her elbow turned down low. The news was on. She was painting her long curved nails a putrid pink. Yolanda, I got a girl coming out soon as she finishes off some release forms. He pulled open the metal door on the cabinet and grabbed the camera and a film cartridge. When she's all finished send her home and lock up for me, okay hon? He returned to his office, slapping the cartridge into the camera. Yolanda looked up from her nails and rolled her huge eyes at his back. Hon indeed.

When he entered the office the girl threw her arms around his waist and sobbed into his chest. Thanks mista, I won't do it again, I swear. Sniff. Aw kid, you don't have to do that said the man. He unwrapped her arms so he could take her picture and go eat. As he fanned the print dry he told her to finish the remaining papers outside with the secretary. He pinned the snapshot to the bulletin board with the others (damn, she was so dark), then he closed his office door, locked it, winked at the young girl who sat across the room from Yolanda, dropped his keys on the latter's desk on his way out and disappeared for the day. Yolanda rolled her eyes goodnight at the door he had walked through, turned up the volume on the radio and continued to blow on her nails. From the radio a trumpet whined and a young man crooned Cuba, you know I love you, Salsa. . .

Miss, I'm finished.

So, go home. Puff. Puff.

But my coat is locked up in the office.

Yolanda rolled her eyes and tossed the keys in the girl's general direction, using the very tips of two fingers. The keys clattered rudely to the floor. The girl retrieved them and disappeared into the office she'd been detained in. She emerged shortly with her hooded grey coat folded neatly over her arm and locked the door behind her. She tossed the keys to Yolanda even though she had to pass her desk in order to get outside. She nearly tipped over the fingernail polish. Eyes.

Turn right after you get outside and use the employees' door.

Thanks. Miss.

More eyes.

Bones took the subway steps two at a time. When she reached the bottom she put on her grey coat and neatly folded the black leather one inside out, pausing for a moment to get a whiff of its newness. She ripped through a large black alligator wallet, got the money and discarded the Macy's security shield in a pile of trash as rush hour footsteps descended the stairs behind her. Her nose was runnin' bad. Gotta git home. . . As the No. 2 train rocked her away from 34th Street, she fingered the cool band of the man's Longine in her pocket. She was glad the day hadn't been a complete loss but she had hoped to go home with more. She fumbled around in her pockets looking for a tissue. She yawned, her eyes filled with tears involuntarily.

At 116th Street Bones ran up the stairs and crossed Lenox Avenue. The leather coat flapped at her side. A young man dressed in white on white leaned against the front of the barbershop with a hand resting absently on his crotch.

Hey Smack, if that thang's still down there you must be alive! The young man started, then laughed, easing the guilty hand into a pocket.

Where you going in them knee-socks skinny as yo legs is?

You know how it is man, I'm comin' from work.

As she continued up the street a familiar voice called out to her from Jack Daniel's bar:

Boney Baby, what chu got good?

A man's 'Gine ana woman's leather– size twelve.

Coat too small for Emma.

Serious watch Moses, gold digital.

Moses pulled up his sleeve to reveal two watches. He laughed–

Sorry youngblood, catch me next time, I need me a camera. Say hi to your mama for me.

Bones didn't answer him, she was in a hurry. Imagine a fool like that, wearin' two watches. Sho can tell a country boy that never had nothin'. . .

Two men and a woman were just leaving her building as she approached. They moved as one, leaning slightly forward. They looked first one way then the other. Coast was clear. When Bones said hey y'all they mumbled hey in unison, then scuttled on down the street.

Bones held her breath against the pissy cloud that lived in the hallway. When she got to the third floor where she lived she had to tilt her head back while fumbling around to open the door. Snot ran into her mouth anyway. Salty.

Is tha' my baby? Her mother's cracked voice reached her from the kitchen. It was cold and Bones could hear the oven going. She thought of how she had claimed to live in Queens. She shook her head. It hadn't been her first bust so she knew well that any Black girl that got caught boostin' from Macy's who gave an address like 240 W. 116th Street wasn't going nowhere but to jail. It made no difference to Bones where she lived, if she could only have some heat sometimes. . .

Bonita, is tha' you?

Yeah ma, I got something for you. Bones kicked off her shoes and walked into the kitchen. The naked lightbulb in the ceiling cast bold shadows on the bright yellow walls of the room. Gotta wash those dishes she thought as she stood across the table and looked down at her mother. Francis sat at the table nodding. It was a good nod too, a real chin-dropper. A huge jigsaw puzzle lay scattered on the table, she'd been working on it for months. As she nodded with one bloated hand suspended in mid-air a tiny piece seemed lost between two fingers. Bones checked the room for the stuff.

Ma, I'm sick. She sniffed extra loud to punctuate the statement. No answer. The woman continued on her silent journey with her chin on her chest and her bottom lip hanging. Bones circled the table and gently touched her arm. Ma? Always there was the fear that one day she would get no response, Francis would O.D. or run across some bad stuff, or maybe some dopefiend would come to buy stuff and decide to kill her and rob them— Francis had already been robbed twice. Once they beat her up bad. She kissed her mother on the shoulder and said into her ear:

Mommy, I'm sick. I got cramps. Sniff. The woman's head jerked up, the eyes barely opened.

Okay baby, mama got, mama got— She slipped off the curly wig and fumbled around in it before producing three small glassine

bags of heroin. She pulled out another—an afterthought—but drifted off into another nod before she could hand them to Bones.

I got busted at Macy's today, but look what I got. I got us some pictures ma. She snatched the stuff from her mother's hand and replaced it with the two snapshots, her own and her mother's. Francis opened her eyes and looked at the pictures of herself, sadly stroking her own matted hair and muttering something about getting a haircut. Bones placed the stolen watch on the table gently, solemnly. She folded the leather coat neatly over the back of a chair before removing her own. Francis smiled at her last surviving child. She was much smarter than all the other kids on the block and pretty to boot, all smooth black skin and pointy corners there in the snapshot. Looked much younger than sixteen, or was she seventeen?

Comon to mama, lemme hug you. You's a real hustler, won't have my baby bustin' huh ass from nine ta five or whorin' for no man. You can make money on your own, a real hustler. . . Bones could feel the cold floor through her skirt as she knelt there hugging her mother. She felt Francis grow heavy and knew she'd be out for a while so she gently loosened her grip.

As she emptied the dope into the Skippy top they always cooked up their stuff with, her stomach began to growl and her mouth filled with bitter-tasting saliva. Her hands shook as she filled the syringe. The oven hissed in its corner. She took the old brown leather belt from its hook by the refrigerator and sat down on the floor near her mother. She tied up and held the belt tight with her teeth.

There on the floor that no longer felt cold Bones got off. She leaned back and rested her small head against Francis' legs. As she sank into the warmth of her own blood she saw once more her mother's face looking at her with empty eyes from the bulletin board at Macy's. Tears burned their way up the back of her throat and teetered on the brink of her eyes. Unlike the tears she had learned to shed to keep security guards feeling secure, these tears had substance, had been hidden rivers that barely rippled. These tears did not fall easily. The stuff was good, reeeal good, but she could not stop herself from thinking. Each thought a pebble falling from the top of her mind down through silence through darkness into chilled waters. Kerplunk, plunk ripples widening, widening into circles of pain. Tears. Salty. Hot.

Despair is a pale-eyed white man with icy fingers. He gripped the girl's heart and squeeeeeezed it. Bone dry.

Hey Bones! Somewhere you have a mother that loves you/you live in Queens/you are warm Black&beautiful/pass go collect two hundred

dollars/your mother is a shameshameshame to her race? Somewhere your mother has/you have a mother that loves you. . . . . Mommy? Yes precious? What chu doin? I'm tryin' to ease the pain baby, jus' tryin' to ease the pain. . . . Somewhere you have—

Many women in the life had left their children behind. Francis had brought her along. Wasn't that love? Wasn't it? The radiator pipes began to thump. They answered the nodding girl with the promise of heat.

BLOOD

for Kate

You mix flesh, your first time with his paintbox:
raw sienna, white, indian red.
His knife spreads grease rainbows on the palette.
What will you do, now that your father's dead—

you of my poems, whose eyes swallow me
whole, like the dark that drank Persephone—
you spread the paint with delicate bloody strokes
on a large redlipped woman you say is me.

You ripened in my blood like a red fruit
until you split the air with your separate breath.
Then I could not protect you from the fathers;
nor can I bear for you now this father's death.

We paint each other large: daughter, mother,
images delivered of each other's dark.
I've drunk the light of your hair. You've swallowed hell
and can survive the ways it wants you back.

JANA HARRIS

LADY IN A HUNDRED DOLLAR CAR ONE NIGHT ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD

So I says to this guy,
Arny, show me where to put
the transmission fluid in,
and he wants to know if
my husband bought me
the old Chevy cause
I kept strippin the gears
and burnin out the clutch.
I ain't got no husband,
I says liftin up the hood,
and maybe you could
just show me where
to put the tranny fluid in.
No, I ain't got no flashlight
I says and he whips out
a boxa match sticks
tellin me he's gotta be
real careful about
carburetor hydrogen gas.
Just one false move, he says,
poof, no more Arny, see
whatta favor I'm doin for you?
No more my car, I says.
Just a few more matches, he says,
it's gotta be under there
in all them wires somewhere.
Careful, I says, maybe
you shouldn't go stickin
your hand down into the dash
and disconnectin the ignition.
Besides, I don't gotta know
tonight where to put

the tranny fluid in, I says,
this car's been runnin 16 years
it can wait until mornin.
Trust me lady, he says,
this's really got my goat.
Careful of that spark plug wire,
I says. Sorry about that, he says.
Yeah, I says, guess it'll run
just as good on seven, why not
there's no hills around here.
Let's turn on the headlights,
I says, and look in the manual
and he says, see here it tells ya
to keep the fluid level
just below the add-a-quart line.
That's the powersteerin lubrication,
I says and he says, trust me
it's gotta be under there
in all them wires somewhere.
Careful of that terminal, I says
and he says, ok, ok, we can always
hook-up the ignition again,
just tell me where the starter
motor is and I says, I don't know
where the starter motor is,
I don't even know
where the tranny fluid goes in,
but it's ok, I says, this car's
been runnin 16 years.
What'd ya mean ya don't know
where the starter motor is?
he says, I thought ya were
the kinda woman who knew
about cars. Gi'me another match,
he says, it's really got my goat,
he says, I'm gunna find it
if I gotta tear out every one

of them friggin wires. But
what about carburetor hydrogen gas
and, poof, no more Arny? I says
and he says, trust me lady,
just gi'me another match,
what'd ya think I am
stupid or somethin?

WHEN I WAS A FAT WOMAN

My silverware it seemed
was yoked to people's faces;
always I'd lift a fork
and someone's eyebrow with it.

If I sat I settled
careful
to let the fat divide,
spill evenly
around the chair,
hug the stool the same
on either side.

If I ran I knew
behind me my hips
mocked every step
rocking
in parody
the fat rolling in
rolling out,
an evil tide

and snide in
what it said about me:
She eats, she eats
she puts it deep
in her mouth, she
sleeps dreaming of chocolate,
teeth churning the tasteless air,
she cares absurdly how
her salad's dressed
she saves the best
for last.

Waiters always winked at me
obscene in their complicity.
I'd yield

my passion
everywhere revealed;
every stranger knew
what I consented to
in private,

but oh in private!
The rough kiss of the biscuit,
the sour apple's scent
caressed me
asking nothing, asking only
to be known, to be devoured.
Oh my lovers, my enemies,
my sweet excess.

DIANA BELLESSI

from HAPPY CROSSING, GOOD LUCK LITTLE ULI[1]

When my black friend, the spitting image of a Louisiana print of the thirties, sings his blues on a San Francisco pier, when that figure, feverish eyes that the wind evades, under his fur coat disappears on the horizon of Market St., when Chic Corea stops the piano on two notes and within them New York stretches out desolate, when some memorial makes the stereos tremble with your screams my Janis, when I go to sleep in the street among papers and beer cans and the whole city kicks us, when I sleep, when we wake up with so many cracks on our lips they could sketch in the most luxurious miniatures of our time, when I kiss you in the back of the bus that crosses the bridge of Oakland Bay and I lean my hand on the void of your amputated leg my beloved wasted in Vietnam, when we pulled tender leaves wet from the rain and placed them on our eyes at that hour when, whoever could make it, got their high and those who couldn't, walk around or nod on the outskirts of the campus, in the Mission, near the Greyhound or play a tiny harmonica for the sadness of the roses of Rose Garden, at the hour when we think about Chile, about Cuba, about the sisters and brothers and their struggle and the South Americans weep, at the hour when amid the smoke of cigarettes and the rustle of papers and fatigue some fight in the campaign for Bobby Seale for Mayor of Oakland, and the boycott of the Unión keeps up, and the nostalgia of the sixties continues and life continues, playing hide-and-seek behind the panel of torture of the triptych that Hieronimus Bosch sketched and while there is torment and terror and people out of work and the electric goad continues

[1] These fragments are from the book *Buena Traversia, Buena Ventura, Pequeña Uli* (1973-1975), translated by Paul Hecht. All annotations (except the first two which are Bellessi's) have been added by Irena Klepfisz. Italicized initials which follow each footnote refer to sources listed at the end.

and the *grill,*[1] *the dancing lady*[2] continue on testicles and teeth and nipples of that teacher from Corrientes[3] or a militant boy or dozens and dozens tonight and the Armoured Beast suppurates blood, and knowing that even here there are still reasons for life struggling down deep within, at this hour when a fire siren almost bursts my ears, at this hour Uli, you can go fuck yourself, because to listen to you gives me great total shame.

On the planet Onan, under a floss of dark ice, Uli slept the age of amorous return. In her sleep the galaxies were born, a surface crisp with millions of stars and millions of tiny hairs on all the pubescent pelvises on Earth. She listens to the way the world moves. Motionless she listens to the sounds of the movement that makes the world grow. It was when a grain of red dust entered her breathing, that she saw flocks of peasants radiating the brilliant song of hate through latifundios[4] and coffee groves. She stopped the image, watching it like the sudden stilled image of a film in sepia: on each face was the beginning of destruction, in each eye was the beginning of love. A spark of dynamite shattered the fold of her thought, and there slid, out of control, photographic images which retained screams, bombs, caresses and a screwdriver from Kayser factories used as a bayonet, and the golf course of the Jockey Club as a bed of sweet fornication for millions of couples. But before this, she saw bodies of rosy dawn fall; she saw the prison cells of Treleu[5] open their mouths spitting hate; she saw poets dry up with sterile self-criticism; she saw the torture chambers curl up so as not to hear the screams; she saw women, with rings under their eyes as deep as rivers of lava, trembling opposite sewing machines, opposite the blackened stewpot, opposite children eaten by parasites, children dying at the rate of five per minute in the Holy Genocide which the Capitalists, the Pope and the Armies organize for the good and the development of Latin America. Uli invents a country of spacious beaches. A house with

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[1] Slang expressions used by the police for the electric goad, an instrument of torture. (D.B.)

[2] In Spanish, *la parilla, la negra saltarina.* (D.B.)

[3] Name of province in NE Argentina; city and port on the Paraná River. *CG*

[4] Pieces of land, farms, estates. *RH*

[5] One of the most important towns in Patagonia on Chubut River, Argentina. *CG*

climbing vines with her immigrant grandfather harvesting watermelons. A friend who awaits the hour of return, and the memory of golden cane-brake. Uli knows that it is a lie. She plans then to search for the place where her departure was born. She does not know that the sea has already erased that sign in the sand. She returns to Time. But she will only see her closed space of tunnel, the dead woman killed by love on the stage, her harvest of savage oblivion when she looks for those she might deceive. Nevertheless Uli has time to depart in each moment, has a first twilight with undulations of alfalfa and evil lights in the distance. She has the fate of never being expected. She has Uli.

And who told you it was me you are looking for? To survive in your multiplicity Uli, sometimes you have to make yourself one with me. When the flocks of parrots flew over the Ucayali[1] that afternoon, and the beautiful stems of the *ceticos* and the palm-trees sketched their shadow in the river, you looked at me as if I were still the little girl who at the age of seven read her book of picture prints of the jungle. And you crowned my ankles with fur bracelets, and you danced the round-dance of Nadia-again-in-solitude. But the passion was from way before that dear Uli. What you do not know, is how to love one person alone among all the creatures in the Universe, and then how to love all the creatures in the Universe, and then go back to loving them again in one single person in this terrible alien Universe of ours. I swear to you that to do that Uli, we have to have died at least once in the soul of someone we have loved. That is real destruction. To reach the point where Uli can be heard we become a furious samurai, annihilating every heart we touch. I come from under the fire. I come from a blue summer Uli. I come from the dissolving geography of America. I come from having been young. And now, in the midst of so much terror and so much beauty, I begin to question you how you know I am the one you are looking for. My Grandma wrote me a letter asking me what I do in these far-off places and I tell her the dream of a wild duck who lost her flock while she was migrating. About us Uli, you know that there are those who died in their rightful struggle, those who went over and became mercenaries and those who grew through work deliciously, out front and underneath to make the Revolution. What happened to me that I stayed behind Uli? In what wire-mesh did

[1] Name of province and river in Peru; one of the Amazon's main headstreams. *CG*

my feathers get caught and while I was cawing to free myself your little voice began to whisper ballads of the Day to be found? In the dregs of the great cities where I can almost not hear a human voice, yours Uli tells many to me in past tense, especially all the whooping when there were beautiful uprisings and massacres, particularly those of the South, like a furious tango very rarely written because of so much time spent, calling Uli in the cafés. A tango which rambles through the ghettoes, the factory corridors, the prisons, the buses after work, the slaughter-houses, the office-buildings in summer at three o'clock, and the face of everyone smashed by the mounted police, by clubs, tear gas and pistols. A tango like this Uli, you can't write, nor I lost in these far-off places, but maybe tomorrow, when the ultimate feathers grow, the ones which die with one's self, maybe tomorrow Uli, at least I can get to sing it, because, who told you I was the one you were looking for?

If the pale old man with flannel pants would smile at me, maybe together we could drag his valise on wheels over Brooklyn Bridge, if the neighbor from Riverside would decide to make love in the children's park, under the swings and the slide, if the mad women of New York with whom I always stop to talk on the corners, would answer me sometime, then I would not return to the house of the Ecuadorians, maybe never go back to the Clinton Arms Hotel to argue with the cockroaches while the night displays its mysterious beauty forbidden to single women who don't know karate or who don't carry a .72 caliber rifle. Those of us who know the importance of two windows in a rented room today come to say goodbye to you Uli; *light room,* the adjective dances alone on the pages of the dailies, it sounds like beaches, like landscapes lost in the succession of summer. *Place: Russian Tearoom, time: Tuesday 11:30 P.M. July 10. You passed my table, touched my hands, ALEX? Call Arabelle 212-628-1261.* And I will die another day, again alone, naturally, Nina sings in front of her piano, she who is strong and prodigious and is alone. When letters do not come and your friends think about dying, when the present slips away between nuts and bolts and *faster* in South Bronx, when the hands become beautifully calloused and finally there is born that kind of violence your face has sometimes, then Uli think about the winter of '69, about that beautiful love-fiesta where you told me it's only the beginning and the years of the same and different and painful passion will follow. And it was true, as true as the terse counterpart of your beasts, the mouth of the eluding bodies, history making itself without us who were making

another history, the sickness of owls who never wake in the morning, permanence, Uli, like digging green tunnels, orange tunnels in one single heart and resting there in the time of storms, when everything is erased or gone and we seem to stay naked without any other marvel but waiting, without any other terror but the beginning.

The red flashpoint leaps from the second string of her guitar to the pupil of Joan of Arc. To create darkness this way yes in E Minor you could build the pain of the world. Go on sell fantasy on Rue St. Severin—it's raining and the pigeons flutter shitting drops of smoke from the mansards. Do it frowning facing the foreign-news page of *Le Monde* which the politically murdered transform into a huge pointing index finger. There's the rich lady with the broken nose, there's Marilyn with heroin tumors sculling the beautiful breasts, and the salt-stained sirens and those who've just made love in the weeds of Montsouris Garden, the lace and the hideous grimaces canter and the horsewomen on the plains dead from wine and thirst galloping victories above the Black Sea. But you cane-cutting women of Tucuman, you meat-cutter in the Swift slaughterhouses—genteel teacher in country schools you/in the potato planting south of Santa Fe—where where is your round scream? *(Alone in a cell with my eyes blindfolded I heard the screams of a woman being tortured.)* The plus-value of charred cook pots and babies' asses future cheap labor and the burning broom and where is our daily stew. A river divides us here. Its shores etch the dialectic of mistresses and female slaves. Luci/in New York is kick-pedaling her welding machine Carmen/carries hundred pound tin ore rocks on her back in the Huanani[1] or Twentieth Century mines Lupe/ninety times a day shoulders her water pail to the communal well in the dress factories a woman clothes the world and feeds it from charcoal braziers and between her tense legs with a midwife she perpetuates the world. The she-eunuchs of the palace and the women married to Mister Power will have their chance to follow those who Rise up But not forever The great eyes of a working woman murdered in a strike stare at us: The Revolt is out there.

Samira: they pulled off her clitoris with tweezers when she was twelve she and hundreds of Arab girls bleeding. Only penetration for

[1] Town; Pantaleon Dalence province, Oruro dept., W Bolivia; major tin-mining center. *CG*

the pleasure of a man is pleasing to Allah. Uli makes signs to Nadia. She shows her the jungle in the back part of the house. The little figure/tiger-killer and deer in order to sleep on a bone of the congo-bird which travels to the country of the Goose Who Laid the Golden Eggs. On the Planet three primary visions crush flashbacks against the rocks. He (small boy) lowers her lacepoint underpants looks inserts a little stick into her anus stretches his penis so she can touch it. She (small girl) strokes her pelvis puts raspy leaves at the entrance to her vulva urges her to do the same lifting up her skirt. The heroine takes possession of one of the continents: finger which knows so well the clitoris of her own body moving with heels tense hurled into infinity. Right there she begins to play the cymbals and bonfires blaze again among the trees, but thousands of faces look at each other's bodies of the real. Una has walked on all fours on two legs and without them, with feathers of puma, serpent from her buttocks to her back-bone her hair curling. Una never retreats. She strolls with her dogs and her royal birds reciting:

> 600 years ago beneath the great cities of America they beat the women and their screams raised the spirit of the dead warrior women 600 years ago your mouth demanded an ear of corn when the princes accumulated concu-bines and their priests virgins for the plural god of the phallocracies History in stone shadow where flesh is liquefied

The sea outside the mad clocharde[1] in the subway Etoile Line relates calamities and victories. All resistance condemned to persecution and death but also every empire: Aztecas[2] and Tlaxaltecas [3] small subjugated countries of Central America and Arwacos in Sierra Nevada,[4]

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[1] Fr. hobo (woman)

[2] Indian people dominating central Mexico; overcome by Spanish conquest in 16th c. *CE*

[3] Indians of Tlaxala in the mountains in SE Mexico; never conquered by the Aztecs; resisted Cortes but ultimately defeated; became allies against the Aztecs. *CE*

[4] Mountain range in NW Colombia. *CE*

Salazacas and Colorados,[1] Chimus[2] and a hundred countries under the Inca[3] scepter, Tihuanacos,[4] Uros,[5] Calchaquies,[6] Guaranies,[7] Pampas[8] and Patagones.[9] Where is the great vessel buried that she built with a gesture of her dance? Zoulikha dies a hundred thousand times in the hundred thousand murdered girls who commit suicide by the hundreds every year on the eve of auction condemned to forced matrimony, four walls, veiled for life. Kahiva, victorious Berber, she weeps for them. In the Garden of the Oppressor, the Family breeds Chiefs, perpetuators of order and massacre. Whether the harvest was lost whether the landowner diverted the river-water whether they were frightful defeats and not victories due to the inability of the princes, their idiot stare in front of the oracular mirror—then it will be good to invent witches from adolescents with great tortured eyes and Malinches and armies of Harpies as the final blame for the misfortune. They burned you, Anahi among the orange trees. Your scream is still heard over the

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[1] "Call themselves *Tsatchela* or *Tatchi* Indians. Share with the *Cayapa* the distinction of being the last surviving aboriginal group in the lowlands of western Ecuador." *HSAI*

[2] Ancient civilization on the desert coast of N Peru; last phases of Chimu civilization coincided with the emergence of Inca empire, by which it was eventually absorbed. *CE*

[3] "Pre-Columbian Indian empire, W South America. Centered in Cuzco, Peru, the empire dominated at the time of the Spanish Conquest the entire Andean area from Quito, Ecuador, S to the Rio Maule, Chile. . ." Conquered by Pizarro in 1533. *CE*

[4] Tihuanaco: ancient Indian ruin, W Bolivia; equalled by "no other aboriginal South American civilization, not even the Inca." *CE*

[5] Indians who lived in the region of Lake Titicaca and N. Chile. Almost completely extinct today. *HSAI*

[6] Civilization of the Andean region; "one of the latest conquests of the Inca powers, and represents its southerly extension." *MR*

[7] People of the Tupi-Guarani linguistic stock; lived in S Brazil and Paraguay. *CE*

[8] "Wide treeless grassy plains of South America, particularly in Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay." *CE*

[9] Patagonia: region in S Argentina, S of the Rio Colorado and E of the Andes. Indians of this region. *CE*

islands of the Parana[1] over the northern sierras. Galloping curly-head proud Juana Azurduy,[2] warrior militiawoman, a troop of young females follows you in the trenches, mounted on masts and caryatids[3] on the prow newspaper ships changing the routes of life and they rise to all your navigation, sea, of the Transgression your great revolutionary coast.

Fly birds against the red disk of the sun becoming innocent and old each day. Now Uli remembered of old that place it was called Blue Fountain Fontainebleu hunting dogs in the distance and the black dove in the center of the garden. She lowers her eyelid and continues the transvestite journey from the forest to the lake pavilion climbing yellow-eyed lizards—she smiles at the lovers tenuous courtiers who make love on the grass forbidden to tread—if it's ruined what then will our tourists say. Una lets her pass without busying herself with her harmful shadow. It's the human traces which Una follows. There's so many you can't count them. Serfs Serfs Serfs cooks wet-nurses grooms—everything you see and everything which disappeared in the bellies and into the days was made by those who never bathed in the sun of these gardens. Artisans who built the grand staircase of the castle with its linked serpents: *to whom* has departed the bread and the beauty of this world, from the hands that forged it *to whom*? To the zarigueyas-rats[4] to those greedy to govern who did not inhabit the cities of glossy paper with their copulas towers and shelves to let them go in flames festoons of ash on the snow the summer of the year 1952. The towns were built with the materials of dreams and laughter yes with bones of the beaten and tuberculars the foundations with collective massacres in docks mines and plantations with a factory of cartilage and eye-pupils the towns and the king in the suburbs the boss the landlords the president the corporation among vast parks whose trees carry sketched within a sharp guillotine of wood. The human

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[1] Major river of South America; separates Argentina from Paraguay. *CE*

[2] Juana Azurduy de Padilla (1781-1862) "Heroine of northern border warfare in fight for independence. . . . appointed lieutenant colonel with uniform and all the rights and privileges of the rank, 1816. *HDA*

[3] Sculptured female figures used as columns. *RH*

[4] Sp. opossum.

traces are tattooing the body of Una with infinite stories of misery. Oh Tonantzin[1] Pachamma[2] Mother of sweet hips dragging yourself in the church of Guadalupe knees bleeding toward the mad eye of the virgin. To the Virgin of Pilar thousands of pilgrims kissed her until some began to bite. The priests covered her with a cloak and they continue the sick the starving pilgrims choking on the velvet stars and hairy spangles which the sextons daily renovate. Oh Peasant Woman oh Mother of mine Sewing-Woman battered on your five ribs Enormous Working Woman of the cities: by your paths of grace show me how to be the mouth through which you speak through which you weep through which you give life through which you strike through which you scream through which you are creative voice of victory. Then Una learns that not very far away are the wolves in the woods, while the herd wheels in the zoo its hooves calling the new spirit which a female will give birth to under the trees the enemy clans make a truce when the little antelope its legs tense accepts the painful mystery of life a precise shriek barely from both throats heroine companion Vietnamese woman there is no truce for you and your newly born in the political prisons of the south the police shatter bones with rifle butts and clubs the women who surround you circle of flesh armoured by love to defend you. Oh Tiamat Tiamat[3] the tiny fingerprints of the children imprinted on the frescos of Altamira[4] among deer and bison the universe belonged to each molecule Una knows it every time she sees the enormous singing face of the woman dishwasher in the restaurant on Rue D'Assas. And Una opens her ear to the change of landscapes: Where Nadia was received with fishheads and coconut milk and stories the women gave her about a Miskita[5] Indian saint giving birth to twelve

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[1] "Among the [Mexican] earth goddesses the most famous was Ciucoatl ("Snake Woman"), whose voice, roaring through the night, betokened war. She was also called Tonantzin ("Our Mother"). *MR*

[2] Mother Earth. Incan female deity associated with agriculture. *EL*

[3] Female figure in Babylonian epic of creation. Consort of Apsu and mother of gods. Tiamtu means salt-sea. *MR*

[4] Altamira Caves in Spain. "Natural caves occupied by prehistoric man [sic], with . . . extraordinary paintings painted 20,000 years ago." "The animal most depicted is the bison. . . . There are also a wild horse, a stag and two boars." *CE & EGS*

[5] Indians from Honduras. *HSAI*

girls apostles in the confluence of the rivers which fall into the Gulf of Las Perlas near Kaskabilla where the green turtles pass migrations from Yucatan to spawn in the turtle-beds of Barra del Colorado thousands of tender turtles while children die also by the thousands, from parasitic anemia, dysentery, under the palm-leaf roofs or in the garbage dumps of the city of Managua[1] looting the leftover food the rice the beans and facing their ribs sticking out to Nadia they tasted like shit swallows sleeping on the electric cables of Managua. A chip off the old block mommy doña Elda mamá my old lady what lie am I singing if you don't understand you who gave the beginning of all reality and fantasy under the shoots of paradise tree? And *saybé* in Miskita tongue shouted Rosina and *amustayá* Antonia's eyes her black Guajira[2] tunic cutting dawns in Uribia[3] and the farewells were, as if to say, foreign wanderer. Nailed to the wall with bedbugs perforating her pupils Nadia remembers among the flowers/filthy wallpaper the photo of Carson McCullers the socks the silhouette of the guitar and what Una hears she sketches clandestine scrawl on her nape now so linked to the destiny of the women and the men of the Earth that never more will Una be, a foreigner.

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[1] W Nicaragua, capital of largest city of Nicaragua. *CE*

[2] N Colombia, on Caribbean Sea, the northernmost part of Colombia and of the South American continent. *CG*

[3] City on the Guajira Peninsula. *RH*

Sources

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EGS *Nagel's Encyclopedia-Guide: Spain* (Nagel Publishers, Geneva, 1976).

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HSAI *Handbook of South American Indians* (Cooper-Square Publishers, New York, 1963).

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CHICAGO
(WINTER 78)

she had been
living the sane life

6 am
dragging on black coffee
& southern comfort
sipping nicotine

sunrise setting
behind her eyes

day light
darker
than it has ever been

she'd been

logging
passages by meat loaves baked

tallying
time in numbers of toys picked up

clocking
cycles with loads of laundry

face
reflected in tubs of bath water
in leafless cups of tea

those parts of her mouth
cast adrift in a wisteria wind
tips from a filling crescent moon
broken/spilling
voiding under her dresser scarf

behind her mirror
thru cracked & warping silvering
chips of polished eye
from meteor shower
thru last night's window

thru icicles
that hang
dispassionate
as bars
of a stone wrapped cell

watch
to keep from freezing
she's been turning out
poems like breathing

all the time concerned
about the quality
of the air

FOR ELLEN, AT LAKE WESAUKING

Your voice, as we tie on
snowshoes, drifts past my face
across the frozen lake.
After six years
you've come home
to the boathouse, the study
filled with books you grew up on,
dogs who wait at the stoop
each evening when you bike back
from the clinic.

You've given up drinking
and dope; it's these kids, you say,
they can't deal, they're alcoholic at 13;
Tom Valella killed himself last week.
You say, maybe you didn't
say the right things, listen enough.

I'm wearing the old plaid shirt
we shared the first winter
I knew you, the dope burn
still on the shoulder;
I fell in love, secretly,
at least once a week, while you buried
yourself in Faulkner, basketball, beer.
In six years, this is the most
you've talked.

I want to hold you
but I don't. We walk off
between rows of pines
your great-grandfather planted.
I see how soft
your face has become, your head bent,
your hair a fine, dark red cloth
whipped in the wind.

COFFEE AND CAKE

I have not seen my brother Steven since last Thanksgiving, when he forgot to buy the turkey. My mother, my uncle, and I flew out to Tucson for four days. It was one of the very few times all year that it rained, and it rained continuously, the four of us thrown into a more intensive proximity than we'd counted on. I brought a pumpkin bread I'd baked in Massachusetts, carefully wrapped in foil, and winter squash and gourds I'd picked up at farm stands. But when we got there Steven had forgotten to buy a turkey. It was almost midnight on Wednesday.

"It doesn't matter, I'll take us all out to eat," said my uncle—his characteristic gesture, his cure-all for all of life's ills. I had to try to flush out the raw anger and disappointment in my eyes; I couldn't answer the magnanimity of that offer, the pleasure beaming from my uncle's face at the pleasure he was giving us. There was no way I could tamper with his kindness. Steven, sensing my disturbance, said, "You're only here for a few days, anyway. You wouldn't want to spend a whole day inside cooking, would you?"

The next day we took a dismal ride through the rain to Bisbee, where everything was closed for the holiday. Sitting in the only restaurant open in town, we ate slices of turkey in pasty gravy, canned sweet potatoes, frozen peas. My mother was getting enthusiastic about the salad bar, while I sat beside her, furious, humiliated for her, wishing she could be more collected about salad bars. I felt the weight of many salad bars behind me. I wanted to tell them not to be too easily satisfied—but didn't know how to press without stabbing. I was afraid of doing some real damage. Instead, I sat there, miserably watching them in their enjoyment as they absorbed the soullessness of all they touched, knowing that I, by proximity to them, absorbed it too. In the end, I made weak jokes caustic barbs punctuated by ameliorating laughs. They sent me puzzled looks but they held me to my laughter. Nobody actually choked on the indignity of the food. The event, after all, was not serious.

Now I am seeing Steven again, after seven months, at my mother's house in Queens. He arrived last night at 3 AM, having driven almost continuously from Arizona. I have driven in for the weekend from Massachusetts, and I arrive in time for dinner. We embrace, the ceremony so old that we can use it to camouflage the embarrassment of our real warmth. A dog is barking; it runs in and jumps on me. This is Willie, the puppy Steven has recently bought. It's strange to see a dog in my mother's house; stranger still to see it and Steven playing with each other so intimately. I go into the kitchen, where I find my mother cutting grapefruits. We also kiss each other, and then immediately the dog is there, hurling himself at us in his excitement. Steven appears behind the dog and admonishes him to get down. There are four of us in the kitchen; this morning there was only my mother, but now her daughter has come from Massachusetts, her son has driven all the way in from Arizona, and there is this new personage who runs in and out of the room. He runs in and we pet him, talk to him. He comes over to where my mother is standing and puts his paws up around her leg.

"Sit for Grandma!" commands Steven, and we all begin to laugh.

"Sit for Grandma!" Steven says again, when Willie doesn't pay attention to him, and then he pulls Willie on the floor where they wrestle for a minute. The disciplining parent. My mother is still laughing at hearing the word "Grandma" spoken. I see in her face that this is very funny and very absurd to her, and yet the name itself is like a code word nobody's dared to speak before. Grandma. Someone she wishes to be. She laughs, a little confusedly now, at Willie. Her grandchild? All three of us are redistributing our weight, shifting to make room for a new member of whose inclusion in our circle there can be no question.

I watch Willie and Steven for a little while; then I look again at my mother, who is also watching them, removed from the action now, her lips slightly curving, her eyes soft with absorption. Abruptly, I feel a twinge of fear—the fear that here is a new contingency upon which our survival depends, a new element which must be preserved in our fragile chain of love. I am afraid of the looks upon all our faces, the expressions which confess our helpless awareness of each other.

Steven is teasingly twisting a bone out of Willie's teeth and tossing it so it skims the rug and lands near the piano. We all laugh, and I am afraid. We are too close. I am afraid of their pain. I am afraid too of their joy, because once I see it I know it will be tragic if it goes away.

I think of Petra, my lover. With her my fear is of loss, of the unpredictable movements of our personalities. With family, not many changes are expected. The continuance of the relationships is assured; no one else can threaten them. They are utterly pre-determined, pre-guaranteed.

Yet, with all this certainty, all this knowledge, there is still something in the particularity of their pain I can't understand. I see the looks of anguish on their faces, which I perceive even when they are unaware of them. I know too well the delicately honed variations in their expressions. Too well, too, do I know their happy looks. If only I could know for sure that the happy looks would remain, then I could go away, finally, at peace, and not come back.

We don't *want* to be moved by each other. We strive endlessly to be superficially touched, less than profoundly affected. Our joy is always shadowed by death, by geographic mobility, by a dangerous world in which we cannot offer each other real protection, where we play be disparate rules. And I am afraid that later tonight, when my mother goes up to bed and Steven and I go out for coffee, and I finally tell him that I am a lesbian, he won't understand.

One month before, long distance, Massachusetts to Arizona: *This has been a big year for me. A lot has changed. I want very much to talk to you when you come in.*

What is it? Tell me now.

No, it's nothing I can spit out over the phone. I shouldn't have brought it up. I'm sorry. It will have to wait.

But he continues to tease me, playing 20 questions. *Does it have something to do with your career?* Yes. *Is it political?* Yes. *Is it revolutionary?* Yes. *Is it physical?* Yes.

"Now you've got me really confused," he says. "Are you going around planting bombs?"

Yes.

We slide into a booth at The Greasy Spoon Diner. The waitress takes our order: coffee and two slices of hazelnut cheesecake. She puts her pad in her apron pocket, takes our menus, and walks away.

All around us are plump, middle-aged Jewish people of Queens, drinking coffee, eating cheesecake, babka, apple strudel. Tomorrow they will go back on their diets; tomorrow night they will return and break them. Steven and I both pretend to feel alienated among them but between us lies the secret of their familiarity. We've constructed our lives around being different from them, and yet in a minute the pastry smells waft over and seduce us back. I wonder if the smells make him think of what I'm thinking: the week we sat *shiva* for my father, the friends and neighbors and relatives coming to pay condolence calls, bringing cakes and pies from Jewish bakeries all over the length and breadth of Long Island. About 50 visitors a day; which meant five times throughout the afternoon and evening sitting down to coffee from the huge borrowed percolator and cakes on fluted trivets carefully lifted from pastel-colored cardboard boxes tied with flecked string. Did we ever eat dinner? Lunch? Breakfast? Was it a collective plot of our guests to ensure our proper mourning behavior by depriving us of protein and inducing a protracted sugar fit? I don't remember minding or objecting. I only remember loving those cakes for being so inordinately civilized; for being so attractive; for being so expensive. Within those boxes with their script saying "Ida's" or "Mitzi's" or "Ratner's," I sensed my culture.

Yet rarely would my mother have bought such cakes. I had known them all my life from visitors who brought them, from houses I had visited as a child in which they were served. That only my mother, among all mothers I knew, did not identify herself with those pastries branded our family as an anomaly within German and Eastern European Jewish society. Sometimes even now I forget that before my struggle to separate and become an assimilated American, there had been the converse struggle to integrate, to transcend the limitations of a family which was ethnically incorrect.

My family: a year ago, Steven's birthday, the three of us in my mother's house. Steven has been living in the Village for a year but he has come home to re-live the birthday ritual. My family, so fond of form, so oblivious of content. My mother has an Entenmann's Marshmallow Fudge Cake for him. I groan, remembering to smile humorously as I do so, and she turns to me with a laugh and says, "Well, it's his favorite." Boys will be boys. There it sits, sugary, fudgy, tacky in its tin plate. The candles stuck in this skimpy little mass of junk make me want to cry—because this is the cake of his dreams; it is the aspiration of his birthday, and she is so acquiescent in fulfilling it.

Our mother, who was supposed to teach us about life. And Steven, whose window on Cornelia Street draws in air perfumed with Italian breads, baguettes, challahs, cannolis, ruggaluch, croissants, tortes, napoleons, brioches. Steven, Steven, Steven! How is it, why is it that the three of us are gathered around this birthday cake in this kitchen, still going through the paces of this ritual? What is it that sabotages our imaginations, preventing us from inventing new celebrations?

Now, hazelnut cheesecake between us on the very un-greasy tabletop in The Greasy Spoon Diner. Steven leans back against the shiny leather seat. "So what's new?" he says.

He is so relaxed that I think he must know. Yet unless I *know* he knows, which I don't know, I have to proceed on the assumption that he doesn't.

I had said to Petra: "The problem is that there are certain words which mean very different things to me than they do to him, and I'm not sure how to use them."

"Like what?" she'd asked.

"Like 'lesbian,' " I'd admitted.

I look at him and decide that that is not a good place to start.

"You remember Petra," I say, and he says yes, he does. The way he acknowledges it, as if clearing an irrelevant detail out of the way so we can get to the point, tells me that he doesn't know at all. So I say, quickly, "Well, last year we became friends and then we became lovers."

Somewhere along the sentence there has been a jolt in his look of blank expectancy; perhaps a fraction of a second before I got to "lovers."

"Really?" he says, in an unnatural voice, and chugs his glass of water like beer.

"Yes," I say, "really."

Then I launch into a synopsis of this year of my life, and I hear, as if from a distance, the words and phrases spilling from my mouth: "structuring my life," "defining myself," "made a decision," "political

statement." I have become, quite clearly, a paragon of control. I talk and talk, words of power and strength tripping over themselves in their eagerness to make themselves clear. I don't say, "I fell in love with Petra and I was terrified to realize that whether I wished it and willed it or not, I was a lesbian. That I *had* to learn these things because without them I couldn't live." No, not me; I was a right-on radical lesbian feminist from the day I was born. On and on I go, skipping the fright. the confusion, skipping even the love because it is too bare, too vulnerable, and too true. I tell him only the things I have learned, the perceptions I have been injecting into my veins like new, life-giving blood. Maybe if I can reassemble my molecules so that I look like a Holly Near record, it will all miraculously click with him.

But that look on his face. A look of shock, and a confusion he is struggling valiantly to conceal. There is something about that look—how do I know it? Oh yes, now I remember, it's the look on the face of the man Marjorie Morningstar marries, after she confesses to him that she's not a virgin. Never again, we are told, will that look of pure happiness he had when he believed Marjorie to be pure reappear upon his face. I read that book five times between the ages of 13 and 18 and it always made me feel furiously futile. It was as if I could see that man standing not very far away from me, and I wanted to go and shake him, only I knew I'd have to walk all the way around the world to get to him, instead of simply crossing the street.

Now I get that same feeling, only it is more diffuse and not really directed at Steven. I suddenly realize it's not going to be all roses after all. I haven't seen that look on anyone's face yet—and on his face it cripples me, makes my bones feel weak.

"You haven't told Mom, have you?"

"No, but I'm going to eventually."

"I wouldn't do that. Don't forget you're living in a different world than she is. She'd be really crushed."

I feel the terrible sense of power I felt in the restaurant in Bisbee, as he reminds me of the damage I can do. I am sickened to hear the fear in his voice, to hear his conviction that the possibility of telling my mother is a lethal weapon I possess. I'm trying to tell him I've been born, while reflected in his eyes I watch my own death. And this, we both somehow know, is at the root of the protective instinct we

both feel for my mother. I think of Chava, the daughter in *Fiddler on the Roof* who marries a gentile. Her parents sit *shiva* for her, heartbroken as if she had died. I used to despise Tevya for that—for being so fanatic and bullheaded, letting ritual and ceremony prescribe his feelings for his own daughter. Now I understand how words like "daughters," "marriage," "family," and "Jewish" came glued together in their heads, so that when one beam slipped the whole roof fell in. I wonder if "heterosexual" is glued into my mother's definition of me in the same way. I am sure that it is. Steven's face tells me that it is. Which means that when I cease to be heterosexual, I cease to exist.

"Tell me honestly how you feel," I say. My voice proclaims: Spare me nothing. I can take it. Nothing can mar my confidence, so let's be candid. "Are you really that surprised?"

"Yes," he says, "yes, I am. I'm sorry if I seem negative—this will take some getting used to. If you want me to be honest, I guess I can't help admitting I'm somewhat disappointed."

Disappointed. About what? That I've exploded his illusions about my heterosexuality? That I'm flawed?

"I just don't understand how you can *decide* to *define* yourself as a lesbian," he says, hesitating over the word but coming through in the end. "How can you say that's what you *are?* I've had only heterosexual relationships, but I don't *define* myself as heterosexual. I wouldn't say I *am* heterosexual."

"But you don't have to say it. Everybody assumes it anyway. You're very defined—so defined you never even have to mention it."

He thinks about this. I think what confuses me most in this conversation is the careful consideration he is giving to everything I say. I have had friends tell me about coming out to brothers who were football players and corporate executives, men who simply dismissed them across the board as loony dykes. There is something reassuring about having an antagonist live up to your expectations of him. If my brother were to get belligerent, derisive, or abusive, I could dismiss him with equal conviction. Then I could say he didn't matter. But he matters.

"I guess you're right about that," he says. "I never really thought of it. It's just this idea of a political concept settling who you're going to have relationships with that gets me."

I launch into a lecture about the personal being political, but he's right, because there's one thing wrong with my argument: I have expounded on the political and neglected the personal. It's the one part I can't seem to get out. It's perfectly reasonable that he doesn't understand. I'm touched that he's still trusting in me enough to sit rubbing his cheek thoughtfully as he tries to digest what I have not really prepared for consumption.

So I explain why I feel it's important to fully acknowledge all the components of one's identity. "I'm white, I'm middle-class, I'm Jewish, I'm a woman, I'm a writer, I'm a feminist, I'm a native New Yorker, I'm a lesbian," I say. "Each of these is absolutely fundamental to my concept of myself as a person in the world." I add that coming out as a lesbian was what finally made me throw out the last vestiges of my anti-Semitism. Finding out what lesbian separatism meant made me think of what Jewish separatism meant to me all my life. The two reflected so much on each other that I was finally able to really look at separatism—what it was for the separatists, and for the ones being separated from.

"Sometimes I think of those stories they used to tell us in Hebrew school, about the Jews in Europe during the war who were 'safely' assimilated with changed names and false histories, who finally put *mezzuzzah's* up on their doors and got carted away. They used to make these people sound like heroes, and I always thought they were just crazy. But now I understand. Not that I'd be putting any *mezzuzzah* up on *my* door, or coming out if the government were going to execute me for it. I'd still be scared and cowardly. But I understand the point now. I understand what it means to deny who you are." There, it was subtle but he might have caught it.

"I still think it's crazy," says Steven. "You're not denying who you are to yourself. Why would you willingly bring more problems into your own life? I think it's more important to do what you want to do, know who you are in yourself, but protect yourself at the same time."

I tell him then about Rema, a friend from high school who is a lesbian now. I saw her once last year, by accident, in a restaurant in Chinatown. She works for a jewelry company, wears makeup and excruciatingly high heels, and is only out to her closest friends, who are all lesbians and none of whom consider themselves feminists.

"I don't see how anyone can live like that," I say.

"I do," says Steven, "I really do. Not everyone's like you. Not everyone wants to fight. Some people just want to have an easy life."

"At the cost of feeding the world's stereotypes. Rema gets chalked up as straight. When people in her office look around and take stock of the world, they're going to believe it's homogeneously straight, as long as everyone in it claims to be. For all we know, half the earth could be gay and no one will ever know, because everyone's so busy acting straight."

"But that's her decision," says Steven.

"It's not just *her* decision. Rema's not only perpetuating her own oppression—she's perpetuating mine!" Oh my God—I've actually used the word "oppression." It sounds ridiculous uttered here in The Greasy Spoon, with my brother. It's one of those words you generally pitch only when there's someone around who's trained to catch it.

"But can't you understand why someone might not want to deal with being a social outcast?"

"I'm not an outcast!" I yell, hitting the table. A couple in the next booth turns around and looks at me in surprise. If there's one thing I want Steven to understand, it's that I'm no outcast and have no intention of being an outcast. But how can he really come to understand this? How can I convey a sense of my own feminism when there is a hurt look in his eyes every time I say the word "men"? I don't mean him—but I don't know how either of us will react to excluding him from the category. How can I possibly make him understand what a women's community means? What it does? Here is a man I don't *want* to be divided from—but how can I help it, within the terms in which I've chosen to view the world—and now, even in his terms? How can we both remain whole and healthy and still be undivided?

Driving home in the car we talk, unbelievably, of other things. Neither one of us has seized the oars and rowed away, but neither of us has dropped anchor, either. What had to be said has been said; even if it never gets spoken of again, it is there, a little packet of information tied and labeled and irrevocably welded into our relationship. I feel a little ill, physically, although I can't exactly locate the

source of my discomfort. I'm not sorry I told him. If I hadn't, I would have gone on month after month, probably year after year, always planning to, perennially on the verge. And that would have been like pushing a rock uphill through all of eternity; or like writing a book that is all preface.

And there he is at the wheel, still driving, still liking me, not going through any red lights. And I still like him too, even if it would be more convenient at this moment not to. I look at him, his face washed in wave after wave of streetlight as we ride down the Queens avenue we have ridden down since we were born. We aren't waiting to grow up any more; we aren't wondering who we'll become, what profession we'll choose, whom we'll marry. These questions haven't been answered; but we've lived long enough to know that life is not a symphony that plays itself out in three movements. The answers, when they come at all, are unearthed in fragments, like archaic fossils or chips of Greek pottery, and at random, often after many days of fruitless digging. And if Steven and I aren't digging in the same place, at least we share some sense of the theory and the process of the dig, and looking back to where we started our eyes come to rest on the same point.

What I didn't know until now, until I came upon this fragment, is that what I hoped for will most likely never happen. Steven and I have already been socialized. Lies are already firmly woven in the fabric of our past together, insisting upon the shape of our present. Yet there are also truths buried in our history which have spun a binding web around us. We are the world's only two bona fide products of the union of Selma and Larry Edelman, the only two ever to have grown up in our house under our circumstances. We are the central intelligence bank of the idiosyncracies of these two individuals, and we carry these idiosyncracies around somewhere in our own personalities. At best it is like a legacy; at worst, a genetic disease. In either case, certain secrets will always hover between us. Some we'll learn to speak, others will remain silenced, but we will always be pressed into remembrance of their existence by each other's mere presence. There is no one else that either of us can ever be connected to in this way, just as nothing can ever separate us from the common ground of our knowledge—even when the intensity makes us wish to be divided.

My mother used to tell me the story of how I had interrupted my brother's circumcision by crying out at the crucial moment, "The doctor is going to cut the baby!" This was Steven's *briss*, the first

major event in a Jewish boy's life and generally the occasion for a party. If he, the boy, had been the firstborn, the *briss* would have been followed by a *pinion aben* a month later. No one in my family has ever been clear on the significance of a *pinion aben;* they only know that it is a tradition, another excuse to celebrate. At the age of 13 Steven was worth $1500, mostly in bonds given to him at his Bar Mitzvah—the ceremony invented so that the Jewish boy can proclaim: "Today I am a man."

I have been told that my turn too will come. My grandmother, who is senile and often doesn't remember who I am, has one message to impart when she recognizes me at her nursing home: "Remember, I want to dance at your wedding." She has said this to me over and over, like a broken record, sometimes a dozen times in one visit. Ninety-one years old and in a wheelchair, but if I marry she will dance. Sometimes I have the impulse to gather my family and say: "Today I am a lesbian," and see who starts to dance. I would like to see someone rent a catering hall, give me a salad bowl, say, *"Mazel tov, mazel tov,* health and happiness always!" with tears of joy in their eyes. My birth, my marriage, my death—these are the events which did, would, will chart my existence; they are my demarcation lines on the genealogical map.

"Why is it so important to you to tell the world?" had been Steven's question. "What do you get from it?" And I know the crazy thing I hoped to get from telling him. I hoped to see him dance.

MAUREEN BRADY
JUDITH McDANIEL

LESBIANS IN THE MAINSTREAM: IMAGES OF LESBIANS IN RECENT COMMERCIAL FICTION

In 1975 Lisa Alther's publishers chose her novel *Kinflicks* for the best seller list's commercial hype. Not particularly well-written or compelling, *Kinflicks* is a long, rambling narration of a young woman's adolescence and young adulthood. Sex, motorcycle gangs, and the standard inhibitions of growing up in the fifties wend the heroine toward college and a lesbian affair. *Kinflicks,* perhaps because of the extensive hype that pushed it, seems to have proved to commercial publishers that there was a market for a growing population of lesbian characters. We have read sixteen commercial-press novels, all written by women (fifteen published since *Kinflicks* and one before) which have in common the inclusion of a lesbian character or a lesbian experience.[1] We have looked at these books with the deliberate purpose of attempting to establish what images of lesbianism the mainstream commercial presses are willing to publish and promote today.

Although we use specific examples from the literature we have read, we recognize that we are not able to discuss any one novel in its full exploration, but only in the context of our own inquiry. Our intent is not to attack individual women writers but to learn more about where we, as lesbians, stand in relationship to the patriarchally controlled marketplace for fiction. We would like to emphasize that while these books vary greatly in the seriousness with which they take the lesbian experience, as well as in many other respects, we are attempting to study the themes which emerge when they are considered collectively. We hope that other women will address the differences among the various authors' intent and degree of seriousness, as we feel this would be an important investigation. Further, we have not been impressed with any particularly important differences among these books which are attributable to the authors' sexual preferences; however, we feel this might also be an interesting subject for study.

One assumption of our investigation has been that these novels—regardless of the seriousness of the authors' literary intentions—were published by commercial presses for their appeal to a mainstream audience, not their appeal to a lesbian audience. This assumption about what constitutes the basis for commercial selection of art was confirmed most blatantly in a recent review of the film *Bilitis.* Film critic David Rosenbaum assures us that film director David Hamilton "is a whiz at evoking lesbian reveries without vulgarity," and further, that "the first hour of 'Bilitis' is the answer to every lecher's prayer." Unfortunately for the lecher, that "sustained eroticism" turns into a boring "gibble-gabble about life and love" between the two heroines. The result, concludes Rosenbaum, "is that 'Bilitis' becomes a lesbian lullaby and even the most devoted letch will find himself slipping off into slumberland way before 'Bilitis' concludes with a sigh and a whimper."[2] This male critic obviously assumes that he is the audience for whom this film about lesbians was made—an assumption in which he is quite likely correct.

Like the film industry, the commercial press industry is a place where mainstream trends and reactions are recorded and played up, often for economic gain. When a publisher chooses a book as a potential commercial success, he advertises it as the latest trend and promotes the author as the authority on the subject. When the subject of the book—whether novel or non-fiction—is described as feminism, the author becomes a media feminist and is proclaimed a portrayer of or spokesperson for all things labelled "feminist." The same process operates in the depiction of lesbians: a portrait that is "acceptable" to commercial publishers is advertised as *the* "authentic" portrait. By examining our own lives and experiences as lesbians in comparison with the current lesbian presence in fiction, we can better understand the impact such portraits have on us personally, culturally, and politically.

Several dominant themes recur in these books: the common factor is that all in some way disempower the lesbian. The lesbians who emerge in these novels lack erotic power; they are preoccupied with bisexuality[3] and/or heterosexuality,[4] or simply have no time for sex,[5] or suffer from a mind/body split in which the flesh demands the relationship with a woman, but the mind rejects this option.[6] Their politics are either too demanding[7] or too naive for good use.[8] They are primarily white middle-class[9] or upwardly mobile working-class women[10] obsessed with finding a place in an already established

order, searching for a mode of existence that will allow them to "fit in." The exceptions are a few highly stylized lesbian characters who display the "glamour" of the lesbian lifestyle,[11] but who still are largely concerned with how they are perceived by the world of heterosexuals. Few of these characters are granted an intelligent inner life. Most find some sort of punishment awaiting them.[12] They share a general inability to glean from their lives any profound insights which might lead to a political or revolutionary understanding of their situation.[13] The two books by Black women are exceptions to some of the above generalizations, but even in these works, lesbians are punished drastically by the time the books end.[14]

The Punishment Theme. . . condemned to survival

On the thousands of copies of *Kinflicks* sold in paperback, reviewers' comments leap out at the reader from the cover: "Wildly erotic, exuberantly funny masterpiece," "ribaldly funny," "an exuberant raunchy novel." *The New York Times* found it "a talented comic novel" and *The New Yorker* announced that "Ginny's sexual adventures and misadventures are among the funniest ever recorded." Doris Lessing is quoted as saying that "*Kinflicks* had me laughing at four in the morning." *Kinflicks* is a novel that will give lesbian readers nightmares.

We are asked to follow Ginny through her high school heterosexual explorations, her years at a women's college, her intense intellectual admiration for her spinster teacher, and her later painful rejection of that woman as she finds her own life in a lesbian relationship. Whatever the tone of the novel–flippant, semi-grotesque, self-denigrating–these are scenes believable to a lesbian reader. But in the middle of the novel, after Ginny has spent several years with her female lover Eddie, the author creates an argument about a man–not a man in the novel, but man as an abstraction:

> "You're tired of me, Ginny. You want a man. A cock," she added with distaste.
>
> "No! That's not true!"
>
> "I've been expecting it. You don't need to deny it. It was bound to happen sooner or later. You've just been playing around with me. Basically, you're as hetero as they come." (291)

Alther never explores why "IT" was bound to happen. And Ginny,

an apparently totally suggestable character, begins to be interested in a man. After several encounters, Ginny and Ira, the local insurance man, are maneuvered by the author into the bedroom to discuss a life insurance policy.

> "Now I have a plan here that would give you the kind of coverage. . ." He whirled around to show me what he'd written. As he did so, he accidentally butted me with his shoulder. I lost my balance and fell backwards, landing on my back on Laverne's bed. As I fell, one of my legs became tangled behind one of his knees, causing it to collapse. He fell forward and landed on top of me. (343)

Hardly comic writing, these are tortured stage directions designed to manipulate the characters so that Ginny's lover can walk into the bedroom to catch Ginny and Ira lying on the bed. Eddie is furious, of course, and betrayed. She runs out the door, jumps on the insurance salesman's snowmobile, races down the hill, and is decapitated by a piece of fencing wire: "Just before Eddie reached the pond, Ira's Sno Cat appeared to hesitate slightly. The next instant, Eddie's head flew off her shoulders and bounced and spun across the ice like a crazed basketball" (344). Within a month Ginny has married Ira. In the more than one hundred fifty pages left of the novel, she never mourns or reflects on the years she spent with Eddie. But Ginny has been punished. The novel does not end with a happy-go-lucky Tom Jones character off to new adventures. Ginny is miserable. She has been prohibited by her husband from seeing her young daughter. She contemplates suicide but she doesn't need to end her life, for she has already achieved a successful self-lobotomization. "Like most of her undertakings, her proposed suicide had degenerated into burlesque. Apparently she was condemned to survival. At least for the time being. . . . She left the cabin, to go where she had no idea" (518). Ginny is hardly the epitome of the ribald comic character.

Kinflicks did not establish, but rather continued, the time-honored tradition that lesbianism must be punished. From *The Well of Loneliness* through the pulp lesbian fiction of the fifties to the present, few lesbian characters escape either a dire fate or the conviction that they are wrong and deserving of a dire fate.[15] In *Loving Her,* published the year before *Kinflicks,* Ann Shockley's Black character leaves a brutal husband, goes to a white woman lover, overcomes or manages to ignore some of the racism in the white gay community,

and begins to experience a momentary sense of peace and happiness with her lover. Then, in the book's final pages, she is beaten by her husband and loses her daughter to a fatal auto accident when the husband takes the child for a ride. Though the two woman lovers reconcile on the final page, the reader is so stunned by the punishment that she can hardly believe that they can in fact go on from there. Though, of course, they must. They too are "condemned to survival."

In the year following *Kinflicks* four novels by women were published that focus in some way on lesbianism, three of them with a violence as directed as that of *Kinflicks.*[16] Lois Gould's *A Sea Change* only comes close to using the word lesbian once, not when the women in the novel are making love to one another, and not as an expression of sexuality, but as its opposite. " 'Ice,' Leo Bailey thought. 'Dry ice. Maybe a lesbo' " (114). The women in *A Sea Change* hate their bodies; both are described as beautiful women, one a former model:

> . . . At one point, without thinking, Kate asked if Jessie still hated her breasts. . . . They had always talked about breasts in school—everyone they knew hated something about her own breasts: the size, or the shape, the heaviness or the proportion, the pointiness or lack of pointiness. Jessie's breasts belonged on a Botticelli Venus, but Jessie hated them. Nothing *about* them, just the fact of having them at all. (56)

When the women make love, Jessie "would not touch Kate's breasts, and she would not let Kate touch hers" (59). Sexuality is expressed not in touching or tenderness, but in dominance and submission. As the book opens, Jessie is being raped by a Black man who shoves a gun up her vagina. (The racist implication of Gould's choice of a Black man to represent male power are appalling to us.) As it ends, she has turned into a man in order to rape (have sex with) her friend. This is the establishment of her power. To love a woman is to take power over her and shove a gun up her vagina. Kate responds erotically, as Jessie had before her, to the gunman's demonstration of his "power." "She has never been forced to confront her visceral response to that kind of power. He had come to make her do that; make her body admit what they both knew it felt. And he had succeeded" (136). This "abuse of feeling" is what Audre Lorde describes as pornography and obscenity.[17] Their punishment is two-edged: the rape itself and each woman's knowledge of her own (alleged) pleasure in this humiliation of her person.

Another form of rape surfaces in Susan Yankowitz's *Silent Witness.* The protagonist is a deaf mute woman who is raped in prison by the other inmates: one woman holds her down, one squats on her face and uses Anna's mouth, a third licks Anna's cunt. Midway through this scene, Anna seems to become an active participant in the event. Her initial excitement is linked to the experience of being forced: "(She is not a rag doll, she is not a stone.) But how could she, can she? But she is excited. But actually she is being raped. But by women. . . ." Ignoring the humiliation of this punishment, the loss of power experienced by the victim, the author informs us that it wasn't like a real rape because the victim hadn't been penetrated. The distinction is difficult to follow:

> But this much is clear: this is the first sexual experience in which, ironically, she feels unthreatened. Finally there will be no penis to invade her: for always (she realizes it now) she has dreaded that moment of entry when, flesh like steel, it thrusts into her. (176-177)

Although Yankowitz tries to distinguish between the punishment of forceable rape and these events, we find this rape, nonetheless, a distressing punishment.

Rosa Guy's novel *Ruby* begins as a story of a developing relationship between two young Black women. The writing in this novel is persuasive and the interactions between the two lovers are especially believable. One feels the anguish Ruby experiences when her father discovers their relationship and punishes her (both physically and emotionally) until she attempts suicide. Her lover, Daphne, contributes to Ruby's punishment, when she tells her she is "going straight" in order to make it in the white "bougie" world of Brandeis College. As in *Silent Witness,* it would seem that the reader is not supposed to notice these punishments, since in the final scene of the novel Ruby's father asks a teenage boy whom Ruby once admired to stop up and see her. Clearly, this scene is designed as a reward for heterosexuality. Instead of following her first instinct and telling him to go away, Ruby "put her hand up to touch her disheveled hair," straightening herself for the man's eye. The lesson of her punishment obviously learned, she tells her sister, "Tell him another time. . . . Maybe tomorrow" (217). The mandate both to punish Ruby and to have her turn back to males in the end would seem to be especially strong in this novel because it was originally intended for "young adult" readers.[18]

Blanche Boyd in *Mourning the Death of Magic* investigates the

world of a suicidal lesbian. Seduced by a teacher who then deserts her, Galley lives with drugs and depression and nervous breakdowns. At its heart this novel develops the relationship of Galley and her sister, Mallory; it explores their reliance on one another and their perspectives of a shared past. We applaud the author for taking on this subject. However, the book ends abruptly just after we find out that Galley's last suicide attempt was related to her sexual feelings for Mallory, and that she and Mallory have become lovers. This maneuver apparently is intended to redeem Galley, but it is a precarious redemption, as indicated by another character's comments on Galley's suddenly hearty state: "Everyone was delighted, though of course no one expected it to last" (212). Galley has exhibited no self love, no sense of direction; she is portrayed as so fragile that one is left envisioning a future in which disappointment in this incestuous relationship will almost surely lead to suicide.

The Reckoning by May Sarton has only one openly lesbian character, a minor figure who is about to be punished for publishing a lesbian book. Her lover, who needs to stay in the closet, has threatened to leave her if she publishes the book. The love that the protagonist, Laura, has for Ella, a woman friend of many years, is the more significant thread of the novel. Laura is dying of cancer and wants to spend her final months acknowledging the "real connections," but will not let herself call or write Ella, the presence she longs for more and more as her life ebbs. Finally Ella does come and through reestablishing their connection, Laura feels some resolution in her relationship to her mother. The potential richness of women communing together is portrayed mainly in the abstract: its absence in Laura's living is the primary grievance of her dying. The punishment theme emerges as a deprivation in the woman who cannot credit her lesbian feelings until she is dying of cancer. This failure is deeply linked to Laura's sense of loss and profound powerlessness.

In Doris Grumbach's novel *Chamber Music,* two homosexual men die horrible, lingering deaths from syphilis. Much of the book is taken up with graphic, physical details of what this wasting disease does to the human body and mind. When Caroline, wife of one of these men, and Anna, his nurse, finally become lovers, their love is a joyful and celebratory experience. It is sexual and fulfilling: their lives together represent the best kind of sharing and growing for each woman. But after Anna dies in an influenza epidemic, Caroline lives the rest of her life, another fifty years, in solitude and inactivity. Literally "con-

demned to survival," her continuing life is the inevitable punishment for the few years of freedom and happiness she has experienced.

The fates of these protagonists might have been the same, in some instances, if they had loved men instead of women: Laura might still have died of cancer, Caroline might still have lived a meaningless and protracted later life. However, the collective experience of these books shows us a continuing thread in the history of punishment for the lesbian. While we do not mean to insist that lesbian stories must have happy endings, we feel that lesbians must recognize the frequency and magnitude of punishments meted out in these novels. Perhaps the presence of this theme is a measure of the depth of homophobia in our culture. Certainly lesbian writers must be free to explore the lesbian experience fully, and this includes our own homophobia, as well as our other problems and pains. But we must ask ourselves: what would a series of positive resolutions mean to us as we read the stories of our lives? what would be the effect of woman empowerment? and why have not these stories also been published?

Erotic Power. . . or "disconcerting flesh"

Audre Lorde states in *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power:*

> In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives.[19]

Lorde says that it is false to believe that we need suppress the erotic to be truly strong women. We think back to the impotence of our lives before we recognized ourselves as lesbians and contrast that impotence with the exhilaration of coming out as lesbians, with the flood of power we experienced in our bodies, our lives, our work, as we created relationships with women, allowed ourselves to be fully ourselves. "Of course, women so empowered are dangerous,"[20] Lorde reminds us. While we cannot prove by the absence of such empowering stories that the commercial presses have deliberately turned them down, we can say with conviction that the lack of erotic power available to lesbians in the novels they have chosen to publish is conspicuous.[21]

One account of women coming together and out of that experience becoming more connected to themselves, more powerful, occurs

in *Silent Witness.* Once Anna's place within the community of women in prison has been established, she and Flora come together as lovers:

> not the word (love) only but the expression of it in Flora's eyes and in the caress of hands and in, most of all, kisses. It is the first time that Anna has kissed a woman full on the lips. A plush as goosedown mouth sinks into her mouth. A ditto body embraces her. It is not, as with a man, hard against soft, angle against curve, bone against flesh. Now there are breasts pillowing her breasts, a stomach rounding into hers, thighs trembling against her thighs; but whose breasts, stomach, thighs; whose mouth, whose buttocks, whose body is whose when they two are crushed into each other like this, so identically merged? . . . . They do not fit one into the other, but fuse into a single body that sways and undulates. Is it instinct or experience that causes Flora to stroke so gently here, to press so amorously there? But for Anna it is renewed discovery of. . . her capacity to give and receive love generously, without fear of invasion or pain. Flora's kisses arouse her to tenderness. Caresses catapult her into orgasm. One of them sobs; but which?

After Anna and Flora begin their relationship, and as Anna works out her relationship with other women in prison, they begin to form into a political force. They take action, confront prison authorities about their conditions, make some gains. The most important gains, one senses, are in themselves, in the respect they develop for themselves, for each other, for the power of their solidarity.

It is not possible, however, to report the impressive sensibility of these scenes without remembering the earlier scene: the juxtaposition of the lesbian rape with the later emergence of lesbian power expresses a deep ambivalence in the overall presentation of lesbianism, an ambivalence which no doubt made this novel more palatable to the commercial publishing world. Other novels also contain joyous and erotic moments (*Ruby, Loving Her, Chamber Music*), but the effect of these moments is erased by the characters' final punishments.

In many of the novels erotic power is undermined by ludicrous descriptions of lesbian sexuality. Writers who are perfectly capable of depicting a vivid scene or image falter under the pressure of describing

what it is that we do. When in *Class Notes* Kate Stimpson creates lesbian sexual scenes she seems to clutch her pen and write stilted, unnatural prose which leaves us far from enchanted. In one scene, Sophia "stroked Harriet's throat as if the gesture ornamented memory" (123). At least one reader must still be hopelessly entangled in this abstraction. During another encounter, "She sloughed the sheet and the pajama top from Harriet's body. Harriet felt as if she were a tree and Marcia, intently, intelligently, were taking a branch there, a leaf here" (195). The language seems more reminiscent of mutilation than lovemaking. In the single lesbian sexual description in Marge Piercy's *The High Cost of Living,* the imagery descends into grotesquery: "breasts making love rubbing against breasts. . . a mound of living breasts nudging each other swift and squirming and hot and passionate as little piglets, little piglets at the tits. But the tits were hungry piglets themselves, both question and answer. Mouth on mouth. Eyes becoming one round huge eye staring into the other" (114).

In Erica Jong's *How to Save Your Own Life,* lesbian sexuality is not perceptibly different from heterosexuality. It is, rather, indicative of a kind of chic trendiness in the protagonist. "It was stylish," Jong tells us, "to have a lesbian affair that year," and, further, "I thought I might want to write about it" (149). She goes to bed with Rosanna, not out of lust but curiosity. After the first time their bedding was a matter of "obligation." Rosanna has given her an orgasm; she is now on the archetypal male quest to prove herself by giving Rosanna an orgasm, being a better fuck than the next fellow. She finds the experience of (so-called) lesbian sex exhilarating the first time because of breaking the taboo. Her response to this exhilaration is not the opening out of possibility that so many lesbians have expressed in their coming out stories,[22] but. . . "How can I describe it? The word smug comes to mind. . . I felt so goddamned superior to all those people who wouldn't dare" (149). The lesbian affair has become a matter of one-up-manship. Clearly she has to feel this way since there are no rewards for her in the physical experience: "God help me, I am about to tell about my first impressions of cunt-eating and risk the wrath. . . of mine sisters: Gentle Reader, it did not taste good" (152). Under such circumstances, the only possible reward is the *de rigeur* orgasm, the orgasm that seems so elusive:

> I was nibbling her clit as she had done for me. . . . trying
> not to think of the smell. . . . How long had it been?
> An hour? Two? I began to understand what it meant

> to be a man, fumbling around—is *this* the right place or is *that*? Help! I need some guidance. This is uncharted territory. (153)

Like the woman in Lois Gould's novel who must become a man to have sex with a woman, Erica Jong's heroine—ostensibly a woman—seems never to have noted her own sexual responses. Her ultimate solution to Rosanna's lack of orgasm is blatantly male-oriented. "I pounded away with dildo, Coke bottles, green plastic vibrators from Japan. A big one in the cunt and a little one in the ass. . . . I put cucumbers with ribbed condoms in her cunt and bananas covered with French ticklers" (155). She finally succeeds with an empty bottle of Dom Perignon champagne: "I had the pleasure of seeing Rosanna Howard reach tumultuous orgasm with the bulging green base of a Dom Perignon bottle protruding from her reluctant cunt. . . Would she have come with Paul Masson or Taylor's New York State? I think the answer is clear" (156).

Penis, cucumber, coke bottle. These are not the instruments of lesbian sexuality, but rather the images of heterosexuality established earlier in the novel when the angry Isadora fucks her husband instead of leaving him.

> She hates him, she despises him, but she wants his strange root-shaped [sic] cock inside her. . . . He lies motionless, silent, the man who died with an erection and then grew harder as rigor mortis set in. She climbs on his upraised penis. . . . using it as a dildo, coldly. (118-119)

When he comes, she wonders, "What kind of a man is it who makes no noise at all when he comes? A dead man? She feels tainted, ashamed, slightly necrophiliac. She climbs off his dead penis and lies there at his side" (119). Necrophilia—the logical extension of objectified sexuality, a sexuality that exists without caring, without emotional commitment—has little to do with lesbian eroticism, with the lesbian existence we are trying to create within our community and culture.

Self-hatred, expressed as it is in the conversation about breasts in Lois Gould's *A Sea Change,* occurs frequently and is another element that distorts the potential of lesbian sexuality. After Jong's description of how terrible cunts smell and taste, she has her heroine suggest, "It almost seemed she should be brought a silver finger bowl (with rose petals floating in it) after touching my cunt" (152). At the end of Kate Stimpson's *Class Notes* the heroine knows she is a lesbian,

but wonders, "what was she to do now with her own flesh?" That flesh desires women and her first impulse towards it is destructive:

> Harriet wanted to rip off her own skin; to jaw away at the flesh of her own thighs; to yank at the mat of her scalp; to reach through her heart to release blood sufficient to smear against the mirror, over the image of the unwanted, disconcerting flesh. (223-224)

She tries to reconcile her mind, her self, to the reality of living with her body. "Despite taboos, despite the pain the taboos nurtured, despite the bite of her mind against itself as it sought reunion with the body, she was happier with women than with men" (224). Wholeness, for this lesbian, never becomes an option. Self-hatred is inherent in the wrenching apart of what the mind wants from what the body wants, a separation of sexuality from intelligence and from caring commitment. Stimpson's heroine reminds herself of "more pressing worries" (225), work, challenges to her mind. We are left to assume that she will do good works in the world in order to make up for the indulgence of her body. This is not an acceptance of self, an integration or wholeness out of which strength and power will or can emerge.

In Jane DeLynn's *Some Do* we are given portraits of two apparently dissimilar lesbians. Bettina is described as having a debilitating handicap: "she wasn't even normal, she was ugly" (5). She is also portrayed as so dumb her sexual urges are only expressed as vague animal longings; her self-hatred is an implicit part of her self-concept. As she walks toward her first meeting with Kirsh,

> She had this strange desire to go down on her hands and legs and bark like a dog. She wanted to lick Kirsh's feet. She wanted to roll on her back on the floor and have Kirsh's feet tickle her tummy. She wanted to be flushed down the toilet and dissolve like a piece of toilet paper in the ocean. It was where she came from, it was where she belonged. (4)

She really comes from an Ohio suburb, and it is to that suburb she returns at the end of the book, to live with her husband and children.

> Even her family jokingly came to refer to her time in California as a "vacation." Columbus was clearly "real life." In "real life" one did not sleep with members of

> one's own sex, and Bettina didn't. . . . that was part of the deal she had made with God, in return for Donald's taking her back. (That was how she thought of it, as Donald "taking her back.") She obeyed him and her parents as if she were a child waiting to grow up and be free. (345)

The other lesbian, Maria, is Black and says she is "proud to be a dyke." But she refers to her lovers as "new cunt" and justifies her use of denigrating self-hating terminology by insisting, "It's like niggers calling themselves niggers. *I'se* a nigger, but if you call me that, I'll punch you in the mouth" (150). The women she chooses as lovers are "skinny little white girls who looked like ex-addicts" (175). DeLynn's grammar deserts her when she tries to explain that "Maria used dildos: flesh-colored plastic objects to resemble penises" (175), never specifying what color is flesh color. Cass, a white member of Maria's c.r. group, "loved these tales of the little white girls Maria brought home and stuck her dildo into. Maria was a real original. Of course, it was vaguely disgusting. But that was what made it interesting" (174). And, of course, Maria's lovers adore this treatment. "She had no trouble getting lovers, and if she wanted them to, they always came back, each and every one of them, no matter what their politics" (175).

The racism and homophobia in this novel are blatant. That Maria is Black seems a fictional convenience. We never see Maria interact in the Black community. Two Black men appear briefly, one in a completely gratuitous and out-of-context account, in graphic detail, of a Black man falsely accused of rape, who is castrated and dies hemorrhaging while holding his penis in his hand. The other Black man—perpetuating the stereotype of how lesbians "get that way"—rapes Maria and turns her against men for life. Maria never has a Black lover or friend or support network within the Black community. Insisting that the intent of this characterization is to show that contradictions exist in our lives, the back cover blurb depicts Maria as "a black lesbian militant who, despite her rhetoric sleeps only with white women."[23] But we are never shown the political side of Maria. We have no idea whether her "rhetoric" is directed toward left politics or Black nationalism or women's rights, or whether, indeed, she has any political commitment. The use of the sensationalized portrait, instead of actual character development, is another device by which lesbian women are divested of their potential for erotic power.

We find this phenomenon repeated in Rita Mae Brown's *Six of One,* a novel in which aristocratic lesbians roll around in bed, "carrying on like trash" (66). But Brown never takes on an intimate description of a sexual encounter. She relates how Celeste "in her wildness, had torn off Ramelle's blouse" (33) without ever portraying them in a tender, lovemaking context. In the novel's most erotic scene, Celeste goes to her servant Cora for comfort on a lonely night. Cora takes her into her bed and gives her just that. Celeste is, of course, titillated by breaking the master/servant taboo. Brown seems regularly to create characters who might be considered professional taboo-breakers; unfortunately, they fill that role so frequently that their reactions are rote and unenlightening. Despite the fact that most of the primary characters in *Six of One* are lesbians, lesbianism is not an issue this novel explores.

Several other novels suggest that sexual preference is no more an issue than, say, hair color or body type. The lesbian who appears briefly at the end of Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* is peripheral to the novel's plot. Isa finds coming out an affirming experience; she flowers, becomes more beautiful. She has affairs with two married women after her first lover leaves her to marry a man. She does nothing political as a result of loving women. She bonds with no one, she is not powerful. She appears in the novel to demonstrate that the protagonist has encountered all of the options of life and deliberately chosen celibacy.

In Mary Gordon's *Final Payments,* lesbianism is used to fill the space that should have been taken up by actual characterization. Having designated a minor character lesbian, Gordon feels under no obligation to develop her further. In fact, her three women characters, all friends, are in some ways bound, limited, by their sexuality. The protagonist is vigorously heterosexual, though she has had to repress these urges for years until her sick father dies. She looks for support to two friends: one is the lesbian, the other a celibate woman. This lesbian, like the one in Jong's novel, chooses not to leave her husband to live with her lover. Her decision is not explored in depth and the reader is left with Gordon's implication that the marriage perquisites are more than any lesbian would willingly give up: a rich, powerful politician husband, a country estate with horses, babysitters, etc.

Whether the experience of lesbians in these individual books is

neutral, explicitly negative, or ambivalent, the collective experience of lesbianism portrayed in them is depressingly uniform, and dissimilar to our own lives. In "Lesbian Existence and Compulsory Heterosexuality," Adrienne Rich states,

> The destruction of records and memorabilia and letters documenting the realities of lesbian existence must be taken very seriously as a means of keeping heterosexuality compulsory for women, since what has been kept from our knowledge is joy, sensuality, courage, and community, as well as guilt, self-betrayal, and pain.[24]

While the reader of commercial press books may find accounts of guilt, self-betrayal, and pain documented in connection with the lesbian experience, she will find largely absent from the record joy, sensuality, courage, community—vital elements of our erotic and creative power. While the trend to publish lesbian scenes is clearly existent, the house prescription is one which predictably distorts the realities of lesbian existence while pretending to give us records of our lives.

Lesbians in the Mainstream. . . "wiggling upward"

Identifying ourselves as lesbian means, for most of us, an enormous alteration of life expectations from those defined by the heterosexist culture. Some of us have had to deal with the realization that we will never marry and have children in the conventional way that would win us the approval of relatives, friends, and colleagues. Some of us have had to face losing the children that were part of a heterosexual union. Most of us have to deal with obtaining and maintaining economic resources through dependence on patriarchal institutions. Often this requires us to hide our lesbianism. Whatever our circumstances, a lesbian identification almost inevitably means not being a "good girl" in the way the straight world has defined it; we are trying not to get into the mainstream but rather to understand what it means to stand apart from it. Almost nowhere in this literature do we find such an essential theme discussed or developed.

Instead, the protagonists in Marge Piercy's *The High Cost of Living* and in Alix Shulman's *Burning Questions* focus most of their energies on finding approval. Leslie, the heroine of *The High Cost of Living,* is a lesbian of working-class origins. She sees herself as trying to work her way out of the "narrowness" of that world and into the mainstream world of the bourgeoisie. "Miss Greening has saved her

from her class fate by involving her in school" (143). Honor, the young woman whom Leslie chooses to pursue, appeals to her by being "eccentric" for a working-class woman. "The girl was affected, but placed in the house she became more interesting, like an orchid growing out of a crack in the sidewalk" (20). Honor complains that the people in her real life such as her Mama are invading it, and in response Leslie gives her lessons in upward mobility: " 'You'll leave home soon and things will start to happen. Then books won't be more interesting than the people you meet, people you have something in common with' " (23). If Leslie feels that they, as the tokens of their class, have anything in common with their families, she never reveals it. Bernie, a gay man with whom she later has an affair, is another of these tokens.

> "Besides we won't be poor. We're both wiggling upward, Bernie, we've shed our class. We've flayed ourselves bare and plastered over our bleeding flesh with accents and books and classes and everything we weren't and wanted to be." (135)

When Bernie asks, " 'Do you like yourself?' " she responds, " 'I guess not. Not yet. I'm an unfinished project and I show too many signs of haste and wretched planning' " (135). While Piercy portrays some of the alienation fostered by a class system which encourages upward mobility with few backward glances, she fails to bring her characters to a class consciousness in which they demonstrate an understanding of the forces which operate against them, and she likewise fails to show the pain such alienation produces. Instead, they shun their families and seem to believe that self-love will grow with refinement and further distance from their origins. Certainly all of us of working-class origins remember this indoctrination, as we remember the pain of the occasions when we strove for refinement and sophistication, and ended up feeling like imposters who had plastered on a very thin veneer. While we encourage exploration and understanding of the phenomenon of upward mobility and do not mean to advocate downward mobility, we wish that Piercy had gone further in breaking through the mesh of complexity of the class issue. Because her characters do not vigorously examine the system in which they are "wiggling upward," they seem, finally, to internalize the alienation which needs to be directed outward. They appear to have accepted the invitation to assimilate.[25]

Leslie assumes that obtaining her Ph.D. will be a broadening experience, both intellectually and financially, but this assumption is never examined by the author in what purports to be a political novel.

Leslie's work, as such, is ephemeral, and difficult to assess. A paper on railroads occupies her for most of the novel; we never learn what she is doing with railroads or how the study will expand her life. She finds exciting the mysterious archival materials to which she is supposed to have access, but does not protest when at the end of the book her dissertation director pulls her off work with those papers and changes her topic without notice. Piercy tells us several times that Leslie's work is important to her, but we never follow her into that place and see why. For any woman with a feminist consciousness graduate school can be an excruciating experience. Leslie's education is filled with contradictions and competitions which she accepts unquestioningly. Perhaps most distorted is the assumption that her Ph.D. will guarantee her high-paying employment. As a woman, as an open lesbian in an all-male field, there is a better than average chance that she will spend much of her professional life unemployed, at best underemployed—a problem which is never discussed.

Piercy's portrait of life in the lesbian community seems as stifling as her portrait of life in the working-class community. At one point Leslie muses, "If she were living here alone, having lost her lover, they would be wary of her. . . . The narrowness of the world they created here grated upon her. . ." (119). She is lonely in her new city but never becomes part of the community of feminists there; they are "too demanding" and make her feel guilty for not giving them enough of her time and energy. Leslie rejects this lesbian feminist community along with her working-class origins for the "larger" world. Although Piercy shows us at the end of the novel that the Ph.D. director is a morally and intellectually bankrupt man, Leslie nonetheless gets on her motor bike and rides back to work further with him. Her anger at him is violent, but repressed. She knows "some reckoning was coming due. She had to face what she had not been facing" (266). In spite of the title of the book, however, the reckoning of the cost to Leslie does not take place within its pages.

The protagonist of Shulman's *Burning Questions,* Zane, is a middle-class woman with revolutionary yearnings. Like Piercy's character, she would like to reject her origins as "too narrow," and move into the large exciting world of "beat" Greenwich Village. We follow her from that world to marriage and finally to feminism and lesbianism. Zane clearly admires those lesbians in the women's movement whose attraction to women comes through their political involvement:

> A new breed of lesbian began to come out. Self-styled 'political lesbians' who, often as not, had yet to make love to their first woman but who, nevertheless, hungering for some self-respecting life which would enable them to repudiate men without repudiating love, proclaimed themselves gay. (279)

Shulman seems blind to the anguish of a woman who, in seeking a "self-respecting" life as a lesbian, has to encounter herself in the context of a society in which every message is that to be lesbian is *not* to be self-respecting. Integrating one's politics and one's sexuality is to be applauded, surely, but this seems an enormous oversimplification of that process to those of us who have endured much pain and difficulty in our long comings to lesbianism.

Zane implies that she does not, herself, have an erotic attraction to women, but thinks those who do must find it fulfilling; the implication somehow is that those who come to sleeping with women through their politics are less queer than those who don't, or, perhaps, are less threatening to men. She does notice some differences in sleeping with women; she feels freed from roles and is relieved to have a lover who doesn't mind if she thinks, and with whom she feels equal. Passion is mentioned once, but in a passionless manner, that is, the passion is the same as it has been with men. Zane concludes that she has been duped by men into giving herself to them and she says that the truth is "that we *prefer* women to them" (283).

If these insights seem as if they had been dropped by a disappearing ghost, it is because Shulman drops Faith, Zane's lover, just after she has begun to form as a character, and drops Zane's relationship to her, explaining only much later in the novel that their relationship foundered on the one "unsuspected difference," time. "We might have gone on loving if we'd had the time, but the parameters of our lives had been hopelessly incongruous" (321). Zane lived by "clocks and compromises." Faith followed impulses. Since we never see these women interact as primary sources for each other, our conclusion must be that they did not give each other enough to be worth making time for. If either of them suffers loss, it is not mentioned.

Even Zane's most positive statements about loving women suffer from her sense of male evaluation: " 'My god, Faith. . . You're so lovely. Now I see what men love so much in women. You're so soft, so delicate' " (283). Not only does this observation deny the existence

of misogyny, but one must wonder why Zane does not observe, "Now I see what *women* love so much in women."

In the last section of the book when Zane seems unsure of whether the feminist revolution is over or not, we are told: "For some sisters men had been eliminated from their lives altogether, while for others they've gradually been resuming their place as the main attraction" (303). It would be one thing for a woman like Zane to say that she thinks she wants to sleep with men after all, or that she has commenced a search for a man who is willing to deal with his sexism. But to place them as the "main attraction," to use the word "resume," conveys the deep ambivalence running throughout this novel, the conviction that women are not really good enough to ally with. Clearly Zane never really did "prefer women." She knows that she must prefer the patriarch, as he is her source of approval and of token power. After she rises to some fame and fortune in the women's movement and participates in a feminist collective where the women all seem to admire and respect her, Zane is invited back to her home town to give a commencement address. With her parents seated in the front row, she delivers a speech which, one assumes, undermines their values. When her father criticizes her, she cries, " 'Still Daddy? Isn't there anything I can do to please you? Isn't anything enough?' " (298). She has not yet learned the lesson most basic to political survival and growth—that she cannot expect the approval of those she is attacking. The last chapter of *Burning Questions,* entitled "Winner's Luck," implies that only a few can be winners and that Zane will be among them. Such a description is hardly an accurate portrayal of our lives; it is rather a betrayal, a false portrait that misrepresents and trivializes the struggle, pain, and joy of lesbian-feminist existence.[26]

Despite the fact that most lesbian women spend a great deal of time and energy on attaining some economic security or at least assuring material survival, very few characters in these novels show more than blithe concern for the economics of their lives. Shulman throws in the off-hand comment, "When Ricky left us we had to move to humbler quarters" (300). Later Zane says, "My New School classes hardly brought me real power. They barely paid enough to keep me and could be dropped without notice" (305). While this statement would seem to indicate a firm understanding of Zane's predicament, Shulman never pursues this further and one is left feeling that precarious economics are never of central concern.

In contrast to the books written by white women, we found that *Loving Her* and *Ruby* were grounded much more solidly in a sense of concern for material survival. "The bills were mounting and Jerome Lee had been away for a month without a word" (19). The tension over economics is woven in with the other tensions of Renay's relationship to Jerome in *Loving Her.* After she leaves him, she lives with a wealthy white woman lover, Terry, who serves as an economic resource as well as an emotional support. The mother of a young daughter, Renay has an unsteady economic base. Terry grossly exploits her economic power, that is, she puts Renay to work as her cook, grocery shopper, etc., while trivializing Renay's need to work as a nightclub pianist.

> "You really don't have to work, you know." Work? Yes she *did* have to work. To let Denise know she was contributing to their keep, and to preserve her independence, but above all, to keep alive and active that integral part of her—her music. (48)

Terry seems thick with an unconscious racism which often comes out in the spending of her money. "Terry could be so damn naive" (62), the narrator tells us. Incidents in which Terry's monetary offers are juxtaposed with her requests for food service are numerous and incriminating. When Terry comes home with a college catalog and suggests Renay should resume her schooling, Renay doesn't even have a chance to open the catalog before Terry says, "Darling—feed me: I'm hungry. What's for lunch?" (63). We wish the author had taken a narrative stance more critical of the racism here. We do appreciate, however, the attention given to the economics of the relationship between Renay and Terry, and the implicit acknowledgement of the influence of material survival needs in a woman's life.

In *Ruby* we are again given some understanding of how the women's lives are affected by the flow of material resources. We are given an inside view of two families and a sense of the demands for and conflicts inherent in upward mobility for each. Ruby's father is a hard-working immigrant restaurant owner who has ambitions for Ruby to excel in school and move into educated circles. " 'You ain't come all the way to this country to end up no washerwoman nor clerk in a stinking office' " (40). Daphne's mother plays numbers and frequently expresses disdain for her daughter's arrogance: " 'It's about time she got used to the idea that dirty money pays for her expensive

tastes'. . . . 'There's only room for *one* lady in this family' " (73), she says to let Daphne know that her education is possible because her mother is taking care of the business of survival. The upwardly mobile ambitions of both Daphne and Ruby are presented in the context of the possible conflict with their revolutionary potential. Ruby's sister tells Daphne:

> "You set yourself above the people."
> "Pray tell, how did you reach that conclusion?"
> "Just look at the college you chose." (137)

And later Ruby argues, " 'By the time you have finished, you will be one of them' " (162). In the end Daphne goes to Brandeis, her education supported, at least in part, by her mother's sweepstakes winnings.

When the lesbian relationship between Daphne and Ruby is threatened by parental authority, they briefly consider moving away from their families, and rapidly become cognizant of the limitations of their own financial resources, which are essentially non-existent.

The recognition of economic reality in these two novels by Black women is instructive about class divisions among lesbians. Shockley and Guy recognize that the invitation to assimilate is a constant tactic of those in positions of power. We cannot afford to accept it. Nor can we condone authors who portray us as unknowing tokens.

"What has been kept from our knowledge is joy, sensuality, courage, and community. . . ." Strength is rarely found in community in these contemporary novels. The exceptions are a community of women in prison (*Silent Witness*) and Ruby and Daphne's connections to their Black community. In the white world women seem confused about community—which one they came from, which one they can buy into next, which one gives them approval.

These novels taken as a whole fragment, distort, trivialize, and betray lesbian experience. Cynthia Gair of Women in Distribution, until recently the foremost distributor of feminist press books, pointed out in an analysis of the reasons for WIND's folding, "Feminist bookstore sales are off because the New York commercial houses are publishing so many women's books today that they are readily available in regular stores. Book buyers don't have to go to a feminist store in order to get women's books."[27] Feminists need constantly to examine the assumption that the women's books published by the commercial

presses portray what we recognize as women's lives. We need to know what the commercial presses will and have accepted for publication at any given time, why some books are acceptable and others not. We need to know if there is a particular image of the "lesbian" that the commercial presses have an investment in portraying, and we need to understand her relationship to us. We cannot possibly understand her if we fail to examine her in depth. We must also assure the continued development of our independent voices through our support of lesbian and feminist presses, periodicals, and bookstores.

Our lives are fragile; we can count on little as a matter of course. We manage to put these lives together in bits and pieces– ourselves, ourselves with one another. We piece our lives in spite of the mainstream culture that tries to define us, silence us, redirect us and our energies. In these novels we do not read about what we have found in our lesbian relationships–the intimacy, the support for our being and our working and our loving, the conflicts and political curiosity and exploration and tension of a vital, growing community.

NOTES

[1] 1974 Ann Shockley, *Loving Her,* Bobbs-Merrill.
1975 Lisa Alther, *Kinflicks,* Alfred A. Knopf.
1976 Gail Pass, *Zoe's Book,* Houghton Mifflin.
Susan Yankowitz, *Silent Witness,* Alfred A. Knopf.
Lois Gould, *A Sea Change,* Simon and Schuster.
Rosa Guy, *Ruby,* Viking Press.
1977 Blanche Boyd, *Mourning the Death of Magic,* MacMillan and Company.
Erica Jong, *How to Save Your Own Life,* Holt, Rhinehart and Winston.
Marilyn French, *The Women's Room,* Simon and Schuster.
1978 Mary Gordon, *Final Payments,* Random House.
Alix Kates Shulman, *Burning Questions,* Alfred A. Knopf.
Jane DeLynn, *Some Do,* MacMillan and Company.
Rita Mae Brown, *Six of One,* Harper and Row.
May Sarton, *A Reckoning,* Norton.
Marge Piercy, *The High Cost of Living,* Harper and Row.
1979 Kate Stimpson, *Class Notes,* NY Times Books.
Doris Grumbach, *Chamber Music,* E.P. Dutton.

[2] *Boston Herald American,* Monday, August 13, 1979, p. 13.

[3] *High Cost of Living.*

[4] *How to Save Your Own Life* and *Burning Questions.*

[5] *The High Cost of Living.*

[6] *Class Notes* and *A Reckoning.*

[7] *The High Cost of Living.*

[8] *Some Do* and *Six of One.*

[9] *Class Notes* and *Burning Questions.*

[10] *The High Cost of Living, Six of One,* and *Ruby.*

[11] *How to Save Your Own Life, Six of One, Zoe's Book.*

[12] *Loving Her, Kinflicks, A Sea Change, Ruby, Mourning the Death of Magic, Some Do, A Reckoning, Class Notes, Chamber Music* and *The High Cost of Living.*

[13] All of the above.

[14] *Ruby* and *Loving Her.*

[15] See Blanche Wiesen Cook's fine summary of the punishment theme in lesbian fiction during this period in " 'Women Alone Stir My Imagination' Lesbianism and the Cultural Tradition," *Signs,* IV, 4, Summer 1979, pp. 718-739.

[16] Gould, Yankowitz, Guy.

[17] Audre Lorde, *Uses of the Erotic; the Erotic as Power* (Out & Out Books, Brooklyn, NY, 1978), p. 7.

[18] Frances Hanckel and John Cunningham ask "Can Young Gays Find Happiness in YA Books" in their article published in the *Wilson Library Bulletin* (March 1976, Vol. 50, No. 7) and conclude, "One wonders, however, whether any random selection of four YA novels could produce eight central characters with five sets of divorced parents (two of whom are alcoholic) and have plots with three natural deaths and one by violence—plus four car crashes resulting in one mutilation, one head injury, and five fatalities!"

[19] Lorde, p. 1.

[20] Lorde, p. 3.

[21] Paula Bennett asks a similar question in her review of *The Women's Room, Final Payments* and *How to Save Your Own Life.* "Summer Schlock Report II: Corruption in the Marketplace or Getting it Straight," *Focus: A Journal for Lesbians* (Daughters of Bilitis: Boston, MA), Sept.-Oct., 1979.

[22] Julia Penelope Stanley and Susan J. Wolfe have edited an anthology of some of these stories. See *The Coming Out Stories,* Persephone Press, 1980. $6.95. Write: Persephone Press, P.O. Box 7222, Watertown, Mass. 02172.

[23] The cover copy cited is from the trade paperback edition; the book was sufficiently successful to warrant a mass market edition (put out by Pocket Books, a Simon & Schuster Division of Gulf and Western Corporation) with more garish and provocative cover design and copy

[24] Adrienne Rich, "Lesbian Existence and Compulsory Heterosexuality" in the forthcoming *Signs* issue on sexuality.

[25] A phrase described by Mary Daly in *Gyn/Ecology* (Boston: Beacon, 1978). Daly says, "The assimilation of Amazons as Athenas into the Army is an essential aim of androcracy," its form: tokenism.

[26] Beverly Tanenhaus explores these and similar issues in her excellent review of *Burning Questions* in *Chrysalis,* No. 7, 1979.

[27] Kirsten Grimstad, "Introduction to the Feminist Publishing Catalog" in *Chrysalis,* No. 8, p. 106.

CHICA

In front of Mariana Bracetti housing project
there is no story Hollywood could invent
more real than life itself.
Una Chica in a tight white T-shirt spins a rap
and the snow is thick before a youngblood's eyes
illusions of romance gone stale
with three past decades of pillow talk
and Gidget goes Hawaiian
only because she lives off the interest
of investments her father made
in crude oil
although Saudi Arabia has not yet been declared
vacation paradise of the east.
–Chica deme un cigarillo.
And she pulls a smashed pack of Newports from her back pocket.
–Toma.
Let me hold your radio.
Some other part of her must be hiding from herself.
For recreation she would rather be jacked up in a hallway.
It's not about giving up
or taking a note and holding on
till there is no more breath.
Across the street due west of Mariana Bracetti
there is a cafe
esta gente
you know them coming on with their plays.
There is no romance here.
It has gone stale even before you were born Chica
did you know
even before the flying nun took to the skies
she had dreams like Psyche
waiting for the arms of night to claim her.

Chica how was it you discovered love
behind the shooting gallery
in an old abandoned stairwell
bringing back the bread and milk.
While your mother worried
what took you so long
you were busy in the arms of night.

HOWARD BEACH

Howard Beach before hurricane season is about
take the train to the plane
around dawn when the breakfast shift takes over
and the stand-bys get an early start to the airport
around dawn
Howard Beach
and the wind wants to take you
somewhere else far off and away
fly me is the ticket man for $3 a ride.
Howard Beach before hurricane winds
and rain is in the air
the way the trees go wild
and still waiting
by spurts I grow wild
and still with nothing to recommend the day
but umbrellas turned inside out.
Howard Beach
a stop on the rails to Far Rockaway
out where all the Jewish grandmothers
who didn't make it to Miami Beach
were left to die.
On the day of the last sunrise
moon knows it will have its way
and the tides are all going crazy
washing away debris from the end of the world.

POEM IN A YEAR THAT PUNCTUATES A DECADE

i have heard of tortures
yet remain
strangely safe.

—Irena Klepfisz

Whatever can come to a city can come to this city.

—Muriel Rukeyser

1.

1/9/79
Phnom Penh
has fallen
again, flat, flat, a
shipwrecked,
flattened decade, *gonna*
let you down and
leave you
flat, flat,
flat as the
refuse and dreck of
Christmas gone
flat, sour, washed
up on tidal-
flat sidewalks
among the dumpsters
and hydrants
the corner billboards
el sabor es lo
que cuenta, flavor
counts, Puerto
Rico waits,
mocking you
on the bus,

looped tinsel still
bedecks anemic walls
of the unemployment
office, the lone
menorah languishing
in a corner

impossible to
jump out of
one's skin though
that's what we
planned for in
1970, drinking
raw milk from
the co-op, smashing
monogamy and windows
in downtown Portland
turned loose
in that scalding spurt
of young male rage

who'd ever have said
we'd stand around
with the herd?
anyone with
experience, perhaps
now, fallen
on hard times,
no longer in our
first youth and
at last presented
with the clear proofs
of mortality,
nefarious arts
of survival
dawn upon us

though *declaraciones falsas*
are said to result in
castigos severos
i stand in line
inch forward
with the rest
not quite Akhmatova
during the Yezhov terror
i yet dread interrogations:
usted debe preguntarse
estoy desempleado?
listo para trabajar?

yes, yes, yes, i
still search
helpwanted sections
with eternal hope
of dazzlement
as virgins
are rumored
to await bridegrooms

2.

Old craft forgotten, the Fates
now slave for a Boss,

stitch polyester
in a factory

(two of them; one
having got laid off),

while the press bewails
low productivity

and the great mechanical shears
hack away at the cloth.

Backlash City crawls with rumor:
The God That Failed

is being held back this year
another grade;

and circuses, crises
terrify, entertain us;

the lipsticks are
cooler, more translucent

in this, the decade
of the short lyric.

Whatever they told you,
there's no immunity.

Events out there change us
on the sub-atomic level.

They are drinking
Coca Cola in Peking.

3.

season
of demonstrations
season
of stasis

we won't go back, send
Bakke back, we
won't go back,
send Bakke back, we won't
go back, send Bakke back

watching
sunset
over the jailhouse

swimming
laps in the pool
caged, thrashing

oh for craft, Necessity, oh
for a straight
line, a clean
stone border. . .

but all decades, greeted
with anxious *politesse*
are kicked and cursed,
called low and dishonest
at last
as they slink away
and leave us
alone with
the *facts:*
there, the World
Trade Center's
two precise, cloned towers
etched in frozen
unmodifying light

impossible
to write
summer's poem
in winter

bless me, mother,
i'm mired in
what *is*

4.

> *. . . solitary confinement,*
> *tear gas, attrition shelling.*
> *Few applicants for that honor.*
>
> —Adrienne Rich

Nineteenth century women, we look to you!
You brave, lucky ladies, raised with expectations,

dreaming of Europe, Goethe, and the Germans
amid the pragmatic mud of last-century cowtowns.

(I allude, of course, to our notable successes,
the light-skinned, industrious, and well-connected;
no textile operative, freedwoman laundress, but
the daughters–excuse me–*of educated men.*)

We scan your lives to gauge the possible,
denying the motive, like some teenaged girl
who swears she won't be her tight-mouthed mom at forty.
Margaret Fuller. Bronson Alcott's daughter.

One shipwrecked, drowned, returning home to exile
on the rocky coast I've known as equally barren
beneath a veneer of opulent corruption
(yes: *Give me truth; cheat me by no illusion*).

One rich on the meaner portion of her gift,
calomel-crippled, dead at fifty-five,
surviving by two days the binding father
she enshrined in that popular, preachy, lying book.

Writer, what would you? Perpetuity of the footnote?
The tenuous resurrection of Women's Studies?
Would you aim for top honors, like poor plain Marian Evans?
For years, nice women were not allowed to know her,

adulteress, bad as our modern lesbian-leper.
Well, she died embalmed in mid-Victorian honor;
male critics of either sex now stamp her "major";

but was George Eliot lonely?

Are you lonely, Lucy Stone on a fifty-cent stamp,
Susan B. Anthony on a lightweight dollar?
Is anybody lonely, standing by
while the century refines its gag-rules, pass-laws,

and the pronouns continue to be altered
one hundred years after Emily Dickinson,

fifty years after Angelina Weld Grimké,
and Women's Lib fades to roseate nostalgia?

5.

and what
of my Swiss, German, English
great-great-grandmothers,
literate
how far back?
breeders, potato
farmers, wives
first and always.
they will not own me
in this fast company,
nor may i number them among
all my grim,
intellectual heroines,
or the other kin
i'd claim
in any age,
dear deviants,
politicals and poets

Anna Akhmatova, for instance,
no drastic dyke, but
seer, which suffices,
getting by heart
the words that needed burning,
coughing up
the parody-tribute
to killer Stalin,
writing (crabbed, flinty,
arrogant survivor):
This cruel age has deflected me,
like a river from its course.

well, this cruel age
has deflected a lot of us

Whatever can come to a woman
can come to me

even silence

here in the whirlpool
here, still, in
the middle of life

surprised, yes,
when morning
comes to claim me
intact, cold, filled
with quiet light

6.

i, i, i, i, i
how thinly the thin
syllable resounds
in the vault
of their museum

i
am not
apart from
my time

i
am not
apart from
the lives
ploughed under
ploughed under
ploughed under,
the Disappeared Persons
whom we have always with us

long decades without
illumination we
talked of this
sitting in the blue kitchen
pots and pans
reassuringly in their place
the air conditioner
humming
its upbeat hymn
to energy plentiful
as foodglut, backed up
by a chorus of
vacuums, vibrators,
blow-dryers

but now, in an instant,
the hot light
turned in the eyes
comes almost as relief:

okay, let's
talk about the pain

let's talk
about the pain

6.

Brooklyn tonight,
sharply seen, loved, ordinary
as any city
before any famous disaster
(and i think, as i must,
as you must, though we must
not say it:
Hiroshima, naked, turning,
facing that flash)

walk out around nine,
familiar street nervousness,
familiar Saturday evening dissonance
of the couple
in front of O'Reilly's Bar & Grill,
the mini-thrill of the *Times*
stacked at the corner,
the middleclass waiting
with its dogs on leashes
while proles buy sugarfix
to sweeten *News,*
astringent slap of headlines,
bookreview gossip,
familiar perils
and familiar pleasures

the walk back home
past bar, past woman sobbing
as her escort sinks
some devastating thrust
and boy turns, buckling up
from lamppost piss
and poolhall jumps
and pinball parlor jangles
and Haitians caucus
over checkers and beer
behind the half-drawn grate
of St. Joseph, barber.

call in the photographer now
that she may record
each detail
of the wondrous,
the tangled,
the intense,
tense town;
each facet, fact
of the immense,
dense, thick,

dark, of the unthinkable,
unthought, fragile-
ly peopled city;
articulate
and name
and make precious forever:

great city i love
human city i love too well
as i have loved forests
as i love my life

January 1979-January 1980

NOTES

The initial epigraphs are from Irena Klepfisz's "The Monkey House and Other Cages" and Muriel Rukeyser's "Waterlily Fire."

The epigraph to Section 4 is from Adrienne Rich's "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law."

The phrase "the daughters of educated men" is from Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas.*

"Give me truth; cheat me by no illusion." From Margaret Fuller's *Memoirs,* I, 303, quoted in Bell Gale Chevigny's *The Woman and the Myth: Margaret Fuller's Life and Writings.*

Information I recently encountered in Philip S. Foner's *Women and the American Labor Movement* on the racist and anti-workingclass positions adopted by both Lucy Stone and Susan B. Anthony in the course of the struggle for woman suffrage intensified my ambivalence about the tendency to look to such women as more or less exemplary foremothers. In a similar vein, see Rima Shore's "Remembering Sophia Parnok" in this issue for a note on Anna Akhmatova's homophobia.

"This cruel age has deflected me,/like a river from its course." From Anna Akhmatova's "This Cruel Age Has Deflected Me. . .," translated by Stanley Kunitz with Max Hayward.

"Whatever can come to a woman can come to me." From Muriel Rukeyser's "Waterlily Fire."

IRENA KLEPFISZ

THE JOURNAL OF RACHEL ROBOTNIK

So all that is in her will not
bloom – but in how many does it?
Tillie Olsen, "I Stand Here Ironing"

To the Reader:

Over 10 months ago I received a letter from Ms. Robotnik asking for assistance in editing and finding a suitable place for presenting an excerpt from a journal she had kept while writing her collection of short stories *Kaleidoscope* (Random Books, 1978). She explained that, though pleased with the reception of her work, she had become increasingly uneasy about it. She was "plagued" by the idea that something was missing, and, in hope of pinpointing it, had gone back to her journal from that period. One re-reading made her realize that, though not an integral part of the stories, the journal was a kind of companion piece, almost marginalia, to the fictional work, and she became determined to have it published. She, therefore, asked her editors at Random Books to issue it as a second volume; they refused, as did many other editors over the next year and a half.

Her discomfort over *Kaleidoscope's* acceptance into the literary world, she explained, stemmed from her belief that most reviewers as well as readers could not understand it if they did not understand how it came to be. Hindsight, she wrote me, enabled her to see a sharp difference between the realism of her stories (which had received such praise) and the realism of her journal (which had been rejected) – a difference which she characterized as that between "fairy tales and hard-won vision."

> At some point I left one reality for another. It was as if I'd journeyed to another planet. The force of gravity was different. Suddenly I had no grace – was clumsy, awkward, moved with greater difficulty – slow, ever so slow. What amazed me though, was that I never intended to go

there, never chose it. Yet there I was and I had no idea how and when I arrived. It was a time without solace, except for those brief moments when I thought about that 'other' place – which gleamed like a dead star whose light I could still see but whose substance, I knew, had long since burned up and vanished.

Anyone familiar with the *Kaleidoscope* stories must agree they are far from fairy tales. Nevertheless, the discrepancy between them and the journal is indeed unsettling. As Ms. Robotnik wrote (and rather bitterly, I think) in another letter:

> Lovers of great art are pure poison. They live for the single moments, for epiphanies, for great revelations. They want to forget what happens in between; they don't want to see the process, the conditions, the dead flies stuck to the half-dry canvas. Yes, they want the journals and the letters – but only after they've been purified of their 'trivia' – only after they are comfortably part of history. Those appreciators of great art – how conscientiously they avoid dealing with the daily grind, how ignorant they are of the real triumph, of the real nature of the tragedy.

From the outset, therefore, we had a tacit understanding that the journal would be edited only for clarity and that no deletions would be made. But remaining completely faithful to the original proved somewhat problematic.

The manuscript covers the period from September 12, 1974 to March 3, 1977, a period during which Ms. Robotnik wrote *Kaleidoscope* and during which she earned her living as a medical transcriber at Memorial Hospital in New York City. It is bound in two black, plastic covers, each containing approximately 175 unnumbered pages. It is typed – extremely unusual for a journal; each entry begins on a new page and is single spaced. Besides the text, it contains numerous *New York Times* articles which are stapled or scotchtaped at the end of entries or on separate pages between entries. Since it was impossible to reprint the articles in their entirety, we decided to provide only the headlines. Underlined passages, however, were reproduced to indicate focus. As will be seen, neither clipping nor labelling (date, page, column) was systematic or consistent.

In addition to the articles, sections from the stories on which

Ms. Robotnik was working are occasionally included. These appear three times during the two weeks excerpted here and provide a unique opportunity for comparison with parallel passages in the final version of the title story (pages 7, 4, 19 and 22; hardback Random Books edition).

The text itself contains numerous abbreviations, all of which have been retained. The most frequent are: w/ = with; abt = about; cd, wd, shd = could, would, should; sd = said (used inconsistently); fr = from (used inconsistently); wk = week; $$ = "money," "price," "cost," or "expensive" (used interchangeably); K. = "Kaleidoscope," the story; D = Dia, Ms. Robotnik's lover. Except for "tho" and "thru" I have standardized spelling and corrected obvious slips; words appearing in brackets [ ] are my own, inserted for clarity.

Mary M. Arnold
Chicago
January 9, 1980

DELAY ASKED IN CURB ON ALIEN PHYSICIANS–New York Hospitals See U.S. Law as Threat to Medical Care–by Ronald Sullivan–A new Federal law that will drastically limit recruiting of graduates from foreign medical schools by hospitals. . .

In New York State, the foreign ratio is much higher, 52 percent, with even higher percentages in municipal hospitals and in those that have no affiliation with a nearby medical school. (1/5; A1)

ECONOMISTS FIND PAUSE ENDING: GROWTH PROJECTIONS FOR '77 RAISED–by Paul Lewis–The recent advance of several important economic indicators has convinced many private American economists that the so-called pause in the nation's economic recovery from the deepest recession since World War II is now ending. . . (1/6; 1)

CALIFORNIA HOMOSEXUALS HELD TO LACK JOB RIGHTS–San Francisco, Jan. 5 (AP)–Homosexuals have no legal protection against job discrimination the California Court of Appeals has ruled. "There is simply no constitutional right [for homosexuals] to work for an unwilling employer. . ." (1/6)

FOR $59, A NEW YORKER WINS A DIVORCE WITHOUT LAWYERS (1/6; 22)

Fri. Jan. 7 '77; 6:30 AM: Windows completely iced over. Feels like I cd freeze to death. Turned on oven. Must call Stan. It's the boiler, *not* the valves. How can anyone so big be so stupid? Einstein was tiny. But then D pointed out Einstein probably cdn't fix the boiler either.

Spoke to Barb last nght. Wants to get together, but too overloaded. [She] Spent fortune on presents. Dead broke. Found it all pointless. So do I. Meeting her nxt Fri at the D[iana].

Claire back yesterday. Combined coffee breaks & lunch & took Roberta to Brew Burger for her 43rd. Outrageous: $52 w/ tip split 4 ways. Limp salads w/ rippled pickles, drinks–& yes, Marcie's $$ diet burger. Long discussion abt *sculptured* nails. Growth & clipping. Gave me the creeps–thought the plastic nails grew. Everyone hysterical. Claire types w/ nails; Marcie w/ fingertips. Both see a manicurist every couple of wks. $15 a visit. Carmen thought it $$. Claire said no–only $1 a day.

BEAME OFFERS PLAN TO CLOSE THE DEFICIT IN 1977-78 BUDGET–Says It Won't 'Sap' Services–7,500 Job Slots Expected

to be Cut–Proposal Needs the Approval of Banks, Unions, State and U.S. (1/7; 1)

PEOPLE'S INAUGURATION TO INCLUDE SOLAR HEATING, BUT NOT FOR MANY (1/7)

Sat. Jan. 8 '77; 6 PM: Dull flat day. Cold. Recycling center. Dragged clothes to laundromat. $$ up again. Shopped. Coffee $$ still impossible. Refused. Tuna on sale (.39). Stocked up. Vowed to make sandwiches for work. Probably won't–too practical. Always forget. D props hers against the door. Vacuumed. Washed kitch flr. Too long.

My turn to call Fla. The same. She's still obsessing he's dirty; he complains she's constantly "rude." Papa's the only person who still uses this word. Both talked abt the strike; disappointed the Steins haven't come down. Leah called last wk & invited them to N.M. [Albuquerque], but Mamma refused. No explanation. More expansive abt kids. Tanya: "remarkable" reading scores. Adam: swimming medal. Best: Alex's article accepted in *CE* [*College English*]. Certain he'll get tenure. So Alex scraped thru. Felt glad for him/them, but found it painful to hear.

Mamma predictably: how are things at the "shorthand pool"? Moved in another direction. She ignored it. I was doing that 15 yrs ago. Isn't there some school I cd be a teacher? Snapped & she w/drew. Know she was hurt–why won't she let it alone? Neither asked abt D. 2 yrs & they still ignore her. What makes it so hard?

D went back early [to her loft] to work on new stretchers. [I] Started organizing for income tx. Hope for $300. Went over mutual expenses for Dec. Our food $$ just flows. Owe D. Didn't get to work till 3 & have to leave in an hr.

Tried working on K. & thinking abt it in some constructive way. Seems unmanageable–no beginning, middle or end–keeps going on & on unfocused. Have no idea what to do w/ all the details. Listed them to see if there's a pattern. A maze. Just don't see the connections.

STRUCK HOTELS BLEAK IN MIAMI DESPITE WINTER SUN–by B. Drummond Ayres, Jr.–...The union originally demanded pay increases averaging 10 percent annually plus increased hospitaliza-

tion insurance and guaranteed tips for some hotel employees. The union officials say service employees' salaries exclusive of tips, run from a low $10 daily for bellhops to $22 a day for bartenders.

"I make only $400 a month, half what city lifeguards get," Gilbert Manzano, a Doral Beach lifeguard complained as he walked the picket line in front of the hotel's soaring main building. "I must have dignity."

Sun. Jan 9 '76 [sic] ; *5 PM:* Ate last night at Sh[ah] B[agh] on E. 6th. Still only place that's kept $$ down. Brought in brandy & got high. Talked abt writing & painting, what it means in terms of "feeling right & complete." & again: how to balance work ($$) & art (work), if it's possible, the general lack of $$ support, grants, etc. D: you can tell how much society values individuality, originality by support it gives artists—just like you can tell how much it values life, human beings by support it gives the poor. I sd it was the same thing. Long discussion. Confessed I've been feeling like a sham lately—unable to complete anything. D asked what schedule I was on. Still *almost* 41 & only 1 collection *almost* completed. Time.

Thought we'd go to the D[iana] , but it was after 9 & we didn't want to pay the $3 cover. Felt disappointed. Wanted to dance & see if the Santa & elves mobile was still hanging over dance floor. Walked uptown [to the loft] watching my breath all the way. Empire State [Building] still lit up green & red. Checked for lumber [for stretchers] at M[acy] 's trash bins. Dismantled a display case. Tore my gloves, but got good plywood & 2x4's that wd probably cost $15-20. Extremely exhilarated at getting something for free. Had a sense I cd live just by scavenging. Pictured D & me—old ladies—rushing thru the nght—hugging our loot. Giggled a lot over that. D talked again abt buying a ghost town in Wyoming for $5 & living in the bank.

Back here this a.m. Cdn't concentrate. Kept seeing Quinn in his cubicle peering out at all of us. Then suddenly, my last chart on Fri: the boy w/ sickle cell disease—the neat tables of drugs, dosages, & CBC's—lab tests. The senseless words & statistics: leukocytes, hematocrit, platelets, reticulocytes, lumbar puncture, lymphocytes. Veesey's crisp Indian accent pouring out of the machine: "Bone marrow showed hypocellular marrow with many blasts." Thought abt the parents—the long days, the watching for signs.

Don't really understand where all that goes—how I manage to

block it out & yet keep it in me, so that if I'm jarred all the pieces fall into place.

Was determined today w/ K. Feel if I don't figure this out, the whole group won't hold & I won't get to anything else. Seems crucial. Must be a form for the lack of focus, the fragmentation. Retyped list. Not much help. Reconstructed the day I got the toy. Better. Can't articulate the importance, tho I'm moving closer. [I] Remember how Haddley had insisted: "Write about what you know!" Seemed obvious at 21. Now the connections, the logic eludes me—a pointless shuffling fr place to place, fr house to office, fr task to task. For example: it's hard to absorb at this moment—almost as if it were one of those incomprehensible laws of high-energy physics that I'll actually *live* thru the nxt 5 days, second by second, minute by minute. That I'll be conscious, awake, alive— & yet I know I will.

Each morning I will get up & eat. I will dress. I will talk. I will go to work. I will say hello. I will plug myself into the machine. Time. I will unplug myself from the machine. I will eat. I will talk. I will plug myself into the machine. Time. I will unplug myself from the machine. I will drink coffee. I will plug myself into the machine. Time. I will unplug myself from the machine. I will say good-bye. I will go home. I will be numb. I will be tired. I will be hungry. I will argue. I will make love. I will talk. I will eat. I will watch the news. I will wash my underwear. I will go to bed. I will dream. I will wake up. I will not remember the dream. I will eat. I will go to work. I will plug myself into the machine. And time will pass. And the light will change.

She had never seen anything so wonderful as the patterns in the wooden tube—the endless and effortless regroupings of the colored pieces of glass as they reflected over and over in the angular mirrors. Like the designs formed by the older girls in the maypole dance, she thought after her first glimpse—blue shifting with red and green, then fanning out and allowing the yellow and orange to peek through and then unexpectedly clustering in the center in perfect symmetry.

It had been her mother's gift, presented late one morning when Ania was not quite seven and recovering from her latest bout of a mysterious "lung illness" for which the doctor had no name. Mrs. R. hoped the toy would distract her daughter from the shortness of the visit, and thereby spare her another painful confrontation with the child's loneliness. Rushing into the overheated, shadowy room, the

mother was characteristically breathless, appearing unravelled ("not quite put together," her husband had once phrased it), her thick black hair slipping out of its net and her heavy brown woolen coat carelessly misbuttoned.

"I know you thought I wasn't coming, Annushka," she said quickly, upon seeing the gray flecks of anxiety in Ania's eyes. Pointing to the clock on the window sill, she defended herself: "It's only 5 after 11. I'm just a few minutes late. I stopped to get you something." She pulled the kaleidoscope out of the paper bag and immediately saw the child's exhausted fear vanish. This particular toy had once been a favorite of her own and, before handing it to her daughter, the mother stopped for one long extravagant moment to look through it.

"It will remind you of everything beautiful in the world," she murmured almost to herself as she surrendered it to Ania with one hand and placed a thermometer under her tongue with the other. A few moments later, calling from the kitchen where she was preparing Ania's tea and mixing chocolate syrup and milk for Rivka, she added: "You'll never get tired of it. Nothing ever happens twice. As different as snowflakes."

After returning with a tray of two steaming cups of tea and a thick piece of black bread covered with a slice of farmer cheese, she checked Ania's temperature. Relieved it was normal for the ninth day, she began straightening out the tangled quilts and sheets on the makeshift cot, simultaneously instructing Ania to "stay warm and under the covers." Then, in a kind of ritual they had evolved, she proceeded to give the child a bunch of rapid kisses–first one on each eye, then one on each cheek and finally one special one on the tip of her nose–and to press the small face against the rough coat. Quite unexpectedly, as she let her go, the mother added a half-articulate, barely audible excuse: "It's very, very busy today, thank God! Your father needs me." The visit almost over, she now delivered her final orders: "Be sure to nap at one! Drink your tea! Remind Rivka to heat up some soup for you when she gets home! Don't pester her! Wear your slippers when you go to the bathroom! Don't forget to nap!" *And she was off–to her husband and the store–more out of breath and less "put together" than when she entered twenty minutes earlier.*

It was perhaps the only time during the lonely period of her recuperation that Ania was completely oblivious to her mother's presence, hardly noticing the rapidity with which she executed her duties and dis-

appeared. Extremely susceptible to suggestion, the child allowed the toy to draw her away from the dreariness of her isolation, from the oppressive silence of the bleak apartment, towards everything "pretty" she had ever experienced: the spring maypole festival which she had watched from her friend Alice's room, the sunlight as it leaped at her when she stepped outside, the melody of a song her father sang about the poor shoemaker who worked till midnight and then worked some more. And so forgetting her mother's instructions and her own physical weakness, she sat for hours that day turning the tube till her arms ached and her face was numb from squinting. She wanted to prove her mother wrong and failed. There was no way to deny the knowledge that none of the patterns would return or "stay put," and with that realization came, for the first time, an acute sense of loss and vulnerability.

Rivka came home at three. While serving her the bowl of soup, she accidentally bumped Ania's arm so that a particular design she had been trying to balance, suddenly scattered off into the periphery. It did not matter that it was replaced by one equally intricate and fine. Ania was enraged, saying in her most vehement way that she would never, never *forgive her. Unaware of her sister's painful discovery, Rivka shrugged her shoulders and told her she had "gone loco." "It would've cracked up anyway," she said calmly drinking her milk. And though Ania knew she was right, knew that her mother was right, she felt defeated for being robbed of a few extra seconds of something so beautiful, so special "that there was only one."*

Mon. Jan. 10 '77; 7 PM: Stan just left. Said it was the *thermostat.* Set high enough for the lower floors, not for here. Not allowed to change setting. Was furious. Oven is dangerous. My choice: asphyxiation or freezing to death. He shrugged.

D starts [teaching] new [course] tonight. When I woke up this a.m. she looked calm. Hated to leave the bed, her warmth under the blankets, her skin smooth from sleep. But a wreck all day. Called me 3x fr the center & 2x after she got home. Ostensibly, abt Mr. Antonelli. The same old story: another grossly painted papier-mâché figure of a woman w/ her legs spread. Another major speech by Mr. Fernando abt decency in art & the beauty in natural things like birds & trees. Mrs. Stein & Mrs. Sanders indignant, threatening to quit. Robt. promised to speak w/ all of them.

Saw her [D] briefly before she left [for the course]. Don't know

why she gets so crazy. Always at the beginning, then the routine sets in—the complaints abt how young they are, how undisciplined. Wonder how it's going. She's probably introducing herself right at this moment.

We tried the new mid-Eastern place last nght. Knew I shdn't, but wanted to get away fr my desk, the sense of failure. Keep saying I'll hold back, then say: what'll I save? $3? $5? What will that get me? So I went. A real rip-off. High $$, small portions. At home, gorged ourselves on Italian pastries.

Feel very close to D right now. There are times when the connection between us is so clear, so obvious, I find it almost painful. When she kissed me last nght, I began to cry. Don't quite know why. Fear? Keep thinking this can't last forever & yet we seem to keep going. Can see her right now—trying to look stern & determined. Never quite pulls it off. Think they realize right away she's a pushover, as soon as she says: "Despite what you've heard to the contrary—art was never meant to be an agony."

AIDES OF CARTER TALK ABOUT JOB FOR MRS. ABZUG—by Frank Lyn—...Friends of the former Representative from Manhattan's West Side said that a regulatory agency would be ideal for her since it would give her an independent forum and a minimum of administrative responsibilities. (1/9; 15:1)

NEGOTIATIONS BREAK DOWN IN MIAMI HOTEL STRIKE, Miami, Jan. 8 (AP)—... A key union demand is a guaranteed daily tip for maids from each guest staying on pre-paid plans. The union is seeking wage increases of 10 to 13 percent.

Union officials say maids are paid about $16 a day, bellhops $10 a day and food servers about $12.75 a day. All receive tips. (1/9; 26:6)

Tues. Jan. 11 '77; 11 PM: Already overdosed on Quinn & it's only Tues. Seems he'd been to the Coliseum over the wkend for some sort of show & saw 2 midgets there—a couple I presume (why?) Came in this morning, stood in the middle of the room in his shiny blue suit, his hair all puffed up (we heard abt his hair blower last wk) & started describing them: their "wrinkled" faces, the jewelry on their "stubby" fingers. Kept laughing abt how small they were & yet how all their clothes fit perfectly. The woman wore a white fur coat & "cute" leather boots w/ white fur trimming. Everything abt

them was "tiny, tiny, tiny." He was impressed by the $$ made-to-order clothes & wondered if they might be circus [people] who earned a lot of $$. Claire sat & tapped her fingers impatiently & Carmen made faces behind his back. Roberta decided she had to go to the bathroom & excused herself rather abruptly when he started describing their skin. But Marcie feigned interest & surprise & kept repeating "You don't say!" Whenever he had his back to her, she'd raise her eyes to the ceiling. Once she gave him the finger.

How was someone like that created? What mother, father, school, neighborhood made him possible? He fills me w/ such utter revulsion & hatred. Helpless anger that my life is intertwined w/ his, dependent on him in a bizarre way—all connected w/ the fact that I need to eat. Was left w/ an underlying feeling of nausea—slight imbalance. Took it out on D the second I walked in. The sink was piled w/ dishes & she was pissed because she was ready to go & shop & wanted me to clean up. [I] Just wanted to have a drink & not bother. Suggested we go out. She became furious—on a 23-hour, part-time job & 1 art course she can't afford etc. etc. & neither can I. Knew that, but then she'd been willing to eat out all wkend. Told her I can't keep up w/ what she wants (a lie!).

So we went thru it again. Living in 2 places, neither place ever fully stocked or taken care of. Food spoiling. *& again:* we're not ready to live together, but maybe in the near future, etc. Anyway—*finally*—I did the dishes & she went to 3rd [Ave.]. Made Japanese noodles & fried vegetables. Very good & very cheap. $4—enough noodles for abt 3 more dinners & some vegetables for one.

Rest of the evening (not much left), she glued paper for drawings & hammered on her stretcher. [I] Worked on K. Thought I got somewhere, tho it still seems very, very lumpy.

Wed. Jan 12 '76 [sic]; *7 PM:* A scene w/ Quinn & Maurry. Realized that in 2 yrs I've never written abt Maurry. Simultaneously memorable & easy to forget. Probably abt 70, slight limp. Face gaunt, emaciated. Waxy yellowed skin. Sparse hair—stands straight up so even on the calmest day, he looks as if he just came out of a wind-storm. Hard to imagine his evolution—a strange, sweet creature right out of Dickens or Gogol.

His job: to help Terry in the RO [Records Office] across the hall, mainly by running errands, delivering charts, etc. (wd love to see job title & description). Also does odds & ends for Quinn, who's

predictably condescending. Calls him "Mr. Maurice," he told Carmen, "to show his respect." Today, for lunch, brought Quinn an $$ hamburger, then went to the RO to eat his own lunch: prefab food consisting of chicken pot pie, chemically compounded pound cake. Suddenly Quinn yelled for him. Came limping in, smacking his lips & twitching crumbs fr his fingertips. Then we heard Quinn quiz him abt the raw onion. There was none & he ordered extra slices & pd for them. So Maurry went out again–in the cold & slush. Didn't seem to mind, tho. Wanted to be obliging. Glad, I think, to be part of a drama (after all, $$ was involved), glad to be of use.

Remember Papa's somber face when he read us *"Bontshe Shweigt"* [Bontshe Keeps Quiet].* How after a lifetime of being a porter, a non-entity, of being abused, of being hungry, of never complaining–Bontshe finally reaches heaven. Here he can have *anything* he wants. To the angel's horror, he asks only for a warm roll w/ butter. Papa explained: some people have to learn to dream.

THE ECONOMICS OF STARVATION II–The Rats Don't Starve–by Emma Rothschild–"We goofed on Bangladesh," one senior official in the Agriculture Department said, "and a lot of people died."

"It was a man-made famine," another United States official said of the Bangladesh famine of 1974. (1/11; 33:2)

NEW HOSPITAL PLAN WOULD CURB LAYOFF–Proposal by Advisory Group Offers an Alternative to the Drastic Cuts Suggested to Ease Deficit–by Ronald Sullivan–A special financial committee that was set up by Mayor Beame has tentatively concluded that the New York City Health and Hospital Corporation can cut its financial deficit without imposing the wholesale job layoffs that were threatened last year. (1/11; 23:3)

DONATIONS ARE URGED BY INAUGURAL PANEL–Plea for $350,000 Is Made to Union Officials and Business Leaders at Fund Raiser in Capital–by David E. Rosenbaum (1/12)

Th. Jan. 13 '77; 10:30 PM: Another bad fight. Had set the alarm early so I cd get up & work. Went off, but I was sleepy & stayed in bed for what seemed only a few minutes. Dozed off. Finally got up & realized it was too late to do anything. So–back to bed. By then D was wide

*A Yiddish short story by I.L. Peretz. (M.M.A.)

awake, furious. Accused me of *always* setting the alarm & never getting up (one of her global statements). Affirmed my right to get up when I felt like it (one of my Bill of Rights statements) whether I actually worked at my desk or not. Pointed out she does a lot of staring at her work & I need time for that too—& I don't get it. Still was defensive. She was tired fr last nght. Had to talk to students & didn't get home till after 11. [I felt] Guilty for waking her & having nothing to show for it. Ended up slamming out of the house. Forgot my lunch.

15 minutes after I got in Quinn told Claire she wasn't typing enough charts. His tallies show she's got the lowest record (big news!) in the pool. In short—told her to shape up. She was in tears—make-up, mascara blotched. Suddenly noticed how rumpled she looked—the knit suit seemed worn & ragged—not her usual clean & prim image. Worn-out. Older. & of course she *is* older, at least 15 yrs older [than Q]. Took some bus[iness] c[ourses] in man[agement] or something as an under[graduate] & now he's a damn super[visor] over a woman who cd be his mother.

Claire's sure he'll fire her. But Carmen sd he's never fired anyone in the last 4 yrs—& quite a few weird ones had passed thru—too chicken—a real old fashioned bully, i.e. coward. Claire pretty shaken tho. Cindy sick last wk—lost 2 days—no $$. & she's worried Bert will cut off support. Been complaining the payments are too much, asking what she does w/ the $$ & how come Cindy's not dressed "more pretty." She's not sure if he's just hassling for kicks, or if he really intends to cut down/stop the $$. Have no idea how much is involved. Can't be much, tho—he's working in a gas station. Still any $$ makes a difference.

We were all upset & had lunch together. Claire, nervous & defensive: she's been typing a lot of foreigners & it slows her down (added she's not sure she types more than any of us). Roberta: we shd keep our own records & hand in the same ## of charts, at least the same # of pp. Carmen: still not fair since the A[mericans] go faster than the others. Frustrating & tense. Marcie conspicuously silent—picking at her jello & cottage cheese. Sd a couple of wks ago she wants to push so she cd ask for more $$. [I] Wanted to ask how she felt abt equalizing, but somehow cdn't. & it's true. Claire *is* the slowest one, which clearly means she shd be stood against the wall & shot.

The whole thing felt very delicate & nothing was resolved. It wd

help if the drs. bothered to enunciate, but they barely go thru the motions & the A[mericans] are often as hard as the others. Just mumble, suck candy & eat snacks. Assume we'll get what we need in the charts. Time.

When I got home D sd she'd been evaluated at the center. Her 1*st* time, so she was completely unprepared. Robt. gave her grades! She's 45 yrs old & she got grades! All A's & B's—rapport w/ workshop members: A-. We cracked up over Mr. Antonelli. Got 1 C: efficiency in filling out forms. Cdn't believe it! We were both in stitches.

Made no reference to this a.m. Won't set the alarm for tomorrow tho tempted. Don't want a repeat performance & I'm exhausted. Enough issues for one day. Am I intimidated?

After supper made lunch. Worked well for a couple of hrs. K. still in sections—unresolved, but some progress.

HENRY FORD 2nd QUITS FOUNDATION, URGES APPRECIATION FOR CAPITALISM—by Maurice Carroll (1/12; A4)

FROM GROWER TO TABLE, COFFEE WILL COST MORE—by Rona Cherry—Despite the growing boycott of coffee in the United States, some industry analysts expect prices to rise steadily at least until early 1978, perhaps reaching $4 a pound in stores. (1/12)

UNEMPLOYMENT DROPS AND JOB TOTAL RISES: WHOLESALE PRICES UP—December Rise 0.9%—Volatile Farm Sector Jumps, but Industrial Goods Climb the Least in 7 Months—by Edwin L. Dale Jr.—Jobless Rate at 7.9%—3 Million More at Work by End of Year after a Spurt of 222,000 in December—by Edward Cowan (1/13; 1)

ETHNIC GROUPS ANGERED BY PLANS FOR CARTER'S 'PEOPLE'S' INAUGURATION, FEELING LEFT OUT—by Bernard Weinraub (1/13)

Fri. Jan. 14 '77; Midnight: Mamma called. [I] Became very frightened. Late—11:30. But everything's all right. Just keeps ranting—he's dirty—a filthy man! Asked what was dirty abt him. Everything—stains his shirts & leaves spots & hair in the bathtub. Got nowhere. Is she having a breakdown?

Can't understand it. All those yrs of talk abt retirement—their only dream. Wd never look at cheese again, hated the store— the damp-

ness & cold—cdn't wait to get rid of it. At least that's what *she* said. Wanted warmth, sun, late morning hrs. & tonight: "You don't know how he is, how he *really* is. Dirty. Dirty on purpose." Told her to try & relax, pointed out she never thought that before. Classic reply: she'd been too busy to notice—was seeing him "properly right" for the 1*st* time. Then she cried how she tries to keep the apt. clean & how he messes things up & she *must* have order. Just don't understand her. Didn't know how to respond. Think it's strange she called me & not Leah. Apparently been trying to reach me all evening. [Phone] Ringing when I walked in.

Dinner w/ Barb—good! Met for a drink at the D[iana]. Holiday decor dismantled. Reminisced abt the 1*st* time she brought me there. My confusion because I didn't know (a) if we were on a date; & (b) if everyone in the place was a dyke. Was dumbfounded that so many women looked "perfectly straight." Expected to see a bar full of bull dykes in leather & chains. It was crowded tonight, women coming directly fr work, wearing their working clothes. Increasingly aware of how young they seem. It's unusual to see anyone over 40, almost never over 50.

Barb's doing ok—tho very lonely. [She] Concedes it's a relief to come home & not face one of Annie's numbers. Difficult Xmas—Annie conspicuously absent fr the family dinner. No one asking any questions. An eerie family silence around the break-up.

The usual talk abt work & $$ & the lack of it. But big news: Barb came out at school. Sd she's been nervous & edgy, kids really getting to her. Wanted someone to know what was going on. Thought of course everyone knew by now. Told Anita, who was completely stunned. Funny—Barb's been thru the whole trip—someone I know, a friend of mine, this woman I know, my roommate, the woman I live w/. Still total shock when they finally hear: *lover, lesbian.* Felt envious. Wish I cd bring myself to do it—at least w/ Carmen (does she know, *really* know?). Maybe Roberta wd cut the jokes abt Quinn. Why can't I do it? What stops me? Barb sd I'll do it when I'm ready. When?

Feel anxious. Wish D were home. Don't like her seeing Lisa. Hate straight snobs. Always a toss up abt why they're looking down at you at any specific moment.

Weekend: Taxes. K. Movie w/ Barb tomorrow nght.

Sat. Jan. 15 '77; 10 PM: Mamma called this a.m. Told Papa to move out & he went to a hotel a few blocks away. Perfect timing. Strike's over. "He's wasting all our $$," she told me. Asked her how she expected him to live in a hotel & not spend extra $$. Ignored me & complained I always side w/ him (that's probably true—why?). The crisis: he spilled something (tea?) on the new tablecloth w/ lace trimming. Adamant he'd done it on purpose. "These things are not accidents." So she told him to get out. [I] Was tongue-tied—asked her if she felt ok abt spending the nght alone (don't think she's ever done it before). Sd she's "an adult woman" & "it's abt time I shd be on my own." Will call tomorrow. Called the hotel. He sounded extremely tired but ok. Just wants some peace & quiet to read his paper. Sd the bed seemed comfortable, that it was "puffed up looking."

Felt frustrated. Want to side w/ her, or at least feel her side (see it very clearly), but something always stops me. Know she's given up so much for him. But she's so impossible—a broken record, a memorized chant. Can't get past the formula, can't reach the pain. Her rage—why does it put me off so? He's of course, stoic & silent. & there I am: stone.

Started crying the second I put the phone down—like a kid whose parents are abt to divorce & has to choose. Remember how D felt when her parents died—an orphan at 42.

D thought we shd stay home in case one of them called—cancelled w/ Barb. Invited her for dinner, but she wanted to try the D[iana] alone. Sounded disappointed. D went down & bought brie & brandy & food for dinner. Turned the kitchen upside down, used all the dishes. Created an elaborate 10-step chicken curry casserole. Sat around & drank while it was in the oven.

Swapped stories abt our parents, what kept them together. Am constantly amazed how outside our parents we are—outside the bond, the intimacy—in a way we're not w/ friends or even other relatives. How strange to live in a home w/ a secret that will never be revealed. My parents were together for 44 yrs & at this moment he's in a hotel & she's in an apt alone—& except for the obvious I don't have a clue. Maybe there's nothing more than the obvious.

Feel tired & drunk. Started out as the usual Sat: recycling center, etc. Then Mamma's call. Didn't get a chance to do laundry. Now I'll never catch up on the wk. D stayed all day. [I] Was glad, but also

guilty—neither of us did any real work. There's no time to be human.

It came after a long, undefined illness when she was seven years old—something to do with a lung "weakness" inherited from a Russian grandmother who had died of tuberculosis. Mrs. R., who still retained vivid memories of her mother's deathbed, now agonized over having passed on the genetic defect. Each day she watched in terror as the doctor came and felt the hot forehead, listened to the rumbling in the fragile lungs, and puzzled over the fever which refused to be exorcised by penicillin.

When she saw she was ill, Mrs. R. immediately removed Ania from the bed she shared with her older sister and placed her on a make-shift cot created by two overstuffed armchairs facing each other. These she moved near the living room window, close to the steaming, clanging radiator and within arms' reach of the couch where she and her husband slept. For three weeks she sat and watched as the child, lost in a maze of feverish dreams and oblivious to her own danger, diminished visibly in size and sank deeper and deeper into the thick quilts and puffy pillows. It seemed an illness without an end—a futile struggle to force some food into the frail body that consistently refused sustenance.

In addition, there was another worry. Rivka was losing weight and beginning to cough. Her skin looked faded, sallow. The anxious mother consulted the doctor who found nothing wrong. Rivka had managed to contract the symptoms but not the disease. Mrs. R. diagnosed the problem herself one afternoon when she saw her older daughter's face a moment after she had been told to stay out of the living room. It was simple and there was nothing to do about it. She *had to nurse the sick one.* He *had to be in the store. Rivka would have to make do.*

* * * * *

But as soon as Mrs. R. became convinced the fever was banished permanently from her daughter's body, she was once again immersed in the details of the store and in the seemingly hopeless battle to pay off the debts incurred during Ania's illness. Initially, Rivka was kept home from school to watch over her "baby" sister. Though only a year older, she was an adept nurse, reheating soup, making fresh tea and concocting a special "goggel-moggel"—milk heavy with honey and melted butter.

In addition, she was good at telling endless stories about Smelly Fanny, Ania's second grade teacher and her inept solos at Wednesday assembly. But after a week, when Ania's recovery seemed to have "taken hold," Rivka was ordered back to school and Ania was left alone, staring silently at the clock.

If the illness did not change her, the recovery did–a painful period of confinement and isolation which allowed her to focus on her surroundings for the first time. She quickly developed a kind of aversion to her own home, an unspoken anger at her parents. She did not, of course, articulate it that way. What she expressed was more of a feeling, an uneasiness, which had suddenly made her wary. She complained to her mother that she felt dizzy, that she thought she might fall over, that the sidewalk was unsteady, and repeatedly asked if there were a "safe place" to go to. Mrs. R. now began to worry whether the extended fever had not left a serious mark on the child who, though the doctor said had reached perfect health, insisted "the world is crooked and makes me sick." Things were "tipped," she said angrily, tipped so she might slide right off. She thought about Columbus, how he went on his voyage unafraid he might "hit the edge and fall off." Maybe–Ania argued with her father–just maybe, Columbus never reached the horizon. How could anyone be sure? Maybe it was still there–waiting.

Sun. Jan. 16 '77; Noon: 1*st* thing, called Mamma. Very distant. Doesn't like how I talk to her. Thought I'd understand because of my "women's ideas." Asked if all that applied to everyone else. Told her [that] wasn't the point. Almost hung up–sd she needed to vacuum the apt. Coaxed her: talked abt the cold wave, the wind-up of the strike, plants, Mrs. Kravitz's singing. [She] Said it's been quieter lately.

Then Papa: very depressed, somewhat disoriented–doesn't have his things around him. "Do you think she's gone crazy?" he asked. Said I didn't know, but thought perhaps she was very tired & just didn't want to wash another tablecloth.

Finally braced myself & called Leah. Instant hysteria. Kept saying: "I just can't believe it! I just can't believe it!" Promised to call them tonight & me tomorrow. Felt sorry for her–how they neglected her, for work, for $$–made her into the little automaton mamma she is today–& now they can't stand to be in the same room. Keep seeing Mamma at the sink, her red hands wringing out the damn tablecloth, the tight gray bun, the tight lips–no loose ends, no strands. When

did she pull herself in like that?

Totally drained by the calls. Bitched to D the whole wkend was shot, K.'ll never get finished. She casually suggested I quit. Go on unemployment or get a loan (where?) & focus on my writ[ing]. Haven't done that since I got this job. 2 yrs of my life. Seems longer. D thought the business w/ Claire was a set-up. It's possible Quinn's budget's been cut & he's being pressured to fire someone. Hadn't occurred to me, but if it's true, then maybe he'd be content to get rid of me.

Was excited for abt 30 sec—then filled w/ complete, utter panic. To go on unemployment w/ no savings of any sort. I've been thru that—the constant hustling—on the books, off the books. Always trying to be 1 step ahead, at least 1 month's rent ahead. Constantly at the mercy of the phone, unable to turn down any shit job that comes along because there's never any guarantee there'll be another one later. So ultimately the writing came last anyway. I hated, *hated* living like that—never sure where I'd be nxt—no schedule, no order, no routine—working 1 month in the evening, the nxt in the morning. That's why I'd gotten this job. It's steady. It's predictable. It's secure.

But D insists my priorities are all wrong. My writing shd come 1*st*—& if I can grab 9 mos. of even marginal existence, I shd. Sounds very reasonable, perfectly sensible. But then overwhelming breathless fear—like running on a floating piece of ice—& suddenly reaching the edge.

Had hoped, wanted desperately to escape this. Can still see Mamma & Papa going [over] accounts & monthly $$, the rent *almost*, but not quite pd. Mamma begging, then insisting Pappa [call] Uncle Joe & [borrow] $$. He refusing because Joe was younger & his pride wdn't let him. Then he'd leave the table, his food only half eaten, his face set hard, spitting out the words: "I deserve to eat in peace!" & Leah—ashen—[her] fingers clutch[ing] at [her] skirt, pleading w/ him to come back. Always during dinner—till my stomach was a knot fr anxiety abt the numbers coming [out] right, balanc[ing]. The same knot tonight at the prospect of not [being] able to get thru the month, feeling I'm in a race w/ my checkbook. & the less I have, the more frantic, reck[less] I get. Like Mamma before the maypole dance. How strange she seemed—her voice from somewhere deep inside her: "The few dollars Jake, what's the difference? For God's sake! Let them have the dresses!"

BEAME CUTS CITY COFFEE BUYING BY A 3rd—by Edward Ranzal—The soaring price of coffee has added to the city's fiscal headache. Mayor Beame yesterday ordered a one-third cut in the purchase of coffee ordered by the city for its hospitals, prisons and other institutions.(1/14; B3)

20-DAY MIAMI HOTEL STRIKE SETTLED—...Last week the union was said to have dropped the pre-paid tip demand, but the issue of rehiring the striking workers had not been settled until today.

Union members, most of whom are Cubans, are expected to approve the agreement, as recommended by the union leadership. (1/15)

NEW ECONOMIC SLUMP FOR INDUSTRIAL NATIONS IS FEARED—by Clyde Farnsworth. (1/15)

Mon. Jan 17 '77; 7:30 PM: Barb called last night to ask abt my parents. Brought her up to date. Told her D's idea abt unemployment (wonder if D's right abt Quinn). Supportive. Asked what I was saving for. Sd I wasn't saving at all. B: "What's the point? You can always get a job like that." Can I? Took me 3 mos. last time. Thought she was glib.

[She] Lasted exactly ½ hr at the D[ial]. Sd the average age was abt 25 & the whole scene made her feel old, worn out, lonely. Thought the younger women just turned off when they looked at her. Told her she's paranoid, but secretly empathized. It wd scare me to be alone again. When did we become "older dykes"?

David called at the office & sd he'd stop by to have lunch nxt wk. Genuinely shocked abt my parents. Sd he always loved the store & that Papa used to give him extra chunks for treats. Still remembers the crumbs of farmer cheese sticking to his fingers. But he saw it fr the outside. I remember Mamma's rage. "You feed other people's children better than your own," she once said. Have no business giving away food—like giving away $$. "How come," she once taunted, "you're suddenly so big-hearted?" Was she right? Can't find the center.

Bumped into Annie on the way home fr the subway—1*st* time in months. Felt guilty for never calling her. Unemployment up in 3 wks (I clutched). [She] Asked if I knew of any work. Told her I'd think abt it—gave her Sally & Ruth's number. [She] Sd the 9 months had been productive, but rough. Took a lot of pictures. Asked if D & I are planning to live together. Said *no*—there are different ways of being together. Felt defensive. Also somewhat awkward. Know there's

always 2 sides, but do think she was unnecessarily cruel to Barb. Never really understood it, because I'd never perceived her that way before they started having problems. But as soon as that began, she seemed to become someone else. Yet today, on the street, she seemed the old Annie.

Tues. Jan 18 '77; 10 PM: Ironic? Bad fight w/ Quinn. Maybe I *can* get him to lay me off. Came in this a.m. & asked to see me. Checked what I'd done yesterday & told me to change my typewriter ribbon. [I] Pointed out he saw only the carbons. He nodded. So I sd: "You mean to tell me you can look at carbons & know my original is too light?" He became enraged, started pounding the desk–reminded me he was running things. Became frightened, thought he might try to hit me. Left feeling very shaky.

Called D later in the afternoon. Told me to ignore him–just do what I have to & think abt leaving–either getting unemployment or another job–it's not the only hospital that needs transcribers. She sounded irritated, had just gotten home fr the center–only a couple of hrs. left of daylight.

Seemed depressed & distant when I got home. Sd she feels I'm never satisfied, that she doesn't provide me w/ anything. Felt caught off guard. Told her she was absolutely wrong, that our relationship is extremely important. At the same time, thought that *the relationship is not everything.* It doesn't, can't help me w/ certain things, can't ease my frustration that I'm not doing what I want. Sometimes–today–when I'm so stuffed w/ that idiot at the office, so empty of my own self, I wonder who it is she cares for so much. Is it really me?

Feel stymied abt how to save myself, how to hold on to myself. Am afraid I might drive D away. Am so eaten up w/ anger & bitterness that sometimes I don't recognize who I am. *Know* that I must come to terms w/ $$ & my work. *Know* also that maybe there's really no solution, that this is the way it's going to be, no matter how much I rage. Feel as if I've been pounding my head against a brick wall & finally am beginning to *know* for the first time, that there is no way out–there are no real choices, that the opportunities are narrow, limited. *Know* for the first time that all those dreams, those fantasies, abt who I'll be, what I'll be, will simply not come true. Keep seeing the broken toy–the translucent pieces of colored glass all at the bottom of the tube, lumped

together in a dark, opaque heap. The mirrors cracked—no pattern, no design.

Apologized repeatedly to D. Made her dinner. We talked a lot abt our expectations, how to make them realistic. It was good. D grounds me.

ANAIS NIN, AUTHOR WHOSE DIARIES DEPICTED INTELLECTUAL LIFE, DEAD—by C. Gerald Fraser—...In addition to the diaries' pictures of the Bohemian and intellectual life of Paris in the 1930's and of New York during and after World War II, her journals became widely known for their view of the perspective of a Western woman and artist struggling to fulfill herself.

....Her life, she said, "covers all the obscure routes of the soul and body seeking truth, seeking the antiserum against hate and war, never receiving medals for its courage. It is my thousand years of womanhood I am recording, a thousand women. It would be simpler, shorter, swifter not to seek this deepening perspective to my life and lose myself in the simple world of war, hunger, death." (1/16)

FIVE-DAY 'PEOPLE'S' INAUGURATION BEGINS IN CAPITAL TUESDAY—by Bernard Weinraub—...the inauguration planners are emphasizing the 'simplicity' of the day.

For example, the President-elect will wear a business suit rather than the morning coat and top hat traditional for the event. For lunch on Inauguration Day, the families of Mr. Carter and Vice-President Mondale will eat sandwiches, buttermilk, and fruit....

Inauguration Day starts at the Lincoln Memorial at 8 AM Thursday with an interfaith prayer service... (1/16)

Wed. Jan. 19 '77; 12:30 PM MH [Memorial Hospital]: No word fr Leah. Suppose it's terrible, but I didn't call her. Spoke to Fla before going to bed. Both the same. They'd talked w/ Leah Sun nght.

Went w/ the others to the cafeteria. Food looked so disgusting (called "chicken chow mein")—goppy, gooey stuff—abt 3 shreds of chicken—took one look & my stomach flipped. How can hospital food be so awful & so unnutritious? It's all corn starch & chemicals. So bought an apple & coffee & came back. Didn't want to spend the $$ anyway. Have started a writing fund—i.e. will try to save some $$. Tx refund shd help. Too wiped out yesterday & this a.m. to make lunch. *Must* get myself to do that. End up spending abt $15/week in the lousy cafeteria—almost $60/month. Cd use some of it for vacation &

some of it for my writing fund—don't have to give it to that place. Why are all the daily mechanics, the little details so draining, so costly? Why am I not more disciplined? Why am I always forced to choose between time & $$, when time is $$, so I'm always losing?

Quinn tried to be friendly this a.m. Nodded but didn't stop typing. Later asked him abt W-2 forms. Polite, sd he'd ask. He's trying to improve relations. Carmen talked to him abt a point system, so we cd get credit for the more difficult drs. Claire's pushing. Sometimes I can't bear to look at her, the concentration, the anxiety on her face. Can always tell when she's stuck, hearing the tape click again & again as she goes over the same words. & Marcie's just as determined to get her extra $$. Know she's got a right, but sometimes I'm so angry w/ her. Makes no sense. Am angry w/ the wrong one.

It was as if she realized for the first time that the life she was born into was not universal. There were people who did not live in dingy basement apartments, so that all they saw was the strewn garbage on the street. A home was not always three damp, dark rooms. The couch in the living room was not destined to open every night for parents to sleep in, while the two daughters crowded in a narrow bed in the room facing the alley. Not all daughters were exchanged for necessity. All these things, she was beginning to understand, did not have to be.

Yet why, how had this particular life come to her? Was it a legacy like the weakness in her body? Was it an accident? Had it all simply fallen into place randomly? Could it be swapped? Altered? Could the world be jostled so that it formed a different pattern for her? Was it possible, perhaps, to wake up in her friend Alice's sunlit room high on the eighth floor overlooking the park and peer down to where the girls danced around the maypole, weaving their long, brilliant ribbons and forming patterns she could have never discerned from the ground? In short, was there a way to open her eyes one morning and find herself inside another life?

The question was both dream and nightmare.

Thurs. Jan 20 '77; 6:00 AM: Leah finally called last night. Total panic. Kept saying: "What's going to happen? They can't do this! They just can't do it!" Tried to calm her, told her it might be better if they separated for awhile. Mamma hasn't had a chance to realize the con-

sequences. Tried to comfort her, but am very anxious. Don't like to think of them isolated, envision something happening, something physical. Tripping & falling—unable to reach a phone. Am scaring myself, but have always assumed they'd be there for each other (for me?). Leah sd Mamma's still talking abt $$ he's spending. Papa's resigned—eating in the hotel dining room & taking walks. Uncle Joe saw him yesterday. Leah sd Papa was crying. Hard to imagine.

We discussed the possibility of one of us flying down there. Leah implied it shd be me since I have "fewer responsibilities." Meaning: no husband or children—you're obviously free. Growled silently. Wanted to say: I also don't get paid if I don't show up for work! Felt the old rage; a job, a lover, my writing, *my life!* None of that counts. I'm the unmarried daughter—always available, always on call.

D sd Leah's very threatened by it all: "After all, we're the ones who're supposed to have the unstable lifestyle." Probably true. Thought I shd refuse to go, that I just cdn't afford it. I snapped that was easy when it was theoretical. Regretted it the second it was out of my mouth. Knew it wasn't true. Apologized. Feel this is a maze w/ no exit. We finally went to bed. Held on as if I were drowning.

Bad, bad insomnia. Kept thinking abt Leah & Mamma & Papa & the store & what we all looked like 30 yrs ago—the old faded photographs. Who wd have predicted it, any of it? & then kept dozing off & dreaming vaguely abt Quinn—not really able to remember it. & I'd wake up & think abt leaving & writing & the $$. & shd I do it? & cd I do it?

This a.m. got up w/out the alarm at ¼ to 6. Freezing. Exhausted. Decided I might as well get up & write. It's as good a time as any.

COLD WAVE CONTINUES TO GRIP EASTERN U.S.—Two Elderly Men Die of Exposure in Hotel on Amsterdam Avenue—by Peter Khiss—Two men in their 60's were reported by the police in the West 151st Street station to have died during the day at the Hudson Residence Hotel, 1649 Amsterdam Avenue, at 141st Street, because of exposure to the cold. The Police had been told that heat had been only sporadic in the building for several days. (1/19; 1:4)

HOLY RELICS

to Judy Grahn and V. Sackville-West

Part 5 of "Holy Relics" presented here is the last section of a long narrative poem detailing the life of St. Teresa of Avila, 1515-82, Spanish mystic, feminist heroine, martyr, and poet.

Part 1 is concerned with St. Teresa's early lesbian affections. Part 2 outlines her descent into hell. Part 3 tells of her encounter with a demon and additional visionary experiences. Part 4 is a letter to San Juan de la Cruz.

Although the dismemberment of saints to obtain sacred reliquaries was practiced on men as well as women, the terrible and haunting story of St. Teresa especially touched the author's heart.

G.A.

We are the holy relics,
the scattered bones of a saint,
the best loved bones of Spain.
We seek each other.

City of Avila,
88 crenellated towers crowning a low hill.
A silent landscape rises toward indigo mountains,
empty save for clumps of broom and tormented ilex.
Here and there strange stones
like prehistoric ruins.
A granite city in a dour land,
with a cathedral for a fortress.
A land where no mists soften the granite,
where light is relentless.

When she* died, flesh of our bones,
they buried her at the Alba de Tormes

---

*Teresa de Cepeda Davila Y Ahumada

50 miles west of Avila.
They finally buried her
in her patched and shabby habit.
Buried her in her threadworn veil.
Bricked her in a wall of grey stone.

Nine months she lay in the grey stone.
Nine months she lay quietly.
Her daughters, the nuns of Alba, came to her daily—
came to that bricked up place in the wall.
From that place issued a scent
to which they could give no name.
From within that tomb
issued a sound to which they could give no name.

Day by day they waited.
They waited for the good father Gracian,
Teresa's beloved confessor,
waited to tell him of that scent and of that sound.

Entombed nine months.
Four days it took them.
Four days in silence, in secret.
The nuns held the torches
while Father and friar shoveled.
The nuns held the torches,
then cleared away the rubble.
At last the hallowed moment,
the coffin pulled from the cavern.
The moment when the lid is broken,
when the coffin is opened.
They gazed at last at their beloved:
spider webs netted black hair to eyebrows,
earth clotted her arched nostrils.
They gazed and gazed at their beloved.
The nuns of Alba removed her mouldy habit,
with knives scraped away the earth clinging to her skin,
looked their fill,
then wrapped her in clean linen.

The good Father drew near,
lifted her left hand as if to kiss it,
placed a knife under her wrist
and from her rigid arm he severed it.
The father Teresa had loved stood smiling,
hugging her hand to his body.

Two years she lay in her tomb.
Pero para los santos no hay descanso,
for saints there is no rest.
Another priest fell upon her tomb
to claim her holy body for Avila.
At midnight he sent the nuns
to the upper choir to sing Matins.
Then quietly removed the bricked up stones
quietly reopened the tomb.
The mysterious scent and her unspoiled face
(a little more dried than before) greeted him.
And bright red as if freshly soaked
was the cloak of white bunting
that had staunched the flow from her mouth
at her deathbed.
It stained whatever piece of cloth touched it.
The scent drifted to the upper choir
drawing the nuns down to the tomb
like flies to honey
in time to see Father Gregorio de Naciancene
insert his knife under the truncated arm,
in time to see the blade pass through the flesh
as if through cheese.
And flinging the arm at the nuns of Alba
as one would a bone to a dog
he detained them long enough
to mount the shroud on horseback
and gallop away.

We are the holy relics,
the scattered bones of a saint,
the best loved bones of Spain.
We seek each other.

Through the bitter winds of Avila
Teresa raced from the grave.
She traveled in secret,
traveled at night,
and briefly during the run she stopped
to resuscitate a dying child
with the edge of her bloodstained rag,
paused to heal the fiery eyes of a shepherd.
Toward the 88 towers and their indented embrasures
they galloped.
Through the gates of Avila,
past highwalled houses
where black eyes behind lattices stared down
at the shroud riding on horseback.
Into San Jose convent he took her
and placed her upon a bright carpet.
A small group gathered around,
each held a flaming torch.
All were crying.

Later, one witness described the corpse:
"The body is erect, though bent a little forward,
as with old people.
It can be made to stand upright,
if propped with a hand between the shoulders,
and this is the position they hold it
when it is to be dressed or undressed,
as though it were alive.
The colour of the body
is of the colour of dates;
the face darker,
because the veil became stuck to it,
and it was maltreated more than the rest;
nevertheless, it is intact.
And, even the nose is undamaged.

The head has retained all its hair.
The eyes, having lost their vital moisture,
are dried up, but the eye-lids are perfectly preserved.
The moles on her face retain their little hairs.
The mouth is tightly shut
and cannot be opened.
The shoulder from which the arm was severed
exudes a moisture that clings to the touch
and exhales the same scent as the body."

News of her disinterment spread.
It reached the ears of the Duke of Alba.
He petitioned the pope for the immediate return of the body.

Once more Teresa traveled,
traveled in secret,
traveled at night
away from the 88 towers.
Through the bitter winds of Avila
she galloped toward her grave.
Abbots on well-fed mules
turned and gaped.
Peasants stopped threshing their corn.
They followed the mysterious smell
and saw it cure a monk's malaria.
Through the gates of Alba
the priest rode.
He laid the shroud before the nuns.
Raising his torch high,
he uncovered the body.
"If these be the remains of your Foundress
acknowledge them before God."

Again she lay quietly
in her granite grave.
The third time she was exhumed,
a crowd gathered around,
eyes coveting her body.
Over-ardent fingers—

fingers that once had loved her—
pinched off pieces of her flesh.
A priest raised her one remaining hand
gave a sharp twist
snapping off two fingers.
Another grasped her right foot
and blessing her
severed it from her ankle.
A third fell upon her breast
and from her side
plucked out three ribs.
Scraps of her bones they sold
to the aristocracy for money.
They auctioned tiny pieces of her fingernails
and one small white tooth.

Again they laid her in her grey stone grave.
Again priests fell upon her body.
Her dried carnal husk
could still be torn into morsels.
They cut off her head,
laid it on a cushion of crimson satin
embroidered with silver and gold.
Like a crippled bird it lay,
left eye gouged out,
right eye protruding through full lashes,
its black lone gaze frozen.

A fifth time they dug her up years later.
A gaping hole where her heart had been
ripped out to be placed in a reliquary.
Three centuries later physicians would examine it,
would find a wound an inch and a half in length,
the edges of the wound charred
as though by a burning iron.
Above the high altar at Alba,
the fifth and final resting place,
lie the remains of a woman.

We are the holy relics,
the scattered bones of a saint,
the best loved bones of Spain.
We seek each other.

CAMILLE NORTON

THE PURSUIT OF LONGING

I

My pretty sees. Watch her—there—like a cat or a snake. Oh—
she sees what your doctor hoards in the rolling files—a crick
somewhere, a funny spot. Not the liver—you can rest well on that
account—it's spotless. And the spleen—not to worry—is pulpy with
vigor. Not the knees—your knees will never kill you. But a crick
somewhere. Do you feel it? Do your remember feeling it before?
Yes, that's the one she sees. That poor muscle.

My heart, you mean? That hearty blob of life? Why it's lean and
exercised, pared of fat. It thrives in its chamber, noisy and nag-
some as the best of them and prophesies for itself a long internment.
Young and prosperous, with a certain history behind it, a history
only half done.

Have you examined it lately? Inspected each crevice with forceps
and torch? Illuminated it? Stripped the casing off? Gone in, boots
and all, to dirty your hands in the plumbing?

Of course not, otherwise you would see what she sees. The funny
spot. It quivers. It jumps. It misses its pulse. An infection—
an infection of absence—an absence of longing.

You don't remember the moment it walked out through your walls. You
never noticed a vacancy or even the rattle it bequeathed you in
lieu of rent? You say business has gone on as usual, a normalcy
achieved and the status quo maintained. Never a better citizen.
Never a better worker. Never a better link in the assembly line.
Never a better soldier. Or serf. Or woman.

But there are laws against this. Privacy is a premise of Americanism.
And I am an American and there is nothing wrong with me.

II

Yes, yes, yes—I see that you are. But your very private Americanism is not the disease. The symptom only. And so take heart. Take it in your hands. Bring it closer—it mends already. Despite the stinking hole dead center.

What is that sound? Is that the wind tearing through? Or the gun metal clank of my machinery at 2:00 in the afternoon with no relief until 5:00 p.m. when the shift ends and the subway swallows me up? The sound of my children swallowing me? The sound of my husband who was my lover who is my other—is it his sound? Or is it only the wind? Only that?

I will invest in putty and a putty knife to seal it up.
The hole, I mean. Ah, what silence then.

III

No, no, no, no—it is not that simple. Not a case for home mechanics and Missus-Fix-It-All. Not a case for gird your loins and put your shoulder to the wheel and tighten your belt and endure and prevail and pledge your allegiance to the foe within us.

What is needed is this: An undiluted, full attention to the heart. Air it in a warm place, in the kitchen perhaps, near the egg timer. It must be watched as a pot is watched. Stirred as the stew is stirred. Warmed as slowly as milk is warmed. Turn it slightly so that all sides are equally affected. Let it rise and cool. In short, my good woman, give it nurturance. Tenderness, intelligence, every faculty of mind. For this is your heart. With the hole in the middle. And your heart's absence. Your heart's absence of longing.

But I don't know how to. . . .
Of course you do. It's pure maternalism, aimed inward instead of out.

IV

Oh, THAT. Well, I have that. I have received them and delivered them. I have fattened them up. I have been their morning, their night, their goddess, their fool. I have been their mother. My three girls grow like poles planted just yards from one another.

And look at them—one talks to herself and dreams; another scribbles and draws; the last does mathematics and charts. They will go to the University. They will not have holes in their hearts. They will lack nothing. Not love, beauty, money or power; not children, husbands, homes or cruises. Not the strength of their teeth or the pliancy of their wombs. They will bear down in their stirrups and deliver Gods. Another race, infected by immunity and unafraid to be alone. Immortal perhaps. And so, if my heart chafes, I do not complain. I will be outlived by iron-hearts. Already I am obsolete.

But who invited you to ply me with ridiculous baits regarding holes and hearts and what does or does not fill them? Propaganda, I say. Lies. Diversionary tactics. This is what life is:

The ritual of morning.
The ritual of pots.
The ritual of work.
The ritual of forgetfulness.
The ritual of sleep.

And I miss nothing in the time between rituals because there is not enough time for missing and that is how it should be. For if there is not enough time then there is a reason for that, a providential arrangement beyond my means to understand it. But a trustworthy mystery, nevertheless. And who am I to invent time for it—for missing and grieving and counting things up—me, a machinist at General Automatic with somebody's life to lead?

I do not miss it—that something else where the hole is—I do not miss it.

V

But who are you anyway?
Why, I am the face of your denial. Your bone's truth. Your marrow's wisdom. I am the pretty one who sees. As a plumber—or a dentist—sees the truth about pipes and cavities. I, who never leave you, am your heart's own administrator. Or, if you prefer, your own best friend.
Will no murder shut you up?
Too counterproductive. You'd fall on your own axe. You're a bright woman. Surely you see that.

Yes, it grows apparent. What do you want me to do then?
Be still. Listen.

VI

Ssshhh. . . what goes there when I listen? Something turning green. Grasses and feet over grasses, the feel of grass and feet, separately, together. A sprig of clover caught between the mother toe and its sister. Now the legs run like antelopes. Surely, this is what it is to run, to be able to do. . anything. . . .

Now I am my mother's daughter, my own photograph with two bronzed plaits of hair trailing my spine. And I drink milk in my mother's kitchen, watching her knead a loaf of bread with her good, brown hands. "Mother," I say, "to do anything. . . to do anything. . . ."
"Yes," she says, "that's right, dear."
I am her colt, her little god, her iron-heart. No holes in my heart.

My heart is milky all over being with her.
1935. I am ignorant of depression.
I am a little gold nugget ready to be hammered.
And I long, I long, I long—to be like this always.
To be anything. That's what I long for.
Now I remember.

It is six o'clock in the morning. My husband sleeps in his dream pocket. I am starting the coffee and the cream of wheat. Now I groom my daughters and insure my husband's passage to the factory. Now they are gone with lunch pails in hand, my portable family blown apart. Now I put 50¢ in an underground turnstile. A dangerous man devours me with his eyes. Now I am at my shop.
"Hi, Gracie," my foreman says as I punch the clock.
"Hi, Gracie," my bench partner says as I touch my machine.
Now I am my machine, my terminal life.
Now I whir. Now I forget.
Now I am.

VII

Grace? Grace? Are you listening?
What? Oh, I'd forgotten. I always forget just now. It's afternoon.

Lunch break is over. It's hot. I always forget just now.
But all that's changing. Now you will begin to remember. It's just the other side of forgetting. All you have to do is turn it over. Gently.
Like this?
Exactly.

VIII

Now I remember. Odd the way the brain sorts out this incident from the next, or fishes up the small occasion. Now I remember. The first time mathematics came to me, and lines, charts, graphs, a numerical order I could arrange or rearrange. How the mind bolted! And then I understood the relationship between my arrangements and the solid ground between them.

In my thirteenth year the line of infinity becomes visible. I make a web of it, a mass of connections yet I do not lose the origin. I mark a place where the thread begins.

"She has a genius for algebra," the sisters wrote.
"She must go to the University."
I long, I long, I long to go to the University.
Now I remember entire summers full of wanting, when to lie back was to imagine being there, was to invent another self, one without past, only future spinning out to meet the line of infinity. Now I remember that I did not go.
"There is not enough money," my father said. And it was true. Money was some measurement I did not yet understand, though its lack was to reveal shapes and postures of other selves, other women I had not yet become.
But my brother went to study accounting, the first of our clan to outwit the factory. And I became a solderer working third shift at General Automatic.
The years worked this sort of revolution upon me: I ascended to the second shift and with time, gained seniority and a place among the workers on the first shift.

Now my factory whistles blow, each whistle distinctly pitched. One for morning, one for afternoon, one for evening. This one sends me home as it has sent me home for twenty-five years. And for twenty-five years I have felt it release me in just this way, whether I am

on the shop floor or in my yard routing weeds, whether I am twenty years old or forty, whether it is Sunday or Monday: a dull chord of amazement nuzzles my spine. Now I am standing utterly still in order to anticipate it.
Keen, keen, keen. Each corpuscle waits. Here it comes. Do you hear it? Yes, that's it. Now it is gone.

IX

Grace, Grace, what is gone?
The whine of freedom.
What's gone, Grace?
The line of infinity.
What else, Grace?
You want me to say: "longing."

X

FROM *THE GENERAL AUTOMATIC EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK*
All of our employees reap the full harvest of corporate involvement. From the beginning, General Automatic has offered the widest range of worker benefits: GA subsidized dental and eye care, paid vacations, sick leave, an extensive insurance and pension package as well as a 50% discount on the wholesale price of all General Automatic appliances. Because we think of our workers as family, we offer one of the most generous pay-scale systems in the country. Many of our people buy and own their own homes.

XI

This house that I live in, stucco and brick, is attached to another house I do not know so intimately though it is possible to hear, through the wall between us, the lives there thump and heave and hurtle and spit in much the same manner as our lives. The woman in the house just beyond the plaster between us is a seamstress at National Linen and Sheets, a widow, poor thing. I suspect that she drinks. Certainly her sons do. She has three of them, all drill operators at Consolidated Circuit and Cable. The sons work evening shift, a sleight of circumstance and livelihood that works to my advantage. I worry about my daughters.

This house that I live in, stucco and brick, has a yard behind it that breeds a contortion of roses and vine. Along the fence separating us from the widow and her sons, my beans grow in orgiastic clumps. A patch of mint runs along the casement windows. For years, on my days off or on late afternoons after work, I have encouraged this kind of activity. Except for a sporadic hoeing, my garden hardly needs me any longer. Each season, reinventing itself from the cold clay, the garden inherits an extemporaneous vitality all its own.

This house that I live in, stucco and brick, has settled against me and inside me and beyond me like an immutable, porous skin I maintain just as I would attend my own body: soap and water, a perpetual airing and sealing up. The roof is leakproof, the windows stormproofed and the furnace compliant with the president's policy regarding the conservation of fuel. Not one species of insect has managed to proliferate here. This is, in all modesty, a civilized house. Inspect the shelves, lined with fresh paper, the closets, innocent of dust, the floors, waxed every Saturday. But ignore the crack in the cellar floor. It is a small crack, something I intend to erase with a jar of putty and a putty knife.

This house, stucco and brick, has held our five lives for twenty-five years and though we have payed its due three times over, the payment is never enough. A solid house built during the war with an eye towards children, its property value jumps and jumps. I am the keeper of this house. Beyond my longing to possess it, I long for nothing. Really, I want nothing else.

XII

That's what I want, I said, that one with the green bow trailing all the way to the floor, the one with the starched cuffs and the white bib and the lace collar and I want to be a dancer with the national ballet and have teeth and calves which are perfectly straight and I want to be all the women in magazines whose faces have moved me out of my own mediocrity towards the notion of beauty. I want to be the doctor's daughter; I want to be the doctor's wife; I want to be the doctor. I want to be all the little girls who laugh at Genardi's counter because they have money to spend, because they study Latin and Greek and play tennis on weekends at Grosse Point. I want to be the mathematician who alters the relationship of numbers, the chemist

who re-aligns matter, the poet who reveals the nature of sound to the deaf, I want. . . .

"To be anything, Mother, to be anything. . . ."
"That's right, dear."
"To be anything I want to be?"
"Well you will have to choose. Choose something."

XIII

I want to leave the city. I want to leave the factory. I want you to stop drinking. I want you to think of the children. I want you to stop abusing me this way. I SAID, I WANT YOU TO STOP ABUSING ME. I want you to love me as you used to.

XIV

Yes, Now I remember what I long for.

To be anything, to go beyond the limits of rock and water like the amphibian that sprouts a third lung, an iron lung, and wings which tuck underneath the hind quarters. And to sprout a third eye of terrible luminosity which dissects the fourth dimension. And to roost on my own haunches with one finger dipped into the veil of night, and to laugh, to cackle, to crow at human hopelessness.

Now memory comes. The most unlikely sounds and stinks drag it up. There are crickets here, a hum of them, and if I look up, stars, and if I look beyond, no city at all but a gaggle of memory. June-bugs flashing over the back field bump the eyes of Orion, the perfect titan, and there's the dipper, and there are the nameless and this is a smell I will never forget.

Now memory comes and as I leap and fall I confuse this falling with the last fall I will ever know. My breath stops and I have to hold on until I land on all fours like a cat or begin to crawl like a snake along the balance. Like my pretty. Like anyone who sees.

CLARIBEL ALEGRÍA
GIOCONDA BELLI

Translators' note:

The poems on the following pages are the work of Claribel Alegría and Gioconda Belli, two Nicaraguan women. We are presently collaborating on a bilingual edition of poems from Alegría's Sobrevivo/ I Survive *and Belli's* Linea de Fuego/Firing Line, *which will include an introductory essay on the poets and the struggle which forms a background to their poems.*

The victory in July, 1979, of the forces of the Frente sandinista de liberación nacional *(Sandinista National Liberation Front) over the Somoza regime was the culmination of 150 years of struggle for Nicaraguan independence. The poems reproduced below reflect the final phase of the Sandinista campaign.*

By the time of its downfall, the Somoza clan–established and maintained in power through the agency of U.S. political and economic interests–owned almost half of the nation's wealth and land. The regime's brutality finally forced even relatively apathetic and conservative citizens to support the Sandinista Liberation Front, named for Augusto César Sandino (who had, in the 1920's and '30's, waged a successful guerrilla campaign against the occupying U.S. Marines). Armed struggle against los Somoza *left the country devastated, with over 20,000 people dead. The victory of July, 1979 marked the beginning of a new effort: to reconstruct a ravaged country, and to teach a people with an illiteracy rate of 50-90% to read and write.*

Women have been involved in every phase of the Nicaraguan liberation struggle, and every level of political organization, from neighborhood and village associations to national leadership ranks. Reportedly, they form majorities on committees that are directing the national reconstruction effort and the literacy campaign.

Further information is available from: The Nicaragua Solidarity Organization, Wanso, P.O. Box 32074 Calvert Station, Washington, D.C. 20007; WIRE (a women's Latin American and international information exchange group), 2700 Broadway, Room 7, New York, NY 10025; Nicaragua Solidarity Committee, Box 1919, Boston, MA. 02105.

Electa Arenal *and* Marsha Gabriela Dreyer

ÉRAMOS TRES

Era invierno con nieve
era de noche
hoy es día de verdes
de pajaros
de sol
día de cenizas
y lamentos
me empuja el viento
me lleva por el puente
por la tierra agrietada
por el arroyo seco
rebosante de plásticos y latas
la muerte cobra vida
aquí en Deyá
los arroyos
los puentes
mis muertos acechando
en cada esquina
las rejas inocentes
de un balcón
el reflejo borroso
de mis muertos
me sonríen de lejos
se despiden
salen del cementerio
forman muro
se me vuelve traslúcida
la piel
me tocan a la puerta
gesticulan
era de piedra el puente

WE WERE THREE

It was a winter with snow
it was night
today is a day of greens
of birds
of sun
a day of ashes
and laments
the wind pushes me
it carries me over the bridge
over the cracked earth
over the dry brook
brimming with plastic and cans
death comes to life
here in Deyá
the brooks
the bridges
my dead lying in wait
at each corner
the innocent grid
of a balcony
the hazy reflection
of my dead
they smile at me from afar
they say goodbye
leave the cemetery
form a wall
my skin
becomes translucent
they knock at my door
they gesture
the bridge was of stone

era de noche
los brazos enlazados
por el vaivén de un canto
como pequeñas nubes congeladas
nos salía el aliento
en las bocas
era invierno con nieve
éramos tres
hoy la tierra está seca
reverbera
se me caen los brazos
estoy sola
montan guardia mis muertos
me hacen señas
me asaltan por la radio
en el periódico
el muro de mis muertos
se levanta
se extiende de Aconcagua
hasta el Izalco
continúan su lucha
marcan rumbos
era de piedra el puente
era de noche
nadie sabe decir
cómo murieron
sus voces perseguidas
se confunden
murieron en la cárcel
torturados
se levantan mis muertos
tienen rabia
las calles están solas
me hacen guiños
soy cementerio apátrida
no caben.

it was night
our arms entwined
with the swaying of a song
like small frozen clouds
our breath issued
from our mouths
it was a winter with snow
we were three
today the earth is dry
it echoes
my arms fall
I am alone
my dead stand guard
they signal to me
they assault me from the radio
from the newspaper
the wall of my dead
rises
extends from Aconcagua
to Izalco
they continue marking directions
the bridge was of stone
it was night
no one can say
how they died
their persecuted voices
fuse
they died in jail
tortured
my dead rise
they are enraged
the streets are alone
they wink at me
I am a cemetery without a country
there is no room.

translated by Electa Arenal & Marsha Gabriela Dreyer

LA MADRE

se ha cambiado de ropa.
La falda se ha convertido en pantalón,
los zapatos en botas,
la cartera en mochila.
No canta ya canciones de cuna,
canta canciones de protesta.
Va despeinada y llorando
un amor que la envuelve y sobrecoge.
No quiere ya solo a sus hijos,
ni se da solo a sus hijos.
Lleva prendidos en los pechos
miles de bocas hambrientas.
Es madre de niños rotos
de muchachitos que juegan trompo en aceras polvosas.
Se ha parido ella misma
sintiéndose – a ratos –
incapaz de soportar tanto amor sobre los hombros,
pensando en el fruito de su carne
– lejano y solo –
llamandola en la noche sin respuesta,
mientras ella responde a otros gritos,
muchos gritos,
pero siempre pensando en el grito solo de su carne
que es un grito más en ese griterío de pueblo que la llama
y le arranca hasta sus propios hijos
de los brazos.

THE MOTHER

has changed her clothes.
Her skirt has turned into pants,
her shoes into boots,
her pocketbook into a knapsack.
She no longer sings lullabyes,
she sings songs of protest.
She goes unkempt and crying
a love that envelops and frightens her.
She no longer loves only her children,
nor does she give only to her children.
She clasps to her breast
thousands of hungry mouths.
She is a mother of ragged children
of little children who spin tops on dusty sidewalks.
She has given birth to herself
feeling – at times –
unable to support so much love on her shoulders,
thinking of the fruit of her flesh
– far off and alone –
calling her in the night without answer,
while she responds to other shouts,
to many shouts,
but always thinking of the one and only shout of her flesh
one more shout in that clamor of the people who calls her
and pulls from her arms
even her own children.

translated by Electa Arenal and
Marsha Gabriela Dreyer

YA VAN MESES, HIJITA

que no te veo.
Meses en que mi calor
no ha arrullado tu sueño.
Meses en que sólo
hemos hablado por teléfono
—larga distancia, hay que hablar aprisa—
¿Cómo explicarte, mi amor,
la revolución a los dos años y medio?
¿Cómo decirte: Las cárceles están llenas de gente,
en las montañas el dolor arrasa poblados enteros
y hay otros niños que no escucharán ya la voz de sus
madres?
¿Cómo explicarte que, a veces,
es necesario partir
porque el cerco se cierra
y tenés que dejar tu patria, tu casa, tus hijos
hasta quién sabe cuándo
(pero siempre con la fe en la victoria)
¿Cómo explicarte que te estamos haciendo un país
nuevo?
¿Cómo explicarte esta guerra contra el dolor,
la muerte, la injusticia?
¿Cómo explicarte tantas,
pero tantas cosas,
mi muchachita. . .?

MONTHS HAVE PASSED, MY DAUGHTER

since I have seen you.
Months in which my warmth
has not rocked you to sleep.
Months in which
we have only spoken over the telephone
– long distance, one must speak quickly –
How can I explain to you, at your two-and-a-half years
the revolution, my love?
How can I tell you: the jails are filled with people,
in the mountains, pain razes entire populations into the ground
and other children will never again hear the voices of their mothers?
How can I explain to you, that at times
it is necessary to leave
because the siege closes in
and you must leave your country, your home, your children
until who knows when
(but always with faith in victory)
How can I explain to you that we are building you a new country?
How can I explain to you this war against pain,
death, injustice?
How can I explain to you so many,
but so very many things,
my little girl. . .?

translated by Marsha Gabriela Dreyer

ENGENDRAREMOS NIÑOS,

cientos de niños saliendo a la alborada
entre piernas morenas y canciones.

Engendraremos niños
con el puño cerrado
y la conspiración, el secreto en los ojos.

Engendraremos niños,
los verán aparecer por las montañas,
los campos
las ciudades,
niños con mirada de relámpago,
niños sigiloses cruzándose en la noche los mensajes,
niños sin padre o madre,
hijos de mujer y hombre agazapados,
niños clandestinos.

Engendraremos niños,
por cada hombre o mujer que nos maten,
pariremos
cientos de niños
que sequirán sus pasos.

WE SHALL BEGET CHILDREN

hundreds of children born at dawn
between brown legs and songs.

We shall beget children
with clenched fists
and the conspiracy, the secret in their eyes.

We shall beget children,
you will see them appear in the mountains,
the country,
the city.

Children with the look of lightning,
children stealthily carrying messages in the night,
children without father or mother
offspring of captured man and woman
clandestine children.

We shall beget children,
for every man or woman they kill,
we shall give birth to
hundreds of children
who will follow in their footsteps.

translated by Marsha Gabriela Dreyer
and Electa Arenal

I CALL THEM SPARROWS

Today metal is in the air,
the cold steely feel of winter
finally grabbing its place.
All this long fall I have
waited for something aggressive
to work the final change
on a life yet in limbo.
Driving by the lake
I see a flock of small
birds suddenly rise
in unison, with little
wings fluttering against
a sky too wide to feel
the impact. Still the birds
rise at once, claiming it.
They rise and rise, all
together. I call them
sparrows, not knowing
what they are, I call
them sparrows, common
birds, their song not
as lovely as some exotic
warbler's, their song
is the song of everyday
life, humdrum, usual.
But their flight is
a rush against
a menacing sky, their
flight the flight
of risk, rattling
my chest to life.

EIGHT POEMS

The following poems, written in Russia between 1915 and 1933, were translated by Rima Shore. Her essay "Remembering Sophia Parnok" follows this selection of Parnok's work.

FORTUNE TELLING*

I'm the queen of clubs. The others, all three,
in a secret alliance against me are bound.
Look below the nine, the love card, you'll see
the ace of spades is pointing down,
a pointy dagger laid beneath the heart.
The other kings all hold staffs, you see,
the club alone has grasped a sword,
his look is cruel; the others glance less wickedly. . .
Fierce combat between two wills, this love will be.
Who is this menacing king? Who is he?

No roads, no cheer, no rendezvous, no friends!
as if former destiny's worn thread,
not a wedding chorus, my door defends;
on that night graves will make a marriage bed.
From all I love, I'm kept from everything
by the black cards you see laid out here.
Thoughts, black thoughts—heralds of the king,
the fateful arrival in my light home is near. . .
Fierce combat between two wills, this love will be.
Who is this menacing king? Who is he?

---

*In this poem, Parnok draws on at least two categories of Russian folklore associated with women tellers or singers: the *gadanie* or fortune, in which a woman tries to see the future by fulfilling certain rites, and the bridal lament, the melancholy song performed by women of a village before a wedding, in which the bride's bitter fate—marriage, loss of virginity, separation from loved ones—is treated symbolically.

It must be that my voice is false,
my sweet words sound with emptiness.
The sonnet's done, I've heard the waltz,
my lips have long ago been kissed.

Through glass the world is glazed with ice.
On the book an aster falls.
L'Abesse de Castro near me lies—
the coldly passionate Stendhal.

How good when lips belong to none,
how sweet my desolate abode.
Tell me, why have you now come,
bearing the wind of every road?

September 3, 1915

When you murmur in your sleep
and there's passion in your voice
I'll take you gently by the hand
and whisper: Speak to me. . . of me
How you love me, my love
And adore me, my love.

And the doors, 'til then shut tight
will part in awful folds
and all at once the pain will come
tortured twisting of the tongue
and your soul will realize
how completely you despise.

December 24, 1919

from DREAMS OF SAPPHO

Believe: in time
Someone will remember even us.

Sappho

"Believe: in time someone will remember even us. . ."
She said, and lay her head on her friend's breast;
Is this a dream—has a strange dream seized me? But here all around
Everything has come to life: over my bed, above the lyre
Chirping, buzzing, as if a swarm of bees
Got tangled in the strings, as if crickets are chirping.
"Sappho!" I hear, in chorus,
Again the name is sung in vain—"Sappho!"
And I see: wearily scurrying, back and forth,
From the lyre to the bed, from the bed to the lyre—mice.
What's Sappho to them?. . . Suddenly all is lit up
(Even the mice hadn't seen!) And you are before me, Aphrodite!
Your indescribable face smiles at me.
The wonderful voice: "There's talk, Sappho:
They want to know to whom you write your eternal love songs,
Nectar of the gods! To young men, or to maids?

1922

And so on other shores, by another singing sea,
A thousand years later, in just such an early spring,
Recalling her ancient Aeolean childhood,
A maid on a thoughtful day fingered the strings.

In a breeze from beyond the sea the breath of Aellada touched her,
A breeze unfelt by others sways her heart:
And it seems to the maid—she dreams on your dreams, Sappho,
She sings on to us your unfinished songs.

1922

for Ludmila Erarskaya

Like a patient on the ward
quite suddenly set free,
I never fully knew, my Lord!
how sharp the air can be.

I don't think I had ever seen
the sky so huge, the clouds this light,
that even on dark evergreens
the needles are so bright.

How soft and deep the moss can be
how stillness is so still.
I walk and listen inwardly
for poetry's sure feel.

On the heather, trembling dew
greets me now as then.
I scarcely can believe it's true
that I've come home again.

July 14, 1926

We hid in an armchair at twilight—
me and my heartache, entwined.
We both would have died long ago,
but for dying there's simply no time.
Still it's useless to complain
and there's no one to reproach
that there's no time—
to live,
and there's no time—
to fight,
and to die, there's no time,
that to live and be forlorn
is slashing wind with a knife,
that a pendulum gets worn
from swinging day and night.

April 25, 1927

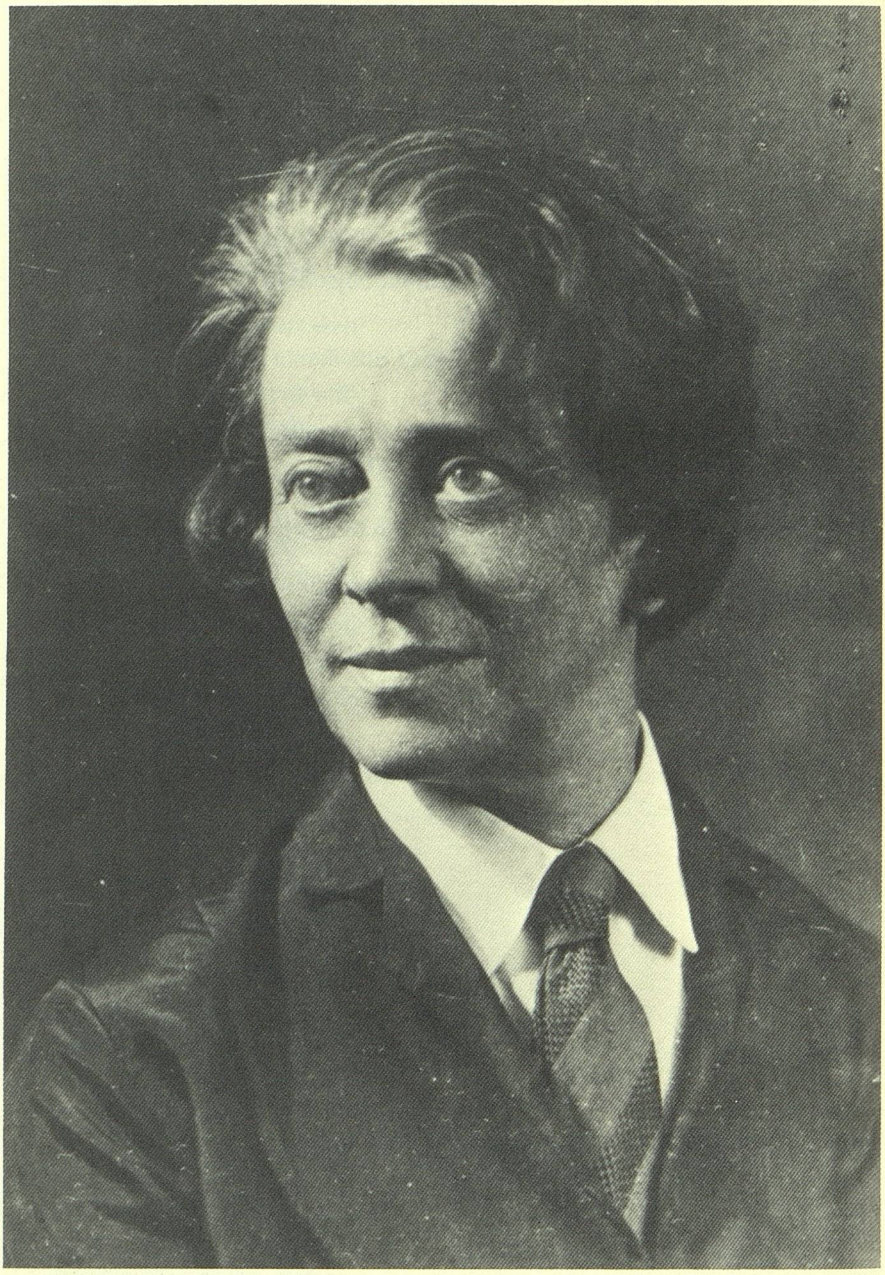
We'll be happy, you said, whatever comes of us. . .
And yes, my friend, happiness and I had quite a time of it.
But now, so soon, a fatal weariness
closes my eyes, my soul.

But now, so soon, without a fight, without objection,
I hear the heart sounding its retreat.
I grow weak, and the bond weakens
That bound you so closely to me.

And now, so soon, the wind blows fierce, blows high.
Everything's in blossom, around me all is still.
Goodbye, my friend! Don't you hear? Goodbye.
I'm speaking to you, my far-off friend. I'm bidding you farewell.

*July 31, 1933**

*This was her last known poem. Parnok died on August 26, 1933.



Sophia Parnok in the late 1920's

RIMA SHORE

REMEMBERING SOPHIA PARNOK (1885-1933)

'Believe: in time someone will remember even us'
Parnok, "Dreams of Sappho"

I first came across the name Parnok in a directory of lesbian bars. Leafing through GAIA's Guide, *a British publication which lists lesbian meeting places around the world, I was surprised to find an entry under the heading "U.S.S.R." It named no bars, but it did say that one of this century's "foremost" Russian poets, Sophia Yakovlevna Parnok, had been a lesbian.*

That news was astonishing, for though I had spent half my life studying Russian literature, I had never so much as heard the name. I quickly checked the index of any book on my shelves that might have said more about Parnok, but between Parnassians *and* Pasternak *I found nothing. I wondered how I might get hold of her poetry, and began inventing schemes of no little complexity. It turned out that both Columbia University and the New York Public Library own editions of Parnok's 1922 collection* Roses of Pieria, *and within a few days I had the book in hand.*

That was four years ago. In 1979, Ardis Publishers, a Michigan-based press specializing in Russian literature, put out a Russian-language edition of the works of Sophia Parnok, with commentary and a hundred-page introduction (in Russian) by the volume's editor, Sophia Poliakova.[1] *A woman in her late sixties who lives in Leningrad, Poliakova assembled biographical data gathered from archival materials and from interviews with people who had been close to Parnok, and offered previously unknown poems.*

This article, to my knowledge, is the first discussion in English of Parnok's work; the poems translated here appear in English for the first time.[2] *I would like to express my indebtedness to Poliakova and my admiration for her work: for a Soviet citizen to remember Sophia*

Parnok—to preserve and make known her writing—is an act of daring.

I

Writing in Russia in the early decades of this century, Sophia Parnok created a body of poetry which reflects her commitment to women and to a literary culture founded on works by women. Parnok was a lesbian. We are spared the discomfort of speculation by her own refusal to deny or obscure the important facts of her life. Obscurity came later, after her death: though Parnok was well known in her day, her work and even her name have been forgotten by all but a handful of "specialists" in the Soviet Union or abroad. She is forgotten despite a great lyric gift, despite the opinion of some readers that she was a poet of the magnitude of the more celebrated Marina Tsvetaeva or Anna Akhmatova.[3]

Parnok left no papers to speak of: she left no journals or diaries, and apparently kept none. She did not save letters addressed to her or write memoirs, or if she did they were lost along with all traces of her fiction. Parnok changed lodgings frequently and precipitously, and often did not safeguard her writing. In preparing the Ardis edition of Parnok's works, the editor Sophia Poliakova more often located unpublished poems in other people's possession than in Parnok's own notebooks. (Approximately one-third of the 261 poems in that edition had never before been published.) Poliakova nevertheless traced the outlines of Parnok's history by searching the archives and the memories of people who had known her. To some degree one can fill in that outline, as Poliakova sometimes does, by referring to the poems.

Born in Taganrog, an industrial port city on the Sea of Azov, Parnok grew up in an upper-middle-class Jewish family. Her mother, Alexandra Eidelson, was a physician; her father, Yakov Parnakh, was a druggist and proprietor of a pharmacy.[4] When Sophia was ten, her mother died giving birth to twins. The children were raised by governesses and tutored at home; Parnok later enrolled in the Taganrog *gymnasia* (secondary school) where she began writing poetry, fell in love with Nadezhda Poliakova (apparently no relation of the editor), and won a gold medal at graduation.

She returned home unwillingly. Her father had married the German governess, and by all accounts, Sophia was not particularly welcome in their home. At 21 Parnok wrote, "In my father's eyes I'm a wayward

girl and nothing more. My way of thinking and my tastes offend his patriarchal scruples, and he is condescending toward me."[5] "Way of thinking" no doubt refers, at least in part, to Parnok's lesbianism, for she had from her adolescent years recognized and acted on her feelings for women. The relationship with Nadezhda Poliakova began when Parnok was 16 or 17, and lasted for five years.

The years after that relationship ended and after she left home were filled with wandering and indecision. In 1905 Parnok went to Geneva; a poem suggests that infatuation with an actress motivated the journey. In Geneva she lived with a Russian family and entered a conservatory, but soon withdrew and returned to Russia. Settling in Petersburg, she determined to study history and philosophy, then enrolled in law courses. She found the work dull. At the same time Parnok began writing more seriously and, encouraged by her new acquaintances among the city's literary and musical intelligentsia, she made her first attempts to publish her work. In 1906 she published for the first time in a literary journal.

Her marriage the following year to her "tutor," the poet and playwright Vladimir Volkenstein, was—as Poliakova puts it—a "rather unexpected episode in Parnok's life."[6] Parnok may have been reacting to the painful separation from Nadezhda Poliakova, for soon before marrying Volkenstein she had written to him: "Yesterday on my way home from shopping I saw Nad[ezhda] in a coach. We looked at each other and Nadya began, with the greatest attention, to read the shop signs. We didn't acknowledge each other. And to think, that's what I gave five years of my life to."[7] It may also be that Parnok thought of the marriage as a literary alliance of the kind so common in her day. In any case, it was not a happy arrangement, and divorce followed after little more than a year, though in actuality the marriage lasted only a few months. Parnok would neither renounce her lesbianism, nor use marriage as a cover. She wrote to Volkenstein:

> I know that my leaving you won't do my public image any good, but I know full well that at my first serious success all those who turned their backs on me will meet me full-face with obsequious smiles. So it's all the same to me if I see their backs or their fronts.[8]

Her sole regret seemed to be the distress that her decision might cause her brother and sister, who were then young adolescents:

> I didn't think, Volodya, that you would begin to involve the children in our relations and would deliberately upset them. You won't spoil my relationship with them, you'll just cause them completely unnecessary unpleasantness. This is your business, however; I am simply expressing my surprise. The children have done you no harm, why do you trouble them? For two weeks they have been suffering with the thought that I'm with Poliakova again, and they haven't dared to write to me about it.[9]

For the rest of her life, Parnok remained primarily dedicated to and sustained by relationships with women—lovers, friends, poets. She was not, and did not think of herself as, a separatist. Parnok associated with men at the literary circles she frequented, renewed a friendship with Volkenstein, and became close to the composer Mikhail Gnesin. But Parnok was unambiguous about her feelings. In the self-ironic tone that characterizes her letters, she wrote to Gnesin in 1910:

> You once told me that you thought I was in love with you, probably because my letters struck you as excessively expansive. For God's sake, don't think it now. Volodya [Volkenstein] managed to explain to me that when I think very highly of someone I speak in such a way that a man might take it to mean that I'm in love with him. I never, unfortunately, have been in love with a man.[10]

The next decade, and particularly the years surrounding the 1917 Revolution, was a lively, exciting period in Russian literary life, and in the life of Sophia Parnok. It was a time of ferment and variety, when new manifestos and journals appeared regularly, and the spoken word took on new importance. Poets took part in public debates, readings, salons. Literature was dramatically and passionately factional; some artists' alliances were formed and dissolved in a single day, others evolved into vital movements. When Parnok began publishing, the literary world was split between the Acmeists and the Symbolists.

Parnok became involved in various loosely formed groups, and published in several journals, but she remained outside the most prominent poetic *-isms* of her day. Poets not easily categorized are not long remembered; this may in part account for Parnok's later obscurity. But in her day, she was active and visible on the literary scene. Aside from publishing poetry, she reviewed new poetry and fiction in the journal *Northern Notes* and elsewhere.[11] Between 1913 and 1916 these often ascerbic reviews appeared under the male pseudonym Andrei Polyanin; later criticism was published under her own name.

In the midst of this rather frenetic literary activity, Parnok met the poet Marina Tsvetaeva at a salon presided over by a mutual acquaintance. The year was 1914: Parnok was 29; Tsvetaeva, 32, was newly a wife and mother. Little is known of their relationship; biographies of Tsvetaeva don't even mention Parnok.[12] But over the next two years the two women had an enormous impact on each other's lives. The poems they addressed to each other suggest a love which was sudden, intense, and almost certainly physical.

Poliakova's account of the relationship between Tsvetaeva and Parnok is one of the most fascinating aspects of her introductory essay. For Marina Tsvetaeva was a widely recognized poet, thought by many to be modern Russia's finest; among Slavists she has become something of a cult figure. And while there have long been rumors among the Soviet intelligentsia that Tsvetaeva had lesbian relationships, to mention that possibility in print has been considered heretical. Poliakova does not explicitly state that the two poets were lovers, but the conclusion is inescapable. More importantly, she appended to the Parnok volume the remarkable cycle of poems "Woman Friend" (1914-1916), which Tsvetaeva wrote about Parnok, and which remained unpublished in the Soviet Union or abroad for more than half a century.[13]

"Woman Friend" is a moving, amusing, episodic account of their relationship. Tsvetaeva places Parnok center stage from the outset, addressing her directly:

> All Shakespeare's tragic heroines
> I see in you.
> You, a young tragic lady
> Whom no one has saved!

"I love you!" she declares halfway through the first of seventeen poems, then enumerates some of the qualities inspiring that love:

> For this trembling, for. . . am I dreaming?
> Could it be?
> For this ironic marvel:
> That you are you, not he.

Tsvetaeva offers a vivid portrait of Parnok: her face, hands, voice, her stance, her manner. She recalls their first meeting:

> I remember how you entered,
> Your face without the least color,

How you stood biting your little finger,
Your head slightly bowed.

. . . . . .

In a motion without reason
I stood, we were surrounded,
And someone's jocular voice said,
"Get acquainted, ladies!"

Parnok and Tsvetaeva parted ways abruptly. There was evidently a serious misunderstanding; Poliakova published with "Woman Friend" a poem of 1916 which Tsvetaeva specifically dedicated to Parnok and which speaks of a time when they will again understand one another. More than a decade later, Parnok wrote a poem forgiving Tsvetaeva. Very little is clear about their estrangement: Poliakova mentions that a photograph of Tsvetaeva remained at Parnok's bedside, and that much later, several years after Parnok's death, a mutual acquaintance gave Tsvetaeva a copy of the poem in which she had been forgiven. Tsvetaeva's response was, "It was so long ago."

II

At the outbreak of the 1917 Revolution, Parnok was 32 years old. She had, the previous year, published her first collection, *Poems*. "Parnok met the Revolution unsympathetically," Poliakova notes. Cut off from her family, Parnok was by no means financially secure; it even "appeared that she might benefit from the changes that were taking place."[14] But Parnok was horrified by the brutality of the political process. "Everyone's mood is murderous," she wrote to her friend, the composer Julia Weissburg, in February 1917. "It's almost impossible to live."[15]

Parnok spent that summer outside of Moscow: "In the countryside it's quite dreadful," she wrote. ". . . And with every day, I better understand the saying, 'the more I see of people, the more I love dogs.' "[16] She was afraid of the peasants who were her neighbors, whose faces appeared "mystically clouded," whose passions were, Parnok believed, aroused and manipulated by political opportunists. In a letter of 1917 she wrote:

> God grant that this tale will come to a happy ending! In Moscow all of this is proceeding relatively smoothly, but Petersburg seems to be in the throes of passion. If it should

not prove possible to stop people with petty ambitions, then we can only hope that some true, consummate opportunist will appear and put an end to all this.[17]

In the Revolutionary era, writers and artists were obsessed with the question of continuity with the Russian past. Parnok was no exception. The war with Germany had aroused in her both pacifist and nationalist feelings. Her conversion to Russian Orthodoxy must be viewed in this context.[18] It was, I think, more a cultural than a religious statement, for Parnok was horrified by those who, in the name of "history," willingly swept aside the sustaining moral force of culture; culture, for many intellectuals of her day, was practically synonymous with Orthodoxy. Six years after the Revolution, in an article on the state of the arts, Parnok complained about the bankrupt cult of "today":

> The thesaurus is being enriched. Nowadays in literary circles instead of saying about a book, "It's good" or "It's bad," they say, "It's today" or "It's yesterday," and without further explanation they understand one another.
>
> But what does "today" signify in the language of people in the arts? Why is it so dear to them? And which today is this? Our revolutionary day? Or is every today to be valued by virtue of the fact that it has replaced yesterday, and that it is the eve of tomorrow? And tomorrow it will already become yesterday, and so on. . . . How can you measure by a standard which does not have a constant value?[19]

In the aftermath of the Revolution, Parnok made the important decision not to join those of her acquaintances who, like Tsvetaeva, were emigrating. She spent the difficult Civil War years in Sudak, in the more temperate Crimea, possibly because of the illness of the woman who was now her lover—the actress Ludmila Erarskaya, possibly because of her own poor health. Parnok had contracted tuberculosis.

There she did full-time clerical work to ensure her food ration and grew a garden to supplement it. The work was exhausting, but these years away from the literary scene were in many respects fulfilling and productive. In Sudak Parnok and Erarskaya developed a circle of acquaintances, including several women who remained close to them. And in Sudak, Parnok wrote much of her strongest poetry as well as the libretto for the opera *Almast.*

Parnok returned to Moscow in 1922, and over the next several years published four books of poetry in rapid succession: *Roses of Pieria* (1922), *The Vine* (1923), *Music* (1926), and *At Half Voice* (1928). In the early twenties, she frequented various literary gatherings (writing about them cynically in amusing letters), gave some readings, and published in several journals and anthologies. Her contacts were not limited to the literary world: in these years, Parnok's poems were set to music by Mikhail Gnesin, as well as by the women composers Julia Weissburg and Valentina Ramm.[20]

Money was a constant problem. What little she had, Parnok was apt to send to friends in need. At the same time she complained that her "damned job. . . takes up seven hours a day and brings on utter exhaustion."[21] When she could, she took on translating work, including a volume of Baudelaire.

In 1926 Parnok became involved in founding and operating a small press called *Uzel* (which means knot or bundle, but can also refer to a group of people). In the late twenties, the era of relative artistic freedom was coming to a close. This was a time when, as Parnok wrote, "a voice like mine is officially unlawful."[22] *Uzel* allowed those poets who were denied access to official publishing houses to publish their own works. *Glavlit,* the official censorship, tolerated *Uzel* because their press runs were so small (700 copies, of which little more than half circulated among the reading public), and because they knew that the demand for the poetry it published was so limited.

Parnok herself did not escape the censors' notice, however. Several poems in her last collection could appear only after changes were made. In one lyric poem, Parnok was required to change "October moon" to "December moon," lest the image be taken as a reference to the Bolsheviks' October Revolution. In the poem "We hid in an armchair at twilight. . .," she had to change the line "and there's no time—/ to fight" to read, "and there's no time—/to love"; the censors objected that the original verb could be thought to mean revolutionary struggle.

As the decade progressed, the situation deteriorated for Parnok, as for other writers. *Music* (1926) was nowhere reviewed or even mentioned; journals would no longer accept Parnok's submissions. *Glavlit* permitted *At Half Voice* (1928) to appear only under "manuscript rights," that is, in an edition of 200. In practical terms, it did not circulate at all. *Uzel* was closed in 1928, and like many others, Parnok ceased publishing altogether.

This was a devastating period: Parnok's health was deteriorating, she had not the strength to work, and depended for support on her close friend, the mathematician Olga Tsuberbiller: "I still *cannot* work for a living, cannot look for translations to do, can't finish the one I already took on. I'm living at the expense of [Olga], and that pains me. What lies ahead—I don't know, and I'm afraid to think of it. . . ."[23] Other letters show frustration and anxiety to the point of distraction: they are not always entirely coherent. The one professional satisfaction of this time was the production in 1930 of *Almast*, the historical opera set in Armenia which Parnok had written in Sudak. She wrote this ironic report of its success: "The performance on the 26th went off with great success. . . At the performance. . . were Enukidze, Kalinin, Molotov, and, they say, Stalin. Their enlightened opinion is not known to us."[24]

In late 1931 or early 1932, Parnok met the physicist Nina Vedeneeva. The bond between them was powerful and immediate; Parnok's illness, and the great difficulty of the times, gave them both a sense of urgency, intensity, and sadness. Parnok called Vedeneeva her "grey muse," dedicating to her many of her last poems, including "We'll be happy, you said. . . ." Vedeneeva was with her when Parnok died in 1933, at the age of 48.

News of Parnok's death was posted at the Moscow Writers' Club only the morning of the funeral; many mourners nevertheless appeared, including such prominent figures as Boris Pasternak. From Paris another leading poet, Vladislav Khodasevich, issued a statement praising Parnok's "distinctive voice." But she was soon forgotten by all but those closest to her. She was buried in Olga Tsuberbiller's family plot. After Parnok's death, the women who had shared her life—Erarskaya, Tsuberbiller, Vedeneeva—met often to remember her.

III

Parnok was an active poet, critic, translator, and editor. She kept the company of other poets; when she chose not to, friends and lovers provided a retreat. She was by no means entirely alone. And yet, many of Parnok's poems present a woman talking to herself. Most often, there is no real contact with anyone, only imagined conversations with people who cannot hear. Parnok's frequent rhetorical questions are not mere stylistic affectation, but an echo of her inner experience.

The appearance of another person in her poetry does not necessarily end solitude. An encounter, even in an intimate setting, more often marks separation. If a woman lies in the poet's arms, she is generally asleep, as in "When you murmur in your sleep. . . ." Often, as in that poem and in "It must be that my voice is cold. . .," solitude is associated with quiet and tenderness, the safety of illusion or fiction; contact brings on devastating truths.

Other poems give a sense of being left intolerably alone with oneself. Parnok's writing often suggests that, born somehow into the wrong era, she had become a captive in time, unable to connect either with her contemporaries or her predecessors. Her first collection contained a poem to her mother, who died when Parnok was a child ("You would have loved me," she says), and a poem to another woman who died soon before Parnok's birth, the poet Karolina Pavlova (1807-1893).[25] In her poetry and prose, which intensely affected Parnok, Pavlova had concerned herself with the quality of women's lives, expressing sympathy with all the "mute sisters of my soul."[26] Largely unappreciated in her lifetime, Pavlova was all but forgotten for two decades after her death until 1915, when her work was "discovered" and reissued. In "To Karolina Pavlova," the poet is bitter that Pavlova has forgotten her; the strange complaint–that her predecessor doesn't remember her–had for Parnok an emotional logic that informs much of her poetry. In a later poem, "Fragment," Parnok identifies with Pavlova: "But having lived in her own day misjudged,/Pavlova, like a great-grandma, has become beloved." Parnok has a kind of nostalgia for the future. There is, in much of her writing, the sense that she does not expect to be soon understood, that she is writing for readers of another time.

And in fact, Parnok was not understood in her day. The prominence of the names Anna Akhmatova and Marina Tsvetaeva may create the impression that "women's poetry" flourished in Russia in the teens and twenties. And in fact, a fair number of Russian women were publishing in those years.[27] There were even poetry readings devoted to works by women. But the poetry scene was in Parnok's time, as in our own, overwhelmingly dominated by men. The journals and presses that published women were largely male enterprises; the literary entrepreneurs who organized readings of women's poetry were men.[28] And for the most part, the women who proved most successful in the literary world were, like Akhmatova, allied with men through marriage or close literary association, or both. Among Parnok's contemporaries, the only woman

writing about lesbian relationships, to my knowledge, was Lydia Zinovieva-Annibal, who is most often identified as the wife of Symbolist poet and saloniere, Vyacheslav Ivanov.[29]

The lively critical press of the twenties demarcated women's poetry only to disparage it. In his 1922 article "Literary Moscow," the respected Acmeist poet Osip Mandelstam wrote:

> [Adelina] Adalis and Marina Tsvetaeva are prophets, as is Sophia Parnok. Their prophesy is a kind of domestic needlework. While the elevated tone and bombastic rhetoric of men's poetry has subsided, yielding to a more normal use of the vocal apparatus, feminine poetry continues to vibrate at the highest pitch, offending the ear, offending the historical, poetical sense.[30]

Mandelstam's dismissal of women's poetry in the same essay as "the worst aspect of literary Moscow" suggests the context in which Parnok lived and worked. In this setting, she attempted to discover or construe connections with women of the past, to reclaim their forms, to approach an aesthetic founded on their works. A poem called "Fortune Telling," for example, reclaims a Russian folklore genre associated with, and generally limited to, women—the bridal lament.

The fifteen poems in the collection *Roses of Pieria* repeatedly call out to Sappho and evoke her poetry. The title apparently derives from a poem by Sappho whose theme had unquestionable meaning for Parnok:

> When you have died, there will be nothing.
> No memory of you will remain,
> not a trace
> to linger after:
> you do not share
> the roses of Pieria with us,
> and will wander unseen
> in the hall of the dead,
> a fitful shade among the blinded ghosts.[31]

Parnok's poems reach out "through the centuries" to the ancient poet, idealizing the island that for Parnok meant community: "In that land I was not alone/Oh, my wonderful friend!" She envisions herself as keeper of the flame, singing on Sappho's unfinished songs; she sings of "Penthesilea," of strong, fearless Amazons entering battle.

These poems exploit archaic figures, stock classical images. At times they are embarrassing in their unabashed use of florid cliche. A hostile review in the journal *The Press and The Revolution* said: " 'I shall hear only the song of the Aeolean lyre,' the poetess avers, as 'music in the veins.' The reader does not feel this music in his veins."[32] Parnok herself later regretted publishing the poems, calling the effort "esthete." Poliakova seconds Parnok's opinion, acknowledging the poetry's "pale stylization."

These are reasonable evaluations of the collection, but there is more to be said. Nowhere does any of these critics acknowledge the meaning that Sappho and Lesbos must have had for Parnok. She had previously written love poems with explicitly feminine pronouns and verb forms; in this she was quite direct. But in her Sappho poems, Parnok took a further step. Working in an ideological vacuum, Parnok moved toward a literary aesthetic rooted in her experience as a woman and as a lesbian. And while the liberal intelligentsia might tolerate her lesbianism, it would be unlikely to acknowledge, no less approve, any suggestion of a lesbian literary culture.

In the best poem of the collection, Parnok does abandon stilted language and archaic imagery in favor of colloquial speech (effectively mixed with "poetic" word order) and concrete situation. The second poem in the cycle *Dreams of Sappho* begins in a tone similar to other poems in the volume. Then suddenly, mid-line, a change occurs: "But here all around/Everything has come to life. . . ." The poem comes to life with the setting. What follows is a simple "I see": She sees mice scurrying about, making noise—an image, it is tempting to think, of the ambitious literati of Parnok's day. "What's Sappho to them?" This is a rare moment in Parnok's poetry, for the issue of sexual orientation arises as a political matter, as a subject of public debate. This is not the corrosive self-irony that marks some of her poems, but the sharp critical irony which she generated often as Andrei Polyanin, less often as Sophia Parnok. Parnok was at her best when she was angry. She was not angry often enough.

IV

While there is, I think, a strong homophobic strain in Russian culture, the intelligentsia also pride themselves in a liberal matter-of-factness about private lives.[33] In this sense, homosexuality, and particularly lesbianism, may be acknowledged, but it is almost always dismissed

as immaterial to literary concerns, if not for the writer, then certainly for the reader. Neither Parnok's emotional commitment to women, nor the resistance it met (the distress of family, the patronizing attitude of critics who misjudged or trivialized her basic commitments) has been discussed as an influence on or concern of her poetry.

Poliakova's account of Parnok's life and work does explicitly refer to Parnok's love relationships with women, offering some sense of who they were and of their significance in the poet's life. Early in her account, Poliakova provides readers with this footnote: "Since Parnok made no secret of this side of her life, and since without knowledge of it many of her poems will be incomprehensible, the directness with which this is treated here should not be construed as a tactless and idle invasion into a very private sphere."[34] This is her most direct reference to Parnok's lesbianism; the word *lesbian* does not appear anywhere in the Ardis volume (lavender cover notwithstanding).

I mention this circumlocution not to chide Poliakova, whose work on the Parnok volume was assiduous and courageous, but rather to underscore the attitude toward homosexuality characteristic of the Russian intelligentsia. The important point is that Parnok herself did not escape that attitude. The self-irony expressed in poems and letters is sometimes lighthearted and amusing; at other times it is corrosive and painful. Parnok's own homophobia surfaces in a letter of 1911:

> When I look over my life I feel discomfort, as if I were reading some cheap novel. . . . Everything that is infinitely repulsive in a literary work, that could never be in my poetry, is evidently in me somewhere and seeks fruition. Here I look at my life with a disgusted grimace, as a person with good taste looks at someone else's tastelessness.[35]

My intent is not to analyze Parnok's emotional condition, not to draw firm conclusions about her inner life. I am trying, rather, to make sense of my own experience as a reader of Sophia Parnok. While I was engaged and moved by many of her poems, those in which she spoke most directly, I found others to be stylized, inaccessible. In those poems, I sensed that Parnok's own homophobia, intensified by isolation as well as by political constraint, had limited her efforts to conventional forms; it is probably no coincidence, for example, that Parnok was most artificial, most distanced from her subject matter, in *Roses of Pieria,* the collection in which she dealt most extensively with specifically

lesbian themes. I found myself wondering whether, had she lived in another era, Parnok would have used her voice in other ways. But that kind of speculation is necessarily academic, and does not do justice to Parnok's own experience, to her life as she lived it, to her work as she created it. For Parnok's contribution is best judged as she herself judged it in a poem of 1925: "What have I given to our times? Simply/ I gave what I could give."

NOTES

[1] The 1979 Russian-language edition of Parnok's collected poetry *(Sobranie stixotvorenij),* edited and with a critical introduction by Sophia Poliakova, is available from Ardis Publishers, 2901 Heatherway, Ann Arbor, MI 48104 (380 pp. $14.95 cloth, $5.00 paper, add $2.00 handling). Page numbers in subsequent notes refer to this volume. Ardis provided the photograph of Parnok.

[2] English translations of two other poems by Parnok, "No grain will sprout within a barren land" (1916) and "Cobwebs on my dark folding icon. . ." (1923), appear in V. Markov and M. Sparks, eds., *Modern Russian Poetry* (1967).

[3] Published praise for Parnok's work has been tucked away in footnotes which record scholarly hearsay. In a note to *Osip Mandelstam, Selected Essays* (Austin: U. of Texas Press, 1977, p. 230), editor Sidney Monas wrote: "I have been told by scholars who are familiar with her *Nachlass* and whose judgment I trust that [Parnok] is an unrecognized poet of the magnitude of Tsvetaeva or Akhmatova." Monas adds that Parnok's brother was "known" as a poet and dance critic.

[4] The family name was originally Parnakh; Parnok changed it by age 20, apparently because she disliked the gutteral sound *kh.* Poliakova disputes the assertion of Clarence Brown, in *The Prose of Osip Mandelstam,* that Parnok changed her name to obscure her Jewish origins. My impression is that the name Parnok sounds no more Russian than Parnakh.

[5] Letter to Vladimir Volkenstein, June 23, 1906, cited by Poliakova, p. 8.

[6] Poliakova, p. 10.

[7] Letter to Volkenstein, mid-1907, cited p. 9.

[8] Letter to Volkenstein, January 25, 1909, cited pp. 11-12.

[9] Letter to Volkenstein, March 25, 1909, cited p. 15.

[10] Letter to Mikhail Gnesin, February 6, 1910, cited p. 15.

[11] Parnok's reviews appeared regularly in *Northern Notes*, where she reviewed poetry and prose by leading writers of the day, provided overviews of literary movements, and wrote on works by women including Anna Akhmatova and Natalia Krandevskaya.

[12] Parnok is nowhere mentioned, for example, in Simon Karlinsky's *Marina Cvetaeva* (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1966; the title uses an alternative transliteration of the name Tsvetaeva). The omission apparently reflects the degree to which Parnok was forgotten before the late seventies, rather than the biographer's personal bias; Karlinsky has frequently written on gay (male) writers and themes in Russian literature. (See note 33.)

[13] "Woman Friend" (*Podruga*) was first published 35 years after Tsvetaeva's death, in an edition of her unpublished poetry, drama, and prose (Paris: YMCA Press, 1976). Notes to that edition do not associate Parnok with the cycle. Poliakova appended "Woman Friend" to her edition of Parnok's poetry, adding a final poem dedicated to Parnok which did not appear in the Tsvetaeva volume. (I have been told that a selection of Tsvetaeva's poetry with explicitly lesbian themes has appeared recently in Paris, but I have not seen that collection.)

[14] Poliakova, pp. 19-20.

[15] Letter to Julia Weissburg, February 8, 1917, cited p. 20.

[16] Letter to Mikhail Voloshin, June 20, 1917, cited p. 20.

[17] Letter to Julia Weissburg, March 29, 1917, cited p. 20.

[18] Poliakova devotes only a paragraph to Parnok's conversion: she cites the 1903 poem "To Jews," which expresses a clear commitment to Jewish values and traditions. It remains unclear when Parnok converted, but judging by the fact that her wedding was a Jewish ceremony, it was probably after September 1907.

[19] Parnok, "B. Pasternak and Others," in the journal *Russian Contemporaries* (No. 1, 1924), p. 307.

[20] The Lincoln Center branch of the New York Public Library owns scores of music composed for Parnok's poetry by Ramm, Weissburg, and Gnesin. Julia Weissburg (1879-1942), whose married name was Rimsky-Korsakov, was a close friend of Parnok; Parnok wrote two operatic librettos for her,

[21] Letter to M. Voloshin, August 3, 1922, cited p. 26.

[22] Letter to E.K. Gertsyk, January 11, 1926, cited p. 27.

[23] Letter to E.K. Gertsyk, January 11, 1926, cited p. 32.

[24] Letter to M. Steinberg, June 29, 1930, cited p. 31.

[25] For an excellent account of Pavlova's life and work, see Barbara Monter's introduction to her translation of Pavlova's novel *A Double Life* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1978; 148 pp. $3.65).

[26] The phrase "mute sisters of my soul" comes from Pavlova's epigraph to the novel *A Double Life.*

[27] Among the women publishing in the years after the 1917 Revolution were Anna Radlova, Vera Ilina, Nadezhda Pavlovich, Nina Serpinskaya, Adelaida Gertsyk, Natalia Benar, Elizaveta Stirskaya, and Malvina Maryanova.

[28] The male poet Valery Bryusov, for example, arranged an Evening of Women Poets in 1921; other such evenings were arranged by Fyodor Dolidze.

[29] A translation of Lydia Zinovieva-Annibal's "Thirty-Three Abominations" appeared in *Russian Literature Triquarterly* (No. 9, Spring 1974), pp. 94-116. That issue of *RLT* was devoted to women in Russian literature.

[30] Osip Mandelstam, "Literary Moscow," in Jane Gray Harris, ed., *Mandelstam, The Complete Critical Prose and Letters* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1979), p. 146. Mandelstam did not adhere to this outrageous view of Tsvetaeva, which may well have been related to his earlier infatuation with her. As for the poet and translator Adelina Adalis [Efron] (1900-1969), he wrote later in the same passage that she "at times achieves masculine force and truth." Mandelstam let stand his judgment of Parnok.

[31] *The Poems of Sappho,* translated by Suzy Z. Groden (Bobbs-Merrill: 1964). Groden changed the text to read "rose of the Muses, presumably to make it less archaic, but explained in a note that "the text actually reads "of Pieria." Pieria is a district in Thessaly, with a mountain that was sacred to the Muses.

[32] This review by Valery Bryusov appeared in *The Press and the Revolution* (No. 4, 1923), which often published slick reviews trashing writers of considerable talent. The previous issue had run a review of *Roses of Pieria* by a woman identified as D. Barkova, who praised the "beautiful, rather cold" poetry, then dismissed it as "sweet nothings" which have little significance for the emerging intelligentsia of workers.

[33] In the decade before the Revolution, male poets who treated gay themes—Mikhail Kuzmin, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Nikolai Kluyev—were in

general well received. There was, apparently, a backlash in later decades. Simon Karlinsky's review "Death and Resurrection of Mikhail Kuzmin" in *Slavic Review* (Vol. 38, No. 1, March 1979, pp. 92-96), discusses the homophobia of Anna Akhmatova and others. While Akhmatova's early verse was strongly influenced by Kuzmin (she asked him to write a foreword to her first collection), she later said that she was "depressed" by his 1929 collection *The Trout Breaks Through the Ice*. "Kuzmin has always been homosexual in his poetry," she told her friend Lydia Chukovsky in 1940, "but here he exceeds all boundaries. . . . Perhaps [Verlaine] was able to manage this sort of thing, but as for [Kuzmin]—no. It is utterly disgusting." Karlinsky comments: "Could Akhmatova have really forgotten the liberalized air of that last pre-revolutionary decade, when all sorts of previously unmentionable themes—social, religious, political, and sexual—had become acceptable for literary treatment?" (93).

[34] Poliakova, p. 310.

[35] Letter to L. Gurevich, March 10, 1911, cited p. 13.

reviews

FRANCINE KRASNO

TRUE TO LIFE ADVENTURE STORIES (Volume One) edited by Judy Grahn. Diana Press, Inc., 4400 Market St., Oakland, California 94608. 224 pp. $5.00.

The twenty stories in this first volume of a projected three-volume series give a new, female interpretation to the word "adventure." They are stories about imaginable, fully human women. There are no masculine heroics here, no conquests of nature, military battles, or voyages to exotic countries. The conquests are over conflicting ideas of self (self-love and self-hate), and the adventures are where women live and work—in offices, in prisons, on the streets. The editor, Judy Grahn, intends the collection to explore "real-life situations," to undermine the class bias of standard English, and to synthesize content and form. The collection as a whole does successfully present a new concept of the adventure story genre, but the individual stories reflect varying degrees of mastery over the actual craft of writing fiction and autobiography. The stories are "true to life," but they do not always transcend the confusion of life in their attempts to elucidate or interpret human experience.

Grahn's primary concern in this first volume has been the use of language to challenge traditional relationships between author and characters, artist and audience. She has looked for stories with language that is as "intimate and dramatic as outbursts at the kitchen table" ("Murdering the King's English," p. 14). There are no omniscient narrators speaking "correct" English writing about people who speak dialect or slang.[1] Using upper-class standards to edit working-class English condescends to the author, Grahn says in her introductory essay. This decision not to standardize the language of the stories makes the anthology controversial within the canon of contemporary feminist literature. Some would argue that grammatical and spelling errors are evidence of illiteracy, rather than of a specific cultural art form.[2]

"A 'workingclass' story which is not told in a workingclass manner is only half a story," Grahn says. This is an interesting idea which

she does not develop beyond this dogmatic assertion. *Is* there a distinct working-class way of telling a story? The narrator in "Twenty Days" by Sharon Isabell speaks directly to the reader with nonstandard spelling and grammar intact. "Charm School" by Sandy Boucher uses a third-person, omniscient narrator and standard English. Each story has a working-class woman as the heroine and working-class experience as part of its thematic structure. Each story is powerful in its effect. Is "Charm School" only half a story because it uses standard English? Perhaps what is more important in considering the authenticity of a story is the coherence of style, characterization, and theme.

"Twenty Days" and "Charm School" do successfully integrate their distinct styles with the theme of women trying to maintain their integrity in humiliating circumstances. Sharon Isabell, a prisoner, uses language very close to the spoken word, one of the few enspiriting forces left to her in prison.

> The people vs Sharon Isabell. I wanted to call out to the people, I didn't hurt no poor people. I only wrote bad checks to the rich stores that use to make fun of my mother when she went in them to buy my school close.
>
> ("Twenty Days," pp. 16-17)

Watching the relatives of other prisoners during visiting hours she says:

> Of course it was a mistake that their kids were in jail or a slip but those others, what did they do? I sat and watched the relatives stare and I wanted to laugh. I wanted to stand and laugh until I fell down. Understanding was easy when it was your own. But those others!
>
> ("Twenty Days," p. 21)

Throughout the story, Isabell reveals herself to the reader as a complex, feeling human being and then, in this ironic end, challenges the reader's impulse to dehumanize her.

In "Charm School," Boucher explores the disillusion with romantic love, and the power of men to set standards of beauty, command sexual gratification, and obscure female perceptions of reality. When the heroine, Ellen, brandishes a stick at a man who exposes himself to her, the reader expects a fight. But Boucher undercuts this movement toward a traditional "heroic" climax by deflecting the struggle to an emotional conflict within the heroine. The use of the third-person

narrator gives Boucher the freedom to make necessary psychological observations about her character. Ellen looks into the eyes of the man and sees humiliation and self-loathing, a reminder of her own humiliation when she was sexually abused as an adolescent. "He makes her experience some sort of herself which she does not want to own, and she is held there, bound to him in weakness, disgust" ("Charm School," p. 76). Ellen breaks the bond with him—and with the part of her personality that is self-despising—by dropping the stick and walking away. He is left on the beach, his exposed genitals "a doughy bouquet," his face "obscenely beseeching" ("Charm School," p. 76).

Another example of the successful integration of form and content is "It's Hard to Stay Dry in the Ocean," by Helle. The language and rhythm of this piece, more like a prose poem than a traditional narrative story, collar the reader as one would grab a stranger on the street. The sense of what is permissible in the form of short fiction is expanded by this story's actual physical appearance on the page. A small chunk is missing from one paragraph because that is the way it was found stashed in a box in the author's apartment. The mutilated paragraph is a powerful reminder—concrete, visible, startling—of the mutilation of the narrator's life as a prostitute in New York.

Judy Grahn says of this collection that "the voices of these many writers speak from where they are standing, without tricks or larger than life amplifiers" ("Murdering the King's English," p. 14). When an author is "close" to her material, she has the advantage of more immediately implicating the readers' sympathies. But little or no distance between an author and her material can be a pitfall. An author can be "close" to her characters and still place them within a context that is larger than the characters' limited point of view. Some of these stories simply fail to provide this larger context.

"Shoes" by Pat Parker raises questions about the nature of survival that are not adequately resolved because her attitudes and feelings are too closely allied with those of the heroine. Frances, a Black child, is whipped by her father for refusing to say "yessir" to his white employer; she will not say this to someone she does not respect. The father is alternately violent and loving. In a scene at the beginning of the story, he beats his daughter; his wife then takes him away to the bedroom "to find the man again." The story abruptly changes to a scene in front of a shoe store where Frances and her friends wait for a bus to take them to school. She is in love with the variety of shoes

in the window display (all too expensive for her) and lingers in front of the store until the time when the white, male owner asks her inside. At first she is afraid of him but when he tells her to look around at the shoes she thinks he is "the nicest man in the world." Remembering her father's beating, she calls him "sir," but this polite language betrays her. The owner of the store forces her to perform fellatio. The respectful language of her father cannot protect her. Did she like it? the owner asks when he is done with her. Ironically, in her fear and disgust, she can only respond, "yessir."

The story's ending gratifies the reader's wish for the child to escape the continuance of this sexual humiliation which has larger implications for the survival of Black women. But the ending does not resolve the theme of the relationship between the father and the daughter. He is simply dropped after about one-third of the narration. What of his humiliation as a Black man who is often unemployed, reduced to feigning respect for white men, dehumanized by his acts of violence? If the father sometimes loves his daughter, could not his violence toward her be seen as tragic? His erratic behavior is incomprehensible to the heroine, who is a child. But the adult writing the story should be able to place his behavior within a larger context. The white man and the Black man are equally reprehensible, and the story suffers because of this simplification. Perhaps Parker feared that the point of view of this young Black woman would be lost if this fictional world were not presented exclusively in the heroine's terms.

"THAT MESERABLE SCAR" by Linda Marie is a story in which the author's attitude toward her material is completely ambiguous. The narrator, who lives in some arctic wilderness, speaks directly to the reader (all words are capitalized which gives the impression that she is screaming at the top of her lungs). The first thing she does is to dismember a male animal in a kind of ritual slaughter. We don't know what he has done to her. She throws the pieces of his body to her sled dogs. She is not finicky about her victims: "RAN MY THUMB UP AND DOWN THAT MESERABLE SCAR LEFT BY A FEMALE****MAYBE THIS ONES SISTER??? I HOPED TO GET HER TOO ONE DAY" ("THAT MESERABLE SCAR," p. 195). There is an ironic ending but no real ironic distance which views this violence as dehumanizing. The story is meaningless and peculiarly out of place in an anthology in which accountability to others and endurance are the prevailing images of female strength.

What does emerge from this collection is a new way of thinking about "adventure." The women in these stories are strong but their strength is not obdurate. They are fully human: self-reliant and self-doubting, vulnerable and self-possessed. When their lovers fail them they do not go crazy or commit suicide. Most importantly, they survive hazardous experiences with their sense of self intact. Their bodies are violated in rapes, botched abortions, beatings, but paradoxically they remain, in a larger sense, indomitable.

The heroine of "Turtle Voices" by Mary Jo McConahay is pregnant, an image which captures her capacity for creation and protectiveness. She remembers voices of other women whose bodies have been both a source of pleasure to them and a battleground: a younger sister, awed and delighted by the stages of her pregnancy, who gives birth alone, unaided, in a hotel room; a friend who satisfies her sexual needs without guilt or shame and who has her insides "scoured dry" in a nightmare abortion. Then there is a turtle who migrates thousands of miles to lay ninety-eight eggs that are promptly devoured by a fisherman's family. "They know the fruit of her womb is theirs, that in the end she has no control" ("Turtle Voices," p. 205). The narrator says to the fetus inside her, "Hang on, little egg, I've got you covered. *Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away"* ("Turtle Voices," p. 206). She is not a self-conscious heroine. She has never been "brave," she is "afraid of pain, of accountability." She slips away from the people devouring the eggs, unnoticed, just as the turtle "rides a wave out to sea." Like the best of these stories, "Turtle Voices" typifies much of what is new and valuable in feminist fiction: an unsentimental apprehension of reality, the emotional primacy of women to other women, accountability to others, and the paradoxical female heroism that transmutes vulnerability into strength.

One last note about the collection: there is no biographical information about the contributors, a deviation from the usual format. An author can use the contributors' notes to drop her fictional persona and speak more directly to the reader. In an anthology that focuses on actual life experience, the absence of biographical notes is an especially peculiar omission.

NOTES

[1] The short stories of Toni Cade Bambara are another example of the closeness between author, narrator, and characters. Speaking of her

voice as an author, she says, "You see, one of the reasons that it seems that the author is not there has to do with language. It has to do with the whole tradition of dialect. In the old days, writers might have their characters talking dialect or slang but the narrator, that is to say, the author, maintained a distance and a 'superiority' by speaking a more premiumed language. I tend to speak on the same level as my characters, so it seems as though I am not there, because, possibly, you're looking for another voice." "Commitment: Toni Cade Bambara Speaks," Beverly Guy-Sheftall in *Sturdy Black Bridges* edited by Roseann P. Bell, et al. (New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1979), p. 248.

[2] Hope Landrine, a Black radical feminist, expresses a point of view opposing Judy Grahn's in the article "Culture, Feminist Racism & Feminist Classism: Blaming the Victim." Landrine explains that in anthropological terms, "culture" is made up of many components that are passed down from one generation to the next, and that are considered "good and true" by the individuals in that culture. Characteristics of ethnic and racial minorities such as poverty and illiteracy are *not* authentic components of their cultures because they are not considered "true and good" by those minorities and they are not purposefully passed down to future generations. Landrine says, "I know of no ethnic culture existing in the United States for whom. . . signs of illiteracy, like those of poverty, are cultural forms." *off our backs* (November, 1979), p. 2.

BARBARA NODA

ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN, two special issues of Bridge: An Asian American Perspective (Vol. 6 No. 4, Winter 1978-9; Vol. 7 No. 1, Spring 1979). P.O. Box 477, Canal Street Station, New York, N.Y. 10013. $1.50/issue; $5.00/year subscription; $4.00 student subscription.

This review is primarily aimed at other Asian women. I view it as a discussion among ourselves that we are allowing others to listen to. In being critical, I know I run the risk of making a mistake, of alienating my own peer group. But it is a risk I am willing to take.

At the same time, I must admit I am not a completely detached or "objective" reviewer. I feel very much involved in the material I discuss, not only because I contributed to it, but also because it is the result of work done by women like myself. I am an Asian woman. I was brought up by an Asian woman and have had Asian women for aunts and grandmothers and cousins and friends and lovers. I have been politically involved with Asian women for several years. Asian women are my colleagues in the arts and Asian women are my neighbors in Japantown, San Francisco. They are people I care about. They are people I respect. They are part of my inspiration.

Bridge: An Asian American Perspective is a magazine written by, for, and about Asian Americans. It promotes our unique history and culture and cultivates a growing awareness of our experience. Inherent in that process is the examination and documentation of racism and its effect on Asian and Asian American people. Two special issues on Asian American Women (Winter, 1978-9; Spring, 1979) were compiled by Genny Lim and Judy Yung, who had approached *Bridge* about the necessity of publishing more writings by Asian women. This compilation of writings, one of the most extensive anywhere on Asian women, strengthens the overall picture of the Asian American community. These publications are necessary for Asian women, providing us with a meeting ground to share experiences as women in an environment that does not challenge our identity as Asians. They illuminate the symbiotic relationship between racism and sexism and make evident

the critical need for a political understanding that does not isolate the issues of race from issues of sex and sex-role stereotyping.

Asians and Asian Americans—it all depends on where you're coming from. As these two issues show, Asian women are by no means one culture. Despite the common socio-economic position we have traditionally occupied in the United States, we are composed of distinctly unique cultures and backgrounds.

Who are Asian Americans? We are American- or foreign-born of Asian ancestry and we live in the U.S. A more provocative question is, how has our ethnicity affected us and how have we been affected because of our ethnicity?

On the one hand, many Asian Americans react almost schizophrenically to their label and undergo a series of identity crises; this is understandable, because Asian American is a bi-cultural term that joins sometimes incompatible and contradictory values. Am I Asian or am I American? Who is the Asian in me and who is the American? This rigid line of questioning has left not a few of us searching for a loophole in our reasoning. It is insidious to be trapped by a lack of authenticity. Certainly, this loss of identity is exacerbated by being a woman in a male-dominated society.

On the other hand, to be Asian American can result in the fusion of dynamic elements of old and new, Oriental and Occidental, traditional and revolutionary—a synthesis that reflects sophistication and integration, the latter a quality the West has been sorely lacking.

Whatever hand one chooses to write from, the writings of Asian women are as varied as the writers themselves. The two issues of *Bridge* contain a wide range of fiction, non-fiction, visual arts, and poetry as well as a book review and a thorough bibliography which lists periodicals, books, anthologies and articles by, about, or for Asian women. The non-fictional and documentary offerings of the two issues include:

1) *Historical, Factual, and Statistical Information:* This information is important for defining the terms and scope of our experiences and for providing a context to understand those experiences. The focus of many of the articles is of particular relevance to women, for example: "Prostitution: San Francisco Chinatown, Mid- and Late-Nineteenth Century" (Winter) by Joyce Mende Wong and "Rape: It Can't Happen to Me!" (Spring) by W. Chu and S. Fong Torres.

2) *Activities and Involvements of Asian Americans in Their Community:* "Taiko!" (Spring) by Cindy Tong introduces the Japanese art of drumming called taiko and the Asian American expression of this artform. Another example from this grouping is "Asian American Dance Collective" (Spring) by Judy Yung, which explains the need and basis for an Asian American dance company.

3) *Analysis of Our Role as Asian American Women:* Several of these articles discuss our role as women in the Asian American community and the relationship between feminism and the struggle of Asian Americans. One article, "We Are Here In The Asian American Community: A Dialogue With Three Asian Women" (Spring) by Barbara Noda, Kitty Tsui and Zee Wong, openly confronts the Asian community with the issues of lesbianism and homosexuality.

4) *Hidden Voices:* This sub-grouping includes the more isolated segments of the Asian American community and Asians who are not fully represented in these issues, for example, the part or mixed Asian. ". . . And Becoming More of Myself" (Spring) by F. Mui-Cheung is an intimate portrait of an Asian woman who is a foreign student. This article is unusual in that it expresses the dilemma of a still largely invisible minority within a minority. Asians from Asia, especially those whose predominant sense of family and culture is rooted in Asia, are a dispossessed group. Even among Asian Americans their identities often become fractured and misaligned. *Who comprises the community that these issues and* Bridge *are directed at and for?* Again, it all depends on where you're coming from. (In Hawaii, many "Orientals" proudly refer to themselves as "Orientals." The minority problem there is quite different, though still a problem, with the Asian population in the majority and the racial distinctions among Asians very apparent.)

The poetry and fiction are equally diversified. In general, the writings reveal the extensive process of self-questioning that Asian women are undertaking as they establish themselves in a world of conflicting values. This questioning is portrayed in a family-oriented setting and the family is more than a backdrop for Asian Americans. In the U.S. the bombardment of negative stereotypes, like psychic bombs of Hiroshima implanted in our minds, has fragmented our values and culture. The strength of the family (and here I use the term loosely to include non-traditional family structures) has held us together and reconnected us with our beginnings and past. As carrier of tradition,

the family has preserved our emotional and spiritual lives from the alienation and uprooting of society.

Merle Woo's story "Recovering" reveals the life of Helen Chong, an alcoholic Chinese American woman. We watch Helen swim in dark waters, nearly drown, and take a few breaths of air on land. Despite the limitations of form and language, the content and aspirations of the story are like a shot of vodka—potent, strong and straight to the gut. The piece is significant for its revelations of a disease that is widespread and painfully hidden among many women and for its courageous openness about a subject that is non-spoken and taboo in most Asian families. Yet, the reasons for alcoholism are intricately embedded in our Asian American identity and the reaction of our families to such deviations illustrates the double-bind Asian Americans find themselves in. While the family unit has protected us from racial and cultural disintegration, this protection has sometimes been at the expense of the individual who does not conform.

Helen finds a profound emptiness in herself that the institutions of marriage, family, or religion cannot fill. Into this emptiness, this loss of identity, she pours alcohol. She says to her daughter Jennie: "See this, Jennie? It has to stay in this pickled liquid; otherwise it will surely die." What does it mean to Helen to "straighten up and fly right"? Isn't she again accepting the values of others and won't this ultimately lead to another crushing disappointment? It is obvious to Helen that she needs to make radical changes in her life. She views these changes as "recovering," precisely the phase an alcoholic or addict must encounter to become healthy, but she avoids the real issue of *uncovering* who Helen Chong dares and dreams to be and who Helen Chong will in fact become.

Woo's portrayal of the situation and problems of a Chinese American woman makes a strong statement about our lives without relying on the forced Asian-ness seen in some Asian American writing. If "Chink" or "chow mein" is not all there is to our lives, then what is? In her review of Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior,* Nellie Wong touches on this point. She questions those who have denounced Hong Kingston's lack of Chinese American sensibility of language and culture. As Asian women our goal is to write from the voice that is ours, and we cannot if we are caught in the vicious circle of throwing back a "chopstick" for every "Chinaman" that is thrown at us.

Another woman searching for independence and freedom is Mrs. Kim. The article entitled "A Picture Bride from Korea: The Life History of a Korean American Woman in Hawaii" by Alice Chai is based on an interview conducted by Chai in preparation for an ethnic history of women in Hawaii. Mrs. Kim recounts the passage of her life from her birth in 1904 to her present age of 75 and articulates the hardships faced by many Asian immigrants who, settling in Hawaii and the mainland U.S., established if not for themselves then for their children the birthplace and birthright of Asian Americans. As one of those children's children, I found Mrs. Kim's story just one piece of the past which is now being *uncovered* in the form of oral history.

Mrs. Kim describes her initial shock and disappointment upon meeting her future husband, who had sent a photograph of himself as a young man. He was 45 years old, she 20. For three months, she lived with him in painful silence: "Well, God give me life, I can't help him being too old. Cooled down, make everything nicely, make each other talk. So, 34 years we lived together before he died." The narrative reflects her refusal to accept defeat, to give up too many days to injustice or loss.

> Then one year a heavy rain flood came, the farm and my house and everything I had, all washed down. No more—nothing left. Even nothing for cooking meals. So neighbors brought some rice and shoyu. But my garden place was no more, every drop of dirt all washed down. That time, all my neighbors were Portuguese or Hawaiian. They all come look. Everybody was crying out to me, "Oh, Mrs. Kim, you worked so hard all these years, and everything washed down. Now you have nothing!" I said, "No, it can't happen. All I can make up again."

For her, defeat means an inability to survive and identity is a matter of birth, which, like a passport, is carried through life. What Helen Chong seeks to "recover" Mrs. Kim has never discarded; what Helen may hope to *uncover* was for Mrs. Kim not a possibility. But Mrs. Kim does not feel powerless. However limited her identity, she seeks to utilize its full potential, and in so doing she transcends her condition:

> I helped my family all the way. . . I give them education. Now, they married and all in Hawaii and in Los Angeles, living well. Girls, I sent to sewing school. Now they are all in sewing business. My eldest niece is rich already, about thirty people work for her. I went to see, I was very happy

> because they are all living well. I give them dinner in Chinese chop suey house. Twenty families there. I was very happy. So, happy time. Then, we went to one of the Korean night clubs. We all sit down, drinking, young people dancing, I sit down, look, very happy because I brought them all and I raised them. Now, I live only by myself, alone. But I'm never lonesome, too busy for lonely feeling.

Mrs. Kim's monologue, spoken in the direct, simple language of "broken" English, should not be read as a work of art, because that is not what it was intended to be. Nevertheless, Mrs. Kim is one of those people, as common as flowers and as full of mystery, who perceive their lives with startling clarity. She returns us to our beginnings as Asian Women.

Works by lesbians in *Bridge* bring us to the present. They examine the changing identities and newly-created images of Asian women. Kitty Tsui's poem "A Chinese Banquet" describes the arrival of "the one who was not invited." This poem examines the lack of communication among family members and the glaring exclusion of the viability of a lesbian or homosexual lifestyle. Tsui conveys a strong sense of identity; her work fills a vacuum which is felt by many Asian women, and which in these issues of *Bridge* is reflected in several works, including Nancy Hom's untitled poem:

> Sometimes
> I want to forget it all
> this curse called identity
> I want to be far out
> paint dreams in strange colors
> write crazy poetry
> only the chosen can understand
>
> but it's not so simple
> I still drink tea
> with both hands

and Takako Endo's poem "I'm Asking":

> Neither black nor white
> Minority or majority
> Suspended in between
> To balance out power?

How are we to deal with our oppression? Tsui concludes her poem with words of re-affirmation and expansiveness:

i want to tell them: my back is healing,
i dream of dragons n water,
my home is in her arms,
our bedroom ceiling the wide open sky.

I do not detect an openness on Tsui's part to include the experiences of her "aunts n uncles n cousins" who inquired "sold that old cars of urs yet?" in her vision of the "wide open sky." She seems defensive at her family's lack of understanding and approval while her mother, with "emotions invading her face," also feels despair and frustration at being trapped because she is unable to share in her daughter's happiness.

Our creativity has been severely limited by the natural and man/woman-made disasters discussed by Mitsuye Yamada in "Invisibility Is an Unnatural Disaster: Reflections of an Asian American Woman." If we are committed to changing society and society's image of Asian women, then boldness is required. To deny ourselves the "crazy poetry," the "strange dreams," is to deny ourselves the beauty, not the curse of our identity. Yamada passionately calls for a more visible Asian person who will repudiate the stereotype of passivity which has crippled many Asian women (and men). She says that Japanese Americans went to American concentration camps with a shrug of the shoulders and the resigned acceptance that the Japanese call *shikatagani.*

But despite the compromises that have been made by Japanese Americans, Yamada must surely recognize the sacrifices which benefit us today and which were made with greater courage than a "shrug of the shoulders" implies. The bitterness, anger, and regret is justifiably there, but if we are to condemn ourselves and our own people, perhaps her generation of Niseis will be fated to a lifetime of outrage. In her article "Socio-Psychological Effects of the Concentration Camp Experience on Japanese Americans," Amy Iwasaki Mass wrote:

> We still fool ourselves trying to believe we gain true acceptance by accommodation. The evacuation was such a devastating experience, Japanese who were interned will spend all of their lives trying to get over the experience. It will never be okay. It has left a permanent scar. It could still happen again.

But if Asian Americans have a confused identity and a scarred past, so also do we have a singular strength and determination to reshape the present and give to the future. In the long and illuminating

poem "On Weaning in America," Genny Lim expresses the unnatural denial of our mother's milk as symbolic of the seizure and loss of freedom. The poem was profound in its uniquely feminine metaphors for the course of history and skillfully blended the past with the present. A communion was reached when she wrote of her mother "You are the ritual that/ I must complete." But the trail of suffering has been long and some of us feel implicated in the inequities of our parents because as Americans we drink from the "milk" of America. We feel guilty at the natural impulse to nurture the "silent gulping tapering/ melting off the edge/into a river of sighs" and thus respond to our own innocence.

In conclusion, a vast amount of information varied and strong is presented in these special issues. However, I am disappointed by 1) the limited degree to which our his/herstory is presented as an influence in our lives, 2) the lack of support for a feminist perspective and, 3) the attitude shown by many of the writers. For these reasons, the issues present an imbalanced and narrow picture of who we are.

The last eight years have had a tremendous impact on our his/herstory, but we represent ancient cultures and much of our identity today reaches far back in time. As Asian Americans, it is our responsibility to *uncover* (especially at a time of changing roles for women and families) those roots that have been so blatantly torn from our lives. (I strongly disagree with P.J. Harabayashi's statement in the article "Taiko!" that "We are developing a culture without having to go back to our roots." The blends of cultures emerging from Asian Americans are innovative and exciting, but how can a Japanese American taiko player not acknowledge the origin of taiko? This is very curious to me.) It is not enough that we know the hand that oppresses us. We need to know the hand that feeds us. Is my identity dependent on words like "Jap" and "gook"? From many of the writings in these two issues, sadly, I would think so. If only for this reason, I recommend these issues to anyone desirous of better understanding of the Asian woman. The devastation to the psyche alone that is a result of racism cannot be understated. It has become a cruel fact of life. These issues are testament to that.

Feminism is not a word I use casually, because for me, feminism is an active, daily force that propels me forward as a woman and as a lesbian. Even when I talk about it I'm more likely to use an example than to actually label an action with the word "feminist" or "fem-

inism." Just the same, I know it's there and it influences the way I think, act and feel. I am disturbed by many of the authors in these issues because of their denial of a feminist perspective reflected in their writings. They do not have to proclaim themselves feminists or lesbians, but where in their words do they acknowledge whole-heartedly the strength, assertiveness and success in their lives as women? These are unusual women, many of whom are identified with non-traditional roles or non-traditional family structures. (For example, the raw power and impact of a taiko player is totally contrary to the stereotyped image of Asian women. Or for example, how many of these women exchange roles with their husbands that they may better pursue their activities?) Why are we reluctant to acknowledge the radical changes in perspective and roles being assumed by Asian women? We acknowledge the cold fact that we experience guilt, frustration, confusion and entrapment. When do we acknowledge the warmth in our hearts? ASIAN WOMEN ARE BEAUTIFUL.

GIVE ME YOUR GOOD EAR by Maureen Brady.
Spinsters, Ink, RD 1, Argyle, N.Y. 12809. 1979. 141 pp. $4.50.

Maureen Brady is an excellent writer, and *Give Me Your Good Ear,* her first novel, is filled with precise observations of character and place, with apt descriptions, neat phrases and evocative details. I think it is an important book, though not a fully successful novel—and its failings typify some of the problems of writing a seriously feminist novel.

Told in the first person, *Give Me Your Good Ear* is an account of how Francie Kelly, a young physical therapist, comes to terms with her painful family history and makes peace with her mother. Much of the action takes place in flashbacks to Francie's childhood on a chicken farm; and there is also much happening in present time when Francie is living and working in New York City and struggling to get out of an oppressive relationship with a whiny, neurotic man.

Brady is good at making small incidents yield a broad sense of her characters and their relations with each other. Returning from a dismal drive with her lover, the always-dismal Ben, Francie has insisted on stopping at a restaurant to eat and use the bathroom:

> I looked around and registered the fact that the exposed light bulbs were going to drive Ben bananas. I noticed the gash in the yellow seat cover on his side of the booth. It reminded me of the plastic dinette chairs in the kitchen where I grew up—a shiny, pearly look for those who have never seen a showcase of designer furniture. I considered switching sides to sit on the gash, knowing that Ben would shrink disgustedly from it as if it were an open wound seeping bacteria. He was taking a long time in the restroom and I wondered if it too was out of toilet paper, if he'd taken a shit before he realized it, if maybe I should go knock on the door and offer to pass through a Kleenex.
>
> *For God's sakes, why do I think I have to take care of this man?* (11)

The daughter and grand-daughter of women who devoted their lives to taking care of men, Francie is trying to wrest control of her life from the chain of women as they are supposed to be, women who make the best of things. The major story in this novel is how Francie becomes able to confront her mother, who is just such a woman. Francie's effort involves the past and the present: her memories have to be re-examined and understood and in her current life she must develop the courage to break free of tradition. Central to her struggle is the effort to truly understand the events leading to the violent death of her father, which Francie witnessed but could not comprehend and which has therefore held her in thrall.

Francie's childhood memories are highly specific and fascinating. Living on a farm, the children washed eggs, fought, and survived in a tense, difficult, but far from cut-and-dried family situation. The ambivalences are beautifully expressed:

> When Dad let me sit up there at the table with him, sipping my beer and watching the sun come down through the screen door, squinting when it got to the angle that could blind you, I'd feel I was a real person, his companion and his daughter. I knew that he was bigger and that his glass was taller and that the head of his beer was at the top of his glass while mine was at the middle, but none of those things mattered. What mattered was the silent camaraderie that gave me such a sunny feeling about him, a feeling that fooled me time and time again so that I never could quite believe he was the same father who was liable in the next moment to be spitting harsh commands and pounding his fist on the table. (22)

Francie's father is an alcoholic, and the children's fear and their mother's controlled dread of his drunken rage are chillingly well-told. His death, when it comes, is frightening, but Brady handles it so there is never, for the reader, that sense of violation that can come from reading about things so horrible that all you can do is wish, helplessly, they didn't exist.

This deftness, this acute, delicate perception, characterizes most of the part of this novel which is concerned with Francie Kelly's past, her memories, her intensely felt conflict with her mother. It does not, however, appear nearly so much in the part of the novel which takes place in the present, which has to do with Francie's efforts to free herself from Ben—her thoroughly obnoxious lover—to learn to

live alone, to reach out to other women. The entire "present" of the novel seems a kind of superstructure, an artificial life given to Francie so she will not seem so much a creature of the past. Apart from Francie's physical therapy work, which is interesting and vivid, the present story is far less individual. For many of us, I believe, the situation of a woman leaving an oppressive relationship with a man, finding strength in a consciousness-raising group and beginning to feel attracted to a woman friend has by now become a much-told story. This is, of course, not to say that it lacks importance and passion in the life of any woman personally; but I found Francie Kelly's retelling of it no more than passingly interesting.

For one thing, after Francie's initial infatuation wears off, Ben begins to seem so one-sidedly bad, so without attractions, that Francie's devotion seems not only sad but foolish. I felt that Francie, who is portrayed as purely victimized in the relationship, was getting her revenge by depicting Ben as a monster of selfishness, and I began (feeling like a traitor) wishing I could hear Ben's side of the story. Such awful men undoubtedly exist in life, but in fiction they strain the imagination, and to no end; Ben is such a fink that his eventual comeuppance lacks crunch.

Francie herself also began to trouble me. Her general air of serious, sincere victimization coupled with unacknowledged resentment began to wear me down so my sympathies started leaking off not only toward Ben but even toward her mother. Francie is very angry at her mother, and for excellent reasons; but she also has not forgotten a single small grievance. It is a risk of first-person narration, this entrapment of the reader in one character's consciousness; having lost patience with Francie there is no footing to be found anywhere. Francie is apparently meant to be entirely sympathetic, the thoroughly *good* character; even her rages always seem not merely justified but overdue. But Francie describes her mother from so purely an angry daughter's viewpoint that she begins to seem still ungrown-up, or at least humorless. Mother shirked the dishes when it was her turn; she jammed the hairpins in too harshly to control Francie's stray locks. In a telling interview between Francie and Mother, Francie remembers what happened when her mother got a hearing aid. (There is an apparently hereditary loss of hearing in one ear in the three generations of women in this family, to which the title refers.) Upon hearing better, Francie's mother becomes irritated by the "awful racket" her children make. She gets into the habit of taking off the hearing aid

when she gets home from work, and Francie muses to herself, "Why were those people at work so much more worth listening to than your own children?" This is a child's perception, and the pain of such a rejection is real; but Francie is now an adult, and capable of realizing (intellectually at least) that one sometimes has to listen to the people at work, like it or not. And that to all but saintly mothers, children sometimes do make an awful racket. Francie's anger at such things, while personally justifiable and necessary, makes a weak link in her generally serious recounting of the conflict between herself and her mother as two women of different generations, who sensed different possibilities for themselves, who took opposing views on what each saw as responsibility and freedom.

There is another, and to my mind more serious problem with the book, and this concerns its half-hidden sub-plot about dirt and the getting rid of it. A great many of the childhood flashbacks have to do with dirt and washing, and in Francie's adult life this preoccupation takes a nasty turn; there seems to me, throughout the novel, to be an equation of women with cleanliness and of men with dirt. Many of Francie's complaints about Ben have to do with his exploitation of her in the realm of cleaning. And when Francie, after she has left Ben, begins to feel attracted to her friend Lisa, it is in the most hygienic of circumstances; they have each just bathed, and Francie has been contemplating the perfection of fresh snow.

The legend of women as pure and clean and men as rough and dirty is an old one; we are sugar and spice and everything nice; they are rats and snails and puppy dogs' tails. The trouble with this dichotomy is that, to the extent it is true, it is the result of social conditioning (Keep your dress clean!) and should not be made to represent essential truths about character, as if through centuries of housekeeping we have achieved a cleanliness of soul unavailable to men. Worse, though, this polarization (women clean, men dirty) seems to me to lead eventually to the reaffirmation of heterosexuality as the natural balance between the unstable alternatives of sheer purity and utter filth. Certainly novels have been written around this theme, but not, usually, by feminists. Perhaps it might be better, if Francie and Lisa are to end up together, not to oversimplify in this way. And, in general, Brady does not—there are some wonderful passages in which Ben uses his voice, his stance, to assert a quite unconscious (and all the more infuriating) presumption of superiority.

Brady has chosen in this book not to have Francie and Lisa be-

come sexually involved, although that possibility remains. Personally, I hope Francie loses Lisa, and finds herself another woman, because despite Francie's insistence on this point, Lisa's charm escaped me. In fact, from their conversations together, Lisa seems self-pitying and self-centered and altogether has a great deal in common with Ben; so if things go as Francie hopes they will, she may find herself being as tactful and selfless in a new relationship as she was in the old.

The interesting thing about this novel, though, is that while Francie may not suspect this, the reader does, because Brady in her relentless faithfulness to character reveals more than she perhaps intends; and this is a gift which only needs a bit more getting hold of. All the complexities are there, latent, the difficulties that can make fiction so delicious; their effectiveness is diminished by the limitations of the main character. Francie's self-righteousness as a daughter, her vindictiveness toward the wretched Ben and her fear of becoming a lesbian all seem continuations of the chain that Francie is breaking in her effort to be herself.

Maureen Brady, with Judith McDaniel, formed Spinsters, Ink to publish this novel when commercial publication proved impossible. The book contains an Afterword by Jacqueline St. Joan detailing the events leading to this edition. *Give Me Your Good Ear* is, even with its problems, an interesting book and an important one for readers who are concerned with the combination of literary and feminist sensibilities, and I hope it will be the first of many from Maureen Brady.

CHERYL CLARKE

MOVEMENT IN BLACK: THE COLLECTED POETRY OF PAT PARKER, 1961-1978, by Pat Parker. Diana Press, 4400 Market St., Oakland, CA 94608. 158 pp. $8.75.

Movement in Black enriches at once the tradition of black poetry and of women's poetry in America. Pat Parker—the "goatchild" poet—has here given us the poetry published over nearly two decades, 1961 to 1978. All women, particularly black women, who experience Parker's poems will welcome her voice, which confronts both communities with the precariousness of being non-white, non-male, and non-heterosexual in a racist, misogynist, homophobic, imperialist culture. Nkyimkyim, African goddess of plasticity, and Aya, African goddess of defiance and rebellion, have guided her creative struggle through the wilderness of the isolation one faces as a black lesbian feminist, as their graphic symbols—the fern and the twisted pattern—guide our experience of the poems, page by page.

The first section of the collection, "Married," opens with "Goatchild," an autobiographical narrative which heralds a black woman's survival of girlhood—at once defiance and triumph—and her torturous, arduous development to womanhood. The poem evokes Nkyimkyim, as we are recounted experience after experience that changed, diverted, contradicted the goatchild's reality of herself as a woman, a black, and a self-determining person, refusing to pour herself into anyone's mold but realizing her vulnerability—her womanhood:

> . . . . i'm the fourth girl
> & my father was pissed.
> . . . . fought my way thru
> first grade
> defending my right to
> wear cowboy boots even if
> i was a girl
>
> . . . . . .
>
> the real hang up
> was something called virginity

which I had already lost
2 years ago to a really
hard up rapist that i
never could tell my parents
about. . . .

(19, 21)

Talk about it now. Bring it out of the closet:

run to california
& golden streets
& big money
& freedom to go
anywhere & not being
served in new mexico
or arizona. . . .
i learned my skills
to cook – to fuck
to wash – to fuck
to iron – to fuck

. . . . . .

to wait – to fuck
& this goatchild cried
& screamed & ran

. . . . . .

in that leaving
the goatchild died. . .
& a woman was born.

(30)

The black woman has two evils to confront–the rapist and the racist. The goatchild learns this quite explicitly.

However, some girls are born into womanhood with another type of ritual. "For Donna" explores motherhood, that coveted rite of passage into womanhood. It is not the pain of birth but the pain of separation and loss which characterizes this motherhood. The poem is a poignant statement of a young, unmarried woman's punishment for her innocent defiance of custom. The mother calls out to the daughter she has given up, not pleading for forgiveness, willing to accept hate, and asking for understanding:

understand my choice =
give away a part of myself
to save a part of myself.

(31)

"For Donna" recalls Gwendolyn Brooks' poem "the mother," in which a woman calls to her aborted babies for that same understanding.

"Married" continues with a series of poems concerned with man-woman relationships. "Sometimes my husband acts just like a man" (32), "Fuller Brush Day" (33), and "You can't be sure of anything these days" speak to woman's coerced conformity to the role of service provider to her husband, who is

Too weak to pick up a dish
too dumb to turn on a burner
too afraid to do laundry
too tense to iron a shirt.

("You can't be sure of
anything these days," 36)

Nkyimkyim, the goddess of plasticity, provides the poet with the skills to adapt to and explore many situations, to cope with feelings of love and feelings of hate. Juxtaposed to the previous statement of disillusionment with the emotional conventions of heterosexual relationships is the poem, "To see a man cry" (35), which acknowledges the bond that develops between some women and men as they struggle through their conditioning—defying it, conforming to it—to be intimate, to be empathic:

Even in our worst of times
some part of us –
finds each other.

(35)

But defiance is as eminent as change. "Exodus (to my husbands, lovers)" marks a woman's emotional/circumstantial departure from the prescription of heterosexuality:

Trust me no more –
Our bed is unsafe.
Hidden within folds of cloth

a cancerous rage
. . . . a desperate slave

(37)

This first section is aptly named, for women are not only "married" to their husbands but also to their roles and everybody else's expectations, which repress plasticity, autonomy, and self-determination. Black women are "desperate slaves," fighting the misogyny of two masters, the white man and the black man. It is time for black men to embrace Aya more completely in order to reject their own gynephobia and join us in the righteous struggle to destroy white male supremacy. "Married" serves to irridesce Parker's awareness of the vulnerabilities and complexities of those who are of her sex and race.

"From Deep Within," the last poem of this first section, is a stark comment on the poems which precede it as they relate to women. With visceral clarity, the poet images woman as a passive, almost Job-like figure of suffering and atonement, whose "flesh learns slow by fire and pestle,/Like succulent meats, it must be sucked and eaten" (39). The images and what they portend for women are terrifying. What will come of our flesh being "sucked and eaten"? Liberation?

"Liberation Fronts," the title of the second section, reveals a consciousness more complex, more attuned to the workings of the external world and to its impact upon women, blacks, lesbians, more willing to explore the levels of struggle implicit in our existence as women and blacks and lesbians. The voices are more adamantly those of Aya and Nkyimkyim—rebellious, rejecting, changing, re-defining self.

Like "Married," this section opens with an herstorical poem, "my hands are big. . .," in which the woman acknowledges her patriliny and her matriliny:

My hands are big. . .
like my mother's

My innards are twisted
like my father's.

(43)

This poem is more reflective and circular than "Goatchild," which has a declarative, linear structure. The woman here is more accepting of her emotional/biological heritage from her parents and more certain in rejecting their expectations that she conform to traditional models of womanhood:

myself is my big hands –
like my father's
& torn innards
like my mother's
& they both felt
& were
& i am a product of that –
& not a political consciousness.

(44)

In contrast to that conclusion, I would like to suggest that, though we *are* the children of our parents no matter how much of their conditioning we have rejected, we are still products of a political consciousness which emanates from the ideological framework within which our parents socialized us to accept or reject the prevailing culture.

In this section the poet deals with the politics of repression. She enunciates the double-bind of the black woman, caught between the sexism of the black man and the racism of the white woman ("Brother" p. 46; "Have you ever tried to hide?" p. 47). The poet exposes the absurdity of the professor who urges students to study Kafka instead of the San Francisco police department as the best example of a "nightmare" ("English Lit," p. 48). She argues that freedom of speech ought to be militantly denied right-wing vigilantes like those of the American Nazi Party in order to save our very lives. Parker puts it on a very personal level:

what the Nazis say
will cause
people
to hurt
ME.

(66)

"Where do you go to be a non-citizen?" (61) is a cry of exasperation and desperation over economic/social inequities. I would overlook the self-indulgence of this poem, if it were not also apoetic, arhythmic, and contrived:

The A.P.A. finally said all gays aren't ill
Yet ain't no refunds on their psychiatry bills.
A federal judge says MCC is valid – a reality
Yet it won't keep the pigs from hurting you or me
I wanna resign; I want out.

(62)

"To My Vegetarian Friend" (67) is funny, but ahistorical. Yes, I suppose a black person can positively identify with "chitterlins & greens/neckbones & tails" as survival food and no longer be ashamed of these Southern Afro-American delicacies. But it ought also to be said that black people have not survived *because* of these foods—as the poet seems to suggest—but *in spite* of these highly caloric and high-in-cholesterol foods, whose regular intake over a period of time can be hazardous to our health.

The poet returns to her theme of political repression in the poem, "Boots are being polished" (74), which appears untitled in this collection—as many of the poems are—but appears under the title "Where Will You Be" in *Conditions Five: The Black Women's Issue.* Throughout "Liberation Fronts," Parker enunciates her fear of the impending police state in America. In this poem, she alerts gay people that the "crusade" against us has begun with all the fervor of imperialism's earlier quests. But instead of hunting infidels, these latterday "crusaders" hunt "queers"—"defined as opposite—perverse. . ." (75). The poem then seems to collapse into another poem which becomes an elaborate paradox revolving around our own "perversity" in allowing ourselves to be coerced into hiding, into the closet:

> Everytime we watched
> a queer hassled in the
> street and said nothing—
> It was an act of perversion
>
> (76)

This perversity, this repression of our identity, like the coerced conformity of women to prescribed roles, only make us more vulnerable to attack. The poem then shifts back to the tenacity of our enemies who will come for us "to the cities/and to the land/to your front rooms/ and in *your* closets," and concludes with the question, "where will you be/when they come?"

The last poem of this section, which begins with the lines "I have a dream. . ." (83) juxtaposes King's dream of racial/human equality with a dream of gay liberation. Essentially, the poem expresses anger at having believed in everybody else's dreams of equality, peace, freedom while the issue of gay liberation has been rejected by everybody as a nightmare. The anger expressed in this concluding poem is more positive than the passivity expressed in the concluding poem of the first section.

The poet finds many voices in the poems of this section, and she has become more public in her disdain for the curtailment of justice and freedom.

"Movement in Black" is the title of the third section and of its only poem. True to the tradition of black poets in America—Sterling Brown, Robert Hayden, Gwendolyn Brooks—Parker uses an historical backdrop to render an herstorical catalogue of the Afro-American woman's movement from slave-woman to ex-slave-woman. The poem is replete with the names of glorious black women from Phillis Wheatley to Audre Lorde (who wrote the "Foreword" to Parker's collection). "Movement in Black" is a performance piece and in this sense as well is consistent with the Afro-American tradition of oral history.

In the fourth section, "Being Gay," the poet reveals her perception of the repression of lesbians. In the poem "My lover is a woman" (98), Parker juxtaposes the warmth and safety of holding and being held by her lover to the racist, homophobic, misogynist violence and hostility in the external world. The speaker is black and her lover is white, and their union alienates them both from their own racial groups. The issue of interracial relationships between lesbians is often not addressed openly. This poem scratches the surface mightily. But until both black and white women understand and reject the centuries-old taboo in America against interracial relationships, we will be victimized and divided, strung-out between guilt over our love for one another and a false sense of loyalty to either the single issue of black liberation or of women's liberation.

"For Straight Folks Who Don't Mind Gays But Wish They Weren't So BLATANT" attacks the heterosexual privilege of affectional exhibitionism:

> And the woman in your office
> Spends your entire lunch hour
> talking about her new bikini
> drawers
> & how much her husband likes
> them.
> BUT GAYS SHOULDN'T BE SO BLATANT.
>
> (111)

"Womanslaughter" (141), which appears in "Love Poems," the last section of the book, is an eloquent, autobiographical poem about

violence against women. When the poet's older sister is murdered by her ex-husband, there is no recourse! In an effort to defame the character of the murdered woman, the poet's sister, the court admits testimony that she had slept with other men and with women. The poem denounces the court system's injustice to black people, and in particular the cultural sanction of violence against women:

> What was his crime?
> He only killed his wife.
> But a divorce I say.
> Not final, they say;
> Her things were his
> including her life.
>
> (149)

And the murderer is convicted of manslaughter, not murder, for his act of womanslaughter: "It is a crime of passion./He was angry" (147).

Pat Parker's triad of identity is an affront to, a rebellion against, and a defiance of the expectations of white-supremacist patriarchy. Her poetry is a departure from the racialist, nationalist radical Afro-American poetry of the last decade, because it dares to present a black lesbian's experience of oppression in the world as well as her vision; and it embellishes the archives of women's poetry, because it reveals both a black lesbian-feminist perspective of love between women and the circumstances that prevent our intimacy and liberation.

Judy Grahn, who wrote a powerful "Introduction" to this collection, places Parker soundly in the "continuing Black tradition of radical poetry," credits her with reviving "a militant tradition of feminist writing on the West Coast," and extols her for reconnecting with a nearly 3,000 year old tradition of lesbian poetry.

Parker's language is direct, "spare," as Grahn states. Sometimes the lines are glaringly unedited, uneven, in need of revision. Sometimes her treatment of subject matter is frivolous, as in "The *What* Liberation Front" (71), or puerile, as in "Dialogue" (51), or contrived, as in "Movement in Black." But it is the moment of her creative impulse to communicate: the love, the anger, the fear, that "powerful sense of justice–and injustice" (Grahn, 11), the cynicism, the humor that she gives us. Her themes are circular and cumulative. The earlier poems, like some of those appearing in the first section, are monothematic, short, sharp; the later poems, like the narratives, are multi-

thematic, reaching back to older themes to integrate them into newer, expanded concepts, completing the circle and sharply demarcating the black lesbian poet's space in the hermetic world of Afro-American letters.

TO KNOW EACH OTHER AND BE KNOWN: WOMEN'S WRITING WORKSHOPS by Beverly Tanenhaus. Out & Out Books, 476 Second Street, Brooklyn, New York 11215. 70 pp. $3.50.

THE PASSIONATE PERILS OF PUBLISHING by Celeste West and Valerie Wheat. Booklegger Press, 555 29th Street, San Francisco, CA 94131. 76 pp. $5.00.

GUIDE TO WOMEN'S PUBLISHING by Polly Joan and Andrea Chesman. Dustbooks, P.O. Box 100, Paradise, CA 95969. 296 pp. $4.95.

1980 MEDIA REPORT TO WOMEN INDEX/DIRECTORY OF WOMEN'S MEDIA edited by Martha Leslie Allen. Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press, 3306 Ross Place, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20008. 86 pp. $8.00.

I have often thought it miraculous that we manage to read as much feminist writing as we do. In *To Know Each Other and Be Known,* Beverly Tanenhaus describes the process of sharing that helps create such writing. She writes about the Women's Writing Workshops at Hartwick College in Oneonta, New York, scheduled every summer since 1975, which bring together published writers and women just discovering their own voices.

The structure of the book recreates the mood of the workshops: it interweaves the statements and poems of participants and speakers to produce the effect of many women talking. Tanenhaus includes as well participants' "breakthrough poems," the ones in which they have made the clear and powerful shift from a vague objective voice to an explicit personal one. In the latter section of the book she pairs poems written before the workshop with poems written there, along with each woman's statement of how she views the change in her work.

Much in contrast to the gritty reality of writing and publishing, the process of getting into print tends to be mythologized. *The Passionate Perils of Publishing* by Celeste West and Valerie Wheat contains a highly critical examination of "The Literary-Industrial Complex"; it provides an enlightening list of the corporations that control publishers, a realistic guide to the economics and politics of small-press and self-publishing, a selected guide to the independent alternative press, and a special section on alternative library resources. It is the most complete feminist analysis of both the frustrations and the rewards of publishing now available to feminist readers, publishers, and potential publishers. But since it was published in the summer of 1978, it is already more a historical document than a practical guide. Fortunately most of the articles will appear in a revised and expanded form in the book on publishing being prepared by the Feminist Writers Guild.

The Passionate Perils is more impressive for what it is than for what it is not. Every reference is annotated in the practical candid style which has always characterized the work of Celeste West and Booklegger Press. References to "publish-it-yourself" tools, the independent press, the feminist publication world, kids' liberated literature, and alternative library resources contain evaluations as well as addresses and other ordering information. The footnotes are as fascinating and informative as the text; there are no vague references or sloppy statistics, and the tone is brisk, but thorough. West is optimistic about the hard facts and difficulties. She gleans methods of and approaches to printing, promotion, and distribution which are ignored by established houses, but are the practical lessons of the alternative press movement.

Reviewing this book is made difficult by how good it is. Trying to pull out the meaty quotes, I found myself wanting to copy whole chapters, to put every paragraph on a 3" x 5" index card. How could anyone resist a juicy tidbit like:

> What do Random House, Knopf, Ballantine Books, Modern Library, Vintage, Pantheon, L.W. Singer and Beginner Books all have in common? Answer: they are all the same company. These eight houses are the different publishing imprints owned by RCA, the six billion dollar a year conglomerate. (1)

The Passionate Perils gets quickly beyond the glamour to the politics of information control, to how the economics of big business affects what gets published and what we read. Listen, for example, to Valerie Wheat's argument for feminist publishing:

> . . . if it seems that women's books are "accepted" now, that equal numbers will be published and reviewed, that's not the point. Only certain forms have received the imprimatur: the housewife-in-revolt novel, the how-to-get-yours guide for the woman executive, history or biography of women that is not too radical. But the men at the top make the decisions. Women may not be "publishable" (i.e., profitable) tomorrow and it's off to the shredder. Examine some of the books and periodicals coming from the feminist presses for another world light years ahead of the mass market. These books won't be advertised or reviewed so often or be as readily available in the local bookstore or library, but they are worth seeking out. What you see now will, in five years, perhaps be imitated and watered down into a "best-seller"! (51)

The Guide to Women's Publishing suffers from the same time limitation as *The Passionate Perils of Publishing;* it too was published in 1978. But Polly Joan and Andrea Chesman offer a comprehensive index of those women's journals, newspapers, presses, and distributors which were operating at that time. Each listing includes statements solicited from the publication or business, which means there is a wide variation in the range of information provided. Its great value is that almost every listing provides enough information to guide a writer in submitting material suitable in form and content for a given journal or press. In the two years since it was prepared, no more complete overview has appeared.

Collecting the information and organizing the material for the *Guide* was clearly a major piece of work (discussed in the introduction to each section). Just as difficult were the political decisions involved in selecting and organizing the material, decisions which required constant recognition of who the likely audience would be and how the *Guide* would probably be used. The *Guide* is designed to connect feminist publishers and editors with subscribers, writers, alternative press reviewers, and that whole other world of "straight press" people who want to see what the feminists are doing now.

It is nearly as hard for our editors and publishers to do promotion and outreach as to get reviews and criticism. Joan and Chesman are as positive and supportive as possible of each publication/press, and em-

phasize the unique strengths of each. Unfortunately, I found their style frustratingly matter-of-fact and their language bland, so that their characterizations do not sufficiently communicate the particular style and content of each publishing venture. The *Guide*'s frequent failure to be informative about journals I know made me less trusting of its treatment of those I don't know. Still, the *Guide* responds effectively to the myth that nothing of "quality" has been produced by providing long lists of our "quality" publications and presses.

The *Guide* does not avoid the tough political issues that feminist writers and editors confront constantly. For example, Polly Joan writes that "the title 'Women's Publishing' was not chosen lightly. Often we were tempted by our politics to narrow the book into a more concise 'Feminist Publishing.' It is a battle that still rages within us. . ." (1). Later she states:

> My criteria for inclusion has been based on that vague and abused term "Feminist-oriented." It has seemed to me that presses, even if run by women, that simply mirror society's traditional image of women, that seemed to support social intolerance and inequality, classism, sexism, or racism did not reflect the spirit or reason behind the explosion of women's publishing. As such, I did not feel they were appropriate for this book. (106)

I found the discussion of these and other questions in the introduction to each section almost more valuable than the descriptions of the journals and presses. In working with feminist publications, there is a tendency to get caught up in the issues of survival–outreach, production, and distribution. It is important to go back to the basic decisions about why and how we are doing what we do. The self-critical approach of the *Guide* in delineating what was selected and why provides a useful model for other such collections. My major reservation about both the *Guide* and *Passionate Perils* is their failure to provide what is equally rare in the feminist and alternative press networks: a discussion of the special problems of publishing for women of color and for working-class women producing community-based journals.

Much has changed in the two years since the *Guide* and *Passionate Perils* appeared. We no longer have Women in Distribution, Diana Press, Daughters, or the Women's Press Collective. Many of our journals have had to interrupt their publishing schedules, and some are on the verge

of failure. The economic difficulties of continued publishing have grown greater, and while some new presses have surfaced, some of the optimism expressed by Polly Joan and Celeste West in 1978 now seems unrealistic.

For those who want to follow the changes and reverberations within the feminist publishing network, there is no better combined resource than the *Media Report to Women* and *The Media Report to Women Index/Directory.* The monthly report and the annual directory provide accurate addresses, listings, and contact information for women in all areas of media. Donna Allen and her daughter Martha Allen have worked out a concept of selection and presentation which seeks primarily to affirm women's efforts in all the communication fields. Through the Women's Institute For Freedom of the Press they seek to create and maintain a women's resource that parallels the kind of thing that guilds and clubs do for the boys. Their directory offers a feminist alternative to *Literary Market Place.* It gives writers an up-to-date reference to most publications and publishers, and it provides publishers, workshop organizers, businesses, and speakers' groups with a wide-ranging list (including brief descriptions) of many of the women active in the communications fields today.

Working from *The Guide to Women's Publishing* to *The Media Report Index/Directory* and back to *The Passionate Perils of Publishing,* contributes to the sense of a struggling network of feminist publishing which might just survive and help us share the powerful and important work women writers are producing.

USES OF THE EROTIC: THE EROTIC AS POWER by Audre Lorde. Out & Out Pamphlet, 476 Second St., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215. 1978. $1.00.

WOMEN AND SUPPORT NETWORKS by Blanche Wiesen Cook. Out & Out Pamphlet. 1979. 41 pp. $2.00.

THE MEANING OF OUR LOVE FOR WOMEN IS WHAT WE HAVE CONSTANTLY TO EXPAND, by Adrienne Rich. Out & Out Pamphlet. 1977. $1.00.

In the words of Adrienne Rich, "there is a movement of women going on like no other in history."[1] Essential tasks of this, as of any other, revolutionary movement include the development of information, theory, and strategy. Since our theorizing goes on in the pages of feminist journals, in hand-circulated mimeos, and in lectures and speeches, we are faced with the task of circulating ideas in forms accessible to large numbers of women. Out & Out Books is one of the feminist presses now serving the women's community by reprinting material that might otherwise be buried and lost.[2] These reprints begin to outline an emerging lesbian feminist political theory and a "woman-centered vision" of the world we are creating (Rich, p. 7).

Before we can form future visions, however, we need to have some accurate assessment of our past. Giving us our real history back has been the task of historians such as Blanche Wiesen Cook, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Judith Schwarz, and Nancy Sahli, among others.[3] Out & Out Books has now reprinted Cook's article, "Female Support Networks and Political Activism" (originally published in *Chrysalis* No. 3), along with the text of a 1977 speech, "Women Against Economic and Social Repression"; both reclaim from patriarchal history the social reformers of the earlier twentieth century, particularly Crystal Eastman, Jane Addams, and Lillian Wald. Patriarchal historians have hidden the fact that women such as Addams and Wald were nurtured and sustained throughout their lives by other women, both in individual relationships and in political networks:

> In the past, historians tended to ignore the crucial role played by the networks of love and support that have been the very sources of strength that enabled political women to function. Women's friendships were obscured and trivialized. Whether heterosexual or homosexual, the private lives of political women were declared beyond the acceptable boundaries of historical inquiry. . . . Denied knowledge of the many women whose full and vital lives have been erased, we have been left instead with crude and dehumanizing stereotypes. (16)

These stereotypes have included that of the asexual, saintly spinster and that of the lesbian as "a personification of feminine evil" (Rich, p. 3). Both myths presume that the only appropriate outlet for emotion and commitment is heterosexual. Feminist historians are rapidly proving that not only is this a heterosexist assumption, it is totally belied by the evidence.

Jane Addams shared forty years of her life with another woman. Lillian Wald lived within a network of female friendships. Katharine Lee Bates, author of "America the Beautiful," lived her life with another woman. Susan B. Anthony was erotically attracted to women. And recently we have learned about the "private life" of Eleanor Roosevelt.[4] Lesbian feminist historians will no doubt uncover additional evidence that innumerable women labelled asexual, frigid, or spinsterly were, in fact, powerfully woman-identified.

As this information is uncovered by scholars and we learn more about the networks that tied women together in artistic, political, educational, domestic, or work environments, we are faced with the question of what to name this networking. Many historians, including feminist and even lesbian-feminist ones, have avoided naming these attachments "lesbian" because, in our homophobic environment, enemies often label a woman "lesbian" in order to attack her political credentials or her psychological stability. So historians talk about "romantic friendships" and "devoted companions" or "woman-identification" or "woman-bonding," and always they warn against placing twentieth-century concepts (lesbianism) upon an earlier reality (woman-love). Yet, as Adrienne Rich points out, "the *unspoken*—that which we are forbidden or dread to name and describe—becomes the *unspeakable* (as in the phrase *unspeakable acts*); . . . the nameless becomes the invisible."[5] There is no clearer evidence of the power of words than the

unwillingness of many scholars to name love between women *lesbian.*[6] Cook, to her infinite credit, is not afraid to name: "Women who love women, who choose women to nurture and support and to create a living environment in which to work creatively and independently, are lesbians" (20).

Cook, however, takes a cautious position on the political impact of lesbianism, in contrast to some lesbian feminist theorists. Cook believes that the women's movement is part of a "larger" movement for economic and political transformation of society, and, consequently, calls for a socialist revolution fueled by lesbian energy: "The power of women to come together, to support each other in community, in creative self-criticism and love, gives us the power to intensify the economic and political struggle" (10). I found it significant that the two articles collected in the Out & Out pamphlet deal respectively with *radicalism* and *sexuality.* One article attempts to demonstrate that the social reformers were really radicals, and the other that they were really lesbians. This division perpetuates the idea that "politics" is about economic reform (socialism) and lesbianism is about sexuality. As a result, lesbianism in itself is not political, it merely fuels political women. Given this perspective, it isn't surprising that Cook calls sexism, racism, and heterosexism "diversionary tactics" (9) rather than structures of oppression. The real oppression is capitalism, but lesbians are needed to make sure that the socialist revolution does a thorough job of mopping up bad attitudes. Given the long-standing volatile relationship between socialism and feminism, I was less than satisfied with such an analysis.

For Adrienne Rich, lesbianism is more fundamental to the process of political change. Out & Out Books has reprinted her speech, "The Meaning of Our Love for Women is What We Have Constantly to Expand," which was first delivered at the New York Lesbian Pride Rally in 1977. She eloquently argues that patriarchy hates lesbianism not because it is perceived to be "deviant" sexuality (the fear of lesbianism is *not* the equivalent to the fear of homosexuality) but because it poses the threat that women united into a political force could wipe patriarchy off the face of the earth:

> I believe that a militant and pluralistic lesbian/feminist movement is potentially the greatest force in the world today for a complete transformation of society and of our relation to all life. It goes far beyond any struggle for civil liberties or equal rights—necessary as those

> struggles continue to be. In its deepest, most inclusive form it is an inevitable process by which women will claim our primary and central vision in shaping the future. (4)

Here I am reminded that several years ago lesbians in the women's movement were accused of insisting that only lesbians could be true feminists. Whether or not this accusation was at all accurate, it is certainly a charge that lesbian feminists have been apologizing for ever since. Rich, in essence, takes up the challenge first hurled by the "Woman-Identified Woman" manifesto: that the primary energy that fuels a revolution is love between women. Although she does not state explicitly that revolutionary feminists must be lesbians, it seems to me, nonetheless, that her speech implies that only a women's revolution rooted in self-love and sister-love will succeed.

Perhaps Rich mutes the implications of her analysis because key to it is the word "pluralistic." She insists that we respect all women's processes and resurrect the tarnished word "sisterhood." She believes that lesbians should continue to work politically with all women over all women's issues: abortion, childcare, racism, violence against women. She warns us that "there is no way we can afford to narrow the range of our vision" (6). She is particularly concerned that women will succumb to one of two urges, both of which seem to result from the fear that a women's revolution cannot succeed: a return to the gay male movement or a retreat into an idealistic "dyke separatism." (5).

I find Rich's vision of a pluralistic, women-centered movement inspiring. I have painful personal memories of the "lesbian wars" and the trashings in the name of "political correctness." But, as suggested by my reservations over Blanche Cook's political perspective, I don't think the appeal for diversity should prevent us from raising hard questions, arguing, and learning constructive ways to criticize each other—which the women's movement often has avoided doing. For example, Rich envisions a revolutionary process different from Cook's; hers is a women's revolution in which women's issues and women's oppression are primary and fundamental. Such a revolution would ultimately be to the good of all, but her path toward it is nonetheless woman-separatist (although not lesbian-separatist).[7]

Out & Out Books' third reprint is Audre Lorde's "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," originally presented at the Fourth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women in 1978 (also reprinted

in *Chrysalis* No. 9). In it Lorde attempts to name and define the source of the energy that is fueling today's feminist revolution. She attempts to reclaim the word "erotic" from its patriarchal association with the pornographic, and to extend it beyond its old connotation as strictly sexual energy: "When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life-force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives." The erotic, Lorde writes, is a kernel within each woman that thoroughly pervades everything she thinks and feels and does.

I agree with Lorde that there is a primary energy that unites all our activity and feeling, and that there is something profoundly feminist about this energy. Yet, at the risk of seeming to quibble over words, I must admit that I have difficulty calling this the "erotic." In the first place, I am not convinced that the word can really be reclaimed from its patriarchal sexual context. Secondly, I do not really understand what Lorde means by erotic. At times she identifies it as the primary life-force, but at other times this force is fundamentally sexual or sensual. At times the erotic is the totality of all feeling, at other times a bridge between various parts of our being. To say that the erotic—"the sensual"—is the bridge that connects "those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us" is one thing; to say that all forms of expression are ultimately individual channels for the primary life force is something different. Lorde seems to establish a hierarchy in which political activity, intellectual achievement, friendship, work relations, etc. are all avenues for sexual and sensual energy. Yet one could as easily say that the intellectual or the emotional or the psychic or the political is that kernel within us that forms all our experience. Obviously patriarchy has denied to women the expression of our bodies. Just as obviously it has denied women full use of our minds and our psychic power and our political expression. I would not want to obscure these ways of being in the world under the name of the erotic.

Despite all the reservations I have stated here, I have been inspired by Lorde, Cook, and Rich to further investigate the fundamental importance of woman-identification—lesbianism—in the creation of a new society. This is one vital function of pamphlet reprints such as those of Out & Out Books: to spread the information and theory essential to the development of a revolutionary feminist movement.

NOTES

[1] Rich, "The Meaning of Our Love for Women is What We Have Constantly to Expand," Out & Out Books, p. 6.

[2] Other presses serving this function include Spinsters, Ink (R.D. 1, Argyle, NY 12809) and the Lesbian-Feminist Study Clearinghouse (1012 Cathedral of Learning, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA 15260).

[3] In addition to Blanche Cook's articles discussed in this review, see: Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual," *Signs* I, 1, pp. 1-29; Judith Schwarz, "*Yellow Clover:* Katharine Lee Bates and Katharine Coman," *Frontiers* IV, 1, pp. 59-67; Nancy Sahli, "Smashing: Women's Relationships Before the Fall," *Chrysalis* No. 8, pp. 17-27. *Frontiers* has prepared a special issue on lesbian history.

[4] See *The Life of Lorena Hickok* by Doris Faber (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1979) for information on Roosevelt's long friendship with Hickok.

[5] Rich, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," *Sinister Wisdom* Six, p. 18.

[6] In relation to this issue, see Joanna Russ's response to Sahli in *Chrysalis* No. 9, pp. 6-7, and to Schwarz in *Frontiers* IV, 2, p. 71.

[7] In the text of "The Meaning of Our Love for Women" as it appears in *On Lies, Secrets and Silence* (W.W. Norton, 1979) is Rich's footnote acknowledging "a separatism which is neither simplistic nor rigid. . ." (p. 229).

The following is ordering information for journals cited in these notes:

Chyrsalis, 635 S. Westlake Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90057. $12/1 yr., $21/2 yrs., $30/3 yrs.

Frontiers, Women Studies Program, Hillside Court 104, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO 80309. $9/yr. ($15 institutions), $3.25 single copy ($5.25 inst).

Signs, The University of Chicago Press, 5801 Ellis Avenue, Chicago, IL 60637. $16/ 1 yr. ($24 institutions, $14.40 students).

Sinister Wisdom, Box 30541, Lincoln, NE 68503. $7.50/1 yr., $13/2 yrs., $2.50 + .50 postage/sample issue.

CLARIBEL ALEGRÍA, poet and novelist, was born in Nicaragua in 1924, grew up in El Salvador (which she claims as her country) and lives in Mallorca. Since 1955 she has published six books of poems. A novel, written in collaboration with her husband, was a finalist for the Seix Barral prize, 1964. *I Survive*–from which the poem appearing in this issue is taken–was co-winner of the Casa de las Americas poetry prize, 1978.

DOROTHY ALLISON, a contributing editor of *Quest: a feminist quarterly,* is an expatriate southerner who recently moved to Brooklyn where she writes fiction, poetry, and critical prose. Primarily an anthropologist, she knows more than she ever wanted to about computers.

GLORIA EVANJELINA ANZALDÚA, a Chicana from South Texas, has worked in the fields, taught Third World Women's Literature, cleaned houses. She coordinates El Mundo Surdo (The Left-Handed World), a feminist reading series in San Francisco, and is a member of Dial-a-Token, five Third World Women who give readings and workshops. Her poetry has appeared in *Tejidos* and *Lady-Unique-Inclination-of-the-Night.*

ELECTA ARENAL is a feminist writer, translator, and activist committed to the lessons of women's liberation in Latin America and throughout the world. Associate Professor of Spanish and Women's Studies (Staten Island/CUNY), she recently composed a play drawn from the poems and prose of Anne Bradstreet (1612-72, of Massachusetts) and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-95, of Mexico), and is writing a book, *Untold Sisters: 16th and 17th Century Hispanic Nuns in Their Own Works.*

DIANA BELLESSI, an Argentinian poet, was born and grew up on a small farm whose land was never owned by her family. She has travelled widely in North and South America and is the author of a book of poems *Destino y Propagaciones* published in Ecuador. Her work has appeared in numerous South American journals as well as in *Heresies* and *Conditions* in the United States.

GIOCONDA BELLI, b. Managua, Nicaragua, 1948. Won University of Nicaragua poetry prize, 1972; published her first book of poems, 1974. She was in exile in Costa Rica from 1975 until the Sandinista victory,

July, 1979. *Firing Line (Línea de fuego)*–from which the poems appearing in this issue are taken–was co-winner of the Casa de las Americas poetry prize, 1978.

MAUREEN BRADY is a co-founder of Spinsters, Ink, publisher of her novel, *Give Me Your Good Ear.* Her closets are presently filled with copies of the second printing, which she hopes you will help to empty soon.

ELLY BULKIN has written about teaching lesbian poetry for *Radical Teacher, College English,* and *Women's Studies Newsletter.* Her interview with Adrienne Rich appeared in *Conditions: One* and *Two.* Her article, "Racism and Writing: Some Implications for White Lesbian Critics" is in *Sinister Wisdom 13: Lesbian Publishing and Writing.*

CHERYL CLARKE is a poet who lives in Highland Park, New Jersey. She has published previously in *Conditions: Five, The Black Women's Issue.* Her poetry has appeared in *Lady-Unique-Inclination-of-the-Night,* a feminist journal of the goddess.

JAN CLAUSEN frequently reviews prose and poetry for feminist periodicals. She has published two poetry collections; her first short story collection, *Mother, Sister, Daughter, Lover,* is now available from The Crossing Press.

RACHEL DEVRIES teaches at The Women's Writer's Center and Syracuse University. Her book of poems, *An Arc of Light,* is available through The Wild Goose Press. Her poems have appeared in several magazines, most recently *13th Moon, Sinister Wisdom,* and *Poetry Now.*

MARSHA GABRIELA DREYER majored in Spanish at U. Mass/Boston where she participated in an intensive advanced translation program. She has spent time in Guatemala and this year is living and teaching in Isla Margarita, Venezuela. Feminist theater, music, and ceramics have also claimed her creative energies.

SALLY GEORGE is a writer and typesetter who lives in Brooklyn. Her novel *Frog Salad* will be published by Scribners in 1981.

REBECCA GORDON lives, writes, and does office work in Portland, Oregon. Her poems have also appeared in *Calyx, Sinister Wisdom,* and *off our backs.*

LOIS ELAINE GRIFFITH is a writer and painter living in Brooklyn, New York. Her first volume of poetry, *Barbadian Fantasies,* will soon

be published. Her play, *White Sirens,* was produced at the New York Shakespeare Festival in 1979. She also works with the Nuyorican Poets Café on East 3rd St. which holds poetry readings and does theater productions. Her play, *Coconut Lounge,* opened at the Café in May, 1980.

JANA HARRIS was born in San Francisco, grew up in Oregon and Washington, and worked on commercial fishing boats in Alaska. Her poems have appeared in *Ms., Moving Out, Black Maria, Plexus, Libera, Room, off our backs.* Her novel *Alaska* and a book of poems *Manhattan as a Second Language* are forthcoming from Harper and Row. She teaches a women's writing workshop at New York University.

SAUDA JAMAL is presently living in New York and is working on a collection of short stories, poems, and photographs. Her work has appeared in *Essence* and *Black Forum.*

IRENA KLEPFISZ is the author of *periods of stress,* a collection of poetry, which she distributes herself. Recent poetry is scheduled to appear in *Woman Poet* (Northeastern Issue) in the Fall. Her essay "Woman Without Children/Women Without Families/Women Alone" has been anthologized in *Why Children?* (The Women's Press Ltd., London), also to appear in the Fall.

FRANCINE KRASNO lives in Florence, Massachusetts. Her stories, book reviews, and articles have appeared in *The Chicago Daily News, Black Maria, Chomo-Uri, Women's Studies Newsletter,* and *Conditions: Three.* She is associate editor of *The Correspondence of Lydia Maria Child* (U. of Massachusetts Press).

JOAN LARKIN develops and teaches women's writing workshops, helps run Out & Out Books, a women's independent press, and is on the faculty at Brooklyn College. Published work includes *Housework, Amazon Poetry* (anthology edited with Elly Bulkin), *A Sign/I Was Not Alone* (recording).

MARY HOPE LEE lives in San Francisco and is former poetry editor of *Plexus.* Her work has appeared in *Essence, Callaloo, Plexus, Azalea,* and *WomanSpirit.*

JUDITH McDANIEL is a writer and teacher who lives in upstate New York. With Maureen Brady she has co-founded a feminist publishing company, Spinsters, Ink. Her poems have appeared in *Conditions, Sinister Wisdom,* and other journals.

HARRIET MALINOWITZ is from New York and now lives in Montague, Massachusetts. Her work has appeared in *Chomo-Uri, The Massachusetts Review, The Valley Advocate, The Valley Women's Voice,* and (soon) *Sinister Wisdom.*

KARYN MEYER lives in Brooklyn. She photographs in and around New York City as far as a subway token will take her.

BARBARA NODA is a poet and writer who lives in San Francisco. Her forthcoming book of poetry *Strawberries* will be published by Shameless Hussy Press this year.

CAMILLE NORTON left Philadelphia before she reached the age of reason and has still not found it. She lives in Cambridge now and listens late at night for the bombers circling Boston Harbor. Her poetry and fiction have been published here and there, most recently in *Sojourner* and *Aspect Magazine.*

MINNIE BRUCE PRATT is a member of the collective that edits *Feminary: a Feminist Journal for the South,* which emphasizes lesbian vision. She was born and raised in Alabama, lives now in North Carolina, and is currently writing an essay on false and true rebellion. Her poetry has also appeared in *Sinister Wisdom, Women's Studies Newsletter,* and *Atalanta.*

CLAUDIA SCOTT died in December, 1979 by suicide. She was the author of two books of poetry, *Portrait* (Lavender Press, Chicago, 1974) and *In This Morning,* published posthumously by Tree Frog Press.

RIMA SHORE will be teaching Russian literature at Columbia University, where she has been named a Fellow (!) of the Russian Institute. Her play *Life in America* appeared in *Conditions: Three.*

MAY STEVENS is preparing an artist's book on the life and work of Rosa Luxemburg and Alice Stevens. It will be called *Ordinary. Extraordinary.* She teaches at the School of Visual Arts and is a member of the *Heresies* collective.

JUDITH VOLLMER is a poet living in Pittsburgh and is a co-founder of Wildsisters Coffeehouse, Inc., a group of twelve women who promote women's art. Her poems and reviews have appeared in *The Mountain Review, Moving Out,* and other magazines.

BONNIE ZIMMERMAN teaches women's studies at San Diego State University. She writes literary criticism and reviews for a variety of journals and newspapers.

Small-press books by contributors to CONDITIONS: SIX *include:*

Maureen Brady, *Give Me Your Good Ear,* novel (Spinsters, Ink, R.D. 1, Argyle, New York 12809), 1979, 144 pp., $4.50 plus .60 postage.

Elly Bulkin, Joan Larkin, editors, *Amazon Poetry: An Anthology* (Out & Out Books, 476 Second St., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215), 1975, 120 pp., $3.50 plus .65 postage/handling.

Jan Clausen, *After Touch* (Distributed by Long Haul Press, P.O. Box 592, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215), 1975, 76 pp., $2.00 plus .60 postage/handling. Checks payable to Long Haul Press.

————, *Waking at the Bottom of the Dark* (Long Haul Press), 1979, 80 pp., $3.00 plus .60 postage/handling.

————, *Mother, Sister, Daughter, Lover,* stories (The Crossing Press, Trumansburg, N.Y. 14886), 1980, $4.95.

Rachel deVries, *An Arc of Light* (The Wild Goose Press, P.O. Box 10, Cazenovia, N.Y. 13035), 61 pp., $2.95 plus .75 postage/handling, New York State residents include 7% sales tax.

Jana Harris, *The Clackamas,* poems (The Smith, distributed by Horizon Press, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010), 1980, $3.00.

Irena Klepfisz, *periods of stress,* poetry (P.O. Box 56, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215), $2.00 plus .65 postage/handling. Checks payable to author.

Joan Larkin, *Housework,* poems (Out & Out Books), 1975, $3.50 plus .65 postage/handling, NYC residents add 8% tax.

————, *A Sign/I Was Not Alone,* LP recording with Audre Lorde, Honor Moore, Adrienne Rich (distributed by Out & Out Books), 1978, $6.00 plus .80 postage/handling. NYC residents add 8% tax.

Judith McDaniel, "Reconstituting the World: The Poetry and Vision of Adrienne Rich" (Spinsters, Ink), 1979, $1.50 plus .50 postage.

Claudia Scott, *In This Morning,* poetry (Tree Frog Press, P.O. Box 25125, Chicago, Illinois 60625), $2.95.

————, *Portrait* (Lavender Press, P.O. Box 60206, Chicago, Illinois, 60660), 1974, $1.50.

Work by contributors to CONDITIONS: SIX *is included in the following small-press anthologies:*

Amazon Poetry: An Anthology, Elly Bulkin and Joan Larkin, eds. (Out & Out Books), *Jan Clausen, Irena Klepfisz, Joan Larkin.*

Ordinary Women (Ordinary Women, P.O. Box 664, Old Chelsea Station, New York, N.Y. 10011), 1978, 136 pp. $3.95 plus .30 postage/handling. NYC residents add 8% tax. *Lois Elaine Griffith.*

Why Children? (The Women's Press Ltd., 124 Shoreditch High Street, London E1 6JE England), forthcoming. *Irena Klepfisz.*

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

Judith Arcana, *Our Mothers' Daughters* (Shameless Hussy Press, Box 3093, Berkeley, CA 94703), 233 pp., $3.95.

Nancer Ballard, *Dead Reckoning,* poems (Good Gay Poets Press, Box 277, Astor Station, Boston, MA 02123), 56 pp., $2.50.

JEB (Joan E. Biren), *Eye to Eye: Portraits of Lesbians,* photographs (Glad Hag Books, P.O. Box 2934, Washington, DC 20013), $8.95.

S. Diane Bogus, *Woman in the Moon,* poems (WIM Publications, P.O. Box 5037, Inglewood, CA 90310), 58 pp., $6.

Jean Carey Bond, ed., *Lorraine Hansberry: Art of Thunder, Vision of Light* (Freedomways, 799 Broadway, New York, NY 10003), 121 pp., $2.50.

Katherine Brady, *Father's Days: A True Story of Incest* (Seaview), 216 pp., $9.95.

Karen Brodine, *Illegal Assembly,* poems (Hanging Loose Press, 231 Wyckoff St., Brooklyn, NY 11217), 63 pp., $3.00.

Olga Broumas, *Soie Sauvage,* poems (Copper Canyon Press, Copperhead, Box 271, Port Townsend, Wash. 98368), $4.00 paper, $22.00 signed, clothbound.

Dorothy Bryant, *The Garden of Eros,* novel (Ata Books, 1920 Stuart St., Berkeley, CA 94703), 170 pp., $5.

————, *Writing a Novel* (Ata Books), 122 pp., $4.

Donna Camille, *Bra Strap Bar & Grill,* novel (P.O. Box 12171, El Cajon, CA 92022), $6.00.

Ellen Cantarow, with Susan Gushee O'Malley and Sharon Hartman Strom, *Moving the Mountain: Women Working for Social Change* (The Feminist Press), 208 pp., $4.75.

Suzy McKee Charnas, *Motherlines,* novel (Berkeley Books), 246 pp., $1.95.

————, *Walk to the End of the World,* novel (Berkeley Books), 246 pp., $1.95.

Cynthia W. Cooke and Susan Dvorkin, *The Ms. Guide to a Woman's Health* (Doubleday), 443 pp., $7.95.

Cathy N. Davidson and E.M. Broner, eds., *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature* (Ungar), 327 pp., $8.95.

Andrea Dworkin, *The New Woman's Broken Heart,* stories (Frog In The Well, 430 Oakdale Road, East Palo Alto, CA 94303), $3.00.

Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (Doubleday), 369 pp., $3.95.

Jennifer Baker Fleming, *Stopping Wife Abuse: A Guide to the Emotional, Psychological, and Legal Implications for the Abused Woman and Those Helping Her* (Anchor), 552 pp., $8.95.

Gay Task Force of the American Library Association, *Censored, Ignored, Overlooked, Too Expensive? How to Get Gay Materials into Libraries* (P.O. Box 2383, Philadelphia, PA 19103), 1979, 10 pp.

Ruth Geller, *Seed of a Woman,* novel (Imp Press, P.O. Box 93, Buffalo, NY 14213), 314 pp., $5.95.

Gingerlox, *Sense You,* poetry (Gena Rose Press, 2424 Franklin, No. B, Denver, CO 80205), $3.00.

Jana Harris, *The Clackamas,* poems (pub. by The Smith; dist. by Horizon Press, 156 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10010), 68 pp., $3.

Mary A. Hill, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: The Making of a Radical Feminist* (Temple University Press), 1980, 362 pp., $14.95.

Eda Howink, *I Am Just There,* poems (Golden Quill Press, Francestown, NH), 72 pp., $5.

Ann J. Jawin, *A Woman's Guide to Career Preparation: Scholarships, Grants and Loans* (Doubleday), 355 pp., $5.95.

Madonna Kolbenschlag, *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Good-Bye: Breaking the Spell of Feminine Myths and Models* (Doubleday), 244 pp., $8.95.

Geraldine Kudaka, *Numerous Avalanches at the Point of Intersection,* poems (Greenfield Review Press, Greenfield Center, NY 12833), 83 pp., $3.

Ruth Lepson, *Dreaming in Color* (Alice James Books, 138 Mt. Auburn St., Cambridge, MA 02138), 1980, 69 pp., $3.95.

Jean Lozoraitis, *LOUDcracks/softHEARTS,* poems (South End Press, Box 68, Astor Station, Boston, MA 02123), 84 pp., $3.75.

Alice Mattison, *Animals,* poems (Alice James Books), 1979, 72 pp., $3.95.

Rosemari Mealy, *Lift these Shadows from Our Eyes* (West End Press, Box 697, Cambridge, MA 02139), 1978, $1.00.

Janice Mirikitani, *Awake in the River,* poems (Isthmus Press, Box 6877, San Francisco, CA 94101), $3.00.

Cynthia Navaretta, editor, *Voices of Women: 3 critics on 3 poets on 3 heroines* (Midmarch Associates, P.O. Box 3304, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10017), 1980, 54 pp., $4.50 + .50 for 1st class postage.

Florence Nightingale, *Cassandra,* essay (The Feminist Press, Box 334, Old Westbury, NY 11568), 58 pp., $2.50.

Marge Piercy and Ira Wood, *The Last White Class: A Play about Neighborhood Terror* (The Crossing Press, Trumansburg, NY 14886), 145 pp., $4.95.

Joanna Russ, *The Two of Them,* novel (Berkeley Books), 181 pp., $1.95.

Jessica Amanda Salmonson, ed., *Amazons!,* stories (DAW), 206 pp., $2.25.

Pamela Sargent, *Watchstar,* novel (Pocket Books), 238 pp., $2.25.

Claudia Scott, *In This Morning,* poetry (Tree Frog Press, P.O. Box 25125, Chicago, Illinois 60625), $2.95.

Jean Sirius, *Womyn/Friends,* a Book of Poems (Sirius Books, Box 1027, Brooklyn, NY 11202), $2.00.

Heather Smith, *Heat Lightning* (Black Widow Publications, 1044 53rd St., Oakland, CA 94608), 1980, 114 pp.

Julia Penelope Stanley and Susan J. Wolfe, eds., *The Coming Out Stories* (Persephone Press, Box 7222, Watertown, MA 02172), 251 pp., $6.95.

Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (Harper & Row), 218 pp., $6.95.

Linda Johnson Stem, *The Secret Witch and They Met The Who-Ever-It-Was,* 2 children's stories (Metis Press, 815 West Wrightwood, Chicago, IL 60614), 38 pp., $4.

Lynn Strongin, *Nightmare of Mouse,* poems (L'Epervier Press, 1219 East Laurel, Fort Collins, CO 80521), 82 pp.

Marta Tikkanen, *Manrape* (Academy Chicago Limited, 360 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60601), $8.95.

Lee Upton, *Small Locks,* poems (Fallen Angel Press, 1913 West McNichols C6, Highland Park, MI 48203), 39 pp., $2.

Renee Vivien, *At the Sweet Hour of Hand in Hand,* poems translated by Sandia Belgrade (Naiad Press, 7800 Westside Dr., Weatherby Lake, MO 64152), 81 pp., $5.50.

Alice Walker, ed., *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing. . . And Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive, A Zora Neale Hurston Reader,* introduction by Mary Helen Washington (The Feminist Press), $6.95.

Ruth Weiss, *Desert Journal,* poems (Good Gay Poets, P.O. Box 277, Astor Station, Boston, MA 02123), $5.

Fay Weldon, *Praxis,* novel (Pocket Books), 283 pp., $2.50.

Susan Windle, *Molehills and Mountains* (order from author, 1627 Rodman St., Philadelphia, PA 19146), $2.00 plus .50 postage/handling.

Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig, *Lesbian Peoples: Material for a Dictionary* (Avon), 170 pp., $5.95.

Women's Songbook Project, *Out Loud! A Collection of New Songs By Women* (Inkworks Press, 4220 Telegraph, Oakland, CA 94609), $5.95.

This index of names is followed by a listing of the essays and interviews which appeared in Conditions: One *through* Six.

ESSAYS/INTERVIEWS

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EMMA–BUFFALO WOMEN'S BOOKSTORE: 2474 Main St., Bflo., NY 14214. (716) 836-8970. Books by, for and about women: lesbian lit, poetry, third world lit, health, theory, pamphlets, periodicals, albums, posters, T-shirts, calendars, notecards, bumper stickers, buttons, lending library. Referrals, resources, community events. Tues-Thurs: 3-7, Fri and Sat: 10-6.

THE FEMINIST WICCA: Matriarchal Spiritual Center. Incense, candles, oils, jewelry, books, tarot, and other occult supplies. Astrologers, classes. Cat. $1.50. 442C Lincoln Blvd., Venice, CA 90291. (213) 399-3919.

HEALING, MAGICAL HERBS, OILS AND TINCTURES; menstrual sponges; New Women's Tarot Book! SASE brings free catalog. ELF & DRAGONS, P.O. Box 609C, Woodstock, NY 12498.

NOTECARDS FOR WOMEN, by women artists. Free brochure. Three Women Graphics, 135 Santa Clara St., P.O. Box 817, Attn: WS, Ventura, CA. 93002.

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PUBLICATIONS

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FEMINIST SCIENCE-FICTION QUARTERLY, $6/4 issues. Sample, $2. Windhaven–Ikesdatter Press, P.O. Box 5172-V, Seattle, WA. 98105.

GAY WOMEN WRITE/MEET with supportiveness and confidentiality through *The Wishing Well* Magazine and Services. (Introductory copy $3.00 ppd.). Also offering gay women group travel. Information: P.O. Box 664, Novato, CA. 94947.

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Topics include historical overviews that emphasize sexuality as a changing social form; the ways that factors such as sexual orientation, gender, class, race, ethnicity, and age work with each other in each person's sexual life; how popular culture, media, and the arts imagine (sometimes stereotype) the sexual self; and current political struggles and debates around sexual issues. Aimed at a general readership, the book will be edited by Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson and published by Monthly Review Press. We are interested in original pieces and reprints (no longer than 25 pages, please), stories, poems, journal excerpts, illustrations, and picture essays. In response to this call, we would like (a) a precis or outline (3 copies); (b) an appropriate reprint of your own work (3 copies); and (c) suggestions for articles, stories, bibliographies, etc. (deadline 8/1/80, SASE for return). For a tentative outline, send SASE to The Sarah Eisenstein Series, c/o Sharon Thompson, P.O. Box 1161, Stuyvesant Station, NYC 10009.

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$3.00

In the Hartwick workshops a strong emphasis is put on criticism. For me, the best part of *To Know Each Other And Be Known* is the record of criticism it provides. The words which catch my attention are those which delineate a feminist standard of criticism: honesty, clarity, taking a risk, revealing, authentic, explicit, defiant, detailed. The participants talked about moving away from safe, ambiguous, inaccessible, "coded" language; no line was drawn between style and content. "We were unwilling to confuse politically correct rhetoric with eloquence or to record as awesome events mere bandwagon miracles," Tanenhaus writes. She makes the ethics of the situation clear when she says, "To censor one's criticism is a lack of generosity and a gesture of contempt that will keep a writer from developing her finest potential." Nor is there the assumption that criticism will be taken easily. The fact that the workshops were a few short weeks long did not prevent a complicated community from developing, with all the stresses, angers, and resentments that such intensity produces.

The book is not intended merely to document the experiences of these workshops, but also to serve as a text and a stimulus for other women's writing communities. Unfortunately, this is also where the book is weakest. There is little discussion of the practical aspects of organizing such a workshop in local communities, the difficulties of duplicating the protected woman-centered atmosphere where creation and criticism are encouraged. This lack becomes even more evident in the letters and comments in the book's final section, which addresses what happened to the participants when they went home. Some were able to maintain enthusiasm, but many were not. A few tried to organize a writing exchange by mail, but it has lapsed on occasion; by the time the book was written only five women were continuing to correspond regularly. Other letters speak of isolation, attempts to organize local workshops, and a desire to be part of such an experience again.

Tanenhaus' book makes clear the need for such workshop resources. But few feminist writers have the money or time to go off to Hartwick College, and even if most of us did, the time to leave would still come. Moreover, as a writer I want to stay in my community and create my special working atmosphere. While Tanenhaus' book shows how good workshops function and provides encouragement and inspiration, I wanted it also to serve as a guide for those of us who cannot go away to such workshops, to address the problems involved in connecting with other feminist writers and setting up workshops and networks in our own communities.