



# CONDITIONS: EIGHT

a magazine of writing by women
with an emphasis on writing by lesbians

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Conditions: Eight was supported, in part, by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Conditions is listed in Alternate Press Index, P.O. Box 7229, Baltimore, MD 21218.

Conditions was founded in 1976 by Elly Bulkin, Jan Clausen, Irena Klepfisz, and Rima Shore.

Conditions: Eight was typeset by Diane Lubarsky.

Distribution Coordinator: Shelley Messing

Office Manager: Cherrie Moraga

Cover: "Girl Ice Skating" by Gwyn Metz.

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### TO OUR READERS:

In our statement to readers in Conditions: Seven we announced that we would briefly suspend work on the next issue in order to undertake a much-needed reorganization of the editorial collective. The urgency of this task increased with Jan Clausen's decision to stop work on the magazine following the publication of Conditions: Eight. After nearly six years of editorial work, she will now be leaving the collective.

Our reorganization is virtually complete, and we are extremely pleased with the results. Five new editors have joined us. Their participation will strengthen *Conditions*, move the magazine in new directions. The increased size of the collective will undoubtedly complicate the editorial process in certain respects, but will also give to *Conditions* a vitality, a long-range stability, and a variety of editorial perspectives which we feel represent an important step forward for the magazine.

The following statement introduces the new collective.

Elly Bulkin Jan Clausen Rima Shore

CONDITIONS: EIGHT is a transitional issue, assembled as the collective expanded to encompass a larger, more diverse group of women. Work began on CONDITIONS: EIGHT months before the addition of new collective members. The three original editors solicited reviews and were responsible for editorial decisions concerning them. While nearly all other manuscripts were discussed after meetings of the larger collective had begun, the eight of us agreed that final decisions regarding the contents for the issue already in process should remain with the original editors, and that beginning with CONDITIONS: NINE, all decisions would be made collectively by the new group.

Nonetheless, the larger group read and discussed in great detail all the manuscripts submitted; in this way, the final selection emerged from a general consensus within the group as a whole. New collective members also took part in tasks related to production and ongoing magazine business as EIGHT was underway.

In this way, new collective members became involved in the concrete work of putting together this magazine. The process enabled a group of women with little prior knowledge of each other to discover how the diversities of our individual backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives translated into collective decision-making. Despite individual differences, we share a number of identities. We are all lesbians. We are all writers—of poetry or drama or translation or fiction or feminist theory or criticism. We have all been involved in political activism, working on issues which are local, national, or international in scope.

Beginning with our ninth issue, the magazine will be edited by the following women:

Dorothy Allison, (b. 1949, Greenville, South Carolina) is adjusting to a settled two-person homelife after many years in a lesbian-feminist collective. She writes fiction, poetry, critical essays, and occasional bursts of doggerel inspired by her mad affection for B.K. (late of Berkeley, California). Dorothy is a white, iconoclast, working-class, lesbian, deviant-anthropologist, radical pervert. She carns her living as a computer specialist. Her ambition is to make a difference.

Elly Bulkin (b. 1944, The Bronx). A confirmed critic in a world of creative writers, I have edited anthologies of lesbian literature and published articles on lesbian poetry, racism and writing, heterosexism and women's studies, and feminist literary criticism. I have most often combined my literary efforts with some form of community-oriented political activism. A Jewish lesbian of lower-middle-class and Eastern European background, a nearly life-long New Yorker, I live in Brooklyn with my lover and our 11½-year-old daughter.

Cheryl Clarke (b. 1947, Washington, D.C.). Poet, critic, social worker. Preoccupied with expressing self as a black lesbian feminist. Am particularly proud of my essay, "Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance," which appeared in This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color. Published in Conditions: Five, Six and Eight and Lesbian Poetry: An Anthology. Living in New Brunswick, New Jersey since 1969.

Jewelle L. Gomez (b. 1948, Boston, Massachusetts). Poet, teacher, and Gap Tooth Girlfriend interested in theatre, film and criticism and the literary contributions women are still to make in these disciplines, Author of *The Lipstick Papers*, and a soon to be published collection of lesbian vampire stories.

Carroll Oliver (b. 1957, Elizabeth, New Jersey). An only child of families from the South, East and North U.S., Trinidad and Africa (though not in

that order). Raised in the communities of Harlem and New Jersey, I'm dealing with the dialectics of life/death, culture/consciousness and the ideology of economics struggling to become a metaphysical materialist via love and trouble.

Mirtha N. Quintanales (b. 1948, Havana, Cuba; immigrated to U.S. 1962). Third-World lesbian socialist feminist, recalcitrant anthropologist, part-time artist, aspiring writer, closet occultist. Presently working on a study about the emergent culture and politics of Third World Women in the U.S.; a novel about a young Latina woman; and a fantasy piece involving several highly unusual women. Other projects: translating women's literature into English and Spanish, and getting the Third World Women's Archives off the ground in New York City.

Rima Shore (b. 1948, Paterson, New Jersey) is an underemployed Slavist, and an overextended writer, editor, translator, teacher. Of Russian Jewish ancestry, she has spent half her life studying Russian language and literature, and has visited the relatives who remained in Russia when her father's family emigrated fifty years ago. Her essay on the Russian poet Sophia Parnok, and translation of Parnok's poems, appeared in Conditions: Six. This summer she is teaching a course at Columbia University entitled "Death and other beginnings in Russian fiction." She lives in Brooklyn.

In our meetings, we have discussed the possibility of establishing an editorial advisory board to expand the range of perspectives reflected in our editorial policies and in the work we publish. We hope in this way to involve older women, women with disabilities, women from different regions, racial/ethnic groups, and class backgrounds, women in institutions.

We expect change: from the way we conduct our meetings, to the work we publish, to the way the magazine looks when it arrives from the printer, and at every step along the way. We will report on the process in CONDITIONS: NINE.

Dorothy Allison
Elly Bulkin
Cheryl Clarke
Jewelle L. Gomez
Carnoll Oliver
Mirtha N. Quintanales
Rima Shore



# CONDITIONS: EIGHT

Vol. III, No. 2

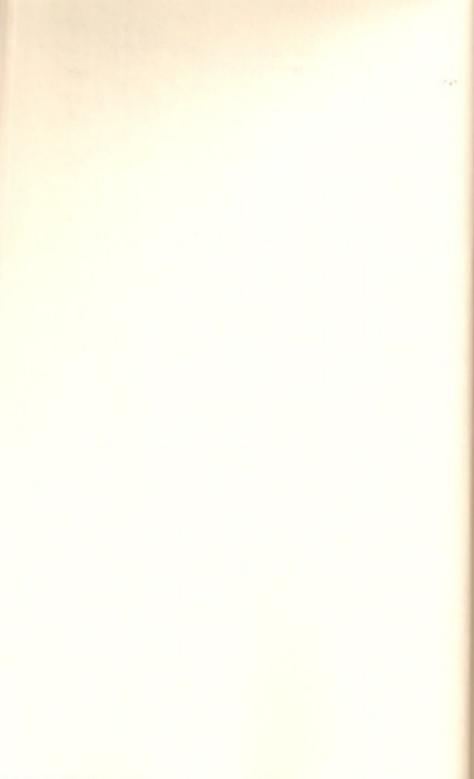
Spring 1982

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### SY MARGARET BALDWIN

## DECEMBER 29, 1936, SALINE VALLEY, CALIF., 3000 FEET

for Annie Montague Alexander founder of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, UC Berkeley, collector of plants & small mammals, who spent her 69th birthday snowbound east of the Inyo Range

in this craterlike sink between the Last Chance & Inyo Ranges in this dead basin called Saline Valley
Louise & I wait out the storm/ mornings we split wood in the wash, afternoons I add to my journal, gophers are always uppermost in our minds/ we stopped to look for their sign in Waucoba Wash & again in Marble Canyon at that time there was snow only on the highest peaks

both access roads are blocked & we are down to beans & commeal/ a large drift of snow lies against the car/ before breakfast the temperature hovered around zero & I was out setting traps for microtus on the ice, I followed the tracks of a single tiny mouse across the windpacked snow until they vanished under the stubborn white bodies of the mountains

in this severe december the ridges & basins are ironhard, the warrens of the gophers are like subways of warmblooded life under the stiff sheath of the soil

today is my birthday, I watch out for new grasses/
I consider the 60s a very appropriate period in one's life
to do fieldwork I have learned to observe,
to see things as they are,
the true lineaments of this desert sink, its
skin of sage, silvery & astringent.

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the open hook of the sky bleached of color/ in this remote place which has become my territory I thrive, loving what little there is

#### THE DESERT IS NOT THE ENEMY

for the Salvadorans who died in Organ Pipe National Monument 7/80

1.

on thursday they crossed the border
the blue sky of the Sonora burned
over their heads
on friday they reached the edge
Caludia under the shadeless palo verde
Rosa dying face down in the desert a cactus
stuffed in her mouth flesh together with spines
(she said kill me Carlos there
can only be so much pain)

in the night a sharp moon sinking quickly into forms of bitter scrub/ at sunrise we fought over the water that was left reeling through the dry watercourses, scratched by cactus again & again

I am hiding this piece of clothing soaked in urine so I can survive

2.

he said it would be easy
he said it was all taken care of
he said they wouldn't catch us walking across the desert
we paid him with our savings & crossed the border
fleeing towards a better life/ we were not prepared
for the heat, the spines, the creosote-spotted
plain, the eroded buttes, the dry gullies
fingering back to the gray volcanic mountains,
the incredible shape of our thirst

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3.

this was El Camino del Diablo this was the road of the goldseekers down to the last watering place, Quitobaquito, a grove of trembling cottonwoods

4.

mesquite ironwood paloverde what my name is I have forgotten I take off my blouse/ it is my skin

it is the thin desert soil

5.

the way the july light strikes down like a knife the way the pores slam shut like doors

the way the mesquite's taproot travels
hundreds of feet feeling for water the way
the exposed skin turns dark & leathery, the unexposed
skin sloughs off

the way the flesh shrinks from the bone
the way the great inland lakes of the Pleistocene
shrank to form the American Desert
the way our lives have been
shaped by arbitrary borders
the way I've been scratched by transparent spines
the way the desert is the background of who we are
the way only parts of us survive

6.

on thursday they left behind the headless bodies in the streets they crossed the border carrying 20 gallons of water into the open desert

# THERE ARE NO RIVERS

1.

in the yellow house my mother is on
her knees ferociously brushing up
crumbs/ down the road Mrs Day's chickens
singing through a neighborhood of silence/ we forgot
the vinegar, broke the eggs
I won't send you & your sister
to do the shopping again

I squeeze into the wallpaper until there's nothing left to keep a conversation going until there are no rivers to carry me into you

2.

mostly there is silence between us/ sometimes we talk about the lifecycle of tapeworms or the exact shape of lentils mostly the room is a reservoir of uncertain air

3.

what I have to tell you is I don't think anyone can fill anyone else's emotional void what I have to tell you is sometimes when I make love with someone we grow farther & farther apart

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4.

in my dream there's an elevator that travels sideways instead of up & down until I've forgotten where it is I'm supposed to meet the woman that I love

there's a bathroom door slammed back on its hinges, there's a spinning current of anger, a small spider in retreat across the hall ceiling/she screams just keep your voice down you want the Wilcoxes banging on the wall?

chickens with beady orange eyes singing through the chilly silence, through the center of the weeds

there are no rivers to cross on your palms

### TO AN EX-LOVER

how I remember it will not be the way you remember it a freshness coming up from the sea, dogs running from the seawind when we settled on the lifeguard hut to watch for unusual astronomical events, a lunar eclipse in which the moon's edge peeled away at the earth's rusty touch, or the meteor shower in which we only saw one meteor but it was so huge & intense we stared after it with open mouths/

it isn't as if it's not important, everything we shared but the climate has changed: your star, the Scorpion's red heart, has sunk beneath the horizon mine, the winter dogstar, glitters now with cold other winds are sweeping down from the north bringing a river of ice/

I've begun now at the middle pulling on this long thread of my life breathing deeply from the envelope of loneliness that surrounds me it isn't that I don't want to be touched but I lost myself in your touch/ I'm more comfortable with this desert of foxes & crows, comfortable just waking up to the frozen ground & seeing it's my hands

### HATTIE GOSSETT

### on the question of fans/the slave quarters are never air conditioned

when I went to cuba in 1973 going there was still a mortal sin against imperialism that couldn't be stamped on your usa passport so you had to go to mexico or canada or europe first where there was a cuban embassy that could issue you a visa and an airport that would service cubano airlines.

also you usually had to be sponsored by some male dominated white leftist revolutionary organization and you had to go in a delegation composed largely of them unless you went as part of a delegation of male dominated black leftist revolutionaries who got there

by hijacking an airplane.

the delegation i traveled with was of the former persuasion since i didnt have enough nerve to be hijacking no airplane and we found ourselves staying in mexico city a little longer than we had planned due to bureaucratic circumstances far far beyond our control.

while we were waiting we had meetings.

between trips via the muy clean and pleasant subway to the visa office the pyramids the visa office the anthropological museum and back to the visa office again we had meetings and spanish classes (i learned donde está el baño) and meetings.

well it was summer and even mexico city with its way way way high up above sea level altitude which caused me to fall right out in a cold faint in mid sentence within hours of getting off the plane was warm so i was using my 5&10 cents store imitation chinese foldup paper fan a lot during the meetings cuz of course the group wasn't staying in an air conditioned hotel.

my fan wasnt even nothing exotic like marabu or peacock feathers or delicately wrought filigree of ivory or teakwood.

well to my surprise the foldup paper fan bothered the white male leftists.

i really wasnt ready for the severe criticism i received about my dangerous bourgeoise female tendencies viz a viz the fan (they never touched on any of the things about me that could have stood some criticism) womanhood; think they said of the french and italian based ladies or the greek and roman demi mondains and how the sipped wines and ate roasted meats and sugary tidbits and themselves at the expense of the sweat and blood of the trying in vain to shake up a little breeze with their damp in handkerchiefs thus unwittingly giving gross evidence of the development of the masses and especially the wimmin

think i pleaded of the wimmin slaves (unwaged and waged) laboring in conditioned cane cotton corn and tobacco fields and un air conditioned factories offices bedrooms laundries and kitchen when they were able to snatch a moment or 2 away from baroque incorporated or ms demi for themselves in a corner somewhere.

what do you think they were doing?

fanning themselves of course.

fanning themselves and each other while sipping cool water tasting more food exchanging dreams thoughts plans and schemes.

fanning themselves.

fanning gnats ticks flys mosquitos and wasps away.

fanning up freedom struggles.

fanning honey fanning.

only the slaves were the wrong class and color to have their fans qualify for most museum displays.

well the white male leftists didnt wanna hear about my greatgreat grandmamas and aunties and neighborhood ladies doing no fanning.

talk about cultural imperialism!

counterrevolutionary bourgeoise female tendencies was their considered unwavering judgement.

well time passed and eventually we got to cuba around 2 oclock one morning

my strongest first impression is of cuban women easily and familiarly handless large guns at that hour as part of the regular civil guard duties.

- then i remember checking into the hotel nacional in havana near the ocean and taking a predawn stroll along the malecon looking at the waves and loving the caresses of the tropical breeze.
- then going to sleep and waking up and going out in a minibus on 2½ weeks worth of visits to factories schools hospitals museums movies radio stations housing developments beaches and nightclubs and meeting cuban wimmin who were seriously struggling against all kinds of contradictions and gasp! fanning themselves.
- you know there was very little air conditioning so people sweated and fanned a lot.
- and the cubanas had these bad paper fans with all kinds of color reproductions of revolutionary people and scenarios on them.
- well you know i enjoyed myself in cuba dont you.
- I fanned right along with the cuban wimmin and felt right at home.
- and everytime i saw a cuban woman with a fan i would ask the white male leftists if she was a counterrevolutionary bourgeoise female like me.

# DAKAR/SAMBA

-1-

rust red rocks clay and dust black rocks dry heat atlantic ocean breeze rhythm ancient chants and rituals time

-2-

warm
gentle
giving
flowing
metaphysical and pragmatic
deep quiet
patient
guarded interior
soft bass voice
holding babies and bundles for women
on the bus
bargaining in the marketplace
playing with the children
smiling shyly and beautifully
slick guitar licks

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# DAKAR/SAMBA

-1-

kher bann acc souf you khone té khour kher you nioul tangaye hou wow pëkhom gédjou sowou yungou yungou woy acc bakhou thiossane diamono

-2-

ité

tëye

laabir

walagaan

baatin ace saalr

khoot seidd

bania yakamti

am biir

baat you noy té néékh

niongui fapp khale yi acc umbou djigéen yi thi otto yi

di wakhaalé thi marsé yi

di fo acc gouné yi

di rec réc gou raffett té andacc rouss

boumou khalam you neekh

wolof translation; cheikh tall

yellow gold bubba and golden brown sandals red suede boots vellow and white sneakers hours and hours of evening tea talk and music lemonade reefer cookie stewed fish rice cabbage onions hot peppers little bags of peanuts grilled fish with fresh lime mangos and oranges evening walks harmony lilting kora chords cool nights

-3-

neocolonial tensions and contrasts
have you met le plus grand m'sieur
also known as toubab negro
mosquitos
running sores and twisted limbs
clitorectomy
widespread and severe pain
imported bottled water
people living and sleeping in the streets
cardboard and tin shanties squatting next to
abstract french architecture

moubou you m'bokhé ni n'galam acc thiarakou der melni ourouss bottou dérr vou khonk dalou dawkatt vou m'boké te wéékh misic acc wakhtaan you andacc atava ave wakhtooy wakhtou hou takossane dioté limonade tangalou yamba thiebbou dieunn cornéttou thiaff dieun you niou lacck saffal cook limong mango acc oranss dokhontou takoussan n'dégo boumou kora youye walagane goudyk péékh

-3-

diakhlé acc wouté gui néck thi nootangue goú bééss gui avez vous vu les plus grand m'sieur connu sous le nom de toubab negro

maatt yi

goom you kholekouyi acc tank you lafagné yi

n'diongu

tiiss gou revy té métty

boutée lou "evian" (diogué bitim rew)

nith niy di doundé thi m'bédami di nélow thi m'bédami

keurou bante acc cartong takhow thiy wétou tabakhou toubab you diakhaso yi

hollywood brand chewing gum intense street hustling cheap labor and high cost of living the donald duck nursery school absentee landlords and president black on black exploitation dry cracked earth sparse vegetation on the edge of the desert on the verge of explosion chigomou holliwood
diāyanté bou mettibi
pay gou touti dounogou gou séér
le jardin d'enfants "chez donald"
borom keur acc president
kou nioul di not kou nioul
souf sou wow bey khar
niákh mou yārakh
thi thiatou diórgui
mouy diegué totje

### EL PAISANO IS A BIRD OF GOOD OMEN

from a novel in progress

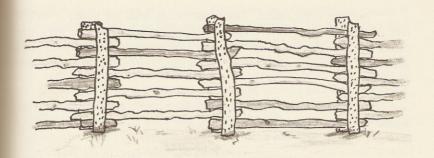
She straddles the mesquite post. Balanced on the top of the corral, she watches the white sky dwarf the chapparal, the cattle and horses, the house, and the *portal* with the guests moving under it. These objects ripple under the sun's glare like clothes billowing on the clothesline. Only the compact shadows give the objects and people the solidity of reality. The sun

dominates the land. Always. La tierra. Everywhere, punctuated here and there with mesquite thickets and clumps of prickly pear. Under the quickening hum of the guests' conversation and the clinking of knives on plates, she hears the cackle of the hens clucking over their finds, a fat earthworm or dry grass seeds. On the highest branch of The Mesquite a mockingbird imitates another bird's trill. Under her, the hard roundness of the mesquite post seems an appendage of herself, a fifth limb, one that's also part of the corral, the corral that's part

of the land. The corral is a series of thick posts sunk side by side into the ground with just enough space between them to accommodate, horizontally, half a dozen logs alternating one on top of the other in such a way that the logs lock into each other between the paired posts. Like people who try pairing, then stacking to accommodate each other and fence out the awareness of separateness. If the tops of the posts aren't flush with the average height their heads are either lopped off to make a tidy corral or they are cast out as deficient, unsuitable. She feels her body flowing from

one post to another until it, too, encircles what the corral encircles. But the gates are wide open, the circle will be incomplete until dusk when the newly calved cows are rounded in for the night. No, not complete until her new house is finished. Anda en la garra—on the rag. During

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her menses she feels fragile, expansive, the limits of her body stretched beyond her skin, she flows out like a sheet, encompassing, covering chairs, people, everything around her. There is still time.

There is still time to change her mind. She shifts her bottom, the post is now on the left side of her cunt. Gently, she sways back and forth. If she does it just right she can bring herself to orgasm. Not as good as during a fast run, the wind whipping the mare's mane, her own hair across her mouth, no one hears her. She wonders: what encircles, what excludes, what sets apart.

"Andréa." Her mother is walking towards her. She's dressed in a pin striped two-piece suit, white blouse, black hat veiled at the back, white open-toed pumps. Her mother made it a point to dress better than the other women.

"Si, 'Amá. Qué quieres?" she asks, jumping down.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Everything. Why? What do you care?"

"You look hollow-eyed, hot. I don't want you embarrassing me today."

"The feeling, 'Amá. It's come back."

"No seas tonta, hijita. You must mingle with the guests. And get out of those man's pants. I find it totally incomprehensible why you moon out here like a lost calf and why Zenobio keeps himself hidden all afternoon in the house with your sisters draping themselves around him like a harem."

"And what's the harm in that? Why can't he just do what he wants?"

All day he's kept away from her, the waiting in his eyes (Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother.) expecting a word or act from her. But if he's not around to remind her she may never say it or do it.

"Go and change, greñuda, muchacha chiflada. And comb the mesquite leaves out of your hair-go! Chase your sisters out of the house. Tell them to bring out more tortillas de masa y la carne."

"No."

Her mother opens her mouth then closes it. Then more gently, Andreá says, "Why don't you go and do that and talk to Doña Inés. Todos la hacen menos." Both turn and look at Doña Inés, Zenobio's mother. She stands alone in the middle of the portal wringing a pair of black gloves. Under a crownless, parachute hat her face is emaciated and passive. Her beige jacket hangs loose from her thin shoulders, her black wide hemmed skirt drags on the dirt.

"All she talks about is how well her 'bahy' can cook. I supppose if he wanted to she would let him take up sewing," says Andréa's mother.

"If he enjoys cooking, why shouldn't he cook," says Andréa turning away, at once regretting her habit of contradicting her mother, her habit of heaping all her griefs, from infancy to womanhood, on her mother's back. She knows that on top of the stored up grievances, she will lay future ones. But the thought is an old one, too familiar to explore, and almost at once she forgets her mother.

The land. She never tires of looking at the land. She could never leave the land. The house faces east. It is an oasis in the middle of the brushland. To its right, on the gnarled limbs of The Mesquite, her brushlers have roofed a shelter for guests and tables of food. The portal,

ected with corrugated aluminum of different lengths and cedar branches that still distill their piny fragrance, looks unnatural. The Mesquite reigns were the portal, the house, the yard. Only The Windmill rivals its height. It is fifty or sixty foot deep roots tap the same underground water were as The Windmill. She wants to tap that deep place, too. Maybe if the stayed still long enough her feet would worm roots into the moist wore. Her two things: The Papalote, The Windmill, that she built with her throthers' help and The Mesquite she claimed as soon as she could climb to Both connected... somehow. The trunk—a black wrung-out piece of the whose whorls and twists point toward some

revelation. She studies the gnarls and tries to unravel them. The Mesquite looks like an ancient ballet dancer doing a one-legged twirl, arms and head appealing to the sky. The trunk oozes a black gummy secretion from a lipless vagina mouth. If only she knew how to listen to the tree she would know what the mouth is screaming. She could once. She remembers gazing up at the tree and talking to it in its own language then she was about three. What is it that To Efraín is always pladitudinizing? "Beautiful women and trees are more apt to be embrujadas." Betiched. She climbs the corral again to see The Mesquite better. As the wind stirs the tree's limbs, Andréa sways

like The Papalote, Andréa sways, her hair becomes ruffled leaves. The tree is a tree. But is it just a tree. ("Ego jungo ves in matrimonium.") To the right of the portal, the partially finished house, looking like the gutted side of a cow, two walls up, a skeleton roof, the floor strewn with pieces of lumber and buckets of nails resembling the rotting entrails of the animal. Laughter erupts from a group of men sitting on two thick cedar logs and half a dozen bales of sorghum that lie sprawled in a semi-circle under the portal. She is not part of this half

circle. She is outside of it. (The priest sprinkles water over their bowed heads.) Directly west of the house are the corrals. Next to them, towering over the ranch house and corrals, is The Windmill, a permanent silver sunflower. She twists around. The Windmill, the beacon that guides the hands home from a sea of brush and cactus, is moving. The wind has turned the vane. The vane, an arrow shaft, points toward the south. On the vane, the words DE LA CRUZ shine bright in the afternoon sun. Hay algo en al aire. Something is in

the wind. The Windmill's sails rotate faster and faster as the south wind surges louder and louder, and though she sits motionless, Andréa too rotates with the sails. She doesn't have to sit up there, she is up there. She feels the guests' sly glances brush over her wild henna hair. She can hear their heads repeating over and over, "strange," "Too willful and impulsive." They would like to throw a saddle on her, dig their spurs deep into her sides, pull hard on the bridle until her mouth runs red, loses its adamancy. Or, tie her to a post like a wild heifer, tail between her legs, head caught in the trough and

milk her, Sand down her dentata to a toothless grin, Well, she's not going to laugh at their jokes and snide remarks nor smile. Already her mouth hurts from not smiling. She touches her throat, touches

pearls. The string of pearls she didn't wear. She will not wear. Her hands smooth the silk of her dress, the dress she does not wear. She will not wear dresses here. Not here—maybe in another place. No, no, no. Sweat drenches the hair in her armpits. She takes a deep breath. Another, After a while the no's become quiet like baby chicks under the mother hen. She weans her attention away from The Windmill and waits for the everydayness to fold its wings around her again. Warm and safe. Home,

A handful of steers drink at the edge of the waterhole beyond The Windmill. Half a mile beyond the waterhole is the dark green of the lagoon. Andréa blinks and half of her moves to the lagoon's edge. The greedy land slowly sucks at the meager rains it trapped in its hold during January and February. Insidious roots slither silently toward its edge and swell like thin sponges. Low dark clouds crowd the horizon. If only the wind would turn. Huisache and prickly pear fringe the lagoon. The yellow-orange flowers of the cactus and the pale gold of the huisache, the sole colors in the brown and barren land. It is April: the semidesert is in bloom. The huisache's tiny pompom blossoms move gently, dispersing their delicate perfume in the hot wind. Andréa feels the leaves' feathery softness on her face, soft like the heads of newly hatched chicks, crests still wet and yielding. A thorn scratches her cheek dispatching her other half

back. Instantly, the lagoon and huisache are far away. The men's

fury is more unbridled than ours. They can't temper their . . .well,

What do you know about females. The closest you've been to is that cow you keep in your kitchen."

"You mean his wife?" There is a roar of laughter.

"No, no," interrupts another, "it gets in their blood, there they wile vapors. When they belch they infect everyone near them."

"Yes," says another, "if a pregnant woman comes near them she'll carry and lose the child." Andréa pushes

their voices away. Her grandmother. And now she. And what else besides remembering events before they happen? She jumps off the cormal. Walks to the windmill. The rough tiles under her hands and feet feel mensely thick and deep. They can plumb the center of the world. Now she's on the platform under the blade and must be wary of wind change—it wouldn't do to get rapped on the head by the sails, by anything. She has to—no, not think, just allow the quiet to seep into her body and wait for the flash to strike 'the knowing.' Today. Zenobio. Her and. Her people. The people not as much hers as the land. Beyond

the lagoon is the monte where the cattle shelter, nibbling mesquite pods or what grass they can find. ("You will go through this ceremony, cabezóna.) The dark clouds are looming nearer. North of the
house, to the right, are three lone dark green cedars. Quiet sentinels
watching over the land. Always watching. Half a dozen vehicles are
parked under them. Some of the guests disembark from old Fords and
Chryslers. A Willys Jeep, a relic from the war that has just ended, had
earlier emptied a large family from tiny tots to aged grandparents like a
tree at first light vacating chickens that have roosted there all night. A
few guests had arrived on horseback. ("You have to go through with it.

You don't want to end up a solteróna like your aunt Ramóna?") Don
Efraín had driven his '41 Lincoln Continental Coupé. He gives more care
to it than he does his family. He is seen spitting on it then shining out the
spots of dirt with the shirt tail under his forearm, is heard whispering
love words to it. The platform

Their fury is more unbridled than ours. They can't temper their . . . well, their tempers. And they're fickle by nature."

"What do you know about females. The closest you've been to use is that cow you keep in your kitchen."

"You mean his wife?" There is a roar of laughter.

"No, no," interrupts another, "it gets in their blood, there they boil vile vapors. When they belch they infect everyone near them."

"Yes," says another, "if a pregnant woman comes near them she'll miscarry and lose the child." Andréa pushes

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trembles. Andréa blinks. Expands. The other Andréa flows down, down, The men are talking of something else now, "No one can imagine. It was so long ago. That kind of quake, thrown to the ground. The earth became a crazy dancer. It was as if a dissident orchestra had mutinied and each musician had played a different song. So long ago when the Indians were free." Back. Looking

down she sees it's only her Uncle Efrain scaling up. His arm muscles taut. Her own muscles taut. The fingers grasping the ladder become her fingers. She is beside her uncle, "You shouldn't pretend to be younger and sronger than you are," she tells him, stretching out her hand to help him.

"You're not supposed to know that," he says ignoring her hand, He gives a little hop and lands his scrawny buttocks on the platform. "Saying truths is not the thing to do, hija. People won't stand for it and men will always try to impress you, you know that."

"Why do they have to always prove themselves?" she asks.

"Sepa dios. Qué te pasa? Your mama said you were being difficult."

"Difficult is the only way I can be with her. It's all this fuss and bother. I can't decide." Andréa remains silent for a while.

"There's nothing to decide, it's all been decided for you, Like it was for me. I wouldn't go through with it a second time, though. Not for all the land in The Valley. Why in my time. . . Andréa stops listening. The land, people married for it.

"It's peaceful here, like being in another world," says Andréa. "Or another self."

"You're right, hija. It's a tiny island floating above everything."

"That was a nice gift you brought us, Tio. It must have taken you weeks to carve it."

"It took me months. Yes, that paisano was a long time coming. But how I loved working on it. Couldn't get it right until I got the idea of carving a base for it. For balance. Had to send my boys out into the brush. They came back with enough cowhorns to make a dozen road-runners and enough bones for mija to paint on for months." His daughter

had presented Andréa with a cow pelvic bone with a small hole and a thin strip of cowhide with which to hang it around her neck. On the bone carved and painted: The Mesquite with The Windmill in the background. Andréa puts her hand between her breasts. The bone is warm.

"You've got that look in your eye, my girl. What you need is some cerveza." They climb down.

Andréa takes her beer, which she isn't supposed to be drinking—the frown on her aunts' faces and the male guests' eyes tell her.

Andréa takes her beer to the corral and places it on a post.

Andréa is not anywhere near the corral or a post.

Andréa places her beer on the post where it rocks a bit but doesn't topple. She looks at the women. Andréa does not look

at the women. The bridesmaids, wide pink skirts (they wear identical dresses) swirling around their calves, cast coquettish looks at one muchacho or another as they traffic among the tables ladling out chunks of carne asada, arroz con pollo, and papas con frijoles, serving beer or lemonade or chocolate. Not much to say for their lot until they learn to say no. (Andréa's bouquet sails into the sun over the heads of the shrieking bridesmaids. Sweat pours down their faces. The flowers hit one girl in the face. Clutching them, she scrambles away laughing. The men will get hit in the face, too. Later. "Así son las cosas, mijita," her mother would say everytime Andréa complained of the restrictions marriage imposes on people.) She hasn't eaten since yesteryday noon, but that's not why it

happens. That López girl has nice tits and her. . . Andréa blinks.

herself—the self that sits atop the corral. The men sit on the bales of hay in their stiff dark cotton suits eating, their felt stetsons on the ground beside them or hanging from the mesquite branches. Some are

rolling or smoking their Buglar and drinking, discussing the drought. Now one talks of the quarantine of his cattle by the government, another cuts in with the movidas del compadre Juan. One signals to her but she pretends not to see—feeling guilty for the pretense, wanting to hit him in the face. It's only when they're bunched up in herds, alone not one of them would dare look her in the eye. Zenobio brings her a plate of food and leaves before she can say anything. She doesn't touch it—she's no longer there. The músicos are feeding their music with whiskey, fueling the songs' fire before the dance begins, their instruments beside them on the ground like crippled birds. As she picks up her beer her hands start to tingle. The flow of liquid down her throat feels like a wind

milling down her middle. Her hands are fluid. Where does the edge of the glass end and her mouth begin? Then she tries to define the "feeling" but can't and becomes afraid. She smiles. Yes, when she wants to be gone, to be that, all she has to do is look carefully, focus steadily on something and she takes leave

of herself. The women sit taking turns talking about what their offsprings do, what their maridos say. They seem to rush through their words in a desperate attempt to make up for the seclusion of their lives. Funerals and weddings, the only events that bring them together. Their men and children. Andréa wants to run away. She wants to run to her grandmother and kneeling before her, bury her face in her ample thighs, smell the smell. (Why? Because the fourth finger of the left hand is the least active finger of the hand least used. But I'm left-handed!) Her grandmother is sitting on the Windsor chair that Andréa has taken out of the house for her. She sits near but not with the women. Andréa feels removed from the women, from everyone, It seems that she inhabits a space that is not there, one impervious to the bodies milling around her, to the food and laughter. There. But not there. Here. But not here. Hearing, yet deaf to the chortles that follow the jokes, the tittering of the young in the backyard. Motionless, feeling nothing, thinking nothing, rotted to the post, not even seeming to breathe. (But señorita, you must find your certificate of haptism. I never was haptised because I never was born. Mamagrande gave birth to me in her kettle. Mama's baby was born dead. I was put in its place so she wouldn't grieve its death. Stop it, Andréa. Don't listen to her, Father, she likes to make jokes.) A world lay in that smell. She would not cook for the man, nor bear his dark moods and snotty children. She would not bolster his spirits when cattle died off like flies, nor his balls when he dried up. Zenobio is table the others, he would accept this. Another world lies out there.

self out there. "Fué un escándalo," she had overheard. "Sleeping med with la serpiente. A huge rattler. A diamond back, the most midus killer of them all. Her henna hair wild over her body, her body istening, the serpent entwined around her middle, its head peering from pubic patch, its dry scaly tail rubbing the silk of her. She lavishes on pet the warmth she cannot lavish on a man." Rubbing the depression each side of its

shout, between eye and nostril. Bibora loved that. She would take as tail between her hands and study its hollow, ring-like bulbs at the tail entering the biggest ring and the other rings gradually diminishing in size, each opening to its neighbor. Several times a year, it would shed its skin. A new one would form beneath the old one. Then the old one would be soughed off. But not completely. It would retain something of the old kin. The old tail sheath would remain loosely fitting over the new one. With each moulting another joint would be added. Some would wear away with time. If only she could shed her old skin and grow a new one as easily. She loved to feel the rapid vibrations of the tail. She'd had it since it was a baby, no longer than a foot long and thin as a tapeworm. Now it was over eight feet long and as thick as her thigh. Now she had to keep it outside in the nopal thicket-everyone in the house was terrified of it. That she had such a pet her family and the neighbors could accept more readily than the fact that the snake always returned after its nightly excursions. Even after weeks of absence. The people could stomach

her taming wild bulls and mad dogs but not a snake. On one of the tables, a head of a steer, pit barbecued, is spiraling steam out of its dull gaping

eyes up toward the branches of The Mesquite. She smells the rich odor, too rich. It's as if her nose were buried in the head. Revulsion pinches her gut. Surely it's not one of her favorites. The wild ones sometimes get caught, too. Her mother had gotten up at three in the morning, spicing it, wrapping it in burlap, burying it in the ground, and covering it

ming, at fucking the cantineras. They ogle the girls, most often the linez girl. A few eye the horses in their beautiful sleek flesh snorting from the trough or standing stiff-legged, tails swishing off flies. It is required, I will instruct you in the doctrine. Now, the nature of the prize is obedience, . . .) This marriage will save us from having to make the boys are throwing at a tree stump out of sight in the backyard. José the boys drowns out the laughter of the guests. A young boy tears the backyard chased by an enraged tom turkey. The boy runs into the rope that some girls are jumping and sprawls amid skirts and squeals and slaps. Soft bodies and soft hands slap

Andréa. She ducks, then looks around furtively to see if anyone is making. She'll have to burn prickly pear and mesquite pods to feed the mattle this summer if the rains don't come. Everyone will be upset, not much at her doing a man's work but for doing it better. A group of meeching children surround a boy in a yellow shirt dangling a string mached to the head of a horned toad over a heap of warming reducts. The horned toad squirms, body convulsing. The piercing pain in

her arms and hands almost shock her into crying out. She rolls up see seeves. The red spots on her arms were made from climbing the windmill, from the splinters. And those on the back of her hands? Finalby a boy in a purple shirt scatters the children and releases the horned that. The toad scuttles out of sight under some nopales. (The two altar boys carry the vessel of holy water to the altar, the sprinkler, and the lattle basin that will hold the ring. The priest walks behind them.)

"Hijita! Get off of there. A fine hostess you are." Andréa looks fown. Her mother again, arms crossed, a scowl on her face.

"I want to be alone, 'Amá."

"Andréa de la Cruz, get down and go greet the Flórez." The pearls around her neck bubble up and down. "They've just arrived—late as usual."

"They shouldn't have bothered."

with live coals. It has slowly simmered for ten hours. Don Sebastian, it was told, had taken the entrails of one of his dead cows into his kitchen and laying the bowels over a gridiron had lighted the stove murmuring. "That will make the bruja real hot." Hombre. Why does he fear us. The more female we are the more he fears us. Is it our strength or our

tenderness he fears? The only way not to alarm him is to acquiesce and allow him to lock us up in a room. A will indifferent to his own he cannot abide. How dare we have wills. He wants us to mother him, give him pleasure, grant all his wishes and ask for nothing. Someone puts

a hand on her shoulder. (God made them male and female.) Without looking she knows it's Zenobio. What Zenobio fears is her power to evoke in him the naked helplessness of his being. The power to make him aware that he has no control over that feeling. That to him is betrayal. But she never takes advantage of him when he is the most exposed. He knows I never will, Andréa thinks, yet. . . . Zenobio grins, puts a pomegranate in her hand then disappears. She blinks. The pink, blue and white frosted cake lies on the middle of the center table. Looking at the stiff figures of the novia y novio smiling inanely on top. She already feels herself becoming stiff. She touches her arm to reassure herself. Pan de polvo, empanadas de calabaza and pitchers of hot chocolate lie by the cake awaiting la merienda. (She stands at Zenobio's right hand. The madrinas and padrinos stand behind.) Tall glass vases with huge red and white roses from her grandmother's jardín flank each end of the table. The stain,

the chocolate stain disfigures the white

lace tablecloth.

Hearing a burst of laughter, Andréa looks

down the length of the corral.

Hearing laughter, Andréa refuses to look

Andréa looks up. The younger men congregate at one end of the corral. Astride posts, legs dangling, bottoms squirming, they pummel each others' arms as they trade witty nonsenses. She might as well be sitting right

next to them. Secretive whispers, boasts of prowess at roping,

up.

"Pórtate bien, Andréa. You must stop this bickering with your cousin."

"All right, but I didn't start it, he did, and if he makes a wrong move I'm going to flatten him." Andréa leaps off raising a little cloud of dust from which her mother backs off, the scowl, a permanent feature now.

"It's not good for women to quarrel with men, especially about . . . well, it's just not good."

"You mean it's not good for women to have opinions on anything."

In fact it's not good for women to do anything."

The Flórez approach and she greets them, but turns away from José Manuel's smirk and outstretched arms.

"Here's your wedding gift," he says smiling. She remains silent. He drops the cage he was holding out to her at her feet, almost on her toes. "The paisano will bring you good fortune." He's still smiling. Andréa stares at the bronzy green reflections in the bird's plumage.

"I have already received my good fortune." A weasel in his smile. What had ever possessd Zenobio. It's not like José Manuel has been the only other one. There's Pete and Mando. (I hereby proclaim the coming nuptials of Andréa de la Cruz and Zenobio Ríos. Those who wish to bring to light any obstacles that stand in the way of this union, let them come forward. This pre-nuptial announcement will also be made during the next two misas as befits canon law.)

"No one can have too much of a good thing," says José Manuel, weasel mustache twitching. "Fried palsano is a remedio for the itch, or so they say." Someone snickers.

"A caged thing never brings anyone luck, least of all the one who captures it," says Andréa.

How do you like that for thanks," says José Manuel, ears flattening against his skull as he surveys the guests that have bunched up around them. All avoid his beady eyes. It is to Andréa that they always come when they're short of money or water or feed for their cattle. At other times, when their cows go dry, they whisper behind her back, say that fulano saw her cast a stone over her left shoulder toward the west. Or that once she made midnight of high noon. Andréa looks men full in the face. Andréa looks

fully at him, her eyes absorb the hostility emanating from him. Her body full of it. And he knows. He and Zenobio. Innocent, trusting Zenobio. Then "the betrayal" as Zenobio dramatically called it when he told her about it. And she even more stupid—she should have warned Zenobio. Poor Zenobio, duped, seduced, betrayed. She would never forget his pain. Andréa blinks and says, "You are not welcome here." She is herself again.

"I'm always welcome at the house of my aunt."

"Make any trouble and I'll boot you off of my land."

"Your land? You're a woman-or are you? Women don't inherit."

"Vaber pedo. A fight, a fight," the boy in the yellow shirt chants. José Manuel pushes her once. Twice. As he tries to push her a third time she takes a knife out of her jeans and his hand

runs into it. Shocked, he backs off staring at the blood dripping from his hand. Don Efraín pushes his way through the group. "Now, now," he says putting his arm around Andréa and turning her around. Complete silence, all eyes riveted on the blood dripping.

"Consider Zenobio," Don Efraín whispers moving her away while at the same time José Manuel's brother takes José Manuel's arm and pulls him toward the *portal*. José Manuel muttering, "Should have given her the yerba—would of cured the chingadera out of her." A small squeak. Hand on his throat and gagging. He turns and looks at her, rust in his mouth, eyes wide with fear. In the future I will not need a knife, she thinks. She stands

holding the cage at eye level with both hands. The paisano cocks its head to one side, then the other, looking at her through first one eye then the other. Killer of rattlers. Killer of alacranes and tarantulas. The bird blinks its fierce eye, film clouding and unclouding it. The bare patch of vivid blue and red skin behind the eye fascinates her. The bird blinks again, the eye clears then films. Clear then clouded, unclouded then filmed, over and over and over. The feeling, and a tingling in her hands. The boy in the purple shirt watches her. She opens

the cage door. A beautiful cage made of bleached dry twigs and

grass stems. It doesn't move. Just the eye. Clouding and unclouding The paisano takes off down the back road in a streak so fast it seems be skimming the ground, long legs churning, tail flat. The road forks on to the right and another branch to the left. Aridrea silently urges the paisano to cross the right road from left to right. Squatting, she looks the track, two toes pointing forward, two toes pointing backwardmislead the evil spirits people say. (Cállate el hocico, Zenobio. You's asked me what time it is a hundred times in the last five minutes, Ca mate, she'll be here on time.) She looks toward the north, clenches he fist and concentrates. Lightning flashes in the north. She counts slowh and when she gets to seven there is a low rumble. She begins to coun again and at seven the wind comes sweeping over the rancho. Andre turns to find the boy in the purple shirt looking at her. "Will you teach me how to do that?" he asks. Both smile. Andréa looks for Zenobia He's not in the house. He's not with José Manuel. He's with his mother on one of the benches that have been set up to accommodate the Flórez The benches, she notices, close off

the circle. He's standing by the wedding cake laughing at something Don Efrain is saying. They stand close together. Don Efrain never should have married. It's not too late, she thinks. Not too late. Not too late "Oh, there you are, Corazón," says Don Efraín, putting his arm over Andréa's shoulder. "Oyes, paisana. I was just telling your hombre here how lucky you are."

"Ya lo sé." She doesn't want to hear anymore about 'luck.' "I'n bailing him out. And myself. We're rescuing each other, for now any way."

"What nonsense you talk sometimes, hijita. You sound more an more like your mamagrande everyday. Be careful. People do not tolerat what's different." Zenobio doesn't seem put out by their conversation she thinks, annoyed with herself and everyone. She's never seen hir flustered or even self-conscious. He always looks beautiful. She look at Don Efraín and studies the sombrero in his hand. The small hole around the crown form a pattern of inverted squares inside of which more holes bisect their angles to form a cross. Sun wrinkles spread ou ward around the eyes gazing at her. Why, he's chuckling at our situation And pitying it, she realizes. A lizard scurries out from

between her legs. She is partial to lizards. (Lo cagamos, the ring doesn't fit, says Zenobio. You didn't think it would, did you. It's not supposed to fit. Nothing is supposed to fit so don't start expecting things to, she tells him.) "Some more mescal, Tio?"

"Yes, but I'll get it. I know you want to be alone to fight with your 'novio'," he says, accentuating the novio. The music starts. The men begin moving all the tables to make room for the dancing. Everyone turns to look at Andréa and Zenobio. Dan Efraín is there beside them, urging them to the center of the portal saying, "The bride and groom always start the first dance."

"I don't want to dance with him. Nothing personal, Zeno."

"Cagáda, let's get it over with," says Zenobio, putting his arm around her. They stand motionless, freeze a smile for the photographer. They are waltzing smoothly. Her hands on his thin shoulders, his bony hands on her waist. (For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body . . . .) She is a substanceless body doing the courting being courted. He is a substanceless body doing the courting being courted.

"Why are you looking at me that way?"

"I feel like not going through with it," she says.

"Tas loca. It's the night before."

"I don't see the point of it. Just why are we doing this. So we won't have to go through a 'real' marriage? We're being hooked into it. Into doing what's 'done.'" She looks around. Others are dancing. The waltz becomes a polka, a foot-tapping, dust-raising Texas Mexican polka full of ahua's. Andréa walks away, Zenobio follows. They stand on the sidelines watching the dancers. Everyone, old and young, is dancing. The girls left without partners are trying to cajole their young brothers into dancing with them. Two seven-year old girls dance with each other. Andréa walks up to the López girl who's been turning down man after man, all bunched up around her like cattle around a salt lick, tongues falling out.

"Ven. Baila conmigo." The López girl smiles, her teeth gleam as Andréa takes her into her arms and whirls her around the circle. Andréa's head is full of the music. The strings of the guitar twang inside her skull. The beat becomes her heart beat, opening her, widening her diaphragm,

her hips expanding. Only the tune exists and Belinda López. Throbbing. Her pelvis makes circles around Belinda's navel. She shakes her head and blinks, lips glisten, jaw falls slack. Her spine is undulating. Gradually, she notices that most of the dancing couples have taken root right in the middle of the portal and are staring at the two women, lips thinned and whitening.

"Stop, let go," says Belinda López, teeth whiter than ever.

"Aw come on, you like it."

"Yes. But we're not supposed to."

"I'm tired of the millions of things we're not supposed to do," says Andréa.

"Well, you're the only one that can get away with doing things we're not supposed to do."

"Ay chulita, I'll tell you my secret. I just do them."

"But you're different. They're scared of you. Andréa la Bruja, they call you behind your back, making the sign of the cross when they say your name," she says. She breaks from Andréa's hold, running out of the circle of petrified eyes. Her palpitating breasts affront the men and bring a look of envy to the women's eyes.

Andréa walks back to Zenobio. "Qué pendejada fue ésa, Andréa?"

"I did it because I wanted to just like you want to dance with the boy in the purple shirt staring at you," she says.

"What I want and what I do are two different things."

"You're beginning to sound like them," Andréa says pointing her head at the guests, "Oh, let's stop squabbling."

"OK, I know what you're thinking. You want to run off and leave me," he says. "But we need each other, Andréa. We understand each other. No one else does. We have to stay together." And when she makes no reply, he says, "Take me with you." They put their arms around each other. The image of a tumbleweed wrapped around a post with the wind whirling past is in her mind. But who is the tumbleweed and who the post? Over Zenobio's shoulder appears the frowning face

of her mother, Andréa feels a vague sense of guilt, a diffused disbyalty. The warmth and affection and love that is her mother's due she wishes on her grandmother, on Zenobio, on Bibora, on the land.

"I wish we hadn't started building our own home yet," she tells

"It'll be finished in a month, then we'll have some privacy."

"You don't know my mother."

"Querida, it won't matter. We can put up with her for a month.

And she with us."

"Or, we can skip out. It's not just her, Zeno, it's me. And it's you. We don't fit here. So maybe we won't fit anywhere else, but maybe we well. Maybe there's a place for people like us somewhere."

"You mean in the white world?"

"I don't know. Zenobio, don't look like that."

"I want you to stop talking like this. I'm hungry. Let's go eat."

"You go, I'm not hungry. I'm going to talk to Mamagrande."

Her grandmother is sitting on a bench under The Windmill, arms on her lap, quietly rocking.

"I was waiting for you, mijita." They remain silent. Silence—their way of talking. Finally her grandmother says, "It's a closeness, a connection."

"Yes," says Andréa, "with people and things. But only with certain people and certain things at certain times. It's frightening."

"Only because it's new and unfamiliar. Soon it will become comfortable and in time indispensable."

"I don't mean that. I mean others' fear of it and my fear of their fear. Why do I seem evil to them?"

"Because you are wholly yourself. *That* terrifies people who are prisoners of others' upbringing, who are molded by others," says her grandmother.

"I don't know what to believe, It's terrible! I don't want it. It means being alone."

"Which? Tu poder o tu querer?"

"Both. Don't the two go together, Mamagrande?" asks Andréa,

Andréa walks back toward the portal, then turns to go back to the corral. A small group has gathered around José Manuel. He playfully puts a pair of pants over a heifer's head, one of the ladinas. He opens the gate and hits her sharply on the shanks. Blinded she whirls around and around trying to shake off the cloth over her eyes. Frightened and enraged she runs straight toward Andréa. From the guests—an audible sucking in of air. The heifer is almost on top of Andréa. Andréa jerks the pants off her horns. The animal stops dead in her tracks, wild-eyed spewing rivulets of saliva. Andréa whispers to her and walks into the corral. The wild heifer follows her meekly. Andréa turns and locks the gate. The circle is complete. She ignores the remarks addressed to her repeating to herself, It is not a sickness, nor is it evil. Another melody attaches to the first. I must do it I must do it, An incantation to ward off.... A white glare

lays over eveything like a fine dust. Another world, a different one, superimposed over the normal one. The land, the people, everything takes on a fused quality. Like figures carved out of the same white rock. What was it like before? Where's the Andréa that left her bed that morning? What was the dream about that woke her up?

She is standing on the banks of a river holding a bucket. She fishes by dropping it into the water and scooping it up. At first she catches a big beautiful paisano. She knows it's a rare one. She throws it back into the river. It metamophoses into Bibora, her pet snake. Bibora stands on the water flicking her tongue, then with a rattle of her tail, turns and swims for the shore. Once on land, she crawls toward the west. Andréa wakes up saying to herself, a dream about my future.

She hurries back to the portal and sits down beside Zenobio. (And the two shall become one. And they shall be one flesh.) who has multiplied and his several selves fan out around him like cards held in a hand. The physical Zenobio draws the others. (I pronounce you man and . . . .) These others are Zenobios that she's never met. She feels a tightness in

her head and a great wind in her bones.

"Pa'donde vas?" Zenobio asks when she starts to leave.

"Away from here."

She finds herself once more on top of The Windmill. She doesn remember climbing up.

The world gradually settles down around her, forming a different rockbed. There is nothing that she can compare the feeling with—except maybe dreams. She puts her hands on her temples and presses hard. It must all be part of what could have been or what is, she thinks. The vane now points toward the west. I am that I am. The paisano is a bird of good omen. She descends

from The Windmill and walks slowly to the portal. She dips a broom sprig in water. A fine rain begins to fall. The feathers of an eagle consume all other feathers if they're mixed together. Leaning against the gnarled Mesquite, hair touching some of its leaves, she begins to bid the guests goodbye.

1976

## CHRYSTOS

## FOR SHAROL GRAVES

deep breath inhale the drums feet begin we sway in fringed shawls sparkling beadwork deerskin leggings to the voice of the South Drum singing

gently tin cones tingle whispers of women

as we wheel around the sun

wearing jewel colored velvet shirts - moccasins only for pow wows holding feather fans - family blankets

beyond us the men leap & prance shaking bells their roaches bob we're a circle apart

within

first time we've danced together

in the distance big silver cans steam with stew drunks reel children eat fry bread dripping with butter & honey

our feet pass over the earth with soft thuds your ofter fur braids swish

you worked all year on the thunderbird belt & ribbonwork skirt for this day

your beauty echoes

beyond drums

holds me here now

dancing with you washed in light over us canvas circles whirl

we step into

the still center

of a friendship drum

### ACRYLIC FOR LEE

we were swimming in the public pool her cropped hair a dead giveaway in girls & boys land where fingernail polish reigns supreme

she'd offered to drive me regularly because it helps my bad back we came to rest at one end as the others

splashed laps

Half afraid of my own question I said

Are we friends yet

or is it still too early?

She looked intently into the water answered

Yeah, it's too early

& swam off

Later as we dressed we glanced shyly at each other's bodies didn't admit it

not from desire but curiosity our lovers were once lovers so here we are

juxtaposed naked & wet & trembling for all the clean cut American reasons connected with swimming pools

neither of us in the least American

her darkness foreign, mine native

our lovers fair freckly pink & white with green eyes, sandy hair they lived together for eight years

on this

& swimming every afternoon we're attempting

to build a friendship which shows constant sign of drowning for lack of training

it pains me that she had to get a dog to speak her own language because her family have cut her off for being queer I don't even know

my language never heard my father speak it

have looked in musty volumes of natural history for my ancestors she drinks too much dark beer or gin when they have the money I write

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it's the same thing a sloshing of words against that loneliness special to those with no home an erased & bloody path we made her something beautiful for her birthday she wept I wept at her tears which we both hid it seems making her something has helped

if I was painting our portrait I'd concentrate on illuminating
the negative space with strange designs
our eyes would be averted
but our hands would touch
as though by accident & the closeness
of the frame which pushed us unrelated
together

## MARILYN HACKER

### SATURDAY NIGHT BILE

Multiple relationships? I like waking up mornings in a row, doing it the fifth time in two days. Somebody always sounds like a dentist advocating root-canal. Multiple relationships: dates to meet, tentative as teen-agers. Perennial courtship, I don't like courtship; its pleasures are intense but febrile. I like kitchen pleasures: familiar egg-beater. third cup of coffee, not cringing when the phone rings. Three in one bed: hard to work it, worth it when it works. One in three beds: twelve potential animosities, Saturday night bile,

## BARBARA T. KERR and MIRTHA N. QUINTANALES

# THE COMPLEXITY OF DESIRE: CONVERSATIONS ON SEXUALITY AND DIFFERENCE

Mirtha: I really believe that the bottom line in any discussion that we have about sexuality is about being satisfied, being happy. I'm not talking about the "pleasure principle," get off any way you can, or the "do your own thing" at the expense of other people. I'm talking about the kind of satisfaction and happiness that comes from being an integrated human being, in touch with all your "parts," aware of your needs and desires, sensitive to those of others.

I wouldn't say that sexuality is "central" to our lives, but it's very important. You discover this when things aren't "right." It affects everything—down to your sense of self. I remember what it was like when I thought I'd never be with a woman. It got to the point where I began to feel like a disembodied soul. Also, last year, for example, when I chose to be celibate for a while, I found that it was almost impossible to have any kind of physical experience with anyone besides the old "lesbian bear hug," or the massage. My body felt thirsty continuously, it almost ached, and I felt like crying a lot. I was not satisfied, you know? You're touching but you're not really touching?

Barbara: It was a physical touch, but not an emotional touch.

Mirtha: Right. It was as if there was nothing in between genital sex and this almost impersonal contact. I finally figured out that for me, sensuality, sexuality and intimacy meant different things than for many of the women I was spending time with—mostly non-Latinas. This became clearer to me after hanging out with a Latina friend. We were lying in bed talking and unselfconsciously touching each other—legs, thighs, asses. It was affectionate, sensuous, intimate and satisfying. At the same time, emotion and extensive touching did not automatically mean "sex." With somebody else I may have been accused of being a "tease." Since then I have discovered that this incident was not an exception, I have thought a great deal about these experiences and what they imply in terms of how people of very different backgrounds relate to each other.

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Like many other Latinas I've talked to, I grew up having a whole lot of physical intimacy with people, especially women. Though my father was, and continues to be, a very important figure in my life, my world as a child was primarily composed of my mother, my grandmother, my great aunts, aunts—my mother's sisters, female cousins and neighbors and family friends all doting on me: my parents' first child. I remember curling up in my grandmother's lap, as she rocked herself in her rocking chair and chatted with the other women in the family; hugging and kissing one of my aunts as she stood by the sink doing the dishes; sleeping with my girl cousins; bathing with my girlfriends. There was always a woman to be close to. So for me, physical affection and emotional closeness have come to mean "security." For others who have had different growing-up experiences, it may mean something else. "Invasion," for instance. What do we do when we confront each other?

Barbara: You've gotta get across that gap. My growing up situation was one where touching did mean "invasion," clearly. Now, I also grew up in a female-dominated environment, but it was very different from yours. My mother, my grandmother and my aunt were very powerful women, very "present" in anything they were involved in, while their husbands were almost shadow figures.

I was an only child and both my parents had died by the time I was eight, and I went to live with my seventy-year-old grandmother. She was not the sweet-little-old-lady type. She was strong-minded, independent, tough, stoic, and reserved—and in many ways a good role-model for me. But she was at that stage in her life when she was starting to need to be taken care of. Since it was just her and me, I felt like I had to be an adult, like I had to grow up too fast. This was partly due to the fact that in my family there wasn't the kind of personal interaction and support that you were talking about, and there certainly wasn't anyone else around. We didn't even have neighbors during the winter. We lived in a very small town, a summer resort where they still turn off the traffic lights when the crowds leave after Labor Day. I didn't have that many playmates; there just weren't that many kids my age, and my three boy cousins who lived twelve blocks away were all too old to be my friends.

At my aunt and uncle's house everything always seemed pretty stiff and formal and there was an extra layer of animosity between my grandmother and them because my uncle had married out-of-the-faith: "we" were Episcopal and my aunt was Catholic. Between all of us, caring was never expressed through touching, but through doing pragmatic, practical favors or some work that was needed. When there was touching, it almost seemed ritualized; it happened mostly as part of an "occasion." Like you go to visit for Thanksgiving Dinner, you walk in the door and get the requisite hug. Then you get a perfunctory kiss when you leave. That was about it for physical interaction. At best, touching was a duty. Mostly I learned that emotional distance was the way you "survived." Anything less was a sign of weakness. I've gone through a lot of changes since then, but if you and I had met five or ten years ago and gone out together, your touching me in your friendly, casual way would have made me jump three feet.

Mirtha: Right! I've had that experience. And the more folks jumped, the more scared I got, because for me not touching means "rejection." It's been very hard on me—this realization that being affectionate in this country can be so risky. I don't know if I could ever get used to having people jump three feet every time I go near them.

Barbara: Maybe the problem is a lack of communication on some level.

Mirtha: Yeah, in part. But two people could tell each other how they feel and why and still not be able to come to a satisfactory solution because the needs are so . . . different. I may come to understand that your jumping three feet has nothing to do with me being a yucky person (laughs). I may also come to understand that you don't consider me a "lech" just may also come to understand that you don't consider me a "lech" just because I want to touch you a lot. But I'd still need a great deal of physical contact, and not having it would make me feel like I'm not getting something I need to be happy. And you would probably need more separateness, more space around you, and not having it would make you feel you're not getting something you need. And I'm not sure about how deep these different needs are, not sure we could really change them, even if we wanted to . . . Boy, we would make a rather sad couple.

Barbara: Oh, it's so bleak! Humm . . . you know, that sounds like some of what was going on in a relationship with a former lover. She had a very strong need to touch and my needs didn't match it. Now, over the years I've worked at having more physical and emotional closeness with friends and lovers, because I figured out that it felt good. It can be nourishing and calming, but this woman always seemed to feel that I was "holding back." It caused a bunch of hassles between us, because my not needing to touch as much, be as "emotional," or sexual as much, or physically responsive in ways she expected, or in ways that were satisfying to her, she would interpret as my not being "open." The high level of emotional and physical interaction she wanted made me feel crowded and

made my skin crawl. I liked this woman and I cared for her, but mon-verbal, gut-level dynamic between us was such a problem. Sometimes I'd have such extreme reactions to her needs—feelings of suffocation—that I'd sort of become a hermit. I'd need to be totally alone and unter for long periods of time in order to feel like I was altogether again and back in one piece. Does this sound crazy? No matter how much we alked about it, I simply, physically, emotionally could not meet her meds and she couldn't meet mine.

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Another area where I've experienced difficulties in being sexual people is that of role-playing. What I hear most often in the women's munity is that lesbian feminists either do not or should not "play thes." This seems very odd to me. I mean, how is it, then, that women how to approach other women, how to court them, how to make to them, how to begin, maintain and end relationships with them so on? Since we do manage to find each other and form intimate and relationships regularly, I have to assume that this doesn't appen in a vacuum. We don't just roll around and randomly bump into other like balls on a pool table. We must be getting some information somewhere, and, obviously, using it as a guide to our actions. The trying to figure out how we do, in fact, conduct our sexual lives as belons.

I can't really speak for everyone, but I know that in my case, retality is still very much tangled up with gender roles. I grew up in a still where gender roles are very polarized, and everything under the is thought to have a gender. This world view is even in the language. It know, a sofa is masculine, a shoe is masculine...

Barbara: A bed is feminine . . .

when I refer to myself as androgynous, I go back and forth still, and forth, between one pole and the other, between masculine and minine, masculine and feminine. From the way I dress to how I feel work, domesticity, my place in the world, my role in bed. That is way of being androgynous. If the two elements are not there, both myself and in my interactions with people, I get confused. I feel something is missing or like things are out of balance.

I see roles and androgyny very differently. I don't really under-

stand this jumping from pole-to-pole with nothing in between. For me, roles exist along a continuum, with many gradations from hard butch to ultra-femme. I see myself as more butch than femme, although I tend to place myself close to the center, an androgynous center. But in terms of looks, in terms of body type, I'd say I'm definitely more butch than femme. I don't know how many times I've been called "sir" or "mister" in the check-out line at the supermarket, When I'm in a crowd of women, lesbians, I find that I often like the "look" of butchy women. And in a way I am attracted to these women, but we rarely "connect." When I think back about the women I've been involved with, it's clear that they have almost always been femme (unless they were something I'd call a "soft butch"). Here again, I'm not talking about an extreme opposite like ultra-femme, but usually I'll become involved with someone who's just over the center line, the femme side of that androgynous middle ground.

Mirtha: The kind of androgyny that you're talking about is a problem for me. There seems to be such a blending of elements that I can't distinguish them anymore. The "middle ground" feels almost asexual to me, close to what I'd think of as "neuter." I really can't relate to it.

When I attend meetings or other events in the lesbian feminist community I often find myself getting bored or sleepy staring at a sea of people looking pretty much alike, with the same kind of "androgynous" dyke outfit: blue jeans, flannel shirts, or T-shirts, vests, hiking boots, sneakers, Birkenstock sandals . . . that seems to be the norm. I am reminded of pre-puhescent youngsters—not too many people in skirts, dresses, fancy shoes, wearing jewelry, perfume or make-up. I think those things would be considered symbolic of acquiescence to male standards of beauty, to Madison Avenue—perhaps evidence of a lack of feminist consciousness, lack of awareness for the need for safety in the streets. After all, who could run from an assailant wearing high heels?

The messages behind the norm seem to be: be aware, look out for signs of male oppression, guard and protect yourself from sexism in any form, and "fight back." That seems to be reasonable enough. But the analysis that I have been able to extract from this ideology is that role-playing on the basis of gender-differences (masculinity/femininity) is by definition synonymous with sexism, that gender, as a socially constructed category which recognizes two "kinds of people"—men and women—is again, by definition, "oppressive."

This equation makes no sense to me. It's like saying that skin-color differences among people, or even the creation of conceptual categories Taces") on the basis of these differences, somehow constitutes "racism."

I think that the ideology that supports most kinds of social oppression—

exism, heterosexism, racism and so forth—is not, "We have the right to

tale because we're different," but rather, "We have the right to rule be
ease we are better."

Up until very recently, my sleepy boredom would lead to panic. What's wrong with me that I find it so difficult to get interested?" Again, it took being in the same place with other Latina lesbian feminists for me to gain a sense of perspective on my difficulties. I remember this one party . . . so many Cuban and Puerto Rican women . . . I was so excited I wanted to cry. Everything "felt right"—the music, the color, the funky clothes, the perfume, the way everyone would come up really dose and touch. We were almost inhaling each other. It was cold and mainy that night, but it felt so warm . . . and I felt so sexual. For the first time in my life, I got a clear sense of the kind of social context I need to really be able to experience my sexuality as an integral and vital part of myself—out of as well as in the bedroom. Before, I had often found myself just going through the motions; for the most part, feeling nothing.

But being in that room with other Latinas was so different and powerful! The women did not look or act like caricature versions of men and women, but you could recognize and feel the pleasurable tensions of the feminine and masculine dynamics defying uniformity and predominance of either "mode." There seemed to be such flexibility. You could pick out any one woman, catch her in action, and observe the way she looked and how she acted: well-dressed, if casually; hair obviously styled; jewelry around her neck, fingers, wrists, ears. As she walked near you, you could smell the scent of oils mixing with her own scent. You could watch her go up to another woman, put her arms around her shoulders and invite her to dance and lead. A while later you could observe the very same woman respond, accept the advances of another woman, see her body flushing, a little smile forming in the corner of her mouth. I think anyone would have been hard pressed to pick out the butches and femmes, because there weren't any, though the elements of Latin femininity and masculinity were there and overt. Obviously, our so-called "heterosexual legacy" could and was being used positively and creatively by this particular group of women.

Barbara: That reminds me of something I became aware of a few years ago. I'd gotten tired of going everywhere and only wearing my standard uniform, which was just like you described: jeans and a flannel shirt. I

did this just to please myself and to make me feel good, but people's responses to me were a revelation. I'd show up at some event, a concert or a party, dressed in some good wool pants, real shoes instead of sneakers, a nice shirt, maybe a vest and a blazer. Now I know this might be normal everyday wear for some people, but for me it was being dressed up. So I'd go to the event and stand around and talk to women—and I want to say these were mostly white women—but all of a sudden their reactions to me were very different. And it all felt very sexual. I could feel the difference and I didn't really understand it. These women were women I'd known for years, though some hardly more than to say "hi" to, but all at once they were coming up to me, coming on to me, and chatting up a storm.

I know I wasn't dreaming this because after I figured out what I thought was going on, that it was the way I looked. I played with it to really check it out. Some events I'd go to in jeans and others I'd dress up for. When I was in jeans, the women who'd previously come up to me and talked to me like I was their long lost friend . . . well, they'd practically ignore me. Then, when I'd dress up again, there they would be, right up against me. It had to be the clothes, the way I looked, because there weren't any other factors which had changed that would have affected the nature of my relationships with these particular women.

It makes me wonder what else is going on behind this dyke dress code, beyond the desire for comfortable clothing and safety. I think it has been an act of resistance or defiance in the past and in some cases still is, but within the lesbian feminist community I think it's become an expression of conformity. It can be a political fashion: anti-hierarchical and downwardly mobile. I also think that the sameness of dress is a way not to call attention to ourselves as individuals, while at the same time it provides us with a group visual identity-at least for those who do or want to fit in. But recently it has seemed to me that the dress code has become a way to mask differences, and reinforce the Myth of the American Melting Pot. Mostly, it's made me think of so many of the values I was raised with. "Be pragmatic, wear practical clothing, sensible shoes." I was taught about the "advantages" of muted colors and especially of grey -they "blend in" (laughs). As a result, for years all the clothes in my closet were conservatively cut and in various shades of grey or beige or their hybrid, "greige." As for behavior, it was always, "Keep it toned down. Don't be loud, emotional, flashy, obvious. Don't do anything to rock the boat. And for God's sake, don't look or act 'suggestive,' because people will think you're 'cheap,' a slut."

For all the talk about how "women's culture" is so revolutionary and different from patriarchy, a lot of it doesn't feel very different to me. I often feel like the attitudes and perspectives have pretty strong mots in my cultural heritage: conservative, white, middle-class, patriotic and very Protestant Christianity. It's just that the old values and taboos have been transposed and renamed and therefore made okay.

When it comes to sexuality it seems to me that our feminist veries is often still defined against a negative base, you know, what we wildn't do. It's like I keep hearing my grandmother telling me, "That's saty. Take your hands away from there." The "don't do this/don't do this writing over the major way sex has been talked about in minist writing over the past few years, and especially in anti-porn saterial. As I see it, the awareness of victimization and the fear of harm been so well developed, that we've wound up putting on a pedestal that few activities we can't possibly be hurt by. I want to be safe too, there's a way that such a continuously protective, defensive stance is making me feel dead inside. Having sex is starting to sound too grim, It's like we've got to be so very careful that even robust, tumble-around, masing, aggressive sex, for instance, becomes too scary because of its potential for harm. Jeez, I'm not that fragile!

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Barbara: You were saying earlier that gender doesn't equal sexism, but, most societies, men do have power over women. There are ways in which our politics have confused gender with power itself. Eventually, wer winds up on the negative side of the equation. It works out like his: power equals male because men have had all the power. But they've med it badly: therefore, power equals "bad." In contrast, female, by "mature," must equal "good"; but because women have been excluded from power or have felt powerless, this powerlessness somehow becomes merpreted as "good," So the underlying feeling I get is, "Oh poor us, we're such powerless women, we're pathetic victims of these horrid male oppressors who are wielding their bad, evil power against us." I mink this trend in feminist politics is becoming more explicit and is leading us in circles. We seem to help perpetuate the image of women as metims even though we say we're not. There's a way this progression in minking is like saying we're stuck in this role, and a lot of the time we wind up wallowing in it, in feeling powerless. It's the glory of martyr-And when you step back and lift up a corner of this ideologywhich is part of a matriarchal supremacist argument-what you see is good old-fashioned biological determinism, simply reversed.

Our political values affect our sexuality and how we are able or unable to talk about sex, but it comes out in all sorts of ways. Right off the top it makes me think about the rhetoric surrounding penetration: that it's a male activity, so it's bad, it's not pleasurable for any woman—and, in fact, is symbolic of, or even synonymous with, rape. This idea runs counter to all the work feminists were doing not so long ago to establish clear distinctions between rape and consensual heterosexual intercourse.

Mirtha: I agree with you that current feminist sexual politics is very negative and often puts down some of our sexual preferences as P.I. and therefore undesirable, even harmful. And of course this politic is bound to affect all of us who consider ourselves feminists.

But the critical issue for me regarding the politics of sexuality is that as a Latina lesbian living in the U.S., I do not really have much of an opportunity to examine what constitutes sexual conformity and sexual deviance in my own culture, in my own ethnic community, and how that may affect my own values, attitudes, sexual life and politics. There is virtually no dialogue on the subject anywhere and I, like other Latina and Third World Women, especially lesbians, are quite in the dark about what we're up against besides negative feminist sexual politics.

The feminist dialogue on sexuality-regardless of what views are expressed (pro or against s/m, for instance) is almost exclusively in reference to white, middle-class, anglo-saxon, Protestant or Catholic values and lifestyles. Now, I know that since I am a lesbian and a feminist in this country and relate to other white American lesbians and feminists, the dialogue does have something to do with me. But mostly what it has to do with me is give me a sense of how politics may "come down on me," support or condemn my opinions within the confines set by a dialogue which is essentially not my own. And that is my criticism of current feminist sexual politics—that it leaves no room for Third World Women's sexual issues.

But, yeah, insofar as we are discussing what feminist sexual politics condemn rather than what it leaves out, I think that one of the issues that I find most problematic is that of dealing with gender-based roles specifically in the bedroom. If, as you say, anything that is associated with "masculinity" is automatically considered oppressive, then I think we, as sexually active lesbians, have a big "problem in our hands" (so to speak).

If women's role in bed has essentially been conceived and constructed as "passive," for instance, what happens where two women want to be sexual with each other? What are the implications of either one of them becoming "aggressive" . . . "like a man." I don't know about you, but I have discovered that when many of us get down to the nitty-gritty business of "sex" past the early days of a romantic love affair, things become confusing: who shall do what to whom, when, how often? And "are we being oppressive?" becomes the question.

Barbara: It's also the You-do-it-to-me-and-then-I'll-do-it-to-you School of Thought. It's a kind of "structured" attempt at equality or mutuality. At times that's been good for me, especially when I first came out. I guess it was a way I could guarantee that I'd be satisfied sexually and not have to constantly resort to masturbation after the other person got off and fell asleep. But I feel like I've gotten past the fear that I'll never "get mine."

I remember pretty clearly when my feelings began to change—when I started to loosen up. Even after coming out, I was still pretty passive when it came to sex, and relationships. I'd never initiate anything or say what I wanted. Actually, I thought I was getting what I wanted: women. and sweetness and orgasms-because that's what I hadn't had up until then. I didn't think there was anything more, but I was often very listless in bed, sort of like that "sleepy boredom" you mentioned. I was getting and not getting at the same time. Then about four years ago, a woman I'd been seeing . . . we got into some wrestling while we were making love. It was out of the blue and it was the first time something like that happened to me and I loved it. I really loved it! The energy, the struggle and the firmness of her touch was so exciting. The next morning I remember feeling embarrassed and a little uneasy, but I managed to blurt out, "That was great last night!" Well, she just kind of brushed off what I said and what had happened; it didn't go anywhere or mean anything to her I guess. But it was instantly obvious to me that it was this active/ aggressive thing that I liked. I felt like I "woke up." It took me a couple of years, some experimenting and a lot of talking with different people until I finally figured out that, "Oh yeah, I don't have to sit around and wait for somebody to come along and tap me on the shoulder. There are things that I'm finding out that I want, that I enjoy, and I can go after them." And all of this is interesting because, even though on some levels I know I can go after what I want, I still find it very difficult to come on to somebody (laughs), and to really say what I want.

Mirtha: That's something that I find easy to do, but that I have gotten a

great deal of flak about. I would go out there and ask, and "push." Then what would happen is that I'd be told, "You're too fast. You're too aggressive. You're too intense (read: "You're too much like a man"). The message was: "It isn't okay to go after it," even if we're both interested, because—now someone actually told me this—"Women are slow: you've got to sort of do it in a round about way. . . . " I'd feel manipulated since I'd never be told point-blank, "no" or "stop" or "I don't want to make love with you." But I'd be kept in a state of "frustrated libido" with the "goodies" dangled in front of me like the proverbial carrot. Very controlling on her part, wouldn't you say?

Barbara: Maybe she's interested, but she's afraid of being out of control. Okay, look, this is my interpretation: you're being aggressive and she is maybe, number one, turned on by you; number two, turned on by your aggressiveness. But there's this fear of being out of control so that's why there are all of these little blocks that get set up, "I don' know you," or, "Take your hands away from there." I think that's part of the issue of control and power in sex. You know, examining the questions: Why is power bad? Why is losing control or relinquishing control bad? We're all so goddamned controlled!

Mirtha: I understand someone being afraid of losing control. What I don't understand is why my actions are seen as controlling. I am just being assertive, expressing my feelings. And I certainly feel vulnerable.

Barbara: Well, maybe she interprets your assertiveness as "invasion." Actually, I have never perceived someone approaching me in that way as being vulnerable. I've seen them coming at me, coming after me, and they're gonna get something from me if I don't watch out. Am I going to let them? Do I want to "give it up"?

Mirtha: Right . . .

Barbara: (laughs) No. I don't. I don't want to lose control,

Mirtha: My experience is different. Someone pursuing me is communicating to me that she's interested in me. She's admitting to being under the effect of my charms (laughs). Now that's affirming; I'm desirable. And in being assertive, she's being vulnerable. I could reject her—but obviously someone taking the risk of being open about her wishes and desires is saying something positive about herself: she is confident about having something to offer, about being able to please. That's how I feel about myself when I say to somebody, "Hey, you turn me on."

But negative reactions to my being sexually assertive have finally resulted in my stopping to come on to people in the way that is most natural for me. Who wants to be rejected all the time? Yet if I'm interested in somebody and I perceive that there's a connection between us, as extraordinarily painful to just sit there and bite my lips. I find it very demeaning and humiliating not to be able to express or act on my feelings. That's probably one of the most critical issues in love-making, how we deal with the so-called "power dynamic." Do we have to think in terms of and act as if the exchange were about "taking over," "giving ap"? Why not think of it in terms of becoming mutually vulnerable, nutually powerful?

Barbara: But not everyone interpets this exchange as one where power an flow in both directions and where vulnerability is positive. Assertion of power is often seen as an abuse of power, and vulnerability as having see's integrity and safety stripped away.

witha: Yeah, I think it's hard for many of us to risk intimacy (which I mink mutual vulnerability is about), because what we tend to learn sowing up, dealing with men, dealing with those who are above us in the social hierarchy is that abuse is not only possible, but a regular feature in sur lives.

Barbara: We get paralyzed by the fear of rape, of falling into someone se's power and being unsafely out of control . . .

parded stance. Paranoia wears me down. I have to be able to trust seeple trusting is not what hurts. Actually, I think it is when we let our mor down that we become sensitive to people, and more able to really who means well and who doesn't, who acts with our best interests in mind, and who doesn't . . .

Reflecting on my experience, it's clear that making myself emolimitally vulnerable is relatively easy and safe. But there's an area where
have had difficulties, and that's the area of actual physical arousal. Up
mill fairly recently I found it very hard to get turned on physically—
mean I would feel attracted to someone, open to her emotionally, and
tonce affection became deliberate "foreplay," my body would "fail"
My skin would become almost completely desensitized, all secretions
wild stop, and gradually the excitement would disappear. Orgasm was
amost always impossible to achieve. This became such a problem in my
mill life, that I finally said to myelf: "I've got to stop making love with

anyone until I figure what is going on and what it is I need to change to have satisfying sexual relationships."

What finally motivated me to be celibate was an experience I had with a woman I hardly knew. We were both attracted to each other and so we decided, "Why not?" It was awful. But it gave me the first insight into the nature of my "problem." After our unsuccessful attempt at enjoying ourselves we got into a shouting match. I kept telling her she wasn't being open, and she kept tell me I wasn't being open . . . Finally it hit me! Being open had a different meaning for each of us. Open to me meant being emotionally communicative. Open to her meant being physically communicative. These were our "bottom lines" for risking mutual vulnerability, risking intimacy . . . and enjoying sex.

Barbara: So in a way someone could be saying to you, "Be vulnerable," and you'd say, "But I'm being vulnerable." And you could be saying to her, "Be vulnerable," and she'd say, "But . . . I'm being vulnerable." She'd be there with her legs open and you'd be there with your guts hanging out.

Mirtha: Right. Yeah, it's really strange.

Barbara: It's just not obvious to each other, because the way vulnerability works out for each of you is very different—even though you say you want the same thing.

I want to point out right here that you and I are creating the value that vulnerability is an important component of a fulfilling sexual interaction. This might not be true for everyone. But since that's our given for the moment, then the question is: How do we get or give permission (if that's what it takes) to make ourselves vulnerable in a sexual context? For you a large part of what's involved is being emotionally open, for me it has a lot to do with knowing the other person well. Building trust, and to some extent, having similar interests outside the bedroom, you know, being able to talk to the other person about all the things that interest me . . . Though this isn't always true. In some instances I've met people towards whom I've had a totally irrational and electric and very "animal" sexual response. Then the question becomes: "Who cares about talking? Where's the bed?" When this has happened, "permission-giving" as I usually think of it has been absent.

Mirtha: Wait a minute. I think there is a lack of understanding here. My needing a greater emotional exchange in sexual activity than you do in no

may means that I somehow don't need to know my partner well, or trust ber, or share many other interests with her. Nor is it "passion" in and of itself that makes me trust anyone. There are plenty of "passionate" folks set there I wouldn't go near, let alone get sexually aroused by or involved with! But it is true that I wouldn't really trust someone who is not emotionally open with me or with whom I can't be emotionally open for some reason. So open emotional communication is a necessary but not sufficient element in what I consider a good and satisfying sexual relationship, or even encounter.

Barbara: I wasn't assuming you were a "passion junky" or anything like that. Mostly I was trying to describe the things that make me feel secure and not "invaded." I guess I was prioritizing for myself what I generally need or look for before I can "let down my guard." This is mixed up for me because in some ways what I come up with are ideals. It's like trying to figure out "what I'd like," but I know from different experiences it doesn't always work out this way.

For instance, there's a woman that I have an ongoing, but very intermittent sexual relationship with. We live in different cities, have different lives, interests, never write letters or call each other, except to notify the other when we're going to be in town. For me, the fundamentals (whatever they are) are absent for a "primary lover," "couple," or "partner" relationship to ever exist between us. Our relationship is RAW SEX. That's what we do when we get together, we fuck like crazy. And "'s made us both feel a little nuts, because I think we both have the ideal that we should have a broader, more complex friendship relationship. We've actually declared moratoriums on sex so that it won't get in the way of our talking! We tell each other, "I want to get to know you better." But even when we've gone out to dinner to "socialize and talk." we sit there saying things like, "I want to rip your clothes off and ravish your body." This has been going on for over two years and I keep trying to explain it to people: it's something about her skin. When I'm near her or touch her, all my protective defenses short-circuit and I could care less. I don't feel invaded by her.

It's this relationship along with others in the past few years which have made me feel that sex can be different with different people, and that my feelings and what the sex means to me can change a whole lot. It's not that I might be doing anything especially different, like making love in the shower or on the ground out in the woods. Sometimes it's much more intangible than that. So when I think about all the arguments

about what a "feminist" sexuality "is," I resist the trend to "define" it. What I do see when I look around is a big push to classify different kinds of activities and attach a range of values to them. And the more this goes on, the more I don't seem to qualify as "feminist." Yet I'll be damned if I can see what the categories have to do with who I am, my experiences, at what level my consciousness is at, what kind of political work I do or how I treat people!

Mirtha; You sound angry.

Barbara: I am angry.

\* + +

Mirtha: I think that the kind of sexual activities we are interested in having and that we find most pleasurable have a lot do do with what we have learned to eroticize. That can be anything from emotion itself, to other sensations, to all sorts of objects or things. For me, emotion is undoubtedly eroticized. And, in a way, functions like a fetish . . . like I was saying earlier, if it is not there, I simply cannot "get off."

Barbara: I remember a conversation I once had about fetishes with a friend of mine. She pulled out a regular Western-cut shirt with snap buttons and said, "This is real erotic to me." She said, "I love it. I love the way it's cut. I love the way it feels on my body, and I love to hear the buttons unsnap." It took me awhile to appreciate that because I simply couldn't imagine that shirt being a turn-on. It seemed so dull. There are different fabrics and clothes that turn me on, but they are usually smooth, silky material, like satin or velvet. Eventually I had to say to myself, "Well, something that looks mundane to me and everyday and blah and boring gets somebody else off."

I had to realize that that's just as valid as the things I like which, in fact, other people have given me a hard time about. You know, like sleazy underwear. I've had friends say to me, "God, why do you want to run around in that?" Or, "You've bought into patriarchal definitions of what is supposed to be crotic." The problem with that, though, is that it is erotic for me. I used to be pretty paranoid about it, and I still am, somewhat, but I've also found that there are a lot of other women with all sorts of goodies stuffed in their bottom drawers that they never talk about cause they'd catch a lot of shit for it. At least it's helped me stop feeling like so much of a kook. But I've also spent a couple of years really looking at myself sexually and what it means for me and what I get

of it and I've come to the conclusion that the lacy stuff is no big

All this stuff led me to literally start looking in my closet at a lot my clothes that I've bought over the years and I've begun to realize:

Lyeah, this is crotic to me, and so is that, and that blouse I bought years ago that I've never worn because it's just not the kind of set I wear . . . I don't intend to get rid of it because there's something to that I really like. All of these things, I've figured out, are a kind fetish for me. I'm not saying that I absolutely must have any of it sent for me to have good sex—though I do know people for whom the sent there are some things that I find erotic which I like to with when the mood is right.

while what you're saying about yourself is true for me also, though I mak in a more generalized way. I'm turned on by bright colors, highly extured fabrics like raw cotton and silk. High piled rugs, wooden bookness full of books, artwork on the walls. The scent of flowers, oils and refumes, incense, fresh coffee. Music—especially blues and jazz—the mand of the ocean, heavy rains and thunderstorms. Certain foods like mangoes and other tropical fruits. I guess that in a way "environments" which combine a number of these elements are what make it or break it for me. I don't think "single items" would have a marked erotic impact me.

Though, let me think. I'm sure some things are erotic to me in a more specific way . . . anal sex. It's not a fetish for me, but it is a great turn m. I think this is not just a matter of individual preference for me, though. The "ass" seems to be a regular feature of Cuban sexual folklore. There are more stories and jokes about it than I could begin to tell. And the interesting thing I've found is that unlike American jokes about "tits," for example, which seem to thinly veil a great deal of male hostility towards women, the message behind the Cuban ass joke or anecdote is at worst, "the ass is terribly funny," and at best, "love your ass." And this applies to both men and women.

I think it is very important to know what we and our lovers consider crotic and to be clear about what is absolutely essential for all concerned to truly enjoy love-making. It does seem to take a long time and experience and risk-taking to get at this crucial information, though. Sometimes you know you're not going where you want to go or feel like "there's got to be more. . . ."

Barbara: But you don't always know what it is, or even if you do know or think you might know what you need, it might be against your values to check it out. Then, of course, there's also the values of your particular community or social group, and I think that's real hard to deal with, 'cause it can tie you in knots if there's conflict. But even before that, there's the question of how you even find out what "it" is that you need.

Mirtha: Definitely fundamental. I think that besides actual experience, fantasies and dreams can be a source of information for us. In my case, they gave me the earliest clues about my attraction to women, for example.

Barbara: Me 100.

Mirtha: But I have to say that overall, I didn't really pay much attention to my sexual fantasies until recently. They were just there.

Barbara: My fantasies have gone through several metamorphoses, or cycles, over the years and I've done a lot more thinking about them since all the furor over s/m. There was a time when I first came out as a feminist that I entirely stopped fantasizing. I don't recall anyone ever saying that any of my fantasies were "bad"—after all no one knew what they were about—but gradually I started editing things out. I sort of decided, "Well, this is bad. This is nasty and I shouldn't be having these things in my fantasies." The result was—that I stopped maturbating. I stopped being sexual. I wasn't getting turned on anymore because I wasn't allowing myself to have the particular fantasies that really did it for me, And I really tried to make effective substitutions, but they just didn't work. Eventually I gave up altogether. When I finally started allowing myself to go back and explore the old fantasies again, I began to feel more sexual, more interested in sex with someone and in masturbation.

Mirtha: I don't recall ever feeling like I had to censor the contents of my fantasies. What was a problem for me in connection with fantasies was the role that fantasizing often played in my love-making. I would get lost, almost escape into fantasy during love-making to the point of forgetting that I had a body. I would sort of "disconnect" from the physical activity.

I think I acquired this habit in reaction to situations I was describing earlier, you know, where I felt unsafe about "letting go" physically. Fantasizing was my ticket out of physicality, so to speak. And this has been a very difficult habit for me to break. I think that it's just fine to fantasize during love-making; for some women to allow themselves to do so is an extremely liberating achievement. For me, to have no thoughts during sex, to be totally in my body, feeling the tingling sensations, the flushing, the sweat . . . now that's a tremendous accomplishment.

Barbara: The other important thing to talk more about is those women who don't have sexual fantasies, or who have whole different classes or kinds of fantasies. I have friends who fantasize colors and patterns, sometimes music, and become aroused from that, which is unlike my experience. Because of differences like these, I think we may be coming to conclusions about sexuality from very different bases.

Mirtha: I wonder if and to what degree we can talk about "fantasy compatibility." I have just recently begun to analyze the contents of my fantasies and talk to other women about that. And I have discovered that I share many images and "plots" with other Latinas—like having sex in public places, or surrounded by people, or for money; masturbation scenes seem to occur frequently. But I'm not sure how significant this similarity in "mind sets" is in terms of how we'd get along in bed. At any rate it scares me a little to discuss this topic. I've only talked to a few Latina friends and can't really make any generalizations. And I do wonder how "safe" it is to stick my neck out this far.

Barbara: Right. There's so much we don't know and I want a safe way to explore it honestly, non-judgmentally if at all possible, because that's the only way we're going to get anywhere. I think that because we haven't talked about the nitty-gritty up until now, I feel like there's a dosing up of the range of allowable turn-ons. Like I said before, peneration is often talked about as being "male-identified" and, therefore, fucked up. And dildos are also bad—I'm not so sure about zucchini laughs). But basically, it leaves a lot of women out. And you know, bout two years ago I would have said the same thing about penetration, but now I'm beginning to like it. So, "Am I fucked up?" Or what other people are saying, "Is that fucked up?"

birtha: I can sort of understand women not liking penetration. There are bings I don't particularly care for. But I personally get pleasure from metration—both "doing it" and having it "done to me." And it does uset me a great deal to hear people attach such extraordinarily negative maning to it. I mean, who decides what sexual preferences are o.k. and to.k., which qualify as p.c. and which do not?

bara: Yeah, but there are people out there dictating what's proper or

improper, healthy or unhealthy behavior for feminists.

Mirtha: Let's see. The best way for two lesbians to meet is in a collective situation doing work. A har is sort of o.k., because it's part of our history, but it is not necessarily cool to pick up a woman. Good sex is supposed to happen spontaneously, almost magically. And Lesbians just "naturally" know how to please each other. Humm, oral sex is o.k. now . . .

Barbara: Mmm hmm, that's on the top of the list. That's what "Lesbian Sex" is all about.

Mirtha: Right. So, if you're sticking your fingers or your hands into each other's cunts and asses, then what you're doing is somehow not lesbian sex. Neither is patting somebody on the ass a little roughly, I suppose. Certain kinds of language may also disqualify one as a lesbian, or I should say as a lesbian feminist. I have seen people taken aback and clearly offended by my saying "fuck." Like in "I like to f---," or "Let's f---." I've actually been told that "women don't f---."

Barbara: Right. Men fuck women and hurt them so "fuck" is a maleidentified word.

Mirtha: Of course, But I think fuck is fine. It's a really positive, strong description of what I do!

This dialogue has undergone many revisions. In the course of a year and a half, many of our ideas and priorities have changed, and we have tried to include new insights and concerns in the final version. We have deleted a great deal that we originally taped because we felt that it was too personal for us to make public at this time. The process of working on this dialogue and discussing it with friends has led each of us to think further about sexuality—both personally and as an issue within the lesbian community. We know that the dialogue is necessarily incomplete and part of an ongoing process within each of us.

While we make some generalizations, we realize that we speak as individuals, with the knowledge that our experiences and perspectives have been shaped by our own individual personalities and circumstances, by our different racial, ethnic, and class identities, by those identities that we share with one another—able-bodied, light-skinned, comparatively young, formally educated, living in the United States. We hope that

dialogue will be part of a continuing interchange about leshian exuality within our community.

We want to acknowledge and thank our friends for helping us at surious stages of this process: Dorothy Allison, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga and Laura Tow.

# CHERRÍE MORAGA

## IT GOT HER OVER

You're lucky you look the way you do, you could get any man. Anyone says anything to you, tell them your father's white.

> From Claiming An Identity They Taught Me To Despise, Michelle Cliff

1

Years later she began to feel her skin, thick like hide, not like flesh and blood

 when an arm is raised the blue veins shine rivers running underground with shadow depth, and tone.

No, her skin
had turned on her
in the light of things.
In the light of Black
women and children
beaten/hanged/raped
strangled
murdered in Boston
Atlanta
in California where redneck
hunters coming home
with empty white hands
go off to fill 'em
with Black Man.

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skin had turned
the light of these things.

kt to her now
the a flat immovable paste
the grey
the a life.

## it got her over

SHI

machines ate her change
machines ate her dollar bill
men cops stopped to check out
the problem was

Remember

Themember

The word be your daughter she used

The word be your daughter she used

The place on the sand

There two women were spread out, defiant

There he read

here he read
he white one
he protected
hat instance, saving
here both.

It got her over
the the bill was late
the she only wanted to browse not buy
the hunger forced them
the highway and into grills
aled "Red's" and "Friendly's"
the shops packed suburban
the on white eyes shifting
them and away
them and away
them and away

She had never been ashamed of her face.
Her lust, yes
Her bad grammar, yes
Even her unforgiving ways
but never, her face
recently taken to blushing
as if the blood wanted
to swallow
the flesh.

Bleed through guilt by association complicity to the crime.

Bleed through

Born to lead.

Born to love.

Born to live.

Bleed through and flood the joint with a hatred so severe

people went white with shock and dying.

No she had never been ashamed of her face.

Not like this.

Hearing it like an accident withinh.

It was

miling up warman, now darkened moestre

3

See this face?

tembbing her own two cheeks, ter fingers pinched together. As if they held between them, the thin tepth of color.

See this face?

The blood leaving her skin.

Where do you take this hate to lunch?

How to get over this one?

## WORK SONNETS

with Notes and a Monologue

1

i.

iceberg
I dream yearning
to be fluid.
through how many nights
must it float cumbersome
for how many centuries
of sun how many
thousands of years
must it wait
so that one morning
I'll wake
as water of lake
of ocean
of the drinking well?

and day breaks.

ii.

today was another day. first i typed some letters that had to get out. then i spent hours xeroxing page after page after page till it seemed that i was part of the machine or that it was a living thing like me. its blinking lights its opening mouth looked as if they belonged to some kind of terrible unthinking beast to whom i would always be bound.

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oblivious of my existence it simply waited for its due waited for me to keep it going waited for me to provide page after page after page. when it overheated i had to stop while it readied itself to receive again. so i typed some letters that had to get out. and he said

he was pleased with the way things were going.

#### ijį.

today was my day for feeling bitter. the xerox broke down completely and the receptionist put her foot down and made it clear to the repairman that we couldn't afford to keep such a machine and it was costing us extra money everytime we had to xerox outside. they hemmed and hawed and said the fuzz from the carpet clogged things up and then they worked on it. and she watched over them and made sure it was going properly when they left, by then i'd fallen behind and he asked me to stay late and i said i was tired and really wanted to go home, so he said it was really important and i could come in late tomorrow with pay, so i said okay and stayed, but i didn't feel any better about it.

a morning is not an evening,

iv.

volcano
I dream yearning
to explode.
for how many centuries
of earth relentless
grinding how many
thousands of unchanged
years buried
will it take
so that one morning.
I'll wake
as unfettered flame
as liquid rock
as fertile ash?

and day breaks.

٧.

today was my day for taking things in stride.

i was helpful to the temp in the office next
door who seemed bewildered and who had definitely
lied about her skills. the dictaphone was
a mystery to her and she did not know how to use
the self-erasing IBM nor the special squeezer
to squeeze in words. she was the artist type:
hair all over the place and dirty fingernails.
i explained everything to her during her coffee
break when she had deep creases in her forehead.
i felt on top of things. during hunch
i went out and walked around window shopping
feeling nice in the afternoon sun. and then
i returned and crashed through a whole bunch

of letters so i wouldn't have to stay late.

moday was my day for feeling envy. i envied mery person who did not have to do what i had to do. i envied every person who was rich ar even had 25 cents more than me or worked even one hour less. i envied every person who had a different job even though i didn't want any of them either. i envied poor homeless children wandering the streets because they were little and didn't know the difference or so i told myself. and i envied the receptionist who'd been there for years and years and years and is going to retire soon her hearing impaired from the headpiece she'd made been forced to wear. For her it was over.

She was getting out, i envied her so much today.

wanted to be old.

112.

蚯

to yield.

how many centuries
of water pounding
for how many thousands
of years will it take
to crode this hardness
so that one morning.
I'll wake
as soil
as moist clay
as pleasure sand
along the ocean's edge?

and day breaks.

viii.

new title and brought a bottle of wine during lunch and we all sat around and joked about how we'd become such important people and drank the wine. and the receptionist got a little giddy and they told her to watch it or she would develop a terrible reputation which was not appropriate for someone her age and maturity. and she laughed and said "that's all right. i'll risk it." and the temp from the office next door came in to ask me to go to lunch. so we gave her some wine and she said she'd been hired permanently and was really happy because she'd heen strung out and getting pretty desperate. i noticed her hair was tied back and her nails neater.

and then we all got high and he said to everyone
this was a hell of a place. and then he announced
he had a surprise for me. he said he was going to
get a new xerox because it was a waste of my time to
be doing that kind of work and he had more important
things for me to do. and everyone applauded and the
receptionist said she hoped this one was better than
the last because we sure were losing money on that
old clinker. and he assured her it was, and then he
welcomed the temp to the floor and said "welcome aboard."
and he told her across the hall they treat their people
like we treat our people and their place is one hell
of a place to work in as she'd soon discover. and then
he winked over in my direction and said: "ask her.

she knows all about it."

ix.

dust
I dream yearning
to form.
through how much emptiness
must it speed
for how many centuries
of aimless orbits
and many thousands
of light years must it wait
so that one morning
I'll wake
as cratered moon
as sea-drenched planet
as exploding sun?

and day breaks.

and day breaks.

П

#### Notes

Says she's been doing this for 12 years. Her fifth job since she started working at 18. The others were: in office of paperbox manufacturing co. (cold and damp almost all year round); office of dress factory (was told she could also model for buyers; quit because buyers wanted to feel the materials and her; was refused a reference); office of make-up distributor (got discounts on products); real estate office; and this, which she considers the best one. Throughout high school, she worked part-time to contribute towards household expenses.

Extremely sharp with them. Says: "I'm not a taperecorder. Go through that list again." Or: "It's impossible. I've got too much to do." Two days ago, she told me: "Make them set the priorities. Don't make yourself nuts. You're not a machine."

Am surprised, because I always feel intimidated. But she seems instinctively to understand power struggles. Is able to walk the fine line between doing her job well and knocking herself out beyond what she thinks she is being paid for. But she is good. Quick. Extremely accurate. Am always embarrassed when they return things with errors and ask me to do them over again. Never happens to her. She's almost always letter perfect.

I've told her she should demand more. The dictaphone is old and the typewriter is always breaking down. She should make them get her better equipment. It's too frustrating the way it is. She shrugged. Said it really didn't matter to her. Was surprised at her indifference.

Friendly, yet somehow distant. Sometimes I think she's suspicious of me, though I've tried to play down my background. I've said to her: "What's the difference? We're doing exactly the same work, aren't we?" Did not respond. Yet, whenever I've had trouble, she's always been ready to help.

Her inner life: an enigma. Have no idea what preoccupies her. Would be interested in knowing her dreams. Hard for me to imagine. This is a real problem. Ist person demands such inside knowledge, seems really risky. Am unclear what the overall view would be. What kind of vision presented. How she sees the world. How she sees herself in it. It seems all so limited, so narrow. 3rd person opens it up. But it would be too distanced, I think. I want to be inside her. Make the reader feel what she feels. A real dilemma. I feel so outside.

Says she reads, but is never specific what. Likes music, dancing. Smokes. Parties a lot, I think, for she seems tired in the morning and frequently says she did not get much sleep. Lives by herself. Thinks she should get married, but somehow can't bring herself to do it. "I like having the place to myself," she said the other day. Didn't specify what she was protecting.

Attitude towards them remains also unformulated. Never theorizes or distances herself from her experience. She simply responds to the immediate situation. Won't hear of organizing which she considers irrelevant (and also foreign inspired). Yet she's very, very fair and helpful to others and always indignant if someone is being treated unfairly. Whenever a temp arrives, she always shows her what's what. Tells her not to knock herself out. Reminds her to take her coffee break. Once gave up her lunch hour so one of them could go to the dentist for a bad tooth. Did it without hesitation. For a stranger.

Q: Is she unique or representative? The final piece; an individual voice? or a collective one?

I've learned a lot here, I think. It hasn't been as much of a loss as I expected. At least I've gotten some ideas and some material. But thank god I'm leaving next week. Can't imagine spending a whole life doing this.

#### Ш

### A Monologue about a Dialogue

And she kept saying: "There's more. Believe me, there's more."

And I was kind of surprised because I couldn't imagine what more there could be. And then I began to wonder what she meant by the more, like maybe a bigger apartment or more expensive restaurants.

But she said that wasn't it, not really. "I'm not materialistic," she said and then looked kind of hopeless, as if I could never understand her. "I just want to do something," she said, obviously frustrated. And she looked hopeless again. And then she took a big breath, as if she was going to make a real effort at explaining it to me.

"It's just," she said, "it makes no difference whether I'm here or not. Anyone can do this. And I've always wanted to do special, important work." Well, that made me laugh, because I've stopped wanting to do any work at all. All work is bullshit. Everyone knows that. No matter how many telephones and extensions, no matter how many secretaries, no matter how many names on the rolodex. It's all bullshit.

But she disagreed, "No," she said. "There's really important work to be done."

"Like what?" I asked curious, for I've seen enough of these types running around telling me how important it is to do this or that and just because they're telling me it's important they start feeling that they're important and doing important work. So I was curious to see what she'd come up with.

But she was kind of vague, and said something about telling the truth and saying things other people refused to say. And I confess I've never heard it put that way before.

"I want to be able to say things, to use words," she explained.

"Oh, a writer," I said. I suddenly understood.

"Well, yes. But not like you think. Not romances or anything like that. I want to write about you and how you work and how it should be better for you."

"So that's it," I said, understanding now even more than I had realized at first. "So that's the important work. That certainly sounds good. Good for you, that is. But what about me? Do you think there's more for me? Because I'm not about to become a writer. And I don't know why I should just keep doing this so you have something to write about that's important. So can you think of something more for me? I mean I can't do anything except this."

And I could feel myself getting really mad because I remembered how in school they kept saying: "Stop daydreaming and concentrate!" And they said that your fingertips had to memorize the letters so that it would feel as if they were part of the machine. And at first it seemed so strange, because everything was pulling me away, away from the machine. And I really wanted to think about what was going on outside. There seemed so many things, though I can't recall them now. But they kept pushing me and pushing me: "Stop daydreaming! Concentrate!" And finally I did. And after a while it didn't seem so hard to do. And I won first prize in class. And the teacher said I'd have a real good choice in the jobs I could get because quality is always appreciated in this world and with quality you can get by.

And when I remembered how I'd sat doing those exercises, making my fingertips memorize the letters, I was real mad because she was no different than the others. There's always something more. More for them. But not one notion about something more for me. Except maybe a better machine so that I can do more work more quickly. Or maybe a couple of hours less a week. That's the most that they can ever think of for me.

And I was so furious. I'd heard all this before. And I know that as soon as they tell you they'll fight to get you better working conditions, they go home and announce to someone: "You couldn't pay me enough to do that kind of work." That's what they say behind your back.

And I started to yell at her: "If you got words and know what to say, how come you can't come up with something more for me?"

And she was so startled. I could see it in her eyes. I mean you have to have nerve. I'm supposed to just stay here while she writes about me and my work.

And then I said: "They're always going to need people to type the final copies. And I can see you'll never waste your time with that once you've thought of all the right words." And she kind of backed up, because I must have looked really mad. And she bumped into the file cabinet and couldn't move back any further. And I said to her: "What's difference to me? It's all the same. I always end up doing the same thing. So let's make it clear between us. Whenever you finish whatever it is you're writing about me, don't count on me. Never count on me, no matter how good the working conditions."

### JAN CLAUSEN

### CREDENTIAL

Yes: I was there
among anxious billions,
dwelt
in one of ten
thousand
fair, precarious cities,
one of the most famous
(as worlds,
suns, galaxies
are said to spin
in (he briefest
bough-hung trembling,
drops of rain)

Yes: familiar to me,
that weather
when
yawning atoms
interrogate history
when only politics
and poems
matter

#### SOLSTICE

1.

Yes
you shall have my words torn broken
bloody stuttering syllabic in scorched
heaps upon the reeking soil spoil wreck
of your conquering wheels tanks vision
cavalry judgment

Yes
you shall get your peace poems words
victory chopmeat scraped scrawled
pale as bled flesh on the slab
of your sexless right radical platonic
form of your love dream wish of an
innocent power

Yes
you shall eat my curse words
scentless tasteless disembodied dumb
wraiths subtextual whispering beneath
the suborned the unimpeachable the
correct litany (I shall master the phrasebooks
get them by heart in exile) of forgeries
juiceless drained of female bile
done in my hand signed with my
woman's name

I fake the confession burn the diary hush the culpable mutter of the blood I know nothing 2.

Early light leaks skim milk into the weary room cold and December gold sunlift risks a fire behind stripped trees

I begin in stone
as though each mortal step
hewed out the ascent to morning

I have cut my hair I have turned my face away

woman

I know now it is finished

I have no words for you

### RHYME

The truth was too grievous for grief

The anger too raw to be borne

The hurt too near mortal to mention

I did not like to look

I did not want to rave

I did not plan to weep

I never intended to mourn

the dead

the women in prison

and those I no longer speak to

## SISTERHOOD - AND MY BROTHERS

1.

I have had some things from you to which I perceive no meaning. They either were very vast, or they didn't mean anything, I don't certainly know which.

Emily Dickinson to her brother Austin, 1854

In the Fair Lawn house where we grew up were two attics, and we had names for them. The more dreary was the Grandma Shore attic, a crooked hollow toward the front of the house, with no natural light that I can remember, with a smell of spoiled oranges and ashes. Its far side sloped at a menacing angle, not a wall or ceiling, just a bleak surface that pressed down on anyone who entered. Somewhere on that surface, a hinged door could be pushed open into a cavern which was actually a crawl space under the eaves, but which, in its resonant emptiness, became forever my idea of eternity. I was not often in the Grandma Shore attic, but its mysteries never seemed to discourage my older brothers. Ricky and Bradd arranged drop-leaves and shelves from the attic's stored furniture to hold thick bottles filled with liquids of colors for which I knew no names. They labeled them with words or symbols that were indecipherable to me or Kenny. There were four of us in those years before Barbara was born, and we were forever founding laboratories-Ricky and Bradd in their corners, Kenny and I in ours.

Kenny and I were more at ease in the Grandma Kirsch attic, a musty, cozy room full of corners. In it was a wooden trunk, and in the trunk felt hats from our parents' days in the millinery trade, letters they had written during the war, swatches of fabric of all kinds. Ricky reminded me of that trunk not long ago. He told me that when he was a kid, that was where he thought you went when you died: you went into the old wooden trunk in the Grandma Kirsch attic. That room had different associations for me and Kenny. Enclosed there we would convene hushed meetings of the clubs we would form and dissolve every few months. Once the four of us began a bench-building club: we built benches, then sat on them at meetings where Ricky would collect dues.

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After a while Ricky and then Bradd withdrew. Kenny and I thought up new clubs, warily admitting kids from the block. Ricky and Bradd began working as junior volunteers at a hospital in Paterson. In the Grandma Shore attic, the bottles gave way to dissecting equipment.

My ideas about being alive in those years—before the new house, a new town, junior high school—had everything to do with that foursome. What I saw, what I believed, what I wanted, were shaped by the pacts we made, the rules we laid down, the loyalties we exacted from each other. We would break other people's rules to help each other. When Kenny and I were nine and ten, we went to neighboring boys' and girls' sleepaway camps. Kenny was homesick and altogether unhappy there (or perhaps it was I), and though it was forbidden, we would cross camp limits to meet secretly every day.

My brothers and I have not always gotten along, but we have always been able to rely on each other. When we moved to a new town, I was in the seventh grade and Bradd in the tenth. The transition was especially hard for me, and though it was simply not done, Bradd walked to school with me every day. Twenty years later, when my apartment was burgled, Kenny made a two-hour trip the next morning to bring me his typewriter. When Ricky was dying of cancer these last months, he knew we would be with him and Elaine day and night.

I have gotten many things from my brothers. Since the illness and death of my oldest brother, I have been thinking about their meaning.

I am a woman who is committed to other women: my lover; my former lovers; my friends; my mother and sister and sisters-in-law; women I work with; women I play volleyball with; women whose work I read and who read mine; women I have never met whose lives in some way concern me. I agonize over political divisions, grieve when lovers or friends separate. I think of myself as having a place in a women's community, yet I know that many of my most intense feelings, most fierce loyalties are directed toward the men who are my brothers. And much of what I know about being a sister, about sisterhood, I have learned with them.

My situation is not extraordinary. I have heard leshians who are

close to sons, fathers, male friends, ex-husbands or former male lovers, speak about the seeming paradox; I have read what some have written. I suspect that lesbian/feminist poets who have written about these relationships have been included less frequently on the programs of the movement's poetry events. Or when invited, they have read poems about relationships with mothers and grandmothers, sisters and lovers. Perhaps this is as it should be . . . do we need more words in praise of men? But I worry about the strictures that have sometimes kept me from writing or even talking about my brothers, and I wonder how many other women have deformed their own experience.

Some women I know talk often about their mothers or stepmothers or sisters. I am sometimes surprised to learn in passing that they have brothers. I think of a woman I have known for nearly a decade: it seems to me that she has a brother, but I don't know his name or anything about him. Of course I know other women whose brothers have been important to them and who will say so, and I seem to search them out. While others scour Emily Dickinson's letters to Suc, I find myself reading what she wrote to her brother Austin.

2.

I do well remember how chilly the west wind blew and how everything shook and rattled before I went to sleep and I often thought of you in the midnight car, and hoped you were not lonely.

Emily Dickinson to Austin, 1851

To the day-room of the hospital I bring books about dying, break their backs holding them flat against the newspaper on my lap, afraid to let patients or other visitors see their titles. I sit here for hours at a time, and the bold news of world events rubs off on my sweater and my jeans. This is the afternoon, before most visitors arrive. One woman is here; her husband has been in intensive care, next to my brother, and now she waits for him to return from surgery. Around us are men: patients who have come to smoke and pass an hour, the elevator supervisor and an orderly who have stepped in to catch an inning of the Yankee-Dodger series. It is October.

I am reading Gerda Lerner's A Death of One's Own, about her husband's death from brain cancer. She describes the day-room of an unnamed hospital—its view of New York's East River, its cheerful walls, its plastic chairs. I match its symptoms with those around me. This too is a neurology floor, the day-room walls painted brightly like a cellar

turned day-care center. Ricky has been diagnosed: malignant melanoma of the spinal chord and lining of the brain. I read Gerda Lerner's account needed to tell him. If I could love him, why not another man? And if I chose not to love another man, could I care for him? In fact, he asked nothing. Looking away, he told me he loved me. I did not know then that we would have, over the next five months, long visits, slow car rides, time to try to sort it all out. It was still October.

At home one of those first nights, after hours in the hospital, I wait for Judy to finish work. We sit together in the dining room, cat leftovers that don't seem to be the right color. We move closer together to look through the newly developed prints of photographs we took in August, "before the world changed," as we have begun to say. We have cried together for three nights. Now she asks about the hospital: how does Ricky seem? what have the doctors said? how much more radiation? how are Elaine and my mother? I give her only headlines for now, too worn for the fine print, afraid to go through it again. I tell her they want to reduce the pressure by operating, putting in a tube to drain excess fluid from his brain to the lining of his stomach. "But there are cancer cells in the fluid, aren't there?" she asks. "Won't that just spread it?" I'm stunned at her logic, distantly curious at the absence of my own. As I add this to my file of questions for the neurologist, it strikes me that if spreading the disease is the lesser of evils, there won't be much time.

Judy runs a bath for me and I make two phone calls, the first to my sister in California. I give her a report: the steroids are reducing the pressure, they are deciding about putting in the shunt; Ricky is less confused (the word we've adopted for the "neurological deficits" we have been told to expect). It is a brief conversation. I listen closely to the sound of her voice, hearing a new timbre, listening for clues about how she is, and how I am.

I call a friend, a relatively new friend, long-distance. I tell her the news a bit abruptly. The spinal tap has come back positive. It might be weeks or months but no more. Ricky knows everything, He's been talking about suicide, doesn't want to die of cancer.

She is quiet at the other end. I hope she doesn't feel obliged to find right words, hope I won't lose her to correctness, won't feel sorry to have called so new a friend. I wonder, when she starts to speak, whether she thinks I have called for advice, for counsel. What did I want? We have recently had some differences on issues personal and political: am I using Rick's illness to dissolve the distance?

"That's so unreal," she says when I tell her that Rick has been talking about funeral plans. "Trying to hold onto control even after ...men aren't very good role models for dying."

"Don't lose this year," she urges a moment later. "You've worked hard to make time for writing. Don't lose it. He's not your lover."

3.

I watched you until you were out of sight Saturday evening, and then went to my room and looked over my treasures; and surely no miser ever counted his heaps of gold with more satisfaction than I gazed upon the presents from home....

Emily Dickinson to Austin, 1847

My brothers were my first lovers. We did not have sex, though we did our share of seductive slow-dancing to "practice" for school events, snuggling under covers while quizzing each other for social studies tests, peeking at each other naked, or giving each other the chance to peek. My shame at these experiences has always been disproportionate to whatever we did. I have never believed that other brothers and sisters did the same, have rarely heard women speak about this.

These relationships were intense, unspoken to this day. And of course we split up, at different times, with different degrees of resolution. These partings were some of the most painful I can remember, and much of what I have since felt in leaving women I have loved, lovers or friends, whether I have acted admirably or viciously, has pulled me back to those losses.

In a larger sense, much of what I know now about relationships, about trust, loyalty, and conflict, about merging and separating, I first experienced with my brothers. And much of what I first knew about crotic expression, about sexual signals, desires, limits, jealousies, I learned with them.

I fall asleep this October night in Judy's arms, comforted in a way I have not thought possible. I dream of Ricky and Bradd, upstairs in one of the attics of the old house, with bottles and scalpels and frogs.

The next afternoon at the hospital I peek into Rick's room. Elaine, his wife, is sitting with a book, settled by his bedside as if she had been as primer and prophecy. Already in these first days, words like steroid, pain med, shunt, are becoming second nature.

The game drones on, and as I read the sounds comfort me. I find myself, astonished, caring about the outcome, and listen more attentively, memorizing details I will pass on to Ricky if he is not too sick from the radiation to listen.

In the assortment of lines and images that fill my mind, that create this new picture, he is the vanishing point. My thoughts reach in his direction.

I abandon Gerda Lerner as her husband loses power of speech, and slipping the book into my bag, concentrate on Ron Guidry's pitching. I am pleased to be watching on a color TV. When I was growing up with my brothers, I spent summers watching baseball, knew the batting averages of half the American League. I talked baseball with Kenny and occasionally with my second cousin, Marsha.

I imagine that my brothers have wondered: what does it mean, this choice of mine, this turning away from life with a man, with men. Only a few hours after Rick heard the positive diagnosis, I was alone with him sitting on his hospital bed. He told me hurriedly that whatever troubles we had had, whatever unhappiness I might have had, were because of him. "Remember that heart I once gave you for Valentine's day, what a bastard I was—we had a fight and I took it back, and gave it to Susie Zarchin?" I remembered. I had thrown it back at him. Take your stupid locket, Moved, horrified, furious, I responded as he talked to me. No, I wasn't unhappy, and no, it wasn't his "fault" that I was a lesbian, and yes, of course I had made a choice. This was not a conversation we had ever had, directly. He was the one member of my family who had never seemed at ease with me, my life, my lovers. He was loyal, protective, loving, but always from a cautious distance. He was

proud of me in the abstract—had brought his friends into a bookstore to point out my name in *Conditions*—but for reasons I am only beginning to fathorn, he was afraid of me.

No, it wasn't his fault, and yes, I had made a choice, I told him that he was leaving me out of his calculations. His apology was presumptuous, and I could have said more, but we were suddenly and unaccountably measuring his life in days or weeks. In his formal, wild statements I heard questions: he needed to know how I was connected to him and I there for hours. She steps into the corridor to talk to me: they haven't taken him down for radiation therapy yet; the pain pill has finally started to work; it looks like he might be asleep. I take another look, My brother—his eyes the color of mine, his body, always solid and broad, now shrunken. Gravity suddenly grips at the weight I have gained in the last year. He opens his eyes, says hello. "It's grown in a lot," I tell him, thinking his face doesn't look so drawn with the beard he began to grow when he expected that treatments would make his hair fall out. "Just my luck," he says. "Just when my beard grows in I have to die."

Elaine asks if I will go with him to RT today, to give her an hour alone. The escort arrives, offering Ricky a stretcher, but he falls instead into a wheelchair, scowls, looks at me for encouragement, says, "You're here again to sit shiva? This is no place for healthy people." He seems glad that I'm going with him. I chase the wheelchair as it is pushed quickly and expertly through a maze of hallways and elevators, into a somber makeshift waiting area. Hammering and drilling shake the room from behind a feeble partition. "A new treatment room," the escort explains as he leaves. I look around me at six or seven people lying or sitting, waiting, with little or no hair, emaciated, magic marker lines drawn on their skin to target the radiation. By now Rick is holding his head; he carries a basin with him in case he needs to vomit. He begins to move rhythmically, a sign I have already learned to know for pain. The drilling and dust show no signs of letting up. "Headache?" I ask him as a dull throbbing sets in somewhere behind my eyes. I approach a nurse, ask if there is somewhere Ricky can lie down. "Certainly, Mrs. Shore." They move us to the hydrotherapy room, and after a few minutes Ricky asks whether I know what hydrotherapy is. "They boil it out of you, limb by limb or all at once." He is trying to scare me. This is a more familiar Rick, and I decide he must be feeling some relief. He is quiet for a few minutes, then turns on his side, asks me about prospects for a teaching job. I stroke his arms and his back.

Soon they are ready for us. "You can wait over there, Mrs. Shore," a nurse tells me. Rick looks at me uneasily, and then away. "Not Mrs. Shore," I correct the nurse. "Professor Shore." Ricky laughs, and I return to the waiting area where I stand near the desk so I can see what they are doing on the closed-circuit monitor. Ricky's body appears: he is on his side, enveloped by an eerie light. After a few minutes a technician goes in and turns him over.

By the time we again admit Rick to the hospital a few months later, I have learned something odd, Just as people there will insist that Judy my lover of four years is my sister (particularly when we stay overnight with Ricky, sharing a narrow cot to get a few hours' sleep), they often will not believe that Ricky is my brother. I go to the admitting office to fill out papers while Elaine stays with Rick. "Do you have your husband's Blue Cross card?" the woman asks me. "Not my husband, my brother," I correct her. "Don't confuse me," she answers. When it comes time, a moment later, to sign certain forms, she recalls that I am "only the sister" and asks to see Elaine. I feel alarmed at the thought of what would happen if it were Judy or 1—not even sisters—and resolve to call my friends to urge them to sign and notarize statements about who is to be considered kin in a medical crisis. My long-distance friend has shown me statements she and her lover carry.

I have finished Gerda Lerner's book and have started another—Alice Bloch's Lifetime Guarantee. I read aggressively, looking for clues, for help. She too has had worries about playing the maiden aunt, without a legitimate family of her own, free to nurse her sister, to hold vigil at her bedside. I don't hide this book as I read in the day-room, The title seems less threatening, and anyway I've lost my former delicacy. I've become a regular there, and it is harder to read now. People wander in and out, wanting to know how I am, what I'm reading. I see the woman whose husband had been in surgery during the World Series. He is walking with her today. He looks swollen, bloated in his pajamas, childlike in his gauze shower cap. I conclude that he will not die soon: if it were terminal she would not be so anxious. She introduces me. I say hello and look down at my book; too tired to read I go through Persephone's back-cover blurb over and over: . . . the personal chronicle of a woman faced with the impending death of her sister from cancer . . .

explores the complex and intense bond between sisters . . . a strong woman-identified sensibility. I decide that I will not write about this death . . . there are already books about women experiencing cancer . . . would women really want to hear about my complex and intense bond with a brother, a 38-year-old man with dubious politics, a strained history with me. . . .

And indeed there are women who have not wanted to know. The friend who urged me not to lose this year has never called, has not acknowledged that I even have a brother. Others whom I see often ask nothing. Are they afraid? I ask myself, a few friends, and Judy. When her brother died several years ago, there were women who suddenly vanished. Would they call if it were a sister, or a mother?

Ricky died two weeks ago, in early March, the day we brought him home from the hospital. By then he could not stand up alone, or see as far as the end of his bed, or swallow food or water. His speech was increasingly slurred until he could barely make himself understood. One of the last nights in the hospital, at 4 o'clock in the morning, Ricky seemed desperately to want to say something. My mother and Kenny were with him, but neither could make out his words. Kenny gave him a piece of paper and a pen, and he labored for some time before producing the word thanks.

4.

As lesbians we invent our own laws, create and define the bonds among us. Is it not difficult, even dangerous, to grant importance to our families of origin, particularly when these families have often rejected or patronized or infantilized us? If we are going to struggle in relationships, should it not be with each other? Do we not, by the very act of valuing the nuclear family, demean the ties we have chosen?

As the politics of identity play an increasing role in our community, I find myself baffled at conflicting claims on my loyalty. We are being urged, and urging each other, to acknowledge and to reclaim the cultures from which we have emerged. This process has been important for me; in a sense, I have made it my profession. Studying Russian for half my life, I have been able to return to the place from which my family emigrated, and where many relatives remain. The closeness I have felt to my family is connected, in some way, to ideas about family I learned in my Jewish home. Am I to value the culture from which my family came, while dismissing the family itself? Do I seek to identify with Jews in the abstract, but not with the brothers I have loved all my life?

I feel sometimes like a political exile. I would not want to return to the place I have left. I have made other choices, other commitments. But I cannot forget that much of who I am, much that I value in myself, even the fortitude to make those choices, came with me from the old country, whose air I have breathed, whose language I have spoken.

#### HOME

For Renée and Zillah

I can't sleep. I am sitting at an open window, staring at the dark sky and the barely visible night time gardens. Three days ago we came here to clean and paint this apartment in the new city we're moving to. Each night I wake up, shoulders aching, haunted by unfamiliarity. Come to this window. Let the fresh air and settled look of neighborhood backyards calm me until exhaustion pulls me back to bed.

Just now it was a dream that woke me. One of my dreams.

I am at home with Aunt LaRue and I am getting ready to leave. We are in the bedroom packing. I'm anxious, wonder if she can feel a change in me. It's been so long since I've seen her. She says she has a present for me and starts pulling out dozens of beautiful vests and laying them on the hed. I am ecstatic. I think, "She knows. She knows about me and it's all right." I feel relieved. But then I wake up, forgetting for a minute where I am or what has happened until I smell the heavy air, see Leila asleep beside me. The dream was so alive.

I felt as if I'd been there. Home. The house where I grew up. But it's been years since then. When Aunt LaRue died, I had to sell the house. My mother, my grandmother, all the women who'd raised me were already dead, so I never go back.

I can't explain how it feels sometimes to miss them. My childish desire to see a face that I'm not going to see. The need for certitude that glimpsing a profile, seeing a head bent in some ordinary task would bring. To know that home existed. Of course I know they're gone, that I won't see them again, but there are times when my family is so real to me, at least my missing them is so real and thorough, I feel like I have to do something, I don't know what. Usually I dream.

Since we got here, I think of home even more. Like today when we were working, I found a radio station that plays swing . . .

Every so often one of us sang a few lines of a song. I said, "Imagine. It's 1945, the War's over, you've come back, and we're fixing up our

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swell new place."

Leila laughed. "You're so crazy. You can bet whoever lived here in 1945 wasn't colored or two women either."

"How do you know? Maybe they got together when their husbands went overseas and then decided they didn't need the boys after all. My aunt was always telling me about living with this friend of hers, Garnet, during the War and how much fun they had and how she was so gorgeous."

Leila raised her eyebrows and said, "Honey, you're hopeless. You didn't have a chance hearing stories like that. You had to grow up funny. But you know my mother is always messing with my mind too, talking about her girlfriends this and her girlfriends that. I think they're all closet cases."

"Probably," I answered. We go on working, the music playing in the background. I keep thinking about Aunt LaRue. In the early fifties she and her husband practically built from scratch the old house they had bought for all of us to live in. She did everything he did. More, actually. When he left a few years later she did "his" work and hers too, not to mention going to her job every day. It took the rest of her life to pay off the mortgage.

I want to talk to her, I imagine picking up the phone.

Ili Aunt LaRue. Ahunh. Leila and I got here on Monday. She's fine. The apartment's a disaster area, but we're getting it together. . . .

Leila is asking me where the hammer is and the conversation in my head stops. I'm here smoothing plaster, inhaling paint. On the radio Nat King Cole is singing "When I Marry Sweet Lorraine." Leila goes into the other room to work. All afternoon I daydream I'm talking with my aunt. This move has filled me up with questions. I want to tell someone who knew me long ago what we're doing. I want her to know where I am.

Every week or so Leila talks to her mother. It's hard to overhear them. I try not to think about it, try to feel neutral and act like it's just a normal occurrence, calling home. After battling for years, Leila and her mother are very close. Once she told me, "Everything I know is about my family." I couldn't say anything, thought, "So what do I know?" Not even the most basic things like, what my father was like and why Aunt Rosa never got married. My family, like most, was great at keeping secrets. But I'd always planned when I got older and they couldn't treat me like a kid to ask questions and find out. Aunt LaRue died suddenly, a year after I'd been out of college and then it was too late to ask a thing.

For lack of information I imagine things about them. One day a few weeks ago when I was packing, going through some of Aunt LaRue's papers, I found a bankbook that belonged to both my mother and Aunt LaRue. They had opened the account in 1946, a few months before I was born and it had been closed ten years later, a few months after my mother died. The pages of figures showed that there had never been more than \$200 in it. Seeing their two names together, their signatures side by side in dark ink, I got a rush of longing. My mother touched this, held it in her hands. I have some things that belonged to Aunt LaRue, dishes and stuff that I use around the house, even the letters she wrote to me when I was in college. But Mommy died so long ago, I have almost nothing that belonged to her.

I see them the day they open the account. Two young Black women, one of them pregnant, their shoulders square in forties dresses, walking into the cavernous downtown bank. I wonder what they talk about on the busride downtown. Or maybe my mother comes alone on the bus and meets Aunt LaRue at work. How does my mother feel? Maybe she senses me kicking inside her as they wait in line. As they leave she tells my aunt, touching her stomach, "I'm afraid." My aunt takes her hand.

I wonder what they were to each other, specifically. What their voices might have sounded like talking as I played in the next room. I know they loved each other, seemed like friends, but I don't have the details. I could feel my aunt missing my mother all through my child-hood. I remember the way her voice sounded whenever she said her name. Sometimes I'd do something that reminded her of my mother and she would laugh, remember a story, and say I was just like Hilda. She never pretended that she didn't miss her. I guess a lot of how they loved each other, my aunt gave to me.

But I wonder how someone can know me if they can't know my family, if there's no current information to tell. Never to say to a friend, a lover, "I talked to my mother yesterday and she said . . ." Nothing to tell. Just a blank where all that is supposed to be. Sometimes I feel like I'm frozen in time, caught in a nightmare of a hot October afternoon when everything changed because my mother stopped living.

Most of my friends have such passionate, complicated relationshps with their mothers. Since they don't get married and dragged off into other families, they don't have to automatically cut their ties, be grown-up heterosexuals. I think their mothers help them to be Lesbians. I'm not saying that their mothers necessarily approve, but that they usually keep on loving their daughters because they're flesh and blood, even if they are "queer." I envy my friends. I'd like to have a woman on my side who brought me here. Yes, I know it's not that simple, that I tend to romanticize, that it can be hell especially about coming out. But I still want what they have, what they take for granted. I always imagine with my aunt, it would have been all right.

Maybe I shouldn't talk about this. Even when Leila says she wants to hear about my family and how it was for me growing up, I think sometimes she really doesn't. At least she doesn't want to hear about the death part. Like everyone, a part of her is terrified of her mother dying. So secretly I think she only wants to know from me that I can be all right, that it's not so bad, that it won't hurt as much. My mother died when I was nine. My father had left long before. My aunt took care of me after that. I can't prove to Leila or anybody that losing them did not shatter my life at that time, that on some level I still don't deal with this daily, that my life remains altered by it. I can only say that I lived through it.

The deaths in your life are very private. Maybe I'm waiting for my friends to catch up, so our conversations aren't so one sided. I want to talk like equals.

More than anything, I wish Leila and I could go there, home. That I could make the reality of my life now and where I came from touch. If we could go, we would get off the bus that stops a block from the house. Leila and I would cross 130th Street and walk up Abell. At the corner of 132nd I would point to it, the third house from the corner. It would still be white and there would be a border of portulacea gleaming like rice paper along the walk. We would climb the porch steps and Leila would admire the black and gray striped awnings hanging over the up and downstairs porches.

The front door would be open and I would lead the way up the narrow stairs to the second floor. Aunt LaRue would be in the kitchen. Before I would see her, I'd call her name.

She'd be so glad to see me and to meet Leila. At first she'd be a little formal with Leila, shy. But gradually all of us would relax. I'd put a record on the hi-fi and Ella would sing in the background. Aunt LaRue would offer us "a little wine" or some gin and tonics. I'd show Leila the house and Aunt LaRue's flowers in the back. Maybe we'd go around the neighborhood, walk the same sidewalks I did so many years ago. For dinner we'd have rolled roast and end up talking til late at night.

Before we'd go to bed, Aunt LaRue would follow me into the bathroom and tell me, again, shyly, "Your friend's so nice and down to earth. She's like one of us." I'd tell Leila what she'd said, and then we'd sleep in the room I slept in all the while I was growing up.

Sometimes with Leila it's like that. With her it can be like family. Until I knew her, I thought it wasn't possible to have that with another woman, at least not for me. But I think we were raised the same way. To be decent, respectful girls. They taught us to work. And to rebel.

Just after we met, Lella and her roommate were giving a party. That afternoon her roommate left and didn't come back for hours so I ended up helping Leila get things ready. As we cleaned, and shopped, and cooked, it hit me that almost without talking, we agreed on what needed to be done. After years of having to explain, for instance, why I bothered to own an iron, it felt like a revelation. We had something in common, knew how to live in a house like people, not just to camp.

When we first started living together I would get déjà vu, waves of feelings that I hadn't had since I'd lived in that other place, home. Once Leila was in the bathroom and I glimpsed her through the door bending over the tub, her breasts dropping as she reached to turn off the water. It was familiar. The steady comfort of a woman moving through the house.

I don't want to lose that moving here. This new place is like a cave. The poverty of the people who lived here before is trapped in the very walls. Harder than cleaning and painting is altering that sadness.

Tonight we made love here for the first time. It was almost midnight when we stopped working, showered and fell aching into the makeshift bed. When I started to give Leila a single kiss, her mouth caught mine and held me there. Desire surprised me, but then I realized how much everything in me wanted touch. Sometimes our bodies follow each other without will, with no thought of now I'll put my hand here, my mouth there. Tonight there was no strategy, just need and having. Falling into sleep, holding her, I thought "Now there is something here I know." It calmed me.

But I have been afraid. Afraid of need, of loving someone who can leave. The fear makes me silent, then gradually it closes my heart. It can take days to get beneath whatever haunts me, my spirit weakening like a candle sputtering in some place without air underground. And Leila has her own nightmares, her own habits of denial. But we get through. Even when I'm most scared, I knew when I first met her that it would be all right to love her, that whatever happened we would emerge from this not broken. It would not be about betrayal. Loving doesn't terrify me. Loss does. The women I need literally disappearing from the face of the earth. It has already happened.

I am sitting at a table by a window. The sky is almost light. My past has left few signs. It only lives through words inside of me,

I get up and walk down the hall to the bathroom. If I can't get back to sleep, I'll never have the strength to work another fourteen hour day. In the bedroom I take off my robe and lie down beside Leila. She turns in her sleep and reaches toward me. "Where were you?" she asks, eyes still closed.

I answer without thinking, "Home,"

#### RED STRING

At first she thought the lump in the road was clay thrown up by a trucker's wheel: then Beatrice saw the mess of feathers. Six or seven geese stood in the right-of-way, staring at the blood, their black heads rigid above white throats. Unmoved by passing wind or familiar violence, they fixed their gaze on dead flesh and something more, a bird on the wing.

It whirled into the thicket of fog that grew up from fields plowed and turned to winter. It joined other spirits exhaled just before dawn from the rows of clay, creatures that had once crept or flapped or crawled over the land, twists of slime mold, coils of moccasin, each gliding now in the life called death,

Beatrice had heard her mother tell of men who passed as spirits. They hid in the limestone caves by the river, hooded themselves inside the curved muscle, the glistening wall of rock. Then just at dark they appeared as if they had the power to split the earth open to release them. White robed, faceless horns for heads, they advanced with torches over the water, saying they were the ghosts of Shiloh and Bull Run fight.

Neighbors who watched at the bridge knew each man by his voice or limp or mended boots but said nothing, allowed the marchers to pass on: they ran their skinny hounds to hunt other beings into ravines, to keep flesh, darkness and death another night distant from themselves, to save their white skins from the carrion beetles, spotted with red darker than blood, who wait near the grave for the body to return to black earth.

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Some Octobers the men killed scores, treed them in the sweetgums, watched the face of a beast flicker beside the starry purple-black leaves; then they burned the tree. Smoke from their fires still lay over the land where Beatrice travelled. Out of this cloud the dead of the field spoke to her, three voices from the place where women's voices never stop:

They took my boy down by Sucarnochee creek, He said, "Gentlemen, what have I done?" They says, "Never mind what you have done: we just want your damned heart." After they killed him, I built up a little fire and laid out by him all night until the neighbors came in the morning. I was standing there when they killed him, down by Sucarnochee creek,

I am a mighty brave woman, but I was getting scared the way they were treating me, throwing rocks on my house, coming in disguise. They come to my bed where I was laying, and whipped me. They dragged me out into the field so that the blood strung across the house, and the fence, and the cotton patch, in the road, and they ravished me. Then they went back into my house and ate the food on the stove, They have drove me from my home. It is over by DeSotoville, on the other side in Choctaw.

I had informed of persons whom I saw dressing in Ku-Klux disguise; had named the parties. At the time I was divorced from Dr. Randall and had a school near Fredonia. About one month before the election some young men about the county came in the night-time; they said I was not a decent woman; also I was teaching radical politics.

They whipped me with hickory withes so the gashes cut through my thin dress into the abdominal wall, I was thrown into a ravine in a helpless condition.

The school closed after my death.

From the fog above the bloody entrails of the bird the dead flew toward Beatrice like the night crow whose one wing rests on the evening while the other dusts off the morning star. They gave her a jet-black look and said:

Child, what have you been up to while we were trying to keep body and soul together?

But never mind that now. Here's what you must do:

Tie a red flannel string around your waist for strength. Plant your roots at the dark of the moon. Remember your past, and ours. Always remember who you are. Don't let the men fool you about the ways of life even if blood must sign your name.

Samhain, 10/31/81

# OUT OF SEASON

In the backyard earthworms had migrated, tunneled down the morning that ice grew up like spikes of red grass through the dirt. Below the frostline they raveled together, a ball of twine waiting for the sun to pull them to the surface in the spring.

But Beatrice did not want to wait. Light slithered from the beveled edge of her mirror in the bands of red, indigo, violet as she set out to anticipate nature. She potted up four narcissus bulbs and put them in the brief winter of a closet.

Roots circled in the dark, pressed pale reptilian stomachs against the clay. Brought to the window, leaves began to rise striped green and white, garter snakes in a glass jar when she was five. Then paper hoods split around white mouths:

on the table flowers loomed, cobras summoned from a basket by the secret word. For days Beatrice enjoyed their scent and her power to charm them into form out of season, inside her time. By the tick of her banjo clock she lured

narcissus into her room in mid-winter.

Winter Solstice 12/20/80

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### SHADES

Even before the flat yellow sail of the sun passed beyond the horizon, Beatrice stopped looking. Fog had whited out details, blurred the landscape like an overexposed photograph.

For that day she had seen enough.

She had seen too much. In the morning she had worked in a room where arched light fell unhindered against the broken plaster.

She had not drawn the blinds while they talked of the Middle Passage: of the Ibo, the Yoruba, the Bambara caught by men as white as ghosts who shipped some on deck and most in the hold,

who decided which would have sunlight and which the dark where children drowned in their own excrement, and women remembered another kind of night spent on their knees beside their mothers' graves,

the air thick with cries and the spirits of those who had gone before, the wine glittering on the ground to reconcile living and dead under the moon. A thousand miles out they were led in coffles to the deck.

There some refused enslavement of their night and day. They fled into the sea, into depths where light came from no one direction but was present everywhere, refracting blackness into its countless shades.

Home for the evening, Beatrice wished to see no more. She tried to walk out into an uncomplicated dark, down to the deserted farmhouse to pick the last of the zinnias. In the garden only the paler blooms floated, like dead foam.

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Her hands had to guess at the other, hidden flowers. She thought she held burnt orange, red and fuchsia set on tough green stems, but she stood until she began to see, plainer than in the hour after dawn,

the petals, the color of each flower in the night.

9/81

## A COLD THAT IS NOT THE OPPOSITE OF LIFE

Nothing but pine boards between her and the wind that would not stop blowing. She heard it come again from beyond the ridge, heavy and cold, moving tree limbs with the voice of dead leaves. She had spent the day alone in this house, someone else's house, at the bottom of the world. The pipes had frozen, and the dish water in the sink. The begonias died as if left out on the porch; from their dark puddled leaves came the smell of new mown grass. Snow lay, a thick white skin on the pasture, the road. She was stranded at this pole of inaccessibility. Always before she'd been able to visit and leave. but today she went out to the pump for water with movements fixed as her shadow, following a path made by another woman, hidden in the snow's glare.

She had pictures of herself in the snow:

in one taken at thirty-three with the sun over her shoulder, she was a shadow that stood as long as evening on the white, feet spread in defiance; in another, she was four, up to her knees, by a sagging screen porch, while the woman who raised her in the daytime watched, a short dark woman in a headrag, a shadow under the surprising icicles.

Of past women and snows, she knew little; of the dark woman, nothing; of her mother

only a story of first snow, a grandmother who would not let her do anything, not put white hand out into the mystery, not put tongue to the unknown whiteness, not walk in it since one shoe had a hole. It had melted into invisibility as she sat waiting at a window of their frame house, like the houses up and down this road, like the window where Beatrice stood, thinking about the women who had looked out before her while silence fell in drifts on the brown grass, on the last clumps of green at this end of the county.

There was a summer picture of one of the women:

on the porch, screen door ajar behind her, three children barefoot, staring, her feet heavy in white pumps, dark hair braided and crowned, dark print dress strained over her next child, short sleeves tight over muscles white upper arms, hands enormous and full of the baby on her lap.

#### Beatrice had facts about her from a book:

at the home of a tenant farmer, mother of the family thirty-three years old, married at twenty-one, four children from six months to nine years, a sharecropper all her life,

# Through neighbors still living, Beatrice heard her words:

She'd split out of her clothes like a grasshopper with every child, but hadn't yelled with any.

She'd grunted it out because if you yell on a pain, you'll have it over; anyway, if you yell too much, you'll kill the baby. Before she married, her papa had said she was his best hand; she could plow cut and maul wood, harrow, do everything a man could.

But if you've got to be taking care of children too, housework is easier, although there's always cooking, cleaning, washing, milking, churning, sewing, canning, and the children. Really, if it weren't for worrying over them, she'd rather've been working outdoors any time: she was brought up to it. Most years they planted forty-thousand hills of tobacco, five an acre, with sweet potatoes, field peas, corn, and cane for syrup.

One year her father's death kept them from getting the fodder off the cane: the leaves had carried the frost right down to the heart of the stalk and killed it. One year the beetles ruin'd all the beans; that made it harder to scrape up a meal three times a day. She never had no noon, and many a night stayed up, without company, to tend the fire in the curing barn.

When she was younger, she'd had her a girlfriend, still wore her gold brooch with the miniature taken together when they were eighteen; they used to go into town to sell blackberries, and eggs and butter, with a bunch of girls, as they were afraid of the negroes. After she married, her husband did all the buying and selling; she managed inside the house, he managed the outside: that was no place for a woman.

After the last baby, she hadn't visited much except to go to funerals. It wasn't her fault she had so many children: she'd never enjoyed it. When nature left her, she still knew what was going on down there, but at least she didn't feel a thing. He'd always treated her just like she was a beast, didn't care how many babies he made her have. She had ten surviving, and one dead, had passed it in the evening, walking home from the field. She'd had on overalls so no one noticed, but she hadn't felt the same inside since.

She'd raised the others pulled them right up by the hair of their head. When they were little she used to go outside and watch the stars; then she realized, they'd been there before her and would be when she was gone, so she stopped going out. She'd tried to be content with her lot; she'd done the best she could and you can't do more than that, but sometimes she'd got tired.

Beatrice had been raised hearing this voice come from the mouths of many women; she carried it around inside her. She put another slab of pine in the stove and tried to listen instead to the fire buzz with the black, red, yellow flame of a wasp.

The windows thickened with ice, the pasture blurred.

Beatrice did not want to go numb, to stay shut up inside with her mother and the other women.

She did not want to develop a ten-foot stare in a twelve-foot room, to lose focus at the wall and fall silent. In this house with no closets all possessions were exposed: the hatchet on the mantel with snakeskins and homets' nest, the jars of preserves stacked on the floor, up the wall. She did not want to think that these oddities of light were more substantial than the shadow of her heart. Nor did she want her body stretched out like a white field under someone else's hand.

And if she stepped outside, she did not want her horizon to disappear into a waste of white until isolated in sameness, she began to fear shadows, whatever moved between the cedars at the woods' edge. She wanted to notice what she looked at. The old directions to the farm were third house on the right, but on the way she had seen five; yards where dark people walked had not been real enough to be counted by the woman before her.

She resolved to throw out her own shadow as a guide over the white killing frost she had been taught, to come to a cold that was not the opposite of life, as she would in a walk to the creek beyond the pasture. There above the beaver dam, water lay in waves of ice; its flow caught past seasons, fragments of dead leaves, But underneath, it scaled green algae still breathing, the beaver with her store of sweet-barked twigs, a cold necessary to break the sleep of seeds.

She resolved not to endure the house, but to live in change, the cold to break at the bottom of the marsh, the wind in the room to remind her There is something different from you dwelling here.

3/8/81

# WALKING BACK UP DEPOT STREET

In Hollywood, California (she'd been told) women travel on roller skates, pull a string of children, grinning, gaudy eyed as merry-go-round horses, brass wheeled under a blue canopy of sky.

Beatrice had never lived in such a place.
This morning, for instance, beside Roxboro Road she'd seen a woman with no feet wheel her chair into fragile clumps of new grass. Her legs ended at the ankle, dark old cypress knees.
She furrowed herself by hand through the ground. Cars passed; the sky stared down.
At the center of the world's blue eye, the woman stared back.

Years revolved, began
to circle Beatrice with a ring of burning eyes.
They flared and smoked like the saw mill fires
she walked past as a child, in the afternoon
at 4 o'clock, she and a dark woman,
past the cotton gin, onto the bridge
above the railroad tracks. There they waited
for wheels to rush like the wings of an iron angel,
for the white man at the engine to blow the whistle.
Beatrice had waited to stand in the tremble of power.

Thirty years later she saw the scar, the woman who had walked beside her then, mutilated, but determined to live, raising mustard greens to get through the winter. Whether she had this spring, Beatrice did not know, if she was sitting, knotted feet to the stove, if the coal had lasted, if she cared for her company, pictures under table glass, the eyes of children she had raised for others.

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If Beatrice went back to visit at her house, sat unsteady in a chair in the smoky room, they would be divided by past beliefs, the town's parallel tracks, people never to meet even in distance; they would be joined by the memory of walking back up Depot Street.

She could sit and say I have changed, have tried to replace the iron heart with a heart of flesh. But the woman whose hands had washed and pulled a brush through her hair, whose hands had brought her maypops, the green fruit and purple flowers, gaudy fierce eyes of living creatures; she had forgotten for many years to honor that woman's needs. Words would not remake actions in the past; she could not make them vanish like old photographs thrown onto live coals. If she meant to live in the present, she would have to work, do without, send money, call long distance about the heat.

4/11/81





Because of the unusual importance of This Bridge Called My Back to all women and the different meanings that the book has for women of different backgrounds and identities, we decided to have it reviewed both by a woman of color and by a white woman. Eds.

# PAULA GUNN ALLEN

THIS BRIDGE CALLED MY BACK: WRITINGS BY RADI-CAL WOMEN OF COLOR. Edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa; Foreword by Toni Cade Bambara. Persephone Press P.O. Box 7222, Watertown, MA 02172, 1981, 261 pp. \$8.95.

If radical feminism is about anything useful, it is about creating a context for personal and social identification that will enable people to engage in positive self-definition. But the difficulty with the development of such a context has been that feminism and radicalism are both derivatives of a western urban-industrial world view that more often than not creates an exclusionary context and that defines personal and interpersonal significance in terms of political "correctness," Radical feminism as well as more moderate forms of feminism are largely the creation of Anglo-European and Anglo-American urban, privileged, secular women who are not acquainted with traditions outside of their own cultural view, and who, even with the best intentions, are unable to comprehend non-western, non-urban, non-industrial views of existence.

Certainly, some of those who have been most actively involved in developing and promulgating contemporary feminist and radical points of view are not Anglo-European/American Christians (or their descendents); but these women, many of whom were raised in a Jewish radical tradition and who are often very conscious of non-white women and non-privileged classes, are also bound by their own cultural view of politics and power. Radicalism itself is a system of thought that is distinctly patriarchal and western-technocratic, and its context is such that it necessarily excludes world views and systems that are neither western nor technological. Particularly, it excludes tribal world-views. Indeed, it sometimes derides them, dismisses them by silence or coopts them, misrepresenting or romanticizing them out of all significance.

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It is not sufficient that radical feminists acknowledge the presence of non-western peoples by including our work in collections and anthologies, for this usually amounts to including work that fits the preconceptions of the western radical editor; it is seldom the case that such an editor—given her value system, her cultural inheritance and its concept of aesthetics and her assumptions about what constitutes acceptable discourse and appropriate politics—can recognize copy that is a vital and well-wrought expression of non-western writing and thinking styles.

The issue is more than that of not including women of color in meetings, policy-making bodies or publications—though these are crucial to any feminist practice. The issue is a question of conceptual frameworks—evidenced by styles of diction, organization, intuition, interrelationship and tradition. The significance of an utterance by a black radical feminist will differ from the significance of the same comment made by a Sioux or a Chicana woman; their contexts are quite different. Similarly, the same remark made by a white feminist, well-versed in political theory and movement rhetoric, will mean differently still: the terms of the history/experience each brings to the statement are very different, so the implication and the intent behind the remark will differ. This factor is overlooked by almost all white feminists, and it is also overlooked far too often by feminists of color—who take the white feminists' lead in making political and interpersonal decisions that have disastrous consequences for women of color.

Perhaps it is a truism to say that there is no content outside of context, but it is a truism that is all too often ignored by the radical community. Yet until that community is aware of the limited and potentially destructive context in which it functions, the right of women of color to define ourselves in terms of our own several traditions, understandings, histories and experiences will be denied.

In the struggle to create a usable non-oppressive context for all oppressed peoples, This Bridge Called My Back is a landmark volume. Within its pages women of diverse traditions and experience speak to one another within a framework which they have defined as radical and feminist. They speak of and from a life-long history of denial and self-definition, and out of an equally long lack of a context that includes all of the experiences that have characterized their lives in their own communities; they speak from and with the rage and grief that these denials and lacks have engendered. Their voices are American Indian (Barbara Cameron and Anita Valerio), Black (Andrea R. Canaan, Cheryl Clarke,

Gabrielle Daniels, doris juanita davenport, hattie gossett, mary hope lee, Audre Lorde, Pat Parker, Donna Kate Rushin, Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, Ms. Luisah Teish), Asian-American (Genny Lim, Nellie Wong and Merle Woo, Chinese-American; Barbara Noda and Mitsuye Yamada, Japanese-American), Latina/Chicana (Norma Alarcón, Gloria Evanjelina Anzaldúa, Jo Carrillo, Naomi Littlebear Morena, Cherríe Moraga, Mirtha Quintanales) and "Coyote"—mixed blood (Chrystos, American Indian-White, Aurora Levins Morales, Puerto-Rican-Jewish, Rosario Morales, Puerto-Rican, Judit Moschkovich, Argentinian-Jewish). They are lesbian and not lesbian, dark and darker, highly educated and untouched by formal educational socialization, poets, writers, mothers, single women, lovers, political activists and witches, and their contexts are shared and independent, interdependent and multiple as the traditions and backgrounds they come from are.

The six divisions of the volume take the reader through the multitudinous experiences of these varied voices, from early childhood through socialization, to politicization and disillusionment with leftist politics, on to awareness of homophobia within their own social systems and the anguishing choices that realization necessitated, toward the self-affirming stance of writer, artist, activist and visionary. In the section on writing, "Speaking in Tongues," the voices take off. The writers reach toward the power of self-definition and it is in this act alone that true power and restoration reside. The last section of the book, "El Mundo Zurdo: the Vision" represents the attempt of the editors to place the experience and consciousness of radical women of color into a context that is empowered with a sense of continuance and meaning outside the framework of anger, pain, oppression and discouragement that too often is the only context women of color are allowed.

This section of the book is the weakest; but that is because radical women of color are not yet a cohesive group accustomed to defining for ourselves who we are and who we intend to be in the eyes of others; until recently we have, perforce, been defined—and that definition has been debilitating in the extreme: we have been the ultimate victims whose rescue gave many radical workers a sense of mission and purpose in life, and whose victimization was therefore essential to the radical community's continuance. But it is not our status as victims that will empower us; it is rather our vision of our strength, our power and our kinship that will allow us to take control of our destinies. Indeed, the weakness of this last section is the most moving indictment of contemporary radicalism in feminist and other movement circles: for a group of people

whose vision centers on isolation, annihilation, rage and confusion is a grievously wounded group. The exact process of the mutilation is well-chronicled on the pages that precede the last section, and it is a mutilation of will and joy, of a sense of dignity and significance that has been inflicted on us by our would-be friends as well as by those who the Movement(s) have pointed to as our enemies.

When I received the manuscript of This Bridge Called My Back last spring, I became painfully conscious of the exact difficulty of existing in a world that provided me with numerous partial contexts but with no one context that included all of my "selves." From the foreword and preface onward, I was caught within many of my own memories and intuitions—some of which had all but disappeared from consciousness because there had been no way to think about them, no way to contextualize them, no way to interpret or share or define them. Bridge provided me with exactly that: ways to view myself and my history/experiences that gave me order, coherence and meaning. I was by turns delighted, enraged, grieved and stunned. I was deeply conscious of how wounded I have been.

In her preface to the volume, Cherrie Moraga writes of her own quest for self-identification in terms of those experiences that led to the publication of this book. She recounts the anguish of recognizing her own failures, her own complicity with that which destroys, that separates us from ourselves and each other, and her rage at the white radical/feminists who could not bring themselves wholly to a discussion of racism but were virtually immobilized by the terrors of such a confrontation:

I watch the white women shrink before my eyes, losing their fluidity of argument, of confidence, pause awkwardly at the word "race," the word, "color." The pauses keeping the voices breathless, the bodies taut, creet—unable to breathe deeply, to laugh, to moun in despair, to cry in regret. . . . (xv)

Recognizing her own complicity with that which destroys, she writes:

Sometimes for me "that deep place of knowledge" Audre [Lorde] refers to seems like an endless reservoir of pain, where I must continually unravel the damage done to me. It is a calculated system of damage, intended to ensure our separation from other women . . . the women whose pain we do not want to see as our own. (xvi)

She also recounts the joy of "coming home" when after a forum on racism in the women's movement she and five Latina sisters "walked down Valencia Street singing songs in Spanish," and joined together for food and talk and tears. "Si, son mis comadres," she writes, "Coming home. For once, I didn't have to choose between being a lesbian and being Chicana; between being a feminist and having a family" (xvii-xviii).

These passages pretty much define what will follow in the volume: the jazz prose of hattie gossett, the measured, carefully-wrought work of Audre Lorde, the careful, balanced analyses of Barbara Cameron, the insights of Rosario Morales, the clear, anguished tales of Mitsuye Yamada, the raging radicalism of Pat Parker, the mystical vision of Gloria Anzaldúa, the bitter fury of Chrystos, the humor and pained articulation of Jo Carrillo, the incisive multidimensioned argument of all the women writing out of their feminism, their color, their vision, who articulate the courage and insight of women of color who are politically active, artistically aware and humanly clasped within various contexts and histories, emotions and understandings, dreams and realizations. All are unwilling to make the impossible choices that seem to be demanded of us: of choosing between politics and family, loves and tradition; each is plainly determined to be the measure of her own life and the definer of her own significance.

Gloria Anzaldúa writes that the fact that we don't fit any context comfortably makes us a threat, and this is true; it also makes us the focal point for any true revolution; for as she writes, "we are the queer groups, the people that don't belong anywhere, not in the dominant world nor completely within our own respective cultures. Combined we cover so many oppressions . . ." and, she might have added, so many unexplored—almost unimagined—ways to be, that El Mundo Zurdo is the most useful space in which to form the new world order we are birthing; it is from this space, she insists, that the planet can be transformed (209).

Of all our queer experience—denial, exclusion, dismemberment, disfigurement, despair; of coming home and recognition of a greater community; of political activism and the hope and power it brings; of the reality of racist brutality and sexist degradation, of love for many who are the same as some part of ourself and who are different from another part—out of all of these experiences of difference and solacing recognition, which will we choose to base a new world order upon? Of the multitude of contexts we spring from and live within, of all the flesh of all the realities we inhabit, which will define our present, reclaim our past and shape our future? This question is not answered but in tentative and saddening ways in the volume, though the groundwork for such an eventual answer is amply laid out.

I would wish for more of a positive affirmation and less of rage, for more of creative assertion and less of chronicles of diempowerment; for though the past is full of pain and full of rage, the present is abundant with new and powerful senses of growing together in a way that will enable each of us to find her own way home. I wish for a book by and about radical/lesbian/feminists of color that does not end with a paean to absolute destruction of the isolate and ultimately alienated self, for though that final apoealytic vision must occur to all of us, it will not do as a foundation for any future I care to help create. For it is my passionate conviction that the forces of destruction-what hattie gossett has termed "big daddy patripower"-wish for us to believe in total annihilation, in bloody civil war and worldwide militaristic destruction and it is my equally passionate conviction that we must not agree to that vision, however seductively it sings in ears lacerated by rage and grief, oppression and denial. For, as Donna Kate Rushin writes, a bridge can be something others walk on, or it can be a passageway to one's own vital and creative self:

The bridge I must be
Is the bridge to my own power
I must translate
My own fears
Mediate
My own weaknesses

I must be the bridge to nowhere But my true self And then I will be useful (xxii)

El Mundo Zurdo certainly must begin with a clear and sober assessment of the exact nature of our situation. Anything less than that will lead to more of the same old game, or to global disaster; but once that assessment is made, action must be taken on the basis of strength, not on that of despair; it must be chosen from a position of affirmation of what matters to human and non-human and spirit lives, rather than on denial of what is inimical to them.

"I am a revolutionary because I want me to be free," Pat Parker writes (240) and Andrea Canaan offers us a view of what that freedom might consist of: it is the freedom to make choices for oneself about one's own identity, and to base one's actions and associations on that self-determined sense of self. We must think for ourselves, she says, and we must remember that freedom is based on knowledge of actuality.

The enemy is browness and whiteness, maleness and femaleness. The enemy is our urgent need to stereotype and close off people, places, and events into isolated categories. Hatred, distrust, irresponsibility, unloving classism, sexism and racism, in their mytlad forms, cloud our vision and isolate us. (236)

Third world women who are feminists and/or lesbians are not easily led into safe comforting/comfortable ways of looking at the world. The fact that we are not members of any particular group is the overwhelming fact of our existence; and this integral "oddness" makes us the most able to spot culture-trance when it happens—whether it be the trance of the Left, the traditional Christian, the orthodox Black, Latino, Chicano, American Indian, Asian American, Puerto Rican, Jewish, pagan or whatever home group we have emerged from,

This Bridge Called My Back is a nourishing and empowering book, for it gives us ways to think about ourselves, about the woman's movement and the radical movement, about the struggle that we have been engaged in for so very long, and the ways in which that struggle has been discouraging, demeaning, infuriating and in which it has been powerfully life-enhancing. Certainly I, a multicultural event who was raised in a Chicano village in New Mexico by a half-breed mother and a Lebanese-American father, surrounded by people who spoke Laguna, English, Spanish, Arabic, German, Navajo and everything in between; related to people who were Protestants, Jews, Roman Catholics, traditional American Indians, atheists and all imaginable combinations of the above, can attest to the terrible pain of being a bridge, But I can also attest to the strength and clarity of commitment and vision that such a heritage engenders. My wish for all of us the women whose work appears in this volume and our sisters all over the country and for myself-is that we will take strength and courage from that vision of multitudinous complexity This Bridge Called My Back provides, that we will produce more books such as this one, that we will insist on our rightful place in the leadership of the feminist movement, and that we will dedicate ourselves to bringing to the new world the important values and traditions of all of our peoples while never losing sight of our fundamental right to define and determine the significance of our own work and lives. Venceremos.

THIS BRIDGE CALLED MY BACK: WRITINGS BY RADI-CAL WOMEN OF COLOR, edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa.

"It's like a breath of freedom," a friend wrote to me in a letter from prison, summarizing her response to This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color. My friend, a young white woman, expects to be locked up for years to come; she does not speak lightly of freedom. I, a so-called "free" white woman, concur in her assessment. This Bridge makes palpable the diverse and specific strengths that women of color offer themselves and each other. It embodies an emerging Third World feminism capable of immeasurably strengthening the theory and practice of "women's liberation" as these have developed within a thusfar white-dominated movement. And it powerfully challenges racism, while at the same time providing feminists of every background with support for our attempts to come to grips with personal identity as "theory in the flesh," basis for future action.

The monumental significance for Third World women of this anthology's publication is, I think, evident from the testimony of its contents alone. A deep hunger for these writings, these communications and connections, is plain in pages which movingly convey the effects of oppression intensified by isolation and invisibility—and the relief and excitement of creating a political context in which private experience can be shared and put to use. This Bridge is so far unique among anthologies in its woman-identified, multi-racial, multi-cultural approach to Third World feminism. Women of color will be affirming, disputing, celebrating, and supplementing its varied, sometimes contradictory perspectives for a long time to come.

One of the things I like best about This Bridge is its concreteness, "Theory in the Flesh," the subtitle of one section, would have made a fitting heading for the majority of pieces, both poetry and prose. At a time when many white feminist "theorists" seem to have been seduced by the heady possibilities of fuzzy, high-flown generalization, this work is, for the most part, patient with the evidence, with experiences and emotions which defy convenient or reassuring classification. Through

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the willingness of many contributors to share glimpses of their lives, I learned—as deeply, I think, as one may learn from books—a great deal about a range of cultural and material realities I will never know from the inside.

Not content with merely pronouncing "Third World," "Native American," "bi-cultural," "lesbian," "Asian-American," "middle class," "Latina," and so on, This Bridge speaks with love and sometimes with pain in the voice of this lesbian who is half Native American, half Chicana (Anita Valerio); this feminist who is Chinese/Korean American (Merle Woo); this immigrant from Argentina who is Latina and Jewish (Judit Moschkovich); this Cubana for whom a "middle-class" Cuban childhood meant educational advantages combined with a standard of living most Americans would consider "deprived" (Mirtha Quintanales). Occasionally the voices directly contradict one another: there is this Black lesbian calling for an end to put-downs of love relationships between Black and white women (Cheryl Clarke) and this Black lesbian ready to give up altogther on most forms of contact with white women "until these wimmin evolve" (doris davenport, 89).

Neither do these writers content themselves with abstract denunciations of racism; they make us feel its effects by listing at least eleven ways a little Chinese-American girl longed to be white (Nellie Wong); by pointing out the astronomically high early death rate among Indians (Barbara Cameron); by exploring the implications of the fact that college students taught by a Japanese-American woman expressed surprise and indignation upon learning that Asian-Americans are just as angry about their treatment in American society as are other Third World groups (Mitsuye Yamada). The frustration and weariness of women of color who have been tokenized by white feminists are reiterated so compellingly that, if words can educate, such behavior ought to diminish instantly and markedly in white readers of this book.

Long before This Bridge appeared, I knew that its editors were two Chicanas, Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, and that its purpose was to include the viewpoints of a wide range of women of color. Nevertheless, one of my first reactions to an initial reading was that Black women seemed somewhat underrepresented. Later I realized that I had in fact expected Black contributors to dominate the volume—and it dawned on me how symptomatic this expectation was of the characteristic American myth that Black/white is the color difference, the race "problem." The absorption of such an attitude is particularly ironic in my own case, given

that I grew up in the Pacific Northwest, where my earliest experiences of color difference and racism involved Indians and Asian Americans.

The residence of many of this volume's contributors outside the boundaries of Black/white definition; the fact that a larger number are lesbians vulnerable to the homophobic disapproval of the communities in which they were raised; the mixture of cultural influences which has been formative for many—all these factors inform the approach to Third World feminism, making it richly complex. Editor Gloria Anzaldúa explains:

The mixture of bloods and affinities, rather than confusing or unbalancing me, has forced me to achieve a kind of equilibrium. Both cultures deny me a place in their universe. Between them and among others I build by own universe, El Mundo Zurdo [The Lefthanded World]. I belong to myself and not to any one people. (209)

This Bridge is divided into six sections which, as the editors say in their introduction:

intend to reflect what we feel to be the major areas of concern for Third World women in the U.S. in forming a broad-based political movement: 1) how visibility/invisibility as women of color forms our radicalism; 2) the ways in which Third World women derive a feminist political theory specifically from our racial/cultural background and experience; 3) the destructive and demoralizing effects of racism in the women's movement; 4) the cultural, class, and sexuality differences that divide women of color; 5) Third World women's writing as a tool for self-preservation and revolution; and 6) the ways and means of a Third World feminist future, (xxtv)

There is considerable thematic overlap among the different sections; most of the pieces reflect in one way or another a commitment to "identity politics," defined by the Combahee River Collective as the belief that "the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end someone else's oppression" (212).

A belief in self-liberation has of course been central to the second wave of the American women's movement since its inception. But the "identity politics" perspective of *This Bridge* seems, in general, more insistent than much recent feminist writing on the manifold dimensions of personal/political experience. Identity is exactly equivalent neither to race, nor to gender, nor "sexual preference," nor mother tongue, nor cultural setting, nor country of origin, nor educational background, nor class, nor any other aspect of experience to which a label can be affixed; it is a subtle blend of all these factors, and of an individual's choices

about what to do with them.

One expression of this perspective which I find extremely valuable is "Across the Kitchen Table: A Sister-to-Sister Dialogue." Here Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith attempt to identify the points in their lives where various oppressions intersect-to compare, for example, the effects of poverty, of racism, of sexism not in order to establish "hierarchies of oppression," but to develop change-oriented politics truly reflective of their experience and that of other Black and Third World women. They explore the concrete effects of an economic marginality which, they believe, creates a very significant experiential difference between many Black and white women. (White women, they observe, nevertheless tend to assume that a Black family in which education was valued must have been "middle class.") They discuss the particularly painful forms homophobia assumes in the Black community, while at the same time conveying a vivid sense of their rootedness in Black culture and social life, and the loss they experience through functioning in a largely white context where "there is so much about Black identity that doesn't get called into practice. . . . Because the way you act with Black people is because they inspire the behavior" (Beverly Smith, 119).

Much of this book's strength comes from its contributors' frequent willingness to examine many-faceted identity even when the questions raised are discomfiting. Cherrie Moraga begins her essay "La Güera":

I am the very well-educated daughter of a woman who, by the standards in this country, would be considered largely illiterate. My mother was born in Santa Paula, Southern California, at a time when much of the central valley there was still farm land. Nearly thirty-five years later, in 1948, she was the only daughter of six to marry an anglo, my father. (27)

Where she could have chosen to speak simply out of her oppression as a working-class Chicana, Moraga takes the risk of exploring the intersections of working-class upbringing and educational privilege, of Chicana heritage and "white" appearance, which have been formative for her. She calls on us to "scriously address ourselves to some very frightening questions: How have I internalized my own oppression? How have I oppressed?" (30).

Exploring the implications of relationships among women of different cultural and class backgrounds, Mirtha Quintanales observes:

I am a bit concerned when a Latina leshian sister generalizes about/ puts down the "white woman"-especially if she herself has white skin. In the midst of this labeling, might she not dismiss the fact of her own white privileges regardless of her identification with Black, Native American, and other Third World women of color? Might she not dismiss the fact that she may often be far better off than many white women? I cannot presume to know what it is really like to be a Black woman in America, to be racially oppressed. I cannot presume to know what it is really like to grow up American "White Trash" and destitute.

But I am also a bit concerned when a Black sister generalizes about/dismisses all non-black women, or all women who are not strict "women of color" or strictly "Third World,"... Yes, racism is a BIG MONSTER we all need to contend with.... But I think we need to keep in mind that in this country, in this world, racism is used both to create false differences among us and to mask very very significant ones cultural, economic, political... (152-153)

It feels both dangerous and important to state that I find the questions posed here by Moraga and Quintanales, and similar ones raised by other writers, to be among the central contributions of This Bridge, Dangerous because there is always the chance that the least hint of ambiguity in the public posture of oppressed people will be used by others to deny the reality of that oppression-as, for instance, talk about racism among Third World peoples has sometimes been used by whites to deny our own primary responsibility. Dangerous, too, because I risk failing to convey adequately the sense of deep love for and commitment to their Third World cultures which emerges from Moraga's and Quintanales' explorations, as from most of the pieces included here. Important-vitally sobecause in feminist discussions of oppression, the nuances of identity and choice have too often been denied (by the "privileged" quite as much as by the "multiply oppressed"), with the effect that oppression begins to appear, in and of itself, a moral guarantee or political credential. This Bridge clearly reaches out to all women, seeking to push us beyond safe formulations, whether those be the cozy conventions of white solipsism, the sterilities of pat, intellectualized anti-racism, or the self-righteousness of identity worn as unexamined armor.

The courage of this stance helped me immeasurably in the confrontation with my own racism that reading the anthology entailed. For, despite the fact that I'd looked forward to its appearance, I felt intimidated when a copy arrived at my house late last May. A whole fat anthology was different, I suddenly realized, from the isolated discussion group, the darker face or two or three in the pale crowd, the island article or poem or "special issue" in the familiar if boring White Sea of feminist publishing. This Bridge was almost unprecedentedly nontokenistic—and, despite my experience-based conviction that tokenism is destructive for both Third World and white women, the fact made me uneasy.

What was I afraid of? Anger, above all. "Here's a whole anthology by radical women of color, and they're going to be mad at me." It's still hard for me to confront some of that anger. However, having survived several readings of the section on "Racism in the Women's Movement," I can now better see that anger as something to be learned from—while recognizing that it is really an astonishingly small part of what This Bridge has to communicate. And I have to chuckle ruefully at the sardonic accuracy of Jo Carrillo's "And When You Leave, Take Your Pictures With You" ("Our white sisters/radical friends/love to own pictures of us/sitting at a factory machine . . . " [63], but are unable to deal with real live Third World women); I can recognize that Chrystos' critique of the doctrinaire rigidity of certain white leshian-feminists speaks to aspects of my experience as well ("I Don't Understand Those Who Have Turned Away From Me").

This Bridge is very much a writers' book, though not in the rarefied sense that statement seems to suggest. Many of the contributors are committed and experienced writers, and the inclusion of the section "Speaking in Tongues: The Third World Woman Writer" underlines the dedication of the two writer-editors to writing as a means of "self-preservation and revolution." The sense of the struggles of these writers to get the work down on paper and out into the world is very graphic and powerful: "The voice recurs in me: Who am 1, a poor Chicanita from the sticks, to think 1 could write?" (Gloria Anzaldúa, 166). Yet the effort is successful: for the most part, these words live.

The poetry is often particularly exciting. I especially enjoy Hattie Gossett's exuberant "billie lives! billie lives," a prose poem about a mysterious Billie Holiday recording entitled "gloomy sunday subtitled hungarian suicide song. . . , one of those my man is dead so now i am gonna throw myself in the grave too funeral dirge numbers (tragic mullatress division) that they used to mash on billie when she went into the studio" (110). A resourceful Billie manages to interpret this retrograde ditty in such a way as to have "them bigdaddy blip d blips leaping outta windows in droves" (111).

Chrystos' "No Rock Scorns Me as Whore" is one of the most affecting poetic meditations I've seen on the terrors of the nuclear threat, the necessity for a "deep, deep understanding of the sacredness of life, the fragility of each breath" (245). I was struck by the positioning of this sad and powerful piece at the end of the volume, in refreshing contrast to the usual practice of ending political works on a note (often unconvincing) of revolutionary optimism.

Unsurprisingly, not all of the material included in *This Bridge* is as specific, as grounded in the "flesh" of experience, or as successful in its use of words to convey that experience as the pieces I've discussed so far. "The Pathology of Racism: A Conversation with Third World Women" by doris davenport seems to me to constitute a relapse into identifying people by convenient labels and generalities; white women are weak and dumb; Black women are strong and together. (In fact, davenport seems to be addressing Black women, but uses "Black" and "Third World" almost interchangeably.) For the sake of honesty, and the further instruction of all students of the absurd and useless convolutions of racism in our time, I must add that I probably wouldn't have had the courage to state this reaction publicly had I not discovered that a woman of color whose political judgment I respect takes a somewhat similar view of davenport's piece, thus giving me "permission" to feel critical of it. Yeecechhh!

I find Pat Parker's "Revolution: It's Not Neat or Pretty or Quick" disappointingly rhetorical, full of shopworn "radical" phrases which fail to illuminate the realities they refer to. And while I absorbed useful information from Norma Alarcón's "Chicana's Feminist Literature: A Re-vision Through Malintzin/or Malintzin: Putting Flesh Back on the Object," the piece doesn't succeed for me in "fleshing out" its subject matter, but remains stiffly academic.

Perhaps in part because its editors and so many of its contributors are writers, This Bridge reflects an emphasis on cultural expression, consciousness-raising and theory which has tended to characterize much of the recent feminist movement. With the exception of a few pieces like the Combahee River Collective's "A Black Feminist Statement," scant attention is devoted to the ways and means of effecting public, structural, institutional change. One volume can't—and shouldn't—do everything; the cultural focus becomes a serious limitation only if This Bridge is regarded as a stopping-place, rather than as the beginning its makers clearly intend it to be.

White readers, I believe, have a particular responsibility to this beginning: to listen accurately, as far as we are able, to what is being said, to the range and complexity of what is being said. For the danger exists that because of our own preconceptions and defenses, we will hear only pain and anger, and will miss the many affirmations and joyous

moments. Or that, on the contrary, we will deny the pain and anger altogether. Or that we will use this volume for the old purposes of tokenism; that certain of the contributors will be touted as "spokeswomen," and the book itself embalmed and canonized as the last word on Third World feminism, thereby hampering its role as catalyst and initiator.

These are hard times for all feminists. Hard times seem to encourage the dangerous response I have come to think of as "hunkering down in our oppressions": focusing on the very real differences in privilege and experience which divide us to the exclusion of the equally real factors which might unite us—as though, paradoxically, suffering and fear constituted the surest sign of radicalism, the most convincing proof that we are worthy of respect and care. I am moved and very, very grateful that so many women of color, among the least safe and privileged of feminists, have instead chosen here to make themselves more vulnerable; to reach out; to risk so much.

At the end of "Across the Kitchen Table," Beverly Smith remarks:

The way I see it, the function that Third World women play in the movement is that we're the people who throw the ball a certain distance and then the white women run to that point to pick it up. I feel we are constantly challenging white women, usually on the issues of racism but not always. We are always challenging women to go further, to be more realistic..., Our analysis of race and class oppression, and our commitment to really dealing with those issues, including homophobia, is something we know we have to struggle with to insure our survival. It is organic to our very existence. (127)

This Bridge challenges all women "to go further, to be more realistic." What's better yet, time and again it demonstrates that we can. CLAIMING AN IDENTITY THEY TAUGHT ME TO DESPISE by Michelle Cliff. Persephone Press, P.O. Box 7222, Watertown MA 02172, 1980, 72 pp. \$4,00 plus \$1.00 p/h.

Early in Michelle Cliff's book, Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise, she writes about a childhood experience with surgery. Surgery—from the Greek words meaning a working of the hands, a handicraft or skill—becomes a strong link in this work, both technically and imagistically. Not only does it represent helplessness and surrender to the physician, but it is also a strong metaphor for the knitting together and healing Cliff does of her own physical, spiritual, and emotional self. She is her own surgeon and works here with the tools of memory, experience, and strong imagery. She sews together two separate parts of herself, the Jamaican black with the Anglo-American, and she emerges with a new flesh, one that is made whole.

During surgery, as Cliff remembers it, she is in limbo, existing neither in the conscious world nor the unconscious. This borderline state begins the breach that follows as a main theme of the book, the gulf between black and white, between the United States and Jamaica where Cliff's origins are, the growing alienation of herself from her family.

She describes herself in the operating room, her half-felt voice: 
"I am split—only wooden pegs and wire holding insides inside" (9). She follows this dual perception through in various ways, in lines such as, 
"This kind of splitting breeds insanity" (11), and in her recalled dreams of dismemberment: "Of arms and legs removed to make escape impossible" (12). Separation into parts and pieces is a form of death that begins a new cycle of life. She emerges from the submissiveness of a patient, from being worked on by something outside of herself, and takes charge of her own healing. For Cliff, there is a taking apart and a putting together, a new psychic anatomy.

She is nurtured and saved by darkness, by the dark room in the hospital, the face of a tall black woman, the black box beside the bed which suctions the poison from her body. And there is the morphine

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vision of a genetic past, "The lined faces of tribal chieftains" (10), the vision that begins the journey through origins, through the dissonance of a racially split life, and into the rebirth of herself. She arrives, via this montage of language, dream and memory, at a new core of herself. She moves from the pieces into wholeness, from confusion into strength, and these images of darkness become her salvation. They lead her into a different kind of separation, that of a woman who no longer accepts the dishonesty of "passing," a woman who refuses any kind of assimilation into a world she can't accept, who prefers to create her own strong self and name her own identity.

Darkness with its connotations of evil and mystery becomes the source of Michelle Cliff's new strength and vision. She is like the lizard she writes about: "As he got angry he turned black with rage and blew a balloon of flesh from his throat—and sat there" (14). This book, in all its gentleness, is Cliff's balloon of rage. From her throat the words swell and emerge, words telling of the pain of pretending to be other than what she knows herself to be, like the mysterious words of her mother—"Free paper burn now" (5)—that make assimilation impossible.

For people whose cultural experiences do not fit neatly into the American blend, there is often guilt and anger, a fear of losing the geography of the self. I think of Ferris Takahashi, a Japanese-American poet, beginning a poem with, "I have no face." There is a sense of not existing. Cliff describes this as camouflage, the camouflage of passing and, in her words, "Passing demands a desire to become invisible. A ghost-life. An ignorance of connections" (5). The tension of not feeling real, not being visible, often becomes an impetus for creative expression. And that expression becomes the means by which an artist pays close attention to the connections Cliff mentions. There is a need to bridge two lives, two cultures. And yet, that bridging is risky business. It demands honesty and courage. It means wandering in two lands, possibly with acceptance in neither. It means that the gains and losses must be carefully weighed, for the keenest difficulty for those of us who are of two bloods is in learning that any gain is accompanied by some kind of loss.

Cliff nevertheless takes that risk and makes her way in a struggle against the facade of whiteness her family has attempted to build and maintain. While she gains her own strength and identity, she loses mother and sister, as well as others:

I thought it was only the loss of the mother but it was also the loss of others: who grew up to work for us and stood at the doorway while the tv played and stood at the doorway while we told ghost-stories and fromed the cloths for the tea-trays. (4-5)

And yet, Cliff transforms the losses, sees through them as though they were transparent, as a surgeon sees into the inner workings of the body.

Through the process of remembering, she comes to a new way of seeing. She has written with love about the women in her family even though their own identities have made them fearful to the point of giving up the sister's daughter because, as they say, "We can't take care of her and ourselves'" (64). At the end, Cliff chooses her own losses when she says of mother and sister, "I leave them to themselves" (64).

She replaces them with other women. The book contains a constellation of women, women writers whom Cliff quotes, women doing laundry at the river, a maid who suns rectangles of white cloth behind her house, mythic women, women categorized as "mad," family women she admires, the woman who repays Cliff's wallpapering work with a cake baked in a milk tin. She chooses the women of Jamaica, black women and white, all strong, all replacements for the women she has lost. In choosing, Cliff's richness and substance grow to fill the gaps her losses have made.

She replaces. Re-places. Places again.

"The ship in the vision has foundered," she writes. "The cormorant has taken her place and surveys the damage. Her dark plumage is wet. .." (49). And later, Cliff says, "It would seem the cormorant has replaced the dragon in my dream" (49). One thing gives over to another, Light, whiteness, is transformed into the saving darkness which is dense and nurturing.

As these transformations and replacements take place, Michelle Cliff puts things back together in a new way, both imagistically and stylistically. This is no easy task because once the pieces are out of their first position, "It is like trying to remember a dream in which the images slip and slide." As one thing takes the place of another there are many places where they need to interlock. Instead they threaten to disappear and this shifting about makes for an interesting structure. Style becomes, for Cliff, another way to express and define a fragmented identity. The book is written in a prose-poem style, containing a collage of things that ultimately do fit together, the pieces of experience and thought coming to-

gether like a quilt.

There are ten separate sections in this book, and each one reads much like a poem, although each is fabricated out of memories, dreams, descriptions, and often some line-break poetry. It is like being given a glimpse of a diary, a cluster of the many events and small vignettes which make up a person's life.

The length of the pieces vary. In the longer image pieces, Cliff slows down and gives more time to the music and the depth of language. She uses color and a warm sensuousness that I admire, such as in the section entitled "Against Granite," where she writes about the black women's history headquarters:

Out back is evidence of a settlement: a tin roof crests a hill amid mountains—orange and tangerine trees form a natural border. A river where women bathe can be seen from the historians' enclave. The land has been cultivated; the crops are ready for harvest. In the foreground a young black woman sits on grass which flourishes. Here women pick freely from the trees. (29-30)

Resonant and rhythmic pieces of writing such as this hold the book solidly together. They are vibrant when they appear, and they appear often enough to keep us attuned to the work, to carry its momentum, and to enable the collective effect of the pieces to be charged with visual and imaginative energy. When these fragments of magical language are not there, I miss them.

More of this kind of writing could further enrich this book even beyond its present intensity. In a few places, the lack of "imaging" stands out as a loss. What might be an image that startles us with its power becomes at best a document, as if the subject is too difficult to confront, For example:

Those who practice on women/those who practice on children:
The providers of Depo-provera: the deprivers of women's lives.
The promoters of infant formula: the dealers in child-death.
The purveyors of starvation and mutilation there is no way else to say it. (30)

There is, and needs to be, another way to say it. The listing of oppressions is already with us. And the oppressions are still with us. The lists have not worked and so we need to infuse them with the power of imagery that takes the reader beyond what she already knows. They need

a force and depth that shake the reader out of habitual thought and apathy.

In a work like this one where each bit of writing becomes a building block for the whole, each brick does not necessarily need to be strong, but a more imaginative approach to the few weak places would accomplish what Michelle Cliff sets out to do.

Where she does achieve her goal, the work is dynamic and full of the kind of electricity that makes for revolutions. Her words, in the stronger places, reach into us and possess us. In this passage, for example, she writes:

I have seen the wreckage of sugar mills covered with damp and green mosses. When the concrete cracks across, green veins trace the damage. There are tracks where mules used to circle—to crush the cane. There are copper cauldrons once used to boil the juice, from which molasses and foam were drawn off to make rum. (The purest rum—do I have to say it?—is colorless and called white. Other rum is colored artificially, taking on the darkness of the casks over time—they think the golden tint makes it more appealing. The final type is colored by impurities and was once called Negro rum.) (49)

Here Michelle Cliff has condensed history, personal history as well as that of all class, all color, into one well-conceived paragraph. This is the kind of brilliant writing that dominates the book.

This brings me to some brief speculations on poetics and literary style. We are in a time when it is necessary to examine identity and investigate our personal universes. One voice speaks to many, and most of us are anxious to hear about the experience of other women. It is important that we document the truth as we know it to be. Our spiritual lives as women need to be explored. But writing our truths can be a literary as well as a personal risk. When we are this hungry to talk and this hungry to hear about the personal, where do we place the power of imagination?

The literature most of us grew up with was largely written by men and was all imagination and technical maneuverings of language. Because of this, I welcome the kind of honest and sincere work Michelle Cliff has done. I like the integrity of her self-definition. At the same time I believe that women need to expand every possible image into the best art, adding imagination to truth. Cliff comes close to combining the two. At the end when all the pieces come together into a whole, this book is resonant and fertile enough to breed new possibilities for Cliff's future work, Each

fragment she writes in this montage has the potential of being a full-length work in its own right. Perhaps that is what makes the book exciting. It opens a new world, one of mangoes, mysterious births, cane fields, a slave woman discovered with roots and leaves. Although we have only a glimpse of this world, it is a rich one. And while she has us dazzled with the colors and images of this geography, she puts together personal vision and memory and brings what was not defined about this new land-scape of experience into order and focus. She takes on the issues of oppression, racism, and family with courage. The aftereffect of this juggling of topics and imagery is one that stays with us.

Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise is a book that creates potential for new literary directions, and adds to the development of us all, especially those of us whose multiracial worlds sing a different part of the song into each ear. Cliff puts the song together, and in so doing creates a new, more sonorous one. This work untangles the music of all women's history and gives women the strength to continue building their own lives as she has done when she says:

The question of my identity is partly a question of color: of my right to name myself. That is what I have felt-all along. (8)

LESBIAN FICTION: AN ANTHOLOGY edited by Elly Bulkin. Persephone Press. P.O. Box 7222, Watertown, MA 02172. 1981, 336 pp. \$8.95 plus \$1.00 p/h.

LESBIAN POETRY: AN ANTHOLOGY edited by Elly Bulkin and Joan Larkin. Persephone Press, 1981. 336 pp. \$10.95 plus \$1.00 p/h.

Lesbian Fiction and Lesbian Poetry both open with well-written introductory essays by editor Elly Bulkin. (Co-editor of Lesbian Poetry is Joan Larkin.) There was a time, she reminds readers, when lesbian literature came wrapped in brown paper or lurked in questionable bookstores. There was a time when lesbian readers coaxed meaning out of promising poems and stories in feminist anthologies or journals. There was a time when lesbian literature meant only Gertrude Stein and Radelyffe Hall—the "charmed circle" of legend—and had no place for the poor, the black or brown, the obscure.

And then there was the time when dykes and amazons and lesbian feminists and revolutionary lesblans of color began to self-publish thin volumes of poetry-remember them? Edward the Dyke, Pit Stop, Dear Sky, To Lesbians Everywhere, Songs to a Handsome Woman, They Will Know Me By My Teeth, Dyke Jacket, and scores of others including Bulkin and Larkin's Amazon Poetry, the nucleus of Lesbian Poetry. There began to be journals devoted to lesbian writing: Amazon Quarterly first of all, and then Sinister Wisdom, Conditions, and Azalea, Writers well known in literary circles, such as Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich, identified themselves as lesbians. We had many more lesbian novels to choose in addition to the pioneering Patience and Sarah and Rubvfruit Jungle. We began to hear the voices of the total lesbian community: old and young; middle class and working class; women of all colors, ethnicities, and physical abilities. We argued and dreamed about lesbian culture, and finally struggled to create it. Books like Leshian Poetry and Leshian Fiction record that culture, and help determine its boundaries and topography. These two anthologies from Persephone Press perform their task with exceptional sensitivity and skill.

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Lesbian Poetry collects the work of over sixty poets, beginning with octogenarian Elsa Gidlow and ending with poets still in their twenties. Lesbian Fiction contains twenty-eight pieces of short fiction, all written or published within the past five years. Both volumes are wonderfully diverse. Over one third of the authors in each are women of color, so that these two volumes are rare, so far, in making more than a token commitment to cultural diversity. Many of the selections are by and about working-class women and Jewish women; several are concerned with aging, disability, and children. The quality of the writing is consistently high. The themes and subjects are diverse, although organized by a selective editorial vision. While Lesbian Poetry and Lesbian Fiction define a territory (or overlapping territories) within "lesbian nation," they do not close off its boundaries.

As I read and contemplated these anthologies, a couple of questions repeatedly surfaced. What themes seem to be most on the minds of lesbian writers—at least of the writers collected here? And what exactly is lesbian fiction or poetry; in other words, is a poem by a lesbian different from one by a straight feminist?

Lesbian writers are interested in identity and selfhood, how a girl or woman comes to define herself as a lesbian. They do write about lesbian sexuality, but even more about the infinite number of ways in which women bond together. They write about love and relationships, and about being lesbians within the family structure: as daughters, sisters, mothers, and granddaughters. They write about their/our heritages: ethnic, mythic, and cultural. They write about social responsibility and political revolutions. They write very much about the oppression of lesbians, women, and people of color. They write about role-playing, about feminism, about work, about men and violence. In short, lesbians write about the whole world, about the complexities of female existence. Those who imagine that lesbian writing begins with a proposition and ends with bed need these volumes to challenge their preconceptions. On the other hand, the rest of us might enjoy a little more in the way of propositions and bedding-down.

If the poems and stories in *Lesbian Poetry* and *Lesbian Fiction* cover such a wide expanse of female experience, why refer to them as *lesbian* poems and stories? Are they not really "universal" or at least universally female? It is true that many of the poems, though few of the stories, might not be immediately identified outside this context as lesbian. But the context is all-important, since it allows us to read with a double or triple awareness. Any woman, and some men, can draw mean-

ing from these pieces, but when that woman is a lesbian who knows that the writer is also a lesbian, the work takes on added power. And if she is Chicana, or Jewish, or physically challenged, there are further levels of identification and validation. There is something going on here beyond literary values; there is a special communication between reader and author who are both lesbians, or black, or mothers, or any combination of female realities. For example, Olga Broumas' poem, "Artemis," is also anthologized in a popular women's studies textbook, Images of Women in Literature (Mary Anne Ferguson, Houghton Mifflin, 1981). Nothing identifies the poet or poem as lesbian, and in that context "Artemis" reads primarily as an elegant and rather cool poem about the transformation of language. In an anthology named Lesbian Poetry, "Artemis" retains that meaning, but adds to it levels of meaning about sensuality and the transformation of identity. In a lesbian context, this poem and many others leave the mind "stunned at the suddenly/possible shifts of meaning . . ." (LP, 208).

Context is equally important within Leshian Poetry and Leshian Fiction. The themes I have mentioned (relationships, work, oppression, etc.) are recurring and unifying; the context provided by each poem and story creates the distinctions of race, class, age, and ethnicity crucial to our survival as a leshian community and political movement. The ideas, visions, and values of leshian writers are worked out in varied settings: a rodeo, restaurants in New Mexico and the South, a front stoop in a black neighborhood, a trailer park, hospital rooms, a cabin in the backwoods, a dilapidated Kansas farm, an upper-middleclass lakeside home, an electronics factory, a convent, a powwow, schools, diverse living rooms and bedrooms, and even a monkey cage. The leshian writer does not have a monolithic room of her own.

This diversity can be seen in the treatment of even the most pervasive themes, such as that of our matrilineality, both literal and mythic. There is probably more about the mother/daughter bond in these books than any one other subject. The attitudes range from ova-tional to troubled, and the mothers may be the writer's biological mother (or grandmother), a mother goddess, or a literary/historical foremother. When one includes all the stories and poems about sisters and surrogate parents, it is evident that lesbian imagination has been strongly touched by what Virgiinia Woolf called "thinking back through our mothers."

One classic expression of the mother/daughter dynamic in lesbian life is found in Adrienne Rich's beautiful poem "Transcendental Etude":

But in fact we were always like this, rootless, dismembered: knowing it makes the difference. Birth stripped our birthright from us, tore us from a woman, from women, from ourselves so early on and the whole chorus (hrobbing at our ears like midges, told us nothing, nothing of origins, nothing we needed to know, nothing that could re-member us.

This is a core idea in current lesbian feminist thinking, that lesbian identity stems from the original symbiotic identification of mother and daughter, and that this tie is the strongest in a woman's life (and lesbianism is therefore the most natural expression of love since the original love of a woman's life is another woman). Whether or not this is "true" (whatever true means) it is clear from these two anthologies that lesbian writers are compelled by memories and visions of mothering. Although very few poems incorporate mythology (which may reflect the editors' tastes rather than the nature of lesbian poetry), those that do draw upon myths and legends of mother goddesses: the African goddess Seboulisa; the Aztec goddesses Tonatiuh, Metztli, and Tlazolteotle; the Indian goddess Iyetico; the Hebrew figure Lilith; and the western goddesses Ceres, Artemis, and Medusa.

Many of the poems celebrate the heritage of women who are literary or spiritual mothers, role models: mountain-climbers Elvira Shatayev, the woman professor "Sayre," the common women of Judy Grahn's famous poems, Harriet Tubman, Gertrude and Alice, Sylvia Plath, Angelina Weld Grimké, Sappho, Pat Parker's litany of heroic black women in "Movement in Black," and the unnamed, unknown foremothers like those Paula Gunn Allen calls "Beloved Women":

It is not known if those
who warred and hunted on the plains
chanted and hexed in the hills
divined and healed in the mountains
gazed and walked beneath the seas
were Lesbians

Nobody knows whether those women were Lesbians. Nobody can say what such an event might mean. (LP, 65-66)

It is clear that lesbian writers draw from these mythic, legendary, and historical foremothers spiritual inspiration and nurturance. Far more complex are their attitudes toward their actual biological mothers. Many a poem or story echoes Susan Saxe's plea: "(Do you hear me, Mother?)" (LP, 199), Judy Grahn swears to "Vera, from my childhood" that "the common woman is as common as the best of bread/and will rise/and will become strong . . ." (LP, 69). In Audre Lorde's "Black Mother Woman" the daughter understands that the struggles of her mother against poverty and violence resulted in painful losses that were the source of the daughter's strength:

I am
a dark temple where your true spirit rises
beautiful
and tough as chestnut
stanchion against your nightmare of weakness (LP, 24)

As these poems suggest, the mother/daughter relationship can be tense and troubled. We see this from the perspective of young girls in "Kippy" by Julie Blackwomon, where the daughter of a lesbian learns her first lessons in homophobia, and in Jan Clausen's "Daddy," where the child narrator is torn between the comforting conventionality of her father and the disturbing lesbian lifestyle of her mother. The ironics of women's lives across the "Lesbian continuum" are caught by Minnie Bruce Pratt in one of my favorite poems:

My mother loves women but she's afraid to ask me about my life. She thinks that I might love women too.

(LP, 167)

Poems by Clare Coss, Cherrie Moraga, and Wendy Stevens, and stories by Maureen Brady and Dorothy Allison, suggest a love for the mother transcending the separations inflicted by woman-hatred, racism and poverty; other stories such as Francine Krasno's "Celia" and particularly Sauda Jamal's powerful "A Mother That Loves You" demonstrate how deep the damage can go. For Kitty Tsui, one of the Asian-American writers collected in these anthologies, it is not mother, but grandmother who is the "living, breathing light" in the granddaughter's soul (LF, 174).

The mother/daughter relationship is only one theme found in Lesbian Poetry and Lesbian Fiction. These volumes are rich in insight, imagination, visions of strength, and memories of pain. Each poem and story reflects upon all the others, sharpening the focus here, deepening a shadow there. I have few criticisms of the works themselves or the selections of the editors: perhaps a bit more humor and fantasy (the dominant tone of both books is very serious realism); perhaps more flawed characters like the silly, selfish, yet sympathetic heroine of Ann Allen Shockley's "Telemania"; perhaps further attention to form, particularly in the short stories, some of which need more shape and a clearer narrative direction; perhaps more of the stylistic experimentation that characterized classic leshian writing without sacrificing immediacy and accessibility. And still I want more: more anthologies, more volumes of poetry, more fiction. I would like to see an anthology of lesbian writing that included the celebrated and forgotten writers of the past generations Emily Dickinson, Gertrude Stein, Angelina Weld Grimké, Amy Lowellso that they also might be placed in the context of lesbian writers. I would like more anthologies such as Lesbian Home Journal that collects the writing of the fifties and sixties. I would like . . . but what we'd all like is more to read, more that tells the truth about the infinite variety of lesbian lives. Elly Bulkin, Joan Larkin, and Persephone Press have given us two superbly edited and beautifully published anthologies for our bookshelves and bedside tables (or stacks). The lesbians writing today wll give us the rest.

## THE CANCER JOURNALS by Audre Lorde.

Spinsters, Ink, RD 1, Argyle, NY 12809, 1980. 77 pages. \$4.00.

For months now I have been wanting to write a piece of meaning words on cancer as it affects my life and my consciousness as a woman, a black lesbian feminist mother poet all I am. (Lorde, 1980, 25)

. . . . To describe a phenomenon as a cancer is an incitement to violence. The use of cancer in political discourse encourage fatalism and justifies 'severe' measures—as well as strongly reinforcing the widespread notion that the disease is necessarily fatal. . . . (Susan Sontag, Illness As Metaphor, 1977, 81)

Upon discovering that some family member, close friend or casual acquaintance, or public figure has cancer, some of us allow that individual no other identity than that of "cancer victim." Most of us have absorbed all the awesome mythology of cancer as a formidable enemy, striking at the high and the low, an imperial power leaving our bodies defenseless under its ravaging conquest. However, our everyday living is carried out in a world to which can be applied all the language of destruction used to metaphorize cancer and vilify the bodies of those who have cancer. As a result of this propaganda those who are stricken with cancer become scapegoats for our fear of and anger with those who manipulate this carcinogenic culture, viz. the U.S. capitalist system (corporate male industry, technology, medicine, and government)—as always profiting from the crises it creates.

The isolation suffered by many who have cancer is, as Susan Sontag concludes about cancer jargon, a reflection "of the large insufficiencies of this culture and our shallow attitude toward death (84). But if we can say cancer, out loud name it, then the living with cancer can be more honest and equalized.

Black Lesbian Feminist Poet Audre Lorde refuses to be silent. The Cancer Journals, a three-part essay interspersed with journal entries detailing the author's emotional experience of pre- and post-mastectomy, affords a rich experience of talking and a rare opportunity of listening. Lorde's visionary idealism/humanism sometimes obfuscates her connections between the personal and political, language and action, and cancer

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and male-controlled culture, environment, and health care. Her language —graphic, metaphorical, imagistic—sets her up as the archetypal amazon, battle-scarred but not battle-weary. The language is decidedly powerful—so powerful, in fact, I wonder if women will identify her experience as women's common experience of mastectomy—black-lesbian-feminism notwithstanding.

Lorde reveals herself as both warrior and victor. Her mood is expansive throughout this poetic recounting. The journal passages, particularly those of the "Introduction," move Lorde and us through a circular grief process, "the process of integrating this crisis" (10) into her life. The entries are kaleidoscopic shifting, overlapping, changing variegations and forms in spiralling motion, making visceral her struggle toward acceptance of her loss and her change:

I don't want this to be a record of grieving only. I don't want this to be a record only of tears. I want it to be something I can use now or later, something that I can remember, something that I can pass on, . . . (46)

Lorde breaks through the denial many post-mastectomy women have closeted themselves in:

If I said all this didn't matter I would be lying. I see this as a serious break in my work/living, but also as a serious chance to learn something that I can share for use. And I mourn the women who limit their loss to the physical loss alone, who do not move into the whole terrible meaning of mortality as both weapon and power. (53)

She speaks of fear as the principal silencer of women. Realizing this, Lorde consciously struggles to name it, live through it, and to write about fear in order that it not immobilize her. Her conception of fear is a startling conceit and personification:

Sometimes fear stalks me like another malignancy, sapping energy and power and attention from my work. . .

. . . . If I cannot banish fear completely, I can learn to count with it less. For then fear becomes not a tyrant . . . but a companion. . . .

I write so much here about fear because in shaping this introduction to The Cancer Journals, I found fear laid across my hands like a steel bar. . . . these emotions . . . were entwined with the terror that if I opened myself once again to scrutiny, to feeling the pain of loss, of despair . . . then I might also open myself again to disease. (15-16)

The depression and the anger (fear) are channeled into the new energy it will take to re-member her life, but not without the bargaining, the fleeting wish for a trade-off:

. . . . I'd give anything not to have cancer and my beautiful breast gone, fled with my love of it. But then immediately after I guess I have to qualify that there are some things I wouldn't give, . . . (76)

Nine months after her breast was "amputated," Lorde realizes that the pain of her loss is an extension of the pain and loss imposed upon all of us by a depersonalizing world, which realization is crucial to counteracting the isolation and the over-personalization of illness and loss:

There is no room around me in which to be still, to examine and explore what pain is mine alone no device to separate my struggle within from my fury at the outside world's victousness, the stupid brutal lack of consciousness or concern that passes for the way things are, (12)

The battle Lorde has had to wage has not only been against the cancer in her right breast but against the irrational power of male-controlled medicine, a battle all Americans must fight whether rich or poor, white or black, whether we admit to the battle or not. Lorde not only survived, she triumphed by coming to terms with the power of her own experience and knowledge. Being black and woman "within this country where racial difference creates a constant . . . distortion of vision" (21), where "we were never meant to survive" (21) has served as fertile training ground for the author's guerilla resistance to the cancer establishment's "concentration upon breast cancer as a cosmetic problem, one which can be solved by a prosthetic pretense." (55)

"The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," a speech delivered in 1977 at the Lesbian and Literature Panel of the Modern Language Association Conference and reprinted here as Part I, is a recounting of Lorde's first confrontation with the fact that she might have cancer. Reflecting upon those anxious weeks before the first biopsy which would prove the growth benign, Lorde says:

In becoming forcibly and essentially aware of my mortality, and of what I wished and wanted for my life, however short it might be, priorities and omissions become strongly etched in a merciless light, and what I regretted were my silences. . . And I began to recognize a source of power within myself that comes from the knowledge that while it is most desirable not to be afraid, learning to put fear into a perspective gave me great strength. (20)

After several readings of this speech, I am hard-put to discern what "action" we must take beyond breaking the silence which prevades cancer specifically and illness in general. Do we refuse to have mastectomies to force the medical establishment to use alternative procedures of treatment? Do we move to break the AMA's and the ACS's monopoly of cancer treatment? Do we lobby for more progressive preventive measures, funding of research into Vitamin C therapy, a guaranteed health insurance plan? Do we use language, as Sontag urges in *Illness as Meta*phor, to transform all the hysterical rhetoric of warfare which surrounds cancer and those who have cancer?

A year after her dramatic speech at the MLA conference, Lorde feels another lump in her breast. The previous experience of preparation, reordering of her life, and biopsy revisits itself, resulting this time in the loss of her right breast.

So this fall I met cancer, as it were, from a considered position, but it still knocked me for a hell of a loop, having to deal with the pain and fear and the death I thought I had come to terms with once before, (26)

Her loss is righteously "marked and mourned" in "Breast Cancer: A Black Lesbian Feminist Experience," Part II of the work. Lorde's refusal to accept as part of herself the "blush pink" lamb's wool puff prosthesis and her struggle to accept herself as "one-breasted" are the themes of this part. She reaches out for the counsel of other women, lesbian and non-lesbian, black and white, older and younger, who have become one-breasted, admitting that the "love of women" (39) healed her.

Lorde recounts how, after her surgery, she longs to talk to women who share her black lesbian feminist politics and vision, unlike the well-meaning evangelistic "Reach for Recovery" volunteers who descend upon post-mastectomy women with platitudes and packages of denial. During her visit from the Reach for Recovery woman, Lorde finds herself wondering whether her changed body will still be pleasurable and attractive to lovers. In a genuinely moving passage, she enunciates her grief at the physical pleasure she will never again feel.

And for the first time deeply and fleetingly a groundswell of sadness rolled up over me that filled my mouth and eyes almost to drowning. My right breast represented such an area of feeling and pleasure for me, how could I bear never to feel that again. (43)

Essentially, it becomes more pressing for Lorde to claim her turf as a vulnerable and powerful part of the community of women "who stayed open to me when I needed that openness like rain, who made themselves available." (53) Her confrontation with mortality gives her a vision of her immortality, as she states in her "Introduction":

. . . . my work is part of a continuum of women's work, of reclaiming this earth and our power, and knowing that this work did not begin with my birth nor will it end with my death. And it means knowing that within this continuum, my life and my love and my work has particular power and meaning relative to others. (17)

Lorde poetically and metaphorically describes the physical pain she experiences after the surgery, after the "dope and the tranquilizers and the grass" wear off, after she leaves the sterile netherworld of the hospital to plod her way toward that acceptance of herself as one-breasted:

. . . . The pain of separation from my breast was at least as sharp as the pain of separating from my mother. But I made it once before, so I know I can make it again. (25-26)

The self-determination explicit in the last sentence of this passage is admirable. But I am frankly confused as to which separation from her mother she is referring to: the separation at birth or the later separation. If she means the latter, then the analogy is apt. If she means the former, then the analogy, though dramatic, remains glib and inaccessible, as most of us cannot remember the pain of being separated from our mothers at birth. But this merely points to the difficulty of explaining to others how we experience physical pain and our fear of remembering how it feels.

More importantly Lorde uses her ability to give her pain voice to counteract the insidious methods used to silence women:

The emphasis upon wearing a prosthesis is a way of avoiding having women come to terms with their own pain and loss, and thereby, with their own strength. (49)

Later Lorde compares prosthesis after mastectomy to giving candy to a baby after an injection—an apt metaphor which pinpoints the absurd light in which women are viewed in this culture.

Part III, "Breast Cancer: Power vs. Prosthesis," is a vivifying attack on the cancer establishment, its repression of information on alternative methods of cancer treatment and prevention, its refusal to take an affirmative stand against environmental and occupational causes of cancer, its administrative waste, and its skewed priorities. This essay is also a recapitulation of the previous parts, emphasizing how post-mastectomy women are invisible to one another because of the pretense and the silence which prevent women from weeping, raging, internalizing, and transcending their own losses. "A mastectomy is not a guilty act that must be

hidden in order for me to regain acceptance or protect the sensibilities of others" (65). She rages at the American Cancer Society and its governmental counterpart, the National Cancer Institute, as "consistently focused upon treatment rather than prevention of cancer, and then only upon those treatments sanctioned by the most conservative branches of western medicine" (71). However, treatment versus prevention is not a problem exclusive to cancer but endemic to health care in general in the United States.

The emphasis placed in male culture upon women's breasts as conveyors of sexual pleasure has locked women to this stereotype in a way that diminshes the rest of our living. To lose one or both breasts is to lose male approval—in the private and public realms—and thus to lose the approbation of this society in general, which can only be minimally regained through the "skillful use of prosthesis."

As women, we fight this depersonalization every day, this pressure toward the conversion of one's own self-image into a media expectation of what might satisfy male demand.... When I mourn my right breast, it is not the appearance of it I mourn, but the feeling and the fact. (64-65)

Lorde's struggle does not culminate in her refusal to wear a prosthesis, but in her struggle against the fatalistic, nostalgic propaganda that isolates those who have cancer from their own living, "There is nothing wrong, per se, with the use of prostheses, if they can be chosen freely . . . after a woman has had a chance to accept her new body." (63) But it is the near coercion to wear prostheses in order not to accept the challenge of a changed body that Lorde urges women to resist. Yet, how do women struggle against this repression and coercion, since many of us do not meet cancer from a "considered position"? How do we organize around broader goals than influencing the market to design clothes for one-breasted women?

The shortcoming of The Cancer Journals is that Lorde does not connect the problem of cancer to the total problem of health care in this culture, where illness is still viewed as a flaw in the character. The high cost of health care in the United States, which the author does not mention, is in no way reflective of its quality. Mastectomy with its ancillary treatment can cost upwards of \$20,000, and it has come to be regarded as a barbaric procedure by progressive health care practitioners in European countries. If a woman decides to look for a physician who might use an alternative procedure, where does she find support in this culture and where does she find the money? The profit-oriented cancer establish-

ment dominates the treatment scene with surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy, though admittedly, these therapies have prolonged the lives of many. Yet, these procedures ensure that money will be made even if one's life is not prolonged. When 80 per cent of the ACS budget is spent on administration and the suppression and blacklisting of alternative methods of treatment and prevention, we must conclude that the existence of a mass of "cancer victims" is profitable, as is all chronic and acute disease.

Warrior that she is, Lorde knows the enemy and makes a wary peace with cancer, which will serve her well in the protracted struggle of daily survival in America. She says in the "Introduction" to this work:

I do not forget cancer for very long, ever. That keeps me armed and on my toes, but also with a slight background noise of fear. (14)

#### And again:

. . . . Once I accept the existence of dying, as a life process, who can ever have power over me again? (25)

Audre Lorde gives us the language of her experience that we might deepen our living and come to terms with our dying.

# MITSUYE YAMADA

AWAKE INTHE RIVER: poems and stories by Janice Mirikitani. Cover and Design and Center Graphic: Gall Aratani. Isthmus Press, Box 6877, San Francisco, CA 94101. 1978. Unpaged \$3.00.

Janice Mirikitani's collection of poems and short stories, Awake In The River, is an imperious presence from the designed-to-shock cover, a young Asian woman's disembodied head in black and white floating atop blood-red waters, to the often bristling poetry and prose within.

Mirikitani, a sansei poet, writes about the effect of racist and sexist wars, national policies and social attitudes on those, like herself, who are outside the dominant culture. Almost every line in this collection screams out at forces that would keep her, Third Generation Japanese American Woman, in a cage. With all this, her poems are not polemical. The wide range of her subject matter appears to be discontinuous flashes of memories and thoughts, but they are, in fact, searingly personal pieces which finally connect to a larger pattern.

The poet shows us that her "family" not only includes members of her immediate and extended families, but also Asians who are victims of racist wars and women who share common experiences. Each piece in this collection becomes a reactivation of emotions experienced before by some member within this large family.

"Spoils of War," one of the three short stories, is strategically placed in the middle of the book, and demonstrates how the pieces of the whole collection fit together. Mirikitani shows us that the Asian American woman, as part of a visible minority with a relatively recent history in this country, may be a victim of crippling stereotypes, but she will use her own and her "family's" experiences to renew herself. The process is a conscious recreation of one's personal history. While the main character in "Spoils of War" sorts out her relationship with her "very blond, very blue and very sure of himself" lover/husband, Gerald, a second story of her nisci parents' experiences through the World War II years unfolds contrapuntally. This arrangement gives the reader a view

of the cause-and-effect relationship between her parents' experiences and her own. Every discordant sensation she experiences—Gerald's crushing need for her which she associates with exploitative power; her feelings of inadequacy which she blames on herself; her feeling that she is accepted as long as she opens her thighs; her uncasiness about Gerald's cavalier attitude toward the My Lai incident—is correlated with imagery which can be traced to her parents' and her own remembered past.

As the past is interspersed with the present, we see the image of the men in the mother's generation who were "bound tightly within, giving nothing of their deep selves" along with Gerald who quietly tries to "maneuver her into bed" without satisfying her need for verbal communication. There is the image of the mother busying herself in caring for her infant daughter in the barrack at relocation camp, "wondering what the crime," as if there were reasons to wonder; along with the daughter echoing the same feelings years later as she is "weakened by guilt" when she withholds herself from Gerald. We already know what informs the thinking process of Gerald, the supremely confident white male figure who acts and thinks with the weight of the American historical past behind him. No matter that his character as drawn here is stereotypic—the young Asian woman gives his strength validity by reacting to it as she is expected to, "with awe," "somewhere in the back of her being."

Mirikitani then skillfully interweaves several events into the whole fabric: the quarrel with Gerald, the death of a small child, an interview for a job, the rape of a child by her uncle. After her quarrel with Gerald, who claimed that the use of the Atom Bomb on the Japanese was necessary and that "atrocity is inconsequential," she recalled images of other events at other times:

Gernld ceased fire for the night. Lifting her to the demilitarized zone. Pulled the bedcover. She, drowning in the wave of sheets, surrendering to dark sleep:

The road shimmered across farmlands in the heat.

The good was a freeway to another large town, and traffic was always too fast. They were cautioned frequently.

Sachiko broke from the younger cousins, eager to get to the cool shade. The screaming of brakes pierced the dense heat.

She sat up in the darkness. Gerald grunted softly and stirred, turned on his side. Her skin prickled as she felt the terrible emptiness of air on her arms. "Without the law, humans would be reduced...."

Incense circling over Sachiko's coffin.

The family got nothing from the man who said he was not drunk when his car hit the kid. She came from nowhere he had said, like a chicken flying across the road.

Immediately following is the interview scene juxtaposed with the rape scene. The method allows Mirikitani to make statements associatively with utmost economy:

The black man who sat behind his disarrayed desk was muscular, animated, his flesh shining as he talked and smiled.

The sinking feeling of losing herself again. . . it had something to do with guilt.

Her uncle offered her a walk through the field, It was dark. She had stayed at her grandmother's too long. She welcomed the offer. In the hot night, toads were thick on the dust dry stretch where the corn had been cut. She dreaded stepping on them. Obscene croaks. He held the flashlight so she could see the toads parting the path, his free arm on her shoulders. Flashlight clicked off. The ground silently leaping around her.

Woman, victim? violator?

White, black, yellow. The world is dark, wet, and still a male preserve. The female child's/woman's path is thick with obscene toads.

Out of the darkness, this Asian American woman—known only as "she" throughout the story—emerges. Her memories have kept her from becoming totally sold on the American Dream, and when she gives that up, breaking away from the "comfortably safe" existence in the arms of Gerald, she finds she has her own cultural heritage, unlike her mother's, unlike Gerald's, unlike anyone else's.

In the end she is able to say, "My Name is Hatsuko," literally meaning the beginning or first child in Japanese, but "ko" as applied to names, always the girl child. I am my own beginning, she appears to be saying. She has finally named herself, "Hatsuko," first woman.

The rest of the collection provides a strong frame for "Spoils of War." The poet covers a wider range of subjects which become part of the historical experience of Asians. Particularly telling are her vivid portraits of her female relatives: mother, grandmother, "Aunt Sumi," "Crazy Alice," and others. In each of these poems, the persona catalogues the silent endurance of the women even as they appear to have "gone mad." She betrays a conviction that no matter what is done to the

Asian woman, she will survive.

In "Attack the War," she is fully confident that the Vietnamese woman in the war photos (whom she sees as her own grandmother) will survive even if her very source of life, water, has been attacked:

> Obachan would chew the food first/spit out maggots. Grandchildren ate the spit-flushed rice.

> > When all else fails attack the water.

In two separate poems, "Loving from Vietnam to Zimbabwe" and "Jungle Rot and Open Arms," an Asian American woman is comforting two Vietnam veterans, one of whom is black. In their delirium, these veterans see her more closely allied in spirit to the Asian "enemy" or victims, not to the government that has "used" all of them, because they knew she "looked like" them. Enormous compassion is felt in these poems; from a woman whose parents were forced during World War II to choose their "loyalties" between Japan or the United States, they are a remarkably non-judgmental declaration.

Belonging to a generation of Asian American women writers who (along with Nellie Wong, Merle Woo, Amy Ling, Geraldine Kudaka and many others), no longer believe biculturalism to be a burden but a liberating force, Mirikitani can openly rail against racism against Asians in our society and against the myopia of white women in the movement. At the same time, she reaches out in support of her Asian sisters and acknowledges her kinship with them:

It is the second of September and the wind is marching blowing the leaves like banners singing through our bodies clothing the earth like a spirit marching victorious I am with you my sister and my tears wash gladly as I see you/glimmering

alive/free.

("September Second"—On the Victory of the People of Vietnam, To Mrs. Huong)

To those of us who have survived, Mirikitani challenges us to be what we are capable of becoming. The title short story/poem "Awake in the River" which closes the book reminds us once again how deeply engrained is the legacy of our past. As it does in many of the poems, the concentration camp experience dominates this poem. The desert image has become our inheritance. The Japanese American woman has survived that experience and, like the tortoise in the poem, has escaped:

Tortoise takes each step inevitable as time full with spawn, a new age to the shore where it will bury eggs.

The men kept their war inside, Pulling weeds by roots. Figures bent, not broken, wind rounding their backs, Grandfather wears his wait like a shell. Sleep in the desert, he warned.

Tortoise, empty, worn, plunges to the deep. In the steady pounding of the waves, offsprings wake.

Mother steady singing by the crib.

Sleep in the desert. Awake in the river.

The wetness of the river is no longer part of the darkness that deyours us, but it is fertile ground for new life.

In her most lyrical poem, "Sing With Your Body," the poet gently urges her daughter Tianne Tsukiko, to create her own rhythm. It is the voice of a mother who has experienced more than she has wanted to. It is the voice of all women:

> We love with great difficulty spinning in one place afraid to create

> > spaces.

new rhy thm

the beat of a child dangled by her own inner car takes Aretha with her

upstairs, somewhere

go quickly Tsukiko,

into your circled dance

go quickly

before your steps are halted by who you are not

go quickly

to learn the mixed sounds of your tongue,

go quickly

to who you are

before

your mother swallows what she has lost.

BLACK LESBIANS: AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY by JR Roberts. Naiad Press, P.O. Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302. 1981. 92 pp. \$5.95/individuals; \$8/institutions.

Black Lesbians: An Annotated Bibliography is, indeed, as Barbara Smith contends in her foreword: "a miracle" and "a triumph" (ix). This innovative text compiled by JR Roberts, a white Lesbian feminist, contains more than 350 entries that include oral histories, political analyses, poetry, prose, recordings, and other print and non-print materials by or about Black Lesbians. The bibliography also documents such historical concerns of Black women as racism in the women's movement and Lesbian/gay liberation struggles, homophobia in the Black community, police harrassment, and other forms of political violence and repression. Black Lesbians notes the many ways we celebrate our lives and rebellion through song, on film, in letters and in conversation. In this way Black Leshians emphasizes the interconnected visions we, as a people, share for a liberated future. The bibliography notes with fierce clarity the many racist, anti-woman, homophobic stereotypes and misconceptions that Black women are subject to in mainstream literature, criticism and journalism.

Black Lesbians is a terribly necessary work. It provides us with many obscure articles from such Black magazines as Jet, Ehony, and Essence. Roberts has also located a number of pieces on Black Lesbians that have appeared in Black newspapers like the Amsterdam News and in local papers like The Milwaukee Journal. The text also cites pieces by or about Black Lesbians that have appeared in women's and Lesbian/gay periodicals that unfortunately are now defunct.

This book is important as well in a number of historical contexts. Through her sensitive annotation Roberts has been able to link the publication of many of the works indexed to historical events and eras. She has, in addition, noted Black Lesbians whose lives are in need of further documentation: Anita Cornwell, a prolific contributor to *The Ladder* and other Lesbian publications, who was "born in the Deep South when lynching was still commonplace, migrated to the North, and later became involved in the civil rights and women's movements" (12), and the

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Reverend Magora E. Kennedy (Miller), a Black Lesbian minister who was "kicked out of two churches for her lesbianism and anti-war activism . . . Approaching worship and the Bible from a pro-woman stance, she was also criticized by the Council on Religion and the Homosexual for her efforts to establish a 'woman-only' church" (20-21). In addition to an extensive addendum and a thorough listing of articles that appeared concerning the Norton Sound case (the 1980 Lesbian witch-hunt conducted by the U.S. Navy) Roberts has listed "Some Suggested Activities for Black Lesbian Research" which, along with the vast contents of the book iteself, can, in Smith's words, change "the overwhelming whiteness of lesbian research specifically and women's studies research generally" (ix).

Despite the incredible need for this kind of book, Black Leshians raises crucial questions about the nature of the research that is to be done about Leshians of color. While white Leshians must be held accountable for ignoring and omitting Leshians of color from their work, the issue of white women examining and documenting our lives and struggles has not yet been appropriately addressed. In her introduction Roberts maintains that her intention in compiling this bibliography is "not to speak for Black Leshians nor to define or evaluate their experience or culture. Rather as a bibliographer, it is to gather all the hidden and scattered voices into a collective place, so that they are more accessible and so that especially Black leshian voices can be heard" (xi-xii). This, in my view, is the direction that white researchers should follow in their work with materials by women of color.

Although Roberts has located a lot of obscure, generally inaccessible material, she has made editorial choices that have left out some important writing by Black Lesbians. Azalea: A Magazine By and For Third World Lesbians, for instance, is indexed selectively; as a result, no listing is included for the specific contents of the issue on Third World Mothers (Winter 1979-1980), which includes stories by Becky Birtha and Audre Lorde, poetry by Lorde and Michelle Cliff, and an interview with Julie Blackwomon and her fifteen-year-old daughter regarding their custody battle. Roberts also indexed selectively Conditions: Five, The Black Women's Issue, thereby leaving out citations for Linda Powell's review of Michelle Wallace's Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman, Fahamisha Shariat's review of Audre Lorde's The Black Unicorn, and Cheryl Clarke's review of Ntozake Shange's nappy edges. These omissions are particularly important to note because these two publications are among the very few where editorial control was completely in the hands of Black-or other Third World - Lesbians,

While it is impossible to expect any bibliographer to collect all of the existing works on any given topic, it is surprising that such misogynist/ homophobic pieces as Eldridge Cleaver's Soul on Ice and Robert Staples' notorious contributions to The Black Scholar are included along with ridiculous remarks by Muhammed Ali, while important literature, criticism and analysis by Black Lesbians in periodicals edited by them are not fully indexed. I would have preferred less of the former and more of the latter.

The cut-off date for the bibliography was 1979, though the addendum lists some works published in 1981. This probably accounts for a number of writings by Black Leshians that did not find their way into the bibliography, such as Deidre McCalla's contribution to *The Conting* Out Stories (1980) or Michelle Cliff's "Words That Chain Us and Words That Set Us Free': Segregation and Lillian Smith" in a 1979 Feminary.

These omissons point to the fact that this book had to be finished—that ongoing research about Black Lesbians is essential. Roberts has done a fine piece of lesbian research and has greatly contributed to the development of anti-racism scholarship. I raise these points only to stress the fact that more work of this sort must be done. The second volume of Black Lesbians is something we all must consider and bring to life. I look forward to seeing and using it.

THE LESBIAN IN LITERATURE by Barbara Grier. Naiad Press, P.O. Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302. 1981. 68 pp. \$7.95 to individuals; \$10 to institutions.

This is not at all the review I would like to have written. An avid lesbjan bibliography buff who regularly scours libraries and second-hand bookstores. I would like to appreciate unreservedly Barbara Grier's 3rd edition of The Lesbian in Literature, which updates the 1975 edition and contains about twice as many entries as that previous bibliography. I would like to revel in a book that, with 7,000 entries, is, as Maida Tilchen states in her foreword, "the most complete listing of writing by or about lesbians that exists" (xi), I would like to appreciate without qualification the commitment and often tedious labor of the many women (and one man) who located not just recent books but a host of older ones that had been absent from the earlier editions: Herbert Mann's 1797 The Female Review: Life of Deborah Sampson, a soldier in the Revolutionary War; Wallace Thurman's 1927 The Blacker the Berry, one of the novels of the Harlem Renaissance; Muriel Rukeyser's 1935 poetry book, Theory of Flight, And I certainly would like nothing to diminish my pleasure in the eighty-nine photographs, starting with Sappho and working their way through Willa Cather, Margaret Anderson, and others, and then on to contemporary writers.

The value of this bibliography lies in sheer quantity, the incredible number of works listed. Rarely annotated, they are included on the basis of "Lesbian content" and rated from "A" ("major Lesbian characters and/action") to "C" (latent, repressed, variant), as well as in terms of "the quality of the Lesbian material" (xx) itself, not to be confused with "literary quality," let alone the author's attitude toward lesbians. So, for instance, D.H. Lawrence's homophobic story "The Fox" received a rating of "A" and two asterisks ("very substantial quality of Lesbian material"), while Judy Grahn's classic lesbian-feminist poem "A Woman Is Talking to Death" receives an "A" and only one asterisk ("some interest beyond the ordinary"), rather than three asterisks ("those few titles that stand out above all the rest and must properly belong in any collection of Lesbian literature").

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Inevitably in such an extensive undertaking, some omissions and errors occur: poet Susan Sherman, for example, is not, as listed here, the Susan Sherman who wrote the 1961 novel Give Me Myself; none of Lynn Strongin's more than half-dozen poetry books are listed under her entry, though they are still in print and, like her 1980 novel Bones and Kim, are additionally valuable when they explore themes of illness and disability. As Grier notes, the immense growth of lesbian literature in the past decade moves the compilers of the bibliography long past the time when they could even hope for completeness. Certainly many of these omissions stem from the increase in writing that is self-published or published in limited editions or published by new presses just learning about publicity and distribution. Given this, it is clearly to Grier's credit that the bibliography contains as many entries as it does.

My main criticisms fall, however, not on the occasional books missed, not on the rare errors, not on the rating system applied to each work, but on the methodology that determines what even gets included in the bibliography. Even where the author is publicly lesbian-identified, for example, her work is included only if it contains "Lesbian content," resulting in such omissions as Carson McCullers, who is described as a lesbian under a Tennessee Williams entry, and Lorraine Hansberry, who had written letters in the 50's to the pioneering lesbian magazine The Ladder. "Current movement periodicals" (xvlii) are not indexed either. Both of these decisions help define the parameters of The Lesbian in Literature and need, I think, to be considered within an historical context. Made in 1968 when the first edition was published, the choice to focus on "content," rather than on "lesbian identification," emerged quite naturally out of Grier's "Lesbiana," the book review column of The Ladder, at a time when finding any writing about lesbians was a notable accomplishment and a woman's public self-identification as a lesbian was a far lonelier and more courageous statement than it has been since the development of a lesbian-feminist movement. Similarly, the decision first reflected in the 1967 edition not to index movement periodicals was made at a time that pre-dates The Furies, Amazon Quarterly, and subsequent lesbian periodicals, as well as off our backs and other feminist newspapers that have published occasional poetry and short stories.

Given the tremendous increase over the past decade in numbers of writers willing to be identified publicly as lesbians and the prolific growth of movement publications, the bibliography is far less definitive than Tilchen's foreword indicates. What are the relative merits, for instance, of including two James Bond novels by Ian Fleming because of their "Lesbian content," but excluding all of the twelve novels and four volumes of short stories by Willa Cather because they are not about lesbians but do reflect the perspective of a tremendously important lesbian writer who, responding to the societal pressures of her time, chose not to depict woman-identified relationships in her fiction? What does it mean for the reader or researcher, particularly the one who uses this bibliography as a starting point, that the individual poems and stories listed did not appear in movement publications, were selected for publication almost entirely by non-lesbian/non-feminist editors, and thereby do not reflect the development of the very periodicals that have been so essential to the creation of today's lesbian literature? I regret that The Lesbian in Literature contains no discussion of questions such as these, which have important implications for its scope—and for some of the uses to which it can (and cannot) be put.

While I simply disagree with Grier about the decisions she has made in these areas, I have far more basic criticisms of a bibliography published in 1981 that is so much whiter than it need have been. Although I will continue to make considerable use of The Lesbian in Literature in my work, its value will be extremely limited when I consider the work of lesbians of color: it does not, as one promotional blurb says, bring us "our entire literary heritage," "all our ancestors." The problem, as I see it, is the application of a bibliographic methodology used in the 1967 edition and not substantially rethought and revised in terms of its political implications.

I am not suggesting a total scrapping of this methodology. But I am suggesting a look at how its strict application—racism being what it is and has been—excludes much of the work of lesbians of color. Within this framework, I see the question of methodology as related to other areas where, while the presence of people of color is viewed by whites as positive, no affirmative action steps are taken to make that a reality; instead, criteria are applied uniformly—grades and test scores, degree requirements, specific paid work experience, lists of publications and awards—as if each operated apart from a context of individual and institutional racism.

Let me offer three instances where I believe these issues come into play:

 The bibliography lists "a number of essay collections and other unclassifiable non-fiction" (xxi), but not critical essays. It lists no fulllength critical work by a lesbian of color, simply because no such work has been published. The bibliography thereby reflects a reality. But the omission of critical/theoretical work by lesbians of color leaves the inaccurate impression that lesbians of color just don't do that sort of writing. To counter this inaccuracy, Grier might have chosen to include a selected number of works by lesbians of color, even if they're not full-length, while including only full-length critical/theoretical writing by white women. A similar decision might have been made in terms of biographical/autobiographical writing, since a comparatively large number of such works by and about white lesbians exists. While none of our lives and perspectives have been written about nearly enough, those of us who are white can still find a great deal more than lesbians of color can to identify with in *The Lesbian in Literature* as it is.

- "We have not indexed current movement periodicals" (xviii). Certainly to do this across-the-board would be a mind-boggling task, especially in addition to the work already done by Grier and other compilers. But with the perhaps unique exception of Lin Yatta's two-page story in Evergreen Review, lesbians of color have not even had access to the publications that the bibliography does list because they printed a rare poem or story by/about white lesbians: Century Magazine, Cosmopolitan, Mademoiselle, New Yorker. Again, the compilers could have chosen to include poetry and fiction by lesbians of color alone that appeared in movement periodicals. Such a reconceptualization of what is eligible for inclusion could also have led, for example, to the listing of Conditions: Five, The Black Women's Issue (1976), a nearly 200-page anthology of writing, mostly by Black lesbians, which, because it was published as a magazine issue, is, according to current guidelines, outside the framework of the bibliography. (As with critical and bibliographical writing, full-length works of fiction and poetry by self-identified lesbians of color have a radically different publishing history than such works by white lesbians: the first book of poetry by a lesbian of color, Audre Lorde's The First Cities, appeared in the late 60's; the first novel by a lesbian of color, Ann Allen Shockley's Loving Her, appeared less than a decade ago; no novels have yet been published by publicly-identified leshians who are American Indian, Asian American, or Latina.)
  - 3. "This edition has a copyright cut-off date of 1979. A few 1980 titles are included. No 1981 titles are included..." (xviii). Again, nothing unreasonable about this on the face of it. But a stronger effort could have been made to include among the few 1980 books listed as many by lesbians of color as the compilers could locate: I counted over

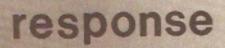
fifteen 1980 books, but only two by lesbians of color. Yet 1980 works include Michelle Cliff's Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise; editors Joan Gibbs and Sara Bennett's Top Ranking: A Collection of Articles on Racism and Classism in the Lesbian Community; Audre Lorde's The Cancer Journals; and Barbara Smith's pamphlet Toward a Black Feminist Criticism. And certainly JR Roberts' Black Lesbians: An Annotated Bibliography deserves prominant mention in the introductory section of The Lesbian in Literature, even if excluded because of its 1981 date of publication; as does Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color, a 1981 book particularly significant for its extensive inclusion of work by American Indian, Asian-American, and Latina lesbians.

My feelings about these omissions are all the keener because I had hoped to find in the 1981 edition of The Lesbian in Literature a work that, like Bluck Lesbians, also compiled by a white lesbian, would, as Barbara Smith wrote about that bibliography, "be one means of changing the overwhelming whiteness of leshian research specifically and women's studies research generally ("Foreword," ix). Given that book, which, like Grier's bibliography, is also a Naiad Press publication, I hoped especially for something different; not the total absence of American Indian. Asian-American, and Latina lesbians from the eighty-nine photographs; not five pictures of Black women, all contemporary, only three of whom are actually lesbian-identified, when so many Black lesbian writers could have been included; not the listing of books as "major" or "essential," with no acknowledgment in the annotation of the complete absence-or token presence-of lesbians of color; not the omission of Audre Lorde's three earliest poetry books, The First Cities (1968), Cables to Rage (1970), and From a Land Where Other People Live (published in 1973 and nominated for a National Book Award), each including poems with clear "Lesbian content" and each essential reading for anyone interested in the life of a Black lesbian who has been "out" since the 50's.

I have gone into such detail about these criticisms of the 3rd edition of The Lesbian in Literature because this bibliography is not the unalterable product that a book nearly always is—it is what we have until it is revised, updated, and expanded into the 4th edition. And I cannot respond to Grier's request for "help for future editions" just by listing books I "find with Lesbian content" (xviii) that are omitted here. Certainly the addition of earlier books by lesbians of color along with those by/about lesbians of color published since 1979 will have a positive impact on the next edition. But I do think that the methodology as a whole

needs to be reconceptualized so that in the future important work can be included that previously had not fit into the bibliography's categories. In many ways, this revision would be consistent with the pioneering concept that helped Grier bring The Lesbian in Literature into existence almost fifteen years ago—looking at what has too often remained unseen, unacknowledged, unvalued; challenging old assumptions; and creating new approaches to making visible a lesbian literary heritage.







#### Dear Editors:

I was just reading the reviews in Conditions: Seven and would like to comment on Penclope and Wolfe's THE COMING OUT STORIES. In the introduction to the volume the editors regret that they had no stories from someone in New Mexico (among some other states mentioned) and in her review, Bernice Mennis comments on the shortage of entries by third-world women (a point well-taken). I submitted a story to the editors—actually, to Susan Wolfe in the spring of 1979 for that volume; it was not printed, so presumably it was rejected (though Mennis comments that the editors "made the editorial choice to accept all submissions and not to edit out any parts"). The story was about the coming out of an American Indian woman, and was a fictionalized version of my own story.

I don't know what ever happened to it; perhaps it was lost in the editorial melee that must have ensued as manuscripts began coming in. But I think the editors' decision not to edit wasn't exactly as clear-cut as it might sound. I never heard from Susan Wolfe regarding the story, and Julia Penelope disclaimed any knowledge of it, so perhaps the goddess purloined it. On the other hand perhaps the lack of third-world southwestern entries isn't as much due to our neglect of the volume as to other factors. As "no one" knows anything about the manuscript after it left my hands, we'll never know for sure.

Sincerely yours,

Paula Gunn Allen

Dear Editors:

I experienced varying emotions after reading Paula Gunn Allen's letter to you.

The first was, quite simply, guilt. I received a letter from Paula in February 1979, and I never answered it. I debated how to answer it, postponed answering it due to personal and job pressures and then forgot it. For that I am deeply sorry, and I'm glad to have this chance to apologize to her publicly. (As everyone involved in publishing will concede, we often delay or even fail to answer correspondence, for many reasons. We don't, in women's publishing have secretaries to write it for us, or type it for us. But that is no excuse—there are postcards. I hope Paula will forgive me.)

My dominant reaction was confusion. Paula's 1979 letter to me contained no story; it contained a poem entitled "He na tye Woman," and inquired whether we'd like to receive her story. So if the manuscript of that story has disappeared, neither Julia nor I, quite frankly, have or could have the slightest idea where it went. (I should point out that our manuscript. The Coming Out Stories under another title was compiled between October 1976 and April 1977. By 1979, it had been considered by four publishers, each of whom had told us it was far too long to print. Julia and I were certain it would never see print. This does not excuse my unconscionable rudeness to Paula, however.)

I was also angry on Julia's behalf. Julia spent the summer of 1980 in New Mexico, a great deal of it with Paula. Julia had never received Paula's letter, which was mailed only to me, and therefore denied having seen it. Paula had ample time to confront her if she disbelieved Julia's disclaimer or the introduction to *The Coming Out Stories*. Yet she chose a public forum instead—over a year later.

Given Persephone Press's commitment to ending racism, I am now confident they would have included Paula's story, even as a late addition to an anthology which was already large by 1979 standards. I did not know that in early 1979, before they had seen the manuscript and before

I had gotten to know them.

But, above and beyond all else, Paula deserved courtesy, and I was lacking in it. I am sincerely sorry for that, and for any misunderstanding I may have caused between her and Julia. And I regret having missed the chance to include a story which would have enriched the anthology.

Susan J. Wolfe

### CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

PAULA GUNN ALLEN, Laguna Pueblo/Sioux-Lebanese American, is presently on a post-doctoral research fellowship at UCLA/Institute of American Cultures-American Indian Culture and Research Center where she is working on several studies on the history, background and writing of American Indian women.

GLORIA ANZALDUA — I'm a fulltime Chicana Tejana lesbian poet.

Right now I'm in the final stage of birthing a book about spirited politics and queer colored vision. I am co-editor of This Bridge Called My Back: writings by Radical Women of Color. In my spare time I try to support myself by giving talks and by teaching creative writing workshops utilizing psychotechniques (magic).

SY MARGARET BALDWIN was born and raised in England. She lived in California for fifteen years; currently she lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Her poems have appeared in Bachy, Beyond Baroque, Hanging Loose, and Earth's Daughter. She works as a firefighter with the Forest Service.

ELLY BULKIN is co-editor of Lesbian Poetry: An Anthology and editor of Lesbian Fiction: An Anthology (both Persephone Press, 1981).

CHRYSTOS descended from the Menominee Nation (we're the ones whose wild rice you eat). I paint my visions, love Jane & couldn't make it without my friends, 2 of whom appear in this issue.

CHERYL CLARKE — Regularly published in Conditions. Poet, critic, and teacher. Currently at work on Narratives, a book of poetry in the black-American tradition.

JAN CLAUSEN's "A Movement of Poets: Thoughts on Poetry and Ferninism," recently serialized in the Feminist Review (New Women's Times), is now available from Long Haul Press. She is having a novel primipara, breech delivery.

HATTIE GOSSETT — born: central jersey factorytown, lives: northern harlem. enjoys; thinking conversating reading writing jazzing & opposing patripower, work herstory: babysitter maid clerk annullee waitress badgirl. n.b.: stay tuned to badgirls grapevine for news of forthcoming collection of writings by miz haltie. MARILYN HACKER is the author of *Taking Notice* (Knopf, 1980). The title poem was published as a chapbook by Out & Out Books. She lives in New York City with Iva, aged eight.

LINDA HOGAN currently works with Colorado Poets in the Schools Program. She recently won the Five Civilized Tribes Playwriting Award. She has two books in print, Calling Myself Home and Daughters, I Love You, and one more at publishers.

BARBARA T. KERR grew up in Beach Haven, N.J. where it was very difficult to find out or talk about sex. Her small press publications are too obscure to mention. Passionate about cooking, she is currently experimenting with the role housebutch.

IRENA KLEPFISZ has completed a new book of poetry From the Monkey House and Other Cages. She has also been writing about anti-Seminitism inside and outside the lesbian/feminist community. Her writings on this subject appear in Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology (Persephone Press, 1982).

GWYN METZ has lived in New York City for the past eleven years, but finds other places more conducive to the tranquil and mysterious images that capture her. Her photographs tend toward a graphic simplicity sublime in nature, a kind of personal journalism. She works as a free-lance art photographer while attending Parsons School of Design. Her work has appeared in many art publications.

CHERRIE MORAGA is a Chicana poet and politica and co-editor of This Bridge Called My Back; Writings by Radical Women of Color (Persephone, 1981). She is also a founding and active member of Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press in New York City.

CARROLL OLIVER is a new member of the Conditions Collective, a writer, a student of anthropology, and a political activist involved in struggle on many fronts.

MINNIE BRUCE PRATT is at work in her second book of poems, Walking Back Up Depot Street. She is a member of the collective that edits Feminary, a lesbian-feminist journal for the South.

MIRTHA N. QUINTANALES — Bi-coastal Latina Lesbian socialist feminist. Anthropologist, emergent writer and closet artist. Founding member of the Third World Women's Archives and new member of Conditions, Greatest need in life: a fifty-hour day.

RIMA SHORE — Slavist, writer, teacher, editor, translator—is perpetually deciding how best to spend the day.

BARBARA SMITH is a Black feminist writer and activist who has recently committed herself to writing fiction. She co-edited Conditions: Five, The Black Women's Issue (1979) and All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies (1982).

MITSUYE YAMADA teaches at Cypress College and at California State University and directs workshops for Asian American women writers. She is committed to encouraging and promoting the writings of women, especially Third World women. She is a subject of a new film, Mitsuye and Nellie: Asian American Poets (Light-Sarat Films).

BONNIE ZIMMERMAN teaches women's studies at San Diego State University. She writes about women's literature, lesbianism, and popular culture.

Small-press books by contributors to CONDITIONS: EIGHT Include:

- Paula Gunn Allen, Shadow Country, UCLA/Native American Series (Publications/American Indian Studies Center, Room 3220 Campbell Hall, University of California, 405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024), 1982, 160 pp., \$7.
- ———, Star Child (Blue Cloud Quarterly; order from Allen, 846 N. Sanborn, Los Angeles, CA 90029), 24 pp., \$3.
- ———, A Cannon Between My Knees (Strawberry Press; order from Allen), 15 pp., \$2.50.
  - ———, Coyote's Daylight Trip (La Confluencia; order from Allen), 50 pp., \$3.95.
- Elly Bulkin and Joan Larkin, eds., Lesbian Poetry: An Anthology (Persephone Press, P.O. Box 7222, Watertown, MA 02172), 1981, 336 pp., \$10.95 plus \$1 p/h.
- Elly Bulkin, ed., Lesbian Fiction: An Anthology (Persephone Press,), 1981, 336 pp., \$10.95 plus \$1 p/h.
- Jan Clausen, A Movement of Poets: Thoughts on Poetry and Feminism (Long Haul Press, P.O. Box 592, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, NY 11215), 1982, 50 pp., \$3.
- ———, Mother, Sister, Daughter, Lover, stories (The Crossing Press, Trumansburg, NY 14886), 1980, 136 pp., \$4.95.
- ----- Waking at the Bottom of the Dark (Long Haul Press), 1979,

80 pp., \$3 plus 65¢ p/h.

After Touch (distributed by Long Haul Press), 1975, 76 pp., \$2 plus 65¢ p/h.

Marilyn Hacker, Taking Notice, sonnet sequence (Out & Out Books;

distributed Crossing Press), 1980, \$2.

Linda Hogan, Eclipse (UCLA American Indian Studies Center), 1982.
Daughters, I Love You (Loretto Heights College, 3001 South

Federal Blvd., Denver, CO 80236), 1981, 20 pp.

, Calling Myself Home (Greenfield Review Press, Greenfield Center, NY 12833), 1978, 33 pp., \$2.

Irena Klepfisz, periods of stress (published Out & Out Books; distributed Piecework Press, GPO Box 2422, Brooklyn, NY 11202), 1975, 61 pp., \$2.

Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color (Persephone Press), 1981, 261

pp., \$8.95 plus \$1 p/h.

Minnie Bruce Pratt, the sound of one fork (night heron press, P.O. Box 3103, Durham, NC 27705), 1981, 41 pp., \$2 plus 50¢ p/h.

Barbara Smith, Gloria T. Hull, and Patricia Bell Scott, eds., All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies (The Feminist Press, Box 334, Old Westbury, NY 11568), 1982, 401 pp., \$8.95 (\$14.95 hardcover).

Mitsuye Yamada, Camp Notes and Other Poems (Shameless Hussy Press,

Box 424, San Lorenzo, CA 94580), 1976, \$2.95.

Work by Contributors to CONDITIONS: EIGHT is included in the following small-press anthologies and collections:

American Indian Writings, The Greenfield Review, Vol. 9, Nos. 3 & 4 (The Greenfield Review, R.D. 1, Box 80, Greenfield Center, NY 12833), 1981, 266 pp., \$4, Paula Gunn Allen, Linda Hogan.

American Indians Today: Their Thought, Their Literature, Their Art. Elaine Jahner, ed., Book Forum, Vol. V, No. 3 (Book Forum, 38 E. 76 St., NY, NY 10021), 1981, 120 pp., \$5. Paula Gunn Allen, Linda Hogan.

Asian American Women, Part II, Genny Lim and Judy Yung, eds., Bridge: An Asian American Perspective, Vol. 7, No. 1 (P.O. Box 477, Canal St. Station, NY, NY 10013), 1979, 55 pp., \$1.50. Mitsuye Yamada.

Ayumi: A Japanese American Anthology (Japanese American Anthology Committee, P.O. Box 5024, San Francisco, CA 94101), 1981, 320

- pp., \$12. Mitsuye Yamada.
- The Coming Out Stories, Julia Penelope Stanley and Susan J. Wolfe, eds. (Persephone Press), 1980, 251 pp., \$6.95. Cherrie Moraga, Minnie Bruce Pratt,
- Conditions: Five, The Black Women's Issue, Barbara Smith and Lorraine Bethel, eds. (Conditions, P.O. Box 56, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, NY 11215), 1979, 187 pp., \$4.50. Cheryl Clarke,
- Echoes from Gold Mountain (California State University, Long Beach, CA 90840), 1982, 112 pp., \$5. Mitsuye Yamada.
- Fight Back! Feminist Resistance to Male Violence, Frédérique Delacoste and Felice Newman, eds. (Cleis Press, P.O. Box 8281, Minneapolis, MN 55408), 1981, 398 pp., \$13.95, Barbara Smith.
- Lesbian Fiction: An Anthology, Elly Bulkin, ed. (Persephone Press), 1981, 336 pp., \$8.95 plus \$1 p/h. Jan Clausen, Irena Klepfisz.
- The Lesbian Path, Margaret Cruikshank, ed. (Angel Press; distributed Naiad Press, P.O. Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302), 1980, 248 pp., \$6.95. Minnie Bruce Pratt.
- Leshian Poetry: An Anthology, Elly Bulkin and Joan Larkin, eds. (Persephone Press), 1981, 336 pp., \$10.95 plus \$1 p/h, Paula Gunn Allen, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cheryl Clarke, Jan Clausen, Marilyn Hacker, Irena Klepfisz, Cherrie Moraga, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Barbara Smith.
- Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology, Evelyn Torton Beck, ed. (Persephone Press), 1982, \$8.95 plus \$1 p/h. Irena Klepfisz.
- The Remembered Earth: An Anthology of Contemporary Native American Literature, Geaty Hobson, ed. (Red Earth Press, P.O. Box 26641, Albuquerque, NM 87125, 1979, \$9.95. Paula Gunn Allen, Linda Hogan.
- This Bridge Called My Back; Writings by Radical Women of Color, Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. (Persephone Press), 1981, 261 pp., \$8.95 plus \$1 p/h. Chrystos, Hattie Gossett, Mirtha Quintanales, Barbara Smith, Mitsuye Yamada,

#### PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

- Paula Gunn Allen, Star Child, poems (Blue Cloud Quarterly; order from Allen, 846 N. Sanborn, Los Angeles, CA 90029), 1981, 24 pp. \$3.
- ———, A Cannon Between My Legs, poems (Strawberry Press; order from Allen), 1981, 15 pp., \$2.50.
- Susan C. Bourque and Kay Barbara Warren, Women of the Andes: Patriarchy and Social Change in Two Peruvian Towns (University of Michigan Press), 1981, 241 pp. S9.50.
- Michelle Connelly, Breaking Dead Wood, poems (The Wild Goose Press, P.O. Box 10, Cazenovia, NY 13035), 1981, 31 pp. \$2.
- Frédérique Delacoste and Felice Newman, eds., Fight Back! Feminist Resistance to Male Violence (Cleis Press, P.O. Box 8281, Minneapolis, MN 55408), 1981, 398 pp. \$13.95.
- Barbara Deming, Remembering Who We Are (Pagoda Publications, distributed by the Naiad Press, P.O. Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32032), 1981, 208 pp., \$6.50.
- Nancy du Plessis, Bud. poems (Eclectic Press, P.O. Box 984, Ansonia Station, NY, NY 10025), 1981, 54 pp., \$3.
- Elana Dykewomon, Fragments from Lesbos, poetry, with etchings by Barbara Johnson (Diaspora Distribution, P.O. Box 272, Langlois, OR, 97450), 1981, 61 pp.
- Sandra Maria Esteves, Yerba Buena, dibujos y poemas (Greenfield Review Press, Greenfield Center, NY 12833), 1980, 91 pp., \$5.
- Miles Franklin, My Brilliant Career (Washington Square Press), 267 pp., \$3.50.
- Jane Gapen, Something Not Yet Ended... (Pagoda Publications; distributed Naiad Press), 1981, 235 pp., \$6.50.
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- Rebecca Gordon, By Her Hands (Ragbooks, 2770 22nd St., San Francisco, CA 94110), 1981, 64 pp., \$3.50.
- Alexandra Grilikhes, On Women Artists: Poems, 1975-1980 (Cleis Press), 1981, 84 pp., \$4.95.
- H.D., HERmione, novel (New Directions), 1981, 238 pp. \$6.95.
- Jana Harris, Manhattan as a Second Language, poems (Harper & Row), 1982, 98 pp., \$5.95.
- ————, Who's That Pushy Bitch?, poems (Jungle Garden Press, 47 Oak Road, Fairfax, CA 94930), 1980, n.p., \$5.

Edith Hodgkinson, Season's Edge, poetry (Hanging Loose Press, 231 Wyckoff St., Brooklyn, NY 11217), 35 pp., \$2.00.

Bell Hooks, Ain't I A Woman, Black Women and Feminism (South End Press, Boston, MA, 1981), 205 pp., \$7.

Eda Howink, They Lived Their Lives, poems (Golden Quill Press, Francestown, NH), 1981, 80 pp., \$5.50.

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Lisa Leghorn and Katherine Parker, Woman's Worth: Sexual Economics and the World of Women (Routledge & Kegan Paul), 1981, 356 pp., \$19.95 cloth/\$10.50 paper.

Robin J. Milstead, Empowering Women Alcoholics To Help Themselves and Their Sisters in the Workplace (Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 2460 Kerper Blvd., Dubuque, Iowa 52001), 1981, 191 pp.

Gail Pass, Surviving Sisters, novel (Atheneum), 1981, 235 pp.

Frances Phillips, For a Living, poems (Hanging Loose Press), 81 pp., \$4.50.

Minnie Bruce Pratt, the sound of one fork, poems (night heron press, P.O. Box 3103, Durham, NC 27705), 41 pp., \$2.00 plus .50 postage.

Victoria Ramstetter, The Marquise and the Novice, a gothic novel (Naiad Press), 1981, 101 pp., \$4.95.

Margaret Randall, ed. and trans., Breaking the Silences: 20th Century Poetry by Cuban Women (Pulp Press, P.O. Box 3868, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6B 3Z3), 1982, 293 pp., \$8.95.

Helen Roberts, ed., Doing Feminist Research (Routledge & Kegan Paul), 1981, 207 pp., \$9.50.

Wendy Rose, Long Division: A Tribal History, poetry (Strawberry Press, P.O. Box 451, Bowling Green Station, NY, NY 10004), \$2.50.

Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal, and Hilary Wainwright, Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism (Alyson Publications), 1981, 253 pp., \$6.95.

Wendy Sanford, ed., Fighting Sexual Harassment: An Advocacy Handbook (Alyson Publications and the Alliance Against Sexual Coercion), 92 pp., \$3.95.

Claudia Scott, Lesbian Writer: collected work of Claudia Scott, Frances Hanckel and Susan Windle, eds. (Naiad Press), 1981, 114 pp., \$4.50.

Arny Christine Straayer, Hurtin & Healin & Talkin It Over, stories (Metis Press, P.O. Box 25187, Chicago, IL 60625), 1980, 114 pp., \$5.

Sheila Ortiz Taylor, Faultline, novel (Naiad Press), 1982, 126 pp., \$6.95.

Valerie Taylor, Prism, novel (Naiad Press), 1981, 146 pp., \$6.95.

Jess Wells, Run, stories and collages (Up Press, 1944 University Ave., East Palo Alto, CA 94303), 1981, n.p., \$2.50.

Frieda Werden, Philosophy Woman at Men's Rodeo, poems (Curbstone Publishing Co., Box 1613 Main, New York, NY 10116), 1981, 75 pp., \$3.95.

Kathleen Wiegner, Freeway Driving, poems (Hanging Loose Press), 1981, 69 pp., \$4.

Barbara Wilson, Thin Ice and Other Stories (Scal Press, Box 13, Seattle, WA 98111), 1981, 125 pp., \$4.95.

Birgitta Wistrand, Swedish Women on the Move, Jeanne Rosen, tr. (The Swedish Institute, Hamngatan 27, P.O. Box 7434, S-103 91 Stockholm Sweden), 112 pp.

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REVIEWS: Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman by Michele Wallace (reviewed by Linda C. Powell); The Black Unicorn by Audre Lorde (reviewed by Fahamisha Shariat); nappy edges by Ntozake Shange (reviewed by Cheryl Clarke).

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FICTION by Dorothy Allison, Diana Bellessi, Sauda Jamal, Irena Klepfisz, Harriet Malinowitz, Camille Norton, May Stevens.

ESSAYS/INTERVIEW: "An Old Dyke's Tale: An Interview with Doris Lunden" by Elly Bulkin; "Lesbians in the Mainstream: Images of Lesbians in Recent Commercial Fiction" by Maureen Brady and Judith McDaniel; "Remembering Sophia Parnok (1885-1933)" by Rima Shore.

REVIEWS: Asian-American Women: Two special issues of Bridge (reviewed by Barhara Noda); Give Me Your Good Far by Maureen Brady (reviewed by Sally George); Movement in Black by Pat Parker (reviewed by Cheryl Clarke); True to Life Adventure Stories (Vol. 1) edited by Judy Grahn (reviewed by Francine Krasno); To Know Each Other and Be Known by Beverly Tanenhaus, The Passionate Perils of Publishing by Celeste West and Valerie Wheat, The Guide to Women's Publishing by Polly Joan and Andrea Chesman, The Media Report Index/Directory by Martha Leslie Allen (reviewed by Dorothy Allison); Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power by Audre Lorde, Women and Support Networks by Blanche Wiesen Cook, The Meaning of Our Love for Women is What We Have Constantly To Expand by Adrienne Rich (reviewed by Bonnie Zimmerman).

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ESSAYS: "Beloved Women: Lesbians in American Indian Cultures" by Paula Gunn Allen; "'The Possibility of Life Between Us': A Dialogue Between Black and Jewish Women" edited by Beverly Smith with Judith Stein and Priscilla Golding.

REVIEWS: The Black and White of It by Ann Allen Shockley (reviewed by Lynne Reynolds); The Coming Out Stories edited by Julia Penelope Stanley and Susan J. Wolfe (reviewed by Bernice Mennis); Lorraine Hansberry, Art of Thunder, Vision of Light, edited by Jean Carey Bond (reviewed by Becky Birtha); Top Ranking: A Collection of Articles on Racism and Classism in the Lesbian Community, edited by Joan Gibbs and Sara Bennett (reviewed by Cherrie Moraga); The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women by Sally Miller Gearhart (reviewed by Catherine Madsen); We Speak in Code by Melanic Kaye (reviewed by Michelle Cliff).

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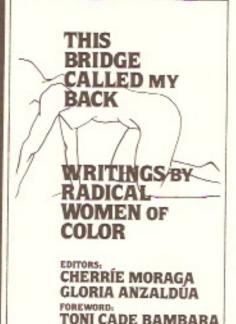
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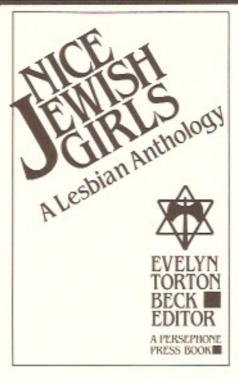
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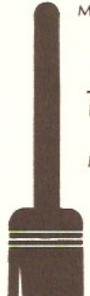
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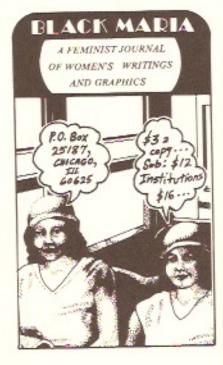
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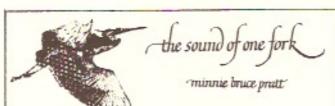
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