

# REVIEWS



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CAROL O. HERRON

**HOME GIRLS: A BLACK FEMINIST ANTHOLOGY**, Edited by Barbara Smith. Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983, \$10.93, 376 pages.

Then  
(Is it suddenly)  
Your voice gets loud  
And fills the night street  
Your voice gets louder and louder  
Your bus comes  
The second shift people file on  
The watchmen and nurse's aides  
Look at you like you're crazy  
Get on the damn bus

(Rushin, "The Tired Poem, 258)

The dynamic poems, essays, and short stories in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* revolve around vocal centers of analysis, refuge, genesis, enflamed anger, compelling peace, and wide lens vision that organizes the present, imagines the future. Barbara Smith's introduction gives a brief glimpse of the home in which she began her quest for Black feminism (although it had other names then). The anthology is divided into five parts: "The Blood—Yes, The Blood"; "Artists Without Art Form"; Black Lesbians—Who Will Fight For Our Lives But Us?"; "A Home Girl's Album"; and "A Hell of a Place to Ferment a Revolution."

Among the poems in *Home Girls*, Donna Kate Rushin's "The Tired Poem: Last Letter From A Typical Unemployed Black Professional Woman," is an artistic analysis of the isolation and communal generosity of the Black professional woman constantly harassed by sexist street commentary and periodic offers to be a prostitute. The protagonist, finally driven to the breaking point by verbal degradation, screams out and continues screaming until she hears herself think, "There is no one on the street but you / And then / It is / Very / Quiet" (259). Rushin creates the inner dialogue of the protagonist with great clarity and immediacy—we touch her hesitation, her vacillation between community and exile, her final revolt, with our own fingers. Rushin's other poems in



this collection, "The Black Goddess" with its stunning lines and the laughing, angry "Black Back-Ups," are equally powerful. Rushin shouts out loud with craft and consistency.

Becky Birtha's "Maria de Las Rosas" is another analysis in poetry. An emerging lesbian carries wildroses to her straight friend who has "a houseful of roses" as well as a man who at the moment has "gone off someplace." Birtha grapples with the debilitating silence that often occurs between lesbians and other women who "can't see women that way" (77). The tone of suppressed awe and admiration, echoed by the mythic/religious aura of the title, is an apt reflection of the speechlessness between a woman and her desire.

The stylistic virtuosity of the staccato conversation in Alexis De Veaux's "The Sisters" carries this poem to the edge between the genres of fiction and poetry—and perhaps spurs it into music. It is an example of some of the artistic challenges that are taken on in this collection. Toi Derricotte takes up, in her poems, the creative challenge of perfect harsh and sweet images wrought out of the substances she describes; "pulls down his pants. Underneath, / there is a shining log, / his cock," "we smear blood over our thick / red lips . . . under our heavy breasts." ("For a Godchild . . ."3)

June Jordan's "From Sea to Shining Sea" is a brilliant poem, reeling off sharp close-ups of U.S. American scenes throbbing with political significance. The precisely altering refrain gives the horror scenes the character of multiplying conversation: "*This was not a good time to be old,*" (226); "*This was not a good time to be a child,*" (226); "*This was not a good time to live in Grand Forks North Dakota*" (228).

To this conversation of poets, Donna Allegra comes exhorting and chiding in "Before I Dress And Soar Again," and Michelle T. Clinton comes wielding strenuous peace and comfort. Deidre McCalla comes conjuring away a worthless man, "But as he fumbled with his pants / He dropped his gun and I grabbed / For my last chance" (271). Chirlane McCray comes identifying the self, Willie M. Coleman comes re-imagining the past, Pat Parker comes prophesying the present.—"They will not come / clothed in brown, / and swastikas, or / bearing chest heavy with / gleaming crosses. (210)" Gloria T. Hull's "Poem," which introduces the volume, articulates the silence from which the complex conversation of Black feminism derives.

Some of us  
we dumb autistic ones,  
the aphasics,  
those who can only stutter  
or point,



some who speak in tongues,  
or write in invisible ink  
sit rigid, our eyelids burning  
mute

(viii)

Several non-fiction autobiographical pieces in *Home Girls* elaborate the diverse situations of Black women beyond the borders of the continental United States. Michelle Cliff, in "If I Could Write This In Fire I would Write This In Fire," describes growing up in the British environment of Jamaica. Her autobiographical analysis is complex, intelligent, and convincing. Throughout her essay she interrelates her perceptions of her life with astute evaluations of British heroes and literary figures. Both Spring Redd in "Something Latino Was Up With Us" and Cenen in "The Blood—Yes, The Blood: A Conversation" (with Barbara Smith) introduce us to the Puerto Rican Black woman. For Black women of the continental United States, these three essays may be the most significant, because they reveal a submerged interconnection for which we can have no experiential knowledge.

Discursive analyses of art and artists in *Home Girls* include Gloria T. Hull's "Under The Days: The Buried Life and Poetry of Angelina Weld Grimke" and her "What It Is I Think She's Doing Anyhow: A Reading of the Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*." In her scholarly discussion of Grimke, Hull probes the question, "What did it mean to be a Black Lesbian poet in America at the beginning of the twentieth century" (174). The essay delineates the cumulative emotional and societal restrictions that ultimately stopped Grimke's voice. It is particularly well-written, and is an intriguing examination of how creativity is stifled or diverted. Hull's effectiveness derives from a concise and footnoted timeline. Hull's essay on *The Salt Eaters* is a gift of clarity to all those admiring brows and eyes that have puzzled and squinched over Toni Cade Bambara's "maestra-fiction." Read it!

In "A Cultural Legacy Denied and Discovered: Black Lesbians In Fiction By Women," Jewelle L. Gomez discusses how superficial portrayals of lesbians have led to popular misrepresentation as well as to artistic weakness in much fiction by women. Discussing such writers as Carol Anne Douglas and Ann Allen Shockley, Gomez elaborates on the difficulty of placing "a Black lesbian in a believable context in an artful way" (114). Gomez also commends portrays of Black lesbians in works by Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, and others. Of course, many of Gomez' evaluations may be debated, but it is exciting to participate in such earnest self-criticism within the lesbian literary community. Furthermore, Gomez' lively portrayals will spur many to read, re-read, and re-



evaluate the works she discusses.

Ann Allen Shockley herself discusses similar problems in "The Black Lesbian in American Literature: An Overview." Shockley's essay is essentially an annotated bibliography of works with Black lesbians as characters. The predominant number of these characterizations have a dismal relationship to the complex reality of Black lesbian life. Shockley's essay, and many other selections in *Home Girls* have set me brooding over the mystic nature of reality in art.

In "Black Lesbian/Feminist Organizing: A Conversation," Tania Abdulahad, Gwendolyn Rogers, Barbara Smith, and Jameelah Waheed discuss the being and becoming of the political Black lesbian feminist. The information we overhear is intriguing, but the camaraderie we perceive is even more powerful. The cords of relationship intersect in the conversation and extend freely outward to other threads, new interconnections—to us.

"The Wedding," excerpts from Beverly Smith's journal, and Eleanor Johnson's "Reflections On Black Feminist Therapy," both give form to the psychological problems that Black women confront. Both selections emphasize the importance of individual women telling their stories. Beverly Smith presents the trauma of a lesbian coming out within the particularly anguished autobiographical moment of a wedding. Johnson reviews the psychological habits of Black women as a whole. This storytelling concept could have not only a dramatic healing effect in the psychological self-perceptions of Black women, but could also enhance the well from which we draw the power of artistic ventures.

In "Black Macho and Black Feminism," Linda C. Powell uses her dissatisfaction with Michele Wallace's *Black Macho and the Myth of Superwoman* to encourage more complex analysis of Black feminism. She urges Black feminists to make the book's limitations a tool for hammering out a less simplistic analysis.

The oft-printed "The Combahee River Collective Statement," reprinted here, has become the Constitution of Black feminist philosophy and art. This statement is an excellent place to begin for those seeking to clarify this period in Black feminist thought. It is impeccably rational—rational almost as an act of heroic defiance when we consider how its voice has arisen from so much anger and pain.

Giving another perspective on Black feminism, Cheryl Clarke criticizes the Black community as a whole in "The Failure To Transform: Homophobia in the Black Community." Clarke is strenuous in her refusal to place blame for homophobia outside of the Black community. "Yet, we cannot rationalize the disease of homophobia among black people as the white man's fault, for to do so is to absolve ourselves of the



responsibility to transform ourselves" (197). She places the source of the most virulent homophobia of Black people against Black people in relatively recent movements of Black nationalism. Although the propensity of Black nationalists for homophobia cannot be denied, this argument would be more persuasive if we could survey homophobia prior to (or in between) Black nationalist movements.

Cheryl Clarke has also written the most gripping short story in the anthology, "Women of Summer." This is a revolutionary tale of subversive rebellion and narrow escape which is most remarkable in that Clarke manages to make nearly everyone "do right" without diminishing her artistic standard. This is an amazing gift, and it is coupled with a concreteness that makes it reminiscent of the fantastic realism stories of Latin America.

"Women of Summer" is one of four *Home Girls* short stories I have subtitled "firestories" because of their sharp images, their enveloping anger, and their insistent focus upon a particular moment of horror. The other firestories are Shirley O. Steel's "Shoes Are Made For Walking," Raymina Y. Mays' "LeRoy's Birthday," and Julie Carter's "Cat." The stories flash mercilessly upon murder, incest, repudiation, and betrayal. Their rhythms increase with measured intensity, as if urging us to swallow fire in neat graduating cupfuls. They are fierce experiences.

Audre Lorde's "Tar Beach" is an extended fresco. This excerpt from her novel, *Zami*, is an open, life-crammed story displaying lesbians coming together. The narration seems to be caught up in a series of quiet but pulsing panels. I think this story is about the nature of freedom.

Two short stories in *Home Girls* focus on the interconnections of past and present place in providing family, love and refuge; Barbara Smith's "Home" and Barbara A. Banks' "Miss Esther's Land." "Home" is spun from a cool twilight flow of beautiful language. As she and her lover Leila set up housekeeping in their new apartment, the protagonist reflects on the women, now dead, who once meant home. The infolding of inner and outer speech, and the persistent present tense accentuate the loss of the past (and hits people) with great poignancy. "I want to tell someone who knew me long ago what we're doing. (65)"

Barbara A. Banks' "Miss Esther's Land" recounts the battles of the same forces. The forces are complex—lover as financial advisor, land as lover, son as encroacher, past as taskgiver, Black people as land insurgents, white people as land developers, lover as beloved. Banks orders and narrates this multiple universe through the consciousness of 75 year old Miss Esther. Miss Esther must decide what is to become of her land, and Banks' literary accomplishment is most evident in her dextrous modulation of these many claims through Miss Esther's strong but ambivalent



language of desire.

The photo essay, "A Home Girls' Album" is also a story about home. It is a collection of one recognition after another. If the photos had had no captions to relate them to the *Home Girls* contributors, I would have been able to discover names for each picture out of my own experience. Can that really be Jewelle Gomez' mother standing there as if she were my aunt? It is a shock and an enlightenment to see one's own face in the portrait of another.

Essays by Alice Walker and Bernice Johnson Reagon give *Home Girls* its widest perspectives of what has happened up until now, and what shapes the future. In "Only Justice Can Stop A Curse" Walker invokes a curse that was recorded by Zora Neale Hurston in her anthropological work; and Walker uses it to stun us with a vision of nuclear annihilation under the white-male dominated society.

Bernice Johnson Reagon opens her essay, "Coalition Politics Turning the Century," by complaining about the limited amount of oxygen where she is speaking. The essay is particularly rewarding in its hopefulness regarding the legacy of coalition, of dynamic peace, that contemporary feminists can forge for the future. As she says, ". . . most of the things that you do, if you do them right, are for people who live long after you are forgotten. (359)"

Most of the voices of the selections in *Home Girls*, even when they are autobiographical narratives, are directed rigorously outward to other women and to the world. The anthology's great value is that it envisions and demands a community that is strengthened by diversity. But I will end with a reflection on Michelle T. Clinton's "For Strong Women," a poem that seems to be written to each of the individual voices that gather in this conversation of Black feminism. "For Strong Women" is a voice directed inward toward a strong female selfhood, beneath whom, nevertheless, from time to time, an abyss opens out.

And tomorrow when there are people to comfort you.  
or you find those damned keys,  
Return to the same well-versed competent woman you are.  
Hold your head up.  
Breathe deeply.  
Return to your life unmarred, recovered and complete.

As though none of it ever happened.  
As though none of it could ever happen.  
Ever.

(327)



**DURATION** by Jan Clausen. Hanging Loose Press, 231 Wyckoff Street, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217, 1984. 90 pp. \$5.00.

Taken as a whole, Jan Clausen's poetry, prose, and fiction present an examination of women's lives as they are determined—to echo George Eliot—by wider social and political forces. *Duration*, which contains work in all three forms, can be seen as another volume in the ongoing series that is Clausen's apparent life work. As usual, her writing is intelligent, forthright, and well-crafted. As usual, she writes of the marginal urban woman: lesbian, feminist, poor, politically committed (if not socialist, at least anti-capitalist), trying to survive, sometimes with a child or lover, in a worn-out working-class neighborhood on the city's fringes.

Her writing matters to me for the same reason Doris Lessing's earlier work did: her women characters are *political*, as well as social and sexual, beings. She speaks for many of us who—whether we live with other women or with men—are not, and do not wish to be, part of the American male-controlled capitalist system. Its myths, roles, and rewards (Hallowe'en apples with razorblades inside) are not for us. Like many of the women I know and care about, Clausen's personas search for wholeness and community within a society which grows increasingly impersonal and dangerous.

*Duration* is a somewhat more somber book than her earlier works. Violence breaks out in many of these pieces. Portland is a city of "rape and roses" (p. 13), "of lethal jobs" (p. 14). The white women lovers in the story "Duration" fear the hostile teenagers—mostly Black and Hispanic—around their doorstep; these youths set their Black lesbian friend's car on fire, destroying it. White men later attack and kill a Black subway worker (an actual occurrence). On a global level, threat of nuclear destruction hangs over these stories and poems. In "Ground Zero," a brilliant collage of quotations from books and newspapers connected by the narrator's own impressions, Clausen comes to a grim conclusion: "Now it can never be right. That's the first thing." (p. 50).

Clausen's work raises essential questions. However, though she writes as a radical lesbian-feminist, her work will disturb—as it is meant to—any reader who expects literature to simply reinforce her own beliefs. This



writing is often politically incorrect. It both affirms and probes the weaknesses of what some of us used to call "the alternative culture." And it is valuable. Unlike some mainstream fiction (I think of Gail Godwin's *A Mother and Two Daughters*, whose "socialist" heroine advises her co-workers to accept pay-cuts, and who has no problem accepting as her lover a manufacturer of pesticides which may genetically affect his workers' children), *Duration* convincingly portrays the relationship between political ideas and "political" people. The heroine of the story "Duration" is perhaps typical she has spent twelve years in the "institutions" of the movement—"The Co-op, Potluck, Demo, Conference, Benefit. The blessed Meeting which we have always with us" (p. 71)—and is now growing frustrated: "I am tired of going through the motions" (p. 71).

*Duration* recalls Lessing's work in another, stylistic way: like Lessing, Clausen frequently revises and corrects her story, so to speak, before the reader's eyes, thus inviting us into the process of creation:

Not that he didn't have his sardonic side. It has always been there, the obverse of his charm. (Or say, rather, the charm depends on it . . .) ("Duration," p. 80)

But if Clausen is indeed the Doris Lessing of the modern lesbian-feminist movement, she is also its Jane Austen or Barbara Pym. Her wit, eye for the details and texture of social life, and gift for capturing these in well-designed sentences are among the delights of the story "Duration." Here are some examples:

I mildly distrust . . . her rumored penchant for perpetual revolution in the sphere of romantic relations. (68-69)

or

I sloshed cheap wine around in a styrofoam cup; gingerly I balanced a paper plate which threatened to collapse under the weight of too many varieties of pasta and vegetables. And as I watched the tall brash girls of Becca's set, her playmates back to the era of tricycles and daycare, an ancient, nameless irritation gripped me. (p. 73)

or

There's a certain type one runs into in places like the co-op. Greybeards of the New Left, they strike me as inoffensive, almost touching, tiny white infants in snugly cloth carriers cradled their flat breasts. (p. 84)



Three pieces in *Duration* stand out. One is the poem "Truth Piece," a wry, witty examination, in mostly rhymed verse, of the piecemeal and limited nature of this desirable abstraction:

They each had a piece of the truth—  
a curse, like a fairytale wish—  
which, worn like an amulet,  
never quite worked as it should.

It didn't make them holy.  
It didn't make them famous.  
It didn't make them kind.  
It didn't make them good. (p. 59)

This poem could stand as Clausen's manifesto, both here and in her other books. While the last stanza reveals that she is addressing women, this poem could apply to anyone who insists on rock-hard, black-and-white categorizing of reality. Such dogmatic insistence upon one's own version of "the truth," Clausen observes, makes it impossible for people to act effectively:

They each had a piece of the truth;  
they thought they would live forever.  
They each had a piece of the truth,  
but they couldn't get together. (p. 60)

A note of defiant affirmation is sounded in the autobiographical memoir, "I Can Tomatoes." This piece is a response to Harvey Braverman's analysis of one deadly effect of monopoly capitalism: it makes us ignorant and incompetent, as more and more of our needs (and our induced "needs") are fulfilled for us by technology. Determinedly against the grain of her times, Clausen insists on ferreting out a farm stand on Staten Island, where she and her lover load up on wonderfully sensuous fruit and vegetables, which she will later can in her hot Brooklyn apartment. This activity, once a traditional task of women, whose responsibility it was to provide food for the lean winter months, has now become an act of rebellion against a high-tech culture that insists time saved is worth taste lost, that wants us unable to do things for ourselves. It is also an act of solidarity with women of other worlds and generations: the Italian women she sees on the bus, "ancient in belted housedresses, who discuss recipes and mass murder," (p. 36), her own mother and grandmother.

"I Can Tomatoes," which first appeared in *Home Planet News*, which I co-edit, speaks to me for personal reasons. My mother and grandmother were also canners and preservers of vegetables and fruit. Two Jews transplanted to the country outside a Pennsylvania milltown,



they grew elderberries which they made, each summer, into jellies and preserves. Later, after my grandmother's death and our move into the town, into a house with a fruit cellar, my mother canned and preserved on her own. What I find terrible and sad is not that she stopped doing these things—her disability made this inevitable—but that she came to distrust her own taste and skills, to believe that chemical-laden "convenience" food really tasted the same as her own. An example of capitalism conning its citizens into accepting, and participating in, their own deprivation, this is one aspect of industrialism that many radical groups, I suspect, would find too trivial to discuss. Clausen's piece is important because it does connect the personal and the political, making each moving and immediate.

The title story "Duration" is the most ambitious and important piece in the book. While it is flawed, it is nevertheless compelling. Actually, it is "fiction" only in a very loose, experimental sense; perhaps it's more accurate to call it a meditation by its heroine—the quintessential Clausen woman—on her life and choices. This heroine, a veteran, as we have seen, of feminist and left-wing causes, has decided *not* to go to Washington for a crucial demonstration: "I'd rather stay home and read about the Thirties" (p. 67). Yet it is her own movement that she examines, almost as an "anthropologist" would. As she expresses it: "I began to think tenderly of all the mysterious connections, the threads and filaments that bind our days. What the FBI feeds into its computers, what grand jury fishing expeditions angle for, I found myself wanting to chart for other reasons" (p. 75).

The title is both ironic and straightforward: this story is about what endures and what does not. One element of long "duration" in this woman's life is her happy relationship with her lover, called simply P., and with P.'s daughter Becca. Though P. and Becca are mostly offstage, they are an essential part of the fabric of the protagonist's life. So are the two other elements that endure: the threat of capitalism with its increasingly sophisticated technologies, and the movement, small and shaky as it is, that opposes it:

Nothing new except their technologies. On our side only the oldest, the least efficient methods. Leaflets, marches, and meetings; word of mouth and the warnings of dreams. Our common sense, our terror, and our love. (p. 90)

What does *not* endure is the heroine's relationship with a man, V. An old friend and very long-ago lover (who is now, like the woman, gay) he has been part of her life for years in spite of the fact that they have been heading in different social and political directions. Indeed, the



heroine tells us wryly, she had originally intended to write a story, called "Duration," about their longstanding friendship: "I would savor the ironies of our long connection, the counterpoint of our severed, contiguous lives" (p. 79).

In the story called "Duration" which she actually narrates, however, their connection is irrevocably split. This is the story's crisis. The immediate reason for this break-up is political. V. has been growing increasingly bourgeois and cynical. Once a caring teacher, he is now part of the administration. His racist remarks about Puerto Rican students provoke the heroine's long-withheld wrath, and she angrily attacks him for "playing god" (p. 82). Later, in a letter, he attacks her in equally harsh terms. Here, too, he reveals his deprived working-class background, which forced him to deny both his musical gifts and his homosexuality. Both of these former friends say terrible things to each other: too terrible to retract, or gloss over. Their relationship is ended.

Clausen apparently wants this failed connection to stand for the impermanence of all relations in our threatened world. Her protagonist reflects "no doubt some vestige of bourgeois morality figured in this desire for permanence" (p. 83). The last lines of "Duration," too, reiterate this theme of instability: "Here in the soft sites, cities. Defenseless in front of morning" (p. 90).

Yet this conclusion is not entirely convincing, for even in the world of this story some things, as we have seen, do endure: the heroine's relationship with P and Becca (which she attributes to luck), the "common sense" and "love" that exist, along with the "terror," in the alternative community. True, a dropped bomb would end the world as any of us know it. But one doesn't have to be Pollyanna—or "bourgeois"—to feel that some sorts of commitments are possible, even necessary, in our endangered culture. Indeed, the heroine, by maintaining connections with her lover and, to a lesser extent, with the movement, undercuts the story's thesis.

Thus, in spite of its brilliance, insight, and wit, "Duration" seems flawed. Perhaps the problem lies in the crucial scene with V. The argument and its aftermath seem to happen too quickly. I wish I had known more about V. (about his working-class background, for example, and his resentment of the heroine's middle-class childhood) *before* the fight scene. While I too have quarreled with friends, and even ended friendships, because of political differences, I still felt there was more to this story than Clausen was telling us here. Since V. and the protagonist have been growing in different directions over a period of years, why do they quarrel *at this particular time*? Did V. make a blatantly racist remark on purpose so that the woman would be obliged, as a radical, to attack



him? How exactly have these friends failed one another? How have the class backgrounds of both contributed to their choices, their need for each other, and their anger? I wish Clausen had given these, or similar, questions the thoughtful, thorough examinations they call for.

I have two other, less important, quibbles with this story. One concerns the quirky practice of assigning some characters initials instead of names (a throwback to the 18th century, when authors wished to create the illusion that their character were actual persons). Names confer richness and resonance; I'd like to know that P. is Patricia, Patsy, Pat, or Penelope; that V. is Victor or Vinnie.

Also, here, as elsewhere, Clausen is sometimes harder on white middle class characters than she need be. At one point, the narrator tells us that she, her lover and their child "loaf and invite [our] souls in seven rooms, while on the ground floor two Black women and five children overflow the four-room apartment the welfare pays for" (p. 88). The Whitmanic phrase "loaf and invite . . . souls" suggests that these lovers are privileged dilettantes, although the rest of the story makes it clear that they share many problems—buying food, losing apartments through gentrification, getting home safely—with their poor and working-class neighbors (and endure added harassments as lesbians). This seems to be an example of needless middle-class guilt (the real oppressor here is obviously the landlord, in collusion, no doubt, with the welfare system).

These quibbles aside, I found *Duration* a powerful book and one which should be read by all women (or, for that matter, men) who are concerned with living honestly and sanely in these increasingly interesting times. Here is a piece of "the truth" that can help us understand ourselves and the system that determines our lives. Incidentally, the small Hanging Loose Press deserves credit for publishing this book which is unconventional in both its structure (amalgamating various forms) and content. Mainstream and narrowly political presses—each serving its own version of truth—would undoubtedly have rejected this manuscript. Hanging Loose showed good sense and good taste in acknowledging the importance of what Clausen has to tell us.



**GATHERING GROUND: NEW WRITING BY NORTHWEST WOMEN OF COLOR** edited by Jo Cochran, J. T. Stewart and Mayumi Tsutakawa. The Seal Press, 312 Washington, Seattle, WA 98104. 187 pp. \$6.95.

**MANY VOICES, ONE CHANT, BLACK FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES** edited by Valerie Amos, Gail Lewis, Amina Mama, and Pratibha Parmar. *Feminist Review* 17, Autumn 1984, U.S. Distributor Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, Box 2753, New York, N.Y. 10185. 118 pp. \$7.00.

I know things have changed for the better, at least as far as Third World women's writing is concerned, when I am asked to review two recent anthologies by women of color who live, work, and write continents away from each other and also thousands of miles away from what I think of as home. *Gathering Ground* brings together writing from this country's Pacific Northwest. *Many Voices, One Chant* (a special issue of the British magazine, *Feminist Review*) is the first major anthology by Black feminists in Britain. Even before reading these books I was excited by the specificity and complexity their mere existence indicates our movement has come to. I remember all too well the short time ago when there wasn't even *one* work that implied that such a being as a Third World/woman/feminist even existed.

More and more, those of us who are women of color—activists, feminists, and Lesbians—can see our faces reflected not only in writing, but in visual art, drama, music, and political work. Anthologies by women of color have provided significant support in the process of each of us finding ourselves and they have also made it more possible for us to find each other. They seem particularly well-suited to revealing Third World women's experience because they embody the very diversity that is the hallmark of our lives. Not surprisingly, *Gathering Ground* and *Many Voices, One Chant* each contains a spectrum of work and they are also quite different from each other.

*Gathering Ground* is co-edited by Jo Cochran, J.T. Stewart, and Mayumi Tsutakawa who are American Indian, Afro-American, and Japanese American women. Their collaboration on this project must have



been challenging in and of itself and obviously contributes to the richness of the collection. There is work by women whose families come from the Philippines, Korea, Japan, and Malaysia, women from the Cherokee, Klamath, Lakota, Salish and Kootenai tribes, Chicanas, Black women, and many more. Drawings, paintings, and statements by artists are an integral part of the book. I found Cecilia Concepcion Alvarez's paintings of women particularly lush and *colorful* despite the fact that they are reproduced in black and white. *Gathering Ground's* physically beautiful presentation and its generally high artistic quality reflect expert editing throughout.

The first thing I read which immediately pulled me in was Charlotte Watson Sherman's "These Women Only Look Crazy." She writes:

See that sister  
with her chest  
hanging out  
buttocks  
exposed to rain  
wind and white men.  
She used to  
dream of dancing  
her lean torso  
undulating with  
The Dance Theatre of  
Harlem.  
She used to  
dream like the  
nappyheaded baglady  
sleeping at the  
police station  
her swollen ankles  
thickened by  
pantyhose made for  
white women. (53)

This is one of three vignettes in which Sherman examines the nagging question of Black women's relationship to art, a relationship which is constantly undermined by our actual material conditions. Nancy Lee Kennel's haunting story, "Mirrors," also appears in the book's first section, "We Cannot Wait to Be Discovered." It begins:

Sun Hyun was already walking when her father decided that she should be weaned. Sun Hyun was already climbing the pear tree when her father decided that she should be married. Without her child, Sun Hyun's mother went into a decline. She peeled the silver off the back of her mirror with her fingers, and ate it. Her hair fell out. Soon after, she was dead. (43)



In two pages Kennel chronicles generations of loneliness and separation between mothers and daughters, because of the necessities of marriage and assimilation, the inroads of sexual, racial, and economic politics into their lives.

Three short stories by American Indian writers seem like three parts of one long tale. Katheleen Shaye Hill's (Klamath) "The Yellow Dress" is excerpted from a novel-in-progress and portrays a stormy encounter between Jannette and her mother, RoseMary. Hill does a subtle job of portraying both sides of their conflict, indicating that it is not merely generational, but culturally and politically imposed. Jannette has just returned early in the morning from a night out, her face bruised and beaten, her new yellow dress covered with blood. She thinks as she prepares her mother's breakfast:

Sometimes it seemed like the questions were harder to take than the beatings themselves. She knew darn well what the first question would be. That was one thing that never changed. Same as always, the Old Lady would eat her breakfast, rock in the damned chair for a minute or two, look at the rug on the floor, then—slowly—ask, "Did one of those white men beat you up?" (98)

Jannette thinks bitterly, ". . . what color that fist was . . ." doesn't matter. (98) In contrast RoseMary worries:

But what if it had been that white man she'd been seeing lately? Now that was scary. When an Indian man beat up an Indian woman, it was usually because he was drunk or mad. When a white man beat up an Indian woman, it seemed like it was because he hated her. Or because he hated all Indians. Like that guard at the B.I.A. school. How many Indian girls did he beat up before he finally killed that one and they retired him? (101)

Deborah C. Earling's (Salish and Kootenai) story, "Perma Red," also begins with a young woman walking home along the highway after a night of drinking. Like Jannette, Louise wonders what her grandmother's reaction will be.

The shallow drone of an occasional passing car eased the monotony of the fields' humming. She listened to the steady flickering tick of the grasshopper and tried to block the image of her mother's fever-swollen face. She tried to think up an excuse for last night's drunk. But she knew excuses didn't matter now. She had come up with convincing alibis in the past. And Grandma would listen intently, nod politely, and excuse her. She would feel a little guilty at first, but later she would feel smug. But she was never sure she had fooled the old woman,



only pride made her hold onto the thought that she had. (107)

Vickie Sears' (Cherokee/Anglo) "Sticktalk" deals in a different way with alcohol and the challenge of tradition versus assimilation. In this story the old ways help to make change possible. Sears writes:

I was walking alone through a coastal village feeling lonely and pensive. Glad to be on a reservation. That in itself made it safer for many feelings and perhaps riddle answers to recent puzzlings. I was thinking about going to the Shaker ceremony in the morning. It had been a long time since I had participated in any ceremonies other than pow-wows. I'd been living in the city for almost three years. A concrete-caught citizen far away from the smell of sweat lodges with water-splashed spitting rocks. Missed the sounds and smells of old ways ceremonies.

It seemed especially important at this time because I had been reminiscing about drinking for weeks. There was struggle staying sober. I'd been sober for eleven years. (142)

On the beach the woman meets a talking stick. She tries to ignore it, but ends up bringing it back with her to the city. The woman refers to the stick as "she" and eventually learns to respect it as an elder. The advice the stick gives might come from a grandmother, from the wisdom of the woman's own inner voice, or from a stick so imbued with spirit it indeed can speak. At the end of the story the stick tells her:

"It is good you have always called me an Old One. It is true. I am also your forgottens, here to remind you that alone is not always lonely." (145)

These words are lifelines, offering me counsel that during the worst of times my inner resources, like the woman's in the story, might be sufficient for me to make it. Appropriately, "Sticktalk" appears in the anthology's last section, "In Order to Survive," while the other two are placed in the second section, "I Am Going To Talk With Them About Their Daughters."

These stories and much of the work in *Gathering Ground* seem so familiar and yet the landscapes, language, and details of daily living are quite new to me. I realized that one explanation for my feelings of connection is how so many of these writers speak about their grandmothers. This focus not only comes up again and again in *Gathering Ground*, but in writing by women of color generally. (I noticed a similar emphasis while reading *A Gathering of Spirit: Writing by North American Indian Women*, edited by Beth Brant.\*)

\*Copyright 1983, 1974 Sinister Wisdom Books, P.O. Box 1023, Rockland, ME 04841.



The deep feelings we have for our grandmothers repeatedly surface for a number of reasons. Often, because of economic circumstances, racial and sexual politics, they are the people who take care of us when we are growing up. Two generations removed, we may not feel the tensions with them that we do with our own mothers. Finally, they are old enough to have been through the fire, to know the old ways and to carry in their flesh the history of oppression and survival of our people, which literally makes us who we are. Our grandmothers had far fewer chances than we, yet they seem to love us for the opportunities we have and sometimes for the risks that we take. I think Third World women writers not only try to write for our own generation, but for generations past and future, especially for those women who could not bring their own stories to light—in other words, for our grandmothers.

In a transcribed conversation among the three editors, "Listening In," J.T. Stewart and Jo Cochran discuss our having a conscious and ongoing relationship as writers, with our families, neighborhoods, people.

J.T.: Jumping over on the other side, I think it would be absolutely peculiar if any of my white women writer friends said that they felt a responsibility to their people.

Jo: They don't know what you're saying if you say it.

J.T.: They'd say, "What people?" (22)

A sense of peoplehood and community pervades *Gathering Ground*. In their preface the editors assert:

We examined our original guidelines: self-discovery, community perspectives, cultural awareness. We asked ourselves how much should these concepts play a part in the selection of manuscripts. Yes, these guidelines are important, we decided: so much so that we came to see them as imperatives. They are what allows us to define ourselves. (7)

This emphasis accounts for the strength and integrity of the anthology, but it may also account for what I consider a significant weakness—the lack of specific political analysis that points to the ways that Third World identity and cultural output are necessarily connected to political organizing and resistance. The reality of women of color being oppressed and the political conditions under which we create are inherent in much of the work included here, but little is said about the historical and contemporary movements of women and people of color which make the existence of such an anthology possible. The clearest statements about organizing refer to cultural concerns, such as the need for writing workshops run by women of color for women of color.

In contrast the editors of *Many Voices, One Chant*—Valerie Amos,



Gail Lewis, Amina Mama, and Pratibha Parmar—write explicitly as activists. In their introductory editorial they state:

We do not claim to be representative of all Black women, or of the Black feminist movement in its totality. Nor do we see this issue as comprehensive or definitive of Black women's experiences. Rather we hope it will stimulate further discussion and debate . . . The process of collecting material for this issue confirmed our view that there is a wealth of political, academic and creative writings by Black women demanding an outlet. Such writings document our historical and contemporary experiences and inspire our political practice. (1)

There is a sense of pragmatic urgency running through this anthology, which features a section specifically devoted to accounts of "Black Women Organizing Autonomously."

This emphasis upon action conveyed through essays, poems and vivid photographs of women at meetings, at demonstrations, and at work might coincidentally reflect the orientation of the four editors. My sense, however, from visiting London several times since 1977 and meeting with Black women there is that the overt political focus of *Many Voices, One Chant* has much to do with the day-to-day conditions under which people of color must live. The population of Third World people in Britain has greatly increased since World War II resulting in an historically concentrated period of virulently reactive racism from the white British state and from the white population as a whole.

In her article, "Black Women, the Economic Crisis and the British state," Amina Mama points out that ". . . Black women in Britain are historically rooted in three different continents,"—Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. (24) She goes on to explain:

From another angle we can be viewed as three 'generations'. First there are those who have inhabited Liverpool, Cardiff and London since the seventeenth century, who arrived either as slaves, or as the daughters of Black ex-slaves, or of unions between Black sailors and native white women. The middle 'generation' of Black women came as migrants from the tropical reaches of the British empire. Most recent is the growing generation born and/or predominantly raised here by migrant parents. (24)

The quality of racism in Britain has been typified by violence and the most blatant state-orchestrated policies of exclusion. The rise of the fascist National Front, which has verifiable ties to the Ku Klux Klan; the erosion of social reforms and services particularly under the Thatcher regime; and a generally depressed economy are symptoms and causes



of hardscrabble living conditions for most people of color, especially women. These negative conditions as well as the tradition of a well-organized British left contribute to a high level of militancy and political sophistication among British Black feminists which is quite evident in this collection.

The emphasis on "what have we done" and "what can we do" about oppression is inspiring and clarifying. At times, however, the sharpness of the analysis is undermined by an extremely abstract style. Overall I missed a degree of personal and emotional revelation in the writing which might have let me know better the women behind these words. The one prose piece which effectively combines the individual material with political observation is "Becoming Visible: Black Lesbian Discussions," in which the authors of course are taking many other risks. The participants, Carmen, Gail, Sahila, and Pratibha, constantly refer to their connections with and support of the Black family and community, but reciprocal support and the integration of Black Lesbian issues is largely missing elsewhere in the anthology. Despite these problems, I found a level of analysis and practice here, which has often been lacking from Third World feminist writing in the U.S.

The opening article, "Challenging Imperial Feminism," by Valerie Amos and Patibha Parmar focuses upon the various limitations of the white women's movement in Britain and aptly pinpoints why white feminism is not only racist in relationship to women of color, but imperialist. Indeed, the very existence of *Many Voices, One Chant* challenges this brand of imperialism, since up until now white women's publishing in Britain has concentrated almost exclusively upon reprinting work by U.S. Black women, ignoring Black women writers who live right there. Amos and Parmar write:

In the same way that the Labour movement has lamented the supposed lack of involvement of Black people in their struggles so white women have condemned Black women for not engaging in the struggles they have identified as important—the colonial heritage marches on. (4)

The authors provide many examples of how in theory and in fact the concerns of many white feminists are not only inapplicable to the experiences of women of color, but are downright destructive to us and our people.

One issue they discuss which has direct application to the political situation in the U.S. are the reasons that women of color have not gravitated to the anti-nuclear movement. The myopic narrowness in too many cases of peace movement politics as well as the racism of individual



participants account for our non-participation, despite the fact that we consider the curtailing of nuclear weaponry crucial. They write:

Many women at Greenham have begun to experience for the first time the brutality of the British police and some are slowly realizing why many Black women are not willing to deliberately expose themselves to it when it is an everyday occurrence for them, anyway. Black women are up against the state everyday of our lives, and the terror of a coercive police force, a highly trained military and the multifarious arms of the 'welfare' state are familiar ground to us.

The choice to demonstrate 'peacefully' or take non-direct action has never been available to us. When thousands of Black people marched against the National Front racists in Southall, in Lewisham, police were ready to do battle with their truncheons, riot shields and horses. Self defence in such instances has been the only option and the armoury available to us has consisted of bricks, dustbin lids, chilli bombs and petrol bombs. The question of deliberating over how best to fight our oppressor is not an abstract one for us nor for people involved in national liberation struggles around the world. (17)

The international focus of Black feminism in Britain seems much more solid than in this country and the coalescing of women of different nationalities and races more prevalent. There, the term Black refers to people of both Indian and African origin (the two largest Third World groups) and in some cases to other people of color. Although there have definitely been divisions between the Asian and African communities, there have also been many instances of workable conditions.

Parita Trivedi's essay, "To Deny Our Fullness: Asian Women in the Making of History," is an excellent overview of the political situation and organizing efforts of Indian women, both in India and in Britain. Trivedi exposes the white power structure's role in dividing people of color and in undermining organizing efforts through utilizing racist myths. She writes:

The state, with the backing of the media, attempts to create divisions within the Black community (Asian = passive, law-abiding; Afro-Caribbean = violent, aggressive) . . . For purposes of this article . . . I have confined myself to pointing to traditions of revolutionary protest in the Indian subcontinent, to bely the myth of passivity—and have drawn upon some of the struggles in which women in India have historically been involved. (38)

Trivedi describes a number of instances of Indian women organizing autonomously in Britain, particularly around restrictive immigration



laws, unfair working conditions, and violence against women.

For me, one of the most fascinating and useful articles was "Black Women Organizing" by members of the Brixton Black Women's Group, because it analyzes the successes and failures of an actual Black women's group. The Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD) began in 1978 and disbanded in 1982 because of structural problems, opposition from the Black community toward Black women organizing independently, and difficulties caused by differences among its members. OWAAD was a highly effective organization, among its activities was sponsoring four national Black women's conferences between 1978 and 1982. Not surprisingly, "... the complexities of putting the political principles of Afro-Asian unity in to practice ..." and homophobia contributed to splitting the group apart. (85) I admire the ability of the women from OWAAD to be both self-critical and positive about what they accomplished, to demonstrate what they learned from their mistakes, and to write it all down so we might learn too.

The authors cite one accusation in particular which has been hurled at Third World feminist organizations to which I have been committed and which I've never seen so incisively countered. They write:

Another popular way of undermining Black women organizing consisted of accusations about 'dominant, middle-class bourgeois women', who are isolated from the 'woman on the streets'. We succumbed and continue to succumb to the fraudulent and divisive analysis that 'women on the streets' could not discuss, articulate and somehow begin to fight their oppression. The argument goes that because we are organized, we are no longer 'typical' of Black women; and therefore, the campaigns and issues we take up are misguided. This was based on the assumption that we are middle class because we are all supposedly the recipients of higher education. It would be facile to attempt to refute this notion by giving a head count of how many of us had done so. But two points do need to be made. Firstly, since when were we in the business of attacking Black people for gaining access to higher education. It seems somewhat contradictory to accuse us of selling out or being irrelevant when some of those same people are actively engaged in the struggle to ensure that Black children 'achieve' in the education system. Secondly, since when did access to education and the fact that we may occupy 'middle-class' jobs automatically lead to petty bourgeois politics. Our opponents are guilty of conflating two issues in the attempt to absolve themselves of the responsibility to challenge women's oppression. But at the time these kinds of attacks seriously undermined the early unity of OWAAD. (88)

Reinforcing the theme of "many voices, one chant" Parita Trivedi



refers to the same phenomenon in her article on Asian women. She writes:

Asian women who have started organizing and struggling have faced the prospect of being portrayed as 'different' from their community. The immense problems faced in being politically active, as well as the sources from which we have drawn nurturance and strength have been denied and negated. Most of us have rejected these attempts to individualize us and insisted that we be seen as a part of a collective protest: drawn from the family and the community. (44)

I would like to add my voice to this chorus. In the introduction to *Home Girls* I described the process of arriving at a title:

Home Girls. The girls from the neighborhood and from the block, the girls we grew up with. I knew I was onto something, particularly when I considered that so many Black people who are threatened by feminism have argued that by being a Black feminist (particularly if you are also a Lesbian) you have left the race, are no longer a part of the Black community, in short no longer have a home . . . critics of feminism pretend that just because some of us speak out about sexual politics *at home*, within the Black community, we must have sprung miraculously from somewhere else. But we are not strangers and never have been. I am convinced that Black feminism is, on every level, organic to Black experience.\*

Obviously, the attempt to ostracize and oppose those of us who are trying to bring together the many strains of our identities and to fight the multitudinous oppressions they inspire is global. It is painfully ironic that our most hateful opposition has too often come from our own people. Reading *Many Voices, One Chant, Gathering Ground*, and the increasing body of works by women of color helps, if nothing else, to let us know that those of us involved in this struggle are not alone.

*Gathering Ground* fed me artistically, emotionally and spiritually while *Many Voices, One Chant* fed me intellectually and politically and therefore spiritually as well. I need both. It brought me up short to realize that at times the experiences of women living in another country could seem more accessible than those of women living here. I learned a lot reading these pages and glimpsed just how much more I have to learn. What I value finally about these many voices is how they've helped me to experience diversity among us in joyful and empowering ways, in ways that lead to the very opposite of despair.

\*Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology, Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, 1983, pg. xxii.



**CHILIAGONY** by Iris M. Zavala. Translated by Susan Pensak (Bloomington: Third Woman Press, 1984), 51 pp., \$5.95.

Iris Zavala's work as literary critic and poet is well known in this country, in Europe, and in the literary field in general. She has four collections of poems published between 1964 and 1982: *Barro doliente*, *Poemas prescindibles*, *Escritura desatada* and *Que nadie muera sin amar el mar*. *Chiliagony*, originally published in Spanish in 1980, supposes her breaking away from her poetic course and a first attempt into the novelesque genre.

Within Puerto Rican literature there exists a commitment to dealing with socio-political issues due to the colonial status of the island and its people. This has caused, in the field of the novel, a tendency to produce texts for the reader to create an awareness of the status and problems generated on the island by the presence of the United States. *Chiliagony* signals a deviation from this course. Zavala's success, with regard to the historical events mentioned in her novel, is founded in her choice to deal with them within the fantastic or illusory-unreal content of her narration. Without ideological sermons or making detailed allusions to history, the author manages to convey to the reader a greater understanding of historical facts and situations through her craftsmanship in using the technique of defamiliarization. By making these allusions to history unfamiliar to the reader, he or she is forced to participate more fully, while reading the text, in order to extract a historical or political meaning, thus arriving at a more personal awareness of these facts.

If, as suggested by Gerard Genette in his *Narrative Discourse*, we were to reduce the novel's plot to a verb, we would say that the verb is "to dream." Dreaming is "the air and strength" (*Chiliagony*, 3) that uncovers or reveals the hidden passions of the characters who are nothing but essences, dead entities from the past brought forth to render their testimony. It is Paloma Vargas de Ponce's dream of death which re-builds the historical moment when, once the Cuban war has ended, Spain relinquishes the possession of Puerto Rico to the United States by means of the Treaty of Paris of 1898. The novel's title lends itself to various interpretations or readings, something which will also happen with the reading of this short novel. In its epigraph Descartes is quoted to explain



what a "chiliagon" is—a compound figure which cannot be imagined, which cannot be apprehended "with the eyes of the mind." My own reading adds another possible interpretation to the title which I believe fits the hybridity of the text: chil(ly) + agony = the agony of knowing that, despite memory and imagination, the damned or cursed reality, i.e. the historical facts mentioned, cannot be transformed.

The novel begins with an incantation and a prediction uttered by the first person narrative voice. The incantation is observed in "Let us stop killing the mirrors. Let them feed peaceably in the waters" (1). This is a way of asking that memory be cleared away so that the past be allowed in. The prediction is that the destroyed town of Ponce, seen or described at the beginnings of the novel, will not be forgotten and "Its descendants will rule a city without parallel on earth" (1). The story is the reconstruction of Ponce's past by means of imagination and dream.

One of the most important features of Zavala's novel is the complex usage of narrative voice. At the beginnings of the novel there is an enigma as to who is narrating these events. This matter is cleared up for the reader when Paloma Vargas introduces herself as the narrator. However, the third section of the novel, which is composed of three chapters and an epilogue, refers to Paloma Vargas in the third person: "Paloma" becomes "*paloma*" (dove (48)). The uncertainty as to who the narrator is can be explained by taking into account the fact that the author may be reacting against patriarchal authority and the univocal voice of power. By not having one authoritative voice narrating, the novel breaks away from a single discourse of power. This again reinforces what I explained at the beginning of this review. If an historical/authoritative voice is missing, then the reader is asked to collaborate further in reading the text by having to figure events and facts on his/her own, thus experiencing a very personal awareness.

Zavala's novel seems at first to lack lineal movement for it alights upon being after being, memory after memory, dream after dream. Yet, within this synchrony of scenes, the reader realizes at the end of the novel that a lineal movement was occurring in the narration which leads to the confrontation of the opposing forces present in the novel. These opposing forces may be reduced to the figures of the unicorn and the chiliagon; that is, the one and the multiple, imagination vs. non-imagination, order vs. chaos, dream vs. reality, female power vs. male discourse. The novel's ending, the destruction of the unicorn by the chiliagon, completes the omen presented at the beginning of the novel but not in the favorable manner anticipated there. The prediction had led us to believe that the people of Ponce would live eternally and that the city beyond compare to be ruled by the descendants of the people of Ponce,



would be a dream city. The final reality is quite different. The people will in fact live forever—revolving “nine thousand years around the earth and under the earth, in an irrational state” (51). The city beyond compare will be the chiliagon which cannot be equaled to anything imagined or known for it cannot be seen with the eyes of the spirit.

From the above one must remember that the unicorn is a figure often used to symbolize autonomy and feminine power. Thus the destruction of the unicorn by the chiliagon has to be taken as the domination of the male/discourse/power over the female. But this domination and destruction leads to Armageddon: the city of Ponce, a symbol of Puerto Rico but also of the World, revolving in an irrational state for thousands of years. This reality—Armageddon—is the chiliagon; something unknown or unimaginable to those who, like the women in the story and the unicorn, see only with the eyes of the spirit.

The Ponce of the narration emerges before the reader as a Borgian labyrinth:

Perpetual prison the town, main protagonist of enigmas. Dream flies there in the air and on the strength of its enchantments locked up in its house all the neighbors who in two centuries could not break the locks or open the doors or penetrate the walls. (3-4)

During the first two parts of the novel, the main characters are four sisters: Carmela, Lupe, Lola and Suncha. Each one of them lived in a dream world of unreality. Carmela was seeking the winged male with whom she fell madly in love causing her disconcert. Lupe reminds the reader of Medusa and is also the one who confronts lineage, loses and lives her life aloof, secluded in her dreams. Lola lived “without treading the earth, she neglected and touched it no more than the necessary in order to support her body” (11). Never wanting to marry, “She always let fantasy and daydream go free, every evening they ran the bolt” (12). Suncha, who is at first omitted by the narrator, is Paloma Vargas’ grandmother and “She lived her century internally. . . . She made no distinctions between time . . . she held the keys of fantasy” (18-19). The sisters are beings who feed on imagination; they are favorites of the unicorn. The sisters are brought back to life thanks to the water mirage — the narrator’s memory and the recreation of the poet. When on page 44 we are told that the Minotaur destroyed the mirrors, this revelation prepares us for the end of the novel — the dissolution of the refraction which allowed the narrator’s memory to tell us about the sisters and Ponce. It must be noted that the Minotaur is not an arbitrary symbolic choice in the novel. In mythology this is the queen lineage-loving animal.



And lineage and queens in the narration, up to the moment when the mirrors are destroyed, are associated with the four sisters.

Although the mirrors have been destroyed and the refraction interrupted, there exists another vehicle for reconstructing the past; that is through dreams. The last section of the novel confronts the reader with another level of narration closer to reality. In this third section we have three women: Filomena, Fidela and Carola. Here the narrative voice begins to play a more active role in the events that follow due to the fact that the narration is a product of her dreams. It is in this section that the unicorn appears. The unicorn's arrival coincides with Maria Eugenia's reign, and with her "The world awakened" (47). It is in this section where Paloma Vargas disappears as the narrator. The reader supposes that Maria Eugenia's reign, emerging from the unicorn's appearance and symbolizing the leadership of women in the world, ends when "The Chiliagon drove the unicorn from the town" (50); the chiliagon, as mentioned before, symbolizes patriarchal discourse and power. Thus, the end of her reign is the end of hopes of salvation and possibilities — the destruction of the unicorn — and the emergence of doomsday and destruction brought about by the chiliagon.

At the end the town becomes once again the image presented at the beginning — hell — and the conjurer and narrator returns to reality — "to the house to retire in the rocking chair where death awaited" (50). The final mention made by the voice that has taken over the narration indicates that Paloma Vargas has died. The disappearance occurs briefly before the materialization of the initial prediction; a materialization which occurs in the epilogue. It was mentioned that the uncertainty as to who the narrator is could be taken as a reaction against an univocal/patriarchal voice. However, I would like also to offer another interpretation. The voice that takes over at the end of the narration and which explains that Paloma Vargas is dead could be the voice of a male narrator. The defeat of the female narrator by the male narrator could be parallel to that of the unicorn by the chiliagon. Thus at the narrative level we could also be prepared for the curse that takes place when female power, authority and voice are destroyed — the end of Ponce, Puerto Rico and the World.

The translation by Susan Pensak lacks the flow of the original Spanish version. However she should be commended for the undertaking since it is my belief that the task of translating this novel is doubly meritorious given the difficulties in vocabulary, anecdote and style even in its Spanish version.

The novel deserves a more thorough study than the one this review offers as an introduction to a difficult text. For example, it would be



important to do studies on the subject of intertextualities in the novel—from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, Homer's *Iliad* to the Latin American *La invencion de Morell*. There are passages that seem to be taken *verbatim* from these sources. Regarding this fact one must note that although the novel on an anecdotal level is questioning patriarchal discourse, on an authorial level is using men's discourse, as exemplified in the aforementioned intertextualities, thus creating a paradox for the critical feminist reader.

Zavala's incursion into a genre so rarely dealt with by women in the Caribbean is laudatory. By means of fantasy, imagination and dreams, she conveys to the reader the chiliagon—the infinite angles of her work. The conveyance to the reader has happened through the presentation of the Chil(ly) + agony = the eternal and frightening curse of a specific place, Ponce, a refracton of a colonized country, Puerto Rico, and of the World.



**OUT FROM UNDER: SOBER DYKES AND OUR FRIENDS**

Edited by Jean Swallow. Spinsters, Ink, 803 Dettaro St., San Francisco CA 94107. 1983. 239 pp. \$8.95.

"Out from Under"—it's a good title, it's how it feels to get sober, some days crawling, some days walking tall and taller as the days clean and dry go by. The impossible days, five days, fourteen, ninety, six months; I never thought in the eleven years of my drinking I could go this long without a drink. I could not imagine it. "This is a book about recovery. This is a book about how we live after that cold day in hell when we finally said, that's enough, that's enough, oh my god, that's enough" (Swallow, x). When I decided to stop it was because there was nothing left to do,

I could not dream but I could experiment.  
If this doesn't work then try something else.  
Try beer if gin fools you. Try not drinking at home.  
Try giving it up and see how that likes you.

It didn't like me

(Suzanne Hendrich, 9)

A voice I didn't recognise said, "I am an alcoholic," and for the first time I listened to her.

Three weeks sober, shaking and terrified, I found this book and it helped me make sense of what was going on, made me feel less alone, feel "oh yes, yes, I *am* in the right place, this *is* what is supposed to happen" (Swallow, xi). This is not an academic review.

*Out From Under* is a collection of stories, essays, poems, novel excerpts, journal entries by lesbians in recovery from alcoholism, drug addiction, co-alcoholism (addiction relationships to alcoholics and drug addicts), and from the effects of being raised in an alcoholic family. It also includes a series of interviews with lesbians working with women in recovery.

It is an exciting and a necessary book. A year and a half sober and feeling isolated, Jean Swallow could find almost nothing written about lesbians in recovery: "It was like being in a desert at noon in the middle of summer: I knew there was something alive out there, but I couldn't



find it. . . . I sent out a call-for-material the next week" (vii) There is a power to this book because it was created out of a simple and direct need for information and connection, because it breaks silences, because, as a whole and in its parts, it's about doing something new and scary.

Getting sober is like coming out and growing up all rolled into one. Because Swallow chose to focus on pieces about recovery, rather than on stories of the bad old days, *Out From Under* is not a depressing book. There is pain and anger but there is also hope and joy and humor in the journey.

"Becoming sober is a process which only begins with the not drinking . . . things were different. It's not as if I had never done any of these things before, it's just that I had never done them while being consistently sober. . . . Take . . . fruit. Since fruit never went too well with beer, I just never bothered to eat any. I was surprised that I not only like fruit but that I actually craved strawberries, apples and pears."

(Alice Aldrich, 155)

And running and writing and making art and dancing and feeling and sex.

Images of love-making without alcohol are not part of my memory. How romantic can it be with bottled water anyway? I'm learning.

(Swallow, 54)

I laughed when I read these lines. I too am "scared since I seldom had been sexual without alcohol and/or drugs in the past" (Aldrich, 156). Reassured, I relished the love making in Swallow's and Sherry Thomas' narratives.

Later moving my hand strong and sure in her vagina, spiraling deeper and harder to wave after wave of contraction. "Enough," she screamed.

"Enough?" I asked provocatively.

She propped herself up on her elbows, looking down at my face by her vulva. She was laughing and crying at the same time, tears streaming down her radiant face, her chest heaving. "All my life, I've been told I wanted too much," she cried.

(Thomas, 224)

So many discoveries as you learn to trust and to feel again.

Making the focus of her book recovery, Swallow includes writings by women who are not themselves alcoholics or drug addicts but whose lives have been scarred by engagement with other people's addictions. She found that,



the process we went through to get free, to reclaim and relearn, to recover our emotions and our lives, seemed to be very similar.  
(Swallow, ix)

The form of the book grows out of this discovery: instead of being divided into categories of addiction, the four sections cover different aspects and stages of the recovery process. The first section, "The Days of Our Recovery," does consist mainly of writings by addicts and alcoholics about where their drugging and drinking had taken them and about getting clean and sober. The fourth section, "The Way Forward," is more expansive and includes two fine pieces about recovery as the child of an alcoholic. The second and third sections, "The Healers Among Us," interviews with an acupuncturist, a nurse, therapists, and women working in drug and alcohol programs, and "The Politics Of Our Addictions" are the most distinct. But the healers talk of their own early days in sobriety and about politics, and the political theory comes out of personal experience. There are no rigid separations and no closures.

The reader needs to bring to the book a similar oneness and flexibility. *Out From Under* establishes drug addiction and alcoholism as major issues for the lesbian community. This is only the beginning of a journey.

In the lesbian community, according to a study released last summer, the statistics are: 38% alcoholic, 30% problem drinkers. For a lesbian, those statistics mean you either are one or you love one.

(Swallow, ix)

When I first read these figures I thought they were ridiculous. Swallow directs the reader to the bibliography for further information on this study but I could not locate the actual source. With figures as provocative as these she should have either gone into greater depth in the introduction or at least made it easier to check them. In any case, I no longer think they are wildly exaggerated. Over the last nine months so much has come out of the closet: one friend stops drinking and starts to talk about how she got drunk at least once a week; another admits she is addicted to grass but is too scared to stop; a third writes to me casually mentioning that she just seems to get drunk every weekend, she doesn't plan to but it happens; after three months of sobriety I realise that my mother is an alcoholic. These are just a few examples. Suddenly it's everywhere. Like incest, when you're willing to see it, it's there. I wasn't willing to for a long time.

It is such a disease of denial. Alcoholism has such a bad rap and a "lesbian alcoholic," who wants to be that? It's two of the worst things you can be according to the majority culture.



To admit that is really scary. We need to give support to one another to admit it. I believe our community can do this.

(JoAnn Garner-Loulan, 101)

Contributors focus on various areas of support: finding other ways than alcohol to fundraise; ensuring clean and sober space at women's events; pressuring for lesbian residential rehabilitation centers (there is only one in the whole country). But above all we need to be willing to look at the issue. This applies to feminist political organizations as well as to lesbian social gatherings.

When I ask for free space  
the woman over there  
says we must keep our meetings  
accessible: Fay, black,  
has more pain, and needs her drugs  
to continue and Angie, poor,  
remembering rape, can not go on  
without her bottle.

(Catherine Risingflame Moirai, 120)

Working in a battered women's shelter, wrapped up in my own denial, I was "the woman over there." I know the rap. But

watching a woman kill herself  
by inches of a bottle  
is not  
a revolutionary act.

(Moirai, 121)

We do not have to drink and drug, we do not have to support others in their addictions.

It is, in the present state of affairs, still a revolutionary thing to say to a woman (including oneself): Yes, I know that all those things are wrong with your life/head/heart, but did you ever stop to think that they might get better if you stopped using/drinking/smoking dope . . . Do you think you have a problem with drugs?

(Margot Oliver, 140)

Oliver's essay, "Killing Us Softly," is excellent in stressing the need for honest confrontation with our own addiction before we confront other people's. Not only our own relationship to drugs but also to other people's addictions. Oliver is herself a recovering co-alcoholic.

If you're worried about the drug use of someone you're emotionally involved with, chances are you're already doing a whole stack of things which both help maintain that person in their



addiction and—*far more important to you*—are making you as sick emotionally and possibly physically, as they are with the drug. *Only can you see it!!!* (141)

The world is not going to change overnight, it is our responsibility to change ourselves. We do not have to dissolve into guilt, as individuals or as a community, because of the past. We do have to find new ways to survive.

At the same time it is important to begin to understand the politics of addiction, and it is one of the goals of this book to start us talking. Alcoholism is a killer disease. It affects men and women, gay, straight, Black, white, Jewish, christian, rich, poor, you name it, it's there. Yet its devastating effects on our lives as lesbians, on the lives of other oppressed groups such as Native Americans, are so clear that alcoholism looks suspiciously like a means of state control.

I don't think it's a surprise that many lesbians have their life-style centered around the bar scene and alcohol. . . . It's a way to control people by taking away their power, especially if the people are doing it to themselves; it makes it easier.

(Misha Cohen & Cindy Icke, 75)

In itself it is shocking to perceive alcohol in this way, especially for those of us who saw booze as our buddy and as a part of our "fuck you fuck the world I'm tough" dyke image.

Mostly the political analysis of addiction has only gone so far as to point to the "coincidences," such as the fact that for years bars were the only social gathering places for gays. It's a beginning. We need more concrete analyses for the mechanisms of control. In the case of drugs there are some pointers: "The C.I.A. is one of the major suppliers of heroin in this country." (Cohen & Icke, 76) The drug supermarkets are almost always located in the poor, Third World communities, such as the Lower East Side of New York. When gentrification sets in and a big real estate broker buys up Avenue B, the police move in and clean up the drug trade. Think too of the huge prescription drug industry and the targeting of women as the key market for tranquilizers.

Alcohol is the culturally endorsed drug of choice for this culture, it's harder to pinpoint its political manipulation. There are a lot of questions we need to answer: Are there more liquor outlets in poor communities? Who are the people who are most exposed to alcohol? In what situations? With what cultural reinforcements? Just asking the questions is a breakthrough.

Beyond the who dunnit aspects of social control—which men in which rooms of power are making decisions which make us particularly



susceptible to addiction—there is the more nebulous, and for me more fundamental, issue of how ideology and economics work hand in hand as a system, a system which is not directed by a few individuals but which nonetheless has the effect of keeping them on top and us on the bottom. While drugs and alcohol are used in many cultures, they have a particular place in a capitalist society with its ideology of happiness through consumption.

They tell us we can achieve tranquility through tranquilizers, joy through the right drug, energy through the right brand of speed. We have been taught that discomfort is unnatural and that we can get rid of it with a pill. Stress and anger are seen as appropriate reasons to pick up a drink and swallow our rage.  
(Willowroot, I24)

As long as we buy into that, numbing out the feelings we need to guide us, and making our perceptions untrustworthy, we don't have much chance of changing ourselves or society.

The effects of the disease of alcoholism are political in the most basic way: "The Chinese interpretation of disease is a lack of freedom." (Gardner-Loulan, 95) And getting sober is for us a political act:

I have worked in feminism since 1970 and the most revolutionary thing I have ever done was to put down the drink and the drugs. I have worked on committees to save wimmin, stop nuclear power and other issues, but every day I spent money to kill the only womyn over whose life I had any control: myself.  
(Willowroot, I23)

Sexism, racism, homophobia, the class system, do not make recovery any easier. This works in two main ways. One is that the psychological effects of oppression—low self-esteem, isolation, despair, retreat into fantasy, to name a few—are very similar to those of addiction, so to get and stay sober you have to go through a kind of double recovery process. The other is that the basic structures of oppression in this society affect the kind of short-term treatment you can get, and, above all, the ease with which you can make use of existing support systems.

Celinda Cantu, a Chicana working-class lesbian, describes going to the only gay-identified alcoholism treatment center in San Francisco (and there are few enough of those around the country):

Everyone on the staff was blond haired, blue-eyed. Their values for success were basically the prosperous white American male dream: that you had a job, you had a lover, you had your apartment set-up: all very middle class in orientation. Their vision for my recovery was that I would get myself together around some



of this stuff.

Now the fact is that as a Chicana, my identity is really different. . . . I know that as a Chicana, I get treated differently. I also know that I celebrate differently and that I have a basic identity that nobody gets to touch or gets to try to take away. (87)

It is hard to have to translate, to juggle, to select, especially when you are in a weak state physically and emotionally, as most people are when we finally stop. But the bottom line for her, as for the other contributors, is that you stop, whatever it takes:

a big part of recovery is to say "I'm not alone" and to make connections, however you need to do that. If the only thing out there to hang onto is a faggot white boy, hang on to that. I did and it saved my ass.

Don't be like me and be politically correct and hang onto your bar stool and die. (91)

Alcoholics Anonymous, and its sister programs, Narcotics Anonymous and Al Anon (for co-alcoholics), are the most widely available support programs and many of the contributors make use of them. The editor is careful to include a variety of viewpoints, from Sharon Stonkey's alienation and anger at the homophobia she encountered at her small town group, to Faith's gratitude:

I thought of A.A. as my last chance but I was certain it was really hopeless. . . . it was far too late for me. I will never cease to be grateful for the things that were said that night. . . . the people there were just talking about the way their lives had been when they drank, and how they were without alcohol. They were so real, so sincere, that I, the cynic, believed every word they said. That night when I went home, I took something with me that I had not had in so long I couldn't even put a name to it. I had *hope*. (27)

Faith too experienced the isolation of homophobia in A.A.—she came out in sobriety, as do many women—but she was able to connect with a gay group in A.A. There are no easy answers, and the people in A.A. are not so different from the people in society at large.

The original thinking and accumulated experience of A.A. pervade this book. Often, out of respect for A.A.'s tradition of anonymity, which suggests that members do not give their full name when disclosing membership at a public level, there is no explicit acknowledgement of the source of ideas. The accumulated effect of the book is to suggest that many of the writers have used the tools of recovery offered by A.A. and have found ways to integrate them with their lives as lesbians and



as feminists.

Honesty, curiosity, acceptance of one's own vulnerability, a willingness to change, a sense of discovery: these are all basics of recovery, in or out of A.A. And they all make for good writing. There are many wonderful pieces in this book. Of course I am biased, this book helped me make sense of a new and scary experience—but then that's some of what books are for, to give us a language for our realities, to help us create realities out of fragments. As lesbians we don't get much of that from mainstream culture.

Of course, the writing varies. I am impatient with a number of the pieces, Judith McDaniel's novel excerpt, "First Tries Don't Always Work, Chapter Five," and Claudia Kraehe's "Breath of a Gorilla Girl," especially. Impatient because they lack the urgency and vulnerability of so much of the other work. Kraehe hides behind the form she chooses. She describes herself as a Gorilla,

Gorilla girl graduated to another institution of learning—Jack's bar (for Gorilla Ladies Only). (5)

it's cute, funny sometimes, but somehow, so what? McDaniel's excerpt is written in the conventional third person, with the focus on Chris, a fifteen year old alcoholic. The problem isn't the form, Marian Michener's excerpt, "Three Glasses Of Wine Have Been Removed From This Story," uses a similar technique and there the distance lent by third person narration allows Michener to give a sense of all her characters while also taking us inside her main character's feelings. The problem with McDaniel's piece is the prose: it's stiff, feels as if it comes from the head and not the guts. It's difficult to get inside a fifteen year old's mind, and perhaps this chapter is part of a work in progress rather than a finished novel, but as it stands McDaniel seems to be reporting on her character and that feels patronising.

The strongest prose pieces, Jean Swallow's "Recovery: The Story of an ACA," Sherry Thomas' "The Sober Dyke," and A.'s "Fall Journal" are all first person narratives. An important genre in the development of women's writing has been autobiographical writing. For many of us the plot structure, symbology, and other conventions of the novel proved a hindrance rather than a means to discover what we need to say. First person narrative has its own conventions but they are less binding, leave more room for us to go into the insides of our experience and see what forms emerge. Recovery is a process of discovery and not many stories about it have been written by lesbians, or at least not many have been published. Each of these pieces is not only about self discovery but about discovery in language. Is this getting obscure? Read A.'s "Fall Journal."



Like many of the other pieces, "Fall Journal" is about feeling safe enough to feel. It's about growing up, about the narrator finding her own faith in a loving power in the universe, it's about the process of becoming honest. But it's not just about these things, it *is* them. You feel the changes in her in the language.

Deciding to take heroin after nearly two years clean and dry:

And the people at the meeting last night—they cared— . . . What would they feel for me if i said fuck it? "Another one bites the dust." So what. Let the dead bury the dead. Just another dyke who couldn't cut it. You know she spent a lot of time hanging out in the bars . . .

I put my shades back on, smug. I know something you don't know & yr not even gonna know you don't know it. The year of the pre-adolescent continues. When you start being unconscious at the age of 14 you never quite get over puberty, i think.

Grow up or die. (12-13)

I know the anger hidden behind tough talk, the fear behind "fuck 'em if they can't take a joke," I know that adolescent grandiose despair. And I know how I can know that's what I'm doing and it doesn't make a blind bit of difference. That jagged language, being aware just isn't enough, honesty only locking into self-hatred.

This was going to be a story of how i met temptation, fought & won. No winners. Just one scared little girl who can't let go.

I don't even want this. I don't even want to get high any more. Why am i doing this? And yet i know i will. (17)

And then slowly, slowly, out of acceptance of powerlessness, not fighting any more, the feelings change.

I can't do this. Nobody else can do it for me. There must be some Magick at work because i am clean and sober today. . . . There must be a Spirit, a God, & that Spirit must be capable of infinite unconditional love. I am a fool, living at this moment in a state of grace, loved by Magick more fully than i have ever loved myself or been loved by anyone else. I am a child of the Universe . . . I will know fear again, i will experience confusion and doubt. So what. I am only one child among millions. . . . The tightness in my belly rises to my chest and begins to escape in small tentative tears. Right now there is joy and gratitude. I want to live. I want to feel. (20)

"So what." The first time, the voice is full of fear and anger and self pity. The second time it is gentle. It is impossible to doubt the authenticity of A.'s "spiritual awakening." With good writing, so much is lost in



paraphrasing that it's almost unbearable to do. The voices are unique, voices becoming themselves.

The biggest criticism I have of this book is that while different groups of lesbians are represented here, it feels like tokenism. I mean there is *one* Black contributor, *one* Hispanic, *one* Asian-American, *one* woman who refers to the experience of older women in recovery. There is *no* Native American voice here, despite the decimating effects of alcoholism on Native American peoples. It may be that some of the contributors do not identify themselves as women of color, but I very much doubt that. Certainly, as Swallow says herself in the introduction, there are problems doing outreach for a book on recovery—for many people addiction is still a shameful secret. I don't know how aware Swallow was, or how hard she tried to get a better balance of voices. It is sad that the first book on lesbians in recovery should leave such a gap. I hope there will be other books to fill it.

I do believe that even for women whose voices are under-represented in *Out From Under* this book has a lot to offer. What the reader needs to bring to the book is a willingness to identify. I never took heroin but the piece I feel closest to is A.'s "Fall Journal." Rereading the book I connect in different places than I did the first time around. Whether you are in recovery or not, whether you think you have a problem or not, approach this book with an open heart and you'll find something in it for you.

If you are a lesbian reader who has not yet thought about these issues, it is unlikely that you will **not** recognize someone here . . . In the mainstream community, according to a recent Gallup poll, there is alcohol abuse in every one of three families. We all come from somewhere. Who do you remember drunk?

(Swallow, ix)



**ABENG** by Michelle Cliff. The Crossing Press, Trumansburg, New York 14886. 1984. 166 pp. \$6.95.

... how much easier my waking and my sleeping hours would be if there were one book in existence that would tell me something about my life. One book based in Black feminist and Black lesbian experience, fiction or nonfiction. Just one book to reflect the reality that I and the Black women whom I love are trying to create. When such a book exists then each of us will not only know better how to live, but how to dream. (Barbara Smith, "Toward A Black Feminist Criticism," 1977)<sup>1</sup>

For me, Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* is that long-awaited fictional application of Black feminist and Black lesbian thought. Quite frankly, I am still groping for words that even come close to describing what it is that happened between *Abeng* and me.

It is stunning and humbling to confront one's self within the words of another, to open a book fully expecting to be a voyeur, a detached observer of someone else's realities, only to discover that I too am at center stage, and that the bits and pieces of my own fragmented, hazy truths are being explored, organized, and focused into a broader perspective through the clarity of someone else's vision.

In that discontinuous, associative rhythm curious to lyric prose, Cliff makes use of her poet's tools of sound, image, word play and symbolism to present in *Abeng*'s foreground a series of characters, events and actions (as opposed to a linear narrative line) to probe into the dynamics of oppression, spinning out vision after vision of how all oppressions interlock to create the conditions that cripple and often destroy our lives.

But this fundamental truth is but a portion of Cliff's vitally important feminist message. Within *Abeng*'s background, Cliff weaves tales of Black women who *did* survive, and it was through woman-bonding that they tapped into the source of their strength and the hope for *our* survival. This, Cliff hammers home relentlessly, is the key to dismantling the entire structure of oppression.

I am convinced that *Abeng* is lyric prose at its best. Though the language often sings, it is not poetic style that distinguishes *Abeng* as lyric prose, but rather its point of view, a very different concept of



objectivity than is found in more commonly used prose forms (narrative, pictorial, and dramatic).

To illustrate, the 12-year-old protagonist, Clare, is not separated from the world she is experiencing as main characters traditionally are. She is the embodiment of the world in which she lives. It is Jamaica, 1958, just prior to the end of British rule, and Clare is not muddling through some adolescent *weltschmerz*, she is caught up in the bizarre nightmare of a colonized country being ripped apart by the confusing dichotomies of black and white, color and class, and blood and history. Within her own body, the contradictions rage. She is the descendant of both the white slave owners and the Maroons, slaves who rebelled and waged war against their enslavers.

Engaged in a desperate search for identity and meaning Clare's quest is thwarted time after time by the duplicitous messages she receives from her colonized homeland's society and social conventions.

The title of this deceptively slender novel is symbolic of the dualities, contradictions, that plague and ultimately crush Clare, numbing her into accepting the paradoxical ambiguities of her life.

"Abeng," Cliff explains on the title page, "is an African word meaning conch shell. The blowing of the conch called the slaves to the cane-fields in the West Indies. The *abeng* had another use: it was the instrument used by the Maroon armies to pass their messages and reach one another." (It is always the second, the subjugated, the hidden darker definition in *Abeng* that carries hope.)

The multi-dimensional lyric writing mode (with its characteristic absence of concrete time-frame and narrative line) is ideally suited to *Abeng's* exploration of the many issues encompassed by Black feminism. This matching of form to function frees Cliff to document the conditions which ensnarl Clare in an inescapable web of hopelessness while simultaneously merging Clare over and over again with the images of other women characters who are woven into *Abeng's* background tapestry. These women—warriors, magicians, sisters, lovers and friends—are all positive variations of Clare as she might have been, or might become, depending upon the depth of her bondings with women.

The women who appear with Clare in the novel's foreground—her grandmother (Miss Mattie), her mother (Kitty), a neighbor (Mad Hannah), and even her best friend (Zoe)—are as trapped as Clare within the spoils of colonization. It is to these women that Clare turns, groping for answers she senses lay within them. But they are mute, and it is their combined silences which doom Clare.

In the lyric tradition of Jean Toomer (to whom, along with Bessie Head, *Abeng* is dedicated), Cliff has created a work of art because it has



truth; and Cliff's intent to record that truth in such a manner as to elicit a specific response from her reader is successful.

In her classic essay, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," Barbara Smith wrote, "For books to be understood they must be examined in such a way that the basic intentions of the writer are at least considered."<sup>2</sup>

Cliff's intentions are clear. This novel is her "conch shell" through which she entreats women of color to touch each other, open to each other and survive. Her approach to writing is philosophically reminiscent of Toomer's, as explained in one of his several autobiographies, *Reflections of An Earth Being*:

. . . I must see my understandings produce results in human understanding. Productivity is my first value. I must make and mould and build life. As an artist, I must shape human relationships. To me, life itself is the greatest material. I would far rather form a man than form a book. My whole being is devoted to making my small area of existence a work of art. I am building a world.<sup>3</sup>

Cliff builds a world in *Abeng*, fashions it from her own uniquely personal experience, but through the similarities between her experience and that of other women of color, she forges an intensely personal relationship between herself and the reader. *I know this woman. She mirrors me.* And it is within this connection that the power of *Abeng* lies, for it is through this self-recognition that Cliff guides her reader into an understanding of the dynamics that shape and control our lives.

*Abeng* is a useful book, and that which aspires to be art, rather than mere fiction, must be grounded in its usefulness, particularly to those who approach art from the always pragmatic standpoint of Black feminism.

In a review of Cliff's *Claiming An Identity They Taught Me to Despise*, Linda Hogan wrote:

. . . I welcome the kind of honest and sincere work Michele 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.<sup>4</sup>

This applies equally to *Abeng*. But this is not surprising because Cliff, like Toomer, is a "poetic realist."

Toomer said:

As for the writing . . . I am a spiritualizer, a poetic realist. This means two things. I try to lift facts, things, happenings to the planes of rhythm, feeling and significance. I try to clothe



and give body to potentialities.<sup>5</sup>

As in the work of other "poetic realists" (Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, Anne Petry, Toni Morrison and Gloria Naylor, et al.), one of *Abeng's* recurrent themes is how much safer and fuller our lives would be if only we'd tap into the potentialities inherent in woman-bonding. And I've chosen to examine this particular theme for this review.

*Abeng* is organized into three major parts, each prefaced by a song lyric indicative of its contents. (Because *Abeng's* structure is so fluid—another condition of lyric prose—I have not been able to adhere always to the order in which it is written.)

A slave lament introduces the first section which puts into historical context the contradictory social conventions which govern Clare's life. But this history, as told from a Black and feminist and lesbian viewpoint resurrects important pieces of Jamaican history not included in textbooks written by the colonizers, and therefore not known to Black Jamaicans educated in British-ruled schools. (This reclaiming of our history is another emphasis of Black feminism.)

In the beginning there had been two sisters—Nanny and Sekusu. Nanny fled slavery. Sekusu remained a slave. Some said that was the difference between the sisters.

It was believed that all island children were descended from one or the other. All island people were first cousins. (18)

In the 17th Century, Nanny used her magic to unite her people and consecrate their battles during the War of the Maroons. And it was her town, Nanny Town, that was the headquarters of the Windward Maroons, those who held out longest against the colonizers. (14)

And then there were Inez, the Maroon slave and concubine of Clare's father's great-grandfather, and Mma Alli, a slave woman and sorceress, the source of Inez' strength:

Mma Alli had never lain with a man. The other slaves said she loved only women in that way, but that she was a true sister to the men—the Black men: her brothers. They said that by being with her in bed, women learned all manner of the magic of passion. How to become wet again and again all through the night. How to soothe and excite at the same time. How to touch a woman in her deep-inside and make her womb move within her. She taught many of the women on the plantation about this passion, and how to take strength from it. To keep their bodies as their own, even while they were made subject of the whimsical violence of the justice and his slavedrivers who were for the most part creole or *quashee* . . . (35)



... her tongue all over Inez's body—night after night—until the justice returned from his trip from London and Inez had to return to the great house. . . .

*With Mma Alli she remembered her mother and her people and knew she would return home (italics mine). (35)*

Inez eventually escaped the white slavemaster to return to her home among the Maroons where she prepared for the arrival of slaves who'd not managed to escape but who would join her once official slavery ended. But Clare knew nothing of Nanny and Sekusu and Inez and Mma Alli whose lives held her salvation. How could she? Who could have told her? Not her mother. Not her grandmother. Not her neighbor, Mad Hannah. Not even her beloved friend Zoe, for they were as isolated from their shared history as Clare, the light-skinned daughter of the middle-class Boy and Kitty Freeman Savage, whose world was a microcosm of the larger colonized world in which she lived.

Boy clings to tales of his white ancestry in a pitiable attempt to void himself of the Blackness that threatened his masquerade at whiteness. Propelled by fear and self-hatred, he grinds away at Clare's search for Truth, pushing her toward the denial of darkness too.

Boy taught his eldest daughter that she came from his people—white people, he stressed—and he expected Clare to preserve his green eyes and light skin—those things she had been born with. And she had a duty to turn the green eyes blue, once and for all—and make the skin, now gold, become pale and subject to visible sunburn. These things she should pursue. (127)

Kitty is the antithesis of Boy but she keeps her proud love of Jamaica, her darkness, and warm remembrances of friendships formed with women secret “protecting the depth of this love from all but herself.” (127)

Kitty's mistake in all of this was casting her people in the position of victim, so that her love of darkness became a love conceived in grief—a love of necessity kept to herself. The revolution had been lost when the first slave ships arrived from the west coast of Africa, and she felt Black people were destined to labor under the oppression of whiteness, longing for a better day but not equipped, Kitty believed, to precipitate the coming of the better day. . . . (128)

Kitty's thinking might have differed greatly had she not been kept as ignorant as her daughter was, of her Black heritage.

And Kitty's life might have been different and her daughter's life



different, had Kitty's own mother, Miss Mattie, been able to break the silence between herself and her own children and not perpetuate the devastating legacy of isolation that plagued them, and still plagues us.

Then Kitty would have shared her own woman-truths with Clare, like how she came to know the ancient secrets of root healing, like how she came to love Jamaica and Blackness. She would have known how significant it was that she tell Clare that she was named, for Clary, "the simple-minded dark girl," who fought for her and refuses to leave her side, who in an act of sister caring, wiped out the distance between herself and Kitty to bridge the chasm created by color and class.

But Kitty didn't know the importance of these things and Clare, is forced to seek answers outside her home.

The second section of *Abeng* begins with a traditional song lyric about a restless young woman. It is here that Cliff begins weaving the many strands of oppression—racism, sexism, classism, anti-Semitism and homophobia—into the fabric of Clare's quest for self-knowledge—woman knowledge—first as separate themes, then in various combinations that demonstrate how they relate.

There is Mad Hannah, a poor woman who lives in the bush (country) and is a neighbor of Clare's land-owning grandmother, Miss Mattie. Hannah was driven mad following the death of her only son whose drowning death was a direct result of homosexual baiting. Following her son's death, these men hound Hannah, refuse to aid her in conducting normal death rites, and she is eventually "sent off to the asylum at Port Maria, where she tried to explain to the people in charge—the light-skinned educated people—about the death of her son and his incomplete and dangerous burial." (66)

There is Clare's introduction to anti-Semitism in her reading of *The Diary of Anne Frank* which resulted in her immediate identification with, and attachment to, this young Jewish girl who died in a concentration camp. Boy disapproves her intense interest in the causes of the Holocaust and deems it a "dangerous concern" for the underdog. (127).

Clare, uncomfortably aware that her father has failed to convince her he had the courage or inclination to act against such horror, does not pursue this thinking.

To reckon with her father's culpability would also mean reckoning with her mother's complicity. (176)

Prior to discovering Anne Frank, Clare was aware she lived within a world where it was profitable to be light-skinned and straight-haired, but she'd always been morally ill-at-ease with the unfairness of it all. What she learned from studying the Holocaust seemed to be a reinforcement



of her island's status quo:

Clare had learned that just as Jews were expected to suffer in a Christian world, so were dark people expected to suffer in a white one. . . . (77)

As Clare delves into the Holocaust, she recognizes after seeing the movie version of *The Diary of Anne Frank* that while the actress who portrays Anne Frank does not jibe something else does:

What did ring true—and what had in the diary was the relationship between Anne and her mother. (79)

Cliff suggests that Clare connects the distance between herself and Kitty with the remoteness that colors Anne Frank's relationship with her mother. This recognition may have prompted Clare's initial search into the causes of the Holocaust. Clare asks herself:

Would Anne have lived to see her liberation if her mother had been different? Would Anne's mother have been different if the Holocaust had not happened? What was the source of her coldness? Where had the remoteness come from? (79)

Clare is poignantly (albeit, subconsciously) aware of the distance between herself and her mother when she makes the conscious decision not to name her diary "Kitty," as Anne Frank did, because the diary was to be a trusted friend to whom she told all; and she could not name her diary the same name as the mother to whom she told nothing.

The final section of *Abeng* begins with a plaintive lyric of loss. It is summer and Clare is again in the bush living with her grandmother and spending time with Zoe with whom she has developed, over the years, a warm and loving friendship. But Zoe is Clare's opposite. Zoe is the dark-skinned daughter of Miss Mattie's tenant. The conditions of their lives, the divisions between color and class, lead to yet another silence that dooms from the outset the beautiful bond the two girls share, one rich in possibilities.

Clare recognizes that "in her love for Zoe . . . there was something of her need for her mother" (131). Clare is not aware that part of her attraction to Zoe is sexual, and had she known, given her shadowy remembrance of her father's ostracized cousin who drowns himself following an attraction to an American Negro sailor, such a notion would have been soundly rejected.

If Clare felt anything was wrong with her feelings about Zoe and her concern about losing Zoe's friendship—that those feelings ought to be guarded from family, for example—this would have



originated in what she had been taught and what she had absorbed about loving someone darker than herself. (127)

It is Clare's 12th summer, a time for awakening, and she wrestles with the issues of racism, classism, homophobia, colorism as they swirl around her in the bush. Her quarrels with Zoe develop around these same issues. And Clare recognizes her powerlessness to overcome the barriers that divide them.

This overwhelming sense of powerlessness is what sends Clare out into the bush in search of the wild boar, something relegated to the domain of men and boys, those she thinks have the power to control their own lives. Clare chafes at witnessing the freedom that her own male cousins have. Once she came upon them cutting out the testicles of a pig to cook and eat because they felt this power was contained therein.

When she went to Mad Hannah, asking if a boar's testicle held such potency, Hannah, as everyone else, reminds her that she is, after all, a girl. Had only Clare known of Zora Neale Hurston's visit to Jamaica in search of the wild boar.

Clare, accompanied by Zoe, and without permission, takes her grandmother's gun to find the wild boar, seeks out the source of what she has come to believe will give her the "something" that is missing in her life. En route, she and Zoe quarrel over the advisability of the hunt.

So she half-listened and then looked at Zoe—full into her eyes.  
"Den why wunna come with me anyway?"

And Zoe responds:

Because one fool-fool gal like wunna need protection. (119)

On their way home, they stop to bathe in the river together. Lying in the sensual warmth of the sunlight, they are very close. There are words, healing words, that Clare has begun to form. There are feelings, the need to touch, that Clare is on the verge of coming to grips with. But they are startled by one of Miss Mattie's hired men, and Clare fires the gun, aiming over the man's head and accidentally kills her grandmother's bull, destroying her *property*, and shattering the friendship she shares with Zoe.

Clare's reactions to the cane-cutter—her automatic assumption of privilege and class—makes its indelible mark on Zoe. The friendship is lost.

And Clare wonders:



Did [she] shoot from fear or did she shoot from shame? Did she shoot to protect Zoe or to protect herself? Or because she was angry that this man had strolled casually into their closeness? Or because she was angry that Zoe made her stop the hunt and told her things she didn't want to hear? (124)

Miss Mattie believes that Clare's actions are the results of her white ancestry. And Clare has no one left, not Kitty, not Boy, not Miss Mattie, not Zoe, not even Mad Hannah who by this time has been sent away to the asylum.

And Boy delivered her into the hands of a deranged old white woman in the hopes that her close proximity to bona fide white ladies would accomplish what he couldn't.

*Abeng* is a sad story. It is a story of missed connections, unrequited love, a story electric with the undercurrents of unexplored potentialities. At the same time, it is a hopeful story, that is poignantly underlined by the rich and full relationships between women who existed in other times to sustain each other but whose histories and strengths were lost to Clare.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Barbara Smith, "Toward A Black Feminist Criticism," in *But Some of Us Are Brave* eds., Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith (Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1982), p. 173.

<sup>2</sup>Smith, p. 159.

<sup>3</sup>Jean Toomer, "Reflections of An Earth Being," in *The Wayward and the Seeking: A Collection of Writings by Jean Toomer*, ed. by Darwin T. Turner (Washington, D.C., 1980), p. 19.

<sup>4</sup>Linda Hogan, review of "Claiming An Identity They Taught Me to Despise," *Conditions: Eight* (1982), p. 140.

<sup>5</sup>Toomer, 20.



**YOURS IN STRUGGLE THREE FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON ANTI-SEMITISM AND RACISM**, by Elly Bulkin, Minnie B. Pratt, Barbara Smith. (Long Haul Press, 1984) 233 pp. \$7.95.

### QUESTIONED LEGACIES: A REVIEW

History is hard on dreams, particularly on the dream of people of difference working together. Many of us carry legacies of oppression that tell us who to fear and who to hate while some of us strain under the legacies of our false right to power over others. But in this time of Reagan America when to be without money means to be a moral failure, deserving of banishment from the land of those who eat well, dress well and shelter well, we, the people in exile, must find a way to work together. Coalition politics, the building of bridges between disparate groups who share a common vision of how things should be, is a strategy that calls for a tough blend of clarity, compassion and most of all the willingness to experience someone else's history. *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism* is an example of the kind of informed feeling and straight talking demanded by coalition work.

In three essays marked by their personal styles, a white Southern Christian woman, Minnie Bruce Pratt, an Afro-American Christian woman, Barbara Smith, and an Ashkenazi Jew, Elly Bulkin, struggle to make sense out of the clash of old inheritances and new insights. Each woman is courageous and clear both about the difficulty of writing about racism and anti-semitism and the need to do so. Each risks losing a community of readers because of her position but risk and fear and anger are expected experiences of coalition building. The final impact of these three essays is of a grave clarity, a clarity not born of easy solutions but of a commitment to an expanded understanding of each other. This is not a book of rhetoric, of easily mouthed self-righteous maxims. It is a living work, marked by gentleness, fierceness and love.

The first essay, Minnie Bruce Pratt's "Identity: Skin Blood Heart" bears the mark of the poet. The essay is an odyssey of change that weaves Southern Childhood scenes in with vignettes from Pratt's current



life as a Lesbian cultural worker. Her fine eye and ear bring a special life to this exhausting attempt to strip away the layers of false identity and to reconstruct one that is based on a view of the world that is "more accurate, complex, multilayered, multidimensioned, more truthful." To recreate for us the logic of her Southern Presbyterian home where she learned her role as a white Southern woman, Pratt tells of her father's attempt to pass on his world to her. In her eighth year, her father took her up the steps of the old courthouse where her grandfather had been a judge for over forty years, led her higher and higher up the steps in the old building until her courage failed and she could go no further. He had wanted to take her out on the clock tower ledge to show her the boundaries of the segregated world that would be hers. "What I would not have seen from the top [was] the sawmill or Four Points where the white mill folks lived, or the house of Blacks in Veneer Mill quarters." What Minnie Bruce could not have seen that day either was the moment when, many years later, she would be standing before a Southern judge, a Lesbian mother fighting for her children.

The refusal of the "constricted eye" is the central motif in Pratt's work. Past and present autobiographical details are presented side by side, showing the author's constant battle to move from a safe place to one marked by greater risk taking. Change through coalition with those who are different brings constant growth. "To acknowledge the complexity of another's existence is not to deny my own" is how Pratt sums up her experiential wisdom.

Because of her narrative and descriptive sense, Pratt makes us stop and listen to the people who taught her different visions. We too, therefore, take the first steps in coalition building. For instance when she wants to show how history depends on who is doing the talking, she relates the events at a 1974 dinner party.

I heard the story of the market house at a dinner party that welcomed my husband to his new job. In a private club overlooking the central circle, the well-to-do folks at the table, all white, chatted about history, the things sold in the past at the market house, the fruits and vegetables, the auctioned tobacco. 'But not slaves,' they said.

The Black man who was serving set down the dish and broke through the anonymity of his red jacket. 'No,' he said there *were* slaves there; men, women, children sold away from their mothers. Going to the window, he looked down on the streets and gave two minutes of facts and dates: then he finished serving and left. The white folks smiled indulgently and changed the subject.

Throughout the essay, Pratt unfolds her outer life for us—her mar-



riage, her involvement in the first stages of the Women's Liberation Movement, her coming out experience, the loss of her children—while she chronicles the inner transformations that were taking place. She discovers the good parts of her Southern heritage, the history of radical white women who fought racism, the cultural roots that make her feel connected to a geography, the skeptical philosophical legacy of her Presbyterianism while rejecting the "killing ignorance" of the history of privilege based on the "forced subservience of someone else." Pratt, like the other authors, spares us the dead-end experience of inconsolable guilt. Each, instead, claims from her past the evidence of what is possible between human beings. Each of us needs our histories to live, but we must be able to sift out what is limiting and expand what is embracing.

In her essay, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Relationships Between Black and Jewish Women," Barbara Smith presents a taut, carefully organized working paper that expresses her characteristically caring toughness in sharp precise prose. Smith is clear about the risk she runs:

To be a Black woman writing about racism and anti-semitism feels like a no-win situation. It's certainly not about pleasing anybody, and I don't think it should be. I worry, however, that addressing anti-Semitism sets me up to look like a woman of color overly concerned about 'white' issues. What I most fear losing, of course, is the political support and understanding of other women of color, without which I cannot survive.

But she ducks no issues and claims no false purity for herself. She writes with the need to clear the air, to get some things said and then let's get on with it.

First she recognizes the special nature of the relationship between Blacks and Jews—a love hate struggle based on shared histories of oppression that often leads each side to expect something special from the other. When a Jewish woman is racist or a Black woman is anti-semitic, the sense of betrayal leads to deeper divisions. Smith feels that a distortion of responsibility takes place resulting in white Jewish women pouring over the texts of Black feminist writers looking for evidence of betrayal while the anti-semitism of the white gentile women goes by barely noticed. While both Blacks and Jews have been oppressed, the specific history of that oppression is different and in some instances totally at odds. A good example that Smith gives was the role America played in the early new world histories of Blacks and Jews. For one, America was the unchosen prison of forced labor; for the other, it was the promised land of cultural safety. Once we accept that each oppression carries its own distinct legacy, we can also see the common ground between us. Smith points out the shared sense of marginality, of style, of the burdens



of shame and self hatred. But in the embattled world of today, shared similarities are not enough to guarantee that we will not become an obstacle to another's survival.

There are ways that we recognize each other, things that draw us together. But feelings of affinity in themselves are not sufficient to bridge the culture, history and political conditions that separate us. Only a conscious, usually politically motivated desire to work out the differences, at the same time acknowledging commonalities, makes for more than superficial connection.

Smith then addresses the two concerned communities separately, outlining what she thinks has caused problems. To Jewish women she states her impatience with the claim of White European Jews that they are third world women, not white but Jewish, thus denying their access to white skinned privilege. I share this impatience and sorrow at the need that prompts the assertion. We have lived in history differently, Blacks and Ashkenazi Jews. Surely we can respect this difference without losing title to our own pain. There has been and is enough hell for both of us, but as a white Jew I see the places Jews can go and Blacks cannot. I see where the guns are pointed and who has refuge and who has not. Step by step, Smith tells what has been bothering her, but she is never mean spirited or vindictive. She simply knows the complex relationship between past histories and present struggles, between the need for allies and the respect for difference. "Privilege and oppression can and do exist simultaneously."

From Black women, she asks for their admittance that anti-semitism is part of the same killing forces in this land that rode with the Klan. She asks them to consider that to be white skinned can also mean to be the victim of oppression that anti-semitism has a long history marked by genocidal attacks. She then addresses herself to one of the most difficult and disturbing problems between Black and Jewish feminists—Israel and the Arab nations. Elly Bulkin also is to spend close to fifty pages trying to sort out the facts and the passions about this topic. Smith in a few paragraphs calls for a moratorium on the use of "anti-semitic remarks to reinforce valid political perspectives." She reminds us of the feminist and peace movements in Israel and that one can criticize a government without helping to recreate the history of unfocused hatred. She gives as an example of how one oppression is reinforced while fighting another by quoting a *Black American* article which called Koch a faggot. Smith is deadly clear on what is wrong with Koch but homophobic rhetoric, she points out, is the weakest argument one can use against him.

She concludes her work with an analysis of the shortcomings of identity politics, Lesbian separatism and cultural feminism, all of which



she sees as too narrow in their sympathies. "I don't live in the women's movement, I live on the streets of North America." Barbara Smith never wavers on what she finds unacceptable, but she is dedicated to struggling in the strongest way she can, the way that reflects the kind of world she wants to live in. In this essay, she has found a prose style that embodies her political vision—clear, honest, respectful of the reader and shining with a fierce passion for justice.

The final essay, Elly Bulkin's "Hard Ground: Jewish Identity, Racism and Anti-semitism" started as the core of this book and in its over a hundred pages and two hundred footnotes it might have overpowered the other writings but it does not. What it does testify to is the obsessive and encyclopedic approach that trying to sort out Jewish history past and present from a feminist perspective seems to have needed. A hunger is in this work, a need to cover every possible point that could be misinterpreted, to quote the verse and script where the error was made, to present the correct alternative. This is not sterile research or the bragging of the student who has read everything. This is a desperate search to find a livable place amidst so much pain and suffering. Bulkin is the activist and the recorder, the guardian and the scorekeeper. She is the discloser of the other side of the story; she asks the questions we often forget because we are so busy congratulating each other on the fact that we even allowed the speaker space to talk.

She sets out her goals as the following:

... I want to begin to explore the connections and similarities between racism and anti-semitism; to distinguish among oppressions without ranking them and without denying their historical parity, their dissimilar manifestations at given times and places; to touch on Jewish history in this country, its progressive and reactionary aspects, in connection to the history of people of color; to examine the effect on the analysis of anti-semitism and racism of feminist theory which proposes woman-hating as the "primary oppression"; to consider how what happens—and has happened—'out there' beyond our various feminist or lesbian-feminist communities shapes feminist interactions and politics; to analyze the impact of racism and Jewish oppression on our understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; to look at the specific problem of anti-Arab racism; and to find ways both to raise anti-Semitism and racism in activist work and to perceive the links among people of different 'minority' identifications.

She does all she said she would. Bulkin tells us late in her work that the process of writing this essay was not tidy, that her room was overflowing with books, articles, pamphlets in piles that grew and grew. The essay that resulted parallels the history that it is evaluating. So much of



importance to be sorted out, so many alliances and so many betrayals, so many hurts to one people while another is seeking safety.

Like the other authors, Bulkin holds on to what has given her life and rejects the parts of her heritage—both Jewish and feminist—that take life away from others. She quotes from each side on almost every issue, pointing out the shortcomings of both: Israeli-Arab, Left male-radical feminist, Zionist-antizionist. Bulkin appeals to us to break the cycle of history that says a homeland for us at the price of one for you, respect for our need for nationalism but hatred for yours. At the heart of coalition politics is the invitation to enter some one else's world. In a passage that shows Bulkin's intensity, she urges us to make this journey.

In the light of competing claims and a century of conflict, the need is not just to hear the other side, but to speak for the other side. Perhaps in that way we can contribute to bridging the chasm, lessening the sense of the Other. Nobody will argue as forcefully against Anti-Jewish bias as Jews. Nobody will argue as strongly against Anti-Arab prejudice as Arabs. Certainly we must work politically out of who we are. But I do not believe that those of us who are Jews will convince Arab people to recognize our struggles, our oppression, our aspirations, if we are not also ready to recognize—and speak out about—their own. By the same token Jews want to hear recognition coming from the Arabs. Once again, the question is whether we will break a cycle or perpetuate it. I am less interested in who does this first, than that it happens.

Bulkin allows no one to bully her into false disavowals. For example, she does a careful reclaiming of what is important to her in the history of the Jewish left, not willing to give up the "Jewish progressive and anti-racist tradition" because men were involved in its creation.

Bulkin provides copious information both in her text and in her footnotes as well as a series of questions for Jewish women to use in their groups to see if the coalition process is actually happening. True to her commitment to activism, she adds a list of progressive organizations and periodicals that will help the concerned reader. One organization I want to single out because it is closest to Bulkin's vision and to my own as well is the New Jewish Agenda.\*

I will not say this is an easy essay to read; it is not. At times I grew impatient with Bulkin who seemed to stand on top of the mountain pointing out the faults of each side. I am not sure that such an essay is the best way to bring home the needed vision embedded in it, but there

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\*149 Church Street, New York, N.Y. 10007



is a commitment at the heart of it that is itself a moment of history. With its almost two year birthing, its overflowing voices and facts, its intense dedication to justice for Arab and Jew, Black and white alike, its refusal to allow Jewish racism or Black anti-semitism or radical feminist single-mindedness to go unpunished, the essay is a monument to Bulkin's tenacity of vision.

I am a Jew who read this book; you will be many peoples. One thing is sure: racism and anti-semitism will touch all of us. We cannot remain outsiders on this one. In speaking of the relationship between Black women and Jewish women, Barbara Smith wrote:

We are certainly damaged people. The question is, finally, do we use that damage, that first hand knowledge of oppression, to recognize each other, to do what we can together? Or do we use it to destroy?

History is hard on dreams but some dreams and their resulting dedication to action we cannot live without.



**SISTER OUTSIDER: ESSAYS AND SPEECHES** by Audre Lorde. New York: The Crossing Press, 1984, 190 pp., \$7.95 paper.

One of the critical areas in the development of Black feminism, a feminism that genuinely explores and incorporates the specifics of Black women's lives in the U.S. brings us to where our dreams and aspirations can be fully expressed and our lives validated, is the issue of self-image. By self-image, I mean how do we divest ourselves of the 500 year history of myths, images, constraints, lies, and distortions forced on us in this country? One of the results of that history is Black women's internalization of many stereotypes that depict us as less than other women in this culture, lacking in some essential way. How do we learn to love ourselves and other Black women? How do we end the powerlessness so many of us feel in the face of a racist and sexist culture?

One way Black women writers offer to deal with the question of self-image is by making up new words, claiming new names, like Alice Walker's "Womanist," to describe who we are. The premise is we have to choose names for ourselves that reflect our particular vision of what it means to be a Black woman. This process also helps those of us who are feminists demonstrate in concrete ways, that we can overcome our sense of powerlessness and the debilitating effects of our history, by defining and naming ourselves.

Audre Lorde claims her right to name herself, not afraid to stand before us Black, female, mother, lesbian, feminist, poet, essayist, and teacher. None of those labels, even the most common ones, "mother," "female," "teacher," are particularly valued in this culture. "Black," "lesbian," "feminist," "writer," are regarded as suspect, and even dangerous. Lorde explicitly demonstrates in her work that naming can empower all of us.

Her first collection of essays, *Sister Outsider: Speeches and Essays*, spans a decade from the early 1970's to the present and is solid evidence that Audre Lorde has been at the forefront as a Black lesbian writer. One would be hard pressed to find comparison essays from this same time period that cover the themes Lorde addresses. And it is important to note during much of this time, Lorde did not have a large Black feminist community to draw support from, nor Black feminist magazines, journals



or publishers.

These essays document Lorde's personal struggle to break her own silences, to find words to accurately reflect her experiences and those of women around her, and to teach others what she has learned. Audre Lorde is a teacher and this is evidenced in her style which invites discussion, pricks the mind with new ideas and challenges the reader to both introspection and action.

The themes expressed in these essays—sexism in the Black community, racism in the feminist community, naming, self-hatred, internalized oppression, survival, difference, and anger and the uses of it — are central to feminists and all women. What Lorde brings to the discussion of these issues is a relentless honesty and clarity.

Many of these essays I had heard of or read before and as I read the entire collection many different emotions surfaced for me both from the individual essays and the experience of reading the collection as a whole. I'll try to discuss some of those feelings.

I was struck by the differences among the essays "Notes from a Trip to Russia" which opens this collection and "Grenada Revised: An Interim Report" which is the last essay in the book. The first piece about a trip Lorde made to Russia in 1976 as an observer to the African-Asian Writers Conference is a wonderful essay. Lorde details the many emotions she experienced in this complex country. She was able to recognize the source of her own biases and preconceptions and yet continue to trust her own firsthand perceptions about the Russian people. The tone of the essay is thoughtful and evocative.

Lorde's tone is dramatically different in the essay, "Grenada Revisited: An Interim Report." The difference was due to the fact that in Grenada, which she visited in 1978 and 1983 Lorde was no longer the observant traveller trying to understand a very different people, culture and government, she was a witness. She was a witness to the appalling invasion of her mother's homeland. In "Grenada Revisited" Lorde wants us to know the truth about Grenada before the "bloodless coup of the New Jewel Movement which ushered in the People's Revolutionary Government" (177) under Maurice Bishop and after Bishop's assassination and the U.S. invasion on October 25, 1983.

In addition to being a demonstration to the Caribbean community of what will happen to any country which dares to assume responsibility for its own destiny, the invasion of Grenada also serves as a naked warning to thirty million African-americans: Watch your step. We did it to them down there and we will not hesitate to do it to you. (184)



One of the most significant essays for me in this collection, "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," discusses one of the thorniest and most emotional issues in this culture. Lorde writes:

Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people. As members of such an economy, we have *all* been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals. As a result, these differences have been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion. (115)

This statement illuminates several areas that address the conflicts women experience. It is certainly institutionalized racism and sexism that oppress us, but there is, as Lorde states, inside of these ideologies the rejection of difference. Lorde has eloquently named what for me had no name until I read this essay. I found particularly useful her discussion of how we have internalized the rejection of difference. It helped me understand my own rejection of difference. I was forced to examine the ways in which I minimize my own differences and keep silent about "the different ingredients of my identity" as a way, I thought, of protecting myself from pain. But I'm beginning to understand the cost of that act. Lorde says:

. . . I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self. But this is a destructive and fragmenting way to live. (120)

In this discussion of difference, Lorde managed to skillfully cut through the many layers that make dealing with such global issues as "racism" and "sexism" seem so overwhelming. She brings the discussion down to a level that does not lay the blame on the victim but challenges those of us on the outside — women, colored, and lesbian — to see the piece inside, that we can work on and take the results of that work to change the society around us.

I am always curious to discover more about a writer's process and the piece, "An Interview: Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich," which first appeared in *Signs* (Summer, 1981) provided a great deal of that information. In this interview, I learned significant information about the events in Lorde's personal life that shaped her as a writer. I learn of her marriage, of how she became a teacher, and how she came to acknowledge that



she is, indeed, a poet. As a child, she notes that she "learned how to acquire vital and protective information without words" (83), to observe non-verbal communication. As a southern black person, I was taught this same process in order to understand the ways of white folks.

The fact that this interview involves two of the most celebrated writers in the women's movement is significant in itself. The questions Rich raises are provocative and Lorde's responses are equally enlightening. One part of the discussion which drew my attention involved differences between them in the use of language. In the exchange, Rich explains why she needs to ask Lorde for "documentation:"

'... So if I ask for documentation, it's because I take seriously the spaces between us that difference has created, that racism has created. There are times when I simply cannot assume that I know unless you show me what you mean.' (104)

And Lorde responds:

'But I'm used to associating a request for documentation as a questioning of my perceptions, an attempt to devalue what I'm in the process of discovering.' (104)

A conflict seems to be emerging here regarding Lorde's communication and Rich's understanding of Lorde's perceptions. Yet, the discussion changes abruptly with Lorde's reference to her *Black Scholar* article, "Scratching the Surface: Some Notes on Barriers to Women and Loving," (106) followed by Rich's question (106) on the first five lines of Lorde's poem, "Power." This obvious shift seems inconsistent with the previous line of discussion, which reflects a significant point of difference of experience seen in many Black and white women's work and writing. Even with this inconsistency, the interview provides an insightful, personal view of two major women and lesbian writers.

The essay "Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger" was the most problematic for me of the collection, both in terms of form and content. The expression of anger is extremely constricted for women in this society; and for women of color it is a subject that has received far too little attention. Lorde attempts in this essay to understand the particular anger she has experienced toward Black women. It took a lot of courage for her to take this on. As the poet Ntozake Shange has said:

ever since I realized there was someone callt a colored girl an evil woman a bitch or a nag i been trying not to be that & leave bitterness in somebody else's cup.<sup>1</sup>



Some Black women haven't been able to leave the bitterness we feel anywhere but on other Black women. Some of us seem to keep acting out of old feelings: "I been hurt so I'm gonna hurt you as much as you have hurt me." Lorde begins by sorting through the roots of her anger.

She examines her feelings as a child, of trying to understand the contempt she felt from the white people she came in contact with. And in a child's way felt that something had to be wrong with her that people would treat her so badly. In her family she was the darkest of three sisters. She learned early that she was bad:

Did *bad* mean *Black*? The endless scrubbing with lemon juice in the cracks and crevices of my ripening, darkening body. And oh, the sins of my dark elbows and knees, my gums and nipples, the folds of my neck and the cave of my armpits. (149)

Lorde learned that dark is bad, where too many Black children learn it, from their mothers: "My mother bore me into life as if etching an angry message into marble." (150)

What Lorde does not note is that as Black women and feminists we are at best ambivalent and at worst profoundly, deeply angry about the fact that our mothers gave us life and some made sure we survived at the price of gentleness and tenderness. As feminists, women who love and value our bonds with women, we are faced with a dilemma. How can we be so angry at our mothers? We know the pain and oppression our foremothers experienced. We know it took strength to bring us this far. We honor that strength, we value it and we are still angry. And sometimes that anger gets displaced onto our sisters. Lorde understands a part of this is our lack of self love:

We do not love ourselves, therefore we cannot love each other. Because we see in each other's face our own face, the face we never stopped wanting. Because we survived and survival breeds desire for more self. At face we never stopped wanting at the same time as we try to obliterate it. (155).

There are Black women who have talked about this and who have come to terms with our anger toward our mothers. We have to come to terms with the pain generated when we hear the harshness of words like those of Eva Peace to her daughter, Hannah, in Toni Morrison's *Sula*:

. . . what you talkin bout did I love you girl I stayed alive for you can't you get that through your thick head or what is that between your ears, heifer . . .<sup>2</sup>

So many of us have experienced similar responses from mothers, aunts, grandmothers, sisters and lovers. Many of us have tried to change



that behavior in ourselves and in our relationships with Black women. Though Lorde admonishes us to do so—to be gentler and kinder with each other—I find her tone unsettling. I wish she had acknowledged that some Black women are doing this and more. More importantly many Black lesbian feminists feel this is an integral part of our development of a feminist analysis that speaks to all Black women. We are examining the legacy given us by our mothers and attempting to forge a new legacy—one that ensures that we survive more whole, more capable of caring and loving ourselves and each other.

In this essay Lorde also comments on relationships between white and Black women. She seems to suggest that her relationship with a white woman which she characterizes as one “not only of great depth but one of great breadth also, a totaling of differences without merging” (163) is unique among interracial relationships. Lorde should have spent more time developing this part of the essay, teaching us more about intimacy between Black and white women instead of offering glib generalizations.

That middle depth of relationship more usually possible between black and white women, however, is less threatening than the tangle of unexplored needs and furies that face any two Black women who seek to engage each other directly, emotionally, no matter what the context of the relationship may be. (163)

Statements such as the above need clarification. What is this “middle depth,” and how have other Black women experienced this? How have other Black and white women formed deep and committed relationships?

In this collection Audre Lorde has chosen to name herself outsider. Because I too am an outsider and I have yet to reach a place where “being outside” represents a place of psychic comfort, I am disturbed by the use of that word. Are those of us who are female, colored, lesbian, feminist, always to be outside? Odd women out? Wishing many times *not* to be outside? What are we outside of? I think Lorde is ultimately asking us to see that it is possible for us to “claim our own existence.” Reading these essays is at times difficult, emotionally challenging and inspiring. What Audre Lorde asks us to face is no more than what she has asked herself:

What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? Because I am woman, because I am lesbian, because I am myself—a Black woman warrior poet doing my work—come to ask you, are you doing yours? (41)



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Ntozake Shange, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuff* (N.Y., MacMillan, 1975), p. 41.

<sup>2</sup>Toni Morrison, *Sula* (N.Y., Bantam, 1973), p. 60.



**THIS PLACE** by Andrea F. Loewenstein Routledge Kegan Press / Pandora Press, 1984), 440 pp. \$14.95.

'This morning like this evening, night, aint no difference way I see it. In this place they torments you, vex you till you ready to curse the day you born. Even when you be sleeping send you them evil dreams cant even get no rest here. Now she gone come bang my door, my head . . .

'She say, Telecea girl, this look to be one of your bad days well you better not lay a hand on me cause you know where you going if you does - Max.

'Fool! Max aint no different than here. They both prison aint they? Just more quiet up there. Try me and try me one day they gone push too far. Then they see. He Know. He been watching how they do me, gone send his Venger then they be sorry. I tell her. He be watching you bitch, you gone get yours." (1)

So opens *This Place*, Andrea Freud Loewenstein's chillingly beautiful first novel which focuses on the intertwined lives of four women; two who are inmates at a fictitious women's prison, Redburn, and two who work on the staff. From its first paragraph, her novel develops a deliberate ear for the pace and texture of each woman's life, showing with intimate details the horror of living or working inside a prison. It is a deeply political novel yet it stays free of rhetoric, easy moralizing or simple-headed predictability. Loewenstein's characters' lives are like our own, quirky, difficult, uneven. Each struggles, like us, to hold themselves together, to change, to survive, to keep dignity under unbearable circumstances, to find lovers, a friend or, simply, a way to spend an easy Sunday afternoon.

I was ready to hate this book. My own years of doing political work in different women's prisons, as well as the times spent inside as a very angry radical of the 60's and 70's had left me bitter about most things written by white feminists about the "situation of women in prison." There are not many other white feminists I've known (that weren't in Weatherman) who did prison work and kept doing it. So I only skimmed the writings I found. It was usually a last minute addition to a paper that purported to be about "all women, or else it was a "sympathetic"



analysis of the "multiple oppressions" of women inside; an analysis which usually froze all that was human about each woman, turning her into a raised-fist symbol instead. Mostly, though, women in prison, whether in fiction or factual reports, was a NON topic. I could never decide what was worse. "Great," I thought when I was handed my review copy of *This Place*, "a prison novel. There will be one of every known oppression and an ending where the white feminist heroine makes it clear to the rest of us the nature of oppression while leading a successful struggle against a disgusting staff and guards at a patriarchal women-only prison."

Reading *This Place* made me eat my words. From the first woman who speaks, each holds the attention of the reader. Each voice is distinct from the other and each is insistent that we, the readers, pay attention, sit there, listen—really listen—to them. Just as these women are caught there, so are we, each page allowing entry into the world of a woman's prison. The story is told through the voices/memories/impressions of four main characters but Loewenstein is smart and creates many other women to help carry the weight of her novel. None of the four major speakers must represent "all" women inside and her minor characters also vibrate with stories and circumstances that march off the pages of the novel . . . clear, powerful speakers like Norma, Little Bit, Donny, Mrs. Hanson, (Dr.) Dave Thorne, Eddie. Through them all Lowenstein exposes the realities of everyday prison existence, making clear what color and class of women are caught and sent to prison and which color and class of woman becomes the art therapist or sits there as an administrator.

This is an intimate, claustrophobic world, a place where women inmates live with almost no privacy, working in a sewing room stitching together the american flag, sleeping in "cottages" on top of each other when they aren't locked into separate rooms measuring no more than 6' by 8'; observed, followed, reported on, ordered around at will by staff and guards. Yet, even under these conditions, women inside find subtle methods for privacy and withdrawal, and other women inmates protect them. In the novel, one woman has "her" tree in the prison yard that she goes to when she needs to think (and she can be outside), some women use drugs, some resist by going crazy so that they don't operate by "their" rules, some write letters. The women staffers are also caught in that world when they are inside, forced to comply with petty or vicious rules they can barely affect, leaving them little control over the meanness of prison regulations whenever they try to make a difference. Inmates and staff learn fast or they leave, either by firing or, if inmates, by involuntary transfers far from family, support, legal advice and friends.



Telecea Jones, a main character from the book says . . .

"Gots to keep your eyes open in here. Way they gots it hooked up you cant tell who who . . . But I know. Then they gots it fix so you cant tell who the real police here. Oh yes, they will do anything to keep you confuse. They got some police that's black and some inmates like police, so you always got someone watching you all the time. That's why I dont hang wif no one in here. I keeps it to myself cause one day you could turn round and this girl you been telling all you shit to turn out to be a police." (27)

Telecea Jones, an inmate at Redburn, is a black woman whose struggle with her dream/visions, her God, her notion of sex and sin, her desire to be an artist and her madness are a pivot of the story. Telecea, beaten regularly by a grandmother bent on "sparin no rod on this child born bad like her mother the Dultar and her Daddy, seed of the Devil . . ." (82) Telecea roams through the novel witnessing and speaking through her extraordinary visions:

When it start to get light, I climb up on the bed and look out that little window. Cloud coming, got an animal zipped up in it. Then it unzip itself out that grey cloud its furry self. Half black and half white. Them red eyes. Smoke out its mouth. A long dick-tail wif stingers at the end. Big old feathers on its head.

It talk to me. Tell me, I the Venger and He sent me down to you, Telecea Jones. Then the beast climb back in that cloud and zip itself up nice and warm. And the rain come down." (264)

Telecea speaks through her visions; she has a direct line to God and that line helps keep her alive and fighting throughout the novel; it also makes her eerie, prophetic and terrifying. With amazing skill, Loewenstein captures the strange mix of righteous insights and off-the-wall craziness that combine in Telecea, separating her from most of the other women inside even as they listen to her talk.

Candy Peters is also an inmate. Candy is a white, working-class woman, an ex-hooker, street wise, sharp, pretty and careful;

It was a thin line between getting over and sucking ass, but she knew how to walk it and everyone knew she did. (8)

Candy had been on her own and on the street hooking since she ran from the incest and hopelessness of her small hometown. She is poor-white-trash, caring and loving only Billy, her butch lover, a black woman she meets inside Redburn:



The black girls she knew would get up-tight if you said something bout their Mama or anyone else in their blood family, but to tell the truth, Candy didn't really give a shit about her blood. They could go on and say what they wanted about her dad that she hadn't seen since she was thirteen when he washed his hands of her as he put it, and she didn't even mind if they talked about her mom that had always did what he told her, like some fucking robot, and her brothers and sisters were strangers anyways, but when it came to Billy, they knew to keep their mouths shut. "She's my people." That's how she said it outloud." (7)

Her love for Billy and her street sharp ways keep Candy always on guard, watching to see where she needs to take care of something and where she can let go. Billy becomes her hope and her escape, the lover she can finally drop her guard around and who can reach through her history and make her feel new and powerfully about her lesbianism . . .

"She came to Billy then, and dipped her head in the small of Billy's soft neck. And she felt Billy's hands touching her all over in her secret wanting places, and the places she'd been hurt. She had scars too, only most of hers was the kind that didn't show, but every time Billy touched her they seemed to go away more and more. It was a loving of her that Billy's hands did, a healing and a loving." (99)

Finding Candy in the book was important to me. She was like so many of the white women I met inside, cut off or despised by their own families and living on the boundaries of the black community, having few ties and fewer places to go back to whenever they were released. Candy is like most of the women I grew up with if they didn't get married right after high school. She is a survivor, like Telecea, a resister who tries to separate out the different options she has to keep herself and her lover together and still try to grow, change, see things that are hard to face about herself and her chances. The class system what it is, she doesn't have much of a chance when she gets out, though it's a little better than any of the black women will have, and Lowenstein makes that clear.

Andrea Freud Loewenstein took a lot of chances in writing this book. How to create the inside/closed down feeling of being inside a women's prison? How to let the women speak for themselves, be different than we expect and still enough like the readers so that we are hooked into the lives of the women she has created? How to detail the fierce will of the women to survive inside the prison without creating flat little heros? Loewenstein's novel fights all these temptations, not looking for an easy division between her characters because of their class or color. She risks writing unexpected and revealing women who are without easy



answers or simple solutions to their own situations. Each woman in this book sits in the middle of her own set of problems and each woman fucks up, tries again, keeps going. Nobody in this book gets off from being human or vulnerable and none of her characters' struggles is solely determined by her being incarcerated. These are actual women who are mucking through in hard times, with all the pain, oppressions and personal baggage that combine in a real life and make changing and moving so tough to do. There is all the meanness and violence, the ridicule and sabotage from inmate to inmate and staff to inmate, the lying and fears that such a setting thrives on, but Loewenstein also insists on detailing the solitary acts of rebellion, desire, solidarity and vision that the women inside often extend to one another. In this book there is no easy way, no one gets off the hook and there are no happy endings.

The first staff woman we meet is Ruth Foster, one of the psychologists at Redburn for four years, who is assigned all the cases that terrify everybody else on staff; all the women judged too rebellious, too dangerous or too crazy to handle easily or control with authorized drugs. She is limited by her class (middle) and her race (white) but she is not fooled by the limits of her job, the conditions she has to work within or the fragile help she may occasionally be able to offer. She stays in and fights with the tools at hand for the women she works with, intervening when possible, manipulating when blocked. She is a cool, distant, middle-class Wasp, nicknamed 'The Snow Queen', respected by the women inside that she sees like Telecea and Candy. She is also a woman trying to face up to her emerging lesbianism while still living with Victor, a male lover of eight years.

The fourth major voice of the novel is the newly hired art therapist, Sonya Lehrman. A feminist, lesbian, sculpter and painter, she is also middle-class, as expansive and impractical as Ruth is cold. She is naive about herself and her new job, just as she is self-centered and naive herself in general, going from each lover and job without any understanding of what she has done to make all end badly. Nearly every action she takes she imagines being recorded by a phantom camera crew who follow her through her life recording and creating Sonya as she would like to be in the world, powerful, thin, artistic and important. She is the character in the novel least able to face up to her power and position as a staff art therapist at the prison or deal with the consequences of her impact on the individual women inmates who come to trust and care about her. To Sonya, the women inside are backdrops for her fantasies as a feminist sage or they are material for the imaginary film that is her life . . .

"Boxes," she explained to the interviewer. "Enclosures, cages, whatever you choose to call them. They just started



coming when I began working at the prison." . . .

and . . .

A thrill of excitement shot through her as she followed the sign that directed "ALL VISITORS" under the arch and through the prison gates for her first day of work. (13 and 15)

She is not a pretty character. But reading her, I could feel myself shrinking as I recognized some of her actions and romanticizations; how they could have been (or were) my own, things that as a white woman I had thought or ways I had been stupid or afraid to confront that racism that was so rampant or ways I had avoided wanting to fully acknowledge my role inside the prison, head on. Sonya is dangerous to herself and the women she works with precisely to the degree she willfully stays ignorant. Her narrow self-absorption sets up the women inside; as they begin to trust and rely on her, she begins to lie, to pull back from that link, while still wanting to 'appear' cool/hip/in-the-know. I was often as foolish as Sonya or as cold, unapproachable and white as Ruth. It was hard to see Sonya because it was hard to see it in myself.

Like all of Loewenstein's characters, Sonya could have backfired, giving over to a simplified picture of how or why Sonya acts the way she does. But the book resists that, clearly showing Sonya as a talented artist whose skills afford many of the women inside their first chance to explore their own gifts of drawing and painting and sculpture. Sonya is good, she knows about color and paints and clay, what she doesn't understand (or face) is power; her own in that situation and her power *Over* the lives of the women she is working with at Redburn. Ruth confronts her, saying . . .

Are you even listening to me? . . . I keep trying to explain to you but you never really take it in, do you? This isn't some kind of power trip on my part, Sonya. Two people associated with Telecea have already died. OK, we don't know what really happened but it's nothing to play with . . . It's as if, without meaning to we've been playing her like a goddam bull in a ring or something. We lock her up in isolation for two weeks . . . And then when she's all ready to explode, we let her out [of Max]. I mean, what the hell are we asking for? (242)

Sonya's class and her whiteness never budge in the novel. She never understands that all the prison world runs the way it does through the meanness of race and class hatreds at the heart. The novel evokes that again and again, not in rhetoric but in the details Loewenstein unfolds; who goes to Max first or most often, who gets better food, which women have a little better chance of staying out on their release. And she also



exposes the code for anyone working inside a prison; keep your word, come through on what you promise, don't offer what you can't give and don't lie. Sonya never got it. In the novel, as in real life, it was the inmates that were forced to pay for her mistakes.

Part of the subtle way that Loewenstein manages to convey her complicated truths is by developing a difficult structure. The story is told in repeating sequences by the four main voices, each following the other in the same order and each revealing the same or different events within the same sequence of days. We begin to feel that we are there in that shrinking female world, following the small daily episodes revealed slowly throughout the text. the story is told incident by incident, memory on top of memory. It creates a dense novel, impossible to predict right to the end, each woman's life wrapping around the other and each dependent on the other for meaning and depth.

This book is not perfect. It needed to be sparcer, sparer, more tightly wound; piling up the details without lingering so much. There were moments that didn't sit right with me. I had trouble believing Ruth and Victor's breakup and Ruth's confrontation with Sonya after their one-night affair. I thought that she did not portray the rich lesbianism of prison life, did not seem to really understand butch/femme relationships and the even more complicated dynamics inside prison; difficult because some women are gay, some only want lovers during the time they're inside . . . so then, who is queer? And it is often butches like Billy who are the focus and fulcrum for resistance and hatred from the staff. In the face of all that, long term relationships, sexually powerful relationships, occur and flourish. I wanted more of a sense of that female, some-what self-defined world.

There were women who I longed to know more about or whom I wished were more prominent . . . like Norma, whose presence was as a mediator and educator as well as a woman who cared deeply for other inmates inside. But the biggest fault was not in the novel but in the absence of other novels centered in women's prisons, so that this one has to stand for more than it should. We need many novels that begin here, a dozen would just be a start.

The sadness is that most women in the feminist movement are not connected to the work of women in prison, don't know that there are publications like *No More Cages*, "a survival network among women in prison and mental institutions and also linking incarcerated women with women on the outside." Women are there, writing, building and creating a body of work that is as beautiful as Loewenstein's novel, writing poems like this one in *No More Cages*;



## A VISION IN PRISON

Here watching the night slip away  
    eastern star dawning on my darkness  
I will become sky  
My eyes will be lifted  
    the trees will sing  
    the grass will dance  
Who is this flower growing straight  
in the desert sand against the wind?

Cora Whitmore

*No More Cages*, June-July 1983

A friend said to me, "It should really interest women doing prison work, or women inside." And I answered, "That's what I'm afraid of. I want this novel to be as talked about and read as frequently as *Ruth*, *fruit Jungle*, *Choices or Folly*, though I fear it won't be. It is an exciting and controversial book. Beautifully written, its gift is the risks that Lowenstein took when she created these women, never sinking their voices into political correctness, never making them appear less than they were worth. Lowenstein rose to match her characters' challenges. She risked the safety of a too clean, too white, too simple world for women, for one that is uniquely distinct and powerful. Through the grace of Lowenstein's writing and the sharpness of her eye, I can still hear Telecea, Ruth, Sonya and Candy; still wonder where they've ended up. This book succeeds because Lowenstein was able to create a world as diverse and interesting as the real world of women.



## CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

**DOROTHY ALLISON**, b. 1949, Greenville, South Carolina. A member of the Conditions Editorial Collective since 1981; she would publish more if she didn't spend so much of her time earning a living and going to meetings.

**BARBARA BANKS**, b. 1948, Beckley, West Virginia. Grew up in Buckingham, Virginia in an all-Black rural community called "St. Joy," which probably accounts for her enduring optimism. Quit Journalism four years ago to live on a Kentucky farm with her two sons. They raise a little tobacco for money, vegetables for food, and flowers for fun in case other crops fail (as they have each year). Real happy.

**CAROL BARRETT**, b. 1948, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I am a psychologist turned poet on the faculty of Union Graduate School (Cincinnati based). I live in New Hampshire and have published poems in *Nimrod*, *Bloodroot*, *Primavera*, *Woman Poet*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Sojourner* and elsewhere.

**LUCY JANE BLEDSOE**, b. 1957, Portland, Oregon. Lucy Jane Bledsoe has spent the last 2½ years working for a publishing company writing novels for young adults with reading disabilities. She is currently alternating weeks in the mountains with weeks working on a novel of her own.

**DONNA BROOK**, b. 1944, Buffalo, New York. Grew up in Detroit. Now lives in Brooklyn and wedded bliss with Robert Hershon. Has had poems in *Telephone*, *Some*, *Antioch Review*, *Kayak*, *Massachusetts Review* and others. Has reviewed for *The Village Voice* and *New Women's Times*.

**BEVERLY BURCH**, b. 1945, Atlanta, Georgia. A writer and psychotherapist in Oakland Ca. She writes fiction and poetry, hoping to bridge the gap between California and Georgia.

**CHERYL CLARKE**, b. 5/16/47, Washington, D.C. is a black lesbian writer who believes in feminism. She has been a member of the Conditions Editorial Collective since 1981 and has worked on issues Eight, Nine and Ten. The poems appearing in this issue are from her new manuscript of poems, *Living as a Lesbian*. She and Evelyn Hammonds are



compiling taped interviews of black lesbian writers for a book to be published in 1986.

**ENID DAME**, b. 1943, Beaver Hills, Pennsylvania. She now lives in Brooklyn and co-edits the poetry tabloid, *Home Planet News*. Her latest poetry chapbook is *Confessions*. Another chapbook, *Lilith*, is in the works.

**SYLVIA FOLEY**, b. 1955, Louisville, Kentucky. Lives in Huntington, New York. Lesbian feminist writer, housecleaner, graduate student. She was a cofounder of Amazon Transit Company and Feminist Theater; her work has also appeared in *Sinister Wisdom*. She is currently finishing her first novel.

**LISA GARRIGUES**, b. 1954, Los Angeles, California. Shortly afterwards, she began running away to interesting places and people and occasionally writing about them. She currently lives in a turret in San Francisco where she spends most of her time sorting through old suitcases.

**MELINDA GOODMAN**, b. 1957, Manhattan, New York. Lesbian feminist poet and alternative healthcare worker. Member of Bloodstore, a women's poetry collective, 434 6th Ave., Box 676, N.Y., N.Y. 10011. Recipient of Esther Longstreet Poetry Fellowship 1983-85; studying with Audre Lorde; finishing documentary on women's basketball.

**KIMIKO HAHN**, b. 1955, Mt. Kisko, New York. Her poetry has appeared most recently in *Ikon*, *Blind Alleys*, *Lips*, *Bomb*, and *Breaking Silence: Anthology of Contemporary Asian American Poets*. She is the poetry editor at *Bridge: Asian American Perspectives*, Spring, 1985. She lives in New York City with her sister, Tomie.

**EVELYNN HAMMONDS**, b. 1953, Atlanta, Georgia. Evelynnn Hammonds is living in Boston. She is currently working on a project with Cheryl Clarke interviewing Black lesbian writers. She is frequently published in *Sojourner*.

**JOY HARJO**, b. 1951, Tulsa, Oklahoma. She is the author of three books of poetry, including her most recent, *She Had Some Horses*. She is also involved in screenwriting and just completed a series of scripts for the Omaha Tribe. She is currently living in Denver with her daughter Rainy, and her companion, Laura.



**CAROL OLIVIA HERRON** is completing a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature at the University of Pennsylvania and her first novel, *Thereafter Johnnie*, is to be published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux. Her major interest is in the development and expansion of the classical epic literary genre to include third world models and she recently lectured on this theme at the University of Torku, Finland.

**KRIS HILL**, b. 1957, Lawrence, Kansas. Writer and accountant. Have a deep and abiding desire for empowering economic structures; serve on the board of a California Food Coop. Paying the bills working for the IRS. Many of my poems were first published as graffiti.

**AMBER HOLLIBAUGH**, b. 1946, Oildale, California. Amber Hollibaugh is a writer and political organizer living and working in NYC. Lately her work has been about sex, organizing and desire. She is working on a book with her lover called *They Are Connected Underneath: A Book of Butch/Femme Exploration*, and trying to find the time for the rest of her life.

**TERRI L. JEWELL**, b. 1954, Louisville, Kentucky. Black, nappy-haired Libran who spits poetry in public places blatantly. Member of League of Lesbian Writers: "To Sass" ("Taking Ourselves Seriously As Sapphic Scribes"). Considers all writing Lesbians as holy.

**river karner**, b. 10/03/55, Lafayette, Indiana. i'm a lesbian in down east Maine eating suspicion and potatoes out of the same pot. more of my work will appear in *Sinister Wisdom*. i make home with artist, Yogi Morgan.

**CARMELLA LANZA**, b. 1959, Long Island, New York. She is a graduate of Emmanuel College and has published in *The Thornleigh Review* and *The Prospect Press*. She makes her home now in Brooklyn and works full-time in publishing. She is currently working on her first book of poetry.

**ANDREA FREUD LOEWENSTEIN**, b. 1949, Boston, Massachusetts. Andrea Loewenstein's first novel, *This Place* appeared this fall with Pandora Press. She is a lesbian feminist writer and teacher and is now living in London for the year, where she is working on a new novel and a collection of short stories.

**JUDITH MCDANIEL**, b. 1943, San Antonio, Texas. Judith McDaniel



has taught literature and creative writing at universities and prisons. A collection of her poetry, *November Women*, was published in 1983 and her novel, *Winter Passage*, was published in 1984. She is working on an anthology of lesbian feminist theory with Jewelle Gomez.

**MARGOT MIFFLIN**, b. 1960, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Margot Mifflin is a poet, musician, and freelance writer living in New York. She has contributed to *Yellow Silk*, *Appearances* and *Japanophile*.

**VALERIE MINER**, b. 1947, New York, New York. Valerie Miner's novels include *Blood Sisters*, *Movement*, *Murder in the English Department* and *Winter's Edge*. She is co-author of *Tales I Tell My Mother* and *Her Own Woman*. Her work has appeared in *Sinister Wisdom*, *Ikon*, *The Feminist Review*, *The New York Times* and many other journals. She is a first-generation American who grew up in a working-class Scottish-Irish family.

**JOAN NESTLE**, b. 1940, Bronx, New York. Joan Nestle is a founding member of the Lesbian Herstory Archives and Lesbian Herstory Foundation, Inc. She also takes great pleasure teaching writing in the SEEK Program at Queens College, CUNY.

**NINA NEWINGTON**, b. 1958, Hong Kong. Writer and carpenter, sober since February '84, getting wilder and happier every day. Published in *Ikon* and *Ordinary Women/Extraordinary Lives* (forthcoming anthology). Sanity and stories thanks to my writing group, "Overload," Gloria Anzaldua, rocks and trees and sober people.

**KAREN LEE OSBORNE**, b. 6/19/54, Washington, D.C. Grew up in Florida. First novel, *Carlyle Simpson*, will be released by Academy Chicago in Fally, 1985. Earned my M.A. and Ph.d. in English at the University of Denver. Have published in *Sing Heavenly Muse! Denver Quarterly*, *Big Mama Rag* and others.

**ELAINE PARKER**, b. 1955, Jacksboro, Tennessee. My work is the documented result of rituals which grow from a spirituality centered in a woman-identified soul. Communication with an environment can only be accomplished through respect for that place. Therefore, I work solely with materials found on site and harm no living thing.

**KAREN RASCO**, b. 1956, Evanston, Illinois. I now live in Chicago and study printmaking at the School of the Arts Institute of Chicago. Col-



lages, prints and drawings of mine have been published in about seventy-five small press magazines including *Kayak*, *The New Renaissance*, *Moving Out*, *Iowa Woman*, *Feminary* and *Black Maria*.

**ANNE RICKERTSEN**, b. 1956, Lexington, Nebraska. Grew up farming. White lesbian feminist named Rickets now shit-jobbing in Mankato, MN and writing. Am thankful to lesbian and feminist artists and to women sustaining lesbian feminist publications for works that move me.

**SAPPHIRE**, b. 8/04/50, Ft. Ord, California. I appreciate the *Conditions* editors' decision to publish "The Last Day of Winter." I am angered and saddened by their decision not to publish material I sent concerning gentrification, Zionism and imperialism in the lesbian, gay and world community.

**BARBARA SMITH**, Co-editor of *Conditions Five*, *The Black Women's Issue* and *All The Women Are White, All The Blacks Are Men, But Some Of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* and editor of *Home Girls A Black Feminist Anthology*. She is a co-founder of Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press. She is working on a collection of short stories.

**LINDA SMUCKLER**, b. 1954, Cleveland, Ohio. She is a lesbian who grew up in the suburbs. Her work has appeared in *Sinister Wisdom* and *On Our Backs*. She has recently moved to Redhook where she plans to grow a garden this summer.

**VIGDIS STOKKELIEN**, b. 1934, Norway. A former radio operator with the Norwegian Merchant Marine. Author of several novels and short story collections. "A Vietnamese Doll" is taken from *I Speilet (In the Mirror)*, 1934.

**LUZ MARÍA UMPIERRE**, b. 1947, San Juan, Puerto Rico. Both a critic and poet, Umpierre's poetry collections include *En el país de las maravillas* and *Una puertoriquena en Penna*. She is an Associate Editor of *Third Woman*.

**ANDREA WEISS**, b. 1956, New York City. Andrea Weiss is the Research Director of the soon to be released feature film, "Before Stonewall: the making of a lesbian and gay community" and is currently co-directing a film on "The International Sweethearts of Rhythm". She teaches writing at the New York Feminist Art Institute. This essay will be included in her forthcoming book, *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in the*



## Cinema.

**BARBARA WILSON**, b. 1950, Long Beach California. Co-founder Seal Press, editor, writer (*Murder In The Collective*), translator. My translations appear in *An Everyday Story: Norwegian Women's Fiction*. A collection of stories by Cora Sandel will be published in 1985. My work on Sandel was awarded a Columbia Translation prize in 1984.

**SHAY YOUNGBLOOD**, b. Georgia. Shay Youngblood is a black, Georgia born writer living in Atlanta. She is currently working on a collection of short stories about growing up black and female under southern conditions.

**CHERRIE MORAGA**, is the author of *Loving in the War Years, Lo Que Nunca Pasó Por Sus Labios* (South End Press, 1983). She is currently working as an organizer with the Women of Color Caucus of New York Women Against Rape and is a play-wright-in-residence at INTAR theatre in New York City.



Books and anthologies by contributors to *CONDITIONS: ELEVEN/TWELVE* include:

Dorothy Allison, *The Women Who Hate Me* (Long Haul Press, P.O. Box 592, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, New York 11215), 1983, 60 pp., \$4.50 plus \$1 p/h.

———, "Public Silence, Private Terror," in *Pleasure And Danger: Toward A Politics of Sexuality*, edited by Carole Vance (Routledge & Kegan Paul) 9 Park Street, Boston, MA 02108), 1984, 462 pp., \$11.95, Amber Hollibaugh.

Donna Brook, *A History of the Afghan* (Red Hanrahan Press, available from Hanging Loose Press, 231 Wyckoff St., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217), \$3.50 plus \$1 p/h.

———, *Notes on Space/Time* (Hanging Loose Press), 1977, 27 pp., \$2.00 plus \$1 p/h.

Elly Bulkin, *Lesbian Poetry: An Anthology* (The Gay Presses of New York, P.O. Box 294, New York, N.Y. 10014), 1981, 336 pp. \$8.95 plus \$1 p/h Dorothy Allison, Cheryl Clarke, Cherríe Moraga, Sapphire.

Cheryl Clarke, *Narratives: poems in the tradition of black women* (Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, P.O. Box 2753, Rockefeller Center Station, New York, N.Y. 10185), 1983, 60 pp., \$4.95 plus \$1 p/h.

Jan Clausen, *Duration* (Hanging Loose Press, 231 Wyckoff Street, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215), 1983, 90 pp., \$5.00.

———, *A Movement of Poets: Thoughts on Poetry and Feminism* (Long Haul Pres, P.O. Box 592, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215), 1982, 50 pp., \$4.95.

———, *Mother, Sister, Daughter, Lover*, stories (The Crossing Press, Trumansburg, N.Y. 14886), 1980, 136 pp., \$4.95.

———, *Waking at the Bottom of the Dark* (Long Haul Press), 1979, 80 pp., \$3 plus \$1 p/h.

———, *After Touch* (distributed by Long Haul Press), 1975, 76 pp., \$2 plus \$1 p/h.

Enid Dame, *Confessions* (Cross-Cultural Communications, 239 Wynsum Ave., Merricks, N.Y. 11566), 1982, 16 pp., \$2 plus \$.75 for p/h, and \$.25 if ordering more than one copy.

———, *Lilith* (forthcoming from Cross-Cultural Communications), 1985, 16 pp., \$2 plus \$.75 p/h and \$.25 if ordering more than one copy.



- Melinda Goodman, *Freshtones*, an anthology of women's poetry and fiction edited by Pat Lee, (One & One Communications, New York), 1979.
- Kimiko Hahn, ed. *Breaking Silence: An Anthology of Asian American Poets* (Greenfield Review Press, P.O. Box 80, Greenfield Center, N.Y. 12833), 1983.
- Joy Harjo, *She Had Some Horses* (Thunder's Mouth Press), 1983, distributed by Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, P.O. Box 2753, New York, N.Y. 10185, 80 pp., \$6.95 plus \$1 p/h.
- Willyce Kim, *Eating Artichokes* (Women's Press Collective), 1971, \$3. *Under the Rolling Sky* (Maud Gonne Press), 1976, \$4. Both available from author (Willyce Kim, 1647 Edith St., Berkeley, CA. 94703).
- Andrea Freud Loewenstein, *Flowers in a Field of Thorns*, Vols. I and II, writing from women in the Jefferson Park Housing Project. (The Jefferson Park Writing Center, 38 Jefferson Park, Cambridge, Ma. 92140, ATTN: Andrea Loewenstein), 1982, 1983, 28 pp., \$2, no tax or handling charges.
- , *This Place* (Pandora Press/Routledge and Kegan Paul, 9 Park Street, Boston, MA 02108, (617) 742-5863)
- Judith McDaniel, *November Woman* (The Loft Press, 93 Grant Avenue, Glens Falls, New York 12801) also available from Inland Distributors. 32 pp., \$3.00.
- , *Winter Passage* (Spinsters Ink, 803 DeHaro Street, San Francisco 94107) 151 pp., \$6.95.
- Valerie Miner, *Movement* (Crossing Press, Trumansburgh, N.Y. 14886), 1982, 193 pp. \$6.95 plus \$.75 p/h.
- , *Murder in The English Department* (The Women's Press, 124 Shoreditch High Street, London, E1 6JE, England), 1982, 169 pp. (out of print).
- , *Winter's Edge* (Methuen, Britain, 11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE, England) 1984, 184 pp. (Four pounds sterling, including p/h).
- , *Tales I Tell My Mother* (Southland Press, 30 Columbus Avenue, Boston, MA 02116), 1980, \$5.00 plus \$.50 handling.
- Cherrie Moraga, *Loving In The War Years/ lo que nunca paso por sus labios* (South End Press, 302 Columbus Avenue, Boston, MA 92116) 1983, 152 pp., \$7.00.



- \_\_\_\_\_, and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, (Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, P.O. Box 2753, Rockefeller Center Station, New York, N.Y. 10153), 1983, 261 pp., \$8.95 plus \$1 p/h Barbara Smith, Cheryl Clarke.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Alma Gómez, Cherrie Moraga and Mariana Romo-Carmona, eds., *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas* (Kitchen Table Women of Color Press) 1984 245 pp., \$7.95.
- Karen Lee Osborne, *Carlyle Simpson* (Academy Chicago Publishers, 425 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60611) Fall, 1985.
- Barbara Smith, ed. *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, P.O. Box 2753, Rockefeller Center Station, New York, N.Y. 10185), 1983, 400 pp., \$10.95 plus \$1 p/h. Cheryl Clarke, Barbara A. Banks.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 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, New York 11568).
- Luz María Umpierre, *En el país de las maravillas*, (Third Woman Press, c/o Chicago-Riqueno Studies, Ballantine Hall, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana 47401), 1982, \$4.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Una puertorriquena en Penna* (order from Luz Ma Umpierre, P.O. Box 1703, New Brunswick, N.J. 08903), 1979, \$2.50 plus \$1 p/h.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Nuevas aproximaciones críticas a la literatura puertorriquena contemporánea*, a collection of essays in spanish on Zavala, Esteves, Ferre, Cassas and others; order from Editorial Cultural, Calle Robles 51, Rio Piedras, P.R. 00926, \$5.00 plus postage.
- Barbara Wilson, *Thin Ice and Other Stories* (Seal Press, 312 S. Washington, Seattle, WA 98104), 1981, 125 pp., plus \$1 p/h.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Walking On the Moon* (Seal Press), 1983, 161 pp., \$5.95.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Ambitious Women* (Seal Press, distributed by Spinsters Ink, 803 De Haro, San Francisco, CA 94107), 1983, 228 pp., \$7.95.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Murder In the Collective* (Seal Press), 1984, 181 pp., \$7.95.



Barbara Wilson, *Murder in the Collective*, novel, (The Seal Press, 312 S. Washington, Seattle, WA 98104), 1984, 192 pp., \$7.95.



## PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

- Jeannine Allard, *Légende*, novel (Alyson Publications, Inc., 40 Plympton Street, Boston, MA 02118), 1984, 125 pp., \$5.95.
- Carol Ascher, Louise De Salvo, and Sara Ruddick, eds., *Between Women: Biographers, Novelists, Critics, Teachers and Artists Write About Their Work on Women* (Beacon Press, 25 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108), 1984, 469 pp., \$11.95.
- Dodici Azpadu, *Goat Song*, novel (Aunt Lute Book Company, Iowa City, IA), 1984, 110 pp., \$6.50.
- Evelyn Torton Beck, ed., *Nice Jewish Girls* (The Crossing Press, Trumansburg, NY 14886), 1982, 286 pp., \$8.95.
- Susanne Bosche, *Jenny Lives With Eric and Martin*, children's story (Gay Men's Press, London. Distributed by Alyson Publications, Inc., P.O. Box 2783, Boston, MA 02208), 1983, 50 pp., \$5.50 + \$1.00 postage.
- Michael Bronski, *Culture Clash: The Making of Gay Sensibility* (South End Press, 302 Columbus Avenue, Boston, MA 02116), 1984, 249 pp., \$9.00.
- Cambridge Women's Peace Collective eds., *My Country Is the Whole World: An Anthology of Women's Work on Peace and War* (Pandora Press. Distributed by Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 9 Park Street, Boston MA 02108), 1984, 306 pp., \$8.95.
- Ana Castillo, *Women Are Not Roses*, poems (Arte Publico Press, Revista Chicano-Riqueña, University of Houston, Houston, TX 77004), 1984, 64 pp., \$5.00.
- Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango St.*, prose poems (Arte Publico Press, Revista Chicano-Riqueña University of Houston, Houston, TX 77004), 1983, 103 pp., \$7.50.
- Michelle Cliff, *Abeng*, novel (The Crossing Press, Trumansburg, NY 14886), 1984, 170 pp., \$16.95 cloth.
- Jo Cochran, J.T. Stewart, and Maymi Tsutakawa, eds., *Gathering Ground: New Writing and Art by Northwest Women of Color* (The Seal Press, 312 S. Washington, Seattle, WA 98104), 1984, 187 pp., \$6.95.
- Nancy Faires Conklin, Brenda McCallum, and Marcia Wade, eds., *The Culture of Southern Black Women: Approaches and Materials*, curriculum guide (The University of Alabama, Archive of American Minority Cultures and Women's Studies Program, Project on the Culture of Southern Black Women, P.O. Box 1391, University, AL 35486), 1983, 176 pp., \$7.50.
- Jane Roberta Cooper, ed., *Reading Adrienne Rich: Reviews and Re-Visions, 1951-81* (The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI),



1984, 367 pp., \$8.95.

Margaret Cruikshank, ed., *New Lesbian Writing* (Grey Fox, Box 31190, San Francisco, CA 94131), 1984, 200 pp., \$7.95.

Mary Daly, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (Beacon Press, 25 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108), 1984, 471 pp., \$18.95.

Trudy Darty and Sandee Potter, eds., *Women Identified Women* (Mayfield Publishing Company, 285 Hamilton Avenue, Palo Alto, CA 94301), 1984, 316 pp., \$11.95.

Stephanie Demetrakopoulis, *Listening To Our Bodies* (Beacon Press, 25 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108), 1984, 199 pp.

Michael Denny, *Decent Passions: Real Stories About Love* (Alyson Publications, Inc., P.O. Box 2783, Boston, MA 02208), 1984, 223 pp., \$6.95.

Jeffrey Elliot, ed., *Kindred Spirits: An Anthology of Gay and Lesbian Science Fiction Stories* (Alyson Publications, Inc., P.O. Box 2783, Boston, MA 02208), 1984, 262 pp., \$6.95.

Katherine V. Forrest, *Amateur City*, novel (The Naiad Press, Inc., P.O. Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302), 1984, 204 pp., \$7.95.

Kathleen Fraser, *Something (even human voices) in the foreground, a lake*, poems (Kelsey Street Press, P.O. Box 9235, Berkeley, CA 94709), 1984, 35 pp., \$6.25.

Ruth Geller, *Triangles*, novel (The Crossing Press, Trumansburg, NY 14886), 1984, \$7.95.

Judy Grahn, *The Highest Apple: Sappho and the Lesbian Poetic Tradition* (Spinsters Ink, 803 De Haro Street, San Francisco, CA 94107), 1985, 159 pp., \$5.95.

Judy Grahn, *The Work of a Common Woman: The Collected Poetry of Judy Grahn, 1964-1977* (The Crossing Press, Trumansburg, NY 14886), 1984, 158 pp., \$6.95.

Harmony Hammond, *Wrappings: Essays on Feminism, Art and the Martial Arts* (TSL Press, Mussman Bruce Publishers, 139 West 22 Street, New York, NY 10011), 1984, 110 pp., \$8.50.

Bell Hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, essays (South End Press), 1985, 174 pp., \$8.00.

Nym Hughes, Yvonne Johnson, and Yvette Perreault, *Stepping Out of Line: A Workbook on Lesbianism and Feminism* (Press Gang Publishers, 603 Powell Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6A1H2), 1984, 208 pp., \$12.95.

Marilyn Krysl, *Diana Lucifera*, poetry (Shameless Hussy Press, Box 3092, Berkeley, CA 94707), 1983, 44 pp., \$2.95.

Meridel LeSueur, *I Hear Men Talking and Other Stories* (West End Press, P.O. Box 7232, Minneapolis, MN), 1984, 243., \$5.95.



- Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (The Crossing Press, Trumansburg, NY 14886), 1984, 190 pp., \$7.95.
- Jo Ann Loulan, *Lesbian Sex* (Spinsters Ink, 803 De Haro Street, San Francisco, CA 94107), 1984, 309 pp., \$9.95.
- Lee Lynch, *Old Dyke Tales* (The Naiad Press, Inc., P.O. Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302), 1984, 246 pp., \$7.95.
- Judith McDaniel, *Winter Passage*, novel (Spinsters Ink, 803 De Haro Street, San Francisco, CA 94107), 1984, 151 pp., \$6.95.
- Peggy O'Mara McMahon, Marion Cohen, Kay Kaiser-Cook and Kim Fischer, eds., *Mother Poet*, poetry (Mothering Publications, Inc., P.O. Box 2208, Albuquerque, NM 87103), 1983, 149 pp., \$7.95.
- Jovette Marchessault, *Saga of the Wet Hens*, play (Talonbooks, 201 1019 East Cordova, Vancouver, B.C. V6A1M8, CANADA), 1983, 134 pp.
- Mary Meigs, *Lily Briscoe: A Self-Portrait*, biography (Talonbooks, 201 1019 East Cordova, Vancouver, B.C. V6A1M8, CANADA), 1981, 260 pp.
- Mary Meigs, *The Medusa Head*, biography (Talonbooks, 201 1019 East Cordova, Vancouver B.C. V6A1M8, CANADA), 1983, 162pp.
- Deena Metzger, *The Woman Who Slept with Men to Take The War Out of Them and Tree*, prose (Wingbow Press, 2929 Fifth Street, Berkeley, CA, 94710), 1984, 220 pp., \$7.95.
- Jane Meyerding, ed., *We Are All Part of One Another: A Barbara Deming Reader* (New Society Publishers, 4722 Baltimore Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19143), 1984, 295 pp., \$10.95.
- Pat Mora, *Chants*, poems (Arte Publico Press, Revista Chicano-Riqueña, University of Houston, Houston, TX 77004), 1984, 52 pp., \$5.00.
- Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology* (Anchor Press/Doubleday), 1984, 815 pp., \$12.95.
- Brenda Marie Osbey, *Ceremony for Minneconjoux*, poems (Callaloo Poetry Series, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY 40506-0027), 1983, 86 pp., \$5.00.
- Deborah Pope, *A Separate Vision: Isolation in Contemporary Women's Poetry* (Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, LA 70893), 1984, 170 pp., \$20.00 cloth.
- Joy Christi Przeworski, *Connecting in the Community: A Handbook for Programs* (The Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, 10 Garden Street, Cambridge, MA 02138), 1984, 181 pp., \$9.95.
- Georgia Jo Ressmeyer, *Bernice, A Comedy In Letters* (Metis Press, P.O. Box 25187, Chicago, IL 60625), 1984, 113 pp., \$6.95.



- Jane Rule, *A Hot-Eyed Moderate*, essays (The Naiad Press, Inc., P.O. Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302), 1985, 242 pp., \$7.95.
- Jane Rule, *Inland Passage*, novel (The Naiad Press, Inc., P.O. Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302), 1985, 273 pp., \$7.95.
- Jane Rule, *The Young in One Another's Arms*, novel (The Naiad Press, Inc., P.O. Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302), 1984, 214 pp., \$7.95.
- Diana E. H. Russell and Nicole Van de Ven, eds., *Crimes Against Women: Proceedings of the International Tribunal* (Frog In The Well, 430 Oakdale Road, East Palo Alto, CA 94393), 1984, 320 pp., \$7.95.
- Sarah Schulman, *The Sophie Horowitz Story*, novel (The Naiad Press, Inc., P.O. Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302), 1984, 158 pp., \$7.95.
- Judy Simmons, *Decent Intentions*, poems (Blind Beggar Press, P.O. Box 437, Williamsbridge Station, Bronx, NY 10467), 1984, 57 pp., \$5.95.
- Janet S. Soule, *Tracking Our Way Through Time: A Lesbian Herstory Calendar/Journal* (Sandpiper Books, P.O. Box 268139, Chicago, IL 60626-8139), 1984, \$10.50.
- Chris South, *Clenched Fists, Burning Crosses*, novel (The Crossing Press, Trumansburg, NY 14886), 1984, 183 pp., \$7.95.
- Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas (And What Men Have Done To Them)*, (Ark Paperbacks, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 9 Park Street, Boston, MA 02108), 1983, 800 pp., \$9.95.
- Julia Stein, *Under the Ladder to Heaven*, poems (West End Press, Box 7232, Minneapolis, MN 55407), 1984, 51 pp., \$4.00.
- Merlin Stone, *Ancient Mirrors of Womanhood: A Treasury of Goddess and Heroine Lore from Around the World* (Beacon Press, 25 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108), 1984, 425 pp., \$9.95.
- Savina J. Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess: The First Matriarch of Genesis* (Ohio University Press, Athens, Ga 45601), 1984, 199 pp., \$16.95 cloth, \$8.95 paper.
- Joyce Trebilcot, ed., *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Rowman & Allanheld, 81 Adams Drive, Totowa, NJ 07512), 1984, 336 pp., \$10.95.
- Joyce Trebilcot, *Taking Responsibility for Sexuality*, essay (Acacia Books, P.O. Box 3630, Berkeley, CA 94703), 1984, 21 pp., \$3.00.
- Carole S. Vance, ed., *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (Routledge & Kegan Paul), 1984, 462 pp., \$25.00 cloth, \$11.95 paper.
- Evangelina Vigil, *Woman of Her Word* (Revista Chicano-Riqueña, University of Houston, Houston, TX 77004), 1983, 180 pp., \$12.00.
- Sonny Wainright, *Stage V: A Journal Through Illness* (Acacia Books, P.O. Box 3630, Berkeley, CA 94703), 1984, 144 pp., \$6.95.



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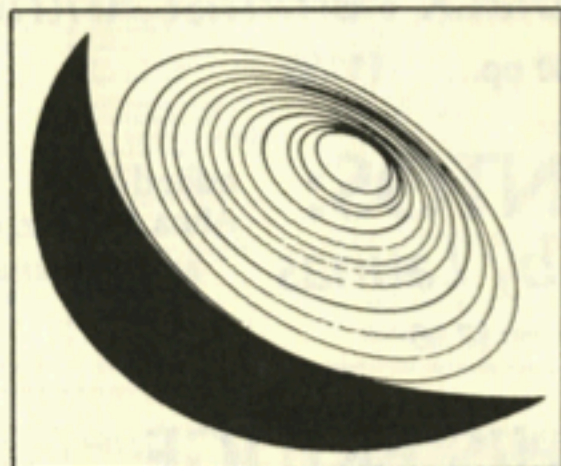
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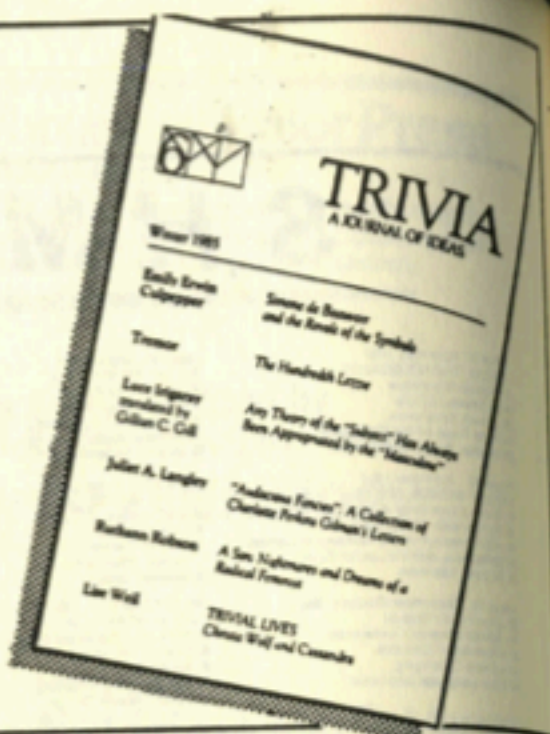
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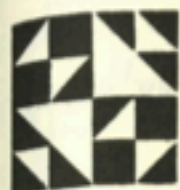
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*Gathering Ground: New Writing by Northwest  
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*Many Voices, One Chant, Black Feminist Perspectives*

(*Feminist Review* 17) edited by Amos, Lewis,

Mama, Parmar

reviewed by Barbara Smith

*Chiliagony* by Iris Zavala

reviewed by Luz María Umpierre

*Abeng* by Michelle Cliff

reviewed by Barbara Banks

*Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on  
Anti-Semitism and Racism* by Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce

Pratt, and Barbara Smith

reviewed by Joan Nestle

*Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* by Audre Lorde

reviewed by Evelyn Hammonds

*This Place* by Andrea Freud Loewenstein

reviewed by Amber Hollibaugh