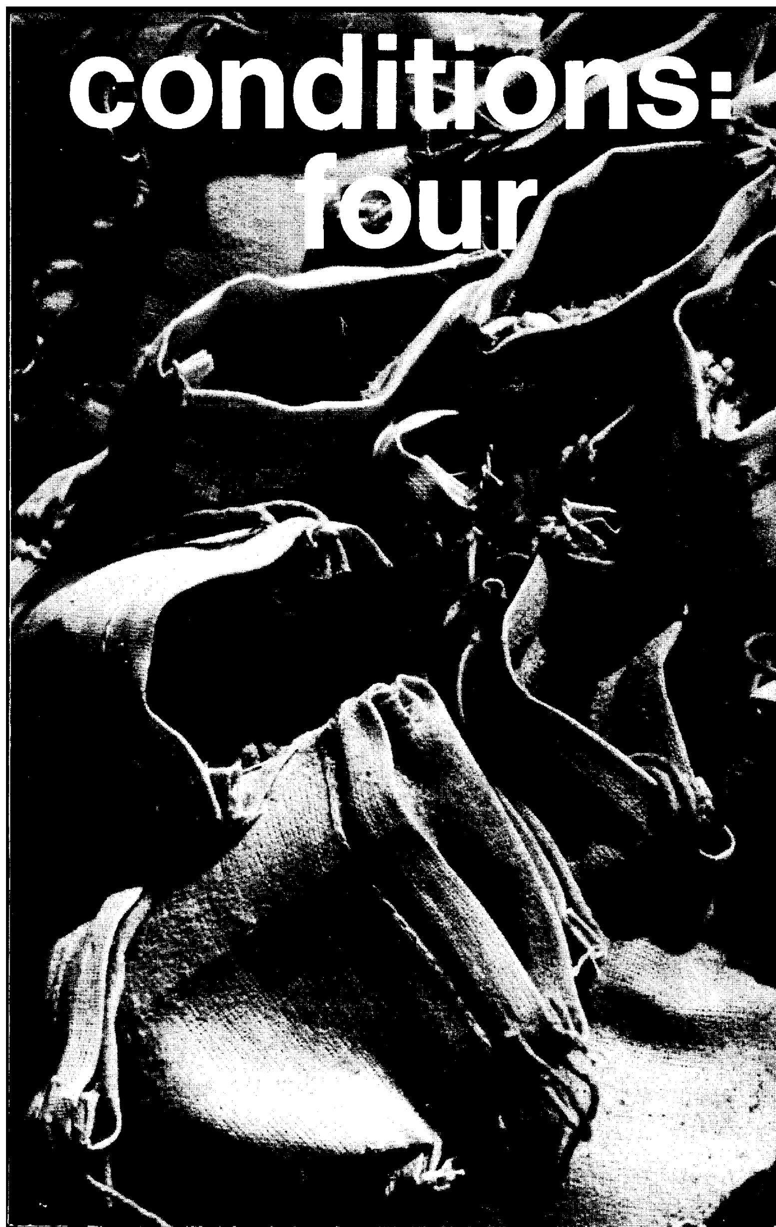
conditions:
four

CONDITIONS: FOUR

a magazine of writing by women

with an emphasis on writing by lesbians

Copyright © 1979 by *CONDITIONS*
Cover design copyright © 1979 by Betsy Damon

All rights reserved.

No part of this magazine can be copied, reproduced, or used in any way without written permission from *Conditions* or the individual author.

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

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

Conditions is now accepting advertising from women's businesses, presses, magazines, etc. CLASSIFIED ADS: 25 cents per word, 20 word minimum. DISPLAY ADS: Full-page (4½" x 7")–$100; half-page (4½" x 3½")–$50; quarter-page (2" x 3½")–$25. Display ads must be in the form of camera-ready copy. All ads must be accompanied by a check or money order. Copy is accepted at the discretion of the editors.

Submissions will not be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Conditions: Four was funded, in part, by a grant from The Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines, with funds CCLM has received from the National Endowment for the Arts.

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

Conditions: Four was typeset by Gail Murray.

Cover: "Bags–Memories" by Betsy Damon. Sculpture–1978.

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

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

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

TO OUR READERS:

With the publication of CONDITIONS: FOUR we are raising our subscription prices to $8 for a regular subscription of three issues; $6 for a "hardship" subscription—that is, for those women who, for whatever reason, simply cannot afford the $8 rate; and $3 for individual copies. In addition we are suggesting $15/$25/$50 as supporting subscription rates. Although this announcement probably comes as no surprise to most subscribers, we wanted to put it in the context of our overall financial situation.

So far, we have kept CONDITIONS afloat with periodic loans from several of the editors. To date these debts have totalled approximately $1,500, a figure which is hardly exhorbitant in the world of small presses (particularly for a periodical as new as CONDITIONS); however, we do not have the personal resources to continue monetary contributions to CONDITIONS indefinitely. We might add that the work of the four editors, as well as that of the guest editors of CONDITIONS: FIVE—everything from "editorial" decision-making to correspondence to pasteup to typing mailing labels to shipping out the finished product—is strictly unpaid. Writers whose work we publish receive no payment other than two copies of the issue. We expect to continue on this basis for the foreseeable future.

During 1978, CONDITIONS expanded both in terms of length (CONDITIONS: THREE and FOUR were approximately 30 pages longer than ONE) and in terms of volume (initially we printed 1,500 copies of ONE and TWO, and then reprinted an additional 1,000 at a higher cost; we printed 2,500 copies of THREE and FOUR). At the same time expenses have increased significantly. In 1978 alone two postal increases have hiked mailing costs by 37½%. This means that we now pay 48 cents (instead of 30 cents) to mail a single copy. We have also had to cope with a 6% rise in general printing costs, in addition to periodic rises in paper costs. These increased expenses led us to our decision to raise subscription rates.

In November we received the good news that CONDITIONS had been awarded a $3,000 grant from the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines, the association of small magazine publishers which serves as

a mechanism for distributing money from the National Endowment for the Arts to small magazines around the country. What this money means to us is that we will be able to use our current balance to pay off our debts and, we hope, to establish CONDITIONS on a firmer financial footing—one where we need not again contribute money from our own savings to pay a printer's bill, for example.

As delighted as we are to receive this grant of three thousand dollars, we should mention that—even without paying contributors or editors—it costs in the neighborhood of *ten* thousand dollars to produce three issues of CONDITIONS. And in any case, we do not believe that any lesbian-feminist publication can rely on grants as a continuous source of income. For ongoing support we must rely, rather, on our subscribers.

Therefore, news of the grant did not alter our prior decision about subscription rates. We hope that the two rates will make it possible for all our readers to continue to subscribe. And we send thanks to those who have been supporting us with contributions.

The Editors.

CONDITIONS: FOUR

Volume II No. 1 Winter 1979

POETRY

JUDITH McDANIEL
November Passage 11

MARILYN KRYSL
Sestina for Bright Cloud, Singing 37
Great Kitchen Garden Love Poem 39

JEANNE FINLEY
Widow 51

NELLIE WONG
Grandmothers 53

ROBIN SILBERMAN
Sequel 78

DIANA BELLESSI
En Vos, Sin Vos/In You, Without You 96

LYN LIFSHIN
"First I go after/the grapes" 98

PROSE POEM

MICHELLE CLIFF
A History of Costume 100

FICTION

JANET STERNBURG
Journal from a Semi-Private Room 14

ERIKA DUNCAN
Laura (a chapter from a novel in progress) 41

SUSAN KRIEGER
Change 55

ELLEN GARVEY
Compound Fracture 80

SANDY BOUCHER
Kansas in the Spring 104

ESSAYS

AUDRE LORDE
Man Child: A Black Lesbian Feminist's Response 30

BARBARA SMITH and BEVERLY SMITH
"I Am Not Meant to be Alone and Without You Who Understand": Letters from Black Feminists, 1972-1978 62

STEPHANIE GOLDEN
The Transforming Tree: Finding Our Roots in the Homeless Women 82

REVIEWS

PAMELA DENYSE TRUNK
For Their Triumphs and For Their Tears: Conditions and Resistance of Women in Apartheid South Africa by Hilda Bernstein 125

JAN CLAUSEN
Dreams in Harrison Railroad Park by Nellie Wong 129

RIMA SHORE
The Pearl Bastard by Lillian Halegua 136

GLORIA T. HULL
Sometimes I Think of Maryland by Jodi Braxton 142

ELLY BULKIN
Take One Blood Red Rose: Poems by Mary Joan Coleman 146

BLANCHE WIESEN COOK
The Notebooks That Emma Gave Me: The Autobiography of a Lesbian by Kay Van Deurs 151

LIZ HESS
The Maimie Papers edited by Ruth Rosen and Sue Davidson 155

Contributors' Notes 162

Publications Received 167

JUDITH McDANIEL

NOVEMBER PASSAGE

1.

in early autumn darkness
I drive past the corpse   a deer   hung
by its antlers from the family shade tree
gutted   soft white stomach   slit
from crotch to throat   swaying
November remembrance   of summer breeze

a woman told me once:
"his oldest boy hung himself in that tree
they woke one day in August
found him there."
and as I drive
the country road   in each bare tree
my mind prints a boy   fifteen   hanging
by his neck   one hand tucked under the rope
as if to tug it away   the other hand
swaying   in the summer morning's breeze.

2.

we are two women
we live on this farm   without men
our neighbor   looks at our work
with the house   and the land
too bad   he warns   you can't find
a man   to do that for you
no locks on our doors   but we own
one splitting ax   three butchering knives
a sledgehammer   a chainsaw   and a rifle
tools of necessity.

Copyright ©1979 by Judith McDaniel.

3.

every day in autumn
our cat presents a corpse as the mice
come into the house for winter
when she doesn't return for days
I search and find her lying in the mud
healing the wounds in her side
I see muscle and bone and grey
tissue around each hole
and I wonder if she stalked this fox
or wandered into violence unaware.

4.

last spring I got two dozen chicks
let them peck and grow but now in autumn
I must choose to build a house
and feed them or kill them
I read a book go down to the yard
with my ax and knife I read a book
and boil the water take the bird
in one hand the book said
ax in the other lay the bird's head
on the chopping block wild unmanageable
now insane flapping cackling clawing
one hen's wings beat my face rake my arms
her reluctance to die heats me
in a fury I kill four
and carry them in my scratched arms
to the bucket of boiling water dip
hang and pluck slit the still warm
flesh knife tearing cardboard and I
pull out the yellow and green intestines
the swollen golden gizzard I kill twenty
birds then give the rest to friends
the smell of blood and wet feathers
grown too strong and all this winter
I will eat chicken stew made from birds I killed
and smell wet feather and see the ax
and the plucked yellowpink bodies hanging
from my clothesline.

5.

our neighbor brings us venison
to be served with turkey for Thanksgiving
two red-faced boys stand behind him
in my kitchen their eyes slide
from me to dill weed feathering
down a rafter I cannot eat
the meat nor refuse their gift.
I wonder who killed the deer
and who will kill the bird.

6.

swaying in the summer breeze
a piece of rope two bales of hay to stand on
and kick away one hand tucked under the rope
beside his neck tugging at the tightness
across his throat white and soft
and his neck broken the book said
place the head on the chopping block
the ax in his father's hand knuckles scraped
an irish drunk and a scotchman's fury
and he swung in that tree.

JANET STERNBURG

JOURNAL FROM A SEMI-PRIVATE ROOM

1. *Lydia*

Lydia's not opposite me and the first three fingers of my hand are numb. My right hand, my writing hand. Use it, use it.

She checked out last night, changed early in the day from her baby doll pajamas to a polka dot slack set. This morning the nurse told me no one else was booked for her bed.

Our beds faced each other like partners in a square dance. Each in neck traction, we showed each other our pain. The mornings stretched slowly over the week, turning into ritual. On waking we asked "How was your night?" My triumph—the first night through without codeine—I shared with her. The first night when I didn't stand by the window at 3:30 looking down on the drained swimming pool in Mount Morris Park. Always at 3:30 the pain has waked me, the nerves in my arm needing cradling like a prickly baby.

Lydia was Filipino and her movements were quiet and delicate. We exchanged raised eyebrows when the voice on the public address system repeated DOCTOR DOCTOR. . .DOCTOR DOCTOR. . .

"Is there really a Dr. Doctor?" I asked the nurse.

"Yes, now isn't that something?"

The voice coming through the loudspeaker cool as an airline stewardess. We heard her above the squeaking wheels of steam tables hauled off the elevator, clatter of food trays jerked out, thump of rubber-tipped walkers and the shuffle of patients gripping aluminum bars down the length of the corridor.

Quietly, Lydia and I took our turns at the sink. We brushed our hair, bending from the knees in order to see in the mirror, rinsed with mouthwash bending from the waist. Backbones straight, heads neither left nor right, we laughed: "The zombies are walking." Clean, we lowered ourselves to bed, hooked ourselves into the traction sets. I tried to read, Lydia switched on the television set that hung, like an African mask, high from off the wall.

Copyright © 1979 by Janet Sternburg.

She was used to being waited on. In the Philippines she walked to school each day with a maid who carried her books. She disapproved of the supply of valium and codeine that I had smuggled into the hospital. "I'm not going to lie here and wait until those night nurses bring me a painkiller." She preferred the wait, the fussing when they finally came.

Sometimes she told me tiny offhand stories of her childhood, how her father had cultivated exotic flowering cacti. She remembered being wakened in the middle of the night, lifted into his arms and carried into the greenhouse. She said you could actually see the blossoms opening up.

She's been discharged, and the morning is stripped of its order. They're about to fumigate her bed. The attendant drags the mattress out to the corridor. The bed is down to its steel railings and springs. In a voice like Smokey Robinson's, he's singing.

"I'm gonna put my pride on a freight train goin' South/I want to go home/oh how I want to go home. . ."

Lydia left carrying a freesia from the bouquet Joanne gave me and some grapes from the huge bunch Mike brought. She paid no attention to the issue of *The Daily World* that Ramon placed on the table beside my bed. He doesn't have any money, so he brought a present that was handed to him in the street. She likes French Provincial. On the weekends she bakes elaborate wedding cakes, it's a business. Why do I miss her so? Today grows shapeless. I need someone opposite me.

"I'm coming," my mother had said on the phone. "When you get home, you'll need someone in the house. I won't take no for an answer."

I said no.

For years I've been asking her to come here. We could walk up Fifth Avenue, visit the Egyptian collection at the Met. She could tell me again about when she was little and used to go to the Boston Museum with her lunch in a brown paper bag. And about how she would hide from the guards, eating her sandwich behind a sarcophagus.

She always had an excuse. The jostling of the bus hurt her bones. Now she's ready to wet my father's handkerchief and lay the cold cloth across my forehead.

"Do you think I'd be in your way? You know all I want is to make you comfortable. Besides, you don't understand. It's not just that you need me—I need to see you."

I have no children, but suddenly I understood about being a mother. She had made it clear. She needs to see me.

I said no again. It's a lesson I've spent a long time learning.

I told Lydia the situation, pressing the button on the bed and ri to a sitting position. "I won't take no for an answer! Why not? What i it's best for me to say no?" Lydia informed me that her house is alway open to her parents. Sure, I thought, they live over ten thousand miles away. Besides, she's the one who loves the idea of someone coming to wait on her hand and foot. I pressed the button and lowered myself do flat. Was I closing the door on my mother, who after all only wants to mother me?

Yesterday I took a new pill that relieved all pain, left me feeling high. To friends on the phone, I described how my chin lies in a sling of cloth that hooks above my head to a taut rope; at its end behind the be dangles a lead weight; how the apparatus suggests a medieval remedy, or torture device; all I need to complete the picture is a high pointed hat. A ten o'clock the woman who each night ladles out ice cubes ferociously into the green pitcher made her grim appearance, followed by the bedtime rounds of orange juice. I lay sticky in the bedsheets. The last phone call of the night, to my mother. I told her she could come.

Silence. Not like her.

"Well, I wasn't planning to tell you but now that it's come up. . . remember I told you I'd been staining? The doctor did a biopsy, nothing is wrong, but he wants to make sure. He told me today. I'm going into the hospital next Thursday. Now don't start like your Aunt Etta. She's already convinced I have cancer."

This morning my opposite is gone. Blue and white striped pillows and mattress ticking. Traction weight dangling, red light on the TV set indicating that the current's still on. My arm woke me during the night. From my bedside drawer I get out the plastic bowl filled with bottles of mouthwash and lotion, the small wrapped bar of soap. I turn slowly to the bureau, take out a fresh nightgown and towel, stand for a minute by the window, facing west in the early morning reflected light. Slowly I go to the sink, bathe my face, press the hot wet towel under my chin where the traction has chafed the skin. I lower the nightgown off my shoulders down to my waist and sluice water off my breasts. I pat myself dry, pull up the nightgown, raise my toothbrush to my teeth. The hospital clatter races around me. Before I can begin to brush, I begin to cry.

I try to stop. Each time I raise the toothbrush the tears come again. I haven't cried this way since my mother left me with the babysitter and I was sure she wasn't coming back. The babysitter was watching television. I used to cry for her to come into bed and hold me.

I shut myself up in the bathroom. Against my cheek the tiles are cold and slippery. I try to stop, wet a washcloth with cold water, press it to my eyes. I walk to the window and try to calm myself by looking down at the drained swimming pool. The tears rise again. This is crying, I think, and keep on crying. My mother tells me that soon she too will be in one of those beds that raise you up, lower you down. What right, what right? Not anger at her. Deeper. Finally I'd asked her to come, come mother me, and on those days when I will need her she will need mothering from me.

Lydia is gone.

I feel a resolve stirring in my three numb fingers, hear myself saying, my words a surprise to me,

"This can't go to waste. This can't go to waste."

The nurse's aide just came in, sees me writing. "Don't worry," she says in her syncopated Panamanian accent. "This place is like—like—you know, what's the word?—a precinct. A bed doesn't stay empty around here."

2. *Miss Goldstein*

On the yellow pad I've filled up line after line, page after page. I'm catching up with myself.

I flip the pages back, hook myself into traction. The pulley stretching my neck up—relief!

I'm deep inside my body, feeling the bones being drawn back into their regular alignment, given room. I breathe easier, alone here and in suspension.

The midday muscle-relaxing pill dozes me off. Dimly, from the other side of the room, I hear white sounds. . .crepe-soled shoes entering, the rustle of rough linen spread out, boxsprings squeaking. A wheelchair rattles nearer, is turned sharply around the corner, into the room. A soft

gabble. . . lifting, lowering. . . someone is opposite me. . . shall I look?. . . no, stay under my eyelids where all is white light, and sleep.

"Do you want a bedpan?"

The shouting comes from the young orderly standing across the room by the bed. "Hey lady, I can't stand here all day, just tell me huh?" He is getting louder, and disgusted, staring down at the uncomprehending old woman.

The nurse rushes in, bedpan in hand. "She's deaf," she shouts, and sticks the bedpan in front of the old woman's face.

"No, no," the old woman waves away bedpan, nurse, attendant. "I go by myself."

Alone together, she and I exchange wary, formal nods. She introduces herself: "Miss Sophie Goldstein."

She settles back on the pillows, dozes. Wide awake now, I look at her. Her straight gray hair is thin, her thin mouth has fallen open. She is snoring lightly. The smell of another person has begun to move into the room, the smell of old teeth, old breath.

The hospital social worker drops by, gives reassuring answers to Miss Goldstein's litany of questions: "Will they take my apartment while I'm in the hospital? Will they let me call my sister? Where's my purse? The nurse took it from me at the desk. She never asked me to sign for anything. She made me give her my ring, where's my ring? I never go out without it. . ." Her hand presses against her cheek, her fingers play at the corners of her mouth. "Oh, oh, where is it?"

The social worker leaves; I cannot. The space between Miss Goldstein's and my bed seems to be shrinking. Miss Goldstein is too close to me; she is drawing me towards her, drawing me back to the steps in front of the apartment house where my grandmother lived. Looking across at Miss Goldstein, I can see the twin panels of opaque glass set in the door; I know just how the hallway will smell, of steam rising off boiling soup and mold from the mustard-colored stucco walls. Broken glass; paint flaking to damp white cement—the building has been written off.

She leans forward in bed: "You're a writer, the nurse told me. Maybe you know my nephew, Leonard Abrams? I wrote him a note, congratulations on his new position. He makes six hundred dollars a week. Did he

ever answer?" She raises her hand, palm facing me. "No, they don't care about you." With a flick of her wrist, she lets her hand fall forward.

I don't know her nephew. I tell her so, shaking my head. But I do know the setting of her complaints. Will she suck me into that hallway, up the stairs and into my grandmother's apartment where my crazy Uncle Bennie opens the door and returns to the living room chair, his arms lined up on the doilied rests, his feet lined up on the carpet, eyes staring straight ahead, while I go reluctantly down the narrow corridor tripping on a turned-up piece of linoleum? "Mama, we should get that nailed down for you," calls out my mother, pushing me forward into the kitchen where I breathe shallowly, trying to escape inhaling a steam that is always in that room, feeling it race through my body and synthesizing it in the only way I know: short exhalations of disgust.

My grandmother is sighing. She sits down opposite me and scrapes the inside of a jar to spoon her homemade horseradish, a fuschia mound, onto my plate. Made to feel a treasonous stranger because I wouldn't eat her relish, that bitter root so pungent it was guaranteed to bring tears to my eyes.

I reach over to the bedside table and pick up a book. I try to lose myself in it, but instead I remember staring at the oilcloth wallpaper in my grandmother's bathroom, trying to lose myself in the pink and black pattern of crenellated shells, willing myself not to look at Bennie's underwear drying over the edge of the tub.

Miss Goldstein gets up, goes to the bathroom. With surprise, I notice how youthful the skin of her back looks, that white patch of flesh where the hospital gown doesn't meet.

She comes out of the bathroom, walks over to me and places a hand on my forearm.

"You drink," she says, "and so do I. But I don't see you getting up like me."

Have I missed some connecting word, am I getting deaf? Or have I willed myself not to listen? I knit my eyebrows, shrug with bent elbows and palms open—a signal for Say It Again.

She points to the bathroom. Ah! I understand, place my hand on her forearm.

I don't know why I hold my water better than she. I try to convey this—to suggest also that we have our different needs—in another shrug, and a smile that I pull down into a philosophic Who Knows?

Miss Goldstein and I are beginning to communicate in the language of the shtetl, a place I've never lived in, but one that seems to have taken up room in me.

ASK THE NURSE!

I nod in the direction of the door and then emphatically at Miss Goldstein: IT'S BEEN THREE DAYS, TELL HER TO GET IT FOR YOU.

But she's afraid to ask for her ring.

Oh damn, I can just see her life! The timid sister, the one who always hung back. Her mother urging her to take a Caribbean cruise, Miss Goldstein and the members of her brother's lodge; "four hundred Masons and their families, I didn't want to go, fifteen days, too much time on a boat." Here the doctors tell her she must walk. She announces to me "I'm going for a walk." Then she stands in the doorway, peering into the corridor.

The nurses still call her "Mrs."

Miss Wagner, the young one, goes out of her way to be kind to the old deaf lady who stands for This Is What It's Like To Be All Alone.

But she still doesn't see her as Sophie Goldstein.

"Miss."

Who went to business. In philanthropic organizations. "Oh it was such hard work, typing, typing, all day, they never left you alone."

Oh yes, they never left you alone, did they, those large families in those cramped dark rooms. . .

Tonight I called my mother. She asked "How's your new roommate?"

"That's a whole story," reluctant to talk in front of Miss G. even though she can't lip read.

"Young or old?"

"Old," I said with a sigh.

"Does anyone visit her?" "No." "Oh, poor thing, I know."

And she does. My mother looks like Miss G.'s daughter, even though she's only about ten years younger. But she feels a chill setting in. Her family is finding that what they need is failing them: long ago, her brother Bennie's mind; then this one's business, that one's child; now eyes are clouding, hearts giving out. It has been years since her sister Etta wrote a newspaper telling of all the family's doings.

Only a few issues of *The Circle News* were saved. . . *"April, 1942.* Mickey is a firefighter and Sam is an air raid warden, so look out, enemies, as we can take care of ourselves. Mama is saving scrap, stepping real hard on her cans. Jennie and I are knitting. A sign to make the enemy sick would be to see Mickey winding wool last week, using Sam's two feet to wind from." *"October, 1942.* Extra! They say there is more work around. Mickey and Sam did some work fixing our Uncle's house. Sam felt at home on the roof, although now he goes up with a rope tied around him. Getting old Sam?" *"January, 1943.* So much has happened. . . there must be a reason for it, which we cannot understand. Let us cling together, more now than ever, as after all, we have just each other."

"I'll tell you more later," I whisper to my mother. "I'll be getting out of here in a few days. You're definitely going in the hospital tomorrow? Is Daddy taking you. . . tell him to call me the minute you know anything. . . yes, the doctor says I'm coming along fine. . . okay, you too. Sleep well."

Is my light bothering Miss G.? I've got into the habit of staying up late, keeping my bedside lamp on long after the night nurse snaps out the overhead lights.

When I come back from the bathroom, I'll draw the curtain all the way around the bed. I'll sit here as in a bathtub, sheltered and private, writing about Miss G. from my side of our semi-private room. But then will she think I'm shutting her out?

I begin to draw the curtain.

"Goodnight, Miss Goldstein."

"Call me Sophie."

I'm lying in bed, released from the schedule of traction, around me the pink mohair shawl that my mother knit. The afternoon light falls on the orange and red berries in the glass pitcher, a branch of bittersweet from Joanne who knows I'm missing autumn this year. The pitcher is on the low table against the wall, midway between Sophie's and my bed. "Berries," she had joined in, "I had those too. A girlfriend from the office, they grew in her backyard. She used to bring them in for me."

On the blanket is a clear bag packed with maple and oak leaves, also a present from Joanne. I draw one red leaf out, slide its flat wetness across my palm. I hold it up to the light coming in from the window—the veins stand out, like bones under an X-ray.

Across the room, Miss Wagner is helping Sophie to make a long-distance call to her sister in Ohio. Sophie is holding the receiver tight against her ear. "Doris? Doris?" Miss Wagner is saying loudly "We have to wait first for the dial tone, Mrs. Goldstein."

Outside in the corridor, the residents are conferring. I hear them discussing Sophie's case, strain to catch their words. A deep voice, the young Hawaiian doctor? ". . . severe ulcerated varicosity. I've been following the case since August." Softer, scratchy, the one with the string tie and red moustache? "We'll have to ligate the other leg. . . should we tell her now?"

They troop in, waving away the nurse, a conquering army of young men surrounding Sophie's bed.

I don't want to give away my concern for fear they'll lower their voices, so I go on looking at the deep red leaf. I see from the corner of my eye that they're unwrapping Sophie's bandages.

Miss Wagner bursts in.

"They've found your ring!" she shouts.

Sophie looks up, puzzled, squinting to hear.

"THEY'VE FOUND YOUR RING!"

I can't contain myself. "Wonderful! Wonderful!"

Through the phalanx of doctors, Sophie rises up in bed, grasps Miss Wagner's hand. "They found it?"

Miss Wagner nods. "Yes, yes, here's your bag, you see? That nurse at the desk was honest after all!"

The young doctors bend over Sophie. She doesn't say anything as they pass their instruments back and forth, lancing away the tissue, then bandaging her up again. They troop out.

Sophie raises herself off her elbows.

"See what they did to me?"

She points to her legs, criss-crossed to the thighs with adhesive strapping.

"They cut me. They cut me."

She is quiet.

Then she holds out her left hand, looks at it, points her fourth finger in my direction. "My brother, he used to be a jeweler. He made it, for my mother. She left it to me."

I walk over to her bedside, and touch the narrow gold band. I turn it slightly, her hand turning with mine, palm upward to show me the ring's filigree. I admire it, and say nothing about what I have noticed first of all—the setting lacks a stone. There are a few prongs, but they surround a small hollow.

Looking down from one of the windows in our room, I see the drained swimming pool through fine rain. Around it are lampposts that mark the boundary of hues: inside, the sharp green walls of the pool; outside, the faded yellow and brown screen of trees in the park.

I stand here wondering why trees don't blaze here in the city, and what happens to a tree when its leaves don't fully turn before they wither.

From her window, Sophie looks out over the pool. "No one's using it. . ."

I hug my shoulders and shrug, It's Too Cold.

"Ice-skating, maybe?"

I shrug again, Who Knows, Drop The Subject.

"Roller-skating?" she suggests.

I brighten up. That's A Good Idea, I nod.

"Roller-skating. . . I thought it would be used."

I'm going home today. I'm not sure I want to leave. Oh yes, of course I want to leave. But today? It would be too rushed. . . mightn't tomorrow be better?

I know, it's always been this way; at the point of getting well, I hang back. When I was nine, I broke my leg and had to wear a cast until it healed. Then, as the doctor started to cut the plaster open, I burst into tears. The doctor told me not to be afraid; it wouldn't hurt. I was silent, ashamed of the true reason: I was afraid to go out without protection, with my vulnerable skin exposed.

And yet I know I must go. Now, when Sophie and I talk, I find myself using her gestures. I feel as though I am beginning to walk like her, in short steps, nervously around the room. In the morning we get out of bed at the same time. Our legs dangle off the sides, our feet feel around under the bed for our slippers. Yes, I must leave today.

She'll miss me. I see her saddening.

I've given the newsboy money for her papers. Once I saw her fishing my *Times* from the wastebasket. From then on I passed her the paper with my all-purpose shrug: Do You Want It? Yes, yes, she would say in a loud voice as if I were offering her an annoyance.

She has said nothing about my leaving. No suggestions even to make the usual exchange of addresses.

. . . I'm saddening too.

Today I sat in an armchair facing the corridor. Next to me sat Sophie. We were companionable, sharing that silence one sometimes sees between two people who have been wheeled out to take the air.

Then the draft became too much for her, and she went back to bed. We both were at a loss, and I began to gather up my belongings.

3. *My Mother*

This push and pull we're caught in—always needing, heading out into a force that throws us back—and always being needed, struggling

against the sweep of an undertow. We tread in the rip of our own tide, trying to stay alive and intact. Believing that there will be a stay.

The phone rings. I'd been waiting. I knew it was my father.

Joanne is at my apartment and asks, "Do you want me to get it for you?"

"No." I get up slowly carefully from the wing chair, lift the receiver from its cradle, slowly bring it up past my thick neck collar, to my ear.

"Hi baby. This is your father. How are you feeling?"

"I'm fine, but how's mother?"

"She's right here beside me," he says, his voice soothing. "I'll put her on."

Her voice sounds weak. "I'm all right, it's a nothing procedure and everything's fine, so don't worry. I'm just a little tired, that's all. I'll give you back to your father."

"Is she going home tomorrow?"

Silence. Not like him. "Why don't we talk about all that later?"

"Look, something's not right. I'll call you at home tonight."

I hope he'll deny it, bluster, "No, no, no need to call, everything's hunky-dory, you just take care of yourself." Instead he says, so calm, so grave, "All right, why don't you do that."

"I'll call at 7:30—you'll be home by then?"

Slowly I replace the receiver in its cradle, make my way back into the wing chair.

Everywhere there are the visible signs of consolations—the rooms we inhabit, the objects we surround ourselves with, the words we write; what are these if not a highly articulated set of consolations? Then something happens. . . and I feel inconsolable.

They opened her up. My father says the doctors think they got it all out.

She's home now, after the operation. And now that I'm better, I want to go to Boston and see her. "Nothing special," I tell her, "I just want to spend a little time with you, do a couple of errands—I'm sure you could use a few things—"

"No," she says. "All I want is to be left alone."

At first I'm impressed that she speaks up for her own needs. "You have your own way of doing things," she says, "and I have mine. If I want a cup of tea, I make it for myself when I feel like it. That's all I want."

But I need to see her.

Has she changed? Become suddenly old? I picture her opening the apartment door, and for a second I won't recognize her; I'll think I'm seeing not my own mother but her mother, my grandmother's upper lip lined like piecrust dough where the tines of a fork have pressed.

"Look," I try again a few weeks later, "this is a perfect time for me to hop on a bus. . ."

"No, no." She doesn't change her mind, but she goes on—her sisters don't call her, no one offers to come up to the apartment with a pot of food. When her sister Etta does phone, it's to tell her every little detail about visiting Bennie at the Nursing Home. "That's all I hear," my mother says, "how hard it is for her, how hard, on and on."

But that's what I'm hearing from you.

"And then she gets angry at me when I don't call her to find out how Bennie is. Well I'll tell you something—I don't care about Bennie. I've been through an ordeal, and if you want to know the truth, I don't care about anything."

Not even about me?

And yet under the harshness I hear her wanting to make a moat around herself, nothing more to be asked of her—

"How many years have I taken care of my brother? We went through plenty before we got him into the Home."

—saying she will no longer succor. Cut into, part of what was inside her taken out. Her freedom purchased only at this price: no one can enter, while she lies there needing.

"Let someone else worry about him for a change. Etta doesn't like to hear me say this. You know her, she's not happy unless she's worrying. She means well, it's just her nature. Well, I've changed—I have to think of myself first."

Yes, I'm hearing the cry of a long illness, a cry I know too well, love me, plump the pillow behind my head. And knowing her cry, from where it issues, why then can I answer only with the harshness of my own logic?

"But how can you complain when you won't let anyone do anything for you?"

She is quiet for a moment. "If I listen, I'll let everybody tear me apart."

She has cracked me. My logic falls away on either side, and I'm cradled in the split shell of both our pains.

". . . People are selfish. I know you think it's different. And it is different for you. You have friends, people whose parents live far away, people who are all alone in New York City, and you help each other. And in California I hear strangers do things for each other. But not here. This is a cold, cold city. Here you're alone."

I am listening with every ounce of attention. We are talking long distance, through space, and also through time. She seems so young to me. I have travelled where she has not been; she has stayed in that city for fear that if she took a chance she would lose forever the small order she has amassed—the apartment where every year she climbs on a stool and opens each ring on the curtain rod, gathers the heavy drapes in her arms, soaks them a pair at a time in the tub, days of ironing. . . and, rehanging them, turns and pins and smooths the material to hide the faded parts. She hears of California as a queen might have listened to an explorer, wanting not the foreign gifts but the eyes to fall on the gleaming room that surrounds her, on the clean green drapes—praise for the effort and cost and will to maintain.

"I have to be realistic. In the end you're alone."

Is this her wisdom?

Am I to be left with only this bit of her truth, issued out to me from her city, her citadel?

But you're not alone—

Has she heard me break my silence?

But the outpour is over. She remembers that we are talking long distance. "We have to hang up," she says. "Do you have any idea of what this call is going to cost you?"

Beside me now on the wall is a calendar, the months set out below a Klimt painting, men and women and children merging into one another. The figures are held together within a curving form; beside them hunches a skeletal Death, club in hand. I stop writing and look up at that painting. I say no Death, you're not standing outside us, poised to smash into that light-filled enclosure. You're inside the form, slowly darkening it.

Late November. I'm driving, New York to Boston, along the bleak artery that's been cut through old stone ledges. Through the windshield I'm looking out towards the vanishing point, watching how the landscape in front of me continually parts, and becomes the landscape on either side—the sheered stone walls I'm rushing past.

And now I am home at last, a visitor in my old house. I've brought my parents up to date on my doings; I've slept on the day-bed they keep for me.

My parents are out this afternoon, visiting Bennie at the Home. I look around the apartment—at the arrangement of family snapshots, the large photograph of myself painted over in oils.

The doorbell rings. I open the door and look down.— There's the crown of my father's bald head. He used to ring downstairs and then be at the door before I opened it, greeting me with his Who Did You Think It Was grin. There, coming up behind him, is the teased corolla of my mother's hair. When I'd be reading in my bedroom, I'd hear her put the key in the lock.

I prop the door open and run down the stairs to carry their packages, the shopping bags that contain Bennie's socks and underwear that my mother will wash and send back to the Home.

I take the bundles from them and run up the steps, toward the open door where light comes through the windows, through the drapes,

and floods the room with watery green. There, in that doorway, as in a strip of film held to the light, my childhood swims into focus, meets and dissolves into a sequence rising and moving me in it.

No, no, we have said to each other. But then we spoke again, saying Come.

AUDRE LORDE

MAN CHILD: A BLACK LESBIAN FEMINIST'S RESPONSE

"NOT ONLY OF A RELATIONSHIP, BUT OF RELATING"

This article is not a theoretical discussion of Lesbian Mothers and their Sons. Nor is it a how-to article. It is my attempt to scrutinize and to share some pieces of that common history belonging to my son and me. I have two children: a 15½-year-old daughter Beth, and a 14-year-old son Jonathan. This is the way it was/is with me and Jonathan, and I leave the theory to another time or person.

This is one woman's telling. I have no golden message about the raising of sons for other lesbian mothers, no secret and effective elixir to transpose your questions into certain light. I have my own ways of rewording those same questions, hoping we will all come to speak those questions and pieces of our lives we need to share, women making contact within ourselves and with each other across the restrictions of the printed page.

The truest direction comes from inside. I give the most strength to my children by being willing to look within myself, and by being honest with them about what I find there. In this way they learn to look beyond their own fears.

Our children are outriders for a queendom not yet assured.

My adolescent son's growing sexuality is a real dynamic between Jonathan and me. It would be presumptuous of me to discuss Jonathan's sexuality here, except to state my confidence that, whomever he chooses to explore this area with, his choices will be non-oppressive, joyful, and deeply felt from within.

One of the difficulties in writing this piece at this time has been temporal, since this is the summer when Jonathan is becoming a man, physically. And rest assured, our sons must become men—such men as we hope our daughters, born and unborn, will be pleased to live among. Our sons will not grow into women, and so their way is more difficult than that of our daughters. For they must move away from us, without us. They will never be women. Instead, our sons have what they have learned from us, and a howness to forge it into their own image.

Copyright ©1979 by Audre Lorde.

Our daughters have us, for measure or rebellion or outline or dream; the sons of lesbians are trailblazers, having to make their own definitions of self as men. This is a position of both power and vulnerability, for the sons of lesbians have the advantage of our blueprints for survival, but they must take what we know and transpose it into their maleness. May the goddess be kind to my son, Jonathan.

When Jonathan makes me angriest, I always say he is bringing out the testosterone in me. What I mean is that he is representing some piece of myself as a woman that I am reluctant to acknowledge or explore. For instance, what does "acting like a man" mean? For me, what I reject? For Jonathan, what he is trying to redefine?

Raising black children female and male in the mouth of a racist, sexist, suicidal dragon is perilous and always chancy. If they cannot love and resist at the same time they will probably not survive; and in order to survive they must let go. This is what mothers teach, love, survival, that is, self-definition, and letting go. For each of these, the ability to feel strongly and to recognize those feelings is central; how to feel love, how not to fear and discount his own fear, how to enjoy feeling deeply.

I wish to raise a black man who will not be destroyed by, nor settle for, those corruptions that are called power by the white fathers who mean his destruction in the same ways that they mean mine. I wish to raise a black man who will recognize that the legitimate objects of his hostilities are not women, but the system which programs him to fear and despise women as well as his own black self.

This begins, for me, with teaching my son that I do not exist to do his feeling for him.

Men who are afraid to feel keep women around to do their feeling for them, while dismissing women for their supposedly "inferior" capacity to feel deeply. But in this way also, men deny themselves their own essential humanity.

Jonathan was 3½ when Frances, my lover, and I met; he was 7 when we all began to live together permanently. From the start, Frances' and my insistence that there be no secrets in our household about the fact that we were lesbians has been the source of surface problems and deep strengths for both children. In the beginning, this insistence grew out of the knowledge, on both our parts, that whatever was hidden would always be used either against the children or ourselves—one imper-

fect but useful argument for honesty. This is the knowledge of fear which can help make us free and about which I wrote in my poem, "School Note":

> for the embattled
> there is no place
> that cannot be
> home
> nor is.

For survival, black children in america must be raised to be warriors. For survival, they must also be raised to recognize the real enemy's many faces. Black children of lesbian couples have an advantage because they learn, very early, that oppression comes in many different forms, having nothing to do with their own worth.

For perspective, it is important to remember that for years, in the name-calling at school, boys shouted at Jonathan not—"your mother's a lesbian," but rather—"your mother's a nigger."

When Jonathan was in the third grade we moved, and he went to a new school where his life was hellish as new boy on the block. He did not like to play rough games. He did not like to fight. He did not like to stone dogs. And all this marked him early on as an easy target.

When he came in crying one afternoon, I heard from Beth how the corner bullies were making Jonathan wipe their shoes on the way home whenever Beth wasn't there to fight them off. And when I heard that the ringleader was a little boy in Jonathan's class his own size, an interesting and very disturbing thing happened to me.

My fury at my own long-ago impotence, and my present pain at his suffering, made me start to forget all that I knew about violence and fear, and blaming the victim, I started to hiss at the weeping child, "The next time you come in here crying. . .," and I suddenly caught myself in horror.

This is the way we allow the destruction of our sons to begin, in the name of protection, and to ease our own pain. *My* son get beaten up? I was about to demand that he buy that first lesson in the corruption of power, that might makes right. I could hear myself beginning the age-old distortion and misinformation about what strength and bravery really were.

And no, Jonathan didn't have to fight if he didn't want to, but somehow he did have to feel better about not fighting. The old horror rolled over me of being the fat kid who ran away, terrified of getting her glasses broken.

About that time a very wise woman said to me, "Have you ever told Jonathan that once you used to be afraid, too?"

The idea seemed far-out to me at the time, but the next time he came in crying and sweaty from having run away again, I could see that in some way he felt shamed at having failed me, or some image he and I had created in his head of mother/woman. This image of being able to handle it all was bolstered by the fact that he lived in a household with three strong women, his lesbian parents and his forthright older sister. At home, for Jonathan, power was clearly female.

And because our society teaches us to think in an either/or mode—kill or be killed, dominate or be dominated—this meant that he must either surpass or be lacking. I could see the implications of this line of thought; consider the two western classic myth/models of mother/son relationships: Jocasta/Oedipus, the son who fucks his mother, and Clytemnestra/Orestes, the son who kills his mother.

It all felt connected to me.

I sat down on the hallway steps and took Jonathan on my lap and wiped his tears. "Did I ever tell you about how I used to be afraid when I was your age?"

I will never forget the look on that little boy's face as I told him the tale of my glasses and my after-school flights. It was a look of relief and total disbelief, all rolled into one.

For it is as hard for our children to believe that we are not omnipotent as it is for us to know it, as parents. But that knowledge is necessary as the first step in the reassessment of power as something other than might, age, privilege, and lack of fear. And for a boy, whose societal destruction begins when he is forced to believe that he can only be strong if he doesn't feel, or if he wins, it is an important step.

I thought about all this one year later when Beth and Jonathan, 10 and 9, were asked by an interviewer how they thought they had been affected by being children of a feminist.

Jonathan said that he didn't think there was too much in feminism for boys, although it certainly was good to be able to cry if he felt like it, and not to have to play football if he didn't want to.

The strongest lesson I can teach my son is the same lesson I teach my daughter, how to be who he wishes to be for himself. And the best way I can do this is to be who I am, and hope that he will learn from this not how to be me, which is not possible, but how to be himself. And this means how to move to that voice from within himself, rather than to those raucous and persuasive or threatening voices from outside himself, pressuring him to be what the world wants him to be.

And that is hard enough.

Jonathan is learning to find within himself some of the different faces of courage and strength, whatever he chooses to call them. Two years ago, when Jonathan was 12 and in the seventh grade, one of his friends at school who had been to the house persisted in calling Frances "the maid." When Jonathan corrected him, the boy then referred to her as "the cleaning woman." Finally Jonathan said, simply, "Frances is not the cleaning woman, she's my mother's lover." Interestingly enough, it is the teachers at this school who still have not recovered from his openness

Frances and I were considering attending a Lesbian/Feminist conference this summer, when we were notified that no boys over 10 were allowed. This presented logistic as well as philosophical problems for us, and we sent the following letter:

> Sisters: Ten years as an interracial lesbian couple has taught us both the dangers of an over-simplified approach to the nature and solutions of any oppression, as well as the danger inherent in an incomplete vision.
>
> Our 13-year-old son represents as much hope for our future world as does our 15-year-old daughter, and we are not willing to abandon him to the killing streets of New York City while we journey west to help form a Lesbian-Feminist vision of the future world in which we can all survive and flourish. I hope we can continue this dialogue in the near future, as I feel it is important to our vision and our survival.

The question of separatism is by no means simple. I am thankful that one of my children is male, since that helps to keep me honest. Every line I write shrieks there are no easy solutions.

Jonathan has had the advantage of growing up within a truly non-sexist relationship, one in which this society's pseudo-natural assumptions of ruler/ruled are being challenged. And this is not only because Frances and I are lesbians, for unfortunately, there are some lesbians who are still locked into the patriarchal patterns of unequal power relationships.

These assumptions of power relationships are being questioned because Frances and I, often painfully and with varying degrees of success, attempt always to evaluate and measure over and over again our feelings concerning power, our own and others'. And we explore with care those areas concerning how it is used and expressed between us and between us and the children, openly and otherwise. A good part of our bi-weekly family meetings are devoted to this exploration.

As parents, Frances and I have given Jonathan much love, our openness, and some stuff to help form his visions from. Most importantly, as the son of lesbians, he has had an invaluable model—not only of a relationship—but of relating.

In talking over this paper with Jonathan and asking his permission to share some pieces of his life, I ended by asking him what he felt were the strongest negative and the strongest positive aspects for him in having grown up with lesbian parents.

He said that the strongest benefit which he felt he had gained was that he knew a lot more about people than most other kids his age that he knew, and that he did not have a lot of the hangups that some other boys did about men and women.

And the most negative aspect he felt, Jonathan said, was the ridicule from some kids with straight parents.

"You mean, from your peers?" I said.

"Oh no," he answered promptly. "My peers know better. I mean other kids."

MARILYN KRYSL

SESTINA FOR BRIGHT CLOUD, SINGING (BUT NOT THE BLUES)

To liberate women is not
to manufacture washing machines.
Mao Tse Tung

In China
women hold up
half the sky. Guess who
holds up the other half.
The men are planting
rice, and manufacturing tractors

and washing machines and more tractors
so it can't be the men. In China
one day I was planting
my feet on and keeping my shoulder to and holding up
my half
of the conversation when Guess Who

walked by. "Guess who's
driving the tractor
today," I said, and with the other half
of my mouth crooned the baby a Chinese
lullaby, while holding up
the turtle, the elephant and the man and planting

a little rice with my third eye. "Planting
is man's work," said miffed and muttering Guess Who.
"Comrade, pardner, amigo, pal, you are holding up
progress," I said, and plowed him under with my tractor.
Here under the great blue sky of China
things have been quiet lately. Half

Copyright ©1979 by Marilyn Krysl.

the time I read Emma Goldman and the other half
I rock, feed and change the baby, plant
rice, oats, peas, beans and barley, and compose Chinese
proverbs for the Fortune Cookie Company. Guess Who's
grave is green. And when the tractor
breaks, I lie down under it and sing. I hold up

pretty well, as Grandma used to say. Hold up
this sky a minute will you, while I solder these two halves
of this old Chinese proverb back together. *One tractor's
not enough for a woman like you,* I sing, planting
Chinese parsley tenderly over Guess Who:
he's favoring progress at last. In China

holding up your half's easier without interference.
Guess who's planting peach trees today! Bright Cloud says,
FOR A SMOOTH CHINESE REVOLUTION, GET A TRACTOR.

GREAT KITCHEN GARDEN LOVE POEM

Know from the first our purpose
wasn't serious. Buying bib
lettuce, we lacked solemn intention. We had
fun feeling onions, shoulder to shoulder, pretty
hip bone to hip
bone. Yes,
pretty, my parsley, my lettuce, know this:
your hips aren't
serious, and though your shoulders have the look of
grecian matter, freckles
add I'm glad a certain
wit, and your spine, *fraulein,*
is a garter snake, drowsy
in warm sand, and
your belly, hammock of woven twine
slung between saplings, sways back and forth as you

breathe. Under the influence of these your
attributes,
I was minute by minute more
susceptible to fennel, artichokes, Italian parsley, and the
Idaho reds were ample
evidence
we lacked any serious purpose at all, unless
eating the common potato at dusk
can be thought an act
of solemnity. Such casual
feasting was the purpose of our bellies' leaning
over bins of ruta-
bagas and our wrists'
flicking dimes of light into the crevices of leafy

Copyright © 1979 by Marilyn Krysl.

greens. Say how be
serious taking the groceries home in a red
convertible, your hat flowered and alone in the
back seat
like a gay aunt chaperoning us, approving
my becoming fond of you. So that in
noon sun, as the clock ticks in its wallpaper
garden, and noon light moves into
afternoon, stately
and with some majesty, as though part of a
plan, made by a good god to undo
both of us, I un-
lace

the ties of your bodice, you open
one by one the eyes of my
blouse, and there
below throat's avocado
shadow your two stiff
nipples, and now it's

three, and in this
corny kitchen, water faucets
without earnestness, utensils lightly devoid of
gravity, eggplant
asweat like the fat lady, in dimpled
shadow of cherry tomatoes and peas,
in green and yellow salad afternoon
under the auspices of the great hubbard squash,

you lean
back, against the refrigerator, serious,
and now grave, a woman of
weighty intention, girl
purposeful and to be reckoned with,
intent and quite
sober on checkered linoleum,
I kneel

and go down on you.

ERIKA DUNCAN

LAURA

A chapter from THOSE GIANTS: LET THEM RISE!, a novel in progress

Melanie was walking quickly now. She was so close, it no longer seemed worthwhile to procrastinate. She passed through many amber stucco tunnels inlaid with a multiplicity of earth-toned pebbles, crossing the broad bystreet made out of red-brown brick, still flooded from a rain of days ago. Then she walked on past the abandoned ivy-covered railroad signalkeeper's turret with its mass of hanging disconnected wires, and the old aristocratic mansions where no lights or mailboxes were ever seen, until she came to the last arch which marked the formal ending of the fancy section of the neighborhood.

This final tunnel stood without a function in the middle of the sidewalk, only as thick as the single layer of red brick from which it had been made, providing neither connection nor covering. But beyond it the trees changed. They suddenly were warped and sinister in shape, bending unnaturally around large patches of decay stuck in their trunks. They looked much more like twilight animals than trees, like owls or birds of prey bearing a hundred bark-healed eyes where branches once had been, and many pointing hands and beaks and fingers, pointing to her mother's house.

Far in the distance she could see the tall elm trunks that stood like naked obelisks of some forgotten glory. The neighbors said that they were victims of a local epidemic affecting only their chosen species. She had always wondered why they had been left so high, shorn evenly of upper branches at their apex, instead of the usual low sawing of sick trees which leaves only forgotten stumps. It was as if they had been kept as monuments in order to remind the skyward soaring trees that there had been a murder. Often, Laura, her mother, would take Melanie to see those trees and talk about the special meaning that they had for her. For all epidemics fascinated Laura, even plagues of plants, reminding her of her own early deprivation.

The elm trees would seem to turn almost human as Laura tried to find words to talk about the fact that they had triumphed even though they were once killed. And she would talk to Melanie about the many

Copyright©1979 by Erika Duncan.

times when she herself was totally obliterated, by her cruel stepmother, her uncaring father, and the later husbands who were frightened of her neediness. And yet she had lived on and had grown stronger, learning early how to surface and become revitalized. She had lived on by growing larger than she really was. Still she identified with all bereft, for she too was bereft, a war orphan, though there had been no war, her mother having died a natural death.

"I was cradled in the wake of transcontinental weakness and loss of blood," she would say half in humor, quoting the small group of historians who blamed the First World War and its effect upon American morale for the tornado-like influenza epidemic which had swept her mother away from her before she had had time to etch her mother's features indelibly into her memory, to record in some deep place inside herself the intonation of her mother's voice, before she had had the understanding by which she could have known if her mother had been good to her, or had been cruel like the others. The influenza epidemic had come and gone, leaving Laura no memories that were her own, but only the pale grey photographs and faded anecdotes of the indifferent survivors with which to recreate her own beginnings, and the vague feeling of having once been valued, the obsession that someone once must have cared for her.

Melanie could no longer remember the first time she had heard her mother's story or the first time they had gone out walking underneath the elms. By now the two had merged into a large and terrifying whole inside her mind, the dark and gloomy grandeur of the tall dead trees and Laura holding her so tight trying to tell her there was human hope in standing straight and being strong. Even now, so many years after the tales were told to her, they all rushed back to haunt her as she sighted the unchanging elms, still not cut down and naked with the deaths that she could not undo.

Nothing in Melanie's first world had happened out of context, with simplicity. Because her mother was a psychoanalyst, she had learned early to breathe in interpretations the way other babies breathed in song and air. Long before she was old enough to think in metaphor, Laura had spoken to her in a language in which every tree, each sunset and each human gesture, had had a symbolic meaning linked to the emotional life. She had taught her to experience existence intensely, to pay attention to the small neglected poignancies, be they the drooping yellow heads of sunflowers past peaking, smells of wilting roses, or the cracks that ran through faces of the marble sculptures of antiquity. All cruelties were

personal assaults to Laura. Each uncalled-for death in distant portions of the world had hurt the hurting thing inside of her, the part of her that had been killed so long ago and yet had lived.

Nightly she would take Melanie into her arms to listen with her to the evening news broadcast, when the enormity of the world's suffering told in so many graphic details would come over both of them like a cold lunar shadow, eclipsing and echoing the ever-present burning of Laura's dissatisfaction. Or she would hold her little daughter close and talk to her about her childhood. "My stepmother never used to touch me," she would say running her slightly rough lips over the softness of Melanie's cheek, resting her own cheek in the tangled parts of Melanie's soft hair, "except occasionally to hit, or press my face into the bed urine when, after she came to live with us, I would get scared and wet the sheets. She never showed me any physical affection. But once when I was sick I had to sleep with her. I had a high fever and the doctor thought it would be dangerous to let me stay alone.

"Even sharing my bed she had ignored me, turned her face away. But as I lay there, so close to her that I could feel her heat of breath, could smell her sweat, she suddenly put both her arms around me tight. I do not know what she was dreaming of or whom she thought that she was hugging. She never woke to find that it was only me. All night I did not stir, I hardly drew a breath, lest I might jar her delicate position, lest my least movement might cause her to pull away. I did not dare to sleep at all that night, for fear that it might stop. I never told her later what had happened."

And she would tighten her hold upon Melanie's small body, covering her face with kisses salty from her tears, while Melanie, rocked and embraced would feel ashamed of the cold core inside herself that made her feel as empty as the child Laura, though her life had been so entirely different, wondering if she could ever become as saintly or kindhearted as Laura, wondering if she would ever learn to love.

Laura who worked so hard all day with other people had needed to talk to Melanie about herself. But Melanie had preferred Laura's stories about her patients. For then her mother's pale blue eyes grew calm with sympathy and a benevolent new gentleness would spread over her face. Melanie never tired of listening to the infinite variations of the tales of hopefulness emerging out of great despair, the stories of the nameless crippled beings who had voyaged from one mental institution to another, from one renowned psychoanalyst to another, until they finally found

Laura who would help them soar by plunging further down into their depths than any previous therapist had dared. At such times Melanie would feel her mother's warmth as almost safe, and would imagine that she too was rocking in the endless womb of her mother's great givingness, not knowing of her mother's pain.

Laura was a very special psychoanalyst, Melanie had always been sure. For she had an extraordinary gift for working with the wordlessly wounded, whose inner wounds so many of the others could not even see. There was something cosmic about her relationship to loss and pain. It made her the great harbor to whom hurt ones came, the great healer. And yet her own pain frightened people. She had become so competent and vast that few had thought to comfort her, and until Clara no one could come close.

Theodore's untimely death had frightened her, the way he sunk into himself so suddenly and would not talk. "If only he had come to me and opened up," she used to say, "Perhaps I could have saved him." But Theodore had never confided his hurts to her, or let himself be swallowed in the largeness of her caring. Perhaps if he had learned to love her for the storm-tossed inner self her many losses had created, he would have found the inner balance to accept the difficulty of his own lot, Laura felt. "I would have been entirely there for him in every way. I would have offered him so much support, if only he had had the trust to bring his weaknesses to me."

Only Laura's patients really understood how good she was, as she soothed and supported them so that they could get better and then mov away. In their dreams she would become the perfect mother and the per fect lover, while she gave them all the love that knew no precedent, sinc she herself had had no mothering. The men and women both would star to love her, as she helped them murder their own parents in their minds bringing her flowers, Oriental cloth-bound books with endearing inscrip tions on their inner covers, seashells, hand-enamelled brooches, mosaic boxes shaped like hearts, and Mexican embroidered blouses, writing poems in her honor, and making necklaces for her to wear around her throat of many hanging moons of hammered brass and amber, incorpor ating her into their every fantasy.

Only her patients had flourished, nourished by her unswerving be in the possibilities of life, by the value which she placed upon life. One by one, she had lifted them from their limitations, from the bondage o their early mutilations, for she was a fighter against all tyrannies, large

and small, and believed in the ascendency of the human soul.

Over and over she had taught the insecure to appreciate their own goodness. Wistful marriages had mended, oppressive marriages had crumbled, dependent adolescents had flown from smothering nests, new loves had sprung like over-ready rose blooms from beds of long-dry leaves. Bereaved ones had been helped to mourn fully and then to rise again. Hidden homosexuals had at last come out of hiding and experienced happiness. Barmaids had become schoolteachers. Gas station attendants had become labor leaders. Children had been helped to act out against their mothers without guilt and mothers had been helped to vocalize resentments seething just below the surface. All angers had been unleashed, redirected, energized. Drug addicts were becoming clean and alcoholics were becoming dry. Deep feelings were emerging in the previously frozen, activity in the autistic.

Laura's patients were getting better all the time, and there were always new ones to replace those who left cured. Her practice was forever growing larger. And her patients were satisfied, by and large, except of course when she became the surrogate for the oppressive parent they were trying to rid themselves of, and that was as it should be, psychoanalytically speaking. So far there had been no suicides, and Laura hoped there would never be. Only one middle-aged woman whom Laura had helped rise far beyond her wildest expectations had unexpectedly slid beyond the grasp of all emotions and now walked the garishly lit city streets oblivious of destination, inert and totally unwilling to be helped.

Melanie walked onward, coming to her mother's favorite rosebush now, the one that she was so allergic to when she was young. Even now the odor of it caused a faint tremor of compression like a shudder deep within her chest, an echo of the old lost asthma. She still remembered how her mother used to take the roses in each morning, still half closed she could watch them open, fondling the frail tipped buds against her throat. Then she would inhale deeply, sighing as she checked to see if Melanie was watching, breathing to absorb their total essence, to let through her senses the full power of their sweetness, as if to say that their beauty thus transmuted was also her own.

It was the same message that Melanie would get whenever they listened to moving music. Laura would lift up her face and rock with ecstasy, would sigh and sob, but somehow it had always seemed she found her own sobbing more compelling than the music which brought it on, for the music had been heard before by others and

had been responded to, while she was always all alone. Yet in her secret heart, Melanie was sure, Laura found the story of her life as stirring as the Mozart symphonies, the great Greek tragedies, and plays of Shakespeare. From all sorrowful things she collected echoes, each outside sadness mirroring and adding to her own.

There was a time way back when Melanie could well remember loving all her mother loved. She had done so instinctively, with trust, like a young animal. That was the time she even now was trying to return to, giving every ounce of affirmation that she had to the childlike young artists who all clustered in her livingroom, afraid, afraid.

When she was very young her mother used to read to her and she would give the right response, the one her mother needed most to hear. Over and over they would read the Russian folk tale of the child who lost his mother and kept telling all who tried to help him find her that she was the most beautiful woman in the world. The people in the watercolor illustrations brought him all the local beauties but he just grew sadder, until finally, as a last resort, they came with a homely washerwoman whose hidden magic was invisible to all except the child. The final page had had no words, only a picture of the reunited child and mother happily embracing, but eagerly they both would wait for it to come, and after they had stared at it awhile would look up at each other smiling, understanding everything.

It was after she learned that Theodore was not a good musician that Melanie moved close to him in sympathy. It was not really shutting Laura out, but Laura, far from Theodore herself, took it as a betrayal. It was from hurt that she turned mean to Melanie, from helplessness to bring her back. She accused her of becoming like her father—cruel, incompetent and cold to life's vitality. And maybe it was true, for something in what was alive began to overwhelm the child. She could no long listen to the radio with Laura without remembering the time she and her father saw the better black man playing Beethoven beneath the cherry blossoms, when her first hint came that all was not as it should be. She could no longer look at Laura's rosebush without hating the way its enti lower portion was so heavy with wet greenery that she could hardly see the strangled buds, heavy as unripe fruit, shut tight to hide their scent. Nor could she tolerate the way its upper branches, climbing over Theodore's immaculate white trellis, were so strangely sparse and thorny as if suffering for their attempted ascendency.

She wanted to close up, to sleep, to die, to kill that feeling core nside of her that caused her to experience all things in symbols as her nother did. She could not bear the pain. And yet she could not help herself and had continued to sink deeper down. For even while she sat up in ier father's attic mourning him, her thoughts would start to whirl around n Laura's way. She would be sitting there with his mute violin laid low across her thighs, thinking of how all of her mother's mandates that he touch his deepest feeling to survive had really helped to stifle him, when suddenly she would discover that her hands were stroking the violin's curved wood the way Laura's would rub her silk-sheathed womb to comment on its emptiness, its wished-for fullness, or fondle the pressed mouthpieces of the black clay flutes her patients always seemed to give her. And even as Melanie stroked the wood she would be weaving with each motion the same kind of melancholy mental melodies her mother always wove around the roses and the elms, the stories of the many losses that had cut her down.

Although downstairs in her mother's perfectly coordinated livingroom, Melanie would make her face as stoical and set as possible, upstairs in safety she would revel in the newness of the art of emotional exaggeration, feeling a thrilling initiation into the wonderful melodrama that was in all her mother did and dreamed of, and the hungry thing inside her mother that had driven all the men away. She would feel an enormous unnamed pulsing through her loins. But never, never, had Melanie allowed her caring for her mother to be seen.

Feline-like she had haunted her father's deserted attic, driving Laura who was jealous mad, driving Laura to get Clara to come and take the room and violin away. Daily Melanie had polished the sweet body of her father's instrument, making it shine the way it had when it played well, when his famous grandfather had sent out its song. Then, when the polishing was done, she tucked it safely down into its molded bed of plush green velveteen, so gently that she might have been burying a child, and muttered wordless prayers of preservation as she shut the lid. Only this ritual had soothed her sense of utter emptiness.

Laura had once asked her if she wanted to learn how to play the olin. But Melanie had looked so terrified she never brought the subject again. So Melanie would spend the better part of every day lost in a ange ecstatic gloom that Laura could not penetrate or cure, digging adore's olive-toned bow into the amber cake of rosin he had kept to icate its sleek horsehairs. She would watch as the rosin which was and round would turn hot and translucent in her tight-cupped palm,

thinking sad thoughts about his sinking while the curved oblong erosion which ran down its center grew more deeply grooved and wider with each downward stroke, as the fine whitened rosin powder would come flying, falling with her father's odor to her knees.

It had been hard on Laura, having her so visibly insane, so totally obsessed with death, and nothing she could do to make it better. And Laura hated thinking that of all air-borne impurities only the flying rosin dust would not set Melanie's easily triggered asthma into motion, not even when it made the others all begin to cough. "Your asthma could be conquered if you cared," she used to say, "if you would work with me and let him go. But while you cling to him it drags us both into a desperation we do not deserve. It puts us into bitter war with ourselves and all we could become.

"It took so long for me to have you, Melanie. For years before I met your father, I tried to conceive with other men. And finally, when I was pregnant, I dreamed you and I would always be together loving thing that we would tramp through blowing grasses taller than ourselves in summertime and shake the trees to let down sprays of oak and willow seeds in early autumn, shyly put the sticky split ends of the maple pods upon each other's noses, laughing, breathing in the smell of fresh-cut timothy, all of the things I longed to do when I was young and had no mother."

After Theodore died, Laura took Melanie to the Rocky Mountain but the thinness of the air there made the frail child gasp for breath and shudder, wanting to go home again. Even then Melanie showed no inter est in the awesome views they travelled for so many miles to see. "Loo how those jagged precipices still defy the water and the wind that has been beating into them for centuries!" Laura would say as they watch sunset after sunset sinking orange into melancholy sky. "See how our smallness sets itself against the rising mountain peaks!"

Summer after summer, Laura had taken her to the side of the roaring sea, saying "Listen to the ocean's sobbing as it beats against th worn away unfeeling shore. Hear how it cries for our pain and try to trust my comforting!" Laura had always spoken to Melanie in a beau way, full of the feelings that most people silence out of pride. But, li a little rabbit sensing unarticulated danger, Melanie instinctively rec

Even now as she walked closer to Laura's house she found her hands tucking the purple belt from Frieda Lawrence underneath her

skirt elastic so her mother would not question her about it, hiding all her other gifts from women in the corner of her purse lining. Laura had said that the ocean was caressing, all enclosing, that it was the greatest joy to give one's being over to its rhythms. But as they stood on the shore together Melanie complained of being chilled. The dampness penetrated her too fragile chest and made her cough.

"Why did this asthma have to come to us?" Laura lamented, complaining about how Theodore for his own purposes had made the sickness seem much more romantic than it really was, much more acceptable. "Oh how I hate that angry jealous thing inside him which caused him to drag you and me also down into his dark," she always used to say, while Melanie would feel her face go cold with hate, would feel herself grow fatter, weaker, more withdrawn and ghostly white like him.

While Theodore lived he was kind to Melanie's weak side. Whenever he saw her upset over her loss of breath, he gathered her into his arms and spoke to her of Proust or read her tiny sections from his worn brown-purple tomes. Laughing he told her how when Teddy Roosevelt had been her age, his terrible asthma attacks had sabotaged the schedule of every European voyage that the family would take. But still it would not stop him. And Olive Schreiner who had been a pale asthmatic child, had grown up strong and competent, winning the love of Havelock Ellis, writing numerous important books.

Theodore never took her failings personally the way her mother [illegible], In fact, he rather seemed to like the times when she was sick. When[illegible] she would start to wheeze, he gathered all the brown and amber [illegible] from the sofas, leaving the livingroom disarrayed, and carried [illegible] with Melanie up all the stairs. There in his isolated attic, offbounds [illegible] mother while he practiced, he made her a bed of outgrown winter [illegible] and odd-sized scatter rugs of simulated fur that Laura had dis[illegible], surrounding her with favorite books and dolls. And all day long [illegible] to listen to him play.

"It's all your father's fault," Laura would sigh exasperatedly, "but [illegible] and does not have to deal with it!" It was particularly hard [illegible] because of her profession, for asthma was a favorite topic of [illegible] her colleagues. And usually the mother was found to blame. [illegible] Melanie's ailments had been more subtle and less popularly known, [illegible] have been much easier. Melanie's too audible cough, inter[illegible] important conversation that Laura would try to start with

her, seemed a particularly malicious assault upon her image as a healer in the public eye.

It was hard now for Melanie to remember how her problems all turned into Laura's, almost before she herself became aware of having them. It was true with her asthma and her being overweight and later with her suicidal tendencies. The older Melanie would grow, the more this situation would be so. She remembered once that they were sitting on the sunporch arguing about Proust's childhood. She could not remember how the subject had come up. She had been only twelve or thirteen at the time and was no match for Laura intellectually. So she could only quote and echo her dead father's theories. The more that Melanie praised Proust, the more her mother mocked her, tried to put the great man down. "Can you not see your father died, that Proust grew up just partly formed and infantile." Then she would talk of how ironic it was that Proust's mother was immortally rewarded for her rather simple-minded adoring support that crippled him, while she, trying to send Melanie forth to a whole universe of better things, was only shunned and scorned for all that she attempted.

As time went on, Melanie's asthma attacks took on a regular rhythm, coming in accompaniment to each new manifestation of the earth's fertility, ceasing only in winter, as if by truce, for then she was allowed to spend as much time as she wished in Theodore's sun-studded attic. That was the season when no new excursions were required of her, and, from three o'clock to sunset, she could read her books, play with her father's instrument, or wrap herself securely in the fake fur coat which Theodore gave Laura and Laura rejected "for not being natural enough," letting the perfume of her mother's betrayals mingle with the pure white rosin powder, peopling the death-remembering air.

But from rose time to ragweed time the seasonal sicknesses would reappear, increasing in severity each year, setting Laura and Melanie against each other in such a way that neither could escape. Then Clara came and Laura was set free.

JEANNE FINLEY

WIDOW

for my mother

I wash the windows of their
photographs, sleep on my side of the bed,
play for all the village weddings as if
each one was my own. I teach the children
reading, adding; marking each
small desk with a nametag at the start
of each September, I lose them all in June.
I watch my friends
remarry, die, or move away but there are some
who phone or look me up whenever they're in town. . .
the mountains are so beautiful
in fall but in the winter driving
is a problem, there's a joke folks crack
up here, they say there are two
seasons only in this place—July and August, and the winter.
When my daughter was a little girl
we lived in town, Al had the station, we'd watch
the cars packed full of summer people
swarming in Memorial Day; and three months later
to the Labor Day, out they'd drive, like lemmings.
I remember walking through the town
and seeing almost nobody. It was kind of sad
to see the litter that they'd left. I wasn't
driving then.

I hear this winter's
supposed to be a hard one.
The year turns over, New Year's already,
and it's funny how I see
my only child as snowprints
in my sleep, she never was
accepted here, they resented her when we moved back
because she was the new kid, she's
more a native than the natives if the truth be known,

Copyright © 1979 by Jeanne Finley.

and my mother, bless
her soul, we didn't know how sick
she was, making apple pies
for dinner, saying as she kneaded
don't pound it, see, just slip it
gently through your fingers
as though I was a little girl and hadn't ever
made a crust before,
and my sisters leaving home in winter
in a rush of love and fortune, one was quite
a singer, successful in New York
before she gave it up to marry Butts,
she's a widow too and when we get together
we do such crazy things and stay up way too late,
the other is an army wife, lived all around
the world, they finally settled
in Virginia in a gorgeous house, I see them
once a year sometimes and my second
nephew's wedding (he's my godson) was so lovely. The babies
that I lost would be thirty, maybe more. Just yesterday

I had them clear away the snow
from the driveway, they plowed me in again,
I couldn't get out otherwise. I visit Jeannie
every long vacation, sometimes take a longer
weekend than I should, but what's the harm,
you only live once, right?, and we always have
a good time and I always learn so much! I miss her more
than I should, those poems always make me cry, I just
can't help it. They want me to retire

and I want to know from what? Al's
been dead six years and I still don't understand
why I ordered, on that gravestone,
my name and birthday next to his, why I
wake up in the mornings (late as usual)
and sometimes don't know where I am, why
my life keeps turning over
like a tire in the snow, spinning deep
into the mud, rocking back and forth, mother that I am,
patiently reshifting, trying to catch hold.

NELLIE WONG

GRANDMOTHERS

i.

Somebody's grandmother has just died.
Why I'm affected I'm not sure.
The woman's daughter took her three sons
to the hospital, said to kiss
their dead grandmother goodbye.

I understand the grandmother and daughter
were not close. Perhaps the daughter
wanted her boys to face death
the way she couldn't
when the grandmother was alive.

For six hours the daughter and her sons
sat in the hospital room. Squirming, looking up
at the clock, the youngest boy reached
into his pocket and said:
"Will you give Grandma these lifesavers?"

ii.

Somebody's grandmother is still living.
In a convalescent home
she steals custard
from her room mate's dinner tray.
Her daughters and granddaughters
make weekly visits
but she doesn't know them.
Right now she is eyeing
the Raggedy Ann doll
plopped on her neighbor's bed.

Copyright © 1979 by Nellie Wong.

iii.

Somebody's grandmother is recuperating.
It might be cancer
but the doctors won't tell.
Sure it is something malignant,
the daughter takes vacation,
her own sick leave used up.
The daughter is more at home than at work.
For this she is criticized.
For wanting to be there
when her mother opens her eyes.

iv.

Somebody's grandmother has just died.
A rare blood disease
discovered just two weeks ago.
The woman's friend has searched
for sympathy cards, has written
ten different notes, torn them up.
"What can I say?" she asks,
"Words are so trite."

v.

Mrs. Campbell has just died.
Somebody's grandmother? I don't know.
Heart failure at age 79.
She was warned she was eating
too many sweets.
Her husband still plays golf,
has Hodgkin's disease, grows orchids.

I write my check to the heart fund.
I remember how she puffed
up the stairs with pancakes
she made for our lunch
when we moved across the hall.
Light. Golden.

SUSAN KRIEGER

CHANGE

It was eight months ago that I first met Deborah at a party across town. She was a woman with dark hair and a serious face, and reminded me of a part of the country where they still value glamor. It was not a meeting really, just the sideways saying hello that one does when the risk of getting to know is too great. I left that party early and would never have thought of Deborah except that occasionally a friend of mine would bring her up because Deborah had at first invited this friend to the party, then took the invitation back, saying it was a closed affair. I went ahead and invited her myself and she came along and was not looking forward to Deborah's surprise. For this is a small town and the community of women within it is close.

The next time I saw Deborah was one night weeks later at the end of a smaller party across the street. This time I noticed that she was thin. She stood in the kitchen and joked with the gray-haired woman of the house, touched her, raised her arms in the air, showed small breasts beneath her shirt. She said she was not sure if she wanted to go home, the house would be empty, the kids away, just her and the cats. She put her arms around the woman then, hugged her, asked if after she drove someone else home she could come back and snuggle with her and her friend in bed. The woman said yes. But she did not return.

The second woman of the house told me later that Deborah had asked for my number that night. I do not remember exactly when she called but it was to ask me to dinner. There were two calls. In the second she told me the time she would pick me up and what we would have and asked if I liked white wine. There have now been so many trips across town at night in that blue car with its wide seats that I would like to think my memory is blurred among them. But it is not. We stopped for gas. She told me about music—she used to play the guitar, it was her life. But she had to give it up to support her two kids. She wished she was free, wished she could be even a poor musician. She spoke decidedly, almost harshly. The world was not a nice enough place for her, I felt. She took her purse from the back seat to pay for the gas, told me her car was a lemon, then got out to fill it.

Copyright©1979 by Susan Krieger.

We drove on to her house, a second-floor apartment. The table was set, the candles were pink, she wore a wine red imported shirt, her hair hung in dark waves. We ate, drank, talked, moved to the couch, listened to a record, spoke of old loves. I felt tired then, felt I was telling her what I did not want to tell. I would see her only this night. I wanted the love I had left, the soft words. Then she offered that I stay. "For comfort," she said. I said no. She drove me back.

After that I was haunted by her. She would come by my office, call me, tell me there was a party here, a dinner there, offer to take me. She would give me rides home late at night from work, meet me accidentally for lunch, stand in the pouring rain to talk. I fought the attention, fought my phone calls to her, my late at night lonely calls. I did not want her in my office or in my house. I could not be caught up with two kids and running track and caring for looks and next year's job. I was sure she was wrong in following me, told her that on one of the rides home. She should not pursue, I said, it was not good, I would only reject. She should choose one who would not hurt her.

Soon after the first dinner there was a party from which she gave me a ride home. She had on high-heeled boots and needed help through the slippery mud out to her car. I reluctantly offered her a hand and felt as if assisting my mother, these the tricks of the mind when one does not want to touch. The talk on the ride back was anecdotal and slow, stories I told which I do not remember. Yet I do remember weighing every word. She left me at my house, asking about a party the next weekend. She wanted me to come with her. I must have said I would let her know. Then I think I touched her arm. That week we talked one day at lunch, a very intense very public lunch. She apologized when her sandwich fell apart. I said I would have to make up my mind about how I felt. I did not want to use her for my loneliness. Then on the Saturday she came over and we talked. She came to my house in the late morning. I had lunch to give her but we did not get that far, for I had decided to say no to everything—the party, seeing her, talking at night. We sat on the couch and I told her no. She asked a few questions I refused to answer and soon afterward she left. She had brought a list but she would not read it to me. She did not cry before me. She went downstairs and across the street to cry with her friends. Or so I assumed, as her car had not moved. She had once before been in my apartment and we had embraced.

She called a few days later, angry with me, that I had not been fair. I avoided her at parties and meetings. I do not know what broke it, but after a while, what now seems a long time but it must have been only

about a month, we started to talk on the phone. It began with work, it was after Thanksgiving, after she handed me a paper with an angry note: "Read it only for content should you choose to read it. . . I owe as real a construction as possible only to those who warrant my trust. Faculty seen only once or twice a week who are not otherwise part of my life are owed a display of intellectual development, no more." It seemed to her—from a quick exchange of words at a Thanksgiving dinner we both attended—that I had asked my students for more.

We started talking about work, about books, ideas, the way to teach. We started the late night calls again. She was my secret, my guilty secret. I did not go to her house or see her kids or get near enough in a closed room to smell her. I remember the smell of her and of the front seat of her car and I know at the time they jarred me.

When I left to go west for the winter vacation, she took me to the airport. A drive again, on a foggy morning. We stopped for late breakfast in a small cafe, talked about our mothers, played with the famous women on the sugar envelopes in front of us. The airport closed down soon after we drove in and she waited there with me for a longer time than I would have thought we could be together. Then she left. I arrived out west and wrote her a note to thank her, then threw it away. I wanted not to remember, not to admit any connection.

She was not on my mind all the while I was gone. My fantasies were of someone else. But then when I was to come back I called her. She met me at the airport, came up to the house. I gave her two presents I had brought her: one a necklace. She was surprised. I hoped she would not give them meaning. That evening she touched me, said she was fond of me, then left.

In the next few weeks we saw and spoke with each other more often than we had before. I soon became uneasy with it and one night on the phone said I would have to cut it off. I cried the next day when I told a friend what I had done.

Then there was the Valentine's dance. I walked alone through the front door of the church building where it was held, walked into the ladies' room, and when I came out of a stall she was there. Coincidence, I thought, and laughed, glad to see her. Her purse fell in the sink. She said, "Are we going to avoid each other all night?" I said "No," surprised she would even speak to me. She played a song for me on the piano in one of the main rooms before we went up, knowing perhaps that I would be moved. She wore a black velvet suit and was intense. Later I did and

did not avoid her. I watched her dance and went home alone.

We began to spend more time together. She would come to my house, or I to hers. We would have lunch or dinner, talk, go shopping. We went skiing one weekend in a neighboring park, fell near each other, went ice-skating, played. I began to think I might like that. I began to think I might be bigger than her. Yet at night when we would get physically close and sexual feeling would start I would cut her off. I would want to go home or to have her leave. I would lie with her on the couch in her house to the point of getting warm. An ache would begin and I would stop it. She would be before me on her knees, wanting not to give up. I would not understand it, would feel she should not humiliate herself, would know it was right that I leave. On the ride back she would tell me she was wet, pronouncing the "t" sharply. I looked to see if she would cry. But it was not that. In my own house I would prize my bed, my separate space. On some of the nights I did not see her I had pains of desire but I would not share them with her.

She remembers the time in my house when I came closest to wanting her, when I pinned her to the floor and she felt my arms strong. I remember another time, when I first saw her stand before me undressed, her thin shoulders, her pear-shaped ass. It was at her house, we were going to a party, she was changing clothes. I was afraid to see her—a little lady who soon after stayed in my bed. It was a weekend night. She was in my small bedroom, naked, waiting. I wanted her to feel the force of something she might never have, heard her breathing hard, fast, moved over her whole body, pressed her between myself and the bed. Afterward she said it made a difference that it was me. I wished it did not. I got up and left the bed and slept that night on the couch, as I did two or three times more when she stayed at my house. We learned to stay at her house and then it was possible to sleep through the night together. The first night she kept checking to make sure I was there.

I began to stay with her more often. Then one weekend she announced that something inside her had changed, a wall had gone up, it was no longer the same. On that weekend my walls came down and I did not want to leave.

I stayed nights with her for a month in the little apartment with the two kids and the green rugs and not enough room, going to bed late, waking up early, returning to my house, to my office each day, watching the children's faces, fascinated by Deborah as mother. I stayed and did not notice until I was hurt that there really were walls, that when we

drove to work and she left me off she was already gone. It was not a way to start a day. I would become angry and carry around a desire to smash her tightly structured world—the clothes she wore at night in case her eldest child came in, the doing of other people's work, the refusal to be stopped, the constant phone, the schedule which had little room for me. In those four weeks, things seemed to reverse. Now she wanted her own space, her freedom at parties, to talk late at night on the phone rather than see. It was she who would only before leaving kiss. She ceased to ask to be touched, ceased to worry about her dress, ceased, she said, to love, or at least she did not know.

There was a party which began as a cookout in a backyard. The evening was cool for this time of year, the trees and grass green in the color of late spring. She and I sat by each other as we ate. The feeling was quiet. Then the party moved inside. The house was small, the people clustered in two rooms. She took on a party style. She flirted. She was sexual, she fingered people's clothes, she teased. A woman who had been her lover arrived whose way of getting on was much the same. They met by placing themselves in each other's arms. Deborah kissed her friend behind the ear. Through the evening they sought each other out. Their bodies met more often than ours had in a week. I ceased to be able to watch. It was only after the lover left that Deborah turned to me.

Then I watched as she danced with two others. One of them tauntingly asked me to join. I stood by the door. I shook my head. The three of them then took my arms and shoulders and pulled me to them. I turned and came down with the side of my hand in a chop, broke the hold, left, walked out the back door and down the street and watched a freight train pass in the night. Deborah met me when I came back, she had gone out to look. We sat inside on a piano bench. I was finally held. She felt I was wrong, I should not distrust. There was nothing between her and her friend, the invitation to dance was not mean.

That night we stayed up late in my bed and I cried. I was up early in the morning but came in to wake her and lie with her. Later in the day there was an embrace in which she did not let go easily. This is what we have now, more meaningful than many of the nights we have shared a bed, the holding quality of it, the saying that I should not go just yet. There is the talk: of muscles that hurt and bones that are banged and kids who are lazy and work that must be done. The talk is about the small things that matter, the items that at first embarrassed me. Why do you tell me all this, I would ask—how many times you brush your teeth, how you put powder under your arms, the ten ways your car is a lemon?

Why do you assume I want to know? But the fact is I do want to know, although my kinds of confessions are different. When it is over and the arguments about what has been given are done, when it is no longer a question of affection and space, we will see that these matter fundamentally less than the lives we let each other know.

It seems a very long time ago that Deborah gave me a present of winter underwear. We sat on my living room floor. She had embroidered my name in violet on the front of the pants and the shirt. I was embarrassed both by the sight of my name and the liberty she took. The garment was to be worn close. I did not take it graciously. She asked to be touched so as not to feel distant. I edged over on the floor, put the box with the underwear aside and let her come to me, feeling all the while the emptiness of the gesture, the very different place I was in, and feeling—and this is the grandest illusion—that I knew her place, simply because I knew what it was to want. I think it was later that week, that weekend or the next, that we made Swedish glugg in my kitchen, went to the store in the icy night when a movie we wanted to see was sold out and bought wine and vodka and honey and cloves and returned to prepare it. Perhaps because it was my kitchen and I was in charge so she was safely there, I opened my arms to her, and she as if always waiting for the cue, a deer with an ear tuned to far away signals, came in against me. It was an embrace without discomfort, the first with her in which I had felt that way.

There are other times I like to remember. The night of the day I first saw her naked, at the party we went to she lay beside me and was quiet. Later she worried about that night, that she would not be herself, as she worries still. I, on the other hand, worry that I am too much myself. I speak with her on the phone. She tells me how she has run through the day—kids, research, a program, a choir practice, then stripping to her underpants to type, and now she must leave and meditate. I hang up angry, then call back:

> "I am sorry. I want to be told that I am important to you."
> "You are important. I assume you know that. Do you need to be told every day?"
> "Yes. I do."
> "I'll try to remember."
> "I do it for you."
> "I know."

The request is a brash one. It is the living room floor—"I need you to hold me, I feel distant."

For months she held me by asking, appearing, offering. Now I hold her. I am habit, a place to check in. I carry her with me through long days of concern that the next time we meet she will flirt with the person next to me. I turn a shoulder each morning and decide to walk away. She stops me: "Don't hang up before you tell me what they said. How was your day?" I want to shrug it off, take my hat from the peg, ride away in a cloud of dust. But I stay. I am anchor. I do not know why we need.

BARBARA SMITH
BEVERLY SMITH

"I AM NOT MEANT TO BE ALONE AND WITHOUT YOU WHO UNDERSTAND"[1]

LETTERS FROM BLACK FEMINISTS, 1972-1978

We began talking about writing an article based upon letters from other Black feminists at least two years ago.[2] Having written and received hundreds of letters, we realized that our correspondence was an important part of our Black feminist activity. Letters have always been an important link for embattled groups, perhaps more so in the last century than in this one, before modern means of communication were available. For women, letters have often been life-lines to each other, since traditionally we have had little control over where we live and have had little access to conventional media. Letters have provided an underground communications medium.[3] For Lesbian-feminists, letter-writing is one means of maintaining our sense of community. As Black feminists and Lesbians, it is an even more essential activity because our numbers are fewer and we are often separated from each other. Most essentially, we write letters because we are apart.

Reading this correspondence all at once for the purposes of writing this article, we realized how many functions besides "keeping in touch" the letters served. They are multi-functional, multi-dimensional pieces of writing. The classic isolation that all of us have suffered as Black feminists contributes to the volume of the correspondence. Keeping in touch and finding and giving emotional support are certainly primary needs that the letters have fulfilled. The letters have created an emotional support network among the women who shared them. The letters have also brought a network of individual Black feminists together. Often women who lived in the same place discovered each other through the link of letters. Eventually many of the letter writers met each other and this was made possible because of continued and conscientious correspondence.

There is a sense in the letters that the writers are "family." We got this impression because of the many inquiries about and references to

Copyright ©1979 by Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith.

other letter writers in individual letters, the loving concern they express for each other, as well as their commonality of experience and vision.

Another aspect of the letters' multiple functions is the kinds of materials the writers enclosed: drafts of articles, poems, part of a novel, conference schedules, political leaflets, photographs, newspaper and magazine articles, advice on healing and of course recipes. One reason for the rich variety of the letters' contents is that we have so few places as Black feminists to send our creations and to share ourselves. When these letters were written we didn't have a single publication of our own.[4] We still don't have our own *off our backs* or even our own *Ms.*

There are several recurring themes which run through the letters: our isolation from other Black feminists and within the women's movement; the painful realities of white women's racism in the movement; commentary on heterosexuality and marriage; coming out as Lesbians; homophobia in the Black community; and our involvement with Black women's culture. The letters both describe the process of our connecting with each other and facilitate that process. This network building breaks our isolation. An essential experience the letters describe is Black feminist organizing during its initial phases. Connected to organizing is the recognition of the need for us to develop theory and in the letters there are examples of our first efforts. Another subject which often appears in the letters is work: looking for jobs, the difficulties of economic survival, the hassles of working as conscious Black feminists and Lesbians in a white-male-run capitalist system, and the pleasure and struggle of doing self-directed work. Women also write about their intimate relationships with other women, both Black and white. Obviously these letters are terribly rich in content and reflect the complexity of Black women's lives. They have many other facets besides the themes which have been mentioned and which the length of this article does not fully allow us to convey.

Articles are not usually written about letter writers who are still alive and active. This kind of attention is generally paid to the correspondence of "important" historical figures, long gone. One thing we know as Black feminists is how important it is for us to recognize our own lives as herstory. Also as Black women, as Lesbians and feminists, there is no guarantee that our lives will *ever* be looked at with the kind of respect given to certain people from other races, sexes or classes. There is similarly no guarantee that we or our movement will survive long enough to become safely historical. We must document ourselves now.

One function the letters have served is to make us real to ourselves

and each other. To write a letter to another Black woman who understands is to seek and find validation. The scope of this correspondence among Black women shows how important we are to each other's lives. In a system where Black women have primacy to no one else, we have primacy to each other.

* * * * *

The letters excerpted in this article are taken from personal correspondence received by the authors and include letters that we have written to each other. Most of the letter writers are in their twenties or thirties and live primarily on the East Coast. Most are college-educated and several of them are involved in literature: teaching, reading, and writing it. We have attached names to letters only when specific permission has been granted. In two cases we have quoted anonymously letters whose writers we were unable to contact, but whose contents we thought were essential to the article. We have substituted initials for names in the letters including some place names. We would like to thank Camille Bristow, Cheryl Clarke, Michelle Clinton, Jessie Fields, Demita Frazier, Gloria T. Hull, Stephanie Johnson, Carroll Oliver and Elaine Scott for permitting us to use their words. Our commentary is minimal since we feel the letters speak for themselves.

"I HAD TO STICK MY 2¢ IN. . . AND BRING OUT THE FACT THAT ONLY BLACK WOMEN CAN SPEAK FOR BLACK WOMEN. . ."

Traditionally, Black women have coalesced with each other around culture. The need for explicitly Black feminist culture is a subject which often appears in the letters. A woman writes about the pre-Broadway version of the play *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide. . .* in a letter dated April 8, 1976.

"I managed to make it back to the city on Sunday to see *Colored Girls. . . .* Needless to say, it was *magnificent.* I felt as if I could've (and *have been*) any one of those women. I hope you can get them to come up to Boston. I also hope I can get a chance to see it again as well as a few of my friends whom I recommended it to. Some interesting things went on during the course of the play in terms of audience response. There was laughter (nervous and otherwise) during a segment on rape and throughout the play I noticed males laughing at the derisive (and *quite* accurate) statements the author made about men. I wonder if the laughter was nervous (unlikely, since most men don't find anything *wrong* with their attitudes toward women), detached (the "I don't treat

my women that way" rationalization) or condescending (the self-righteous, macho response—which gets my vote). I would be interested to compare the responses of different types of audiences. . . ."

In another letter dated May 4, 1976 the same writer describes a workshop on Black women at a university women's festival.

"The discussion got a bit tangential for me. They were getting into the Black man white woman thing which simply obscured the more pressing issue of how Black men respond and interact with Black women. They also got into Black male writers and their position/responsibility as spokespeople for Black folks. I had to stick my 2¢ in at that point and bring out the fact that only Black women can speak for Black women and how imperative it is for us to create *our own* images—not accept or be co-erced into accepting anyone else's image of us. All of this very basic stuff in my mind. . . ."

Another writer also asserts the need for autonomous Black women's culture.

"I'm working with lighting for different concerts and for a women's theater group. As usual, I'm running around trying to do everything like there's no tomorrow. I'm trying to start a Black Lesbian Women's performance group which will do a show synthesizing music and drama. The three other women I've been talking to are mainly involved in music but I think it will be fun to interchange talents. I get so tired of seeing white boys and girls onstage, film and concerts. I know you do too! I think it's more than time that we take our place as leaders of the forth-coming cultural renaissance. Amen!!" (May, 1977).

The same correspondent writes of her very personal reaction to the fate of the writer, Zora Neale Hurston.

"Hello! I am starting a Zora Neale Hurston study group out here and in doing some of my research today I thought of you so I decided to write. . . .

I was reading about Zora Neale this morning and found out about her 'sexual scandal' that broke her heart in addition to virtually stopping her writing. I was depressed all morning over that casualty. . ." (July, 1977).

Another woman cites the Black female source of her poems in a letter dated July 31, 1975.

"I don't know about you, but I find that most ($99\frac{44}{100}\%$) of my poetry comes from my blackself or womanself or some combination of the two. Enough, I'm getting carried away on a subject that I too look forward to rapping with you about. . . ."

The same writer later expresses her thankfulness for Linda Tillery's album, the first by a Black Lesbian feminist. The letter is dated January 3, 1978.

"I LOVE!!! the Linda Tillery record you gave me. The enthusiasm is especially for 'Womanly Way' and Wonderful'. The latter I could listen to all night, non-stop. Woman-identified music period is nice, but to hear a beautiful Black woman's voice singing 'It's wonderful, wonderful, woman' is *shivery* beyond description. It was a marvelous gift. . . ."

"I WONDER WILL THERE EVER BE ANYTHING BUT EMOTIONAL EMPTINESS (STERILITY?) AND HETEROSEXUAL LONELINESS FOR US BECAUSE WE ARE WHO AND WHAT WE ARE?"

Like many women some of our first feminist insights were the result of struggling with relationships with men and/or marriage. This subject came up in many of our earlier letters to each other. On November 17, 1973, following the break-up of a long-term relationship, Barbara wrote:

"You know that my chances of finding a Black male to be kind to me are almost nil. Could you imagine someone who would have respect for me intellectually, who I would be able to communicate with about the things that are important to me. . . who would not condemn me for being a feminist?. . ."

Another letter from Barbara dated April 1, 1974 conveys the frustration of being a Black woman who fits neither society's stereotypes nor Black men's expectations.

"V____ and I talked about this very concept on the telephone last Saturday (for the millionth time). People like us, you, V____ and me just don't belong in anyone's fantasy vision of America. We are supposed to be telephone operators or bourgeois housewives. (Really *Doesn't* Crime Pay?)[5] and not intellectuals which face it is what we are.

". . . I think we are also extremely threatening to Black men as well as to certain white people. Lorraine Hansberry says in one of her record interviews that Beneathea in *Raisin* is a totally unfamiliar character on

the American stage (and also in American life!!) because she is a Black woman with intellectual aspirations. I wonder will there ever be anything but emotional emptiness (sterility?) and heterosexual loneliness for us because we are who and what we are?. . ."

On March 26, 1974 Beverly shared these positive thoughts about having recently left her marriage:

"I know these next few weeks even months are going to be difficult, but already I feel a lot better than before. I feel as if a weight has been lifted off of me. I'm looking forward to living my own life, to creating my own life. I think now I am and will be more open with people. Perhaps this is made easier when one has a positive sense of self. Maybe this is an illusion but somehow I feel I have more time for myself to do the things I want to do. . . ."

A year later Beverly wrote on April 10, 1975:

"The other area of correspondence in our thoughts is about my marriage. I've been thinking very bitter thoughts for the last few days. There are several reasons for this. . . . I think a more basic reason is that through going to the group [a Lesbian rap group] on Monday night I caught a glimpse of how good relationships could be rather than the shit I had to put up with. . . . But I don't want to dwell on the past. I want to talk about the future. Only one more thing. I wonder how many marriages are entered into because of guilt and fear, also feelings of inadequacy. This is certainly the case with R____ and it is breaking my heart. I've just resolved to sit down and have a really serious talk with her. She knows how I feel already. . . ."

Another correspondent wrote "In Agitation" on January 18, 1976 about her feelings after reading *Small Changes.*

"I have just finished reading Marge Piercy's *Small Changes* and I am exhausted. (The book encompasses every issue I can think of that touches women's lives) but mostly I am angry and afraid. In Miriam I saw much of myself and she was betrayed by choices similar to the ones I have made and for identical reasons. I was frightened and kept hoping, in spite of aesthetic judgement, for a happy ending. (Ugh)! Fortunately Piercy knew better. The novel has brought me to the verge of recognizing something I am trying hard not to recognize—I'm really such a coward! . . ."

"PREFERRING TO BE WITH WOMEN WAS LIKE PREFERRING TO LISTEN TO BLUES AS OPPOSED TO WHITE ROCK. THERE'S JUST

NO QUESTION ABOUT THE QUALITY OF THE FORMER OVER THE LATTER."

Leaving heterosexuality, the process of coming out and carving out survival as Black Lesbians, is a vital subject of many of the letters. In a letter dated August 30, 1972 Beverly made this comment describing the mini-tyrannies and endless domestic tasks of marriage.

"One thing I did do last Saturday when I was so torpid was to read *Patience and Sarah.* I enjoyed it tremendously. . . ."

Barbara wrote the following on April 4, 1974.

"I also want to write about living alone, *i.e.,* being single and celibate which is basically what I have been for the last 6 months. There are some very good things to be said for not living in a situation where you are constantly being bombarded by negative feelings. . . . It's true all of my interaction is with women (both social and workwise) but that is not a bad thing when one is constantly being treated with kindness and consideration. I used to think that the reason that relationships with women were so nice is because they are not as close or emotional, but I don't think that's it. I feel extremely close to S____ and somewhat less but still very involved with Y____ 's life and problems. . . . I just think the quality of relationships with women is higher because you don't have the pathology of dominance and also because you don't have a basic sexual antagonism or suspiciousness based upon different sexes. . . ."

Two letters Beverly wrote in April, 1975 express both excitement and fear about coming out.

". . . One thing that worries me about being gay, particularly in my case, is the implications for my career. I doubt very seriously that it would be looked at the same way in public health as in the humanities and the arts. This gets around to the problem of leading a surreptitious life. It's one thing to prefer privacy as we did in heterosexual relationshi[p] It's quite another thing to have to live in constant fear of being discover[ed] Of course, the alternative to this is to be totally out of the closet so you don't have to skulk around in fear. . ." (April 8, 1975).

"This is what I wrote when I came back from the bar on Monday night. 'I felt so happy. I danced. I talked. I felt drawn to the women emotionally and physically. . . . I felt, here is the place I belong. . . .' "

Cheryl Clarke has written many personal and political observations about being a Lesbian. A letter dated September 9, 1975 states:

"Let's get back to coming out. Preferring to be with women was like preferring to listen to blues as opposed to white rock. There's just no question about the quality of the former over the latter. However, I don't like to compare women to men, because there's really no comparison and because that comparison diminishes the quality of relationships with women. . . ."

On May 23, 1977 she writes:

"I really think that Lesbian-feminism ought to be S-P-E-L-L-E-D out: 1) Why it's important to Black people; 2) Why it's essential to feminism; 3) Who (Black men and straight Black women) it threatens and why—because people are homophobic and because they don't want to give up their straight/sexist notions and privileges, et al.

"I don't get discouraged about the revolution, but people's resistance to it makes me sick and angry. I've gotten so angry in the process of writing this letter, I'm grinding my teeth to the bone. I have to stop writing so I can calm down. . . .

"I'm back! Still pissed but I can think clearly again. . . ."

In describing a panel on Lesbianism and homosexuality for a largely Black audience, Cheryl gives astute and humorous answers to very obvious questions. The letter is dated November 17, 1975.

"The panel was excellent. The audience was immature. They did not relate to us as Black people; they did not relate to us intellectually; they were polite. They would not ask us any questions that had to do with us as Black people or them as Black people. . . . Some of the questions:

'Are Black women becoming Lesbians because there is a shortage of men?'

(Women become Lesbians because we love women.)

'Is there a rise in homosexuality?'

(I hope so.)

'Is sexism an issue that the Black movement has on its agenda?'

(Does a snake have hips?)

'How will homosexuality affect future generations?'

(Being gay don't mean you lose your reproductive capacity.)

'Why are you homosexual?'

(Why are you heterosexual?)"

"YOUR LETTER HAS REALLY LIFTED MY SPIRITS. IT'S IMPORTANT TO ME TO KNOW THAT MY SISTERS CARE ABOUT ME, UNDERSTAND AND SUPPORT ME."

Isolation is a painfully familiar situation for Black feminists and Lesbians. The sequence of letters which follows points to our need for each other.

". . . It's too bad that I didn't move to Boston as I had originally planned because although I've escaped the social isolation of D____, I'm just a transplanted, socially isolated Black feminist now! I plan to check N.B.F.O. out in the city, but I'm not very hopeful about it. . . . I've also realized the extent to which 'gaps' exist between me and my friends. With the exception of one sister (who is in *Indiana* in law school) none have much if any interest in feminism. Obviously, I've had to become very self-reliant because there have been no support systems like Combahee River Collective to rely on.[6] The self-reliance has had its positive aspects and is no new situation for me. I suppose all Black women who are feminists have experienced this isolation at one time or another. I hope to put an end to it soon. I'm tired of being forced into situations with white women as one of the few outlets for my feminist energy/activity. . ." (March 9, 1976).

"A note (do we ever have time for much else?)! I've been wishing for you, longing for the gab fests which pass for talk between us. Now that the semester's over, do you think you'll be able to make it down this way? What happened to your projected visit? . . ." (June 14, 1976).

"I am glad I went to the conference. I enjoyed it and learned a lot. It was wonderful to see so many (more than I usually see) intelligent scholarly Black women. I wish I knew them better and had more to do with them. . ." (December 31, 1976).

"I am going to make every effort to make it to the socialist feminist conference. Needless to say, it would do my suffering spirit *worlds* of good to see and be with all of you again—this isolation is maddening! Communicating with you and Barbara (especially by telephone) helps a

great deal though. I enjoy that thoroughly!! I wish it wasn't so god-damned expensive. . ." (February 24, 1977).

"There is a group of Black women here but they tend to be very male-heterosexually oriented. We can and do come together around the fact of being Black in a white dominated society but on a day to day, individual to individual level I have very little to do with them. I love nothing more than strong intelligent independent Black women, and I have met a few here. I am very much interested in the anthology and the Black feminist retreat so keep me posted. . ." (1977).

". . . Really needing to *retreat* right now—this job and all the complimentary trips—take me through too many changes—Need to see you and talk about many things that load my mind—your perspective has become mandatory/needless to say necessary for the semblance of sanity I attempt to maintain. . ." (June, 1977).

The antidote to isolation is networking, the creation of community. Networking is also an essential step in building our movement. This letter from Demita Frazier, dated May 19, 1974, was significant for Black feminist organizing in Boston and illustrates how links between us are made.

"I am writing to you because you were listed as one of the women to contact in Massachusetts re: the National Black Feminist Organization. I am a Black feminist, a printer and I am currently working with a group of women who are trying to launch a feminist biweekly newspaper. . . . Margaret Sloan is an old acquaintance and I was really glad to hear of the solidifying of her goal. We were together in a Black feminist group she implemented single-handedly; she left for New York and due to several factors, the women stopped coming together. I would be very much into meeting with you or if that is inconvenient, talking with you by phone. I see the greater Boston area as having the makings for a strong chapter of N.B.F.O. I hope to hear from you in the near future."

Another woman wrote on April 19, 1975:

"It seems that the more individuals I get to meet, the smaller the world seems. Thursday, representatives of the K____ N.B.F.O. spoke to V____ 's women's studies class. One of them was an associate of yours and mentioned having spoken with you lately."

Cheryl Clarke writes in a letter dated September 9, 1975:

"I liked reading the piece on Black Lesbianism from the young sis-

ter. She said some important things about where she was at with the Black community vis-à-vis her Lesbianism. However, at times, I thought the piece was a little too apologetic. That kind of writing is essential if Black Lesbians are to feel community. (Remember how happy we were to meet at that conference. I would have been happy to meet a Black gay man in that homophobic place—and I did on the last day we were there.)'

Another writer expresses exhilaration after meeting other Black feminists in a letter dated April 8, 1976.

"Meeting you this past weekend was a tremendous up for me. It was my first opportunity to be with Black women who had decidedly feminist perspectives and ideas—talk about a fabulous first! . . ."

In another letter dated September 29, 1976 the same woman eloquently states the benefits of and necessity for a Black feminist community.

". . . I have to thank you for an amazing weekend in Boston. You have no idea what a strengthening experience it was for me. Talking with you and Beverly. Meeting your friends and relating to a strong Black feminist environment brought me *way* up.

"The visit reaffirmed the urgent (to grossly understate the case) need for Black and Third World women to get their shit together. It blows my mind to think that a lot of Black women/feminists may never experience the strength and *positive* vibes that I did in Boston. I'm aware that a lot of those 'vibes' emanated more directly from you and Beverly but I'm also aware of the potential of a Black feminist collective—which is *deep* when you sit back and *think* about it. That's why I really hope something can start happening in your collective—reaching out to touch, support and hopefully change the lives of some Black women in ways they never dreamed of.

"I'm more sensitive and aware of the need for us to build a tight network of communication as a means of support than ever. We have the *power* to do so much more than we give ourselves credit for. We really have to stop minimizing the power that we *do* have. Supporting each other through a Black feminist journal or any other work effort is a power we *can* realize. Sharing our strengths is where it all begins—but what does it take to get people to do that? What *are* we afraid of? . . ."

"WITH ALL THESE PEOPLE DISAGREEING ABOUT AND CONDEMNING BLACK FEMINISM WE MUST BE DOING SOMETHING RIGHT!!"

Black feminist organizing is both the most essential and the most difficult task which confronts us. A contemporary Black feminist presence in this country can be traced to 1973 with the founding of the National Black Feminist Organization (N.B.F.O.) in New York. Our letters show our attempts over the years to connect with and work with Black women. A letter from Barbara dated January 25, 1974 describes the first N.B.F.O. meeting in Boston.

". . . Now to go back to the N.B.F.O. meeting. Basically it was good, but it started off terribly. A woman who is a grad student at Harvard came and talked about what a suspect organization N.B.F.O. was. She hurled accusations right and left. . . . Jesus, it was terrible. We finally got onto a better footing after I and some others expressed our distress. We will be meeting again on February 7. I think we have great possibilities since so many women that each of us know are also interested. I spoke to H____ last night and had a nice conversation about our hopes for the organization. What has National N.B.F.O. been doing? Did you ever suggest the idea of a newsletter. It is sorely needed. Will the people who attended ever be contacted about anything?. . ."

In a letter dated January 14, 1975 which mentions a conference on minority women at Yale, Beverly also describes contacting Lorraine Bethel for the first time. Subsequent letters trace the progress of their Black women's consciousness raising group.

"The other thing is that I called up Lorraine Bethel who is the instructor of the Black Feminism course, today. It turns out that she's a sophomore at Yale. . . . It seems the course hasn't gotten off the ground. I told her that I'd be willing to help her with it and that I thought it should be a study group anyway. We're going to have lunch on Friday. I'm very excited about this. It'll be terrific to meet some new people. . . .

"We've been discussing what kind of group we'd like to form and have decided that we'd like it to be basically a support group to begin with. Several people that Lorraine knows, who've been active in the undergrad women's caucus (Lorraine is a member) and I plan to meet next Thursday to talk about this" (January 31, 1975).

"I think our C.R. group is going to be very good. We're having a meeting for all the women who expressed an interest in it at the conference, on Sunday. . ." (February 20, 1975).

"We had our 'organizing' meeting for the C.R. group. Rather a bust since only 3 people showed up. We're going to try again next week

and then give up. . ." (February 24, 1975).

"We had a really good C.R. meeting tonight. We talked about our sexual experiences and sexuality. . . . It was especially gratifying because the tensions and bad vibrations that seemed to be operating in our last meeting were totally absent. There was much warmth and laughter. At one point someone suggested a feminist laugh-in. Black feminists have a sense of humor even if other feminists don't. What was also amazing (perhaps not so) was that almost everyone expressed varying degrees of attraction, affection involvement with women. . ." (Spring, 1975).

A letter from Barbara dated March 1, 1975 describes problems in organizing during the same period.

"When you called on Thursday I didn't have the opportunity to tell you about our going to a meeting of the Third World International Women's Day Committee. It's a long story but they refused to let us have a workshop on Feminism (same old stuff) and were generally hostile and nasty. W____ , D____ , Y____ and I left feeling quite miffed and disgusted. We're still going to have a booth at the thing next Saturday, but why should we have to put up with this?. . .

"On the positive side a woman who had contacted the Women's Center called me up today, to ask about the group. She seemed so hungry for contact and isolated. I told her to come to the thing next Saturday. . . ."

A reply from Beverly dated March 7, 1975 puts the incident described above in perspective.

". . . The experience with the Women's Day committee sounds ridiculous. With all these people disagreeing about and condemning Black feminism we must be doing something right!. . ."

A letter from a woman in an Eastern city describes a tense summer which adversely affected organizing there. The letter is dated September 1, 1975.

"I received your letter during the Susan Saxe F.B.I. hassle here. How nice of you to think of me. My heart has been bleeding all this summer due to my seemingly deluded hopes for N.B.F.O.

"Everything is very tense here. . . from the city administration all the way down through communities and to the neighborhood bars. Nobody trusts anyone. It is hard to say whether fear or hatred supercedes,

but certainly jealousy is the most predominant factor in our daily ways of life here.

"Indeed, the average home or auto fire has been caused by arson. Even our major hospitals and medical schools are engaged in battle with each other. Needless to say, our N.B.F.O. has been hit by the same fever. . . ."

The need for Black feminist theory as a basis for organizing also arises in the letters. A woman wrote on March 15, 1976:

"Your paper was excellent. It's unfortunate that it was motivated by such a negative and *uncool* event. The observations and analysis you made are precisely what Black feminists need to do more of. We have to start doing some in-depth probing, scrutinizing and appraisal of the *dynamics* of our oppression to further identify what we're confronted with. I've found that most of the literature which I've come across about Black women in general, or Black feminism specifically more often than not scratches the surface and not much more. Many authors have outlined the (popular) reasons why Black women approach feminism with so much suspicion and disapprobation but carefully avoid (or are truly ignorant about) the issue of homophobia, for example, and all of its connotations. There are many instances of these 'deletions' as you pointed out. Folks can't (or shouldn't) go on avoiding them. I was very disappointed that I couldn't do a more searching thesis on Black women, but I hope to drastically expand upon it. I'm glad to know that there's someone out there who *is* getting to the 'crux' of the problem. I'd really like to improve my writing skills so that I can address myself to some of our more pressing issues also. . . ."

Another writer theorizes about Black women's seeming fear of feminism in a letter dated April 2, 1975.

"It's becoming undeniable that Black women in American today, like women everywhere else, are faced with problems in their lives that are rooted in sexism. What many non-feminist Black women do is to deny that the problems exist; for if they admitted the problems existed, they would feel compelled either to deal with them, or fall victim to despair of one sort or another. The relatively small number of Black feminists today is not so much a sign of absence of consciousness, I believe, as of deliberate avoidance, or escape from, or repression of consciousness. . . ."

This woman ends her letter which brilliantly analyzes the issues of abortion, employment, education and economics and Black feminist al-

ternative structures with these words:

"... But I think it, and any similar feminist alternative structure, creates a momentum, a counter-wave in the direction of ultimate radical change, and is something tangible in which people can involve themselves in support of their own cause. I'd like to see such Black women's alternative structures formed—not to *influence* policy, but to *make* policy (previously unimaginable policy), and to carry it out.

"How can we help ourselves first, before we try to influence others to help us? That's the fire within me right now."

A long letter from Michelle Clinton dated March 27, 1978 raises many issues about trying to do Black feminist organizing.

"... Right now I am overwhelmed with a need for leadership/direction. There are so many women! There is so much work to do! There is no one to look to for answers to my *own* questions! It feels like the time is right for something to happen for Black women. I guess my real question is AM I THE ONE TO DO IT? AND HOW THE FUCK WILL I KNOW WHAT TO DO?

"Everywhere I went women of color looked at me with empty eyes. We really do not know. We really have no movement of our own. It really scares me because the need is so obvious in the eyes of these women for some directions they can either trust as their own or reject. But something! ...

"I know about racism in the women's movement. I know what steps we can take to stop it. I know the politics, I know the rap. So I can feel like I'm doing the best thing for women of color and white women when I act in any context to fight racism. ... All I know about is racism. All I know about is how to fight racism within a WHITE FEMINIST CONTEXT. Lord have mercy!

"I feel like the shadow of the white girls. My purpose has been to make their analysis complete. It is not enough.

"I have been faced within myself with this *urgency* along side no leaders, no books, no direction, but I have never before seen it in the eyes of other women. I was truly freaked-out.

"And this kind of thing happened many times while I was on tour.

"So Barbara my sister, what are you doing? What should I do?

"The seed for a Black Feminist Organization has begun in my head. One that reflects my political needs. I figure I am going to read everything you have sent me and look for more while I do talk to sisters that might be interested. Who knows what can happen?"

Michelle's letter dated November 14, 1978 describes her success in organizing. It is also an appropriately optimistic conclusion.

"... When we move, we move so totally perfect and human. Strong Black Lesbians are the best thing there is. The best. Everything I ever dreamed about, even as a young girl is true. I was right all along. And Sisters *know*. We know. We know what is wrong, and how to be right, in spite of all that white men and Black men and white women do to us. We *know* in spite of all of that. We's right. And so the leadership, the answers and solutions, the direction has to come from us. . . .

Actually, now that I look at it, things are really doing well. We just might have a movement on our hands."

NOTES

[1] Carson McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, New York, Bantam, orig. c. 1940, 1970, p. 185. The quotation is from a letter that the character John Singer writes to his friend Antonapoulos.

[2] Beverly Smith compiled another set of letters from Black feminists giving their reactions to the First Eastern Regional Conference of the National Black Feminist Organization. It appeared in *Ms.* magazine, August, 1974, pp. 4-13.

[3] See Caroll Smith-Rosenberg's, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Autumn, 1975).

[4] *Azalea: A Magazine by Third World Lesbians* began publishing in 1977. It is available for $4.00 per year from J. Gibbs, 306 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11238.

[5] Alice Walker, "Really, *Doesn't* Crime Pay?", in *In Love & Trouble: Stories of Black Women*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973, pp. 10-23. The title refers to a story about a Black woman struggling to be a writer in the early sixties, despite the unsupportiveness of Black men.

[6] The Combahee River Collective Statement appears in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, ed. by Zillah Eisenstein, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1978.

ROBIN SILBERMAN

SEQUEL

I

We have cast out the blue diamonds,
the long-haired tearing at their breasts.
I linger for her mound. She is here.
I grind my teeth hungering
lowering my mouth. Silent
silent body. My knowing I can't
crave more than what
my body writhes for.

II

I am plagued by sun. I turn red
knowing I am watched. I strip. I
swallow those seeds planted
at birth. I grow leaves. I sprout. I
feather under my arms. My lashes
web closer and closer forming puddles.
I plan caverns to crawl into.
Enmeshed in roots and clover my
hair spins out.

III

Senses burn. My tongue twitches
over my lips. I crisp easy watering
the ground. I cold quick
into mud. I brown and
slide baking and
crusting together in form. I allow
a drying. I quick into it. My fingers
round over and over. Nails harden.
Palms sweat. It is a knowing of
quicksilver and gold. I drown
salting the lake cooling the curves
of your body.

Copyright ©1979 by Robin Silberman.

IV

We blanket each other   furred and skinned.
There is nothing but flesh compelling us.
We blow. We cry. We gather
tears. We are sightless and ruined. We join
conquering the axes of black shadows.
What we don't feel   we fear   nerves
separating   and
closing. We float and glide over
water   clawing air. We are home.

V

Tracked. They have scented us down.
We free the veins of plants clamped
to our feet   and run. We motion sun   it
follows. We command rain. We arc
over the sky   orange   red   firing
ourselves slowly. We merge.
We clamor together in green and winter
call ourselves madness and empty.
We hang our limbs against the tree
and blossom fruit. We are hybrid and
ancient. We sing   dance   our faces
together grow beards. We dream
first in geometrics   then our eyes crumble.
Purple. Pink. Bronze.
We are Greek   carrying stone.
We are mentioned on tablets.
We groan. We whisper names and
number ourselves. I am seven.
You are four. Together we are prime.

ELLEN GARVEY

COMPOUND FRACTURE

I work for the city. You know what it means to work for the city. We all know what it means. I do something vague during the day. I shuffle papers. I pass them along to someone at the next desk, who sorts them, and then to the supervisor, who shuffles them and deals them out again.

"What do you do for a living?" my prospective landlady asked me. I told her I work for the city. "Ah," she nodded, and I turned into a dull gray spot in her eye, doing vague things all day with a good pension plan. I pass her candy store on a Wednesday afternoon and she remembers city workers get a lot of sick leave.

"No. That sick leave isn't covered, and you're not entitled to unemployment. You weren't employed as of June, so you aren't covered in the contract," Frieda Gilgul in personnel blinks behind her records. But I was just working, I put in the same work time as everyone else, don't I get the same benefits? "No," the chorus of the personnel department has memos and files in front of them. "She thinks she's entitled? No. She's not entitled. No. That's what it says. It's in the contract.' But I was told— "No one ever said that to you. No. We never said that. Who told you that? No. She didn't say that. She couldn't have said that because you're not entitled. It's not one of your benefits." They crowd around the table. They reconstruct theory from the bare bones of the contract. The voices of my relatives, my aunts and cousins in city offices across the city, fly through the door and settle at the table. They must uphold the principles of working for the city. They must hold on to the scraps, take them home in their handbags, in their bellies.

Words rumbling along rocky paths. Words emerge in rock slides, grating rock on rock, speaking in gravelly voices. Nail on slate, words crack from the rocky bottom. Cracking and breaking, mining voices, excavating bones.

"No," says payroll. "It wasn't in the contract. There's nothing I can do about it. Do you want to speak with personnel?"

No. I don't have to speak with personnel. I know what they sound like already. They have the voices of my dead aunts, buried under stones in Brooklyn, Long Island and Zublutza. Their bones rise from under

Copyright © 1979 by Ellen Garvey.

headstones, their heads rise in full voice, bones rattling, humming in their throats, teeth still in their heads. Their bones rise from the graveyard. They reconstitute themselves.

She stands, bones sway, the bones of her forefinger snap together, a miracle without cartilage. She wags her finger at me, shakes it in my face but the bones do not fall off. She shakes her finger. "You're not entitled," says personnel as always, forever. "She's not entitled. She thinks she's entitled. No, she's not entitled." That voice pours into me and chills me. It pushes outward; my clothes fray and tear, money drops through holes in my pockets. That voice is in my bones, my bones shaking without the expected money, without my money. That voice is in me already, it speaks in my bones already. Now I hear it, it shakes my eardrums, rattling inside, hammering at me. External hammers play pattycake with internal hammers. Her bones merge with my bones.

I bought spareribs at the butcher shop. I drink your blood I chew your bones. "Do you want them whole or cracked?" said the butcher. "Crack them," I said. I wanted them cracked along the bone splitting from slab to pieces—individual bones to be scattered, thrown; clattered, gnawed; flattened, sucked; chattered, clawed; grunted, broken hard against stones and teeth; demolished to reincarnate as rage transformed.

I have no money. I will have to become someone who remembers to put beans up to soak in time not to have to buy canned beans. Someone who washes out old plastic bags and hangs them inside out on a line in the kitchen. Someone who remembers to take them along to the store to get them filled with more dry beans.

I will learn to boil bones for soup.

STEPHANIE GOLDEN

THE TRANSFORMING TREE: FINDING OUR ROOTS IN THE HOMELESS WOMEN

Two summers ago, in a small country town in East Texas, an old woman, Mrs. Lila Williams Clark, drew me a family tree. Done in pencil on the wrong side of a piece of shelving paper, it shows a full bushy oak—roots, trunk, branches, leaves, acorns. You see the entire root system, since she drew no background; a squirrel sits on a root holding an acorn, and a pig roots for more acorns beneath the branches. Above the drawing she wrote a poem:

One of Texas' Shrubby Oaks

In the shade of an old oak tree is where we told
the old old story of our past we are planning our future
way out in the plains where the sand blows in piles the
tumble weeds come rolling in. Jack rabbit races by road
runner paces up & down a snake creeps about in the
grass, and a way off hoo, hoo, squirrel in a tree top barks,
mocking bird perched out on a limb doing her chimes—
Mamma on the porch rocking the baby singing—Rocky by
O baby in the tree tops—Papa in the field turning the soil
to plant his crop sitting here underneath this tree realizing
what beautiful sweet world God created, what the devil
has placed upon his earth that has brought storms,
tornados, broken hearts death in many ways.

Less fold our hands look up—God thank you for
the beautiful, sweetness of love you have given us here
on your earth.

Lila added no special places to write in names; each branch, she said, is a member of the family and the smaller branches are their children. Since she did not know my family, she left them for me to fill in. But I never did.

In an old New York brownstone recently converted into a shelter for homeless women, another old woman sat and talked disconnectedly about her youth on a New England farm. Ellen is the name she uses for forms and "the Treasury," but her real name is an American Indian one.[1] She told me about tapping the trees for their sap—honey, she called it—when she was young; you know when the sap has risen because "the

Copyright © 1979 by Stephanie Golden.

trees speak to you." The mountains also speak to you, she said; when you have a problem you can ask them, and they make something clear in your head. When I responded enviously that I had never learned to know any mountains, she said that some people like herself were just natural-born to know such things. I wanted to hear more, but she cannot impart her knowledge openly and directly. Her speech is a real stream of consciousness in which the golden nuggets sweep past too swiftly for me to catch more than a momentary glitter.

Lila's vision is of wholeness. It includes, in a marvelous instinctual rhythm, all the opposites of her world: past and future, woman and man, birth and death. The devil's works are so naturally and inevitably part of God's "beautiful sweet world" that her thanks are given for all of it, not just the good side. The tree's background is the poem itself: it places Lila's own family connections, reaching back into the past and forward into the future, against the larger natural cycle of God's entire creation. She told me that she writes her poems when she feels blue and lonely, as happens now and then, for she has no children, her husband is dead, and her brother, who lived with her for a long time, recently died also. By re-creating her sense of rootedness in a divine natural unity, she can chase the blues.

Deep inside Ellen the same tree-image still lives, in the shape of the old Indian nature-religion, but she cannot picture it whole. Images spill from her like a thousand tiny ancient potsherds, as though the vessel bearing the picture of her tree, once as complete as Lila's, at some point was shattered. Yet on each sherd one can still make out the trace of a faint line: if the entire vessel could thereby be pieced together, we would have reconstructed Ellen's tree. But also—since such a tree is an emblem at once of an individual and a collective history—we would have reconstituted a vision of ourselves that has been equally fragmented, whose underground elements have been split off from our conscious daily lives and embodied in uprooted, outcast, homeless women like Ellen: as though our tree had been cut off at the roots.

A year ago last October, a temporary shelter for homeless women was opened in Manhattan by five nuns. Any woman is welcome, as long as there is room; no questions are asked, no judgments made. The shelter operates on the principle of love—"the one thing," as the motto painted on the dining room wall puts it, "that cannot hurt your neighbor." Its purpose is simply to give what is needed, or what is possible, accepting the women as they are—not to change anyone. Its energizing spirit derives

from the community life fostered among the five sisters, which overflows to everyone else in the house—volunteer workers and homeless women ("ladies," as the sisters call them) alike. I was led to the shelter by a compulsion that I did not understand, a need to learn about the shopping bag ladies of New York City. Now, after four months of working there as a volunteer, I am beginning to see what I was looking for. At the top of every mirror in the house are painted the words "God's image." For me the shelter itself has been a similar reflector: knowing the women there has given me back a different dimension of myself.

From the beginning I felt close to these women who in many ways were so remote from me. Their backgrounds were wildly different; many had lived for long periods on the street. Many had delusions that I knew were contradicted by reality, or spoke irrationally, incoherently. However, at the shelter there are no official roles to hide behind. I was not the social worker, the ladies not the clients; I felt I had nothing to meet them with but myself. When my feelings thus encountered theirs, labels like "paranoid" or "schizophrenic"—which the women carry about like passport stamps recording passage in and out of the various sovereignties of the city's social service system—were not barriers separating us; if anythin they made me feel how easy it is to be paranoid or schizophrenic. The specific contents of the women's beliefs might be foreign to me but their feelings were easy to recognize—being so like my own. I found myself involved, therefore, not only with the external circumstances that had shaped their lives, but with the interior necessities. Their essential condition, I felt, was that of outcast; and I learned from them how that condition is experienced from the inside.

Menacing, terrible imaginings inhabit the shelter, fantasies of viole and persecution by powerful impersonal authorities. Ideas of secret kno ledge, of conspiracy, and of clandestine observation coalesce into obsessions about espionage or the FBI. Fran, who is forty-three, well-educate and brilliantly coherent, can never escape surveillance. Her FBI "entour follows her everywhere, and in retribution for her efforts to expose wh she calls "the corruption of intelligence" has "blacklisted" her from wo ing and caused her to lose her apartment. I could not argue her into admitting any possibility of trust or of positive action (such as getting the kind of job for which her intelligence eminently qualified her); she kne in advance that the FBI would appear and destroy every opportunity. I realized at last that for her the only existence possible is on the street, because any entry she makes into connection with others, any refuge she discovers, is inevitably poisoned by the invisible presence of her en

Sylvia is herself in "espionage." She lives in the expectation of imminent extermination, escaping only by virtue of messages she sends and receives. At one-thirty, she told me, ten men—the West Germans, who are Communists and killed the Jews—would come to the shelter and kill us all. She was happy to learn that I was Jewish because she likes the Jewish people. I heard her sending a message once, speaking about peace; she is trying to help us.

Rose is a European Jewish refugee in her seventies whose family was killed by the Nazis. Though she was unhappy at the shelter, she refused to leave. There were places wanting to take her in but she rejected them. In response to every suggestion or offer of help she would avert her eyes and say, "Let the United States come and arrest me." If you said, "Rose, what do you want to do?" she answered, "I have not betrayed. . . . What I wonder is why the Jewish people have not come, and what is going on behind the curtain." But to me Rose was more familiar than strange, for in her I saw revived my own grandmother, who—as the family used to say— was never happy unless she was unhappy. Tone, gestures, the absolute rejection of every positive proposal, were all identical. Rose's creation of an external authority to carry out the punishment and her inability to accept any permanent "home" meant that, unlike my grandmother, she was literally homeless. But behind the curtain, I thought, they must have had much the same feelings about themselves; and in this identity I found the first link between "normal" women and the previously shadowy world of the homeless.

Then I met Linda, a young woman close to my own age, who was interested in the police. She told me she was estranged from her parents and had to call the police before going to their house in order not to be accused of breaking and entering. The police were pretty dumb, she added, but quickly qualified that: detectives could be pretty smart. "But they're also on a power trip." She next described her collection of guns, assuring me she used them only for sport—skeet shooting. She had, of course, "disconnected" them before she left home, since her father is senile and shouldn't have them around—"he might ruin the wallpaper." And, she added, laughing heartily, a hole through a painting would certainly ruin the painting. But I didn't laugh, because I could not help imagining the painting as a portrait of a person—of Linda herself.

Putting all these things together—Nazis, police, fathers, guns— I found myself in no foreign territory, but the familiar landscape of my own nightmares. The women I spoke to seemed to live out my own worst dreams in their waking lives, and in exactly the same terms—through

images that were not merely similar to mine, but often identical. Rose, who had had the real Nazis in her life, chose the U.S. government to embody the same chastising male authority that often persecuted me in dreams; while Sylvia (like many non-homeless women who were little girls in America during World War II) took the Nazis as her image, casting herself in the role of the Jews. Another woman, fair of skin, blonde and blue-eyed, informed me that her real parents (as opposed to the ones who raised her) were American Indians—another exterminated race. Thus I discovered that the strange fruit of the homeless women's delusions hung from branches belonging to my own tree—on the north side, perhaps, where the sun never shines directly—and that their images were rooted in a symbolic context which I shared.

Even women who are not haunted by such specific agents of destruction as the FBI or the Nazis are often obsessed generally with the kind of impersonal and essentially male authority that is embodied in the State, the legal system, and government bureaucracy. They seem each to have constructed a personal policeman in one form or another whose authority has a dread, deadly quality that paralyzes and prevents action. Anyone who has dealt with the welfare system knows that, on a practical level, this is not a particularly irrational reaction. But that it should enter a woman's soul, as it were, and become the power that forbids her to take any action under the threat of extermination or incarceration—especially action to help herself—is something else. Who—or what—mandates such punishment, simply for relieving oneself of pain?

One afternoon I was talking to Annie, a small, gentle woman with a flair for looking elegant in her secondhand shelter clothes, about what kind of job she might get. We considered several possibilities, none very appealing; then Annie said she would go to the zoo and see if they wanted her in with the lions and tigers. Again I found myself in my dreams, where lions have threatened me more than once—and in those of other women. Anais Nin records a dream of a tiger that leaps into the room with her and cannot be kept out no matter how many doors she closes against it[2]; and Emily Dickinson, too, had a big cat inside her:

> With thee, in the Desert—
> With thee in the thirst—
> With thee in the Tamarind wood—
> Leopard breathes—at last! [3]

These lions and tigers represent, I believe, not external threats but a half-conscious awareness of "tigerish" elements in our own personalities

whose potential violence is too frightening to be directly expressed. Thus Annie's identification of herself with the lions and tigers is essentially the same self-perception as those expressed in the dreams and the poem. However, Dickinson knew what her leopard meant and so could let it "breathe" in her poem, just as Nin and I were able to interpret our dreams. But in the homeless women I have known the tiger is stifled, and the explosive pressure built up by its confinement generates that sense I described of imminent destruction—of the imminent arrival, that is, of the Nazis, whose function is to stamp it out.

The meaning of the tiger is, I expect, one element of the secret knowledge that the intelligence operatives possess behind the curtain. Such knowledge, being dangerous, must be transmitted in code; the homeless women reveal it, therefore, only in their waking dreams, which I must interpret as I do my own dreams of night. A woman who called herself Sandra when she came to the shelter told me a few days later that her real name was Lorelei Scheherazade Marie—attributing to herself thereby a full range of female sexuality: destructive siren, soul-queen seducing the king to transcend his own destructiveness, asexual virgin wedded only to spirit. But the aspect that dominated in her mind was revealed by a spectacular remark she made one afternoon during a conversation about apartments and hotel rooms. She stood up in the middle of the living room, stretched, and announced: "I know the devil. He's going to let me stay in *his* apartment." This was no joke, and the other women knew it; the room was thrown into pandemonium, and one woman was still having fits of hysteria over the idea an hour later. Sandra was expressing exactly the same sense of connection between female sexuality and evil that appeared in the accusations that the medieval witches had intercourse with the devil. She feels herself in direct contact with the powers of darkness.

This, like Annie's remark about the zoo, cannot be dismissed as a chance comment. It tallies too well with the ideas and behavior of women like Rose and Sylvia and—to go to the opposite extreme—with the conscious self-perception of Angela, a woman in her twenties who came in one afternoon without giving any information about herself. Devoured by tension, preternaturally alert to every stray glance in her direction, she was barely able to sit in a chair. When asked her name by one of the sisters, she fled the room. It turned out that she carried two switchblades, and one night her behavior became so threatening that the nuns, fearing violence—the one expression of feeling they do not permit—took her to the hospital. She left behind some writing, in which she said that the end

of the play was near, the actors almost done: "I am walking the dark streets and meeting the darkness which is my friend, in which I find the evil that is inside me."

This is no more than a terrifyingly pure version of feelings that the other women I have described could only express through the obscurer and more concentrated language of symbolism. But I believe, further, that such terribly negative self-perceptions are shared by a great many other women who are not homeless, or paranoid, or otherwise deluded—like the ones who said, when I asked how they felt about shopping bag ladies, "It could so easily be me!" For the homeless women are living out, literally, possibilities that for the rest of us are denied or only partly acknowledged. The pain that direct knowledge would cause is the reason, in their case, for the disguising cloak of symbolism and, in ours, for the frequent choice not to understand it. But we need this understanding, and not only to help the homeless—for in rescuing the outcasts from the streets we would also recover an outcast part of ourselves.

To me, Angela's self-loathing does not seem that different from the feelings of my freshman college roommate, a perfectly nice and ordinary young woman who believed firmly that she was a bad person. She was in a nursing program, not because she liked nursing, but because the only way she could feel justified, as she told me, was to do some work that was so tangibly and directly a form of helping others that it could prove indubitably that she was worth being alive. After a year she quit the program; fortunately, her distaste for the work was greater than her ability to force herself to do it. But I do not think she stopped feeling that she deserved to be punished, any more than Angela did.

What *is* the wickedness that draws down such retribution? I began to find out through Millie, a lovely, sweet woman of forty-nine whose sense of her unacceptability seemed to have little to do with evil. Referred to the shelter by a hospital, Millie was intelligent and lucid and seemed quite in control of herself, except that while talking on the phone to her aunt about her Medicaid records she suddenly broke down in a violent, helpless fit of crying. I took the phone and spoke to the aunt, who announced, "She has been adjudged schizophrenic." This condition, she added, was the result of a broken marriage; before that Millie had been a top secretary in a government office—"quite a position for a black person to hold in the forties." Millie had been living with the aunt, but out in the country with the aunt away all day working there was no companionship and nothing to do, and she tended to wander off. Millie

herself felt that she had to be active. Being in the hospital had been terrible, because there was nothing to do all day but sit, and she was an adult who needed her own place in the world. "But I have this trouble that I get emotional, which is why I can't hold a job. . . ."

The word "schizophrenic" had shocked me; like Millie, I would have said simply "emotional." "She really isn't crazy," I said later to one of the sisters. "Honey," she answered, "that's what we wind up saying about almost every one of them." From a clinical standpoint the diagnosis might well have been "correct"; "affect" is one of the standard criteria by which such a determination is made. But by defining Millie as sick, it reinforced what was wrong with her: it stigmatized her feeling, which then became her curse. She worried that her emotionality would make her unacceptable at the shelter, and this fear made her afraid to ask for anything she needed—even something so simple as a bath, which she wanted desperately. Further, by making her dependent on an institution, the definition reduced her to a level of passive non-functioning that she herself knew was bad for her. She knew what she needed: placement in a foster home where she would have someone caring for her but could also be active when she felt like it and take care of herself as much as possible.

Hoping I could help her find a situation where her capacity for such active functioning would be nurtured, I made arrangements with a placement agency for her to be "evaluated." But the next day her aunt called, and Millie abruptly went back to her. I imagine that on speaking to the aunt (who did love her) Millie was again overwhelmed by a flood of feeling that easily submerged her consciousness of her real need. Thus the same emotionality that she needed activity to overcome sent her back into a situation of passivity, in another repetition of the same cycle.

Such rejection of help, or flight from a solution just as it became a real possibility—back into passivity—was a frequent response of women I tried to help. Someone would tell me what she needed—an apartment, a job, the untangling of red tape at a government agency— and I would start to arrange it; then, when it was almost within her grasp, she refused to reach out—even at times turned her back on it and fled. Anita had made the rounds of the cheap midtown hotels and disliked them, with reason. She said she wanted a room where she could feel safer. I found two or three possibilities—an apartment shared by three women looking for a fourth, for example. But when I suggested it, Anita panicked: I saw her eyes glaze over. She reverted to a certain YWCA that had already rejected her because she had no job, and where in any case

existed all the dangers she objected to in the hotels. Her speech became faster, more random, until she was unreachable behind an almost unintelligible stream of words. I finally realized that she was too strong for me: she *would* not be helped.

Annie, who had some office experience, had been looking for a job but had nowhere to stay. Even though her two weeks were up, the sisters decided to let her remain at the shelter until she found one, in return for some help with the housekeeping. But that same night she went to take out the garbage, and vanished—without even a coat. Despite her need, she could not allow herself to be given a special favor; she had to flee. Several days later she called and apologized, but did not return for two weeks—sick, and refusing to see a doctor. Needier now and more desperate, feeling worse about herself because she was even further from finding a job than she had been, she was that much less able to be helped. She created her own despair as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

It is indeed despair that I have felt in the homeless women: a deep inner unconscious despair that arises from a kind of paralysis, a *necessary* passivity, which goes beyond the inability to ask for help to require refusal even of help that is offered out of love. Their needs, great from any objective viewpoint, are experienced from inside as so enormous that to acknowledge even one would unleash all; the possessor of such need would be destroyed, and any other to whom it was admitted, devoured. This is the voraciousness of the tiger, which requires the Nazis to keep it confined by keeping its possessor passive; any action would awaken it. For these women the role of outcast is the only safe one; it both protects them from that human contact which would rouse the tiger and constitutes a punishment for the evil of harboring it.

I have now partially lifted the curtain. Behind it I think we can see, so far, the evils of sexuality, of insatiable need, of uncontrollable emotion—a range of offenses that can all be described by one word: feeling. I use this word to emphasize that these offenses are shared, to some degree, by everyone who feels, or (for reasons perhaps not so different from those of the homeless women) is afraid to feel. The homeless women have been judged, by themselves and others, for having an excess of feeling. Whatever its justification in any particular case, I think that in general this judgment is only an extension of other judgments—less official and therefore, possibly, less devastating—that are made by and about all women all the time. And I believe that it is from such judgments, and from a great fear of feeling that lies behind them, that the

sense of evil I have described has in large part arisen. What was wrong, after all, with Millie—the source of the diagnosis of schizophrenia—was that she was emotional. What is wrong, for that matter, with women in general (which has been said to make them unfit to be executives, scientists, jet pilots)? They are too emotional.

But what is emotion? Among other things, an unavoidable and horrible reminder of the very worst kind of need. For it is through our emotions, our feelings, that we are able to know our needs; and it is through knowing our needs that we define our selves—what we really are and want, which perhaps we have never been allowed to be and have. But acknowledgment of need is dangerous: if we let it show we will not only lose all love (for the homeless women that was lost long ago); we will be attacked and destroyed—or we will find ourselves out on the street. Virtually terrorized into passivity, we persist, like Millie, in our dependency on whatever established authority—man, parent, institution—has taken over the task of defining us. Woman's need is the submerged side of her being, for it is what can lead her to reject the conditions and definitions that have been imposed on her; we cannot let it fully into consciousness, for if we did we might discover our rage.

For there is another side to the secret evil—another meaning to the tiger, another possible reaction than self-destructive passivity: rage, the other side of despair. At the shelter Pamela, the embodiment of this rage, is a prophet; her jeremiads inspire. She denounces, daily, the major figures of her life, who tried to wrench her away from her self, never allowed her to *be* anything other than the instrument of another's will or desire. When she first came to the shelter she was wild and incoherent, given to outbursts of abuse or hysterical laughter; her uncombed hair stood up like a flame around her face. Now, several months later, much of her rage has boiled off, though when she talks about her past it bubbles up again.

"I like you," she said to me one day. "You don't pick on me like the others." "Who picks on you, Pam?" I asked, and she launched into a tirade about her past. Her mother died when she was three, and she went to her aunt, who did not want her. Although she wanted badly to go to Catholic school, her aunt would not send her, though her brother was sent. Then she had an adopted mother, who was "crazy" and had cancer and a weak heart, and "all she ever thought about was teaching school and money." Pamela says she was raped by her brother when she was three, though nobody would believe it, and raped again when she was seven. She was kidnapped: big tall black women stood around her and

held her and taped her mouth while somebody gave her an injection. She spent ten years in a mental hospital, and her fury against psychiatrists is enormous. I sense that she was surrounded all her life by people who wanted to use her, force her to do what she did not want, be something she was not. "I just told them, 'Leave me alone!' " she repeats. They didn't; but instead of giving in, she reacted with rage— and they locked her up.

All of us, I think, who have been distorted, seduced, frightened, or otherwise betrayed away from our own selves—even though not on the same massive scale as Pamela—carry that rage inside us. It is bottomless, and so frightening that we hide it, even from ourselves. Anais Nin says of her tiger dream, "I was holding back the anger. I resisted the interpretation that the tiger was part of me. . . . [The dream] is the conflict with aggression (the tiger) and I am unable to kill it."[4] Annie too carries at least one rage big enough to turn into a tiger: as children, she once told me, she and her sister thought her mother loved her younger brother best, though her mother denied it. "She probably did love us all the same," Annie assured me. But I doubt it. I think she is unable even to know that she is angry, and that this is partly what keeps her on the street. Rage unacknowledged turns against the self; in those of us not on the street it surfaces as a variety of symptoms that differ from those of the homeless women more in degree than in kind: psychosomatic ailments, compulsions, paranoid tendencies, self-destructive acts.

But since Pamela *knew* her rage, she directed it outward—at the mother who wanted to use her, the men who wanted to seduce her, the psychiatrists who decided she was crazy—and as a result her own values never got mixed up with anyone else's definitions; her moral sense is clear and powerful. That is why she is the prophet. But she paid a terrible price and therefore presents a double image: on one side, the incredible strength that enabled her to hold on to herself; on the other, the punishment she took for doing it. What remains clearest for me, however, is that though she was made outcast, she survived.

I have sketched in now, as well as I could, the part of the tree that is underground. It has been horrible to dig through all that dirt. But our future grows out of our roots; and what I found down there, in the very power of Pamela's rage or someone else's terror, is a strength that can be used to create that future. For even in the passive, withdrawn women, I see the same double image; there is a certain purpose in their passivity. Has anyone besides me felt, on seeing a bag woman in the street, that

somewhere along the line she herself must have done something to *make* that happen to her? She did—she said No. I think it is a kind of strength that has kept so many women out on the street—psychologically as well as literally—but a strength that has had to be exerted negatively, in refusal. They have refused to enter the system that might have taken some kind of care of them (with SSI checks, welfare, "placement") but which they sensed would have required in return a self-obliterating dependency, because there was something they had to preserve. In talking to them I have encountered it—a small secret core of personal integrity, still immaculate behind its many defenses.

It is, I think, a hallmark of women's pyschology that up to now such preservation could only be accomplished in a self-destructive way. But the shelter has been a place of healing. There I have seen the core of self find nurturance enabling it to grow back to a normal size; and there I have learned that the healing can come only from looking straight into that which is hardest to face in ourselves. This is possible in an atmosphere where all needs are allowed; and what we have discovered at the shelter is that all of us have them—"ladies," volunteers and nuns alike. As a result we can begin to have the experience that our needs are not evil.

The process of this healing will be long, and is only beginning. For this reason—and perhaps also because it is actually harder to come to terms with than the pain and masochism that, having been so long a part of our history, seem familiar and even natural—I cannot yet write in detail about it. But I want to recount one event that indicates to me what is possible. One evening last winter some of the women, who for various reasons had been there longer than two weeks, called a meeting. They told the sisters they did not want to leave, for the shelter had become their home and family. They did not like the lonely hotel life, where if your check is late you land on the street; they were getting older, wanted companionship, and had become friends. They wanted to buy a building of their own to create a permanent shelter, near the sisters but independent, so as not to put any more burdens on them. They had a building under consideration and presented a number of ideas for raising money.

As I listened to the speakers I thought: here is proof of the hidden genius of women. It not only did exist, it had never been killed; released in the *allowing* of the shelter atmosphere, it had surfaced as positive strength, born of community. For what these women, battered by life, could not do for themselves, they could do for each other. The same women who four months before had been happy to sit and be waited on by sisters and volunteers were now cooking, cleaning, answering the

phone, setting up new rules for themselves; a new shelter was the logical next step. As it turned out this group of women was unable to carry out their project, partly due to external factors that prevented them from getting the practical and emotional support they needed. But I think the impetus created among them is meaningful in itself. When the five sisters first conceived their shelter they had had neither a building nor financial resources. What they created was born out of the energy resulting from their connection with each other; and in a relatively short time their community of spirit gave birth to a new one, bequeathing to its offspring its own potential. I think it hardly surprising that that potential was not realized on the first attempt, against enormous odds. Many similar attempts will no doubt also fail, but each will bring us closer to the point where a transformation can occur.

I started with the project of piecing together Ellen's broken vessel. What shattered it, I think, was the experience of the whole tangle of female feeling and need as wholly dangerous and destructive. To re-create the entire vision, therefore, we must include the things in ourselves that are so hard to face—like the shopping bag ladies crouched dirty and foul-smelling in the doorways of New York—for in fact much of our strength comes from knowing them, as Lila Clark implicitly recognizes when she thanks God for the devil's works. This is what the nuns did when they took in the women from the streets—why I, who have always depended on my sense of physical and financial security, sought out the homeless women—and why I am tracing the figure of the tree that must have both roots and branches showing. Feeling is the ground and root of life; but although we have learned to admire our spreading branches we have been taught not to look at where they come from. Yet we must; for whe[n] we do, we will begin to see where we share common ground with the outcasts, and from that ground move toward re-creating our wholeness.

The essence of the tree is growth leading to transformation, the synthesis of elements drawn in through the roots into the fruit of the branches.[5] This idea is behind Lila's family tree, which diagrams the growth of the family by showing the continuity of past, present and future as parts of the same structure, and specifically the way the future *grows out of* the past. Figuratively the tree can also express a growth oc-curring in one person, or among many: it provides a natural channel through which those underground, unseen yet secretly nourishing elements of ourselves may rise, be transformed, and ripen, in the light of our conscious understanding of them, into a rich harvest. Thus in tracin[g] here the outlines of Ellen's tree, I make visible a part of the past which

has been buried and, by providing this knowledge of who we are, help release us for the transformation into who we can become.

NOTES

[1]To preserve the anonymity of the homeless women described here I have changed their names, altered many of their circumstances, and omitted the name of the shelter.

[2]*The Diary of Anais Nin, Vol. 6, 1955-1966*, ed. Gunther Stuhlmann (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), p. 93.

[3]Poem no. 209 in *Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1955).

[4]Nin, p. 93.

[5]This description of the symbolism of the tree is based on Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, tr. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 247-48.

DIANA BELLESSI

EN VOS, SIN VOS

Músculos, en su epicentro
en las dársenas   del músculo
estalla
una sombra roja
envenenada
que es mi autorretrato

Imaginá el aparato digestivo de una morfinómana
Imaginá a tu padre acabado
por el manotazo de un terrateniente
Imaginá a los revolucionarios borrachos
al guerrillero en un alfa-romeo
al pintor en su fiesta de inauguración
al sindicalista en conferencia con el presidente
y a tu madre, insomne por veinte noches
frente una máquina de coser
E imaginá al escritor en sus recitales
en las antesalas de la editorial
en los congresos con sus pulcrísimas ponencias
sus borracheras y su olvido
Y mirame, mirame amor mío
y como si pusieras tu boca en la letrina
chupá esta sombra roja envenenada
que es mi autorretrato

Copyright (C) 1979 by Diana Bellessi.

IN YOU, WITHOUT YOU

Muscles, in its epicentre
in the inner harbours   of the muscle
there explodes
a red poisonous shadow
which is my self-portrait

Imagine the digestive apparatus of a morphine addict
Imagine your father finished
by slap of a landlord
Imagine the drunken revolutionaries
the guerrilla in an alfa romeo
the painter at his exhibition party
the union organizer in conference with the president
and your mother, sleepless twenty nights
before a sewing machine
And imagine the writers in their recitals
in the anterooms of the publishing house
in the conventions with their immaculate theses
their drunken sprees and their oblivion
And look at me, look at me my love
and as if you were putting your mouth in a latrine
suck this poisonous red shadow
which is my self-portrait

translated by Paul Hecht

Translation © 1979 by Paul Hecht.

LYN LIFSHIN

you can tell a lot about people by the way they
grocery shop—people who munch their way thru
the aisles, sampling and tasting, feel they've been
dealt a rotten blow by life and want to try to make
up for it by getting what they can when they can.

—Sonia Frieda

First I go after
the grapes   the
green ones   the
seedless   it's
harder with their
skin pressed so
they can't be
touched under
cellophane tho I've
pulled glass around
me too   it's sort
of a challenge to
punch holes in
the cardboard   suck
the green from
behind. Peaches
are messy   apples
usually too big   the
opened up packages
aren't much fun
soggy popcorn   wet
cracker jacks. Once
I ate a huge pickle
between the deli
and the line. In
some health stores you
can get a whole
lunch   soybeans

Copyright © 1979 by Lyn Lifshin.

with onion garlic
sesame bread papaya
juice. It makes
Wednesday sweet to
finish 12 raspberry
caramels or some
chocolate covered
creams falling
up and down aisles
wrappers crunched
in a sleeve or a
bra it's more exciting
to ride them in
the crotch of nylon
panties and not pay
for once

MICHELLE CLIFF

A HISTORY OF COSTUME

In the foreground a bird with a beautiful plume circles round and round as if lost or giddy. There are red holes in its head where there should be eyes. Another bird, tied to a stake, writhes incessantly, for red ants devour it. Both are decoys. . . . It is in the nesting season that the plumes are brightest, so, if we wish to go on making pictures, we must imagine innumerable mouths opening and shutting, until—as no parent bird comes to feed them—the young birds rot where they sit. Then there are the wounded birds, trailing leg or wing, as they flutter off to droop and falter in the dust. But perhaps the most unpleasant sight that we must make ourselves imagine is the sight of the bird tightly held in one hand while another pierces the eyeballs with a feather. But these hands—are they the hands of men or of women?

—Virginia Woolf, "The Plumage Bill,"
The Woman's Leader, July 23, 1920

In the basement of the museum finery is on display; a history of costume open to the public. Plaster models—their heads swathed in varicolored nylon stockings—are placed through rooms dedicated to periods of time.

I

My mother and I meet in public places—and move between the swathed heads:
the faceless heads and covered bodies
the covered faces, the emblazoned bodies
the paisley-shawled bodies cut off from the undistinguished heads.

We came to this exhibit in part to connect, in part to recollect—but we hold few memories in common; and our connections are limited by silences between us. Our common ground is the island where we were born and we speak in the language spoken there. And we bear a close resemblance, except for eye-color.

Copyright © 1979 by Michelle Cliff.

II

We move into a room
filled with fans
            corsets
            parasols
            shoes
the covering of birds/the perimeters of whales/handles made from the tusks of elephants/the work of the silkworm: to receive the lotusfoot.

The tiny shoes are lush: carefully designed, painstakingly executed. Green silk bordered in red, embroidered with golden birds in flight. Sewn perhaps by a mother for her daughter, according to custom. And according to custom, also, fitted by that mother over time.

III

I start to talk about these feet, but our conversation slides into another room, where a court dress of the eighteenthe century is displayed: lapis blue silk sewn with silver; cinched waist; hips spread outward supported by a cage; breasts suggested by slight plaster mounds; small hands gesture toward the throat—no legs are visible.

Behind this dress is a painting: Adélaide Labille-Guiard—*Portrait of the Artist with Two Pupils* (1785). The artist is at the center of the composition, before a canvas; two students stand behind her, women. The artist, later absorbed into silence, meant this work to show her dedication to teaching women; devised a state plan for female education. And her work, because of her intent, was considered radical and dangerous.

I want to talk about this woman's work, but the painting hangs here because of what she wears; and this is what my mother notices.

IV

These rooms are crowded—with artificial light, canned music—women wander past the work of women become the trappings of women. Which women turned the birds-of-paradise into a knee-length frock?—the life work of creatures worn during one evening. By whose direction? Who trapped the birds? Which decoys were employed? Who killed them?

V

In a corner of one room are enormous ornamental combs. From a wall an etching mocks as women topple—fooled into imbalance. But look

MICHELLE CLIFF

A HISTORY OF COSTUME

> *In the foreground a bird with a beautiful plume circles round and round as if lost or giddy. There are red holes in its head where there should be eyes. Another bird, tied to a stake, writhes incessantly, for red ants devour it. Both are decoys. . . . It is in the nesting season that the plumes are brightest, so, if we wish to go on making pictures, we must imagine innumerable mouths opening and shutting, until—as no parent bird comes to feed them—the young birds rot where they sit. Then there are the wounded birds, trailing leg or wing, as they flutter off to droop and falter in the dust. But perhaps the most unpleasant sight that we must make ourselves imagine is the sight of the bird tightly held in one hand while another pierces the eyeballs with a feather. But these hands—are they the hands of men or of women?*
>
> Virginia Woolf, "The Plumage Bill,"
> *The Woman's Leader,* July 23, 1920

In the basement of the museum finery is on display; a history of costume, open to the public. Plaster models—their heads swathed in varicolored nylon stockings—are placed through rooms dedicated to periods of time.

I

My mother and I meet in public places—and move between the swathed heads:
the faceless heads and covered bodies
the covered faces, the emblazoned bodies
the paisley-shawled bodies cut off from the undistinguished heads.

We came to this exhibit in part to connect, in part to recollect—but we hold few memories in common; and our connections are limited by silences between us. Our common ground is the island where we were born—and we speak in the language spoken there. And we bear a close resemblance, except for eye-color.

Copyright © 1979 by Michelle Cliff.

II

We move into a room
filled with fans
corsets
parasols
shoes
the covering of birds/the perimeters of whales/handles made from the tusks of elephants/the work of the silkworm: to receive the lotusfoot.

The tiny shoes are lush: carefully designed, painstakingly executed. Green silk bordered in red, embroidered with golden birds in flight. Sewn perhaps by a mother for her daughter, according to custom. And according to custom, also, fitted by that mother over time.

III

I start to talk about these feet, but our conversation slides into another room, where a court dress of the eighteenthe century is displayed: lapis blue silk sewn with silver; cinched waist; hips spread outward supported by a cage; breasts suggested by slight plaster mounds; small hands gesture toward the throat—no legs are visible.

Behind this dress is a painting: Adélaide Labïlle-Guiard—*Portrait of the Artist with Two Pupils* (1785). The artist is at the center of the composition, before a canvas; two students stand behind her, women. The artist, later absorbed into silence, meant this work to show her dedication to teaching women; devised a state plan for female education. And her work, because of her intent, was considered radical and dangerous.

I want to talk about this woman's work, but the painting hangs here because of what she wears; and this is what my mother notices.

IV

These rooms are crowded—with artificial light, canned music—women wander past the work of women become the trappings of women. Which women turned the birds-of-paradise into a knee-length frock?—the life-work of creatures worn during one evening. By whose direction? Who trapped the birds? Which decoys were employed? Who killed them?

V

In a corner of one room are enormous ornamental combs. From a wall an etching mocks as women topple—fooled into imbalance. But look

again: It is the women-alone who fall—at the left, serenely upright,
a woman walks supported by a man; at the right a deliveryman hurries,
a gigantic package carried on his head.

Together my mother and I remember women with filled market baskets;
women who carry a week's wet laundry from the washing place; a woman
we know who bears water on her head—each day for half a mile. And
briefly—recalling the women of our common ground—we meet.

VI

And then the wigs: the hair of another woman. Jo's chestnut hair cut
off. The plumage of an ostrich. To wear another woman's hair. To
wear the feathers of a large flightless bird. To cover a head with
hair that has been sold.

The women of Marie Antoinette's court—their elevated heads; and the
rats they say lived in them. We talk about teased hair: knotted,
split, sprayed hair; bleached, dyed, kinked, straightened, curled hair.
My mother's hair streaked blonde.

VII

Inevitably we change places with the displays: How did they sit?
How did they walk? How did they get their waists so small?

We see ourselves in riding habits: black velvet coat with thick red
roses—the jacket of Queen Alexandra; heavily veiled top hat; high
leather boots and slender crop—seated askew, the body placed to one
side. Would we slide off? Would we use the whip? The first time—would
we wash the blood off, or let it fade?

VIII

In a dimly lit room are camisoles, slips, all other underthings: these
are soft cotton, pale flowers embroidered and connected with gentle
pastel ribbons. I imagine women dressing and undressing—together in
their white eyelet cotton camisoles, helping each other undo the ribbons.
Perhaps napping during the afternoon of a nineteenth-century house party·
lying side by side on large pillows, briefly released. Perhaps touching;
stroking the ribcage bruised by stays; applying a hanky dipped in bay
rum to the temples of another. Perhaps kissing the forehead after the
application is done—perhaps taking her hand. Head on another's shoulder,
drifting. To be waked too soon. I like to think of women making soft
underclothes for their comfort; as they comfort each other.

IX

This dream is interrupted by the crimson silk pajamas of a harem woman;
purple brocade coat trimmed with gold braid and galloon; coins suspended
above her eyes.

X

This meeting-place is filled with stolen gold, silver, coral, pearls;
with plundered skins, shells, bones, and teeth. Aspects of ornamental
bondage, all used to maintain the costume.

XI

We reach the end of the exhibit: in a corner (American, nineteenth-century)
are a mourning couple; mother and daughter in identical black garb—the
head of the mother swathed in black net; the tragedy of bombazine on a
five-year-old likeness holding her mother's mourning hands.

SANDY BOUCHER

KANSAS IN THE SPRING

I

On Easter morning we drive out across the countryside until we arrive at a low concrete block structure painted pale green. On a bench next to the front door sits a young man in overalls, his skinny knees pressed tight together, his face knotting with anxiety as he watches us get out of the car. Arlyn speaks gently to him. "How you doin'? Windy out here, eh?" And the young man's face smooths in a grateful childish smile.

This is the rest home where we will visit Bess, Arlyn's sister. Bess was the favored child in the family—a plump young woman grinning saucily out of the photographs. Her hair was fastened with tortoise shell combs into smooth dark cones and buns; she wore silks under a fur coat. They sent her to college to be a home economics teacher. But something happened away at college. Aryln doesn't know exactly what. Bess was sent home. She became very strange, and no one spoke anymore of her teaching. For the next fifty years she stayed out there on the farm where she had to be taken care of by Aryln and his other sister Emmeline, until Emmeline died.

Bess turns to us as we enter the dayroom. Hers is the same pouchy pink face as Arlyn's with eyes of China blue. Her white hair falls down snowy and straight next to her cheeks. "Oh I am so glad you came," she says.

She asks our names, repeats them to herself, clasps our hands. She leans toward me, murmuring, "I am so glad to see you, Sandy," and her eyes are like those of a lover, so open and tender, so hungry. Sitting with her, I feel the wild fluttering of her being, the uncontrolled energy that might tip her in any direction. She is aware of the dangers; she hesitates often. It is like being with someone on acid, knowing that each thing I say goes through many transmutations in her head.

Now she must repeat the names again, asking for the surnames this time, spelling them, nodding with satisfaction when she has mastered each one. Her voice is an odd monotone like the sounds from a phonograph record that turns too slowly, the needle dragging.

"Bauer," she says, holding Mary's gaze. "B - a - u - e - r, is that right?"

Copyright © 1979 by Sandy Boucher.

"Yes," Mary answers.

"Mary Bauer," Bess repeats, her eyes dreamy, and then she slips away, her face suddenly empty of all expression.

Arlyn sits turning his cap on his knee. He has told us he does not understand Bess; she refused to help with the farm work or care about farming. He blames her for that. And he cannot quite forgive her for throwing away her chance to become a teacher, when she might have made a salary that would have helped them out during the terrible hard times of the Depression. So he is uneasy in her presence. But this place itself makes him uncomfortable, for some of the townspeople tried to get him committed here last year, and he had to fight for his freedom. He sits staring at the floor, and glances up in exquisite discomfort when one of the old people in the room speaks to him. Many of them here, like Bess, are younger than he, some lived their whole lives in a neighboring town, on a neighboring farm, known to him, but he maintains his stubborn separateness from them.

Este has brought the still camera (we would never have dared to bring either of the movie cameras), and now she asks, "May I take a picture of you, Bess? I could send it to you later."

Bess rouses herself, looks at Este for a time as Este holds up the camera for her to see. She nods. "Oh yes, you can do that for me. I've been wanting my picture—the one from the Pledge commercial. If you could get that for me. . . Yes, I'd be grateful. You know, it's me in the Pledge commercial, where I'm polishing the table. I'd like that one."

Este's expression does not change, but I notice the skin tighten around her eyes. Slowly she lowers the camera to her lap.

All Ann's efforts to coax Bess into talking about her past have failed, leaving Ann silent and perplexed, and the rest of us secretly amused, for we know about the miniature microphone taped to Ann's middle finger inside her cupped hand, the cord traveling up the sleeve of her shirt to the tiny tape recorder hidden in the inside pocket of her down jacket. We had helped her make these preparations back at the house so that she could steal an interview for the film.

Bess does remember Ann. When we entered, she greeted her with her childhood name, Ann-Marie, but she refuses to talk about those days back on the farm when the child, Ann, would come to visit. She ignores Ann completely to turn all her attention to Mary, Este and me. She touches us, tells us again in that one-tone throbbing voice how happy she is to see us, how she hopes we'll come visit her again. She looks at us so intently it seems she wants to memorize us.

I think of Genevieve, Arlyn's wife, her long years of illness, her early death—Ann's father writing in a letter "I do believe that if Genevieve had

been blessed with good health to go with her natural drive she could have given Arlyn leadership and direction and they could have had a really good life."

When so many survived, why were these two destroyed? Genevieve, after all, simply did what was expected of her, like the women in the cafe, saying, "No, see, we all got married. There never was anything else."

And Bess? They lied to her about the world; they coddled her and dressed her up fine and gave her airs, prepared her for destruction.

Arlyn endures. "I love life!" he declares. Genevieve is dead now twenty years. While Arlyn awakes each morning, enjoys his food, tells stories, visits his beloved cattle. Lives his stubborn unwashed eccentric existence in the midst of his fellow townspeople.

Once, speaking of her, he frowned and shook his head. "I never could please her," he said. "Hard as I tried, I never could please her."

It was so long ago.

After sitting through an Easter mass served by a visiting priest, we take our leave. "Come back again," Bess urges. "You, Mary Bauer, and you, Este Gardner, and you too, Sandy Boucher," still ignoring Ann, who stands awkwardly by. "We will," I promise, and then think, why did I say that? and try to find a way to make it be true—perhaps if Ann gets more funding and we come back in the fall to film the townspeople, perhaps. . .

"Goodbye Arlyn," Bess says, her manner growing more formal. "Thank you for coming."

Ever the lady, even in this most distressed and desperately vulnerable state.

Outside the front door of the home, Arlyn takes a long relieved breath, squinting against the sunlight. We follow his waddling, humpty-dumpty figure to the car.

II

I have climbed partway up the ladder on the side of the windmill and cling dizzily there, my head thrown back, while far above me, filling my field of vision, the blades of the windmill spin in my direction. The whole structure seems to move back over me. Much as I try I cannot convince myself it is only the wheel that moves, that the wheel is anchored to the structure on which I stand, whose spindly metal legs were driven deep in the Kansas soil little less than forty years ago and have not moved since, that this tapered frame of windmill, as seemingly brittle as the thinnest of dried bones propped here, may strain against its crisscrossed

1q

wires but does not run with the wind or fall before it. Here where I expected to stand still—an eye only, a sharp observer's eye behind the camera—instead I am carried off in this rushing, this uncontrolled movement and opening of that which I had long ago closed away.

There is a whirring sound, and an occasional snap. The blades of the wheel race madly. The wheel itself seems to flow across the sky as I look up at it. Just as the new wheat flows in the field, a tide of short bright-green blades merged in their motion and then separating in ripples and torrents. A wide green rushing broken by the brown strips of road, the high ground of pasture where the cows stand blinking their pinkrimmed eyes against the wind that lifts the hair on their backs in stiff whorls.

* * * * *

We come back from an afternoon of shooting out at Uncle Arlyn's farm, unload the equipment from the back of the stationwagon, and carry the boxes and tripod and equipment cases up the broken sidewalk, over the porch and into our rented house.

We are here in Morrisville, Kansas, in the early spring—an all-woman film crew from California—to make a movie about Ann Hershey's family. Ann's mother and Aunt Genevieve grew up here, children of a big joyful prosperous French family in a house on Main Street. Her mother, Marie Comte Hershey, is dead, having suffered for years, like Genevieve, from rheumatoid arthritis. The townspeople remember the two sisters as carefree girls, show us photographs of them clowning on a stepladder, wearing bloomers in the line-up for the high school girls' basketball team.

To the townsfolk, Ann, now 38 years old and an independent filmmaker, is still "Marie's little girl," remembered for her visits here when she was a child.

In the living room of our house, Este, camera assistant, sits on the couch with her hands inside the black bag, unloading exposed film from one of the magazines. Mary, sound woman, and Ann sit on the floor with the Nagra tape recorder, playing back a tape of Uncle Arlyn telling us how the old house used to look when his mother was alive. I am at work on the production notebook, filling in details.

"Take 4: Sync sound. Arlyn opening gate, approaching and turning on windmill. Yellow road grader coming right to left on road behind him.

"Take 5: Same, except for road grader.

"Take 6: Close-up of Arlyn turning on windmill. Sync.

"Take 7: Arlyn feeding dogs. Then throws bag over fence with the other trash.

"Take 8: MOS of broken tractors and other junk in the field around the house."

(MOS, Mary Bauer told me, stands for "without sound." The term came from a German director, who of course said "mit-out sound.")

Ann explains once again where the emphasis must be. "This time around, it's Arlyn we have to get. He's eighty-one years old. He might be dead when we come back in the fall."

"I would like to make a request," says Este. "Do you think you could get him to take a bath?"

* * * * *

Arlyn Lundborg. Short, round old man in overalls and a filthy yellow shirt fastened at the collar with a large safety pin. On his feet he wears black high-top tennis shoes; on his head a brown, billed cap, but this he always removes when he comes inside, revealing a head covered with white stubble, just like his chin. His face is Santa Claus plump and ruddy; his little eyes are a bright pale blue, now innocent, now sly.

Ann remembers his kindness to her when she was a child. He had let her ride his old horse alone about the farm, in long summer days of freedom. He had laughed when she drank from the horse trough, had shown her how to care for the animals she loved. He had been the one grownup from her childhood whom she remembered treating her with respect.

For the last few years now Arlyn has lived in a dilapidated house in town. There is no bathroom or kitchen in his house, and few unbroken windows. He lives, essentially, in one front room. Out in the weedy yard several dogs are chained amid an astonishing welter of junk, tractors and wagons, four or five big old cars, four pickup trucks. "How come you have so many pickup trucks, Arlyn?" I asked him. "Well," he said, "if I take one of them out to the farm and get it stuck in the mud, I just leave it there and come back here and get another."

* * * * *

One day Este came downstairs from taking a bath, swathed in a bathrobe, her long hair tied up in a towel on her head, with a gift for us. In the near-authentic country western twang that she slips into now and then for comic relief, she told us that she had just composed a song about Arlyn—and promptly sang it.

> Well I'm smelly and dirty
> I ain't very purty
> and people don't like me around

I'm weird and encrusted
I'm feared and mistrusted
by half of the women in town

I seen some hard times
and I've heard some harsh lines
But I ain't gonna give up not yet

Cause I won the battle
got my land and my cattle
And I ain't gonna change now, you bet!

Cause I'm a survivor a smart old conniver
and I don't need no toilet or bath
My wife used to plague me and badger and beg me
But you know that I had the last laugh.

* * * * *

I'm sitting on a rusted refrigerator in the yard of the farm, waiting for Arlyn to arrive. The sun is falling; a bitter wind claws at my jacket. Cows moo hungrily. It's depressing out here. The ruin of Arlyn's life. The neglect. The debris. The shit.

Mary talks about how everything here is dying. This is a dying culture—the small farmer, the family farm. All the young people go off to bigger towns, get jobs. The land at Arlyn's farm is strewn with rusting broken machinery, dead animals, objects from the past.

The ancient siding of the house, warped away from its nails, all color and sap and life drained from it by the decades of weather, taps randomly, gently against itself in the wind. Inside the house a closet door creaks, a rag of dress squeaks on a hanger, singing to itself. There is almost no inside to this house now, all apertures torn or smashed or simply left open. The piano stands foot-deep in cow manure on the living room floor. The ivory of its keys curls up like the fingernails of a Chinese empress. All the small noises of the house are quietly indifferent—sounds of a ship becalmed and abandoned in this great flat land stretching out to a smear of color where the sky lifts up from beneath it.

In this house Arlyn lived with Genevieve. We have wandered through looking at the objects here. Old flat metal bedpans, an ordinary wooden straight chair with small wheels attached to its legs to make a wheelchair for Genevieve. The bedframe piled over with rags, boxes, rusted objects, jars, photographs, papers flapping in the wind. The broken mattress upstairs spills brittle yellow corn shucks. It is the beds which shook us most, their desolation arousing thoughts of the woman who lay suffering

year after year, her body curling inward, in that house without electricity or running water.

Ann realizes that in those happy childhood visits she had known so little of what went on in this house. Even then, apparently, it had been full of trash and falling apart—once with a big hole in the floor—in winter. And Arlyn did not bother to fix it. Genevieve was crippled by then, sitting in a wheelchair. She was Catholic, saintly; on her face was a smile of sweetness and resignation.

Once when Ann's uncle, Genevieve's brother, came to visit from California, he found flammable oil spilled all over the floor near the cooking stove. And Genevieve not able to walk, with no way to get out if the place caught fire. Arlyn hadn't noticed, didn't seem to register the danger even when the brother pointed it out to him.

> He who has seen the sufferings of men has seen nothing.
> Let him look upon the sufferings of women.
> (Victor Hugo, as quoted in *Kansas: Prelude to the War for the Union)*

* * * * *

Ida, proprietress of the Morrisville Cafe, has invited us to dinner, *sans* Arlyn. Her two sisters and her niece will be there. Ann decides this is the time to record the women's side of what happened in this town back when Genevieve was alive.

That evening Este and I position the light stands across from the line of booths in the cafe. We tape the big reflector sheets to their stands. Cables are laid across the floor to the power sources. I help Mary tape the microphone to the ceiling, so that it will hang over the booth where the women will sit. We set up the tripod, attach the camera, snap on a magazine of film. The two black magazine boxes sit on the counter, ready. The place is cluttered with equipment now; we can barely squeeze through. Ida and her sisters and her niece observe this preparation with anxious glances. Now everything must stop while Este plies her light meter and we hook up a new battery to the camera, just in case.

And then Ida is talking, haltingly at first, while she works at the grill. She tells about her life after her husband left her. The difficulty of supporting and caring for her six children by herself, when she started to run this cafe. Her operations over the years. Major surgery more than once. "But the cafe always gave me something to come back to."

Out in the booth, Ann begins to question the women about Genevieve. "When Genevieve came back from California," says one of the sisters, "when she had just married Arlyn, why she was real good-

lookin'. She was tall and I remember she wore a white coat. She had real nice clothes and she looked nice."

"Yes, I remember that," Ida says. "Then I went off to Oregon to live for some years, and when I came back, why, it was a shame! I couldn't believe it was her. She was all bent over sideways and so crippled she could hardly walk—and the clothes she had on, well, I don't want to say anything about them. But it was a terrible sight."

The sister nods. "But over the years, for all she went through out there on that farm—and I never went out there to see for myself—but for all she had to suffer out there, I'll say one thing for her: she stuck with him!"

The second sister remembers, "When she came to town, no matter how bad off she was, she always had that smile."

III

Our rented house dates from the 1890's. It is actually quite small, but is, as Arlyn points out, "conspicuous," set by itself on a lot a little out from the center of town, toward the grain elevator and railroad tracks. Dormers are built out from each window upstairs; on the first floor is a deep wraparound porch; up on top, a tiny attic room.

Inside, the ceilings are high, and the place is a mixture of the original finishing and the remodeling done since. Old heavy woodwork, new cheap plywood paneling. Fluorescent lights in the kitchen. A bathtub upstairs that takes an hour to fill. Heat from a floor register in the dining room.

In the front room our camera and sound equipment hunches around the walls and sprawls over the couch. Lightstands lean like streetcorner loafers in the hallway. A battery belt coils over the arm of one of the three chairs in the dining room.

My production notebooks rest on another of the chairs along with my small library that is meant to be consolation and escape: Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek; Womenfriends,* by Walton and Newton; *Kansas: The Prelude to the War for the Union,* by Leverett Wilson Spring. The last, in its battered library binding, was published in 1885, and happened to be in my apartment in San Francisco. I am of the literal cast of mind that requires when coming to Kansas one ought to read a book about Kansas. There would be some security in knowing how many bushels of wheat the state produces annually, how many U.S. presidents grew up here—these facts to place over my own more immediate awareness of this Midwest. I know these people; my aunts lived in such towns

as this all their lives, my former husband's mother came from a Kansas farm town. She carried its morality and its social expectations with her wherever she went. Statistics, then: Morrisville is a town of one thousand inhabitants. Uncle Arlyn is worth a quarter of a million dollars, thusly: he owns five hundred acres of farm land, each worth $500. On this land he has a herd of about one hundred fifty cattle. It was for such numbers that I looked in the Kansas book, but found instead the ugly story of the struggle between the pro-slavery people (mainly from Missouri) and the abolitionists (mainly from New England) to colonize and control the Kansas territory before the Civil War. Lies, violence, greed; the fight over abolition in the Kansas territory was a disgusting, shameful series of events.

* * * * *

After days of cold and even snow, one day the weather surprises us with balmy spring warmth. We eat lunch in the kitchen. Salad in a yellow plastic bowl we bought at the dry goods store, a cheese omelet, beer. I tease Mary, babbling to keep my spirits up. I choose Mary to tease because she is the most distant of us, the most ascetic.

In the hour before we must get back to work, Mary goes out to lie in the sun in the side yard. I follow her out, lie down about ten feet from her. We had a discussion two days ago about a book she was reading, which detailed the process of going crazy. Lying there on the prickly grass under the hot sun, I ponder that. Finally I ask, "Have you ever felt on the edge of insanity?"

Silence from Mary's direction. I become aware of the hum of the grain elevator, the twitter of birds in the trees near the broken sidewalk.

Mary says from behind a frown, "I am trying to sleep."

Why am I so vastly lonely, lying here looking up at the scrolls and curlicues of our house, the trees just coming to bud, the lovely house across the street that looks as if it belongs in Southern France, with its Mansard roof and subtle greenish color like the patina on bronze. It is the loneliness I felt growing up in Ohio, as if I was locked away from the life I sought, that must be more passionate than the one I lived, more full of meaning.

The land stretches out—the miles of wheat fields, of pasture, of milo for feed. I seek out treasures like the house across the street, like the definition of "milo" that I copied from the dictionary. Americanization of a Bantu word, "maili." It is "any of a group of grain sorghums with somewhat juicy stalks and compact heads of white or yellow soft grains." How did this word travel from the black tribes of equatorial and southern Africa here to Kansas? I occupy my mind with such questions, in defense, for that which I did not expect is beginning to

happen to me. A wound is opening, an old wound, to reveal the thing hidden deep inside. We grew our layers of denial over it; we grew passivity like a covering of spongy fat, hoping it would protect us. We became complicit with the lying. Here in the heartland, the requirements have not changed. I lied to Bess in the rest home. I said blithely, we'll be back.

IV

SCENE: 5 LOCATION: Cattle auction, county seat

This shot with the Bolex SOUND ROLL: 18

PRODUCTION NOTES: Camera footage of animal pens, restaurant (sign on wall reads "Cowgirls need love too"), auction hall from the audience, auction hall from the auctioneer's booth.

This is an octagonal building, pine-panelled, with bleachers surrounding the arena floor, rising step-fashion up its sides. The animals are driven in clusters past the auctioneer's booth into the central enclosure, where the bidding takes place. Then a cowboy using a stick with a nail on the end, drives them out again and slams the gate. Pigs squealing. Cows pissing noisily. The cowboy accidentally slams the gate on a pig's snout, and the pig is imprisoned there, shrilling loudly in pain. When the animal is released, it staggers away from the door, blood streaming from its nostrils.

"My god, now I know why I'm a vegetarian," Este mutters beside me.

Ann is on the other side of the arena with the Bolex. A much smaller camera than the Eclair, it is easier to handle in a crowded situation like this one, but it cannot be synchronized with a tape recorder, so that she is shooting silent footage.

Mary, with the Nagra tape recorder slung on a strap over her shoulder, earphones on her ears and the long foam-covered mike held out before her, is getting "wild sound," the random noises going on around us. She is tall and thin, small-boned, delicate appearing. In her rimless glasses she can look grandmotherly or like a skinny bespectacled child.

Uncle Arlyn pays close attention to the babble of the auctioneer, peers intently at the animals. He tells me how the bidding is done. The farmers do not want each other to know who is bidding on what, so

each bids covertly with a subtle gesture. A finger raised to a hatbrim, one leg crossed over the other, hand brushing nose—all the while they try to look as casual and indifferent as possible. The auctioneer and the cowboy in the ring must be constantly alert to catch these secret bids. As he sees each bid, the cowboy gives a great whoop.

It's fascinating trying to see who's doing what, while they try to hide it. The older men seem to be doing most of the bidding. They are in general more dominant: probably they have more land and more stock and more money. This is the patriarchy, seemingly intact. The hall is filled with farmers of French and Swedish stock. Many have their male children with them. There are very few women here (though there are two cowgirls working in the stalls), and no brown or black faces in the crowd around me. This is a tight community, held together generation after generation.

At first we had been uncertain how the farmers would react to our filming them, but we needn't have worried. The auction hall is so much their environment and they are in general having such a good time, that the presence of these "girls from California" with their cameras and other equipment is only another occasion for fun. "Watch out," yells a man when Ann aims the Bolex at his seat-mate, "you might break your camera!" That and other tired witticisms make the rounds. The men tease each other about looking good, ask Ann if she wants their phone numbers, and laughter ripples about the hall.

Earlier, when Arlyn and I were in the restaurant section, we sat against the wall watching Este roam the room with the Bolex. She has long thick lightbrown hair, enormous blue eyes in a wide face. "That Este," Arlyn chuckled, "she looks more like a cowgirl than any of the rest of you girls—with them patched jeans. She must've been raised up pretty common." Has he been taken in by Este's phony country accent? He blinks in surprise as I tell him that Este was, in fact, raised up pretty upper middle class, as the daughter of a professor.

* * * * *

At the restaurant in the county seat where we eat lunch, Mary happens to burp, and claps a hand to her chest. Arlyn, catching this gesture, looks up at her from watery blue eyes. "I guess my table manners aren't too good." "No, no," Mary explains, "I just had to burp. It had nothing to do with you." It's clear he doesn't believe her. The rest of us chime in, trying to help. "She didn't mean anything, Arlyn."

He isn't sure. He is quite aware that the sensibilities of most people are offended by his person, that his neighbors disapprove of the junkyard in which he lives, that his miserliness is a town joke. He suffers from these

attitudes, yet it's clear he would change no facet of his behavior to make himself more acceptable. When approached on the subject he retreats into acute discomfort.

Ann starts trying to convince him to install electricity in his town house. Arlyn becomes very ill at ease, his eyes looking hangdog and suspicious.

"But if you had electricity, you could have a television and you could watch the baseball games," Ann says.

Arlyn shifts in his seat. "Uh. . . no. . . the wiring's bad. . . it'd have to be all rewired. . ."

"But wouldn't that be worth it?" Ann asks. "Then you wouldn't have to sit in the dark at night, and watching tv would give you something to do."

"I listen on the radio," he mumbles, and now we can't even see his eyes, he has receded so far. Finally his hand lifts to brush awkwardly across his face. It is a hand like a club, deformed by work—the knuckles swollen, the fingers twisted almost sideways at the joints. All of us stare at that hand, behind which he hides his embarrassment.

Only when we change the subject does he return to us. He watches us warily for a time, then begins to participate once again in the conversation and ends by telling a rousing story about a farmer who got drunk and drove his tractor into the pond on Arlyn's farm, in the middle of the day, and Arlyn had to pull him out or he would've drowned. And he laughs at his own story, glancing around at us. Now he is innocent as a child, his eyes mischievous and shining.

When we get up to go, Arlyn scoops the chicken bones from the plates and without bothering to wrap them, shoves them into the pocket of his corduroy coat. "I'm takin' these for the dogs," he explains.

"But Arlyn," I ask him, worried, "isn't it bad to give chicken bones to dogs?"

He nods good humoredly at me. "Well, they say so. You betcha they do. They say they can puncture their stomachs, but I've never had it happen." And he walks ahead of me out the door of the restaurant, wiping the chicken grease from his fingers onto his overalls.

* * * * *

SCENE: 7 — LOCATION: Cattle feeding Arlyn's farm

CAMERA ROLL: 28 — SOUND ROLL: 20

STOCK: 7247
ASA: Normal
LENS: 10 mm
FILTER: no

PRODUCTION NOTES: Take 1 – Este shooting from the road to get the sunset out across the flat fields of wheat.

Take 2 – Este inside cab of Luke's truck – sync sound. (Luke is the man Arlyn employs to feed the cattle now that Arlyn is too old to do it himself.)

Take 3 – Este riding in back of truck – sync.

The cattle feeding is exhilarating to film, out in the cold wind just at sunset, bumping along in the back of a truck. At Arlyn's house in town, Luke and his son Kledis load thirty-five bales of hay and two bags of protein pellets onto the back of Luke's pickup. Then, with us following, they drive out to the farm, unlatch the gate and go past the dilapidated house into the open field. The cattle see them coming, begin to low and hurry toward the truck. Luke drives very slowly over the ground, which is bumpy with prairie dog holes, while in the back of the truck Kledis opens the bags of pellets and strews them on the ground. The cattle have gathered into a great stumbling herd behind the truck, pushing each other, jockeying for position, leaning to eat the pellets. There are many new calves—wobbly-legged and curious, a bright redbrown, with white faces—who stumble in the midst of the hurrying grown-up cows and somehow never get knocked down.

Now Kledis begins to drop the hay behind the truck. First he cuts the twine holding the bale together, then lets the bale flake off and fall to the ground, where the cows begin to eat. There are two horses in among the cows: one runs around the edge of the crush, its mane lifting in the wind, looking wild and free.

Ann has agreed to let Este shoot the cattle feeding this time. (We will come back several times more to make sure we get it.) We have strapped the bodypod to Este's waist and shoulder and have attached the big heavy Eclair camera to the bodypod. Then we helped her up into the back of the truck where she braces herself on the tailgate, trying to hold the camera steady and stay out of Kledis's way, trying not to be knocked off by the cows who crowd up against the truck. Mary runs beside the truck with the Nagra to get sync sound, and I run behind Mary in case she needs me.

All this is very hard work and tremendous fun. I carry the magazine boxes and the filters and the production notebook. The weather has turned cold again. The wind is icy, and even wearing long underwear, two sweaters and a down jacket, plus a wool hat and scarf, and gloves, I must keep moving to stay warm.

When all the hay has been dropped from the back of the truck,

we look out to where more than a hundred cattle are scattered in a long waving line across the land, their heads lowered to the hay strewn on the ground. Behind them, the sky has turned vermilion.

V

From the bathroom window I can see out across the open field to the grain elevator. In fact that's just about all I can see—that great high rounded building filling the space within the windowframe. Just beyond it is the railroad track, some scraggly trees. Now and then a train comes clacking along the track, screeches to a stop on a separate little side track near the elevator; a chute is moved into position, and the contents of the elevator slide down into the boxcars of the train. One by one they clang into position to receive their cargo. So all the way across the great flat central plains, each tiny farm town has its grain elevator on the railroad track, and the freight trains snake their way across, picking up the crops grown by the farmers and taking them to the big cities. Who in New York or San Francisco ever thinks about this vast flat land where the wheat for their daily bread is grown? I sit gazing out the window, a book open on my knees. The low roar of machinery comes from the grain elevator. It starts up in the morning and goes all day. Not a soothing sound like the ocean or even the flow of traffic on a highway, that you live with and forget most of the time—this is a factory noise, whine of metal on metal, loud thumps and groans of weight being moved. It invades our house. I think of how it would be to live here as a wife and mother, caught in the house, surrounded by that noise all day every day.

The bathroom smells of mildew. I sit in here because of the little gas heater in the corner. On the wicker hamper under the window lies the Annie Dillard book, but the book open on my lap is called *Womenfriends: A Soap Opera.* It is a series of communications between two women who have been friends since college—a dual journal over a period of several years examining the development of their friendship. Pauline, college instructor and political lesbian. Rebecca, working woman, wife and eventually mother. Reading, I am often annoyed at the extreme self-absorption of these women, their competitiveness, their endless self-examination; yet at other moments I am won by their willingness to expose those parts of themselves which are least attractive, to risk making of their friendship a process of discovery.

But now in the quiet afternoon here in our rented house, under

the roar of the grain elevator, with the little town spaced out in yards and houses around me, and the vast flat empty land beyond, I find the writings of these two articulate women as foreign as, for instance, would be a Mexican restaurant on the main street of Morrisville. Pauline and Rebecca live in the largest, most densely populated, most sophisticated city in this country. The thoughts expressed by them come out of who they are in that particular New York City environment, the relationship itself is one that would probably exist only among sidewalks and subways and artists' lofts and expensive cramped apartments. That women should be ego-centered and intensely questioning, seeking full intellectual lives and professional fulfillment for themselves, *as well as,* in Rebecca's case, the raising of a child—this would be heresy indeed in Morrisville. And that there are women like Pauline who love other women to the exclusion of men—well, that would call down the fury of these Kansas patriarchs.

The independent women who surely existed in frontier times—the entrepreneurs and adventurers, the scratchy cantankerous separate women—their history is not felt in Morrisville. The ones who surely exist right now are not visible here. And yet the ideas of options for women are seeping out even here to the prairie. Listen to this interchange from our evening at Ida's cafe.

Jackie-Lynn, Ida's niece, who is in her twenties and the mother of two children, asks of her mother and aunts: "Did it ever cross any of your minds though, that you would ever be anything other than a wife and mother? Did you believe that was your role? Your destination?"

They answer in a jumble, all talking at once: "There never was anything else. . ." "No, see, we all got married." "You have to take what comes in life." "Who had the time to sit around making decisions?"

Jackie-Lynn: "Take girls today just coming out of high school—they can go to college and they have a choice. They can at least *think* about it. They may end up that way too, but you guys didn't really have a choice."

"We did what we had to do," says the mother.

Jackie-Lynn (determinedly): "My daughter is real small now, but as she grows up I'm going to let her know that she can be anything she wants."

* * * * *

We are drawing close to Genevieve now, as surely our forbear as if all of us, like Ann, were Marie's little girls. That big-featured face, long and skull-like with jutting nose, the dark eyes, the black hair hanging straight to just below the ears. Genevieve in her wheelchair, placed at

center-front of the group at the family reunion. Wasted face gently smiling. Her body, bony and contorted, leans sideways in the chair.

The women in the cafe speak of her suffering. First for arthritis, then later for cancer, she had sixteen operations. During one early surgery something was left inside her body when the incision was sewn up. They don't remember what exactly—a pair of scissors? some packing? Its presence inside her caused terrible complications. Later the surgeon opened her up again and found it. Arlyn did not sue the doctors or try to get any restitution from them. As is usual with such torture, there were no consequences to the torturers.

On the days when we must film out at the farm, we stumble about glum and angry. The wind whipping through the broken windows of the house murmurs to us of Genevieve. What was it like to come back from each surgery to this house without lights, without a bathroom?

And the summers. Arlyn has never planted a tree. The house has no shutter, awning, porch, and never did. It is a tall box with gaping holes for door and windows. There would have been no shade, no relief from the heat.

Yet the past is slippery. What can we *know* of Genevieve, dead since 1952. Ann remembers a woman in a wheelchair. Genevieve died when Este was only one year old, when Mary was eight years old, Ann thirteen, I sixteen. So we arrive at her from different historical perspectives (a fifties teenage was different in crucial respects from those years lived in the seventies) and lifestyles (two of us are heterosexual, one now living with a male lover; two of us are lesbians). But Genevieve is a wound in all of us by now, torn open. Inside is found the object, the perception, the anguish we thought we had buried or that we never knew was there.

Este adds two more verses to her song.

> Now me and Genevieve we had a hard life
> And she got more sickly with fear
> I can't understand it I treated her good
> And gave her a bath once a year
>
> Had no water nor heat, but she was so sweet
> That she kept all her suffrin' inside
> She smiled every day, seemed to make it okay
> And I can't understand why she died.

Arlyn told a story set in the Depression, a cruel time for him and Genevieve: "Genevieve and I, we got started to, during the hard times. . . we had her dad to take care of and we couldn't and uh, work was scarce then, we had to do something! And we'd go make these trash piles and

pick out stuff to wear, shoes and whatnot. You know, now Genevieve was, you might say, raised in wealth. . . she was. . . and that was an awful comedown for her. As a girl she had everything she wanted, about. . . she wasn't forced to work and go off and make these trash piles, that was quite a comedown for her. Well, one day Genevieve and I were in the trash pile looking for things. The bus and preacher came by and they stopped to see who it was, and he saw it was us. Well, he just stuck his head up and drove on, like he didn't even recognize us. And Genevieve says. . ." Arlyn lifted up his head and laughed in admiration. "She says, 'Well, go ahead, it doesn't matter to me, if that's the way. . .' She didn't care who saw us."

Ah, she must've been a feisty one, we tell each other. She must've given that Arlyn a hard time. But we have begun to perceive the breadth and depth of Arlyn's stubbornness, this obduracy slyly masked by the appearance of yielding. (How come you never brought that piano into town when you left the farm? Mary asked. Arlyn glanced at the ruined piano standing in its layer of cow shit, and said serenely, Oh yeah, you bet, one day I'm gonna do that. And he believes he *will,* while of course having no intention of doing it.) So it comes to us that Genevieve, isolated out here with only Arlyn for company, had to live *around* that immovability, had to make the best of what little there was in that stark, barnlike house, of comfort, of companionship.

Mary has a theory. "Think of the illness as resistance," she suggests. "If she was sick she couldn't breed; if she was crippled she couldn't work."

To resist by destroying oneself, to sacrifice one's body, is a gruesome idea, but it is better than the thought of Genevieve as passive victim with *no* control over her destiny.

—or "destination," as Jackie-Lynn put it.

(Excerpt from a letter from Ann's father):

"Arlyn came of old, basic Swedish farm stock. Stolid, unimaginative and rather insensitive. Never vicious, mean or cruel. . . . I suppose to Arlyn and the men of his family women simply endured the frailities of their lives. It was Genevieve's misfortune to have more than most to endur

VI

SCENE: 10 LOCATION: Barn Sale, neighboring tow

CAMERA ROLLS: 25, 26, 27 SOUND ROLLS: 19, 20

STOCK: 7247
ASA: Normal
LENS: 9.5–95; 25 mm (cam roll 27)
FILTER: 85 (cam roll 26)

PRODUCTION NOTES: Begins with long shot of farm from the road; snow on red roof of barn; pickups and cars lining the road approaching farm.

Takes 1 through 6 – auctioneers auctioning junk from a flatbed wagon. Arlyn in among the crush of farmers bidding for items and buying them.

Takes 7 and 8 – Women inside barn, selling sandwiches and pies and coffee to the farmers coming in from the sale.

End of roll 26 is just outside the barn, where auction notices are tacked to the barn door. Men stand looking at the notices, which lift and flutter in the wind.

On the way to the sale, Arlyn explained. The owner was giving up his farm to move elsewhere; probably he had already sold it. Now he wanted to sell all his equipment and farm vehicles, everything he had used to work with over the years.

In the back seat, as we drove out into the bleak snowy morning, Este and Ann and I sat crammed together, film gear piled on our laps. I looked out across the open fields to the occasional lines of trees, wondering if Este and Ann were as aware as I was of Arlyn's manure smell here in the closed car. When Este reached to open the window a crack, I smiled.

At the sale, now, there is a sharp wind, and the two auctioneers at work up on the flatbed trucks among the piles of junk are bundled up to the ears. Mud everywhere. Scattered snow. The farmers with their bright billed caps–orange and yellow and red and green–given to them by farm machinery companies and feed companies.

While Este and Mary and Ann are getting the equipment out of the back of the station wagon, strapping the bodypod onto Ann's shoulder, I retreat to the barn. Inside, a dozen women are busily at work. Before them are board tables loaded with homemade pies and sweetrolls, urns of coffee. Behind them are the makings for ham sandwiches, barbecued beef, hotdogs.

The farmers stamp about the doorway, huddling half-in, half-out, drinking coffee. A raw wind enters among them.

While I know I should hurry back out to help start the filming, there is something in this shadowy barn of much more urgency for me. I stand in a corner eating a piece of warm apple pie, watching the women busily setting out the food. There is not one woman here under the age of fifty.

Their eyeglasses, their headscarves, their thick wool coats draw my gaze; their mouths are tight with all the years of doing what was necessary, their eyes shy and curious behind the glasses, noticing me as a stranger, even as I am feeling so much a part of them. I am so relieved to be here among them. They can't know this. Possibly they would not want it. Nor understand my affection for them, how much I want to talk with them, come back in the fall to hear their voices, let them speak their lives. And the cowgirls at the auction hall, the waitresses in the cafes, the wives on the farms—that society of women hidden from us this time around.

I should go outside to help with the equipment; I know Ann will be impatient with me. But I am not yet ready to relinquish this good feeling. I want somehow to take it with me, and I think of the still camera I am carrying in my pocket. Yes, perhaps a picture.

When there is a lull in business, I approach the table. Will they let me photograph them all together, I ask, to the women in general. They look embarrassed. I tell them I am from California, I've never been to an event like this barn sale and I really want to have a picture of them, if they don't mind. There are some moments of hesitation, in which I feel ridiculous, aware of how conspicuous I have suddenly become. But then the women cluster together for the portrait. Looking through the viewfinder at the faces of these stolid survivors, I understand why Bess and Genevieve cannot be here, they who carried the weight of madness and pain.

Now I really must leave the barn and go out to help the others. The women return to work again, arranging food on the table, stirring the barbecued beef in the steamer, slicing the pies.

Outside, the wind is a knife ripping at my clothes. Across the barnyard I see the "girls from California," heavyladen with equipment, making their way through deep squishy mud toward the crowd of farmers around the flatbeds. I hurry to join them.

reviews

PAMELA DENYSE TRUNK

FOR THEIR TRIUMPHS AND FOR THEIR TEARS: CONDITIONS AND RESISTANCE OF WOMEN IN APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA by Hilda Bernstein.

International Defense & Aid Fund, 104 Newgate Street EC1, London, England. 1975. 72 pp. $1.35.

Africa, for decades a continent of mystery and the unknown, seems to be yielding its secrets to public scrutiny day by day. One can hardly avoid hearing news of Africa: a revolution or coup, black students and white missionaries killed, black political leaders dying mysteriously. But upon closer inspection we find that Africa still has not emerged fully from the cocoon of mystery. Most of us know little about this continent. Countries change their names; they merge with other countries and slip from our memories. Perhaps the two countries that do make a strong impression upon us are Rhodesia and South Africa. Both have governments dedicated to the protection and supremacy of the white minority who live there at the expense of the black majority. We read of changes: the government of Rhodesia is certainly in peril.

And surely South Africa seems to be changing. But is it? How much remains to be done before equality is achieved? And what of those who have lived their lives under this government? Few books have dealt with these questions. And newspaper accounts are concerned with what makes news—the violence, the brutality, the government trials. But little space is devoted to the lives of the mass of people who daily struggle to survive. The questions that have not been answered by books and newspapers are basic ones about the inhabitants of South Africa: How have they fared? How much have they suffered? How do they view their own future?

Hilda Bernstein's book, *For Their Triumphs and For Their Tears,* addresses most of these questions about the women who live in South Africa. Having done some work with a South African political prisoner through Amnesty International, I found this book especially useful and moving. Since our Amnesty group corresponded directly with the prisoner, I felt that I had more than the average amount of knowledge about conditions in South Africa. But I was dealing with a male prisoner who

Copyright©1979 by Pamela Denyse Trunk.

was officially designated "Coloured"; this is, as Bernstein explains, "the term used in South Africa for people of mixed white and black extraction" (6). Her book reminded me that no matter how badly a white supremacist society treats its "non-white" men, it treats its "non-white" women worse. And the plight of South African women was even worse than I had thought.

Bernstein begins by giving the background information about apartheid necessary for an understanding of the place of black women in South African society. Pass laws enforce a policy that effectively separate black from white:

> Every single African male and female over the age of 16 years must carry a pass at all times and produce it on demand. . . . The book contains the holder's identity card as well as particulars of residence, employment contract, tax receipts, etc. In addition it contains endorsements regarding the eligibility of the holder to live in, work in or seek work in prescribed areas. (6)

Prescribed areas are those occupied by whites in which blacks can live only under clearly enumerated circumstances. Until 1964, women could reside legally with their husbands in prescribed areas; now, even if a black South African woman tries to obtain employment in these areas, making her eligible for residency, she is almost always thwarted. The only jobs available are for domestics, and these are few and hard to get.

The government takes care of the resulting unemployed women by sending them to the "reserves." While this term may conjure up a picture of lush green fertile areas, the reserves are desolate, barren, and populated only by women, children, the old, and the dying. Also called "homelands" and "bantustans," the reserves are areas the government has put aside for the blacks to live on. Here South African black women are sentenced to isolated lives of starvation and desperation. The South African government sees women as useless: they cannot work in the mines; they do not further the economy; they do not contribute to the labor force. As one government official said: " 'The African labour force must not be burdened with superfluous appendages such as wives, children and dependents who could not provide service' " (12).

Bernstein details other rigid rules that interfere with women's family life or independence. For example, if a husband and wife have managed to live together legally in a prescribed area and the husband dies, the wife must leave the area. She could live there only as long as

she was her husband's dependent, or had some sort of gainful employment. To remain in her home, the woman must prove that she has lived there all her life, "continuously since birth." She may also stay if she has been employed by one person for ten years and has lived in the prescribed area without interruption for 15 years. And, of course, a woman may remain if she is granted special permission by the authorities.

This is just a small part of the entire landscape of South Africa that Bernstein reflects for us. She also tells of the women who have tried to change these laws. She provides portraits of those women who have been banned—who have had "to endure an almost intolerable form of existence with the manifold restrictions of movement and activity imposed under these [banning and house-arrest] orders" (50), who have been brutalized physically and mentally, falsely tried, and finally jailed for trying to change things.

And this is the moving part of the book. Although Bernstein's tone is not emotional, the subject itself is emotional; this book records the triumphs of the women who live in South Africa as well as their humiliation and victimization at the hands of the government. Faced with a system that seems impossibly stacked against them, women do try to change it. We read of women who have emerged to fight against apartheid. We learn of women who have staged peaceful marches of protest—thousands of women marching together, singing joyously as they made their way to the capital. The book contains many stories of women who have refused to carry passes or to observe the pass laws. There are tales of women organizing and banding together to win some sort of justice.

The last chapter is entitled "Looking Forward," and it notes:

> In South Africa black women, these most vulnerable of all people within the apartheid state, have been forced to embark on a struggle that takes them beyond their own specific oppression. The struggle of South African women for recognition as equal citizens with equal opportunities is primarily the struggle against apartheid, for national liberation. Nor is it a question of putting one first, then taking up the other. The victory of this struggle against apartheid is the absolute condition for any change in the social status of women as a whole; their participation is an expression not only of their desire to rid all South Africa of the curse of apartheid, but also of their deep concern for their own status as women.
>
> And they have shown repeatedly the capacity to understand and the willingness to fight for changes that lift them further than their own harsh immediate predicament. (59-60)

"Looking Forward" deals with brief biographies of many of the women who have fought for change. The cost is often great personal suffering. Lilian Ngoyi, a past president of the Women's League in South Africa and a successful organizer, has been constantly persecuted. She was tried for treason; the trial lasted four years. She was in solitary confinement for 71 days, has been banned, confined to her home, and prohibited from having any visitors. Nonsikelelo Albertina Sisulu has managed to educate her own five children and two children of her dead sister. Her husband is on Robben Island, imprisoned for life. She herself has had to endure years of being banned and under house arrest. Winnie Mandela, wife of a black leader and herself an activist, was once in solitary confinement for 5½ months before even being brought to trial. Although she was acquitted at that time, she has been arrested many times since and as of 1975 was imprisoned for having communicated with another person on a public street in Johannesburg.

Despite its grim profiles, this last chapter is not depressing. Rather, the lives of the women chronicled here are impressive. They do not see their struggle as impossible. They do not view their own efforts as futile. They do not lose hope. Hilda Bernstein's work has thrown much light upon the conditions of women in South Africa. And the struggles and triumphs of these women are certainly worth seeing in a clear, positive, steady light.

JAN CLAUSEN

DREAMS IN HARRISON RAILROAD PARK by Nellie Wong.

Kelsey St. Press, 2824 Kelsey St., Berkeley, Ca. 94705. 1977. 43 pp. $3.75.

Love for her parents—deep though not uncritical—shines through this short, powerful book by Nellie Wong, providing a context for self-exploration, a basis for self-transformation. On the attractively designed cover we see a young woman (Wong's mother, it is tempting to imagine) looking gravely and rather apprehensively into the camera, her face framed in an old-fashioned sepia oval. Inside, the dedication reads: "for my mother and father, Suey Ting Yee and Seow Hong Gee." Poems throughout the book refer to them, in connection with both childhood memories and adult perceptions.

In a poem called "Jewelry and Things," Wong tries to convince herself that she has transcended the limitations of her female ancestors, but succeeds mainly in discovering the ways in which their values continue to haunt her:

> I like to think
> I don't beseech idle gods
> like my mother and my grandmothers
> who I never knew, wanting to trust
> in the fragility of jade
> knowing, believing
> without heirs
> the heavens
> will forget me.
>
> If only I could forgive myself,
> I could enjoy jewelry and things
> for their own sake. (21)

Nevertheless, Wong's reflections on her grandmother's, her mother's, and her own early experience do result in a strength evident both in the poems and in the contemporary photograph of the author which closes the book. The face, just as unflinching as that on the cover, is vulnerable but resolute, somehow self-assured.

Copyright©1979 by Jan Clausen.

Such seemingly contradictory elements as attachment to her ancestors and a hard-won security in her own identity as a Chinese-American woman, as herself, are connected by Wong in "Day of the Dead," quoted here in its entirety:

> I open the door in my mask.
> "What is that lady?" a little goblin asks.
> And I might say I am surviving
> the ghosts of myself.
> And I might say I have only begun
> to wear this suit of armor, my hair
> aflame, my eyes blazing
> beyond the bodies
> of my unknown ancestors.
> I fly a kite of a centipede,
> flap its million legs,
> land on the wings of a golden phoenix
> calling me to a land
> of hills and birds,
> calling me beyond
> my childhood fears.
> And if I worship the dead,
> it is because
> I hear my parents whispering
> through the marrow of my bones
> asking to be fed. (39)

In the book's title poem, Wong has spoken of sitting in a park with her seriously ill mother who dreams "of wearing dresses that hang in her closet,/of swallowing soup without pain,/of coloring eggs/for an unborn grandson"; Wong herself dreams "of embroidering/new skin" (18). The effortful yet magical growth process described in "Day of the Dead" might well be imaged as an "embroidering [of] new skin"—on different levels a gift to Wong's parents, to Wong herself, and to the reader.

The effort which produces such growth is in large measure the effort of self-examination, often a necessary response to pain. The conflict occurring when a child must accommodate herself simultaneously to two different cultures, one racist and invalidating of the other, is acutely painful. When World War II was declared:

> Shortly our Japanese neighbors vanished
> and my parents continued to whisper:
> We are Chinese, we are Chinese.
>
> We wore black arm bands,
> put up a sign
> in bold letters.
> ("Can't Tell," 16)

In "How a Girl Got Her Chinese Name," Wong remembers her Chinese teacher's efforts to translate the American "Nellie." Dissatisfied with the result, her parents bestowed the Chinese name "Lai Oy," "Beautiful Love"—which, however, may also mean "lost pocket," depending on context. "Between these names/I never knew I would ever get lost" (9), Wong concludes ironically.

Chinese culture, too, has its painfully oppressive aspects, particularly for a girl child. In "Like the Old Women Suggested," "A girl is bathed in mustard/then in oatmeal" to cure a skin condition:

> She stays under the covers,
> imagines her skin is cream.
> It is her toy,
> her itching, her temporary
> relief.
>
> Once her skin becomes cream,
> she will be ready for market. (10)

With difficulty, the adult Nellie Wong has learned to turn her anger outward rather than inward. Her writing not only records this process but seems central to it. "I want to puke," she says, describing her present-day disgust at the memory of having organized a Chinese dinner for non-Chinese friends, afterwards inviting them

> to tour dark alleys
> the sing-song waves of faces
> peeping from second-story windows
> pointing to ducks, squabs,
> thousand-year-old eggs
> me on the perimeter
> of Chinatown
> with my office friends
> gulping wine, holding my nose,
> masked, playing oriental,
> inscrutable, wise.
>
> ("Not from the Food," 22)

Such a poem functions as exorcism and catharsis. So does the chant-like "Loose Women, You Say?":

> Women who drive trucks?
> Women who shoot their lovers?
> Women who kill their rapists?
> Women who defend themselves?
> Women who touch women?

> Women who write about sex?
> Women who smoke cigars?
> Women who act in porn films?
> Women who commit suicide? (34)

Mingling anger and humor, "Magazine Poem for Father's Day" dispels the insidious influence of capitalist propaganda by parodying it:

> A rare way to celebrate Father's Day?
> Fragrance west of Colorado sage,
> a "Male Tennis Player" figurine,
> less work for father, a personalized deluxe,
> half gallon pouring stand, easier to pour
> his Chivas Regal, artifacts
> by day, by night. (24)

After five stanzas devoted to such absurdities, Wong unexpectedly—and touchingly—concludes:

> This is not written for you, my father,
> who sold mustard greens from a truck,
> in your shorts somewhere,
> your knees I laughed and loved. (25)

Other poems, more ambiguous in their conclusions than those just quoted, tell stories. Wong is so good at this that I hope she will someday experiment with writing fiction, if she hasn't done so already. In "Under Cover," a vignette from her childhood, she and her sisters ("Our hair, once thick and glossy,/now short stubbles,/ready for execution/in our own neighborhood" (14), have contracted lice, and her mother attempts to hide the disgrace from the neighbors. "Chicken Soup" portrays a woman who must pretend that her own daughter (born, the reader assumes, out of "wedlock") is instead her younger sister. The contrast between an ordinary meal and the unnatural silence imposed on the women is chillingly effective:

> The two women sit in their usual places.
> They drink their soup, white of green onion
> floating on top.
> The only sounds,
> chicken bones snapping. (11)

Wong is a materialist in the best sense; her work is grounded in physical and economic realities. Hers is a woman's deeply ingrained consciousness of the everyday tasks which sustain a life, the details which render it pleasant or unbearable. She bases a poem upon the act of relining kitchen shelves. She celebrates food, jewelry, "the Chinese bowl/

with pink peonies" (36), "Floors the rawness of pine, not/puritan grey" (27). Of an old woman who slips and falls in the street, she wants to ask:

> What do you keep in your string shopping bag?
> Do you have a transfer?
> Do you live in a small room?
> Do you cook oats on a hot plate?
> Do you feed a sick husband?
> Do you find it hard to go to the toilet?
> ("Poem for a Woman Who Has Fallen," 32)

Although she sometimes makes effective use of traditionally "poetic" rhythm and even rhyme (for instance in "Day of the Dead," quoted above), the prosaic language in this series of questions is quite typical of Wong's style. It works well here, and in skillfully constructed "story poems" like "Chicken Soup," where the details are carefully selected, the emotional energy sharply focused. In other poems, less well-crafted, less successful, I sometimes feel I am trying to assimilate a rambling series of loosely connected statements, rather than experiencing the electrifying connections of poetry.

In "Poem for a Woman Who Has Fallen," for example, the powerful portrait of the "fallen" woman evoked by the question sequence just quoted is buried (one stanza out of nine) amid descriptions of bystanders, an encounter with a patronizing young man who "might be a sailor," a bus ride, and Wong's own ambivalent feelings. The poem, sporadically powerful, possesses little of the clarity and precision of Wong's best work.

In "Woman in Print" and "Relining Shelves," the "story line" seems to disappear altogether, and I am left feeling I've been told a riddle I can't solve. "Relining Shelves" begins with a playful description of a disorderly kitchen in which "the yellow dish/with a crack in its belly/will meet with the Snowdrift,/collide with the peppercorns,/tackle the mustard,/ruminate with the rum abstract" (36). The author seems totally absorbed in recording the details of a familiar household chore; then suddenly, without transition, she is talking about news announcements concerning "a girl [who] testifies she has been raped." Her final question, "what does relining shelves/have to do/with a prostitute/who is called a 'gook'?" (37) is also my question. I feel that Wong is asking me to make a connection she herself has failed to make in the poem.

Despite my disappointment in a few such poems, they do at least suggest some original perception well worth recording. I find them more rewarding than several short poems which risk far less either because their point is rather obvious ("Drums, Gongs," an indictment of the

Miss Chinatown USA pageant) or because they seem too self-consciously crafted while lacking the original perspective and tone of the rest of Wong's work ("Confession," "Voice," "Painting a Room Yellow"). It is evident that in this first book Wong is experimenting with a wide range of stylistic and thematic possibilities, not all of them equally successful. But her poetic voice—honest, determined, self-scrutinizing even in anger, over and over inviting the reader to share in her amazement at the surprises of everyday life—is already clear and strong.

Dreams in Harrison Railroad Park concludes with two poems, "From a Heart of Rice Straw" and "Picnic," which reiterate the book's themes of strength drawn from the past and of self-transformation. In "From a Heart of Rice Straw" Wong retells the story—one told to her many times in childhood—of her mother's courage on an occasion when an ungrateful cousin shot her husband:

> But papa fooled them. He did not die
> by his cousin's hand. The lottery closed down.
> We got food on credit. You wept.
> I was five years old.
>
> My heart, once bent and cracked, once
> ashamed of your China ways.
> Ma, hear me now, tell me your story
> again and again. (41)

Finally, in "Picnic," Wong expresses her acceptance of her parents and of herself in relation to them. Having survived much of the pain and confusion of her childhood, and her subsequent rebellion against "China ways," she is now able, in fantasy, to meet her dead parents as an equal—almost, one feels, as their contemporary:

> Although we talk together, we three,
> we promise each other nothing. Not trees,
> not oranges, not fish
> for it is not our time to be fenced in,
> not when the spring promises its own
> flowering quince.
>
> * * * * *
>
> We swim, drunk with the sea in our ears,
> as seagulls swoop down to eat with us.
> They are welcome guests and sit on my
> father's knees
> which are still knobby and my mother is still
> telling him what to do.

Look! The swallows are building their nests
and we toast what little ricewine is left.
The chrysanthemums bend their heads.
I gather fresh lichee and leave my mother
                                        and father
my only silk coverlet. (42-43)

A year after its publication in 1977, *Dreams in Harrison Railroad Park* has gone into a second printing. This is, I hope, an indication that Nellie Wong is beginning to find the many readers she deserves.

RIMA SHORE

THE PEARL BASTARD by Lillian Halegua. The Women's Press Ltd., 12 Ellesmere Road, Bow, London E3 5QX, England. (Distributed in the U.S. by Women in Distribution Inc., Box 8858, Washington, D.C., 20003). 1978. 137 pp. $2.50.

"THE THINGS THAT NEEDED SAYING"

When June comes, fifteen-year-old Frankie McGuire trades her St. Agnes jumper for a pair of stiff new dungarees, the "bricks and the bricks and the bricks" of Bronx tenements for the waves and wind of Montauk. She is not exactly running away; she takes with her the unstated blessing and a five-dollar bill from her parents who, with ten going on eleven mouths to feed, are easily persuaded that Francine is sensible. She heads for the Point, the furthest tip of Long Island.

In Lillian Halegua's *The Pearl Bastard,* Frankie tells her own story from beginning to end, interspersing her account of a summer and winter in Montauk with moments from her Bronx past. She speaks in a voice that is poignant and appealing, and full of innocence—though not the innocence of someone sheltered from life's facts, from its 'harsh realities'. Frankie is, after all, a city kid; she has seen boys on sleds crushed by a red and yellow bus. Her innocence comes more from a reluctance to accept words or experiences as hand-me-downs. Sorry for a brother named Torrence, she insists that ". . . all kids should have the right to name themselves" (as she has called herself "Frankie" and her brother Jimmy—"Geranium"). And people should have the right to name their experiences as well, she would say. She rejects or, more accurately, disregards the labels ("fat Jew," "fairy") handed down by grown-ups, and gives us instead her view of the people about whom these labels might be used. When it comes to feelings, Frankie is more likely to discover them—as if they had never before been felt—than to name them. And so we encounter, as if for the first time, awe:

> I kind of stood and looked at the ocean
> and felt all funny like I was taking communion
> or graduating or something. (25)

Copyright©1979 by Rima Shore.

And loneliness:

> Thanksgiving Day I cried and thought of Ma and Pa and all the rest at home. I thought of the pictures of turkeys in the magazines. The fancy colored pictures with the turkey and all the trimmings fixed so pretty it would be a shame to dig right in. (103)

Frankie tells her story in language that is sometimes childlike, as when she speaks of her favorite brother:

> Jimmy would like the eating with the people all around. Jimmy likes people and people like Jimmy. Everyone knows Jimmy. The whole neighborhood knows Jimmy. They know him to say hello and his name. Jimmy knows names too. Jimmy can remember an awful lot of names. (37)

At other moments she produces, without warning, passages which are lyrical and sophisticated. Hitching out to Montauk, she listens to the car radio: "Streamers of sound. Oral ribbons in the wind" (3). These extremes often struck me as too extreme. The voices of Frankie's narrative change quickly. But then, Frankie herself is changing. She is taking leave of childhood.

When I was growing up, I read a lot of books about growing up—as many as I could get my hands on. Then in Mrs. Bream's tenth grade we spent an entire marking period on the "Growing Up Unit." There was a long reading list, but we did not read Lillian Halegua's *The Pearl Bastard,* though it first came out in 1959.[1] (The school library most likely wouldn't have shelved it; in any case, not until the London-based Women's Press brought it out nearly two decades later did I hear of it.) We read *The Catcher in the Rye, A Separate Peace, Huckleberry Finn,* and numerous "boys' books" in which childhood is a newly abandoned but already treasured homeland, adulthood—an unknown but compelling frontier, and the in-between—a sometimes painful but more often bittersweet adventure, full of sacred pacts and solemn rituals.

Frankie McGuire's story has none of this. Her childhood simply vanishes; perhaps it never existed at all.

> The doctor said I was too young and I should [. . .] start my life over.
>
> There was nothing to start over. (95)

As for adulthood, the grown women in Frankie's life do little to recommend that state. She learns from her mother, who cannot enjoy even an outing to the ocean:

> Ma said it was no picnic for her with the looking after all the kids and wiping their noses and packing the lunch and counting us all the day. (19-20)

And she learns from Willie, proprietor of Montauk's Wailing Whale Motel who takes Frankie in and, in her own way, mothers her:

> She said, "Everybody thinks it's all pure gravy and so did I but now I know. It's no picnic. Having a motel is no great picnic." (68)

Childhood is non-existent, the alternative "no picnic," and in between come isolation and brutality. Frankie is raped on the motel's "private beach":

> I could not breathe for the heaviness, pushing, pushing against the heaviness.
>
> I tried to say I was not cold or say get off or scream but his mouth was there and his tongue would not let the words come out. Knees pushing against knees, hands beneath my shirt, grabbing, pulling, mauling on my pants, tearing.
>
> It was like the sea that knocked me off my feet. It was like the sea that surged and pounded and broke in and out in waves. Pushed down drowning in this sea. Burning, hurting with the power of this sea. (43)

Here is the moment when a reviewer might remark that 'the author treats this delicate subject with warmth and humor and poetic vision'; in fact, a blurb to this effect faces the book's title page. And it is not entirely untrue. But I was disturbed by this account of a rape which is never called rape, by a rapist who is abstracted, whose brutality is mitigated by rhythmic language and an extended simile. I can believe that a woman might assimilate the horrifying experience in this way. I considered whether this kind of account might actually render it more chilling. But still, I wanted Frankie to cry out. I wanted her to scream RAPE!

As I read on, I felt more keenly the fact that she could not cry out, that "his tongue would not let the words come out." Frankie is silenced,

The "poetic" voice seems increasingly sad, for it is a voice turned inward. The silencing repeats again and again in Frankie's story. She and Willie talk only indirectly about the rape:

> I said, "I want to tell Ma. I want to tell Jimmy."
>
> She said, "Some things is better not told. [. . .] There's some things that shouldn't be told to family, even to a mother. There's some things a mother doesn't ever want to know." (58)

Frankie knows this lesson by heart; she has grown up with it. Her strength lies in her refusal to live with it, in her dogged efforts to be heard. In this bitter struggle, the entire natural world seems to have conspired to silence her: the rapist, the trusted Willie, the windswept beach that fills her mouth with sand; even animals:

> I know this lady who has about a hundred birds in her house. All you have to do is say you like birds and she takes you in and lets you see all the birds in their cages. She's got all kinds, green and yellow and big and small, singing and talking and one that even meows like a cat. [. . .] she tried to get one to say my name but it didn't. It kept screaming, "Shut up! Shut up!" and I wanted to scream, "Shut up" too, but I didn't. (30)

In *The Pearl Bastard* everyone and everything communicate when they need to—except for Frankie. Her mother may suffer the humiliations our society inflicts on the poor, but she can tell about them:

> I knew about charity and knew about schoolteachery-looking social workers. I knew the way they came and told Ma what to buy and what to spend and Ma had to be nice and speak pleasant until they were out the door and she could say the things that needed saying. (96)

The men who work on Montauk fishing boats get together at the Wailing Whale's bar:

> It was a place for Captain Powers and some of the other boat men to come for awhile and tell the things that needed telling. (78)

Jimmy, "a great talker," manages to tell his secret—that he wants to be sexual with other men. Willie knows "the words to say" (132). Strangers can scream: a woman on a tourist fishing boat never stops "squawking."

The birds sing and talk and meow; even the motel Whale gets to Wail. Only Frankie seems to be cut off, unable to communicate. When during the winter she spends alone in Montauk a blizzard knocks down the telephone lines, there is "no phoning in or out"; Frankie celebrates when the lines are reconnected, but there is no one nearby to call.

When she does try to make contact, Frankie is neither seen nor heard. Not by her parents:

> I said, "Is it old-fashionedness that made Ma forget me so quick?"
>
> Jimmy said that wasn't true. Jimmy said it pained Ma so they weren't allowed to say my name at home. (118)

Not by Jimmy:

> I tried to tell him what really happened but I didn't know how, I tried to tell him [. . .] but Jimmy didn't understand. (120)

Not by the neighbor:

> I tried to say in between her accusing that Jimmy was my brother, but she would not believe. (124)

For me, the most remarkable thing about Halegua's story is that despite the fact that Frankie talks so much, despite the fact that we hear only her voice, her telling, we end up sadly convinced that Frankie can't make herself heard, can't say the things she needs to say.

Despite the liveliness of her storytelling, despite its warmth and hum[illegible] and poetic vision, we believe Frankie when she says, at the story's grim end:

> I sit watching. I can only sit and watch the tides come in. I can only sit and watch the water for a sign. I could not say the things that needed saying. [. . .] (136)

Frankie has not been able to say what she needed to, but by creating this silenced character, Halegua has. She has communicated powerfully the feeling so many women have experienced—in growing up, or throughout their lives—of being drowned out, unheard. I am grateful to Halegua (and to The Women's Press) for this moving story, and look forward to discovering her other fiction: a biographical note says that she has written

other novels as well as short stories.[2] It also quotes Halegua, a New Yorker who works in a library, as saying: "I must feel secure in the knowledge that I can feed and clothe myself before I can return to the arts." I hope that the conditions of her life do not silence her for long, for I came away from *The Pearl Bastard* feeling that Halegua can tell us many of the things about women's lives that need telling.

NOTES

[1] *The Pearl Bastard* was originally issued by Braziller, Inc. just two decades ago, in January, 1959. (A British edition was published by Peter Owen, Ltd. two years later.) Sales were disappointing; in the late fifties precious few buyers were willing to walk into a bookstore and pronounce the word "bastard," says Halegua, who twenty years later is working on a novel called *Fornicating Kate.*

The Pearl Bastard was "rediscovered" and became something of a cult book in London when Jill Neville, writing in the London *Sunday Times* (Nov. 19, 1976) listed it as one of a half-dozen out-of-print "Books To Search For." It was subsequently re-issued by The Women's Press, a small press housed in London's East End which publishes a variety of books by women—approximately five titles per year.

[2] Halegua's published writings include the novel *The Priest* (London: Peter Owen Ltd., 1963), which recounts the further adventures of Frankie's brother Jimmy. It is out of print, but is available at the Brooklyn Public Library (and perhaps at other libraries).

GLORIA T. HULL

SOMETIMES I THINK OF MARYLAND by Jodi Braxton.
Sunbury Press, P.O. Box 274, Jerome Ave. Station, Bronx, N.Y. 10468.
1977. 51 pp. $3.00.

TRADITION AND THE TALENT OF JODI BRAXTON

Perhaps the single most useful word to apply to Jodi Braxton and her poetry is *tradition.* That concept allows us to place her work within the contexts which illuminate it and define her as a young black woman poet.

First of all, tradition operates for Jodi Braxton on a personal level. Her ties to her grandmothers and the small-town Maryland soil which nurtured her are strong and vital, constituting, as she says, "the source of my artistic consciousness and my personal strength." This is a black family/tribal connection—specifically a matrilineal one—which resonates back even to Africa. The book is dedicated to "the Spirit of my Grandmother," and the first section of poems, "Maryland," delves deeply to these familial and regional roots. In "Black Sheba," Braxton addresses her great great grandmother who worked voodoo, "lived in a tar shack in Bladensberg [Md.] " and "pushed a baby carriage/ full of snakes/ down the road":

> you's a black queen Sheba
> great black great grandmom
> i love the you
> that works in my flesh
> African woman, i love you
> yeah, and i know you be giving me strength (3)

This personal level of tradition naturally and inevitably widens to include a folk literary tradition. The women in Braxton's family—in true black folk fashion—told her tales, the cadences of which sound clearly in both the content and form of her work. She frankly acknowledges this source by including a section of "Afro-American Folk Poetry," her transcriptions of traditional folk poems. These "songs with reference to Hoodoo,"[1] consist of "The Devil Will Have You," a days-of-the-week

Copyright©1979 by Gloria T. Hull.

chant, "Hoo-Dooism," a long conjure recipe,[2] and "Pizen," a revenge song which concludes:

> You beat me an' you kick me an' you black my eyes,
> I'm gonna take dis butcher knife an' hew you down to my size.
> You mark my words, my name is Lou,
> You mind out what I say. I'm goin' to pizen you. (14)

A third heritage to which Jodi Braxton belongs is the black female literary tradition, a tradition which extends the folk lineage into the area of formal belles-lettres. Hence, the outstanding fitness of having the volume be introduced by Gwendolyn Brooks, who is herself a pillar of that tradition and one of Braxton's literary foremothers. (In fact, she suggests the older poet in her love of word play, rich verbal ambiguity, and ability to write inscrutable but effective poems.) Like her ancestors—from Phillis Wheatley on down—when Braxton works from this tradition, that is, when she most consciously draws on its norms and ways, she also becomes a part of the whole Western-English poetic culture. This, too, shows in her writing—for example, in her vocabulary, classical allusions (notably to Pegasus and the phoenix, which contribute to the theme and imagery of rising which pervade her poetry), and the crafty, sophisticated form she gives to a poem like "In Case You Forget":

> A spectacle of evening color
> Binds me to you
>
> Tender I touch the teasing tan
> Slick glimmer of perspiration
>
> I like you when you sweat (36)

Very wisely, Braxton realizes that the phases of all these traditions are not isolated, discrete segments, but aspects of a continuous, self-rejuvenating cycle. Or, as she states in the black-blues idiom which she sometimes uses, Braxton knows that what goes around comes around. Her "Poem on Turning Around" best illustrates this knowledge. In it, generations of women are mixed and interchangeable:

> a wrinkled old woman speaks
> out to her mother
> in the voice of a baby
> the listener calls her grandmom
> not daughter
> and cannot recognize the birthmark
> the image of one she has never seen
> as manifest in walnut face
> the smile the hands of youth (31)

In the same poem, "seasons pass," crescendoing "each new birth/ each passing festival/ of juba, boogey and bop." All three dances are simply different manifestations of the same spirit, just as the rock song writer of "Full Moon: Chanson" is a contemporary conjure-fixing hoodooist.

Yet, like every good link of any tradition, Jodi Braxton lengthens the chain of which she is a part. (Otherwise, what would happen to process/growth/progress?) She is not her great grandmother outlasting slavery, or her great great grandmomma pushing the snake-filled carriage, nor even the grandmother who raised her—but a young black woman who lived the 1960's and 70's and writes the changes and conditions which they wrought in the language of a new day:

> who will survive America?
>
> who will survive neo-colonialism
> who will survive default
> urban renewal
> unemployment
> police violence
> piss poor education
> and smack?
>
> In America, who will survive?
> Who will hold the dream
> the vision of the King?
>
> ("Poem on Turning Around," 32)

Concomitantly, Braxton must fashion for herself her own female rituals and forms for renewal, reminiscent though they be of native American rites and her ancestral snakes. In "Conversion," she enters a swamp, unafraid, to experience rebirth,

> to burn my clothes
> to make me a cover
> of snakeskin and prayer
>
> an altar in the wood (51)

Also relevant here is an aspect of the gutsy "womanness" which Gwendolyn Brooks admires in Braxton's poetry—her woman-identified love poems. Even though Braxton does not consider herself a lesbian feminist poet, the female references in these poems are unmistakable to anyone who reads them carefully and sensitively. Witness:

> morning is a salt water
> dance of coming

from your thighs
(they ripple like some porto novo
seaside walking rite)

and i will be there
to drink you fertile rainbow nectars
papaya and coconut

i will drink from the waves (40)

This is sensuous, womanly imagery where even the poem's title, "Home: Sea to Sea," carries traditional female symbolism. These woman-identified poems are among her most successful, ranking up high with the Maryland poems in authenticity of experience, fresh, strong expression, and emotive force.

Jodi Braxton is a talented poet—a young one. And sometimes this, her first published volume, betrays her as such: trendy subjects, thin philosophizing, mild theatricality, occasional over-reliance on descriptive cataloguing, and unsureness about speaking all the truths of her life and experience. However, these tendencies are amply balanced by her many excellent qualities. With added maturity, Braxton will certainly develop into an even finer poet and take her rightful place among all those black women/writers—both folk and formal—whose existences she helps to glorify.

NOTES

[1] Hoodoo: "a folk magic belief of West African origins that was virtually a secular religion" for Afro-Americans, especially slaves. (From Braxton's introduction to this section, p. 11.)

[2] Conjure recipe: a ritualistic formula—either a concoction and/or procedure—used for casting a hoodoo spell. G.T.H.

ELLY BULKIN

TAKE ONE BLOOD RED ROSE: POEMS
by Mary Joan Coleman. West End Press, Box 697, Cambridge, MA. 02139. 1978. 48 pp. $2.00.

Mary Joan Coleman is a survivor. Of Appalachian heritage, she writes of "growing up on the backroads of America, alone and broke on urban streets, plagued by fear and alienation, back home in the coal rush era sifting through remnants of [her] past" ("Biographical Statement"). In *Take One Blood Red Rose,* her first book of poems, she bears witness to the "spirit of endurance" that characterizes her own life and those of the other working-class people about whom she writes.

Dedicating her poems "to the survival of dignity and hope in the lives of working class people in this inhumane society," she writes out of an experience that has too often remained unspoken. Visually descriptive, the poems are grounded in the natural imagery of Appalachia. Each of the book's 44 poems is a long sentence of less than a page, which relies on line breaks to augment visually the images and colloquial speech rhythms. Each poem is self-contained, ending with a few lines that pull it together with an image or a simple statement, sometimes direct, sometimes ironic, most often incorporating an image from earlier in the poem. Most frequently the concrete individual situations and people she describes make a statement that is personally moving and poetically and politically effective.

Coleman keeps alive in her poetry a history that has been passed on to her orally. In "Catch the Blue Hours," she writes:

> we pay memorial to those whose breath sank
> into these tired walls years and years
> until the plaster exhales the scents of their names
> as warm, soft vapors; not letters etched in stone
> we talk of them and the decadent house
> straightens its slumped spine. . . .

Where a history has been silenced, she sings it:

Copyright©1979 by Elly Bulkin.

He was rocking
his right side dangled like a slack scarecrow
where the kettlebottom caught him
in the roof fall at the Lex mine
His voice was like the rush of raw water
down the Floyd County Kentucky hillsides
where he picked the banjo when he was young
and sang sassafrass ballads and alum blues
Night and day he screamed out wild poems
which grew inside him like tangled thickets
of bitter rooted mountain laurel
Shut up in Spencer State Asylum in 1925
they never sent the body home
said he died of natural causes. . . .

("Floyd Coleman, My Grandfather")

Where it has been told over and over, she puts it down on the page:

tell me again of your father who lost family and land
as lone Union soldier of five Southern sons,
tell me of your mother's fugitive father
who climbed the mountains to escape
the deadly march to Oklahoma,
tell me again of your marches and blacklistings,
how you never signed a yeller dog contract
old man of leather, tobacco, earth and flannel
once I held up oak saplings in the sun
you skinned down to bridge a mountain stream;
we are still working together
you bared your history and held it up to the light
now I am laying a bridge back to you.

("Grandfather")

Where her own history touches on public events, men are the visible actors. She shares a legacy of labor struggles and poverty with men like Noah Totten, who held "his spine scotch gentry straight/as he had in the terrorized days of union battles" when "he dug into the black wombs of the mines" ("Noah Totten"). While not writing out of a woman-identified, feminist perspective, Coleman is acutely aware of her link to the women of her family. She recalls especially her "unpardoned grandmother," hated by Coleman's father, with "her coal chunk eyes/from which mine are chiseled," "her root-like fingers in my hair/burrowing into my future" ("Wild Rose"). She recalls too her mother's surviving her father's physically violent rages.

She writes warmly of other women she knows, all of whom have marginal economic existences as waitresses, wives, welfare mothers, of-

fice workers. In "Another Kind of Loving," she remembers positively the woman in Washington, D.C., with whom she had a relationship, certainly intimate, perhaps sexual:

> not the nostalgic dream of the two figures
> watercolored on the garden of memory valentine
> which pales inside a box of old letters;
> tonight the lights may still haunt you,
> I rock you hundreds of miles
> light years away. . . .

Coleman is courageous in writing and acting out of her own emotions and perceptions, regardless of external pressures. She describes, for example, in "The Bartered Treasure," the social worker's weekly visits before her son's birth "with questions of income and housing" and the hospital clerk asking about her "plans to remain unwed." Her final reply to the welfare worker's attempt to let her baby boy be adopted by a Charleston doctor and his wife is a firm " 'he needs me', " no long explanation, no self-pity, simply the expressed confidence that things will work out.

She sees her class, which marks her as potential prey even as she is giving birth to a child, as integral to the experience of poor people, both women and men. In "Survivor," she writes:

> I have been sick forever, five years old
> my whimpers wrapped in gauze and ether
> winters of strep, last minute trips to the doctor
> the desperation of people who can't pay their bills;
> when I was ten, my skin waxed yellow
> we had meat once a month, drank canned milk
> no one sent a Care package, but on Halloween
> when I lay parched with scarlet fever
> town children knocked, "trick or treat for UNICEF"
> The Korean urologist who diagnosed the disease
> scolded me at twenty-five for years of damage,
> he told me once about his family's wealth lost in Seoul
> the riches of his childhood destroyed unjustly in the war,
> he told me Americans had never seen real poverty;
> every morning I wake tired, feel my shrunken kidneys
> like slack balloons from which my life seeps slowly. . . .

Elsewhere, Coleman writes of Curtis Sanders' lying in a West Virginia veterans' hospital ("Humpty Dumpty") and of a "small-town Kentucky boy" whom she loves in Washington, limping on a half-foot ("Preston"). Her concrete descriptions of them underscore one part of the toll taken by the Vietnam War. Coleman's men have only the comparatively

limited options of the poor: without access to student deferments, they are picked off one-by-one by the draft or they enlist to escape black lung disease and other occupational hazards in the mines. Within that framework, the Vietnam veterans she describes are victims akin to the dead miners in "Post Scotia Explosion Fatality": " 'they went down there and worked for their pay,/not askin' no questions. . . .' "

Still, she implies by the placement of "Sweet Child of Hunger" across the page from this mine disaster poem (and right after "Humpty Dumpty") that these men, like her, are far better off than many people with more economic advantages. The "Sweet Child" is a drifting 31-year-old student connected to his parents only by the checks they send from Miami and suffering from a "denial" much crueler than the very "real hungers" in the poet's own past.

"Hope," Coleman writes in her "Biographical Statement," "is one blood red rose." Even amid poems about death and depression, that strain emerges as dominant. In "D.C. Working Girl Lonesome," she remembers "the pink surprise of a Cherokee rose/jumping out of green brier patches." A mine foreman speaks of the voices he hears of men killed in a mining disaster:

> "and it's flowers they cry for—
> blue violets makin' tender eyes in spring moss;
> pine needles shinin' like green catfish bones
> while summer rainbow slip through the silver minnow creek;
> they cry out for ripe apple soft yellow leaves
> cracklin' under grey squirrel feet,
> the ash scent of chilly evenin' campfires. . . ."
>
> ("Post Scotia Explosion Fatality")

When she draws on images from outside this natural context, the contrast is startling and effective. A short poem that describes how her son is simultaneously hurt and fascinated by "the beauty of the stone" on a "rutted hillside" ends:

> I clutch his hands, remembering
> how Van Gogh bled
> on the dirty Dutch street
> when the jagged exquisite stars
> cut his eyes.
>
> ("Afternoon in a Blind Alley")

She concludes a poem about her Washington apartment building, overcrowded, roach-infested, filled with the cries of an alcoholic man abusing

a small boy: "and the crazy woman in number seven/played Dracula movie overtures/on her off-key organ" ("Charlotte Street Blues").

In other instances, when Coleman moves away from what she knows most intimately, her poems falter. When she uses a forced extended metaphor in "I Am the Caught Bear" or when she speaks broadly of the repeatedly destructive actions of the American government ("your castle cooled to a mound of coagulated glue") in "Poem from a Mad American's Journal," her poetry is at its least effective. At other times, she takes an image that is initially effective and re-works it too self-consciously. In one heterosexual love poem she writes first: "I miss your strong steamed voice/rising from the coffee in your eyes," but then overdoes it at the end of the poem: "I stumble, afraid of the dark/startled by midnight echoes of a coffee-eyed voice" ("I Want You To Know, If It's Not Too Late"). The unevenness is most unfortunate in poems that are otherwise moving. "Survivor," for example, so powerful in its precise description of Coleman's childhood illnesses and malnutrition, ends on a weakly abstract note: "I fight off the oppression of the country club doctors/and I struggle to reach the sun" that undercuts the impact and implicit political statement in its earlier lines.

Yet even as I regret its ending, the poem stays with me, a distinct entity not to be confused with any other I have read. In that it is like a great many of Coleman's poems. The attainment of an individual—and moving— poetic voice is cause enough for celebration. When that voice belongs to an Appalachian woman whose poetry reflects a range of experience that has too often been neglected in women's writing and publishing, the occasion is particularly noteworthy.

BLANCHE WIESEN COOK

THE NOTEBOOKS THAT EMMA GAVE ME: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A LESBIAN by Kay Van Deurs.
Photographs by Diana Davies. Published by Kady Van Deurs, Box 199, Youngsville, NY 12791. 1978. 179 pp. $5.00.

Who is Kay Van Deurs—and why should we read her book? To begin with, Kay has survived in high style for over 50 years in a world that neither encourages nor expects independent women without male support to survive at all.

Civil rights activist, peace worker, social worker, writer, Peace Corps volunteer, artisan and feminist jeweller—the self-styled "axe maker to the queen"—Kay Van Deurs began life as an admiral's daughter in Alabama. When he returned home after World War II, father and daughter "disagreed about everything. He talked about 'kikes' and 'wops'. He said, 'Go to Russia'. He said it several times. One evening, I said, 'Go to Hell'." (9) And Kay Van Deurs left for New York City to live near her college classmate, her first woman lover.

> We were so closety that although we were lovers. . .
> we did not live together. Because we didnt want
> anybody to know. We didnt know any other lesbians.
> I thought we were the only lesbians in New York City. (9)

Poor, isolated, in and out of love with women in an alien and lonely environment, Kay Van Deurs began to feel crazy. She tried to commit suicide. When she sought help, her therapist sent her to "an asylum." It was the 1950's; the height of McCarthyism. Scorn for women, fear of difference, hatred for nonconformity rendered invisible whatever support may have been around. Lesbian feminist therapists were nowhere to be found. To protect her from herself, hospital attendants stripped Kay of anything that might be used to kill, including her kotex belt. When she was threatened with shock therapy which she had noticed had been knocking women's teeth out, Kay appealed to her father to get her out. He took her to a fancy Johns Hopkins University psychiatrist who recommended removal to her parents' home, isolation from her friends,

Copyright© 1979 by Blanche Wiesen Cook.

and psychiatric treatment to cure her of her proclivities—five times a week. Kay Van Deurs returned to New York. "It was months. . . before I felt any emotion again." Then one day she "saw sun shining on a red brick. . ." (13).

Over the next thirty years Kay Van Deurs packed a lot of joy into a searching, politically engaged and creative life. She founded the Children's Workshop, one of the great craft learning centers of New York City, in 1962. Built on volunteer time and donated materials, the workshop benefited over 500 children. And Kay, "who really had no children," now "had hundreds of children" (44). And she provided more than sturdy tools and mountains of leather and lumber and fabrics and the use of a kiln. In the great nurturing tradition of Lillian Wald's Henry Street Settlement and Jane Addams' Hull House, Kay realized that the children "needed more than tools. They needed tutors, doctors, dentists, and we found a few. They needed coats in winter and I did find enough. They needed everything and I could not get it for them. . . ." (45).

In 1965 at the age of 38, Kay Van Deurs joined the Peace Corps. Her age, her radical politics and her pacifist activities were well known. But "they couldnt prove I was queer. I was never open and honest about being a lesbian in those days. I wore dresses with ruffles to conceal the fact that I fell in love with women" (65). In Panama Kay Van Deurs remained loyal to her own visions—despite the bureaucratic rigidities of the Peace Corps, North America's newest volunteer gimmick attached so crudely to its foreign aid program. She remained so loyal to her politics that the United States ambassador complained to Kay's director that she was seen "sitting with a line of neighbors, holding signs when President Robles came to the neighborhood. The signs said, in Spanish, 'ONE YEAR OF MUD AND PROMISES. NOW WE WANT STREETS' " (89).

It was that kind of commitment to activism that had inspired so many volunteers to join the Peace Corps in the first place. But by 1967 Kay's group was the last urban program to survive a foreign economic policy that came to rely entirely on military assistance. She returned to New York in 1969; struggled to make money; drove a taxi; crafted bold jewelry and "came out of the closet." 1969 was a time of rapid changes in women's consciousness. There were lesbian dances and meetings. Betty Friedan insisted that New York City NOW purge the lesbians who, she declared, would destroy the women's movement. Kay Van Deurs went to West Virginia to investigate and protest a vast mining disaster in Pittston-owned mining communities (see 98-104); she worked against the war in Vietnam; she dealt with the personal perils of monogamy and

the self-destructiveness of jealousy. She became a feminist. "Not all lesbians are feminists, yet" (171), she wrote. But the revolution has begun.

Kay Van Deurs has led a vigorous and inspiring life: caring, perceptive and courageous. Yet her book—unwanted by commercial publishers who undoubtedly failed to see the value of a book about an unknown lesbian that boasts neither revealing gossip nor thrilling sexual detail, as well as by the few existing feminist presses which might have been interested in such a project—is self-published.

It is an unconventional book, neither fiction nor standard autobiography. Filled with a mixture of narrative passages, fragments of letters, and journal entries, it is charmingly written—occasionally too charming, as in contrived. This seems particularly true in the last section of the book where Kay Van Deurs includes repetitive correspondence of little general interest, such as letters of justification for having written this book, and for its style. Unfortunately, some of these tend to trivialize the process of her good and important work. It does, of course, matter not only that we write, but how we write—how we communicate with each other.

And Kay Van Deurs is delightful when she is describing herself, with a wry or mellow humor: "I am magnificent now: all gouged with age and suffering and endurance and strength—most exciting and improbable. . . . Any intelligent person (and you are always brilliant) would love me" (164). She is at her best when she is describing her activities for peace and freedom and social change; her commitment to the Children's Workshop:

> In the beginning, before I learned how to hand out supplies fast enough, or if I had to close to beg for supplies or money or space (. . . . At churches, "I have 180 children, and they have no coats. Can you help me?" At Goodwill Industries, "I need wheels—skate wheels, wagon wheels, any wheels." They gave me hundreds.). . . .
>
> Nobody borrowed the books. Almost everybody stole the tools. So we agreed that everybody could borrow the tools. We dipped tool handles into red paint and when all the tools were gone, I'd say, "All the tools are out. Why don't some of you go find them." Somebody would say, "They're under the bathtub in Charlie's kitchen." "So go get them." "I can't. He's big." So a bunch of boys would go and bring back tools. (41-42)

Kay Van Deurs ends her book with an angry letter to Holly Near. The singer seemed to Kay to be preaching down to her audience, and to be "coming from some kind of Marxist male left." Kay Van Deurs explains in the letter that she has arrived to feminism from "some kind of pacifist male left" and is "really angry that the male left is sexist." Van Deurs concludes: "Feminism is not necessary to marxism and marxism is not necessary to feminism. Marxism is about capitalism, and feminism is about patriarchy. . . . And patriarchy is my enemy because I am a woman. . . ." (178).

I was surprised by this letter, disappointed that Kay Van Deurs felt it necessary to introduce it at the very end of her book, without context and with no place to go. While such political thinking is hardly a major focus of the book, the placement of this letter gives it a weight it might not otherwise have. If I were to write a letter to Kay—the kind of letter she wrote to Holly and to so many others throughout her book—I would say:

> Dear Kay—
>
> Thank you for writing for us the gift of your book. It is clear-eyed, delightful and always absorbing. Except at the end—where you start talking about how you are not a writer and I have been reading for hours the fine book you have just written.
>
> Now about our political future. Marxism and feminism are indeed two separate things. And they do not AUTOMATICALLY go together. But socialism and feminism NEED each other, desperately and urgently. To "smash patriarchy" without changing our economic environment is to modify the lives of rich and privileged women: women who have no need to worry about hunger, unemployment, housing conditions. Then, to have a socialist revolution without feminism does little to free women of double-job toil, or emotional slavery. So I always say that revolution is a process and not an event, and that to see women as independent and bold and comfortable and creative—all the things your book inspired us to see as possible—is to commit ourselves to a program that combines socialism with feminism.
>
> Yours with admiration, and hope—
>
> Blanche

LIZ HESS

THE MAIMIE PAPERS, edited by Ruth Rosen and Sue Davidson. The Feminist Press, Box 334, Old Westbury, New York. 11568. 1977. 439 pp. $6.95.

Never prejudge a book by its cover blurb. This one informs us that these letters, written from 1910 to 1922, to Fanny Howe, a rich Boston matron, were authored by a "Jewish prostitute." This emphasis on labels is misleading, for the interest of the book lies neither in the sensational aspects of Maimie's former profession (which are never mentioned), nor in the class difference between the correspondents (which quickly seems to dissolve). What the letters do provide is a direct insight into the mind of an amazing woman.

Fortunately for posterity, Maimie modestly declined Fanny's suggestion that she write an autobiography. In a formal literary work she would have had to please the reader; and Maimie, so often an unwilling object of charity, hated to have to please anyone. Here she writes spontaneously to her "other self" and she has no need to calculate the effect of her words. The letters to Fanny are a kind of substitute for the impulsive train ride which Maimie, as a woman, could never take. She writes:

> I wish I was born a man. I know what I'd do this morning. I'd button up my coat and jump on the tail end of a train and steal a ride to wherever it was going—and then when I'd get there, I'd stop to consider "What's next?" (50)

Bemoaning the limiting circumstances of her life, she concludes bitterly: "Whatever I do will have to be regular and thought out and I despise that" (60). At least she found freedom at her desk, usually late at night, when she wrote to her "dear, dear Friend."

The Maimie Papers are so unstructured in form and content that they are an immense repository of information, hospitable to many types of interpreters. The reader becomes the organizer of themes and, in a sense, the novelist. Most reviewers have rated *Maimie* on a sociological and historical scale. The "slice of life" immediacy of the work compels them to catalogue its obvious topics (the working woman; the prostitute; family, class, and sexual politics, etc.) and to treat it as a valuable source of information on the period. Such scholarly analyses are valid (although

Copyright©1979 by Liz Hess.

they would astonish Maimie), but incomplete and even unfair to the spirit of the letters. To get to know Maimie is the best reason to read the book, and to be her novelist, her interpreter, is the most exciting goal for the reader.

The society of her time was Maimie's worst enemy; her portrait of that society should not now be allowed to obscure her image as an individualist. Maimie was a strong woman who lived in a time which denied the existence of the breed, except in relation to men. The autonomous, upwardly mobile woman was an unknown quantity in the newly industrialized society. Being invisible, her type of independent woman was undefined; and as a result, Maimie herself was only intermittently aware of being anything other than "peculiar." Unlike those of her modern-day equivalent, her frustrations were not focused enough to be constantly aggravated by anger and a sense of martyrdom. Her plaintive "I am an outsider" is uttered as a sad fact of her life, not as a rallying cry in a battle with society for acceptance. This book qualifies for the ultimate compliment of male reviewers: it is not a feminist tract. It is something much better, for feminist readers can apply a special focus to Maimie's story. Her epic courage is a magnified version of our own.

While still in her teens, she had tried all three options open to women in the early years of the century: slave labor, "the sporting life," and marriage. At the age of thirteen, the death of her father forced her to quit school and work as a shopgirl. Her ungrateful family declared her "wayward" when she experimented with romance, and they had her sent to a reformatory for a year. After her release she spent the next four years in Boston with a lover and worked as a nude model and actress. She then married a respectable but weak laborer who was chronically unemployed. She secretly took up professional "dating," and enjoyed a brief period of unaccustomed prosperity until she was stricken with an unnamed disease, probably syphilis, and had to have an eye removed. A series of operations in a charity hospital led to morphine addiction. It was during her rehabilitation period that a concerned social worker gave her name to Fanny Howe.

During the early years of the correspondence, we witness Maimie's struggle not to "go back" to a life which at least offered material comforts. In a moment of rebellion, she writes:

> I don't propose to get up at 6:30 to be at work at 8:00 and work in a close, stuffy room with people I despise, until dark, for $6.00 or $7.00 a week! When I could, just by phoning, spend an afternoon with some

> congenial person and in the end have more than a week's work could pay me. Doesn't that sound ugly—and it feels ugly—but they are my thoughts. (12)

The desire for a living wage was as much a question of pride as of necessity: "When I have some money, I feel independent, and naturally I walk and act differently" (18). Her decision to lead an "honest" life forced her to accept endless personal humiliations as well as the usual frustrations of poverty. Despite a hard-won secretarial diploma, for example, she found that no office would hire a woman with an (unaesthetic) eyepatch.

Addressing envelopes was one way she had to earn money independently until she started her own short-lived business in Canada. A new set of problems arose when Maimie finally realized her dream of opening an informal center for wayward girls which was subsidized by contributions. This project collapsed when she remarried and was thus considered to have no further need of assistance. The correspondence then ends, and nothing more is known of her life. Yet the coda of this incredible saga of courage is full of hope for the future. Maimie expresses her desire to return to school, and her last words to Fanny are: "I know what I have yet to know" (416).

Many women endure economic hardships, but not all come out of the ordeal with their spirit intact. The secret of Maimie's survival is never defined, but it is there, like a leitmotif, in the letters. She grew to be what we would now call a woman-identified woman. As her involvement with women grows, the men in her life are treated as fixed quantities (the cruel brother, the pious social worker, the kind but ineffectual lover/husband), and she devotes little space to analyzing them. Her thoughts and actions, detailed in the letters, are centered on her own kind.

This was Maimie's first correspondence with a woman, and in the early letters we see the hesitations of the neophyte in such friendships. Maimie had always related exclusively to men, and men must be pleased: ". . . if you were a man, my fingers would make my pen write things that I never really felt" (4). She is hopeful but uneasy: "I always feel I am misunderstood by women" (4). In the next letter: "I love women—that is, I would like to have women friends—but I can't have; or rather, I couldn't have" (10). She goes on to explain that she had always avoided the company of "bad" women, and that the "good" ones invariably shunned her when they discovered her past: "I never trusted another woman. [. . .] To you I tell the real things" (49). Her relationship with Fanny is enough to change her attitude completely, however, and the

"problem" of relating to women promptly disappears. Later, when her life is devoted to the rehabilitation of "fallen girls," she explains why she does not discipline her charges: "I hope I have been able to make you understand about Stella. I never permit myself to feel anything toward her but the love 'Maimie' never got in her youth, except from men, for short periods—and she [Maimie] was always hungry for a woman's love" (276).

Without access to Fanny's letters, it is difficult to explain the instant and continuing rapport between two people of such different circumstances. We can only speculate on the cause of this phenomenon, but the effect of it is clear: Maimie's life was changed in many ways by Fanny's support. Crediting her new friend with her reform, she writes: "As yet I have stayed clean and decent. . ., and not for any object or purpose—just to be honest with you" (7). In her euphoria she cries: "I worship you and will prove it" (43). Yet this is not heroine-worship, with the older, respectable woman setting an example for the young woman-with-a-past. There is no patronizing involved. Maimie writes: "You always make me feel important" (63) and "You are one and the same as me" (84) and "My dear, dear Friend, I just came in and read your letter. . . I love you so much tonight. You make me feel so much at ease" (24). The ease in the relationship remained constant throughout the twelve-year correspondence, and Maimie never hesitated to write about the "real things." No detail was too small, no thought too shocking, no story too long to relate to her friend.

The content of the letters is often mundane, but the reader never skips a single line. Maimie complained that she was "hampered by small worries and needs." Indeed, on one level her story is a financial Perils of Pauline, with poverty as the villain and a heroine who can never let down her guard. Here she and her partner have been evicted from the rented office:

> Just think, we put up $40.00 for partitions, and alterations and repair. True, much of it we can lug away with us—but what if we don't need it? This really is a staggering blow—for we owe $20.00 yet of that $40.00; and we will have to pay, by the first, the balance. (221)

As the letter continues, we see the effects of this hand-to-mouth existence:

> Frankly, though we are "businesswomen," we are poor as church mice. Though we pay salaries to everyone else, our salaries are generally scraped together. Poor Jean—she has little perspicacity where business is concerned;

> and today, when talking over this new twist in our affairs, she seemed so at sea. As it is, I take only enough each week to pay for room rent and "eats," and not a sou besides. I walk both ways now to work. This is essential now, for a short while, but I have trouble showing Jean why. She pays regular board, $8.00 a week, and she thinks it terrible that I don't let her have $10.00 each week—whereas, so far, I haven't had over $6.00 any week since we are in business. Of course, there is that much more to my credit in the business. It is hard for Jean to see that while we are always terribly strapped for funds, still, we are making the foundation for a business—for each time we meet a payment, we own that much more in valuable machinery. She doesn't worry a rap about the fact that the payments are due and we aren't ready to meet them—for she is Irish, and I am Jewish. Jean thinks everyone will be as easily convinced they don't need the money as she is when I speak to her. It sort of throws all the real responsibility on me. But on the other hand, her absolute knowledge of things I am only guessing at half the time is invaluable. She is kind enough to say my English is good—yet when I finish some work she always finds a *was* where a *were* should have been, or vice versa. (221)

Maimie's skill as a writer (despite an occasional grammar lapse) is most evident in her snapshots of disagreeable characters she must deal with. A typical missionary "cannot look one right in the eyes, and quotes from the Bible at every second word" (345); a pretentious writer had a smile which "seemed to break her face all up, and one felt instinctively that the smile would not just fade away naturally, but that as soon as she released the string, her features would snap back to the same sharp look we saw at the door. And sure enough, it did" (161-62). Her mother "never seems to be anything but froth" (251), and her long-vanished first husband, without Maimie's presence, was "what these artificial diamonds are without the mirrors, black velvet, and the strong electric lights" (51).

Maimie's best subject is herself: a very real diamond of many facets. She admits to being "highhat" and a snob ("They have a liveried servant at the door and I certainly do like airs" [20]), defends her proud ways ("I do not care for his or anyone else's patronage" [34]), but often mocks her own airs:

> You know I appreciate your thought in getting me a dress, especially since it is not given conditionally. Am

> I not awfully particular for a beggar? But I just can't help it. I cannot cringe and fawn on people. (75-6)

Maimie vaunted her cleverness, her "tricky brain," but was unable to use these gifts in the service of hypocrisy. She could not manufacture the religious sentiment necessary to please the smug do-gooders who wished to help her: "Since I had elected to be honest in all my dealings with him, I came out the loser in the end" (73). She is discouraged, once even "outraged" by adversity, but is never humbled by it. At one point she refuses to describe herself as friendless and uneducated, although such a harmless deception would have possibly opened the doors to public employment.

Maimie never loses hope, for her strength is her own creation. Throughout the book she speaks the timeless language of the woman who *must* succeed. Her secretarial studies begin: "When I walk around town now I am a different person, for my future looms up large" (109). She starts her own company by force of imagination:

> I must make this business stick. I will, too, given no handicaps—and everything and everybody must lend themselves to this plan, or get out of my road. (233)

When a world war sabotages her efforts, she prepares to bounce back:

> Conditions over which I have no control have deprived me of my "chance"; but perhaps if I was strong, I'd feel I can make it yet, for I am fairly young. I'm a bit stunned now, but when the clouds lift, I feel sure I'll go at it harder and better than before, don't you?

She resents the defeatists who urge her to return to her family in the United States:

> When a person determines to do a thing that requires strength, it is of course harder when everyone about is offering to break down this determination; and following the lines of least resistance is most natural. (254)

Yet for Maimie, fighting for a good cause was the most natural thing to do. It is after many defeats that she goes on to her moment in the sun. She receives funding to help girls in trouble: "I feel perhaps it was meant for me to help these people as I was helped" (135). The project failed, and Maimie's unique methods of rehabilitating the girls went unnoticed, and would have to be reinvented by others, forty years later, as "peer counseling." Yet despite bad luck and the overwhelming

odds against her success, Maimie did not give in to self-pity. There was still so much to learn, so much more to do, for herself and for others.

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

DIANA BELLESSI, an Argentinian poet, has travelled widely in North and South America; a journal of those travels will be published in Brazil this year by *Versus.* Other work has appeared in journals and newspapers in Mexico, Argentina and Venezuela. She is currently working on Spanish translations of the poetry of DiPrima, Jordan, Levertov, Rich, and Rukeyser.

SANDY BOUCHER has published fiction in *Ms., Sinister Wisdom* and in many other magazines and collections. Her book of short stories is called *Assaults and Rituals.*

ELLY BULKIN's article on teaching lesbian poetry appeared in the December *Radical Teacher.* Co-editor of *Amazon Poetry: An Anthology* of lesbian poetry, she has reviewed women's poetry for several feminist periodicals. She works at the Women's Center of Brooklyn College.

JAN CLAUSEN writes poetry, fiction, and critical prose. Her second book of poems, *Waking at the Bottom of the Dark,* has just been published by Long Haul Press.

MICHELLE CLIFF lives and works in New York City. She is the editor of the recently published book, *The Winner Names the Age: A Collection of Writings by Lillian Smith.*

BLANCHE WIESEN COOK is an historian and journalist. Her most recent work includes *Crystal Eastman on Women and Revolution* (Oxford), and "Female Support Networks and Political Activism: Lillian Wald, Crystal Eastman and Emma Goldman," in *Chrysalis* (No. 3, Autumn 1977). She teaches at John Jay College, CUNY.

BETSY DAMON, visual artist/performer and mother, founded The Feminist Studio (Ithaca, N.Y.) in 1972, and moved to New York in 1976. You can find her hanging out in the streets creating female spaces. She teaches, lectures, and gives workshops on space/energy and performance.

ERIKA DUNCAN is a founder and coordinator of the Women's Salon. She also helped found *The Feminist Review.* Her first novel was *A Wreath of Pale White Roses* (1977); her second, *Those Giants: Let Them Rise!,* is excerpted here. Her "Portraits" of contemporary writers appear in *Book Forum,* where she is a contributing editor. She lives in New York City with her three young daughters.

JEANNE FINLEY currently teaches a writing workshop for the women at the Albany (N.Y.) County Jail and Penitentiary; the workshop is sponsored by Poets and Writers/Mobil Oil Corp. Her recent and forthcoming publications include *Calyx, Centennial Review, Epos,* and *Xanadu.*

ELLEN GARVEY lives in Brooklyn. "Compound Fracture" is her first published piece of fiction.

STEPHANIE GOLDEN is a writer and editor who lives in New York. She is working on a book about homeless women in general, and bag women in particular.

LIZ HESS has quit teaching college in the provinces and is living and working back home in New York City.

GLORIA T. HULL teaches at the University of Delaware. She has published both poetry and literary criticism and is currently completing *Black Women's Studies* (with Patrica Bell Scott and Barbara Smith, The Feminist Press) and *The Diaries of Alice Dunbar-Nelson* (Burt Franklin Publishers).

IRENA KLEPFISZ is the author of *periods of stress,* a collection of poetry. Most recently, a series of her "monkey house" poems appeared in the "Mothers and Daughters" issue of *Frontiers* (Vol. III, No. 2).

SUSAN KRIEGER lives in Albuquerque, and teaches at the University of New Mexico. She is working on a novel and a study of privacy in a small-town lesbian community. Her study of an underground radio station, *Hip Capitalism,* comes out this spring with Sage.

MARILYN KRYSL has published a book of poetry, *Saying Things* (under the name Marilyn Thompson) and has published poems in *The Atlantic, The Nation, The New Republic,* and elsewhere, and short stories in *Foxy Lady, Northwest Review, Frontiers, Seneca Review, Best Little Magazine Fiction 1971* (anthology), and other journals. She teaches creative writing at the University of Colorado in Boulder, and is a reader for *Frontiers.*

LYN LIFSHIN is the editor of *Tangled Vines,* an anthology of mother and daughter poems, and is soliciting women's autobiographical prose for a new book. She is interested in doing readings and workshops and talking about the mother and daughter theme in literature. She is presently working on some short stories, prose poems, and journals.

AUDRE LORDE's latest book of poems is *The Black Unicorn,* 1978, W.W. Norton & Co.

JUDITH McDANIEL is a writer and teacher who lives in very rural upstate New York. With Maureen Brady she has just co-founded a new feminist publishing company, Spinsters, Ink. She is the author of *Reconstituting the World: the Poetry and Vision of Adrienne Rich.*

RIMA SHORE is writing a dissertation on copying clerks in nineteenth-century fiction, and is translating the work of Russian poet Sofya Parnok.

ROBIN SILBERMAN is a native San Franciscan, whose roots stem from Jewishness and cultural feminism. Her poem "Sequel" is from her book *One Part Animal One Part Song.* She is currently looking for a publisher.

BARBARA SMITH lives and writes in Roxbury, Massachusetts. For the past three years she has been involved in a Black feminist group, the *Combahee River Collective.* She was raised by a family of Black women in Cleveland, Ohio. It is to them that she owes her abiding commitment to Black feminism and to exploring the intellectual and spiritual lives of Black women. Her essay "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" appeared in *Conditions: Two.* She will edit *Conditions: Five,* the Black women's issue, with Lorraine Bethel.

BEVERLY SMITH has had visions of writing for most of her life and has made these visions more real this year with the publication of several articles. She is a Black feminist, an unemployed health worker, and lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

JANET STERNBURG's poems most recently appeared in *Tangled Vines* (Beacon Press) and *Ordinary Women.* She has directed the Public Television film on Virginia Woolf and has co-authored a play based on the work of Louise Bogan. Currently she is editing an anthology *The Writer on Her Work* (forthcoming from W.W. Norton), and is working on a manuscript of poems and on a novel.

PAMELA DENYSE TRUNK is an instructor in composition and literature at New York University, and a research assistant at Polytechnic Institute of New York. She has been a member of Amnesty International, and has just completed a Master's degree in Russian Studies at Hunter College.

NELLIE WONG writes poetry from an Asian-American feminist perspective. A collection of her poems, *Dreams in Harrison Railroad Park,* was published by Kelsey St. Press last fall. Her work in progress includes writing a play on marriage.

Small-press books by the contributors to **CONDITIONS**: **FOUR** include:

Sandy Boucher, *Assaults and Rituals,* stories (Mama's Press, 2500 Market Street, Oakland, Ca 94607), 1975, 49 pp., $2.50.

Elly Bulkin, *Amazon Poetry: An Anthology* (ed. with Joan Larkin, Out & Out Books, 476 Second St., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215), 1975, 120 pp., $2.00 plus .35 post. & handl.

Jan Clausen, *After Touch* (Distributed by Long Haul Press, P.O. Box 592, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215), 1975, 76 pp., $2.00 plus .50 post. & handl. Checks payable to Long Haul Press.

————, *Waking at the Bottom of the Dark* (Long Haul Press, P.O. Box 592, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215), 1979, 80 pp., $3.00 + .50 post. & handl.

Erika Duncan, *A Wreath of Pale White Roses* (Magic Circle Press, Weston, Connecticut), 1977, 165 pp. paper, $4.95.

Jeanne Finley and Cynde Gregory, eds., *My Light Comes Shining,* an anthology of women's writing from prison (privately published by a grant from New York State Council on the Arts/Albany City Arts Office. Available free upon request from C. Gregory c/o Albany City Arts Office, 75 New Scotland Ave., Albany, N.Y. 12208), 1978, 47 pp.

Irena Klepfisz, *periods of stress* (Distributed by I. Klepfisz, P.O. Box 56, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215), 64 pp., $2.00 plus .55 post. & handl. Check payable to author.

Lyn Lifshin, *Black Apples* (The Crossing Press, RFD No. 2, Trumansburg, N.Y.), 1973, $2.95.

————, *Glass* ($6.95); *Plymouth Women* ($12.00); *North* ($5.00). Limited editions (Distributed by author, 2142 Appletree Lane, Wiskayowa, N.Y. 12309), 1977-78.

————, *Leaning South* (Red Dust, 218 E. 81st Street, N.Y., N.Y. 10028), 1977, $4.95.

————, *Lips on That Blue Rail* (Lion's Breath Press, 1252 Fifth Ave., San Francisco, Ca. 94122), 1978, $.50.

————, *Offered By Owner,* book and record set (Women's Audio Exchange, 49 W. Main St., Cambridge, N.Y.), 1978, $6.95 complete, $2.95 book only.

————, *Upstate Madonna* (The Crossing Press), 1975, $4.95.

Audre Lorde, *Between Our Selves* (Eidolon Editions, Box 629, Pt. Reyes, Ca.), 1976, 22+ pp., $3.50.

Judith McDaniel, *Reconstituting the World: the Poetry and Vision of Adrienne Rich* (Spinsters, Ink, RD 1, Argyle, N.Y. 12809), 1978, 26 pp., $1.50.

Nellie Wong, *Dreams in Harrison Railroad Park* (Kelsey St. Press, P.O. Box 9015, Berkeley, Ca. 94709), 48 pp., $3.00.

Work by contributors to **CONDITIONS: FOUR** *is included in the following small-press anthologies:*

Amazon Poetry: An Anthology, Elly Bulkin and Joan Larkin, eds. (Out & Out Books), *Jan Clausen, Irena Klepfisz, Audre Lorde.*

Cameos: New Small Press Women Poets, Felice Newman, ed. (Crossing Press, RFD No. 2, Trumansburg, NY), 1978, $4.95. *Jan Clausen.*

Ordinary Women (Ordinary Women, P.O. Box 664, Old Chelsea Station, N.Y., N.Y. 10011), Spring 1978, $3.95. *Janet Sternburg.*

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

Sarah Aldridge, *All True Lovers* (Naiad Press, 7800 Westside Dr., Weatherby Lake, MO. 64152), 282 pp., $6.75.

Paula Gunn Allen, *Coyote's Daylight Trip,* poems (La Confluencia, P.O. Box 409, Albuquerque, NM. 87108), 50 pp., $3.95.

Maureen Brady, *Give Me Your Good Ear,* a novel (Spinsters, Ink, RD1, Argyle, N.Y. 12809), 125 pp., $4.50.

Carrie Carmichael, *Non-Sexist Child-raising* (Beacon Press), 162 pp., $4.95.

Jan Clausen, *Waking at the Bottom of the Dark* (Long Haul Press, P.O. Box 592, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215), 80 pp., $3.00 + .50 postage & handling.

Robert Coles and Jane Hallowell Coles, *Women of Crisis: Lives of Struggle and Hope* (Delacorte Press), 291 pp., $10.95.

Martha P. Cotera, *Diosa y Hembra, The History and Heritage of Chicanas in the U.S.* (Information Systems Development, 1100 E. 8th, Suite 4, Austin, Texas 78702), 202 pp.

Mina Curtiss, *Other People's Letters* (Houghton Mifflin Co.), 243 pp., $9.95.

Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology, The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Beacon Press), 454 pp., $14.95.

Enid Dame, *Interesting Times,* poems (X Press Press/Downtown Poets Co-op, GPO Box 1720, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11202), 35 pp., $1.50.

Jane DeLynn, *Some Do,* a novel (Collier Books), 350 pp., $4.95.

Christiane Fischer, ed., *Let Them Speak for Themselves: Women in the American West 1849-1900* (E.P. Dutton), 346 pp., $5.95.

Gingerlox, *Berrigan,* a novel (Naiad Press), 160 pp., $5.50.

Mary Gordon, *Final Payments,* a novel (Random House), 297 pp., $8.95.

Judy Grahn, *Work of a Common Woman: The Collected Poetry of Judy Grahn, 1964-1977* (Diana Press, 4400 Market St., Oakland, CA. 94608), 158 pp., $8.75.

Janet Campbell Hale, *Custer Lives in Humboldt County,* poems (The Greenfield Review Press, Greenfield Center, N.Y. 12833), 25 pp., $1.00.

Jane Kenyon, *From Room to Room,* poems (Alice James Books, 138 Mt. Auburn Street, Cambridge, MA. 02138), 58 pp., $3.50.

Doris Lessing, *Stories* (Alfred A. Knopf), 626 pp., $15.00.

Judith McDaniel, *Reconstituting the World: the Poetry and Vision of Adrienne Rich* (Spinsters, Ink), 26 pp., $1.50.

June Namia, *First Generation: In the Words of Twentieth-Century Immigrants* (Beacon Press), 230 pp., $12.95.

News from NEASDEN, a Catalog of New Radical Publications (distributed by Carrier Pigeon, 88 Fisher Ave., Boston, MA. 02120), 81 pp., $1.50.

Tillie Olsen, *Silences* (Delacorte Press), 306 pp., $10.95.

Pat Parker, *Movement in Black: The Collected Poetry of Pat Parker, 1961-1978* (Diana Press), 157 pp., $8.75.

Pat Parker, *Woman Slaughter* (Diana Press), 63 pp., $3.00.

Wendy Rose (Chiron Khanshendel), *Hopi Roadrunner Dancing,* poems (The Greenfield Review Press), 38 pp., $2.25.

Barbara Ruth, *from the belly of the Beast* (c/o Ruth, 4494 Arch St., San Diego, CA. 92116), 22 pp., $2.50 + .50 handling.

Barbara Sheen, *Shedevils,* stories (Metis Press, 815 W. Wrightwood, Chicago, IL 60614), 74 pp., $3.50.

Betsy Sholl, *Appalachian Winter,* poems (Alice James Books), 72 pp., $3.50.

Elaine Showalter, ed., *These Modern Women: Autobiographical Essays from the Twenties* (The Feminist Press) Box 334, Old Westbury, N.Y. 11568), 147 pp., $4.95.

Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman* (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich), 265 pp., $3.95.

Wendy Wachtel, *There is a Voice,* a collection of English poetry and photography by Montreal Women (Angle Lightning Press, c/o Wachtel, 17 East 84th St., N.Y., N.Y. 10028), 75 pp., $2.00.

Ruth Whitman, *Tamsen Donner; a woman's journey,* poems (Alice James Books), 75 pp., $3.50.

Barbara Wilson, *Talk and Contact,* stories (The Seal Press, 533-11 East, Seattle, Washington 98102), 74 pp., $3.00.

Michael Wilson, *Salt of the Earth,* screenplay with commentary by Deborah Silverton Rosenfelt (The Feminist Press), 195 pp., $4.95.

The Women's Collage (Enid Dame, Shelley Messing, Arleen Goldberg, Phyllis Stern, Nancy duPlessis, Susan Kronenberg), *Making Contact,* poems (The Voyage Out Press, P.O. Box 142, Ansonia Station, N.Y., N.Y. 10023), 56 pp., $2.00.

Subscribe!

Unlike a book or anthology, a magazine depends, for its financial backbone, on subscriptions, and not on individual sales (though of course those are always appreciated). We want to ensure that *Conditions* will remain self-sufficient, that it will reach as many women as possible. Subscribe now!

NAME______________________________

ADDRESS______________________________

____
zip

Gift subscription for:

NAME______________________________

ADDRESS______________________________

____
zip

Please start my subscription with:

Conditions: One___ Two___ Three___ Four___ Five___

Is this subscription a renewal? No ____ Yes ____

________$8: Individual subscription
(3 issues)

________$6: Special "hardship" rate

________$15, $25, $50: Supporting subscriptions

________$15: Institutional subscription

________$3: Single issue only (specify which)

Forty percent discount to bookstores on orders of 5 or more.

Please make checks payable to:

Conditions
P.O. Box 56
Van Brunt Station
Brooklyn, New York 11215

Gift Subscriptions

If you like *Conditions*, share it! You will be presenting someone with a wonderful gift, and at the same time will continue supporting us. We will enclose a gift card.

Birthdays! **Holidays!** **Anniversaries!**

CONDITIONS

Please send a gift subscription beginning with
Conditions: One___ Two___ Three___ Four___ Five___

Is this subscription a renewal? Yes___ No___

NAME________________________________
ADDRESS______________________________
____
zip

NAME________________________________
ADDRESS______________________________
____
zip

Please enclose card from:
NAME________________________________
ADDRESS______________________________
____
zip

Rates: $8 for individual; $6 "hardship" rate; $15, $25, $50 supporting subscription; $3 individual issue.

Make checks or money orders payable to:

Conditions
P.O. Box 56
Van Brunt Station
Brooklyn, New York 11215

ANNOUNCING CONDITIONS: FIVE
THE BLACK WOMEN'S ISSUE

GUEST EDITED
By
LORRAINE BETHEL and BARBARA SMITH

"De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see."
—Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* 1937

"You ask about 'preoccupations.' I am preoccupied with the spiritual survival, the survival *whole* of my people. But beyond that, I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of black women. . . . For me, black women are the most fascinating creations in the world."
—Alice Walker, in *Interviews With Black Writers,* 1973

"If I could just tell you what it's really like
To live this life of triple jeopardy. . ."
—Linda Tillery & Mary Watkins, "Freedom Time," 1977.*

Conditions: Five will be entirely devoted to writing by Black women. It will be co-edited by Lorraine Bethel and Barbara Smith, and will have a particular emphasis on writing from a Black feminist perspective.

Conditions: Five will include, in part:

POETRY by Becky Birtha, Tia Carstarphen, Michelle T. Clinton, and Pat Parker

SONG LYRICS by Niobeh and Mary Watkins

FICTION/AUTOBIOGRAPHY: "Tar Beach" by Audre Lorde

JOURNAL ENTRY: "On Roses & Thorns" by Janet Singleton

CRITICISM: "The Black Lesbian in American Literature: A Critical Overview" by Ann Allen Shockley

ESSAY: "On Black Feminist Therapy"

REVIEWS of *The Afro-American Woman: Struggles and Images,* ed. by Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn; *The Black Unicorn* by Audre Lorde; *Nappy Edges* by Ntozake Shange; *Womanslaughter* by Pat Parker

Available August, 1979. Individual copies $3.00.

Make checks payable to Conditions, P.O. Box 56, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, New York 11215.

*©1977 Mary Watkins, Linda Tillery (Tuizer Music ASCAP), from *Linda Tillery,* Olivia Records BLF917.
All rights reserved. Used by permission.

CONDITIONS: ONE *IS STILL AVAILABLE*

"The first issue is preciously packed with first-rate writing of varied sorts, and the materials...are singularly important, serious, instructive, and enjoyable, at once. I've told everyone I know about the good news of **Conditions.** "

June Jordan

"... **Conditions** *is an excellent magazine. It explores in considerable depth the theme of women loving women, in language which is varied, fresh and provocative.* "

Mary Jane Lupton *in Women, A Journal of Liberation*

POETRY by Sharon Barba, Ellen Bass, Karen Brodine, Wilmette Brown, Olga Broumas, Enid Dame, Sukey Durham, Polly Joan, Irena Klepfisz, Ana Kowalkowsky, Marina LaPalma, Jacqueline Lapidus, Lorraine Sutton

FICTION by Maureen Brady

JOURNAL by Susan Krieger

FEATURES: "An Interview with Adrienne Rich" by Elly Bulkin; "That Question That Is Our Lives: The Poetry of Susan Sherman" by Jan Clausen; "Radclyffe Hall and the Lesbian Image" by Lillian Faderman and Ann Williams.

REVIEWS: *Battered Wives* by Del Martin and *Scream Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear* by Erin Pizzey (reviewed by Louise Schneider); *Between Our Selves* by Audre Lorde (reviewed by Gloria T. Hull); *Camp Notes and Other Poems* by Mitsuye Yamada (reviewed by Sarah Pratt); *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/ When the Rainbow is Enuf* (poems) and *Sassafras* (a novel) by Ntozake Shange (reviewed by Lynne Reynolds); *In Her Day* by Rita Mae Brown (reviewed by Bernice Mennis); *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* by Alison Colbert (reviewed by Virginia Scott); *Lover* by Bertha Harris (reviewed by Liz Hess); *Twenty-One Love Poems* by Adrienne Rich (reviewed by Rima Shore); *Womenfriends* by Esther Newton and Shirley Walton (reviewed by Anne Gibb and Nan Bauer Maglin).

Individual copies $3.00

Make checks payable to Conditions, P.O. Box 56, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, New York 11215.

CONDITIONS: TWO *IS STILL AVAILABLE*

"Lesbian/feminist writers are undertaking the hard work of creating a tradition of our own, one which could not have been created before our time. I see **Conditions** *as one of the places where this work is being done with seriousness and intelligence."*

Adrienne Rich

"... **Conditions** *contains some of the best writings that this second wave of American feminism is likely to produce. . . . a balance of prose and poetry that works visually as well as intellectually. This is a landmark publication."*

Andrea Chesman *in Big Mama Rag*

POETRY by Georgette Cerrutti, Jan Clausen, Patricia Jones, Melanie Kaye, Sharon Olds, Susan Sherman

FICTION by Jane Rule

JOURNAL by Susan Kronenberg

FEATURES: "An Interview with Adrienne Rich" (Part II) by Elly Bulkin; "Women Without Children/Women Without Families/Women Alone" by Irena Klepfisz; "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" by Barbara Smith.

REVIEWS: Anthologies from *The Ladder* edited by Barbara Grier [Gene Damon] and Colette Reid (reviewed by Liz Hess); *Beginning With O* and *Caritas* by Olga Broumas (reviewed by Judith McDaniel); *Gay American History* by Jonathan Katz (reviewed by Emily Jensen); *Käthe Kollwitz: Woman and Artist* by Martha Kearns (reviewed by Rima Shore); *Letter from an Outlying Province* by Patricia Cumming (reviewed by Inez Martinez); *Portraits of Chinese Women in Revolution* by Agnes Smedley (reviewed by Batya Weinbaum); *Slow Juggling* and *Work Week* by Karen Brodine (reviewed by Susan Goldberg).

Individual copies $3.00

Make checks payable to Conditions, P.O. Box 56, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, New York 11215.

CONDITIONS: THREE *IS STILL AVAILABLE*

"There is no magazine I look forward to more eagerly than **Conditions**. *In each issue, substance that opens up further thought; poetry, fiction, art that exhilarate with a sense of a great blossoming taking place. Already, in the first three issues, my indebtedness is enormous.* **Conditions** *is essential reading."*

Tillie Olsen

"**Conditions** *is highly recommended for academic libraries and is essential for all collections of lesbian/feminist writing."*

Library Journal

POETRY by Enid Dame, Sandra Maria Esteves, Marilyn Hacker, Akua Lezli Hope, Suzanne Juhasz, Marilyn Krysl, Barbara Noda, Sharon Olds, Nellie Wong

PROSE POEMS by Karen Brodine, Michelle Cliff

FICTION by Sally George, Francine Krasno, Alice Walker

ESSAY: "Homophobia and Romantic Love" by Jane Rule

DRAMA by Rima Shore

REVIEWS: *Between Revolutions* by Enid Dame (reviewed by Bernice Mennis); *Child of Myself* and *Pit Stop*, by Pat Parker; *The Poetry of Pat Parker and Judy Grahn: Where Would I Be Without You* (reviewed by Barbara Smith); *Dogmoon* by Rikki Lights (reviewed by Lorraine Bethel); *Making the Park* by Karen Brodine, Patricia Dienstfrey, Marina La Palma, Laura Moriarty, and Rena Rosenwasser (reviewed by Susan Goldberg); *She Who: A Graphic Book of Poems* by Judy Grahn (reviewed by Elly Bulkin); *The True Story of Ida Johnson* by Sharon Riis (reviewed by Irena Klepfisz); *Women on the Breadlines, Harvest, Song for My Time*, and *Rites of Ancient Ripening* by Meridel LeSueur (reviewed by Jan Clausen)

Individual copies $3

Make checks payable to **Conditions**, P.O. Box 56, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, New York 11215.

Submissions

We are interested in manuscripts of POETRY, SHORT FICTION, NOVEL excerpts, DRAMA, and other creative forms (JOURNAL entries, excerpts from CORRESPONDENCE, TRANSLATIONS) as well as CRITICAL ARTICLES on the women's/lesbian movements and institutions, issues involving race, class, age and aspects of lesbian relationships. We welcome REVIEWS and review copies. We are especially committed to publicizing and reviewing women's press publications.

We are concerned that women's/lesbian publications have often failed to reflect the experiences and viewpoints of Third World, working-class, and older women. We want *Conditions* to include work in a variety of styles by both published and unpublished writers of many different backgrounds. We welcome submissions from all women who feel that a commitment to other women is an integral part of their lives.

We are also interested in receiving submissions for covers for *Conditions.* We have no specific preconceptions as to subject matter or theme, and will consider any form appropriate for an 8½" x 5" black and white cover bearing the title of the magazine and issue number. This might be a line drawing or other graphic, a photograph, or a half-tone of a painting, a collage, or sculpture. Please send a *photocopy* and not the original work.

Send manuscripts and art work to:

CONDITIONS
P.O. Box 56
Van Brunt Station
Brooklyn, New York 11215

Conditions: Five will be a special guest-edited issue devoted entirely to writing by Black women. We will begin considering submissions for *Conditions: Six* in late Spring, 1979.

Only manuscripts and photocopies accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope will be returned.

CLASSIFIED ADS – ANNOUNCEMENTS

RECORDS & TAPES BY WOMEN

Free catalog—over 150 reviews—a comprehensive resource. Two stamps appreciated. LADYSLIPPER MUSIC, No. 9CN, P.O. Box 3124, Durham, NC. 27705.

THE GAY AND LESBIAN BLIND ARE OUT AND STRONG

This coalition group of blind lesbians and gay men organized in May of this year out of a need to come together around the circumstances, problems and responsibilities inherent in the double-minority position encountered by blind women and men with same-sex orientation.

The most glaring problem facing us is the inaccessibility of lesbian and gay literature to blind readers. Our solution is a library of book and magazine titles to be recorded on cassette by volunteer readers. The bulk of G.A.L.B. weekly meetings (held in Suite 502 of the Gay and Lesbian Services Center: 110 East 23rd St., N.Y. 10010) centers on this project. Anyone interested in reading for our library or contacting us for any other reason (we encourage sighted visitors at our meetings) may write to the above address or drop by the Center any Sunday afternoon between four and six. We also have a hot-line courtesy of the Gay Switchboard at 212-777-7697. Members of Gay and Lesbian Blind staff this line on Friday and Sunday evenings between six and nine p.m., and messages are taken by Gay Switchboard volunteers at other times.

Blind lesbians and gay men have resolved to fight oppression and prejudice collectively and with the highest possible consciousness, making our double minority into a positive force in the gay and feminist communities.

Lynn Schoenfeld, Treasurer

FUNDRAISER WANTED

Quest: a feminist quarterly (a 501 (C)(3) organization), is looking for a fundraiser who can work on a commissioned basis. In its fifth year, *Quest* is an independent journal publishing feminist theory and political analysis. Join us in a unique work experience. Our only requirement is enthusiasm! Contact: Alexa Freeman, P.O. Box 8843, Washington, D.C. 20003, (202) 293-1347.

PERIODS OF STRESS

POEMS BY IRENA KLEPFISZ

Using various voices and situations, Irena Klepfisz probes the feelings of women trapped by war, by convention, by other human beings. Her poems reflect a special concern for women alone, for their search for a place in society. The settings shift drastically from Europe to America, from city to seashore, from conversations with others to dialogues with oneself.

"Her poems on intimacy with people and the natural world of plants and rocks, and her struggle to find herself in terms of these people and that world are among the best that I have read recently. . . Klepfisz describes the feelings of a woman living on the edges of new perceptions, a woman alone, and defining her needs, her fears, her possibilities."

—Lucille Iverson, *Soho Weekly News*

PERIODS OF STRESS, 64 pp. $2.00 + .35 post. & handl.

Make checks payable to: Irena Klepfisz, P.O. Box 56, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, New York 11215.

sinister wisdom

A Journal of Words and Pictures for the Lesbian Imagination in All Women

". . . a substantial, serious effort to explore all aspects of the lesbian's world. . . . The politics, psychology, aesthetics, etc. of the movement are examined by good to excellent writers. . . . A major contribution and recommended."

—LIBRARY JOURNAL

"Vulnerable, intense, imaginative—the magazine is reminiscent of the best relationships I have known."

—Jackie St. Joan in OUR RIGHT TO LOVE

One Year (4 issues) $7.50
Two Years (8 issues) $13.00
Sample Issue $2.50 + 50¢ postage
(All copies mailed in plain envelope.)

[new address]
Box 30541
Lincoln, Ne. 68503

AVAILABLE NOW FROM
WEST END PRESS

These works of
Meridel Le Sueur

--Harvest (early stories) $2.50
--Song for My Time (later stories) $2.50
--Women on the Breadlines (sketches from the 30s) $1.00
The Girl (novel, 1939) $3.50.

Include 50¢ postage for 3 or more books. Ask for free catalogue from: West End Press, Box 697, Cambridge, MA 02139.

the second wave

a magazine of the ongoing feminist struggle

features
fiction
reviews
poetry
forum
flashes

HELP MAKE A RADICAL DIFFERENCE
SUBSCRIBE NOW

Box 344, Cambridge A,
Cambridge, Ma 02139

individuals - $ 6.00 per volume (four issues)
libraries & institutions - $12.00
overseas surface - $ 8.00

Back issues available for $1.00 each plus 25 ¢ postage.
Send self addressed stamped envelope for free list.

A limited offer of feminist classics.

Until they are gone:

Volumes I and II of Quest: a feminist quarterly, in convenient, attractive, durable box binders for efficient research, easy reference, safekeeping.

Quest articulates and explores feminist issues, in original essays and articles by leading theorists and activists, including:

Charlotte Bunch	Mary Daly
Rita Mae Brown	Z Budapest
Nancy Hartsock	Joanna Russ
Karen Kollias	Bertha Harris
Alice Quinn	Cynthia Washington
Lucia Valeska	Linda Phelps
Sandra Flowers	Jackie St. Joan
Sally Gearhart	Joan Landes

Volume I, 1974-75: Processes of Change;* Money, Fame & Power; Selfhood of Women; Women & Spirituality.

Volume II, 1975-76: Future Visions & Fantasies; Theories of Revolution;* Organizations & Strategies; Leadership.

To order, fill in coupon and send check to: **Quest: a feminist quarterly, P.O. Box 8843, Washington, D.C. 20003.**

☐ Please send Vol. I at $25.00
☐ Please send Vol. II at $25.00
☐ Please send Vol. I & II at $45.00

Name ______________________

Address ______________________

______________ Zip __________

*These issues available only in complete sets of boxed volumes.

Titles available from

MOTHEROOT

WOMEN AND HONOR: Some Notes on Lying
by Adrienne Rich 1.25+.25 p/h

NOTES OF A DAUGHTER
FROM THE OLD COUNTRY
poems by Melanie Perish 1.75+.25 p/h

MOTHER, MAY I
poems by Alma Villanueva 3.00+.50 p/h

!!!ALSO!!!

MOTHEROOT REVIEW of Small Press Books

a quarterly journal dedicated
to women's publications 4.00 year
1.00 copy

Write to:

MOTHEROOT
214 Dewey Street
Pittsburgh, Pa. 15218