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CONDITIONS: TEN

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

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Conditions accepts advertising at the following rates:
CLASSIFIED ADS; *Women's/gay presses and businesses, small presses:* 25 cents per word, 10 word minimum. *Commercial presses:* 50 cents per word, 20 word minimum. DISPLAY ADS: *Women's/gay presses and businesses, and small presses:* Full-page (4½" by 7")–$100; half-page (4½" by 3½")–$50; quarter page (2" by 3½")–$25. Commercial Presses: Full-page–$150; half-page–$75. 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.

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

***Conditions: Ten* was typeset by Diane Lubarsky.**

Distribution Coordinator: Shelley Messing

Cover: "Conditions Ten" by Ann Cammett

TO OUR READERS:

Once again, this issue is out later than we had hoped. After CONDITIONS: NINE appeared, we found ourselves in a major financial crisis. For several months we concentrated on deciding which bills to pay immediately, and which to hold off on. While we continue to receive funding from the New York State Council on the Arts, our application for a National Endowment for the Arts grant was rejected. This grant had, in the past, enabled us to pay contributors and finance a fundraiser, design ads and flyers, do promotional mailings and place ads in other publications. In notifying us of the rejection, one grants committee member commented that one reason for the denial was that the magazine seems to emphasize lesbianism more than literature.

Personal contributions and funding from the Chicago Resource Center have temporarily gotten us back on more solid footing. In addition we received a grant from the Astraea Foundation which will help us increase our outreach to women of color, as readers and contributors. Ultimately, however, the future of the magazine will depend not on outside funding, but on support by our readers and our ability to expand the magazine's circulation.

Collective changes have also slowed down production of this issue. Several collective members have left the magazine: Jewelle Gomez, Carroll Oliver, Mirtha Quintanales and Rima Shore. At the same time, two new members have joined the collective:

Nancy Clarke Otter, (b. 1953, Montgomery, Alabama). A red-diaper baby of predominantly white and protestant ancestry, I grew up mostly in the back of my restless parents' Ford station wagon. I was raised (culturally) white, polite and academic, but I find none of these is incurable. I am a lesbian, singer, word lover, letter and journal writer, quilter, hospital cashier, union agitator and reluctant graduate student in anthropology. I live in Brooklyn, alone after many years of collective households. Sometimes I like it. My ambition is to be alive, every day, one at a time, and to see/feel the connections.

Adrienne Waddy, (b. 1958, Newark, New Jersey). Sassy, "colored", lesbian activist, writer, singer and member of the CONDITIONS collective. Concerned with lesbians asserting their political and cultural identities in every existing medium and in those they will create.

We plan to expand the collective, and have also begun to seek out women who have particular areas of expertise and interest. Thus far,

Ann Cammett-Osirio has joined us as a graphics advisor, and Betty Powell has been working with us as a fundraiser.

Ann Cammett-Osirio (b. 1961, Harlem) is a black, lesbian, feminist warrior whose present cultural battleground is the School of Visual Arts, where she majors in graphic design. She's created images for the Salsa Soul Sisters, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, and the Independent Network Theatre, as well as maintaining her own silkscreen business. Her other interests include an extensive study of Astrology, and a general curiosity about all occult matters.

We are pleased that we now have a CONDITIONS banner which was carried in the August 27th March on Washington. Politics being what they are, we anticipate our banner seeing lots of use in many demonstrations. We are also participating, along with Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, Long Haul Press, IKON Magazine, and Thirteenth Moon, in a series of readings which are part of the Artists' Call Against US Intervention in Central America.

Finally, CONDITIONS depends not just on your financial and moral support, but also on your responses, critical and otherwise. So write us!

Dorothy Allison
Elly Bulkin
Cheryl Clarke
Nancy Clarke Otter
Adrienne Waddy

CONDITIONS: TEN

VOL. III NO. 4 1984

POETRY

FICTION

ESSAYS

REVIEWS

RESPONSE

POETRY

FICTION

ESSAYS

morning coffee: 1945

we are black women, light
as cream, women with black
memories in our genes: that
woman in a ragged shawl
with flat feet and pork-fat
thighs, two generations earlier
was my grandmother walking the
smoking louisiana roads, sun up,
sun down, fifty pounds of laundry
on her head.
in the morning, before the heat
swells from the steaming dirt,
we sit at a kitchen table in the
north, escaped, except for the
hatred in our heart, the
bursting fig she served with cream.
cream-colored women in the north,
taking in the bitter dregs: coffee,
diluted, unlike the coffee
of the woman who
stained the porcelain black.

justice

why is it always white & bland?
i want the lady blinded like a horse
being led through fire. i want her
to walk barefoot over the spines of the dead.
i want her to feel the planet falling off
its bone like a piece of cooked chicken;
then let her lift up her hands & plead innocence.

RAYMINA Y. MAYS

NAOMI AND AVERY

That was Dubrey Walker's girl across the street crying on and waking people up at all hours of the night. It was all around town that all of Dubrey's five girls were crazy and that Dubrey was mainly responsible for their craziness. Folk thought that the sixth girl would have a clear head and a good mind because by the time she was born Dubrey was old, had a bad liver from drinking too much and was demented besides. He wasn't strong enough to influence this sixth child with his bad talk and his cheap wine.

Avery was the child's name and Avery was her mother's name. Folk thought that since Dubrey'd been the one who had insisted on this name at the point of the mother's death during childbirth, something good had come over him. For his wife had been a good woman. He had beat her nearly to death two weeks before she went into labor and Dubrey swore on her deathbed that he'd take care of the child and not do to her what he did to his wife and other daughters. Of course, it was hard for folk to believe all of this because Dubrey did two things well: lie and get drunk. But they wanted to believe.

But Avery was beating on this woman's door in the middle of the night. She looked right crazed, she was so mad.

Hadn't the child come into the world with more good circumstances on her side than her sisters and wasn't she given a good name? Folk believed. Folk hoped for the child. Folk prayed. They talked up Avery's well-being from evening to morning sometimes. Her colds, her scratches, they knew about them. They knew when she was old enough to have her period and they knew when she came on it. They talked about these events into the night sometimes. And in spirit they salved her chest, bandaged her knees with their words, welcomed her into womanhood with their whispers. Folk would say to anybody that they did the best they could by Avery Walker.

But Avery was screaming at this woman who was looking down at her from the upstairs window.

Another important something led folk to believe that Avery wouldn't be like Dubrey and the others. More important than Dubrey being too old and drunk, than their watching the child, which was short of and

better than getting shot for getting in Dubrey's family business, more important was the fact that Avery looked like her mother. Folk thought it was a reasonable myth. Avery looked like her mother. A walk that could have possibly been her own distinctive walk became "the way 'The Ms. Avery' walked."

Even Avery's sisters, Lena, Brey, Donna, and the twins Tess and Teresea believed Avery wouldn't turn out like them. They'd not encourage her one way or the other. They simply believed what folks said. She'd be alright and not crazy. They'd go over to the house when Avery was a little girl and one would float her on a knee and join with the other sisters in cutting up about when they were kids. If one of them had a mind to, she'd comb Avery's hair or pull down her pants to see if she had on clean panties and if not, find some for her to put on, then tell her a story about always wearing clean underwear or being clean in general in case she got hit by a car and had to go to the hospital.

When Avery thought she was old enough to tell her sisters not to come over, she did. They would come anyway and stand over her pots of greens or beans she'd leave simmering while she went to the store. Or they'd spill beer on her homework papers. Once something got over Tess and she ripped up their mother's picture while Avery was out running errands. The picture was all that Avery had and the sisters laughed. From then on Avery met her sisters at the door with Dubrey's shotgun. If they were in the house when she arrived from school, she'd come through the back door and run them out with the shotgun. After a while the sisters stopped trying to come to the house.

As Avery stood under the woman's door and named who she was hating, she called the names of her sisters, too. Avery spoke of being tired. She said she wasn't crazy.

Avery watched the neighbors watch her. She could vaguely hear her sisters taunting her. For the neighbors, she was short on words. For her sisters, she had no words. Her mother was gone and so was the only reminder that she had. Far as Dubrey went in her memory, Avery didn't see him as a father. He was Dubrey Walker, drunk all the time and never was courteous enough to talk directly to her. He talked to the ceiling, or with his eyes closed, to himself. He worked, paid the housenote and got drunk.

Avery tried to cut out the voices and the memories, but she couldn't.

When Avery was ten or eleven, she learned how to ask for money for the bills Dubrey forgot to pay and she would take the bus to town to pay them. When Avery was fifteen or sixteen she would ask around about who she should call for repairs or she learned to do them herself. When she was eighteen, and a graduate from high school, she inherited

the house. One of the few times when Dubrey was sober, he showed Avery the deed to the house, mumbled that Avery's mother wanted the house paid for, and showed Avery that the house belonged to her. Then he left the house for the bar.

Avery had not understood what owning a house meant when she got word from all five sisters at once that someone shot Dubrey while he was drinking at the bar. "Shot him dead," they said over and over, rocking and reeling drunk. Avery remembered making a connection between his death and clean underwear.

The sisters stood outside the door until Avery invited them in. Avery watched them mourn and she mourned, listening to endless stories about Dubrey. The sisters slept sprawled in different locations in the house and Avery had an ambulance take Dubrey's body from the morgue to the Robeson Funeral Home. Two days later, the sisters gathered with some of Dubrey's friends in the funeral parlor, looked at him some, talked to his body some, then drove to the cemetery and watched while he was buried. After this, once in a while, a sister or two would come over to the house to curse Avery about insurance money or curse her about how the house was theirs, too. They'd call her out of her name, calling her Ms. thing or Ms. bitch. They said she was like her mother: stupid and stingy.

When Avery resumed this hard knocking on the woman's door, she began to call everyone's name and she couldn't get into the woman's house. Folk decided she'd completely lost it at this point. How could the girl whose life went on, who was so cared for act like this in public? She'd practically fixed up the house by herself. Folk heard she'd been asking around about college. But what did they know? Avery was alone except for girl friends who'd come over, some staying longer than others. She kept out of sight. If Avery was mowing her lawn or trying to fix one of her storm windows, anybody in the neighborhood knew not to speak but pass on by. She had been alone like this for a year until Anneke, who was upstairs peeking out of her window, moved to the neighborhood.

Anneke had walked right over to where Avery was watering her roses and started talking to her. Folk saw it. Avery invited Anneke in the house and they left some time later talking and laughing. Soon, Avery would even cross the street to Anneke's house and wouldn't leave for days. Avery began to wait on the porch for Anneke's car to pull in the driveway. Just smiling and carrying on when Anneke walked up. Folk saw it, got suspicious and started talking when this happened because there was another woman Avery started talking to. Naomi. Something was wrong in folks' mind because Naomi was crazy. Folk saved this information and they began to recall and drum it up as they stood in Anneke's yard, watching Avery try to beat the door down. They watched Avery

not coming into womanhood as predicted, talking about killing Anneke, talking about love, and bitch this and bitch that, motherfucker this and motherfucker that. She was crazy.

Naomi was standing at the edge of her own lawn watching Avery beat on Anneke's door. Anneke was screaming that she would call the police if Avery didn't go on home. The neighbors, while they didn't like Anneke for befriending Avery, kept commenting about how they wanted to call the police too. In the minutes that they stood watching Avery and thinking about her, they wanted to hate her too, as she had failed them.

Anneke was hanging her head out of her window now screaming, "Did you suddenly become stupid, or were you born that way? Last time I'm going to mess around with a crazy, weakassed woman who shows her feelings in front of every Tom, Dick, and Harry who passes by. Go on home, Avery."

Avery's sisters being drunk and long-winded sat across the street on Avery's porch, shared a bottle of wine and laughed. One of them screamed, "Call the police on the bitch." Avery heard this. She sighed and made a sucking noise as if she was out of breath. A flashlight was shining in her face. When she turned she saw Naomi making her way through the crowd. Avery heard the words "Come with me." Then she remembered.

One day while Avery was standing on her porch, Naomi who hadn't had more than two words to say to her ever, came to her porch and whispered, "When you need me, we gonna both know it." Avery didn't pay too much attention to this at the time because she believed Naomi to be drunk or crazy since two weeks past, her friend died in her house. But now Avery followed Naomi to the house next to hers. She could hear her sisters' laughter. When she made it to the door, she screamed, "Last time!" and followed Naomi into the house.

Naomi let Avery spit out the drunk words. She did not try to calm her. She let her become louder. She waited and she waited. When there was a lull in the one-way conversation, Naomi took Avery's hand and led her through the house, cutting on lights and moving whatnots out of the way with her free hand. Avery found a way to brush past everything anyway. When Avery came to the sofa, she sat and rested her head on a pillow. Naomi began to pace and wondered if her need to talk to Avery was greater than her desire to listen. It had been some days since she had talked to a woman. The last one died in her house.

Folk had shifted from Anneke's lawn to Naomi's when Anneke turned the lights out. They were brewing it up, working with their dislike for Naomi and her friend Fay who died. Fool Naomi had tried to kill

herself over that woman, a woman who she claimed, time and time again, was her cousin. When Fay died, Naomi ran down the street in her bathrobe. She had no shoes on. She had no phone so she had to pound on door after door. By the time the ambulance got there, Fay was gone. While the ambulance people were there, Naomi was locked in the bathroom slitting her wrists. Where it was that Fay had gone when she died, Naomi had tried to go, and since Fay's death had been crazy.

The neighbors were prepared to stay in front of Naomi's house all night. Avery's sisters had gone on home red-eyed from too much wine and as confused as ever, talking about who was at home waiting and being dependent when they had essentially been taken more times than they had been taken care of.

When Avery had calmed herself, she sat up and looked at Naomi. And for some minutes they made eye contact. Neither flinched. They both rarely blinked. Avery began to feel a swelling inside herself. There was a trembling that she couldn't control. She didn't remember tears or what they meant. She only knew that she could not control these and they reminded her of a river. She never took her eyes off Naomi. She watched Naomi's swelling and she watched her river run and wet smiles pushed through the misery of the moment. Avery muttered, "You were right." She broke the silence and the other words flowed. Avery leaned back as she had done after a day's work, when she was in the privacy of her own home or the way she had done when she was with Anneke.

"She did the same kind of lying," Avery continued. "Said there would be nobody else. Said when she saw me standing in my yard– that was it for her. Said it was me. I was the one and she said she knew it. There'd be nobody come along and change how she felt, she said. She was always talking about forever. Big-time lying."

"Seem like folk don't take into account another womun or death. You can't believe forever. Heart attacks got nothing to do with forever," Naomi reasoned.

Avery pulled the bottom of her T-shirt to her face and wiped away the wet.

"You can't live with a womun for twenty years and expect her to leave. My mistake was not knowing. I put her clothes in a pile in the backyard along with everything she gave me. Some jewelry, some letters, a dried rose. Her herbal essence and her birth certificate. I woulda burned everything but I didn't. I got a notion to kill myself and I tried, but not before I put her things back in place."

"Listen," Avery said, "I know. I loved. I used my key to get in her house. I was gonna fix the light switch cause there was a short in it. Then I was gonna light a candle in the bathroom and run bubble bath as we did

sometime. She take a day off to be with a woman I didn't know about. She said only me. Forever."

"There wasn't no warning," said Naomi.

"None whatsoever," finished Avery.

They did not sleep. They talked into the morning. They put emotions in their rightful place. And the anger and the swelling continued throughout.

The neighbors went on home, but not before someone passed the window and said Naomi and Avery had been sitting only so far from each other, as he measured the distance with his hands.

LULA MAE AND GUNNIE B.

When her female goat died, Lula Mae knew something. For as long as she'd been raising goats, nothing of the nature of waking up and finding a dead goat had ever come about. The chow-chow she canned last summer went sour, too. Even a novice at canning chow-chow would hardly ever come up with sour chow-chow. This is not to say that a new one at it couldn't have a host of problems. Bad teacher. Too much of one thing and then another. Tomatoes just a bit too ripe or not the right type of onions. For instance, you could buy onions from Jim's General Store and they'd practically mess up all of your chow-chow, but if you went to Gunny B.'s garden down the road, knew half of what you were doing once you got the onions from her, if you used Liz-up-the-road-from-Gunnie B.'s green peppers instead of talking to Gunnie B. about pepper cause Gunnie B. didn't know nothing nohow about growing no peppers no way, you could get a good batch of chow-chow. Lula Mae'd been making chow-chow and raising female goats for some thirty years, so she knew what she was talking about in terms of this situation.

If you asked Gunnie B. about this, however, she'd say Lula Mae was lying and creating a mysterious situation because everybody knew that the goat was as old as anybody's god and she hadn't ever in her years of being drunk and sober both seen anybody as drunk as Lula Mae come down to the house to get onions for her chow-chow that summer.Therefore, you could ask Gunnie B. and she'd say that Lula Mae's goat died of natural causes and the chow-chow died of the opposite. Besides that, Gunnie B. reminded Lula Mae of the chemical-truck people come down to County last fall and sprayed whatever-it-was around the gardens, the barns and over houses, so that Lula Mae lay up in bed with a rash and eyes swollen closed for nearly a week like everybody else in County did.

Gunnie B. asked Lula Mae to consider those white boys in that truck come to County showing disrespect for people and the land, so that on Lula's 49th summer of making chow-chow, she had a stroke a few days after making that batch.

Well, you know Lula Mae answered Gunnie B. Told her that in the some thirty years they'd been friends, Gunnie B.'d never called her a liar to her face. Lula Mae advised Gunnie B. on this in relation to their friendship.

"Thank about it now," Lula Mae reasoned. "Thick and then, day or night, come rain or shine, hell or high water, you been counting on me for whatever. I ain't never lied to you cept the time I told that man at revival that I believed in having a god cause I wanted to get baptized with you. You know that's the truth, Gunnie B."

At a great risk, Lula Mae went on to tell Gunnie B. that it wasn't just the goat or the chow-chow. Everybody was at fault. Gunnie B. was at fault, anybody within walking distance, anybody last seen in the area, and the white boys in the truck. All Lula Mae knew was that her female goat was dead, her chow-chow spoiled, and the one person in the world who helped her back to good health was gone and now her dearest friend was calling her some kind of liar.

Further Lula Mae was mad at Gunnie B., but she kept making her recall what had happened. When Ife come into town in the first place, Gunnie B., Liz Sizeman and them were none too comfortable with it. Oh, they made her feel right at home, more than she'd probably felt at home in her own home. Bought cake by the house. Didn't care what time of day it was, said, "Hey." Ms. Sizeman invited her to church more than one time. But didn't care how much people were being nice,they were none too comfortable with Ife being in town. Now Ife was gone and everybody was putting their two cents in on the matter and trying to say Gunnie B. was crazy cause of her premonitions.

"Take all this into account," she reasoned with Lula Mae. In the first place, like she said, Ife come into town. Lula Mae knew it was dangerous to be caught on a bus in a strange town without a ticket and no place to go cept jail. Girl got felt on and raped down in that jail last summer and wasn't a thing people did that helped cept hate the Sheriff that did it cause the NAACP or any other CP didn't know where County was. So Lula Mae was glad she was uptown that day to tell the man the girl was in her family. Lula Mae made it home with the help of this girl Ife and she didn't have to wait for Gunnie B. to come uptown to help her home.

When Lula Mae and Ife got up the road some, Gunnie B. come strutting up and said, "Hey," and kept going on uptown like it wasn't Lula Mae she was looking for. Lula Mae didn't know what to make of it till she talked to Ms. Sizeman and Ms. Sizeman explained that Gunnie B. passed on by because she was disturbed with Ife and Lula Mae being together–mainly cause Lula Mae in all her days had been picking up strange things.

"You picked those wild mushrooms and swore they were alright. You coulda died, all the diarrhea you got from eating the poison. You pick up nearly-dead birds. You tried to handle that squirrel that time and

we thought you got rabies," Ms. Sizeman continued.

Lula Mae was studying Ms. Sizeman as she talked. She was forever agreeing with what Gunnie B. said. Ms. Sizeman didn't seem to notice that Lula Mae was looking at her out the side of her eye cause she kept talking, steadily asking Lula Mae, "What else could a person do?" Ms. Sizeman said that when Gunnie B. saw Lula Mae walking with that ragged child who was carrying a old beat-up sack, she had to pass on by and figure what to make of it.

"Besides," Ms. Sizeman finished, "from what she was saying, I got reminded of my grandbaby from Chicago. I love her, ain't no doubt about it. She look just like my son. She his. Child, she wouldn't as much as wash her feet when she laid on my clean sheets. Oh, honey, she'd smoke in my bathroom and leave cigarette butts in my toilet and wouldn't so much as lift a finger. Honey! If it wasn't one thing it was two. She couldn't say, 'yes mam' or 'no mam' if it was to save her life."

Ms. Sizeman kept asking that Lula Mae try to understand Gunnie B.'s concern. The girl's hair was nappy as a sheep's ass, Gunny B. told Ms. Sizeman.

Lula Mae was so mad at Gunnie B. and Ms. Sizeman that she didn't know what to do. Come telling who to let in her house and who not to. She went right ahead on and let Ife move in the back room. Wasn't going to charge her no rent neither.

Ife agreed to get the flower garden going, to get out there and dig double so the roots would have room. Plant azaleas, African violets, iris, roses. She agreed to read to Lula Mae the rules for how to get that old arm of hers to move in ways that didn't make her feel ashamed. That was plenty as far as Lula Mae was concerned. Lula Mae didn't have no more patience with Gunnie B.'s way of helping her no way. Gunnie B.'d stop trying to help her herself and had started trying to take care of her. Lula Mae wasn't going to allow none of that.

The girl moved in and she knew how to dust off a table. "Come on, remember now," Lula Mae continued, giving Gunnie B. a little push with her right hand. "She could rake leaves till the sweat rolled down her face and back and the sun made her about the shade of the sweetest plums," Lula Mae said, exaggerating, trying to shame Gunnie B. by making the slightest to the greatest of Ife's attributes seem greater.

She could double dig that garden till if Lula Mae stepped down in it, she'd sink to who-knew-where. She didn't try it, but she knew she'd sink to who-knew-where.

Lula Mae'd laugh when Ife'd tell her of the girls she'd known. "Some didn't love you if it could save their lives and some would love you so much that you'd either have to leave town or stay right where you were

and get wrapped up in it."

Lula Mae'd hear something from Ife and get her walker and walk down to Gunnie B.'s house cause around that time Gunnie B. wasn't coming over to her house much. She'd wave the right arm around and show Gunnie B. how much she could move. She'd repeat the stories that Ife told her and Gunnie B.'d try not to smile, but Lula Mae could see her smile some, now and then, and when this happened Lula Mae'd go on home.

In the flower garden while Ife was doing work, she'd say poetry. She'd tell a story about a woman who lived 30 miles outside of County– who was colored like them, who was famous and could tell a good story and a good poem. How nobody knew the poems as well as the stories. Ife had said if they just read the poems in the right frame of mind, they'd know what the woman was talking about. Ife would say this poetry and work it like she worked the flower garden: "And remember the desert and how you had one good eye to see it with."

Then Lula Mae'd put the poem in her words, "And remember your good arm."

Oh, they had a good time out in the sun. Lula Mae'd tell Gunnie B. and Ms. Sizeman and they'd grunt and groan and say mean things.

"Coming back now, ain't it?" Lula Mae went on.

"I ain't studying you," Gunnie B. said.

Ife lived with Lula Mae for some six months. She went to church with Ms. Sizeman twice and helped Gunnie B. with the garden, though Lula Mae didn't see what for. She got Lula Mae walking with the walker so she could make it uptown in forty-five minutes, some twenty minutes close to how long it took her before the stroke. Lula Mae loved Ife like she would have loved a child of her own, had she been interested in having one.

One morning, morning after the goat was found dead and two days after she opened a sour jar of chow-chow, Lula Mae was up and moving about the house. She was feeling a chill in the front room. It was dead summer and 90 degrees to 95 degrees, if it wasn't 100. It was six o'clock in the morning and that's when she knew.

She went to the back room where Ife slept and found the note.

Dear Miss Lula Mae,

Thank you so much for letting me stay with you for as long as I wanted to. My girlfriend that I told you about wants to work it out. (Just like you said she would). I'm going home. Thank you. I love you with all my heart. Love you. Love you.

Ife

P.S. Talk to Ms. Gunnie B and work it out.

Between sips of goat milk, Lula Mae made Gunnie B. remember Ife and was thinking she'd go ahead and rub it in that she and Gunnie B.'d been friends for some thirty years.

"Remember this right arm and my good strong right hand. I could get out in the garden and work with you some then."

Gunnie B. turned away, but Lula Mae kept talking. "Thick and then, day and night. . . ."

Gunnie B. smiled and said she wasn't studying Lula Mae.

MAB SEGREST

GRANNY, MAMA, CARRIE, BELL: RACE AND CLASS, A PERSONAL ACCOUNTING

Standing there knocking on Flannery O'Connor's door, I do not think of her illness, her magnificent work in spite of it; I think: it all comes back to houses. To how people live. There are rich people who own houses to live in and poor people who do not. And this is wrong. . . . I think: I would level this country with one sweep of my hand if I could.

"Nobody can change the past," says my mother.

"Which is why revolutions exist," I reply.

from "Beyond the Peacock: The Reconstruction of Flannery O'Connor" by Alice Walker

Introduction

Several summers ago I agreed to try to write a piece on the "traditional" relationships between my white mother and grandmother and the two black women who worked for them as nurses, maids, and–in my grandmother's words–"beloved" friends. Back then I wrote an introduction:

> I want to try to untangle some of the painful, complex relationships among white and black women in the South. I am afraid. I do not know if I can discern genuine love from racist sentimentality. I do not know if I even dare use the word *love* about relationships so bound up in the white supremacist South. As a white Southerner I have grown up in such a system of lies and delusions that I fear I will not ever be able to recognize the truth. But I am a lesbian, and relationships between women matter to me more than anything else in my life. I must take a hard look at the ways race and class have benefited me, and the ways–by their false power–they have thwarted my need for wholeness. I must look at the ways my mother and grandmother betrayed women they said they loved, and ways my own life furthers those betrayals.

I did not finish the article then. I knew that if I could not say something different as a white woman, I should remain silent. I knew that I must write not only to my mother and grandmother and the black women

Carrie Nichols and Bell Lewis, but also to those working-class white women and women of color of my own generation who are more open about their anger and their pain. I was afraid that I would lose everybody: white middle-class friends who might want to distance themselves from my confessions; women of color and working class women for naming my own tradition of race and class privilege, from which they have suffered and which will always be some part of me, no matter how hard I might work; white Christian women like my sister, who gets much of her identity from her religion; Jewish and Arab women who have found the church's history lethal; and finally my mother and the ghost of my grandmother, for naming what I see as their failures as I try to find whether there is a part of their heritage I can build on. I was also afraid that whatever I wrote attempting to understand race and class in my life would betray my racism and my class pretensions–I would unconsciously illustrate what I was trying to criticize. So notes and drafts lay in piles on my desk, then under it, for months.

In that time I have thought of various reasons why I should skip this particular paper. I have grappled with my compulsion to be a "writer": a potent combination of needing "the truth that sets me free," and needing recognition and status. In the time I have avoided or labored over this essay I have done very little other writing. Problems of "structure" and "audience" are too intimately related to confusions in my life.

I have waited and worked for all these issues to feel resolved, at the last page of this essay. I'm not sure that will happen. But over the last three years I do know that I have had to change my life to get near the end of this version of the story.

1. Mabelle and Carrie: "Nothing separate from the thought of her"

My grandmother Mabelle was born in Alabama in the mid-1880's, the daughter of the president of a small women's college. Carrie Nichols was born around 1870, in the first generation of black Southerners born after emancipation. As near as I can figure, both women lived into their mid-eighties. I do not have clear memories of Carrie because she died when I was very young. I knew my grandmother in her old age as a strange creature whose body "ran all together," as my cousin said–her breasts hung to her stomach, shoulders stooped, hump on her back, a slight limp from corns on her feet. She lived upstairs when she visited us, baking custards and date cookies and telling stories and ordering strange gadgets from mail-order catalogues. She was not your run-of-the-mill adult. I wanted her to love me. She had favorites among her grand-

children, and I was not among them. But we were connected because I had her name. I was often told I looked and acted like her. Qualities I liked myself for–a sense of humor and of adventure–were pointed out as "Miss Mabelle" in me. Although I have no personal memories of her interaction with Carrie Nichols, I know that she valued their relationship because of her own stories and two family documents: a speech she made in 1932 and her Bible. I have had both for over twenty years, but recently my understanding of what they say has changed.

In 1932 my grandmother gave one of the addresses at the fiftieth anniversary of Tuskegee Institute's founding. She was invited because her father had been president of a white women's college in Tuskegee while Booker Washington was building the Institute. My mother, a teenager at the time of this anniversary, was embarrassed that her mother was going out to the Institute, crossing the color line to the displeasure of white Tuskegee. Mother had originally refused to go with Mabelle, then–ashamed at leaving her to go alone–had hurried back from school to accompany her mother. On this occasion when both white men and black, including President Hoover on the radio, were honoring other men's efforts at racial cooperation, my grandmother spoke of Carrie Nichols:

> The world thinks–and it's a funny old world, it thinks so straight about some things and gets so mixed up on others–the world thinks that its great men have made it possible, easy, pleasant and profitable for two races so unlike to live so close together. The great men have tried, and have helped some, but what every woman knows who has been a baby, a child, or a young mother in the cotton belt of The South, is that the laurels belong to the Carries.

During this speech, my grandmother articulated the importance of Carrie to her emotional life:

> I must have gotten off on the wrong foot, for the infant wails increased in volume and intensity until my parents were beside themselves. Finally in desperation my mother went into the country and brought back a little colored girl. Her name was Carrie, and as far as the eye could see she was about twelve years of age. As soon as she took me in her arms the wailing suddenly ceased. On my part, it was love at first sight, a love that has grown deeper, and stronger, and fuller for fifty-one years. . . . There is father, mother, Carrie; life, marriage, death, Carrie. There is nothing in my life that I can separate from the thought of [her].

I do not know if Carrie was in the audience to hear these remarks.

My grandmother's speech was a success. I have known about it since I was little. Then I interpreted it to mean that my grandmother was "good." She did not say "nigger" or support the Ku Klux Klan. And, by my mother's account, she had been brave to go and talk. Later, after

I came out as a lesbian and became a feminist, I thought my grandmother's speech was "woman-identified." She was valuing women's relationships over her relationships with men. But lately I have read other messages in her text.

She said: "Will the time come when I will say to Carrie, 'I am the mistress and you are the maid; my place is here, yours there?' Not as long as God rules in Heaven!" But she did not have to say it, when the whole structure of their society acknowledged it as true. I sense that my grandmother felt the pain of this separation from the woman who at twelve could give the infant Mab a loving comfort that her invalid mother and officious father, both "beside themselves" with her cries, could not muster. She did not want this separation, so she tried to wish it away. How much choice, economically or physically, did the twelve-year-old Carrie have when white people came "into the country" and brought her back? There were truths about the effects of racism and poverty on Carrie Nichols' life that my grandmother did not have to know because she did not have to experience them. If Carrie Nichols died "as peaceful and unselfish as she lived," I doubt she ever pointed these facts out to "Miss Mabelle." At the end of her speech my grandmother called on the audience to "go from this room today and tell other people up and down the length and breadth of this fair Southland there daily walk such goodly things as honor, justice, mutual regard, sincerity, peace, joy, love and brotherhood." Every time I read this passage I want to think my grandmother meant that the audience should go forth and *work* for justice, brotherhood, etcetera. But I'm afraid that's not it. At no point in the speech–or in my other memories of her, or stories I've been told about her–does she clearly name the white dishonor, injustice, racial hatred, hypocrisy, and the inflicting of violence and pain rampant in Alabama during her lifetime.

The extent of her distortion became apparent to me when I realized that the very next year the U.S. Public Health Service began its study on syphilis in Macon County (Tuskegee is its county seat), using 399 black men, withholding treatment to determine "scientifically" if untreated syphilis progressed differently in blacks than in whites. No white men were used as a "control group." Although this study was not exposed until the 1970s, it indicates the extent to which racist attitudes sapped black people's lives at the time my grandmother made her pronouncements about "mutual regard." "Each man's color line depends on where he stands and how he looks at life," Mabelle has said, completely without irony. Also my grandmother did not see that for black women like Carrie Nichols to have made "possible, easy, pleasant and profitable for two races so unlike to live so close together" was to say that they carried

in their arms–were expected to *nurture*–the entire racist system of the South.

In addition to this speech, I have a more private token of my grandmother's feelings for Carrie Nichols: her Bible. On the front in gold is embossed her name, which is my name too. The Bible came to me when she died. Inside of the cover she pasted several items. One is a picture of a one-year-old baby–me, I think–sitting on a swing in our back yard and held by an old black woman who is thin, neat, her face impassive as she looks down at the child. Next to the picture is a newspaper clipping headed "Carrie is Dead; Beloved Negro Passes." It quotes a letter my grandmother wrote to the alumnae of the women's college where her father had been president and Carrie a servant for thirty years. It told that Carrie Nichols had died "as peacefully and unselfishly as she lived." It ended:

> Little did Carrie dream through her long life of cheerful service that when news of her sudden illness was spread by telephone and wire to many distant places that men and women of two races would hasten home to look on her face and touch her hand once more. Little did she dream that she would lie in state as a queen–which indeed she was–while tribute was paid her from far and near. Only her maker can know how much brighter, cleaner, sweeter the world became because of the life she lived. May God rest her soul in peace.

On an envelope back written in my grandmother's hand: "Father, we thank thee for the dear and faithful dead who make Heaven a home for us." Opposite this page there is a card with a baby's head on the front and a lullaby, also in my grandmother's handwriting, inside. Only a few years ago, I happened to find in the lullaby card a note my grandmother had written to me on my first birthday in 1950: "I am proud that you and I bear the same name. Take it for what it is worth. Wipe off the stains and heal the scars of seventy years. Use to the best of your ability whatever God gives you of strength and grace." She signed the card, "The Other Mab."

Then, and often since, I have stared at that Bible trying to decipher the message. "Wipe off the stains." Does she really mean it? Is the message "be true to my friend Carrie?" or am I to continue the tradition of "service to others" (*noblesse oblige*) and being served by people darker and poorer than me? What am I to do with the knowledge that now jumps at me from her Bible, that she did not see the terrible irony in her words–"the dear and faithful dead who make Heaven a home for us"–: she expected Carrie to be her maid in Heaven too. In my grandmother's imagination, could this "beloved" friend *never* be free?

It scares me near to death to realize this whole level of reality to

which my grandmother was oblivious. To take this new look at her is hard. I don't think she would like me for what I am seeing. But I feel—whether accurately or not—that in knowing myself I know things about her she was never conscious of, and in dealing with her I come back around to myself. It feels a bit uncanny, this connection with The Other Mab. This identification with my grandmother whose view was so limited makes me afraid of the deeper truths I still do not see. I have to ask, what accounts for her—for my, for our—failure of love, of moral imagination?

My questions take me back to her father and her relationship to his power. In her Institute speech she explained who her father was: "All over Alabama today are thousands of women who keep in their hearts an inner shrine where they worship the memory of the man who gave himself and all he had in an effort to raise the ideals of Southern womanhood." She was clearly one of the worshippers. She spent much of her life preserving her father's memory—making speeches about him at the college, starting a scholarship in his name. We still have a hundred 5x7 copies of his portrait that my grandmother and mother distributed to the college "girls" fifty, sixty and seventy-year-old women who had attended the school during his tenure.

In his autobiography my great-grandfather explained what the "ideals of Southern womanhood" were that he worked so to raise. His most revealing comments come in his defenses and justifications to male colleagues for spending his life educating women, not men:

> I did not believe that I could do any better in the way of public service than by contributing to the important work of making good women.

As another male friend reassured him, this business of "making women" was a noble activity for his manhood and class:

> If you had gone into law [the friend said] you would have had to deal with the most unfavorable class of people to exercise good influence over. In your present position you have had the purest and most impressionable part of human nature to cultivate. You have had girls from the best people of this country as the medium through which you are projecting your influence on the world. You are to be congratulated in your work.

If running a college for women gave him a sense of personal male power and accomplishment, he also realized where this power came from: the dependence of the "political" realm on the "personal." He quotes from and interprets *Psalms:*

> 'That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace'; plainly indicating that the conservative, enduring forces in a society are to be

found in woman's influence in home life.

If my grandmother did not see how Carrie Nichols was expected to nurture the "pleasant and profitable" racist system that oppressed her as a black woman, she also did not recognize the extent to which she as a white woman was "made" by and for white men to do the same.

The money my great-grandfather made off this women's college built the house that my mother and I grew up in, and that Carrie Nichols and Bell Lewis tended. It has symbolized class status and identity in my family for generations. My father, who grew up on a farm, moved into this house with my mother after they were married; and I lived there until I left for college at eighteen. Part of its status is the servants who tend it. My mother sometimes quotes her mother and grandmother: "This house was built for three servants: two for the house, and one for the yard." The "yard man" was a black man named Lewis Bilbo, who helped my great-grandmother in "tending roses and doing errands of mercy and friendship." She was an invalid and he carried her from room to room. The two servants inside were the "beloved" Carrie and later her niece Bell. My grandmother left this house temporarily when she married the son of a judge. Her husband's sister married the town banker.

These men of my great-grandfather's generation—the College President, the Banker, the State Circuit Judge—were part of the ruling class of their town and state, practitioners of a lethal goodness. They operated, as far as I can tell, in a totally Protestant Christian context. I do not think that any Jews lived in Tuskegee during most of my grandmother's lifetime. These patriarchs operated on the assumption that the whole world was—or should be—as Christian as they were. Christianity was part of what gave them their right to rule. These men were Mabelle's connection to power and money—but more than that, to feeling she *was somebody.* She hung her father's portrait in the front hall, where he looked down like a combination of Moses and Napoleon. Long before I knew what *patriarch* meant, I despised his humorless self-righteousness and the way he must have basked in female adoration. Yet I was ambivalent. Because he somehow made me *somebody* too. Mother would explain how we had "Background," which I came to understand made us better than and responsible for even other white people. "You are somebody," she would say; and I understood this was in contrast with the Forts next door who also had a big house but it was bought with "new money"; or my friends whose parents worked in the sewing factory or clerked in stores. It gave me access to education and a belief that people should and would listen when I spoke or wrote.

This class identity got me things I never would have gotten merely as

a woman–even a white woman–certainly never as a lesbian. I got it because my grandmother "kept in her heart an inner shrine where she worshipped the memory of the man who gave himself and all he had in an effort to raise the ideals of Southern womanhood." I think it was this being Somebody from worshipping at the shrine of God-her-Father that caused her to fail the dark woman she called beloved. Her "love" for Carrie Nichols let her go a certain way, but she could not go further without reconceiving who she was. I never talked to her about this, but the *her* in *me* tells me it was too huge, too risky, too much to lose.

If I am not to fail Carrie Nichols too, I will have to find a way to be Somebody that does not make other people into Nobody.

2. Frances and Bell: "When people have to choose. . . ."

And that is only part of the story. There are also Frances and Bell. If Carrie Nichols lived and died "peaceful and unselfish," her niece Bell did not. Bell was, in my mother's words, "bitter." She was also angry, an anger often turned on herself. My mother has told me how Bell, who was a dark woman, would sometimes look in the mirror and say furiously, "Why am I so *black*?" When my mother bought a brown doll for Bell's niece for Christmas, at the niece's request, Bell was furious that the doll was not white. But in my mother's and Bell's lifetimes the white power structure of the town that had solidified in my great grandfather's generation (after Reconstruction) finally began to disintegrate. Southern black liberation struggles brought the tensions embedded in Southern life to the surface and into the streets.

Macon County is almost 90% black. By the fifties–perhaps earlier–it had the largest percentage of black people of any county in the United States. Before World War II systematic racist practices by the Board of Registrars left less than a hundred black voters registered. Registrars required literacy tests that managed to pass white illiterates and fail black PhDs; poor black people were eliminated by the poll tax; and at one time voter registration was held in the bank vault. Charles Gomillion, head of the Institute's Division of Social Sciences, began a voter registration drive during the Second World War and by 1954 there were almost as many black voters in the county as white. In 1956 the Montgomery bus boycott ignited the phase of civil rights activism that came to a head in the 1960s. If my mother's stories to me are any indication, she spent much of her life–unlike her mother–torn by conflicting loyalties and questions of conscience.

In the early fifties, my mother, inspired by Bell, stopped a Klan

march in Tuskegee. Bell came to her one day angry and afraid because she had heard the Klan planned to march through town. My mother, upset and angry too, met her friend Myrt uptown; and together they started a petition. Mother called up the head of the Klan–whom apparently everybody knew, I even think he was on the Board of Registrars. He was not pleased to hear from my mother, and kept asking to speak to her husband. My mother told him that her husband didn't have anything to do with it, she was acting on her own. When the Klansman was not convinced, mother went to the mayor, and he stopped the march.

I also remember my mother confronting the sheriff when he came to our back door asking for votes. She was furious, and told him she would NEVER vote for him. She knew that he framed the black people on my father's farm for moonshining. The sheriff would have somebody drive by and throw a bottle in the yard, then he would drive up and arrest whoever was there. My father generally went down and bailed them out. Mother told the sheriff he was crooked and should feel ashamed, and not to come into our yard again.

My mother was not afraid to confront white men in power for black people she cared about. But she did it from a position of relative safety, a position of class power. Her self-assurance came not so much from having a lot of money–which we didn't, living off my father's salary with occasional infusions of cash from my uncles or from sale of timber on the great-grandfathers' land. It came from family "reputation," and her sense of obligation to take care of "our people."

Mother's confrontation with the Klan led to another crisis of conscience a few years later, when Governor Jim Folsom had her placed on the county Board of Registrars. From what I can tell, Folsom was promoting black voter registration to get Democratic votes. Local politicians sympathetic to these motives recommended my mother to the Board because they knew of her activity against the Klan. She became a Registrar without her knowledge or permission. Whether to stay on the Board became an agonizing decision. She has given me different versions of the story. By one account, the most recent, she says that what she wanted to do was register qualified voters, regardless of race. She found herself torn between what she saw as extremes–the NAACP on one side, who would pressure her to register all black voters regardless of literacy; and the White Citizens' Council–the state chariman of which was Sam Englehardt, the state senator from Macon County–who would pressure her *not* to register black voters, regardless of literacy. She says her final decision came when friends of her family urged her not to take the job, that there was no way she could win. In an earlier account of the story, they told her: "Frankie, it will destory your family in this town."

I have recently learned from my sister that the husband of the woman from whom mother sought advice was a member of the Klan in the 1920s. Whether or not my mother knew this, like my grandmother, her loyalty across race lines was limited by her class. Her sympathy was with literate, educated voters. If her family status gave her some protection to speak out against what she saw as unjust, it also boxed her in: "It would destroy your family in this town." Because she was Somebody, there were limits she could not go beyond. Later she said to me with great sadness, "When people have to choose, they will go with their own race."

Nor were such choices made only by the white women in the story. For a good many years my mother and grandmother had a Christmas dinner for the black people "in the family." Mother and Granny wanted to have the party in the dining room; but Carrie vetoed that as "not fitting" and the meal happened in the kitchen. That move of about ten steps, from the kitchen to the dining room, was no casual journey. It could not take place in some "free space" at Christmas, given the reality of black and white lives the other 364 days of the year.

Racist reality in Tuskegee emerged again clearly in 1956. With more and more black voters registered within the city limits, Sam Englehardt introduced a bill into the state legislature that redrew the boundaries of Tuskegee from a four- to a twenty-eight sided figure, keeping all but a few of the registered blacks from voting in town elections.

Bell's house was one of those excluded in the gerrymandering. Bell was outraged, and she let my mother know it. Mother says Bell would sit on the porch of her small, wood-framed house and look out at white people's houses inside the "city limits" but further from town. She would say, "I pay my taxes! I am a citizen of this town too! Sister, why do they do this? Do you think it's right?" When black people in town organized a very effective boycott of local merchants, mother would drive Bell the thirty miles to Auburn to get groceries and honor the protest. According to my mother, some middle-class black people in town were making money off poor black people by charging them money for shopping trips out of town. The boycott put very effective pressure on white merchants; and the suit that came out of the boycott, *Gomillion vs Lightfoot,* resulted in a landmark Supreme Court decision that brought together the issues of reapportionment and civil rights.

In these events of the 1950s my mother occupied a middle ground. I feel that because of her relationship with Bell she could not look only out of white eyes. Because of her class status, she could not follow her convictions to their "extreme" conclusions. She told Bell at the beginning of the boycott: "We have to hold on hard to our love for each

other. We can't let this separate us."

But it did. Bell Lewis died shortly before public schools in Tuskegee integrated. In that crisis my mother finally "went with her race." The morning that thirteen black kids were supposed to integrate Tuskegee High for the first time, we woke up to find that George Wallace had surrounded the school ground with one hundred highway patrolmen to keep the white people out while the black kids' bus was allowed through. During the weeks that the school was blockaded, some white parents–who apparently had intended to comply with the integration orders up until then–began meeting to discuss starting up a segregated academy. Both my parents were instrumental in these plans. Within a year the first segregated academy in Alabama opened in Tuskegee. The white town split down the middle–families who supported the private school vs. families who kept sending their children to public schools or to schools out of town. Old friendships dissolved bitterly.

In my mother's lifetime a split came between her and women friends who had raised their children together as den mothers, Brownie leaders, planning parties at school or summer excursions. Her best friend Eva was a member of the Church of Christ, the only white church in town to integrate voluntarily. Eva's husband was president of the bank. They sent their two sons out of town to school, their daughter to Tuskegee High. Our family did not speak to them, or they to us, for almost a decade. My friend Hilma's mother also refused to support the new segregated academy. Within a year her family moved out of town. The Cohns, the only Jewish family I remember in white Tuskegee, went to public school. According to my parents, people supporting integration at the time were only after black votes and black money. But neither Eva nor Hilma's mother Rudy were Southern born. The Cohns were outside the Christian power structure. As far as I know, none of the old guard, upper-class white families in Tuskegee worked to peacefully integrate the schools. Instead, white people across class lines poured a huge amount of time, money, and energy into establishing a segregated school that became a model for a network of segregated academies that sprang up throughout Alabama. So my mother, who had been one of the "town liberals," allied herself with George Wallace and other Alabama white people who dug their heels in to maintain white rule as racial conflict escalated in Alabama in the 1960s.

She was once asked by a psychiatrist to whom she was going for chronic skin allergies, "Do you ever think you picked the wrong side?" She replied, "Always." She says she did it for her children–my brother and sister and me. Anticipating integration, she had gone back to college to get a teachers' certificate so that she could be teaching in public

schools during integration or so she could teach us at home. She was afraid of violence in integrated schools, and that they would not maintain "quality" education. So although she had hoped that Tuskegee would serve as a model for racial cooperation, she ended up teaching the segregated private school she had helped to establish. I have often wondered what Bell would have thought, if she had been alive.

The world that Mabelle and Frances and Carrie and Bell lived in together is gone now. My mother is the only one of the four women left alive. White people have to pay black maids minimum wage these days for domestic work, so few white women will pay what it takes to have black women come in and tend their houses and their children every day, as they could in the days when wages were fifty cents an hour. Black people are now in political and economic control of the county. Tuskegee has had a black mayor, sheriff, councilmen, and police for over a decade. Black families now live in many of the houses where black women used to work for white women as maids. On the outskirts of town are large new houses, built by a growing black middle class. My mother says these houses were built in part off of "poverty money" funds the federal government put into building up Tuskegee as a model city. My mother says that black people have not done a lot better than white people at redistributing wealth: that poor black people in the county are not a lot better off economically than they were. But Minnie White's daughter—a young black woman who grew up on the Segrest farm—has gone to technical school to learn to be a nurse, financed by "syphilis money" from the suit against the government.

My parents have changed too, as white people have lost power in the county. In the heat of civil rights agitation in the sixties, mother used to say that she would want her house "blown up" before she would see it sold to black people. I have had this image in my head of my mother at the corner of the block on the sidewalk by the fire hydrant, pushing a plunger to ignite the dynamite as our house collapses in on itself with a big bang. But recently she told me that she realizes after she and my father die, my brother and sister and I will likely sell the place to a black family, and that will be fine. She promises not to haunt me for it. She and my father have chosen to stay on in Tuskegee, part of an ever-shrinking white minority. They did not join the huge white migration out of the county that took place as black people took political power. They say it is their home, its problems are the problems they have been given in their lifetime to work on. My mother is speaking to her friend Eva again. My father goes to Tuskegee Improvement Association meetings to work on political issues with black people. My mother last year handed over her position as Republican chairperson to a black

professor from the Institute. She volunteered to serve as assistant chairperson, and the integrated committee agreed to be fed in her dining room.

3. The Other Mab

Now I am back around to me. I have agonized and puzzled the most over this final section. I have reworked it most often. I have asked myself: How do these women, Mabelle and Frances, echo in me? And who am I besides these echoes? What part of this family heritage can I build on, what parts work to change?

Let me go back and pick up my thread of the story. I woke up that September morning of my ninth grade year calm, the first day of school. White students for weeks had been in turmoil over how to respond to fast-approaching integration. We recognized it as the end of a way of life we'd been born into. It was likely to affect *everything*–cheerleaders, football, dances, band, classes. I was on the student council, and we met several days before school opened to discuss our options. One suggestion getting a lot of attention was a plan to form white fraternities and sororities, so that social functions could proceed as much according to the old way as possible. The plan was to freeze the black kids out. Just act like they weren't there. I didn't say much that I remember at the meeting, but I went home bothered.

The day before school was to open I spent the entire afternoon in my front yard, dragging my foot in the gravel in a figure-eight pattern, and thinking. I kept imagining the black girl who might be in my class. How would she feel to be cut off like that? Shunned? How would *I* feel? She would need a friend. What if I liked her? What would I do with my face–would I look her in the eye? Smile? Say "Hi" and lend her a pencil if her point broke during a test? Hang out in the hall at recess? *What if I liked her*? Could I pretend she wasn't there? Not see the look on her face if the white kids ignored her, or worse than that, if they were mean? And how would the other white kids treat me if I was her friend? Not very well, I had a feeling. And what if *I didn't* like her–would I be friends because she was negro in this awful situation?

By the end of the afternoon I had come to a decision. If I liked her, I would be her friend, whatever the white kids said or did. If I didn't like her, I wouldn't pretend to be her friend just because she was negro. But I would not, in any case, participate in anything that would humiliate her.

So I woke up that September morning scared but resolved. Then my

father came upstairs and told me gently that the school was closed. I don't remember my immediate reaction. For the next day or two, white people stood in a long line on the sidewalk next to the school, watching the troopers ring the grounds. I saw the bus with the black kids go through the first morning, and the next. Once at recess I caught sight of several of the black students walking across the breezeway. I thought they looked lonely. I thought I knew how they felt.

In the weeks and months that followed, I threw my energy into the emerging private school. I didn't think segregation was moral, but I did believe in states rights. I felt: "The federal government shouldn't be able to come in like this and tell us what to do. Besides, federal judges and Yankee Congressmen are hypocrites: they send their kids to private schools, not to Washington public schools." I rooted for Goldwater in 1964. I carried a red rose and wore a white dress in a Republican rally in Crampton Bowl in Montgomery. I wrote a speech about individual rights for the "What Democracy Means to Me" contest sponsored by the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and won $1000 for college.

But I was also changing. I couldn't forget the black kids on the breezeway. When white men beat up demonstrators on the steps of my church, I stopped believing in God. The irony was too much to bear. If they were "God-fearing" then I would not be. I started cussing to defile myself. My friend Ann and I figured out that any God who would send Africans to hell before Christian missionaries got a chance to get to them was not somebody we wanted to worship. After choir practice we would hang out together, *damning* and *shitting* everything we could think of. I figured if I had to have a vice, cursing was preferable to smoking or–God forbid–making out.

My relationship with my mother changed during this period too. We were very close when I was growing up, and we shared our deepest feelings and ideas. I saw her suffer a lot from skin allergies and asthma, and then from the drugs prescribed by my uncles and other doctors to make her better. Part of me felt she was doing the wrong thing in working on the private school–just as part of her felt that she was wrong. And so I began to fear that to some degree she was conspiring in her own pain. I felt all those things–God, segregation, sickness–went together somehow; and that I was caught in it too. Not wanting to be, and unable to explain to her how I no longer completely shared her feelings, faith and ideas, I kept more to myself. That ninth grade year was a turning point, a crisis in my life, an initiation of sorts into what it would mean to be an adult.

The pain of it was compounded by my growing but unacknowledged lesbianism. Increasingly I sensed that I was different from my girlfriends.

I felt very alone, the source, I think, of my identification with the black students walking across the breezeway. And in the year after integration, all my old girlfriends moved away, friends I had hung out with since kindergarten. I was left to face the terror of adolescence without my old companions.

Not only was there a large exodus, but the remaining white town closed down rather than integrate. The pool closed, where I had spent blissful summers for 14 years. The movie theater closed, where we used to go see Westerns on Saturday mornings. I couldn't ride my bike to the lake by myself (there was no one left to ride with) for fear of being raped. My mother told me the risk was too great: I think she was afraid I would be raped by a black man and it would touch off a race war. My body was the fuse to ignite the conflagration. The town I grew up in gradually died, leaving me increasingly desperate to get out in the years it took to go off to college. I spent a lot of depressed hours in front of the television, watching whatever was on–*Superman, Leave It To Beaver, Dick Clark's American Bandstand*; or reading Gothic romances where the heroine got rescued. I was filled with anger and irony that a place could just commit suicide like that out of stubbornness and fear.

At a level I could not articulate, I also identified strongly with black people's struggles in Alabama. I had bitter arguments at the dinner table with members of my family when Viola Liuzzo was shot, and when a bomb in a Birmingham church killed four black girls, three my age. My brother accused me of being Walter Cronkite's dupe, of believing Yankee newsmen about the South. At times I left the table crying, and my mother told me in the kitchen that she thought I was right. I wanted her to give me more public/family support, since part of my point of view I had learned from her. But another part of my feelings–and perhaps this is what separated us–came from my identification as a lesbian with outsiders. I think I knew deep down that people who said "nigger" also said "queer"–and killed both if they could. I sensed that white resistance to black civil rights struggles came from not wanting to give these other people space to be alive. I was not sure then that there was such space for me either. In arguing for black people, I was indirectly arguing for myself. Yet in starting the private school my mother was doing it, she said, for me: "When people have to choose. . . ." Her children's education. . . . In a deep sense, though, she acted against me–against Mab the Other, Mab the Queer, the Mab who wanted as part of her education to learn how not to be a bigot.

And if she acted against me, the her-in-me tells me she also acted against herself, her own sense of justice. That my mother could make passionate statements and actions about her love for Bell and Carrie in

one breath and then in the next explain how these same women were born to clean her house is a kind of cultural/personal schizophrenia bound to take its toll. I have felt the destructive effects of personal race and class privilege first through her life: her skin allergies that made her scratch her own white skin raw. The *her* in *me* feels the trap of that whiteness, the need to claw out. The times I have realized my own racism most, this image has come to mind: I am sitting in a white porcelain bath tub scraping my skin with Brillo pads; there is blood in rivulets in the tub.

So this is the history I bring as, at age 34, I am part of a lesbian-feminist movement of writers and activists that gives me a chance to rescue a fourteen-year-old girl stuck with her feet in the gravel in her front yard. The eighties has much the feel to me of the fifties–the Voting Rights Act under seige, Reagan moving from the General Electric Theater to the Presidency, new anxieties about The Bomb, new civil defense plans for surviving nuclear war, the roll-back of social and economic gains of the sixties as "too expensive." It's as if some cycle has come round again, so that people like Reagan and Strom Thurmond are back on top, and they have not changed in 25 years, they just waited. It feels like a movie going backwards (reverse the civil rights movement, re-fight Viet Nam in Central America, get white women back in the kitchen, increase anti-Semitism and then another World War). It has made me anxious. That my mother and the black professor would have their integrated meeting in my great grandfather's house to work for Reagan's election has too many ironies; from my point of view seems too small a change, given what Reagan has done to reverse gains made by poor, black, queer. The issue is not who lives in the big houses, but the quality of life for everybody. My mother has given me a great deal of individual support for my lesbianism, but I have still not been able to make her see that she is supporting political causes that make me afraid for my life.

This time around I am 34, and not 14; and that has made a difference in both my personal relationships and my political activism. One of the big differences in my life at 34 is that I have friends who are different from me, and we try to acknowledge those differences. Most of my close friends now are open lesbians, and we claim the connection between us as central to our lives. I try to honor it, although I am not always successful. It is this connection that has drawn me as far out from the segregated and class-bound society I grew up in as I have come.

I remember that the only time during my years in Alabama that I came close to real friendship with black girls was in a lesbian situation: Girl Scout Camp. I worked for three years as a counselor in a camp

on Lake Martin, near Montgomery. My first summer there–after my twelfth-grade graduation–the camp integrated during the last of three sessions. I stayed on the last session with a reduced staff, eight black girls and maybe ten white (a full session was 120 girls). For ten days in the Alabama woods in 1967 we lived together serenely, swimming, canoeing, looking at sunsets, sitting around campfires. The only trouble I remember was the rebellion of one of the white Army kids from Maxwell Air Force Base over having to eat her Brownie Bite of cold grits. Two years later, when the first black girl was allowed into the Counselor-in-Training program, the director placed Tony in my unit. We had a good time together. At rest periods we had a strange ritual. She would walk on my back (she was little and I wasn't). It was the half-way place where we met–part massage of the boss, part role reversal as the black girl walked on the white one.

Is it coincidence that this alternative to my white Alabama culture came in an all-female community, the closest I've ever come to Amazon Nation? In sorting through the various strata of my identity over the past several years, I have come to view differently its different components: white and middle class, raised to expect the world at my feet; lesbian and female, expecting the kick of that same booted foot. If I feel a temptation to romanticize the lesbian's suffering or to use her as a way to disown or distance myself from whiteness, I also believe that there is in her a basis for genuine empathy and choice. I grew up among white people who shot other people, or blew them up with bombs, for their differences and their challenges to established structures of power. I know the stakes, and I fear them. When I feel connection to women who grew up on the other side of race or class or Christian-established boundaries, I recognize that pull toward them as different from the forces of constriction and separation I grew up within.

It is this sense of connection with other women–often across great distances–that keeps me going. When someone I care about lets me know that particular words or actions seem to them racist, or reflecting class or Christian-privileged assumptions, that can take a while to work through–the guilt, the self-hatred, the anger, the feeling crazy. I have come to recognize a pattern for the more major events: First I deny it all (the other person is a creep). Then I accept it all (I am a creep.) Then, if I let this internal dialogue go on for awhile, things seem to fall into place. The part of the criticism emerges that feels accurate and useful. When this happens, I often feel relief–no doubt partly relief from guilt, my continuing Methodist battle to be Good and maximize my own self-esteem while minimizing genuine awareness–the desire to "wipe off the stains" facilely, like a rag across a counter top. But part of it is relief

that, having grown up inside a world that was so severely distorted, I have another small chunk of reality. Often, it isn't so hard:

One day C. told me over dinner—"I don't want people assuming I went to college. I was married and got out of it. I was raped and survived. I have taught myself everything I know"—I felt the balance of power between us shift some, and I was startled but glad. One day E. and I were talking about our different class perspectives on manners. I said I thought manners meant a person had the ability to put people at ease, and she said—"Yes, but if they can put you at ease they also have the power to make you uncomfortable." Once in conversation with H. I said that Adrienne Rich's mother was Southern, and Helen pointed out, "Her father was too," and I had to realize I did not hold those things together easily in my mind, Southern and Jew, with my grandmother's easy assumption that the whole world is Christian, or won't remind you if it isn't. And the night B. and I were sitting on the floor talking about grammar school, when she said she used to wonder why some people knew the answers—what the secret was that she didn't have—I saw myself sitting up at the front of my second-grade class, at the "top" of the first reading group reading every sentence right that the teacher, who was my grandmother's and my mother's friend, gave me. Remembering, I felt myself bask in that attention, that generated confidence of being able to have the answer right. But I was seeing myself through B.'s eyes, from the back of the room, and I remembered how my parents would go to the school principal and tell him what teacher to give me every year, not wanting to chance that I got the poorer of two teachers in the draw. I told her that and she said, "I would have hated you. I would have been glad you were fat."

In my work for my own liberation from my various roles as oppressor, I often find myself caught in contradictions. One good example occurred at Women in Print, a meeting of feminist publishers, bookstores and printers in 1981:

"What I want to see is a photoessay of the houses we all grew up in," someone was saying. "That would clear up a lot of this discussion about class." I pulled my head closer to my shoulders. The house I grew up in. I wasn't ready for these women to see it. It would shatter my pretenses that we are all alike.

Another scene, earlier: Three other women and I are facilitating a workshop on race and class in women's publications, presses, bookstores, and lives. I had agreed to talk briefly about white women's racism. Three of us met several times during the conference to prepare for the session, without having made solid contact with the other facilitator. The first remarks of the only black woman in our planning group of three made

me feel safer: "We don't want to throw the white girls up against the wall." Relief. Throw the white girls up against the wall. I wondered if that was where I would be.

In an earlier workshop another black woman had remarked that she considered white people experts on racism—that we could use our expertise to explain a lot. She wanted to hear how racism hurts white people too. I knew I knew a lot about that. I wanted to be clear and concise, to say what I have learned about myself without wallowing in it, to present it in a positive, hopeful context. I was afraid I would not say everything "right." I fantasized being interrupted and having to deal with my bigotries in front of everyone.

C. began the session explaining what we hoped to accomplish. When I started to talk I had to start over, I was speaking too softly. When I finally found my voice, I said something like this: "What white women—and class-privileged women and Christian women—who are working on their privilege have to do is find a new basis for our identities because the sense of self we have been taught is based on lies. This is at first a very disorienting process, and what we have to do is support each other in this disorientation. I have found that for me and friends who work together this process has four stages. First, I am so racist, class-privileged, Christian that I don't even realize it but assume that I am naturally wonderful and superior. Then I begin to see the false status that I get from my race and class and Christian privilege. And as soon as I do, I begin to see lies everywhere and everywhere my own responsibility, my own complicity. As I begin to feel what slavery did to black people I look up and see—God, we killed the Indians too. Then I hit the third stage, of intense self-hatred, which is the reality beneath the false self-love all along. I think the reason why white women avoid their racism so much and can act so weird around women of color is because deep down we are afraid that this third level is all that there is. That we will end up stuck in despair and self-hatred and suicide. But I believe that underneath there is another level, a self that longs for wholeness and connection." I sat down relieved, feeling I'd done ok.

When the facilitator who hadn't met with the three of us started talking, what I'd been afraid of for myself happened with her. I can't report exactly what she said at first because I stopped listening. I think she described how she built up a shelf of books by women of color in her store, and how feminist bookstores are racist and should be more accountable to women of color. But I was looking at the floor, trying to distance myself. I was reacting at first, I thought, mainly to her intense anxiety, which was evident in her presentation, her nervousness of hand and voice. I realized I felt safer because C. and I had come to-

gether and knew we could count on each other for support in risky situations. I started paying attention when women of color began to challenge the speaker from the floor, saying that when she talked about white people she did not say "we," that she spoke as if all bookstore owners were white. "You are making me invisible again." The speaker kept talking, kept trying to explain, to defend herself. The more she did, the worse it got. "You white people stop her, she is being racist," I heard. From the audience someone whispered urgently,"*Facilitate.*" I felt totally out of control, like there was a body in front of me hemorrhaging and I couldn't stop the flow of blood. Finally the speaker left the room. I heard someone sobbing in the hall and assumed it was her. Later I learned it was a woman who had felt ignored when she asked that we discuss class as well as race. I made a note to myself whose pain I had identified with.

At some point in all of the confusion, a woman from the audience said, "We women of color didn't walk out of this room because at first the white women were saying something different. Speaking from the heart." And in my other confusions I felt a flood of relief, almost of joy. From another side of the room a woman explained, "The anger that you hear from us comes from a deep sense of betrayal, of pain." She left the room in tears, and a white woman who at some point had stepped in to facilitate closed the session.

People walked out or sat there, many in shock. Some white women regrouped to discuss why we had to wait for women of color to object to the racist remarks. At various points white women came up to me to tell me they appreciated what I said. Part of me felt proud to have had the "right answer" and relieved that I did not fuck up. Another part felt like an imposter and suspected people's motives. Another part did now know how I felt. But I knew that something different had happened, and my life would never quite be the same.

When I got back home I tried to sort through the contradictions. I felt the relief of articulating for myself forces I'd felt trapped in my whole life. I felt freer, safer, because of the feedback that I had not sounded crazy, that I was on the right track. I felt proud of making a good showing, then confused about that. I was in the middle of writing the first parts of this paper and I had to ask myself: How was I being like my grandmother, making speeches about race relations with four generations of literacy behind me and practice in talking out loud from ten years of college teaching? Part of the zap I'd felt after the session wasn't pure liberation, it was feeling Somebody. My stock had gone up. I am in a movement working on liberation, but it is easy for me to feel the old competitiveness, the wanting recognition and "success." Part

of me still wants to be Somebody in a way that gets its power comparing itself to other people, feeling good when I see myself "ahead" and wretched when I feel "behind." On the other hand, this liberating work of real self-love is a daily work that takes a lifetime. In its process I often find myself caught in its contradictions, between the world I want to leave behind, and the world I want to help create in front of me.

My relationships with women of color are caught in similar contradictions. The immediate context of these relationships is very different from the context in which my mother and grandmother related to Carrie and Bell. I am grateful that black and white women in the South are less often thrust into such situations of forced imbalanced intimacy. I do not have the day-in-and-out, forty-hours-a-week shared history that white women so often bought in the South for fifty cents an hour. My friends can tell me to fuck off without losing their jobs. Sometimes we have easy times hanging out together: I remember smoking dope and laughing with L. in her apartment in Columbia as we worked on a lesbian writers conference together; and talking about writing and girlfriends with R. in the sweaty backseat of a car on the way to NWSA; and giggling with A. on mattresses at a women's retreat. But there are times when the ground opens up in front of my feet and suddenly I find myself what seems miles distant–like a crevice has opened to move us apart, the ground beneath our feet cracked by my own racism as it represents the actions of my people for centuries, as it did most recently in a *Feminary* meeting when I defended a white woman's writing partly out of an impulse to protect her and us, white people. Again and again, I painfully confront the question: Who do I identify with, and what do I get from that identification?

Conclusion

At such times I am haunted by my mother's conclusion: "When people have to choose, they will go with their own race." I have told myself over and over in the three years I have written and rewritten this paper: *I will do it another way.* But I am afraid of isolation, of being caught between the white-valued world I want to leave behind, not part of a colored world, no world yet created to hold us all, truly as "beloved friends." Lillian Smith, another white Southern woman who made different choices than my mother and grandmother, wrote: "To believe in something not yet proved and to underwrite it with our lives; it is the only way to leave the future open."

To underwrite it with my life: Whatever consciousness I arrive at in

language must find its expression in action in the world. If I am serious about friendships with women of color, I will keep working to transform the conditions of our lives. I will assume my share of the danger of living in a racist world. When I was sixteen I wanted to be on the March from Selma to Montgomery. Selma was a hundred miles away, but it might as well have been light years. I remarked to a gay male friend before Reagan's inauguration, "In the sixties I missed the boat. But I won't do that this time." He said, "Honey, this time you *are* the boat." And in the past four years I have Marched on Washington more times than Robert E. Lee ever dreamed of.

In my efforts to move into a different future I do indeed–as my mother told me–have Background. It is almost exactly one hundred years since my grandmother was born, and that hundred years of history –and the struggles of people of color within it–have brought many changes. But my generation is left with much to do. The state in which I now live–North Carolina–has the fastest growing Klan of any state in the country; its migrant labor system is often guilty–though seldom convicted of slavery and peonage. This week Reagan and the Generals sent out Marines from North Carolina bases to invade the black nation of Grenada.

Lillian Smith also wrote of the need to find "the hour when faith in the future becomes knowledge of the past." That is the hour I have searched for in this writing, the hours, days, months, when knowledge of the past becomes faith in the future, when activity in the present helps create something not yet proved. In this search I carry within me many women–not only Mabelle and Frances, but also Carrie and Bell. And all of them, the hers-in-me, tell me: the future is nothing if not what we love in the past, set free.

Many women have helped me with this paper. They know who they are, and I thank them.

IN RESPONSE

My name is not María Cristina.
I am a Puerto Rican woman born in another barrio.
Our men . . . they call me pushie
for I speak without a forked tongue
and I do fix the leaks in all faucets.

I don't accept their ways,
shed down form macho-men ancestors.
I sleep around whenever it is possible;
no permission needed from dearest *marido*
or kissing-loving papa.
I do not poison anyones belly but my own;
no cooking mama here;
I cook, but in a different form.

My name is not María Cristina.
I speak, I think,
I express myself in any voice,
in any tone, in any language that conveys
my house within.
The only way to fight oppression is through
resistance:
I do complain
I will complain
I do revise,
I don't conceal,
I will reveal,
I will revise.

I am not the mother of rapist warriors,
I am the child that was molested.
I teach my students to question all authority,
to have no fears, no nail biting in class,
no falling inlove with the teacher.

My eyes reflect myself,
the strength that I am trying to attain,
the passions of a woman who at 35 is 70.
My soul reflects my past,
my soul deflects the future.

My name is not María Cristina.
I am a Puerto Rican woman born in another barrio.
Our men . . . they call me bitchie
for I speak without a twisted tongue
and I do fix all leaks in my faucets.

Aquellos que alguna vez la amaron
se reunen cada noche en un aljibe,
conversan, juegan a los dados,
escupen improperios por el aire
y están dispuestos a formar un comité
para ayudar a las próximas víctimas.

Those who once loved her
meet every night at a cistern,
they converse, roll dice
remember her,
hurl insults into the air
and are ready to form a committee
to help the next victims.

Penétrame
occidental y perversa
parodiando a los dioses más diversos:
siglos en prolongada decadencia
permiten que para el caso,
cambiemos de papel.

Penetrate me
occidental and perverse
parodying the most diverse gods:
centuries of prolonged decadence
permit in this case,
that we change roles.

Penétrame
profunda y larvariamente
tu laberinto de palabras
tiene el privilegio
que le presta la poesía.

Penetrate me
deep and sinuously
your labyrinth of words
has the privilege
which poetry lends to it.

CRAB QUEEN

(Tuesday morning) Last week in our rap Rev. Tom suggested that I keep a diary of my spiritual progress so here goes nothing. I told him I was never very good at compositions at school, my sister was the creative one, not me, I was just the pretty one and hope I have still got my looks as I am thirty-two now and can still fit into the dress I was married in. But he said to just pretend I was having a rap with Jesus, the way I do with him. To talk to Him freely from the bottom of my heart and He would excuse errors of spelling punctuation and etc. And besides he said not to worry because this diary will be for my own eyes and His alone, Rev. Tom said it was alright not to even show it to Billy (that's my husband) but I could share selected passages with him (Rev. Tom) if I felt the need in our next rap but not to feel I must.

I think Rev. Tom must be the best Spiritual Advisor around and you would think that even more if you knew Bill before he got saved with his Red-Neck ways and every other word out his mouth a cuss and the way he would stay out drinking a lot with the boys. Which was one main reason Mom and Dad threw such a fit when we had to get married plus his family is sort of low-class from the South Bay which is where mostly the Red-Neck and Hill-Billy families that are on welfare live. Rev. Tom says no one will find The Way until their ready and you can only lead a horse so far into the water but he has to drink his own self, but I bet no other Rev. could of led Bill this far to where he has turned 100% around and has not touched a drop of liquor in over two and one half years, and coaches the North Bay Little League that Billy Jr is in for recreation plus takes us all out on his outboard fishing in the bay, in other words has become a real "Family Man". To tell you the truth now I sometimes feel he has left *me* behind the way I lose my temper at times (which I have always had a problem with) at him and the kids but especially at Shirlye which is Dad's wife that he married only less than two months after Mom died of her liver and who is enough to try the patience of a Saint which as I just said I am not.

Which brings me back to: Why I Am Writing This. It is because even *inside* me I have feelings that are not Christian for instance sometimes I feel like just taking and shaking my kids until they snap in two specially

Kate my second girl who always trys to pick a fight with the whole world and does her best to aggravate me and I almost always stop myself and don't lay a hand on her but I still *feel* that way. And when Shirlye is at her worse for instance after Dad had offered to help Bill out on the mortgage on the house just during the Winter months which are the worst time for the Station because there are no Summer People here, galivanting around and not caring how much they spend on gas then. Well that time she forced him to call back after we had already been counting on the help and planned accordingly and take it all back, and even had the nerve to imply that it was *me* behind the whole thing that had *pressured* Dad to give us *her* money as she put it although everyone knows when you marry your money passes right into your husbands hands and is his as much as yours to do what he pleases with. Say what you want about Mom she was never tight with money, she'd as soon give it away as keep it, specially when she'd been drinking. Sometimes *she'd* talk mean to you too, but it was when she was drunk, and didn't know what she was saying, it would just sort of slip out by accident. But Shirlye is the same drunk or sober–just as mean and nasty as she can be.

So when she did that I just kept trying to remember Rev. Tom's sermons, and repeated to myself over and over, "Forgive her she know not what she does", and "Love they neighbor as thyself", only I put in Stepmother for neighbor. But still I woke up like I sometimes do at night with this feeling like a rock in my stomach and just couldn't fall back asleep. It is no point waking Bill at these times, because he just doesn't understand, even though he is as sweet as can be, and will get the Pepto Bismal and even make me a cup of tea if I ask him to. But if I told him it was being angry that was upsetting my stomach he just would not comprehend what it was I was talking about. But Rev. Tom does understand and he says that is why I should keep this diary: as a sincere effort to rid myself of these feelings and develop a truly loving and Christian attitude plus to get an Outlet. He says an Outlet is very important. That it is a constant struggle and battle with your self to be a good Christian. That everyone has feelings like mine even him and it is not wrong to have them as long as you constantly struggle against them and be sure to get an Outlet. Because or else it can get to you and drive you nuts or make you sick, like for instance in my case I could get stomach ulcers. Or Migraine Headaches like Shirlye gets, or Sugar like my neighbor down the road Misty Brown. Or Heart like Dad or else turn to drink like Mom did. Because sometimes you can get to feeling like a pressure cooker with four kids under twelve and a husband to take care of plus a new home with a mortgage that takes more than half his salary and nothing but relatives that don't even realize that a gas station does not bring in that

much and you could use a little help but instead try to make things harder than they already are (not that it's Dad's fault that Shirlye won't give him a penny.)

Also my only sister Kate who Katy's named after that went away to college then moved to New York city to live when Mom was at her worse. Of course everyone has a perfect right to just look out for their-self, but the burden has to fall somewhere, and Dad never could cope with Mom when she was drunk, it just plain upset him too much and brought on his Heart and there I was living three blocks away at the time in our old place so it was up to me. *I* would of liked to go to college too but I guess the Lord didn't intend it that way, and now of cours I have Billy Jr and Timothy and Katy and Barby who I wouldn't trade a hair on their heads for all the college education and BA in this one and MA in that one and PHD that Kate is working on right now and all the fancy ways she went and developed as soon as she left home such as being a liberal and a vegetarian and an atheist and a woman's libber, plus a Homosexual which thank goodness Mom died before she found out although come to think of it, she probly might not of objected if it was Kate doing it. Now when *I* got pregnant they were ashamed to show their heads outside the door and couldn't ever consider me their real daughter again. Plus, they'd knew I would end up that way all the time because of the horish way I acted. (That's the very words Dad used to me, and I haven't ever forgot them, either.) But as for Kate, you would of thought she never did anything to disappoint anyone, the way they treat her. Mom used to wear her honors society key around her neck and had those degrees of her framed and up on her bedroom wall where she wouldn't even hang pictures of her own grandchildren. So probly if she'd found out that Kate was a homosexual that liked girls, that would of been peachy-keen, too.

Well there comes Barby with her blanket in her mouth and dragging down the stairs picking up dog-hairs as she goes and that means the others are sure to follow. What reminded me about Kate is she is coming in two days for a short visit, which will mean extra work and effort on everyone's part with her being a Vegetarian and all, so we never know what to give her to eat and have to cook special. It's just as well she never stays more than a day or two though of course I will be just tickled to see her. It's been more than a year now, and the kids don't even know their Aunty Kate. Last time she came the first thing out of Timmy's mouth was "Mommy, is that a boy or a girl?" before I could get to him. But who could blame the kid seeing that Kate does dress like a man and wears her hair short enough for one, though she is a petite blond like me who could be cute enough if she ever did anything with herself, so she

never looks like a full-grown man, but more like a boy that I bet takes about the same size as Billy Jr big as he is this year.

One person that will not be tickled to see Kate is Shirlye, who has been complaining about it for a week now. She says Kate acts like she's too good for us and even talks Northern now, and she shouldn't even bother to come home if she can't act like folks. Then too, she threw a fit over a letter Kate wrote to Dad last year all about how she never gets to talk to him alone without her (Shirlye) being there which is all too true, by the way, that woman will but in everywhere, you can never snatch a moment alone with your own Father. Plus Kate wrote its impossible to talk about Mom when Shirlye is around because it upsets her and she wants to be able to talk about Mom with him. Well I know just what Kate means, and I think it's darn spooky the way no one will mention her name like she was a ghost that never existed or something but in a way you can see Shirlye's point too in this case, after all she is Dad's wife, and I might feel the same way if Bill had been married before, and not want to be reminded of Her all the time.

(Wed. 3:30 PM) I read what I wrote so far and prayed hard to get rid of my anger and unforgivingness. I have decided not to show it to Rev. Tom until I improve in my feelings. Rev. Tom says all the feeling sorry in the world doesn't help a mite unless you change your actions too, so I called Shirlye right up and talked with her for at least one half hour after the kids left for school. Mostly she complained about Kate. It was hard to put up with but I know it is worth it for how else will the kids have a "real" relationship with their grandparents like all kids deserve to. Billy Jr. still remembers Mom who used to just love him to pieces whenever she was sober, but as for the others, Shirlye is all the "Grandma" they've got, since Billy's folks passed. And too, I can understand how Shirlye feels. You'd think Kate would at least try to adjust to the life we live here which used to be her own, and just eat what is served, which used to be plenty good enough for her.

I had to interrupt to separate Katy and Timmy. Seems like I am always telling *her* to sit still and be a lady and him to fight back which he should seeing that he is a boy and almost a whole year older. And Katy! One time last year she got sent home from school for fighting a little boy in her class, that she said took her lunch which is the way of little boys and the teacher could of got it back for her if she would of just gone through the right channels. But that girl won't ask you for the time of day, she never has, she rather fight. Well that time thank the Lord I remembered what Rev. Tom says and instead of hitting her just talked to her very quiet about how hurt Jesus felt at what she did, and how

ashamed He was of her for not acting like a little lady which I think did have its effect more than a beating would of done, just like he said it would. I sometimes worry that she will take after Kate (I mean in her mannish ways) but come to think of it now, Kate was more like Timmy in that way, shy and small for her age and with that way of sitting so still in one spot all buttoned up and so quiet you almost forget their there. But in how she hates to wear a dress Katy takes after Kate all right.

I remember how Kate used to go and hide under the porch when it was time to get dressed for church because she said the ruffles hurt her legs and I would be the only one who could get her out. By the time she was born, Mom was drinking pretty steady which was why the Dr. had her tubes tied, he said her system wouldn't support another birth. They used to call me Little Mother and think it was cute because I was only four years older than her, but if you ask me it was not cute but sad because who was going to look after that child if I didn't? Mom never noticed if we ate or not, or how we looked. I used to just love getting dressed up myself, and always had the hope that Mom might notice, and say I was cute, but I don't remember her ever doing it. Barby is just like me that way, now. She wants to wear her church dress and shoes to nursery school every day and her favorite game is bride which she plays with little Malcolm Boyd next door, cause she gets to dress up for it, and I tell her she is just the cutest thing alive.

Rev. Tom asked me if Kate had these tendencies when we were young, and it *is* true she didn't date much, nothing like I did, but I think that just because of the contrast between us, so to speak. At the time, my looks meant a lot to me, a lot more than they should of, seeing that it's not what you look like on the outside but how pure your soul is inside that counts for much. I was all involved in entering these beauty contests they used to hold. And then, too, I had a good personality, and was outgoing and friendly to one and all no matter who it was, while Kate used to be so quiet and stand-offish that some people thought she was a snob, or kind of hard, with that blank look on her face that you could never tell what she was thinking. She was that way even at home, like when Mom would be off her head raving about snakes in the bed and Dad would be clutching at his heart and sobbing and I'd be half-hysterical myself, just pleading with her to go to the hospital, you could look over to the sofa and there would be Kate, just sitting there reading on one of her books or staring off into space with that buttoned-up look. It wasn't that she didn't have any feelings, though, she just never used to like to show them. And boys do like a girl that at least knows how to smile, so maybe that was what started her off on the wrong foot, not being popular, especially with a big sister that was.

Sophomore year I got picked Miss Virginia Beach and Junior year I was Crab Queen, picked out of all the girls in five counties besides ours and riding in the lead float of the parade we have each Summer for the Crab Festival, that people come from as far as Richmond and Charlestown, North Carolina, to see, with a white, floor-length decolte gown with two skirts and little red velvet crab insignia all around the neckline, and a crown and sceptor made out of crab claws and five ladies in waiting that wore purple, pink, and orange, to represent the three colors crabs are before and after you cook them, that rode lower than me in the Royal Coach. I'm a natural blond anyway, and I used to just give myself one of those 'Toni' rinses which enhance the natural lights of your own hair, and more than one person told me I looked like a princess out of a book. Although I was the Queen, of course, the Crab Queen.

(Wed. night) Well, there is more news. Kate just called to say she was bringing a "friend" home with her, and you know what that means. I would just like to see the look on Shirlye's face now! I wonder if this is the same "friend" she brought to Mom's funeral which a lot of people were surprised she would do instead of a boyfriend and at the way she didn't shed a tear. But as Rev. Tom says, "be not the first to cast stones" which is one thing the people in this town could use a sermon on, the way they run their mouths. Bill and I had the both of them sleeping over here and Bill took some time after the funeral to talk to Kate about the comfort there is in Christ, although I don't believe she heard a word the state she was in. She was upset all right, although you wouldn't of ever known it unless you knew her like I do. Probably regretted running off instead of staying home when Mom needed her. That's what I said to Rev. Tom at the time, that I was able to grieve with a clear heart because I knew I'd done my best and stood by her when she needed me. I would say that grieving like that has a different flavor to it than the kind you do when you're all full of regrets.

Well I stood by my sister Kate then and wouldn't let a word be said against her just like I always have and always will, now that I'm the closest thing to a Mom she's got. I have never mentioned her liking girls to anyone out loud except to Bill of course and Rev. Tom which doesn't count. Not even to Dad or to Kate herself, just excepted everything with no questions asked.

When Dad called I asked him how Shirlye was takeing the news that she's bringing this girl and he said, "not so good," and that his heart was already acting up. Well, that poor man has had a hard life what with Moms drinking and me getting pregnant when I wasn't married and now this too and I'll pray to be a better daughter to him and try and ease

things for him by getting along with Shirlye and even try and forgive him for the way he used to beat me for coming in late and running with the wrong type of boy. Seemed like the first time anybody really noticed me was when I got my shape, and then seemed like he used to take and beat me every weekend. And that is the only time I remember either of them touching me, come to think of it. Which is probably why I can't stand for anyone to touch on me now. I hate that part of the sermon where you have to get up and embrace your neighbor and I always try to get an aisle seat with Bill on the one side, so I don't end up having to hug up to some sweaty old wart hog of a woman or someone. I know you're sposed to like it, but I just can't stomach it myself. They gave one of those talks at the PTA how it's good for children to get a lot of physical affection even when they get big so I try to make myself but it comes more naturally to Bill. Though I do like to hold Barby on my lap, she's still so little and will stay still without squirming unlike the others. I don't believe it's good for boys past babies, though. It could turn them funny. I am having a real good time writing this diary, and beginning to think I could of been a writer if anyone had ever encouraged me. It feels good to have someone to talk to that will listen and not tell me I'm stupid or get away or else pull on me telling me their hungry or Katy just hit me Mom, or help me with this paper for school or are the kids uniforms dry yet. Which is what Bill just wanted to know, and I haven't even put them in so time to go.

(Thursday, 2:37 PM) Well I re-read this whole diary and am still not satisfied with my attitude. I just sat down and prayed and prayed on it and I believe it helped because when Katy came in with her new school things all dirty I didn't even scold her, just sat her down for a real nice mother-daughter talk. She asked me did I love her as much as Barby and I told her the story how Christ loved all his lambs in the flock just as much even the little bad one that wandered off. And I told her if she would only strive to be a good Christian little girl I would love her even more. I just bet we will be seeing some improvement from a certain person!

Then when Kate called from over Dad and Shirlye's where she just got in, we had a real nice talk too, at least until she asked me did I have those picture albums from when we were growing up. I told her I did and she was welcome to look at them when she came over, which she will do tomorrow, but in my mind I said, "Those were Mom's albums and they will stay right here where there meant to be with me who cared for her and not go back to no New York City!" Kate said the visit was OK so far except there wasn't anything in the house she could eat except maybe

some lettuce and Shirlye and Dad were drinking already. I told her Dad was probably nervous from expecting her and just don't pay no mind to Shirlye. And then she put her friend on, a different one from last time. She is a Writer, and talks even weirder than Kate does herself now, like she was holding her nose all the time, and said she was looking forward to meet me because Kate had told her so much about how I used to take care of her when she was a kid and practically brought her up. So I'm glad at least someone is giving me some credit around here! I have to go now because I need to get dinner before my meeting for the Bible-Summer-School which is at 7:30.

(Thurs. 1:30 AM) Bill is asleep which I don't know how he can do but I am so wrot up I know it will do me good to write because I need an Outlet now if I ever did! Well what happened started when I was still out. Bill had put the kids down and was sitting watching TV when he heard a terrible commotion at the door. And there was my sister Kate sobbing hysterically with her girlfriend who had her arms around her and all etc. right out on the lit front porch for all to see. Well he brought them in and sat them down on the sofa and at first he couldn't get a word out of Kate she was crying so hard except for "can we stay here tonight?" And of course he assured them they could with no questions asked.

Well apparently what happened was Sara (that's her friend) went up to bed right after dinner and Kate stayed up hoping to talk to Dad a little because there were some things she wanted to ask him, like why didn't he answer that letter! Well, Shirlye was listening outside the door which didn't surprise me at all knowing her, and bust in and started shouting all about how it was her home and Kate had no right to insult her the way she did in that letter and take her own husband aside and poison him against her. And how Kate had always thought she was to good for *them* when to tell the truth they ought to be glad they even let her stay there the way she looks and now bringing her girlfriend there that they were supposed to just overlook and pretend it was a man or something! How Dad cried every night at what his daughter had turned into and everyone in town believed it was Kate drove her mother to drink and brought her to an early grave but she wasn't going to do the same to Shirlye and etc etc. Well I wouldn't even know it all seeing how Bill never remembers what you want to hear when he's telling something, but when I came home she had to tell it all again and was still crying which is not the Kate I know! Even when she used to fall off her bike and scrape all the skin off her knees where any normal kid would just ball and run to Mommy, she used to just go right on riding as if nothing happened and maybe at dinner I'd notice and ask her and she'd just mumble I fell off,

and that would be that.

So I knew all of this wasn't necessary and told her to control herself it wasn't that bad, and Shirlye was just like that and would say anything when she lost her temper. And then this girlfriend who is a strange looking girl with lots of wild hair like wire and sort of dark-skinned though she talks white enough and dresses funny but not as mannish as Kate, had the nerve to turn to me and say, "Please let her cry, it's good for her", just as if it was her that had known Kate all these years and just about brought her up, and not me. I was just about to say I had enough, and maybe *they* had nothing better to do than to stay up all night and wake up the kids, but I for one had to get up early, when Kate asked me how did Shirlye treat *me,* and didn't *I* think she was an evil woman. Which you can imagine got me going and we both agreed that ever since Mom had died Shirlye had been doing her very best to spoil things between Dad and his own daughters wanting to have him all to herself. Once we got that settled we started to talk about Mom, and how sweet and sort of sparkling she could be at times. How when she was in a room when she was sober it just seemed like the whole place was lit up. How she just loved Billy Jr. when he was born and forgot all about how she felt when I got pregnant with him. Well, maybe it was dredging up the past, but it felt good, though of course sad, too, and pretty soon the both of us were sniffling and crying together. Well, after a while of this I looked up, and that Sara and Bill were both gone. They had just quietly left the room when we were goin on. I peeked in the kitchen and there they were, just sitting and talking, like two men that had married two sisters, and were giving them a chance for some hen talk together. Like Bill couldn't even tell the difference or something.

When we got to bed I asked him didn't he feel funny sitting there talking to her like that, but he had to play dumb, and wouldn't say anything but "huh?" and, "like what?" So I asked him what he thought of Sara, and he just said, "Oh, she seems like a nice girl, seems to really care for Kate." Which all it turned out to be was a way to work it round to "but not as much as I care for you, sweetheart", which is the way he talks when he wants It. But four is enough for me even though the church does teach us to produce and multiply and the more kids you have for Jesus the better and not to interfere with God's natural process. Well it isn't Jesus that's gonna bring them up, so I did get one of those things, but I can't seem to put it in so it doesn't hurt me so I just pushed him away and said, "not with them right next door."

When he'd fell asleep I had to get up to go to the bathroom which used to be part of the guest room before we renovated it, so now you can hear everything that goes on in there when you're sitting on the john. And what I heard was this little rustling noise and a kind of steady

mumbling which when I listened close was words mumbled over and over sort of like singing, like the way you might do a child that had a bad dream to put it back asleep. I couldn't hear all the words, but some were, "It's OK now, go to sleep. It'll be OK, I love you, it's over now, go to sleep. I'm right here, go to sleep." Like that, and I figured the noise was probably Sara's hand, going round and round as she rubbed Kate's back.

I don't know why, but it made me sad. I went in to see if all the commotion had woke up the kids but they were all asleep. I just stood there looking at the girls and trying to remember when I had done that with them, sort of soothed them to sleep like that, or when they were awake even. Barby yes, cause she's the youngest and we knew a little more by then. Which is probly why she's such a sweet-natured, affectionate little thing. But I didn't cuddle with Billy JR too much. I was only seventeen, and the summer before I'd been Crab Queen and then here I was all of a sudden, married and tied down. He used to cry, and I'd just look at him and think, "I'm not going to pick you up, you little pest. If it wasn't for you I'd be in a beauty contest right now." But Mom used to pet him a lot, and maybe that's why he's pretty easy-going too. And Timmy was born right when Billy was at the age that they're into everything and we weren't Saved yet, and Bill and I would be fighting like cats and dogs every night and I just didn't have the time to hold him that much which is maybe why he's so quiet now and still wets the bed and is the one of my kids that people always forget about. And then Katy who was born the year Mom died and who seems like she was just born stubborn, fighting and the first word out of her mouth no, like she got the bad part of me and nothing else. I just stood there looking at them, and I started to feel all sorry for myself cause I swore I'd be a good mother to them like Mom couldn't be to us, and I started to feel like maybe I failed.

Then I went in the bathroom but that noise had stopped and I got into bed and tried to remember a time when I wasn't like I am now, when I really wished someone would touch me, but I couldn't remember ever feeling that way once I was grown. But Kate must of, and maybe she went and turned into what she is because it's different with a man. They don't give you that kind of attention, the way you want your Mom to do when you're a kid, just to cuddle and pet you and really listen to what you have to say and how you feel and how you look, and just plain notice you the way a woman will.

(Fri. afternoon) This morning after the kids were in school and Bill had gone to work, Kate and Sara wanted to look at that old album. And of course Sara went crazy over the pictures of Kate as a little kid, al-

though she doesn't look like much, just small and sullen with her hair down over her face half the time. Then we came to the ones of me as Crab Queen cut out from the paper, and they wanted to know all about that. Kate said she remembered when I was crowned, and then *I* remembered how she was the only one of the family that came out to see me and didn't even watch the whole parade, just ran alongside of my float with that hair falling in her eyes and the cute smile she has when she ever gets around to smiling.

Then the girls got home from school early today and Sara took them out on the lawn to play which I guess won't do them any harm except that it looked funny the way she was rolling around on the grass with them considering that she is thirty years old. Well I guess if you have no other responsibilities you can afford to act like that. Then Dad came over to talk to Kate and try to patch things up, and I just came right out and told them I wanted to be in on it too, cause she isn't the only one around here that doesn't like how she's being treated. So they said the two of them would talk a while, and then all three of us would. When I was writing the above Sara came in with the girls hanging to her like little crabs asking could she take them on a walk. I said OK since it will be easier having a serious talk with all of them out of the house. She asked me what I was writing and I told her a diary and she said she keeps one too being a Writer. She said she takes hers everywhere and writes down her impressions and then she can refer to it later when she's writing a story or something. Boy would I like to find out what she has written down about me and my family!!! Lucky for her I am saved or I might be tempted to look.

(Fri. 5:00 PM) Well I was good and sorry for my decision when that girl brought my kids back covered with mud and wet clear up to the knees! She'd gone and took them down the Bay where they are strictly forbidden to go what with those tides and not knowing how to swim. I almost had a heart attack when I saw it and I only thank goodness Bill wasn't home because the one time he will really lose his temper is when someone exposes his kids to danger. I really let Katy have it and scolded her but good for exposing her little sister to get drownded and told her what if Barby had fell in it would be her fault. I guess that Sara knew who I was really talking to because she kept saying it wasn't their fault and she was watching them all the time while she was telling them stories and they only played at the edge and didn't go in the water. Which just goes to show. A girl like that who is a Writer and not used to kids could get so involved in her stories that she might not notice if there was one less on the way back!

Then Katy wouldn't stop crying until Sara finally said she'd tell her another story, and then shut right up and scooted over on her lap, which is real unusual for her. So in the end it all ended up with me looking mean and in the wrong just for not wanting my own little girls to get drownded! It would be easier to be loving and forgiving if other people would at least admit their trespasses. But how can you forgive someone when she probably thinks she's the one that should be forgiving you? A girl like that could twist anything around to make herself look in the right and I just wonder how she did this in her diary?

In the talk, Kate was yelling and Dad was crying and then Dad was yelling and Kate was crying. He told her he Loved Her about three times which he never has said to me ever but of course that was not good enough for Miss New York City who wanted him to prove it and how are you supposed to prove a thing like that. I did not get in a word edgewise. Kate has sure changd, and nor for the better, either!

(Fri. 12:00 midnight) Well I did something I shouldn't have. They all went ahead because Billy JR had to practise before the game and the uniforms were not dry yet. I had to check something in the guest room bureau and her diary was right out there on top which was careless if you ask me. It's almost asking somebody to read it to leave it out like that. Maybe she kind of hoped I would. I always hide mine but good in a different place each time. She just started it last month so there wasn't very much, just a whole lot about this big fight her and Kate had I'm not sure about what. The part about us was sort of like a story. This is it.

> –Two sisters and one stayed and one went away. Both daughters of a charming powerful drunk whose mark they'd carry all their lives. Kate who goes away into herself and Jean who lashes out but both of them women who inspire devotion and both with the magnetism of that mother, who made everyone wait–
> –The story of Jean, a powerful woman whose high point in life was when she was crab queen at 17, and nothing's been the same since–The way she makes the kids and the big clumsy man wait on her moods, watch to see if she's gonna smile or snap . . .
> –And behind it all the whine of children and the repetition of prayers like a sedative–and always the lapping of the bay–

Well I must say it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be! Who knows, maybe I'll open a book someday and the main character will be me! All through the game I kept saying it to myself: "The story of Jean, a powerful woman."

(Sat. noon) Well, it's over. They left. And it's just like I knew it would

be. All on me. Shirlye called to say that if I hadn't let them stay here Kate would of had to face reality and apologize to her, and she knows I was behind it all and had never liked her. I had to go and patch it all up and bring her roses from the garden. For the sake of the kids.

Katy whined all afternoon and asked me why didn't I tell her stories like that lady. And Timmy took the book that Kate gave him (something wierd about a boy that likes dolls or something, wouldn't you know) out back and missed his ball practise. I just let them be and went in the kitchen and tidied up a little. There was the picture album, and wouldn't you know it, there were three pictures missing. Well, at least they were just of Kate and not of me or Mom.

Then I tried to imagine what they were doing. Still driving back, I guess, maybe fighting about something, yelling and saying things just like the rest of us do. I can't say that I envy Kate, all in all. I have a few things to look forward to. I have my rap with Rev. Tom on Monday and I guess I'll have to tell him about reading that girl's diary. I know he'll feel bad about it but I guess he'll forgive me, just like the Lord. And I guess he'll be surprised at how much I wrote! I know it's not the way it should be, but at least it is an Outlet and Jesus loves those who try, and you can tell I did that! A whole books worth, almost. And every so often I'll stop and say part of what that Writer wrote about me to myself. "A woman who inspires devotion." "A powerful woman." And then I feel good, like an important person. One that gets noticed. One that when a Writer met her one time she wanted to write a book about her.

After the War

after the war it is quiet/
we take the bus to Bridgenorth
my father rolls up his sleeves, rows
the family in the smooth current
of the Severn/ my mother's dark-
blonde hair moves backwards
against the river, against
the stinging nettles along its banks/
there are warnings of unexploded bombs
there are rows of stringbeans &
blackcurrant bushes, it is quiet,
she folds the blackout curtains
in the spare room, she cuts her
leg on military barbed wire, the
veins mend slowly under the white
elastic stocking/ she buries what
hurts her most stays on her feet
beating the batter for a ginger cake/
bombsites run purple with Rosebay Willowherb/
I watch the stinging nettles behind her face,
the lines, the sediments of war/ I look
through her mouth at the river

I WORK UNDERGROUND

For the woman miner killed by a falling slab of slate.
Coalport, Pennsylvania, October 1979

I work underground mining the soft coal
that powers the generating plant
over by Harrisburg I work
underground in the Rushton mine
where the walls of the
galleries swallow sound

I'm a burrower in black veins

mostly I tend to my own business
the safety director shrugs his shoulders says
this job's too tough for a woman says *anyway*
we don't want women down here
because we respect them my hands
grow hard in my gloves

I mark the leaptides of my muscles/

all night at the bottom of the
mine installing roofbolts I'm not afraid
of the blackness with its
poised slabs of slate/ the charcoal
reflects off the round mirrors of my glasses
I make a safe place for my hands

I come off shift at 8 o'clock
riding the man-trip up into
daylight I shake the coarse dust from
my coveralls I blink the sun off
my eyes like yellow sandpaper

slagheaps coalchutes a stream of steam

I've worked hard all my life
now I'm a miner mining
soft coal for the Harrisburg plant
I know what it means: respect/
in the daylight a cow lowers her head

winds her tongue
around the long spring grasses

MAKAI/FIRST LIGHT*

Here where salt gathers
between shell and moss stones
where birds rise off water
like great winds in passing
where the sea tosses brilliance
of cold stars
was I born
my heart's breath, storm clouds,
surging through air,
my bones, musk and white light,
first snow in winter,
my blood, waterfall, and rituals
under desert moon,
I am a woman filled
with night visions
I walk with the wolves
and howl my own songs,
I lie in the tall grass,
I lie on the mesa,
my hair like black smoke
rises in wind
my teeth like thin razors
flash in the dawning.

**Makai is Hawaiian for "to the sea."*

JAN CLAUSEN

DEALING WITH DENVER

The following is an excerpt from Sinking, Stealing. *Set in the late seventies, the novel focuses on the relationship between two main characters: Josie, a feminist and lesbian, and Ericka, ten-year-old daughter of Josie's former lover Rhea. Following Rhea's sudden death, Ericka's father Daniel has taken the child back to live with him; more recently, Josie and Ericka have run away together in response to Daniel's threats to separate them completely. Posing as Laura Cole and her daughter Cindy, they are traveling by bus from New York to the West Coast.*

Portland seemed like a great idea back in Biddle, Arizona.

Suddenly, following the second and more acrimonious of my phone conversations with Daniel, the one in which he assured me that if I didn't rush his daughter home on the next plane he'd throw the book at me, I'd become convinced LA would be a trap. True, this was merely a superstitious hunch–unless they found some way of tracing those calls, in which case my destination would be fairly obvious. But then I had good reasons for not wanting to wait around Biddle all day–the town already knew too much about us.

When I scanned the Greyhound map for alternatives, there leaped out at me what I ought to have seen before: the thick black squiggle extending north from Albuquerque, bisecting Colorado, nipping Wyoming, and grazing Utah, then slicing a triangle off Idaho and entering Oregon, where it arced through Baker, Pendleton, and The Dalles: to Portland, city of hills, bridges, and rain; cool, somber-eyed market-town of a blessedly backward province, steeped in a marinade of oblivion. Thick-furred with evergreens, looped with gemlike fruit, blackberry vines running wild in all the vacant lots of summer. Where, yes, are set the cunning snares of freeways, and Trojan holds the north in stern nuclear thrall–but you dream the trees might have a fighting chance. Where *quality of life* is savored like vintage wine. Where *nothing ever happens,* oh miracle. And where dwells Rosemary, my spacey friend from Scrubb College, lately saddled with marriage, a mortgage, motherhood–but perhaps still reckless enough to take us in.

This change of plans would mean extra travel time, nearly two days

in fact. But under the spotless sky of Biddle, in the amphetamine relief of having gotten back my lost child, a few extra hours on a Greyhound bus seemed a trivial assignment. Perhaps it even had its virtues, guaranteeing as it did two additional nights' lodging and postponement of the hour when we'd run into an ocean and have to face Real Life.

Of course I romanticized that black squiggle—an easy mistake to make, coming as I do of a generation weaned on the surreal transitions of jet travel, used as I am to eastern distances. Once out west, how far can the coast be?

But North America is serious: not so easily chewed, spit out. I failed to anticipate the grinding miles, that grim night stretch that followed Albuquerque. I didn't foresee the trauma of restroom mirrors, my face looming purplish and diseased-looking in the fluorescent wee-hours glare of Trinidad, Colorado; nor how Ericka, huddled against me through the night, would stir in half-sleep and piteously murmur, "Josie, I mean Mom, how long did you say till we get to go to bed?"

Back there in Trinidad, I decided we needed rest. Sleepwalkers, I grasped, make clumsy fugitives, and despite my instinctive preference for motion, we'd better stop in Denver. Now, as we wait forlornly on the porch of a ramshackle house in an old neighborhood, I'm having my doubts about the Portland plan—and everything else.

It was pretty early when we hit town. I made some phone calls from the station, found out the Denver Y doesn't allow kids, and that all the hotels downtown seem to be either skid row class or exhorbitantly expensive. Then, having with some difficulty obtained directions to a women's bookstore, I shlepped Ericka and our possessions over there. We sat on the doorstep wearily munching corn chips, waiting for opening time.

Opening time was not as advertised. The woman who finally showed up said she personally couldn't help us, but suggested I check the bulletin board in back of the store. And there, in a haystack of thumb-tacked notices, I ran across a sign lettered in crayon:

> SYSTERSEA SHARESPACE. New in Denver? Passing through? In crisis? Looking for Positive, Syster-Centered Space? Come share with us. Pay what you can, stay as long as you want. Also looking to expand our collective. Especially need input from Older Systers, Working-Class Systers, and Systers Of Color. ALL SYSTERS WELCOME.

Well, I was certainly passing through. And probably in crisis. I asked the staffer if I could use the phone. She looked put out, and I couldn't really blame her—our stuff was sprawled across the scant floorspace, we clearly had no thought of buying books. Finally she said she guessed if it was a very brief local call. . . .

After eight or ten rings somebody picked up.

"Hello," I opened, "is this the . . . Sharespace?" I couldn't seem to manage "Systersea."

"Yeah," said a child's voice. "Who's this?"

"My name's Laura Cole. I was wondering–I mean, could I speak to–your mother, or anyone?"

"I'm anyone," she hardily replied.

"I've been looking for a place to stay tonight."

"It's okay, yeah."

"Are you sure? Maybe I should talk to someone else. About when I should come over and everything."

A pause, while something loud got chewed and swallowed. "Come when you get ready. I'll be here."

Scarcely encouraged, I thought to ask her name, as one does of unhelpful Con Edison personnel, in case things go wrong later.

"Astarte."

"Oh."

The staffer was eyeing me.

"By the way," I added, "I'll be bringing along a child. I assume that's okay?"

"Girl or boy? We don't allow pricks."

I reassured her on that point, then made what I hoped was a subtle last-ditch bid for contact with her elders. "Is anybody home who could give me bus directions?"

"I don't think so, you'd have to call back in about an hour or two. B.D. and Chamomile went to shop at the food co-op. Mountain's in the hut and can't be disturbed. I don't know where Cascara and Pat are at."

Defeated, I insincerely thanked Astarte–I still had the feeling she was holding out on me–and hung up the phone.

"We hafta stay there?" Ericka cried.

"Didn't you tell me you wanted to go to bed?"

Brazen with exhaustion, I imposed upon the staffer to furnish a complicated set of bus directions, and we finally set out. The trip, involving two transfers, took about an hour. Ericka yawned and fidgeted and grilled me: What's a "sharespace"? Who ever heard of the name Astarte? Why'd they spell "syster" like that? *She* wouldn't like strange people staying in her house all the time, would I? *Would* I?

"I'm tired, kiddo. Let's just be quiet now."

The third bus we took deposited us in a racially mixed neighborhood of spacious but shabby houses set on ample lots, one that's obviously seen more prosperous days. I'm familiar with the type: it's due for gentrification, but in the meantime is populated by the usual lively, edgy

mix of working-class families with kids, students, old folks who've lived here thirty years or more, feminists, and long-haired men marooned by the ebb of the counterculture.

Finding the bell broken, I've been hammering away at the door of a place distinguished from its immediate neighbors by a decrepitude less cosmetic, more structural. The yard is anarchic with dandelion puffballs. I'm sure it's the Sharespace, although the number's missing, for by peering through a thickness of oval glass in the top half of the door I can make out bundled stacks of *off our backs* and *Big Mama Rags* strewn among the boxes of Mason jars, propped bicycles, withered houseplants. Plastic bags stuffed with clothing appear to have gotten lost on their way to a rummage sale. Behind looms a broad, rather grandiose stair.

"No one's home." Ericka seems hopeful.

No such luck, however. A bumping is heard within, and the door is opened a crack by a husky, barefoot hoyden with unkempt hair, her raspberry-colored robe slit to the thigh.

"Hello, I'm Laura Cole. And this is Cindy."

"You're the one that called?" She doesn't budge.

"Yes. You're Astarte, right?" I say brightly. "You said we could stay—"

"Well, sure. You're women, aren't you? Bring your stuff." We stumble in, hampered by sudden gloom. "Follow me." We climb toward the light.

"How old are you, Cindy?" is flung back at us.

Ericka admits to being ten.

The other baldly states she doesn't look it.

"How old are you, Astarte?" I retort, partly in loyalty to Ericka, partly just curious.

"Twelve in August. I got my bloods already."

We climb to the third floor, a sort of finished attic. "You're gonna sleep here," our concierge announces, indicating a low, narrow, dusty room furnished with single mattresses on the floor. It will do quite nicely, I see: the door shuts. The view from the dormer window is of a backyard half patchy vegetables, half weedy tangle.

"See that?" Astarte gestures toward thick foliage, through which appears some sort of wooden structure. "That's our menstrual hut. B.D. built it last year. We can't use it in the winter, though, it's not heated yet. Mountain's out there now, and Pat and Cascara went to chant with her. You can leave your stuff up here and come down. Unless you want to sleep in my room, Cindy. It's farout, it's grownup-free space."

Ericka looks alarmed, so I tactfully suggest that we can make decisions about sleeping arrangements later. All I want in this world at the

moment is to unroll my sleeping bag and lie down like a hypothermic surrendering to snow, but I figure I'd better meet the Systers first. I try to suggest a nap to Ericka, but she clearly doesn't want to be left alone.

So we descend the stairs again, Astarte leading the way to the kitchen in back, where a big barefoot woman in very short blonde hair, her workshirt open over plump tanned breasts, acknowledges us with a nod and continues chopping onions.

"What's for dinner?" Astarte demands suspiciously. "Yuk, all those onions."

"Millet stew. For you, anyway. I'm fasting."

"Ew yuk, millet stew's the absolute pits. Where's Pat?"

"Still out back with Mountain."

"Can I go out? I wanna chant too."

"I don't know, Astarte, I think you'd better not. Your energy's pretty intense for Mountain's first day. How about helping me, chopping a few of those carrots?"

Astarte screws up her face disobligingly, but does grab several of the largest carrots I've ever seen from a gunny sack beside the refrigerator, then dampens them slightly with water from the tap.

"Not like that, Astarte. Really *wash* them."

She goes back and rinses them again, then commences a desultory chopping operation. Ericka and I stand stupidly in a corner.

I decide I'd better take the initiative. "I'm Laura Cole," I announce hopefully, "and this is my daughter Cindy. We're traveling across country, and we found your place through a sign in the bookstore. I really appreciate the chance to stay here."

The cook extends an onion-scented paw, grips my hand firmly. "Howdy, name's Earthdyke. Where you all headed?"

"The coast. We're on our way from New York City."

"Hitching?"

"No, Greyhound."

"Oh, right." But I see we've sunk a bit in her estimation. After a minute she adds, "That gets pretty expensive, doesn't it?"

"Well, but you get where you're going."

"There's a dyke staying here, been here about a week, calls herself Railroad Sue. Seems to know quite a bit about hopping freights. She'll be at dinner. Two of you ought to talk. Might be able to save yourself some bread."

"Indeed," I mutter, thoroughly incensed, but forebearing to inquire whether Railroad Sue recommends hopping freights with kids.

Jack Kerouac again, coming back to haunt me. The butch reproach of all those cozy boxcars.

"So you're from New York, huh," she continues pleasantly. "I've been through there myself."

"What did you think of it?" My weary eyes feel as though they could sink right into my skull and be lost without a trace.

She gives a tolerant shrug. "Well, every place has its own energy, know what I mean? I couldn't get into it. But then, I've never been much of a city person. New York messed me over so bad, I had to go on a water fast for about three weeks and meditate like crazy and have healing circles and all *sorts* of shit, you know, acupressure treatments up the ass, before I could even begin to get some decent energy going, after I left that place! I mean, talk about a left-brain, patriarchal head! And I'd only been there about a week. Think what years of that could do to you!

"Now, I'm not gonna say what's right for everybody. Maybe some dykes can deal, know what I mean? I have enough trouble dealing with Denver. Me and Mountain are fixing to get us some land with a bunch of women, maybe this year if everything works out.

"Once in a while . . . does it ever cross your mind, it might not be so bad if a tidal wave or something, you know, some volcanic eruption or whatever, some natural emanation of the Goddess, so to speak, would just kind of conveniently come along and wipe out all that urban patriarchal bullshit, give us a chance to start over?"

"Well, no," I admit. "But I'm biased, being from Brooklyn."

"Oh, right." My irony escapes her. "Just a thought. Where on the coast are you heading?"

"Seattle," I improvise. "I know some women there."

"Farout. Beautiful place. As cities go. I have some friends there myself. You ever run into a dyke named Ketchikan? Or Twig? Or Blue Whale?"

I haven't.

Fine, fine women, I'm assured.

The conversation lapses; I feel I've done my duty. I ask if it's okay to take a shower.

"Sure, go right ahead. We don't have any hot water, boiler's broken this week, but you're welcome to all the cold you can use. . . . Say, before you go—"

"Yes?"

"You *are* a dyke, aren't you?"

I avow my affiliation.

"Excuse the question. Pat and B.D. think I shouldn't ask, but the Space *is* open to bis and even hets, and I like to be sure who it is I'm dealing with. I mean, like, if The Man comes busting in all of a sudden, I'd like to have it clear who my friends are, know what I mean?"

Despite the polite disclaimer, I feel she doubted me, and suspect our names have a lot to do with it. "Laura" and "Cindy" may do for the outside world, but here they ring absurdly limp and femmy. And as for possessing a *last* name–sheer gaucherie!

I should have been Subway Ellen or Pocatello.

"See you folks later," Earthdyke cheerfully reminds us. "Dinner happens somewhere around six. We ask two bucks a head, more if/less if. Done chopping carrots, Astarte? Don't you want to take Cindy outside?"

"Uh-uh,"Astarte grunts–to "Cindy's" clear relief. Half-finished chopping abandoned, she idly gnaws a carrot. Her splay-footed crouch on the grimy linoleum hints she grew up in a world without furniture.

"I don't think I like it here," Ericka whispers on the stairs. "I don't want a cold shower."

"Sleep is what you need. Washing can wait till later."

"How come they have those names? And who's Astarte's mom? I don't get it. And what's that shack for, in the backyard?"

Reluctant to get into an exhaustive elucidation of local customs at this point, I say we'll talk about it after we've had some rest.

"But I don't think I like that stuff that what's-her-name's fixing for dinner, and then what am I gonna eat?"

"Look, take a nap. I won't let you starve, kid."

Ten minutes later, back from my bracing ablutions, I find her out for the count on the bare mattress. No amount of effort serves to rouse her when Astarte bellows from the second floor that dinner's almost ready. Finally I cover her with a sweater–the evening is rapidly cooling–and steel myself to meet the multitudes.

The vast, dim, ruined dining room below is full of white, mostly young, mostly crop-haired lesbians who sit jammed on benches around a rough table. Someone is ladling Earthdyke's millet stew into a plethora of mismatched bowls. Someone is slicing a leaden-textured loaf. Hoping to go unnoticed, I claim an empty place; nevertheless, almost immediately–"Hey, wait a minute, women, we've got a new syster with us in the circle, let's everyone go around and say our names," Earthdyke conscientiously insists. And I'm honored by a bewildering litany: "I'm Pat . . . I'm Fern . . . Natalie . . . Elderberry. . . ."

I do manage to attach names to several faces. The one certifiably "older" woman, probably fifty or so, with silvered hair and a riveting blue gaze, turns out to be B.D. Railroad Sue, sitting opposite me, looks more like forty. She's wiry and tanned, white showing deep in the wrinkles around her eyes, a cigarette pack sexily rolled into her T-shirt sleeve above a swell of muscle. Grudgingly, I find myself admitting she

does look like she'd know about trains.

The two young things to my right, who eat with some awkwardness because they are holding hands beneath the table, turn out to be Cascara and Chamomile. Their drastic-dyke haircuts, men's suit pants, and round wholesome faces are so similar that they bear an unnerving resemblance to a pair of twins. Except for one factor: Chamomile, the one right next to me, is, beneath a large labyris pendant and billowy lavender smock, indubitably pregnant.

I address myself to my bread and millet stew, which I supplement recklessly with a dollop of cottage cheese from the container Cascara holds out with the ominous invitation, "Here, have some, if you're not worried about forming a lot of mucus!" The stew is lumpy and lacks seasoning. When Railroad Sue shoves a bottle in my direction—"Pour yourself a glass, if you're not another one of those drug-less, booze-less, life-less, lez-be-ens they grow around here," she chortles cynically—I'm grateful to fill my chipped, handleless cup with sour red wine.

Earthdyke, ascetically sipping herbal tea, resumes her account, interrupted by my entrance, of her sure-fire method of curing allergies by means of judicious fasting. This soon gives way to a general food discussion: someone speaks out on the evils of mixing fruits; someone else explains why we'd all be much healthier if we avoided wheat products; it is alleged that the diligent consumption of miso will neutralize the poisons from Rocky Flats.

Suddenly Astarte begins to fuss, "Pat, Pat, I can't eat this garbage."

"Then go get some of your own stuff out of the fridge," Pat curtly instructs, and goes back to a lively debate about menstrual huts. "The thing is, though, so many of the ancient rituals have been lost under patriarchy. And we can't just re-*invent* them, we have to re-*member* them. Read Mary Daly, you'll see."

Astarte returns from the kitchen with three naked, wrinkled hot-dogs, which she devours banana-fashion.

"I thought someone told me you had a kid too," Chamomile ventures conversationally.

"She's upstairs, sound asleep. We're both pretty tired." But the wine is beginning to hit, so I make an effort and add, "Do all these women live in the house, or what?"

"Oh, tonight we have a lot of dinner guests," Cascara replies for her. "We're going to a concert later on. You and Railroad Sue are the only overnighters. See, the Space collective is really just B.D., Pat, Mountain, Earthdyke—well, and of course Astarte. Me and Chamomile are sort of temporary."

"Maybe." Chamomile dreamily fingers her abdomen. "It kind of

depends a lot on this kid, actually."

"You mean . . . when the baby's born, you'll decide if you want to stay?"

"Well, see, depending what it *is*. They have a very firm Space policy, no pricks whatsoever, not even meter readers, so if it's not a girl. . . . but I know it's gonna be. Cascara says she can tell it's a dyke by how strong it kicks!"

At mention of the name, a bit of botanical knowledge forgotten until now pops into my head: cascara is a plant, native to the west, renowned for the laxative properties of its bark.

"Was it hard getting pregnant?" I politely ask Chamomile.

"No, I hit the jackpot right away, it was really farout. But see, I was eating really, really healthy, you know, meditating a lot. And then Cascara would always help me and hold the turkey baster and everything. I think that's what really did it." She turns to kiss her lover on the mouth in a gesture of gratitude.

"And what will you do if—well, if it's *not* a girl?"

"I guess me and Cascara will just have to get our own place. I hope we don't have to, we certainly can't afford it. And it'd be hard, not being able to go to meetings and women's spaces together, or, like, come over here, you know, but one of us would just stay home with him. I figure that's the risk you have to take, just like you hope it's healthy but you'd still love it if it had a birth defect."

"No matter what, it'll still be our kid," Cascara confirms fiercely.

"Actually, though," Chamomile hastily adds, "the collective's been real good to us. They even said we could have the birthing here, which *does* mean the possibility of male energy in the house, for a few hours at least. Earthdyke isn't too happy about it, but . . . but that reminds me, I wanted to ask, what was *your* birthing like?"

Fuzzy with wine, for a second I draw a blank. "My birthing?" Maybe someone who believes meditation gets you pregnant really expects me to remember being born.

"You know, when you had your daughter."

"Oh, that!" I manage not to laugh. "Goodness, let's see, it was quite a while ago, and. . . ." I stall, await appropriate inspiration. "I mean, I can't remember much about it, the way they knocked me out."

"You had her in a regular hospital?" Chamomile regards me with shocked, respectful pity, as though I've revealed I lived through the siege of Stalingrad, or was a bar dyke before Stonewall. "With painkillers and all that shit?"

"Painkillers!" I'm warming to my fiction. "Not only that—stirrups, forceps, the works. You see, I was overdue, and my obstetrician wanted

to go away on vacation, so they induced labor. Then the contractions were coming way too fast, I was lying there screaming bloody murder, so they came along and . . . first a spinal block. Then they totally put me under. Naturally I don't remember much."

"Oh that's awful!" Chamomile grips my hand.

"Women have suffered worse under patriarchy," I can't resist intoning.

"That's true. But is she–okay now, your kid?"

"Well, yes. I mean, she's ten years old."

"You're really lucky then, because sometimes these horrible violent patriarchal births can do all sorts of damage that comes out later on. You've met Astarte–Pat's kid, over there."

"Sure. First thing."

"Well, Pat had a C-section. And sometimes I suspect that explains a lot of Astarte's problems."

"Hmm, you really think so?"

"I mean, she's just so hostile and negative a lot of the time. I don't know, I guess I sort of believe Nature takes care of things, if you do like she intends. When things go wrong that way–well, maybe that particular baby just wasn't meant to make it."

"But if it was yours, and there were complications–" I begin indignantly. Chamomile's face is peaceful, innocent, her complexion fresh and smooth as Ericka's. It's unclear to me whether she understands that she's just suggested Astarte would be better off dead.

"I try to stay centered," she replies modestly.

Cascara now reminds her they've got to get ready for the concert, and the two of them depart, still holding hands. I wish them all the luck, feeling sure they'll need it.

Nothing prevents me from following them upstairs. I've eaten all the millet I can stomach, there's less than an inch of wine left in my cup. And still I don't move.

It's the wine of course, on top of the exhaustion. The relief of having a bed, for the night at least. My child is safely sound asleep upstairs and . . . how can I explain?

In this ludicrous situation, I'm remembering who I am.

Say it's like this: you live in New York City. You've been out for years. And you're used to the idea; it's stopped being anything like the adventurous old days, when you hoarded your courage for weeks just to walk into some bar; when you looked at women, even on subway trains, and thought: underneath those Levis, those Gloria Vanderbilts. . . . Because, you see, you've stopped being the outsider, latent longer, furtive experimenter. You've joined, you've taken out your party card. Before

you know it you're a pillar of the proverbial "community," and *lesbian* is anything but sex: a political position, social nexus, system of supports and obligations.

Everyone you care to know is queer. Your life is a room of women. Of course you forget to hunger and thirst for them.

But, scooped out of this cozy artificial pond, cast into the high seas of a hostile planet, your attitude quickly alters. Out here in the world, they're wearing mascara, dresses. They're getting married. They're talking about their men.

And nowhere may you touch. Nor think about it.

And so, when you spot some dyke on the street of a small town, or stroll into the one gay bar in three states–what a gift, what a thrill, what balm! It's the rare affirming mirror the Village used to be: others have thought of this, I didn't just make it up.

I'm watching Railroad Sue across the table.

What I like: the small but clearly defined breasts, nipples darker circles under the clean white T-shirt. Her capable shoulders, abandon when she laughs, tosses her head back, lips spread over prominent teeth.

How she narrows her eyes, as though troubled by the sun.

How she moves.

Butch.

It could have been almost anything, of course: bare brown tits in the kitchen this afternoon. But it happens to be this.

My eyes graze hers. I wonder what she sees. Nothing, probably. She stands up, stacking dishes.

"Here, I'll help." I trail her to the kitchen.

We dump the dishes on the counter and go back for more. The pile-up grows alarming. I know I should start washing, but when she guesses she'll go out back and have a smoke, I ask to bum a cigarette.

Not having smoked in years, naturally.

We sit down on rotten steps, before us a vista of lettuce going to seed, the "re-membered" menstrual hut turning its back on us behind ragged shrubbery. She shakes two Marlboros out of a half-full pack. They're my favorite of filters.

I inhale, cautious as a teenage novice. The smoke tastes harsh but good.

"Whew, that's better," she breathes. "I wouldn't dare light up inside, they'd have my ass. They're a fine bunch of women, but they're all so goddamn *good*. Worse than Methodists.

"Even that B.D. And I used to know that woman. Ran into her in bars–oh, eighteen, twenty years back, when I was just a kid. She sure drank plenty then!"

"Maybe it's just as well she gave it up–but I know what you mean," I add. What differentiates all this from my adolescence is nothing much more than a trick or two I've learned: a faith in my talent for dissimulation, the control that separates me into halves–the half that goes on talking fairly normally, and the one that's feverishly conscious of proximity to a strong naked arm, how easily, accidentally we might touch.

"And everything's goddess this and ritual that. Honest to christ, it reminds me of my folks. They were real big Christians, I guess that's why it bugs me. Every other thing you thought about doing was on their list of sins."

"At least they allow sex. Here in the Space, I mean."

"Yeah. Well."

My sally seems mistaken, I feel suddenly embarrassed, and can't think of anything natural to say. Finally I recall her reputation for hopping freights.

"Oh, that." She dismisses the achievement. "Yeah, I tried it a few times when I was younger and dumber, but it's not much of a way to travel. It's colder 'n shit in winter, and it's hard to figure out exactly where you're headed, and if they catch you they think it's a good joke to throw you off in the middle of nowhere. And you can run into some pretty rough customers in those cars, believe me. Man, I love trains–but let me ride with a ticket. If I have to travel cheap, I'd rather hitch. I know I'll get where I'm going quicker, be warmer and dryer at it, and probably a lot safer, too."

Since I don't dare watch her face, I'm watching her long thin hands, wondering why it should be I'm so infatuated with the contrast between a narrow blue-veined wrist and that stretchy metal watchband, the kind my father wears. "Well, that's interesting. I was curious what you'd say. I mean, I *knew* Earthdyke had to be a little over-optimistic, as far as the possibilities of doing something like that with a kid–"

"You've got a kid?"

"Yeah, she's asleep upstairs."

"Hey, that's farout. I used to want a kid. But it's probably just as well I never had one."

"How come?"

"I'd probably have made a lousy mother. Besides, I can see *me* pregnant!"

"Well, why not? Look at Chamomile." Our cigarettes are out. I can't hope to hold her long.

"She's really into it, isn't she, poor kid. See, I've never been able to really settle down and stay in one place long enough to make much of a home life. Like even now, I can't make up my mind whether to

hang around Denver and get some kind of job, or go back out to the coast again, or what. I'd like to see Alaska."

"I bet it's gorgeous there."

"Hey listen, are you coming to this concert? It's some local dyke, supposed to be all right."

"Oh no. I've really got to get some sleep."

"I'd better vamoose, I guess. See you tomorrow, maybe."

We rise. I walk behind her, free to look. And then that's it, I'm on my way upstairs, breathless with lust, ridiculously wet, to lie down on the floor two feet from my slumbering child, in whose presence I can't even decently jerk off.

IT WAS YOUR IDEA

"Look we could make necklaces with these shells there's holes in em already"
I bent to see these small curving cones
bleached white, lavender, rust, golden, gray, umber, sepia
some with small pebbles wedged tenderly in their folds
We gathered separate mounds sifting through gray blue stones
This morning when I was supposed to be on my way somewhere else
after years of collecting shells for necklaces & not making them
I did
You had just left/I didn't want you to go/I was late
I needed a necklace I could name you & wear
soft & worn the muscle of passion gone
the shells remain
Loving you with more tenderness than I gave then
I strung us together on coral silk twist
adding the petrified crab claw & abalone purple edges I found with you
wanted to fit all the small stones of our day together
ran out of thread as we ran out of time
The necklace just barely fits
over my head although I started with a long length
my first one
as you are
Never mind the sand of succeeding loves
it is you I wear on my neck a delicate weight of years
distance doesn't erase it
You're my protection in a life of bleached debris
smooth stone I've caught folding you in
to a place where salt water squeezes from my eyes
it was your idea
to leave

ELEGY FOR JANE

slowly turning away from you water under my feet in my eyes on my knees
in my heart/I can stand anything/they say/I've had a tough life I can take it
on my knees my heart turning
stabs me
a gull dips close not as close as you've been as now there is air under
my feet where you were
the sky gray as my skin/if only you'd died I'd know what to do/chop off my
hair roll my body in ashes & keen sharp as this place where you were/
a thin light on the horizon swims/recedes/my hands are raw & peeling they
haven't touched you in 29 days
all I eat is poisonous I vomit & say it's only the flu
inside you
the world reeled me silver & deep there was no end
this one I'm in now is cardboard I could knock it over
cartoon figures gape call me up to make sure
I'm all right
sure I can take it dead love is no new burden I like my new apartment
on my knees where my heart was here somewhere under this lace
tablecloth we bought together in the beginning when we thought
our horizon stretched without turns you can see light through
the pain in my ribs I'm fine
I'm taking it on my knees this flood of memories promises dreams
I can't breathe I can take it it's only
a chest cold
you are
inside me

FIRST NIGHT

I saw clitoris. You saw tongues.
We knew we would talk through the night.
It was still dark when we stood at the fire
watching purple heat swell until words
we could not say formed a silence
we would not break. "I don't want this to

end," I said. We were sitting, foot to
foot, at either end of a bed. My tongue
had fluttered free of a mouth which finds silence,
in such matters, easier. The night
dark settled. I watched your profile as words
flew from our lips–stories at a fire–

first loves, deaths of parents. When the fire
went cold, we brought more wood, no heed to
darkness passing. I was stumbling for words
to perform a task meant clearly for tongues,
but mine was tied, inexorably as night's
course holds and dawn brings a silence

between tree-toad and birdsong. Silence
of repose is one thing; this felt like fire
compressed. How long could I swallow? Night
would end. We raised ice cream spoons to
each other, ate until they came clean as tongues
one sees in fire, held breath until certain words

burst fear stretched tight as skin, words
gave way to touch, and what had been silence
became cacophany. Yes, there were tongues
and embers brightening like labia. Yes, fire
can take any form it wishes to
when refined by eyes adjusted to the night.

We stoked the fire to burn past the night,
at dawn lay side by side until our words–
gathering, cluttering–exhausted us to
feeling, and what had needed speech wanted silence,
until sun burned through mist like fire
through wood, and morning loosened our tongues.

For the night's length, we kept that silence.
By morning we wanted words to commit its fire
to memory. Clitoris, I said. You said tongues.

BARBARA BANKS

ABOUT THE LIZARDS

The boy was tired. Since daybreak he'd been awake. It was dark now, and he wanted his bear. All day, he had yearned to come home to crawl into bed with the one-eyed blue bear. It would not ask why he'd disputed "Show 'n Tell" by dumping Sam's box of trapped lizards out the school window, nor would it point out, as his mother had, how incredible his newfound empathy was in light of the indifference he'd always shown the lizards, those odd-looking creatures as commonplace in his south Florida city as the palmetto bushes they'd sought safety beneath soon after they hit ground.

Tears, like sharp bits of gravel, cut into his drooping eyelids. Dozens of unshed tears must've collected and hardened during the agonizingly slow-passing hours since his mother'd read the teacher's note and demanded an explanation. He'd expected to be punished, had even braced himself for it. But what he hadn't anticipated was her anger. If those strangers hadn't come, he thought, now angry himself, we might've been able to talk it out. If not, she'd have whipped me as soon as we got home. Either way, it'd be over by now. But the guests *had* come and his mother was in the kitchen with them, remembering old times, while he paced alone in the living room, anxious and still waiting, wanting to be in bed with the silent bear who would understand without words why he'd done it.

The bear wouldn't fuss because he'd turned his back and kept quiet when the teacher stopped soothing that crybaby, Sam, to ask in exasperation, "Why, Timmy, why?" He could have shouted, "Because I hate you." Now, he wished he had. The loathing had gushed, flaming, hot, up from his stomach as he watched her jab the long orange pointer into the defenseless bellies of the lizards, foiling their escape attempts, knocking them back to the bottom of the shoebox. She made him sick, a not unfamiliar feeling lately. He'd had it often since beginning third grade. The churning in his stomach, the tightness in his chest, the throbbing in his head. But today there was a difference. Suddenly, he'd known how to make the sickness go away. He snatched the box from the teacher, dumped it out the window, and felt better as soon as the lizards were free. When asked for an explanation, he stiffened and was silent. When asked for an apology, he shook his head "no." And despite being made

to sit alone at the playground's edge during recess, he'd felt good. He even had to bite his lip hard to keep from grinning.

But the good feeling didn't last. It ebbed once he stepped up into the yellow school bus that would take him home. Max would be waiting at the bus stop, and she was almost as good at seeing through him as his mother. Max might guess what he'd done, might even guess there was a note pinned inside his shirt, and might let on to his mother before he could. He decided to give Della the note as soon as he saw her. Otherwise, he might lose nerve. She would ask why, and when he couldn't answer, demand that he apologize. When he refused, he would be punished again.

Max made a silly face when he got off the bus. Timmy tried to smile as usual, but couldn't. She stooped to kiss his cheek. "Hello, Sillimylinks," she said as she did every afternoon as he stepped down onto the curb.

"Hi," he answered softly. "Where's Mommy?"

"At work where she always is at this time of day." She lifted an eyebrow. "What's this? Am *I* being rejected? Are you telling me you no longer enjoy these afternoon junkets that have become the mainstay of my existence?" She giggled as she always did to signal she was teasing. But he did not giggle in return. It was all so confusing. There were times when he was sure he hated the teacher because she was white, but then he'd think of Max, and she was white, and he *loved* her.

Max guided him toward the center of the sidewalk. "Nevermind. You look the way I feel. Could it be you've divined the news?"

"What news?"

"That the three of us will not mat the new photographs as planned. Instead, I'll go home to my lonely little garret while you and your mother share a scrumptuous dinner with two friends from her youth . . . Hey, I'm sorry, I shouldn't be dumping on you."

"Your mouth looks funny, Max."

"Don't mind me."

"Are they sleeping over? The friends?" He did not want guests tonight, not even Max who sometimes stayed over. The note scratched inside his shirt where the teacher had pinned it.

"Max? Are they, Max?"

"I suspect so, Sillimylinks. But that's not out of the ordinary, you know. All your mother's old buddies eventually show up to spend a night and re-hash the good old days. Is something wrong?"

"No," he said, tucking his small brown hand into her freckled white one as they crossed the street and went into the used furniture store where his mother worked.

Della was not smiling when he and Max walked in. The grim set of

her lips matched Max's. Absently, she pecked his cheek, barely glancing at the note he thrust into her hand. And he was glad to escape to the back room where dusty heaps of broken furniture leaned, waiting to be fixed, against the walls.

"I wish you'd try to understand? I'm always banished when your 'comrades from the revolutionary days' reappear. The thing I don't understand though is why *you* see them. Look at you. You're as miserable as I am. Well, I'm getting tired, damned tired, and this time we're going to talk, really talk, once they're gone."

Then the door opened. His mother's friends were there. Della called him in to meet them, and Max turned to leave. "I'll call you later," his mother said, but Max didn't answer. He called to her as she walked out, "See you tomorrow, Max," but she didn't answer him either.

If the old friends had just stayed away, it would be all over now, and he and the bear would be in bed. But, instead, two strangers would sleep in his bed. Two guests who made Max mad at his mom. Two people who, Max said, made his mother miserable. But Della had seemed glad to see them. They're old friends, she kept saying, old friends who'd gone to Algiers before he was born. She'd given them her house keys and sent them home to rest while she closed the store and rushed off with him to run off those great stacks of green papers that now covered the couch.

In the Kwik-Kopy shop, she'd re-read the teacher's note. "This isn't really about lizards, is it?" she quietly asked.

"I don't know."

"Why Tim?"

"Because I hate her guts."

"Why?"

"Because she's a bitch."

"And what makes you think so?"

"Because she's white."

"And that makes her a bitch?"

"How should I know?"

It was then that Della grabbed him, her fingernails digging into the tender flesh of his upper arms. She lifted him off the floor, stared into his eyes, and said in a voice that trembled with restrained anger, "She probably is a bitch, and her whiteness probably has a lot to do with it, but unless you can explain the connection, you're going to be punished. Think about it, young man."

Never had she used that tone with him. Her iciness chilled him, deep-down-to-the-bone chilled him. And, for a moment, he was sure she was speaking to someone else.

They had not discussed it since they'd come home where the boy still waited, wanting his bear. He picked it up from the coffee table, but immediately put it back. To hold it when anyone other than Della and Max were around was to invite ridicule. Once, he'd overheard his mother remark to Max, with a bitter laugh, that she wished to God people would leave him alone about the bear because it was, after all, his only legacy from the dead father he'd never known. When he asked what she'd meant, she was sorry he'd overheard and said as she always did when questioned about his father, "We'll talk about it when you're older." He'd let the subject drop, but he'd not forgotten the bear's unexplained connection to the mystery of his dad. It had, in fact, made the bear even dearer than before. He'd even begun to send it thought messages when others were around by tilting his head in the bear's direction:

You should have seen them, Bear. They were in a blue and white NIKE box. Sam cut air holes in the sides so they could breathe. When he took the top off, they were just lying there on top of each other, looking up without blinking their yellow eyes. They were being real quiet, waiting until after school when Sam would let them go . . .

Timmy wandered about the room, casting an occasional wistful glance over his shoulder at the bear, touching mahogany warrior figurines, staring up at all the framed paintings of famous Black men and women, and the matted photographs Max had begun taking of him when he was a baby. Snatches of the adults' conversations drifted in from the kitchen. His mother's voice seemed shrill, and he wondered why she was talking so much more than usual, asking the woman dozens of questions that elicited only soft, polite one- or two-word replies. Punctuating the women's higher-pitched voices was the occasional low rumble of the man's abrupt interruptions, always prefaced by "Do you remember the time me and Masai . . ." or "Did Masai ever tell you about . . . ?" As usual, the boy noted, questions about this "Masai" made Della nervous. After each answer, she quickly changed the subject. Finally, the man lapsed into silence. After a while, he came into the living room where he sat drinking dull red wine, muttering to himself over a folded stack of worn newspaper clippings and sheets of paper with handwriting scrawled on both sides. The boy sensed the man's staring, but when he turned, the man smiled shyly and quickly dropped his eyes. He slid the papers back into his jacket pocket. Sighing loudly, the man squared his shoulders and went back into the kitchen.

"Relax Ayodele," the boy heard the man say to his mother. "Just because I mention his name doesn't mean I'm about to break the promise I made you this morning. Don't you know I'd never do anything intentionally to hurt you or the boy?"

"I hope that's true," Della answered stiffly.

"It is. Now, can you relax?"

The boy didn't hear his mother's answer, but through the wide archway between the kitchen and living room, he could see the man hugging Della to him. When he released her, he said, "God, I'm glad that's settled. You were shooting me some awful mean looks there." Then the three adults were in the living room and Della was laughing.

Timmy was startled by the sound. He wondered why she laughed so softly with him and Max, and so harshly with old friends. He went to the stool where she sat talking with the bearded man and his fat wife who seemed uncomfortable in the chairs he, his mother, and Max had retrieved from the store's back room and re-painted in gay, bright colors. He lay his head upon her lap and felt her hand moving lightly, warm, across his back. Even though she no longer seemed angry with him, he knew she still expected an explanation about the lizards, and he still had none. Once more, he wished the two of them were alone. He was so tired. As always, her friends talked about white people and the bad things they did to Blacks. He did not want to hear such talk, especially not tonight. He tilted his head in the bear's direction and predicted what they'd say:

The bastards haven't changed. As long as they're white and we're Black, they'll continue to fuck with us. . . .

When King started branching out into areas that showed he'd finally begun to grasp the total picture, they had no choice but to kill him. . . .

William Ernest never knew what hit him. Never even heard the shot. One minute he was driving along, and the next his brains were splattering all over the windshield. . . .

He and the bear had heard it all before. So familiar were those horror-laced recollections that they no longer evoked dread in him.

Still, he was in no mood for them tonight. Sometimes, his head would ache and throb when he thought real hard about what they were saying. *White people are evil.* And Della never disagreed. So why had she turned on him when he told her the truth about Miss Chance? She *is* a white bitch. What more could Della want from him? He got dizzy and became frightened because he could not follow their words into an area he instinctively knew was understanding, where he suspected lay the answer he must give his mother to avoid the coming punishment over an apology he would never make.

" . . . I don't know, Ayodele," the man was saying, a puzzled look on his face, "I just can't seem to get a fix on things. So much is different. Alien. You're different. Once you were Ayodele. Now you're Della. And Masai. Dead. I never, not once, considered that he wouldn't be waiting

here when I got back."

The boy glanced up to catch his mother shaking her head violently. The man changed the subject. "Anyway, we were in Ghana when I realized the time had come for me to return. I knew I was needed here the minute I heard about that Black bastard who calls himself a conservative and is proud to be one of Reagan's economic advisors."

Della smoothed the boy's hair. She chuckled, "The maddening thing, I suppose, is that he occasionally makes sense. I'm just glad we've begun to realize that our Blackness doesn't require that we agree on every issue."

The man shook with laughter, spilled wine from his glass into his beard, and grabbed his long braids to keep their beads from clinking into each other. "You hear that, Honey?" he gasped to his wife. Then, to Della: "What's happened to you that you can take seriously any African who calls himself a 'conservative'?"

Della smiled. She eased the boy off her lap and went back into the kitchen where she turned up the flame beneath the pot of neckbones and beans that bubbled on the stove. "It's called getting older, Hassan," she said. For emphasis, she tousled her closely cropped natural that was liberally sprinkled with gray. "With age, I've learned to disregard labels, political or otherwise."

Frowning, Hassan followed her into the kitchen. "That's not another way of saying you're apathetic, is it?"

But Della didn't answer. She glanced guiltily at the clock and reached for the telephone. After a moment's hesitation, she went back to the stove and began stirring the beans. The boy felt a kindred pang of regret. He knew she thought of Max.

Hassan, who'd also been watching Della, said, "You really have changed, haven't you? Oh, I don't mean physically–you're still as fine as ever–but something's certainly different. That woman, the one who was in the store when we dropped the copy off, didn't we see her bring the boy into the store? Don't tell me you've gotten so chummy with whites that you're now trusting the fuckers with your kid." He poured himself another glass of wine, but did not look away from Della's face. "Especially that one. I got the distinct feeling that she was queer."

"I wouldn't be concerned with Max, if I were you," Della answered coolly.

"I'm not. I'm just making conversation; but to tell you the truth, I'm tired of idle chit-chat. I've spent the past eight years of my life putting together a foolproof plan for revolution, waiting for the right time, which is now. So you can't blame me for being anxious to get started, can you? In order to do that, I need your help, but you don't

seem too interested. If Masai were still alive, he'd have been with me all the way. But there's no point in wasting time on a lot of what-if's. I'm still going to include my old friend, and the way to do that is to clear his name."

"Hey," Della said, glancing toward Timmy, "you want to talk about your new organization, fine. But leave Masai out of it." There was clear warning in her voice and the boy paid closer attention. "Or better yet," she said, "let's just table this entire conversation until tomorrow. There's plenty of time for talk."

"No, there isn't," the man insisted. *He'd better stop pushing her,* the boy thought to the bear. *She gets real mad when people nag.* But, the man continued, "How long has he been dead? If his sacrifice is to mean anything, the time to move is now."

"Point blank, Hassan, I can't help you."

"You can't or you won't?" the man asked. The boy's forehead furrowed. *What does he want from her, Bear? Whatever it is, he won't get it. Only a stupid person wouldn't know that.*

"I won't be exploited," Della said firmly. "Besides, you'd be better off to forget the past."

"For Christ's sake, Ayodele, are you reluctant to get involved because you don't think my new organization will work?" The man pleaded, "If it's convincing you need, take a look at these plans I've drawn up." He fumbled in his pockets. When he'd separated the worn clippings from the handwritten sheets of paper, he thrust them toward Della. But the papers fell, wafted to the kitchen floor where they scattered wildly. When the boy stopped to help him pick them up, the man brushed him aside, then mumbled hastily, "Sorry, son."

Looking down at him, Della said coldly, "It's not so much your new organization that disturbs me, Hassan. It's how you intend to promote it."

"You misunderstand my motives. Maybe if you let me explain," the man said, his tone conciliatory as he brushed huge drops of sweat from his forehead. "Sure, the organization might benefit from clearing his name, but that's not why I want to do it. Think about his son. You have no idea what's at stake here."

"Haven't I?" Della answered. She stepped backward, out of the man's way as he scrambled about on the floor trying to recapture the papers that, caught in the air conditioner's gust, kept swirling out of his reach. The boy felt sorry for the man, and could not look at him. The women too seemed uncomfortable. Neither of them looked directly at the man either. Finally, Della said gently, "If your organization has merit, wouldn't it be better to find a legitimate cause to champion?"

She reached out to touch the man's sleeve, but he jerked away.

Hassan stood up. He re-folded his papers neatly and carefully put them back into his pocket. He opened his mouth as if to speak, but then abruptly walked out of the kitchen into the living room where he stood at the window, staring out into the night. When he turned to face them again, he had pulled himself together. "You've got a nice, neat little life here now, and you don't want anything from the past to disturb it, not even the truth, right, Ayodele?" the man asked softly. When Della didn't answer, the man shrugged. And though his lips parted in a smile, his eyes remained flat and cold. A look passed between Hassan and Della that the boy could not decipher. He shivered and, without thinking, he picked up the bear.

The man went into the kitchen to pour himself another glass of wine. Finding the bottle empty, he tossed it into the trash, then held out the empty glass to Della who reached beneath the sink for another bottle. The boy relaxed his grip on the bear. Whatever the problem was, it seemed to have passed. Fascinated, he watched the man pour another drink. He had never seen anyone drink so much before.

"That's a great kid you've got in there, Ayodele," Hassan said, gesturing toward the living room with his glass. "I'd like to spend some time with him, but I guess you've got an old man who takes him fishing, and does all those man-to-man things with him."

"Since when is fishing a 'man-to-man thing,' Hassan? I take him fishing, and we get by, don't we, Tim?"

Before the boy could answer, the man was standing beside him, murmuring too softly for the women to hear, "I'll just bet you do." Speaking much louder, he said, "Come here, son. Put down that ragged doll–you're too big for that–and tell me if your mama's taught you the meaning of the colors in the liberation flag?"

Timmy wanted to tell the man he was tired. But, instead, he tucked in his "I am a King" tee-shirt and recited in a high, clear, eight-year-old voice, "Red is for the blood, our blood, green is for the land, our African land, and Black is for the color of our skin."

Hassan clapped his hands. The big woman smiled. "So, you're a king," said the man. "Tell me, where does your kingdom lie? Are you an American king? King of the Jews? Or are you an African king?"

The boy smiled. *This man really is stupid. He gives the answers within his questions.* "I'm an African king," he answered.

"Good. I bet you get straight A's, dontcha?"

Timmy nodded, then looked away. The A's used to make him feel good, but not any more. Not since Miss Chance. Now, he wasn't sure he deserved them. No matter how he did, she always said, "Good, Timmy,

good." Once, he'd purposely stumbled over lots of simple words during reading class, and still she'd murmured, "Good, Timmy, good." But Chad, whose eyes Miss Chance said were the prettiest blue, could miss only one word, and she'd say, "You can do better, Chad." Whenever she did that–and she did it often with the white kids–his stomach would begin to churn. He thought again of the lizards.

Hassan lifted him high above his head and peered up into his face, taking in the almond-shaped eyes, the chiseled features that were just beginning to emerge with the loss of baby fat. Continuing to stare at the boy, the man said to Della, "A kid like this deserves a hero for a father, don't you think?"

There it is again, the boy thought, that angry look sliding across her face. Only this time, she looks scared too. Before she could answer, the man was grinning slyly and saying to his wife, "Look at this, Nefertiti, look. He's the spirit and image of Masai. God, boy, your daddy would've been so proud of you. Is your name 'Masai' after him?" The boy was stunned. He looked down at his mother. *Masai.* Not George like you said, but *Masai.* An African name. His heart beat fiercely. He stared at his mother, willing her to meet his eyes. She would not.

"Put him down, Hassan. Now," Della ordered. "You know his name is Timmy."

But the man only laughed. "So, the African king's name is Timmy." The boy squirmed. He did not like the man's laugh, nor did he like the man's smell of sweat and wine. And he certainly didn't want anyone in his bed who called his bear a ragged doll. But *Masai.* Masai, the man had said. He had heard the name before when other friends of his mother's had shown up, but he hadn't known the name was his father's. Always before, she had stopped discussions of Masai with a shake of her head. Why hadn't she told him? What did it mean? Maybe this man will say more before she throws him out, the boy thought. And she will throw him out. He was sure of that.

"You're over-reacting, don't you think, Ayodele?" the man asked as Della reached for the boy. But the man lifted him higher.

For the first time, the woman spoke to her husband, "Let it alone. Please, Hassan. It isn't our business, and it's obviously a private thing, a very painful private thing." She smoothed the front of the tentlike dress that hung in flounces about her ankles. She stood up and reached for the boy. "Hand me the child, Hassan," she said. "You'll scare him to death."

"Put him down now," Della said evenly.

The man continued to stare up into the boy's face. Finally, he sat him down on a stool and patted his head.

"Tim, take your bear and go into your room," Della said. The pot on the stove boiled over, and Della rushed into the kitchen to turn down

the flame. The boy, shaken, sat rooted to the stool, clutching his bear.

Hassan picked up the bottle of wine and carried it into the kitchen where he put his hand on Della's shoulder.

"I didn't want to do that," he said.

"Let it go, Hassan," Della said through clenched teeth.

"I can't," he said, turning to smile at the boy. "Don't you see that? I've got a responsibility here to Masai and to his son. I can clear Masai's name. I can prove he was set up. I've been back here less than twelve hours and already I've got witnesses lined up who will swear to his innocence. But who will believe me or them if his own wife spreads vicious lies about him? I should think you want what I'm offering. Think about your son."

"Timmy," Della said, "Mommy told you to take your bear into your room. Go now. Close the door. I'll call you when it's time to eat." She spoke very gently, very calmly, and he got up and went into his dark room. But he did not close the door all the way. He stood just inside the doorway where he could see his mother wiping her hands on the dish towel. She spoke barely above a whisper, and he had to cup his ear and strain to hear.

"How could you," his mother asked, "how could you do that after promising me you wouldn't bring up any of this ugly mess before Timmy?"

"You gave me no choice. You may not believe in his innocence, but I do." The boy watched the man move closer to his mother.

"Don't touch me," she said. The boy saw her press her knuckles into her lips. "Damn. Damn. Damn," she said, looking toward his bedroom door. He stepped backward, cloaking himself in more darkness.

The man stretched his arm out to Della. "It isn't as bad as it seems. He didn't act that upset to me. Maybe you're too close to the situation to see that it's wrong to hide truth from children. No one is ever too young to learn the truth. He can handle—"

But Della interrupted, "I decide what he can handle, Hassan, not you. I swear to God I'd put your ass out right now if I didn't think your leaving tonight would complicate things more with Timmy. But, tomorrow, as soon as he leaves for school, I want you out of here."

"If that's the way you want it, fine. But, just tell me this: why are you coddling him so? He's a man child, remember. A Black man child. He has a right to know how his father died. Sure, it'll hurt, but he'll be a lot less hurt if he knows that white men feared his daddy because he dared to be a man, that they put him in jail to silence him, and when they still couldn't break him, the bastards murdered him in cold blood."

The boy slid down onto the floor and craddled his bear. He was sure

his chest would explode. *The lizards, Bear. We mustn't listen to the big people. We should've closed the door . . . the lizards. They were lying in the bottom of the box, not bothering anybody, and they didn't expect anybody to bother them. Who would want to hurt them . . . OH BEAR, MY FATHER . . . but then she, she stuck that sharp pointer down into the box, jabbing at them, and when they tried to get out, she knocked 'em back down, and she started laughing when they started breathing hard, opening their mouths trying to scream each time the white bitch . . . OH BEAR, WHITE PEOPLE, THEY KILLED MY FATHER . . . .*

He opened his eyes to see his mother throwing up her hands. "Why are you so persistent? Why are you so willing to distort the facts to make him into some sort of martyr?"

"Maybe you're unaware of the facts . . ."

"He robbed gas stations until he eventually killed an attendant, a Black attendant."

"I know people who'll swear Masai was nowhere near that station."

" . . . And when he came home, I watched him wash blood off his shoes . . ."

"You were mistaken."

" . . . He handed me a fistful of coins and a wad of trading stamps."

"I heard he said he found them."

" . . . And when I threw the change and stamps on the floor, he whined and said 'They wouldn't let me be a man, so I had to take for you and my coming child'."

"Shut up with your filthy lies."

The boy squeezed the bear and closed his eyes again.

"Is it guilt, Hassan, that keeps you from accepting the truth?"

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"You know exactly what I mean."

The boy opened his eyes to see the man start toward his mother. He watched Nefertiti grab hold of the man, whisper something into his ear. "Hell, no," the man said, shoving her aside, "I want to know what she meant by 'guilt.'"

In the bedroom, the boy trembled and backed away from the door. He wanted to crawl between the sheets in his own bed where he and the bear could be quiet and block out all the horrible words. But he shouldn't muss the covers. The guests would sleep here tonight, and he and the bear would crowd into the sofa bed with his mother. He watched Nefertiti kiss his mother's cheek. He heard her say, "Let's stop talking about all this. It reminds me of all the old shouting matches without all the fun . . . I love your art here, Della. Tell me, where on earth did you

find those precious wood carvings? And that print you used to cover that recliner–was it very expensive? We saw some like it in that Xhosa village. Remember, Hassan?"

Della patted her arm. "Timmy," she called, "come inside now, and take down the plates, We're about ready to eat." *We can't let her know we listened. Fix your face, Bear.* He tucked his shirt into his jeans. On his way back to the kitchen, he heard his mother say, "If you cared so much for Masai as you say, don't make things any more unpleasant for his son. And remember this, Hassan, don't push me, you can gain nothing and I've got nothing else to hide." He heard the man's reply: "Don't bet on that."

Della bent to kiss Timmy. She whispered, "You okay? We'll talk about this later. I promise." The boy pulled away. He propped the bear up in a chair and woodenly set the table.

"Nefertiti," Della said brightly, "You've been so quiet. Tell me about yourself. I can hardly believe you're the same woman who used to keep me awake until dawn talking in the dorm."

"There's not a whole lot to tell, Della. I . . ."

Hassan interrupted and said in a slurred voice, "You know what your problem is, Ayodele? You've lost touch with your responsibilities as a Black woman, fooled maybe by all that white women's liberation nonsense. The going got a little rough and you got apathetic, just closed yourself off from the realities that confront us. To ease your conscience, you make copies of flyers."

Della seemed very calm, much more relaxed than she had been even at the beginning of the evening. And even though he was very upset, the boy noticed how similar the way she stood at the stove was to the way she'd shown him how to stand, braced, leaning forward, ready for the snap when he played defensive cornerback in the Pee Wee League.

"My conscience is clear," she said.

Hassan drained the last of the wine from his glass and poured another. "*You,*" he said incredulously, "*You* have a clear conscience? *You* who work for that old Jew–did you think I'd forgotten–who owns that filthy ghetto clip joint he calls a used furniture store? *You* who used to be intelligent enough to see that if Africans unite with anyone, it must be with Palestinians and other oppressed groups against capitalism and Zionism."

"Oh, please. You haven't changed, but I have. And one of the changes is that I don't have the patience anymore for endless hours of rhetoric. The cornbread is ready. Thanks, Timmy. I'd forgotten all about the coleslaw until you took it out of the fridge. Careful, don't drop it. Anybody want iced tea?"

Nefertiti took the cumbersome coleslaw dish from the boy, then handed him his bear and hugged them both to her mammoth bosom. "You sure are a handsome child, Timmy. And those pictures on the wall really capture you. Who took them?"

"It was Max," he answered dully. "Max. You saw her in the store today."

"And she's very good, isn't she?" Della added, looking at him curiously. He wondered if she knew he hadn't closed the door, if she could tell he and the bear had listened.

"Max again. I asked about her before," the man said, "But you evaded my question. Jesus, you're something else. Friends, from the looks of those pictures, for a very long time with a white bulldagger, and working for that Jew son-of-a-bitch. It's all beginning to make sense."

Della calmly continued dishing up the beans and neckbones. Hassan reached for his plate. Nefertiti buttered his bread and put coleslaw on his plate. "This really looks good," she said.

Hassan grunted, his mouth full of food. "I remember your boss from the old days. Even the newspapers called him the 'Rabbi Slum lord.' He was very angry now, and, it seemed to the boy, more than a little drunk. "Do you collect his rents too, Ayodele–excuse me, it's Della now–or do you only sell his over-priced junk to our brothers and sisters?"

Timmy laid down his fork, shifted the bear in his lap, and thought to the bear: *So much tonight. My father. Hero. Robber. Killer. Murdered. Now, the rabbi who carries candles in his shiny suit pocket. He hurts black people like Hassan says all white people do. And what about Max? She's white. Mommy must agree they're all evil. She doesn't disagree. How can she work for the rabbi and love Max? And if she's wrong to work where she works and love who she loves, then maybe she's wrong about my father too and wrong to make me say 'I'm sorry' to that teacher bitch. I'll find out more about Masai. I bet he'd understand. . . .*

"So, you've got nothing else to hide, eh, Della," the man said. "Well, I think you've got a helluva lot to hide, and that's why you don't want me to clear Masai's name. There'd be a lot of publicity, and your life couldn't stand the scrutiny."

"Hush, Hassan," said Nefertiti, "You've said too much already." She turned to Della. "He's not usually like this. He's been drinking hard all day. Maybe it's the shock of finding out that 'you know who' is dead. And he never could drink, if you remember."

"And if I remember correctly, he always pretended to be drunker than he was whenever he wanted to make a particularly nasty point," Della noted drily.

"Drunk? Sober? What's the difference?" Hassan asked. "A blind man could see through your shit—all lies and evasions—to cover up what you've become. I think me and the boy here both deserve to hear some truths after listening to your garbage all night. You wanna start with the bulldagger?"

"And I think you oughta concern yourself with something closer to home, like why my beautiful, and once vibrant, friend has grown fat and quiet and speaks only of fabrics and figurines, and butters your bread while you dig into things that are none of your fucking business!"

The boy jumped. He watched his mother push her plate away. The tell-tale muscle in her cheek twitched furiously. She looked at the broom closet beside the sink where she kept the pistol "just in case." This made him uneasy, but something greater than his fear of what his mother might do took over. He knew if the man kept talking, he'd discover more about his father. That alone was enough to excite him, but, more than that, he sensed that within the secret of his father lay the key to the answer he must give his mother. . . .

The big man sat back, grinned and spread his palms upon the table. He no longer looked drunk. "Uh oh. Looks like maybe ole Hassan just hit a nerve. Am I finally getting through to you?" Then he stopped grinning. His eyes narrowed. "Nothing to lose, Della? This is still Florida, isn't it? Anita Bryant country, isn't it? Tell me again the kid is none of my business. Tell me again how you 'can't' help me clear my friend's name. And I'll show you that there are some folks in this state who'll not only think Masai's son is my business, but they'll think he's theirs as well."

"That's it," Della said, her face livid. "Get out, Hassan." She stood up.

"No, wait," the boy said, the word tumbling out before he could stop them. "Masai, Mama, please. I have to know." He saw the smirk on the man's face and hated him; and he saw the awful hurt in his mother's eyes and hated himself; but he could not take the words back, nor did he want to. He was too close, much too close, to understanding to allow the man to leave now.

"Tim . . .," Della began, and thinking he'd gone too far, the boy got up to go into his room. But Della caught his arm and drew him onto her lap as she sat back down. In the sudden glare of headlights that flashed through the window, he saw her face, frozen, old, etched in pain, an image he would always remember with guilt. As she struggled to regain composure, each of her involuntary shudders rippled through his body. He gripped the bear tightly with both hands.

In a little while she said, "I have never hated anyone so much as I

hate you at this moment, Hassan, and yet I feel so sorry for you because I understand why you're doing this. I even understand why you keep patting the pocket that holds those old newspaper clippings. Back then, people believed in you. You were certain George's, Masai's idol. In the beginning, we all looked up to you. You rejected passive resistance, and Nefertiti, George, and even I followed suit. You said, 'Give up your names,' and we did. You embraced separatism, and, hot damn, there we were, your three disciples, standing right behind you, demanding the U.S. government give us our own Black state." She made a bitter attempt at laughter, an ugly sound that died quickly in her throat.

"And then, the seventies came, and with them came a time for re-assessment. It was clear that the separatist doctrine you preached was a dismal failure. And you—George's hero—knowing you'd lost us, you ran off to hide in Africa. Your leaving proved to all of us that it wasn't the struggle that interested you, it was your ego. But George refused to see you for what you were. Your leaving only convinced him that you'd gone underground to re-group and come back stronger. He became a carbon copy of you, parroting your idiotic slogans. That was the way he dealt with your betrayal, the letters from you that never came. Only there was a grave difference between the carbon-copy and the original. He began to act out your criminal fantasies. A few months before Tim was born, he'd used up his last ounce of decency, self-respect. Like so many other brain-washed, dashiki-wearing warriors, he was whipped . . . He was murdered, true enough, but not by any white conspiracy. He was stabbed to death during a senseless fight over an insignificant chess match in the prison yard."

It was very quiet. Only the sound of water dripping into the pan beneath the air-conditioner broke the stillness while Della, lost in thought, drew the boy closer. He reached to touch her face, and she began to speak again.

"So, it came to this: I had a dead husband, a new baby, and no money and nobody—nothing, except a wad of trading stamps the cops had somehow overlooked. The only thing I could get for them was that blue bear, Timmy's first toy. We couldn't eat that, and I went out to find a job. They weren't hard to find in those days. Many of our so-called brothers were in positions to hire me, what with all that anti-poverty money floating around, but it wasn't long before I discovered that many of them had become the white men they'd despised. 'Sure, Sister, you wanna job? Well, you wash my back, and I'll wash yours,' and their meanings ranged from juggling the books to divert a little cash from the poor and into their own pockets to a little fun and games in a motel room charged against their particular agency's 'travel expenses.'"

"You wanna call the old Jew a 'son-of-a-bitch,' Hassan? Go ahead. I got no problems with that as long as you remember that the old man's religion doesn't give him a corner on that market, not by a long shot," Della said.

The boy leaned back against his mother, as close as he could get.

Hassan stopped eating and looked up as if bored when Della paused. "Finished with your excuses yet?"

"Not excuses. Explanations. And not for your benefit, for my son's. You seem to think there's something dishonorable about where I work. How many jobs do you think are in this area? There are only four businesses in this neighborhood–two family-owned and operated groceries, a pool hall, and the old man's store. I choose to live and work among my people because this is where I'm needed. Tastes good, doesn't it, Hassan, that food you're gulping? But how can you stomach it? I bought it with money the old man paid me. And you brought me one handprinted flyer from which I photocopied more than five hundred with money stolen from him. You said you like this apartment. Well, I rent it from the rabbi. Not a bad place thanks to the 'Zionists' at the Jewish Community Center, and the 'capitalists' in the Black Business Association–the two groups who forced the old man to comply with local housing codes."

The boy glimpsed a faint smile cross Nefertiti's face though she did not look up from her plate. Hassan caught it too and said, "I've heard enough of this shit. The 'good Jews.' The 'good nigger capitalists.' Now why don't you tell me about the 'good queers' so you can justify your contempt for men and your lust for women?"

"Love, Hassan, not lust. How can I help but love women if I love myself, or, for that matter, how can I help but love men if I love my son?"

"Oh, come off it, Ayodele. Don't play word games with me. People were telling me all day today about you and your bitch . . ."

"Oh God, Hassan, stop it! You don't want to hurt me, and I understand, really I do. Those same people who told you things about me and Max probably told you exactly what I did about George, and that's what's eating at you. You can't accept the truth because you can't accept the guilt. You did what no white man could've done. He trusted you, and you returned his love with betrayal, no matter how unwitting, and that is what ultimately destroyed him. The Great Hassan, a tool of the white oppressor!"

"That's a lie," Hassan said, shaking with rage. He spied a bottle of rum, half-hidden by the cannisters, on the counter and stumbled over to it. He didn't bother with a glass; he gulped from the bottle. He fumbled

in his pockets for his papers. Clippings, yellowed with age, fluttered to the floor. They all bore his picture. "I was something else then, and I'm better now, much better." He shook as he unfolded the sheets of paper. "It's a good plan. Look at it! Masai's gone. But, no matter what you say, he was a hero. And others will see it. I'll make them see it. Masai would've wanted it this way, thousands of young warriors united in his name. He'd have wanted this. And you, you spiteful dyke, you can't stop me from clearing his name, no matter what lies you spread about me or him. You say that boy there isn't my business. You just try and stop me, and I'll make damned sure he becomes the court's. Try me and you'll find yourself explaining to some family court judge about your filthy sex life . . ."

"Get out, Hassan," Della said. "I'm tired. My son is tired." She lifted the boy off her lap and went to open the front door.

"Get the bag, Nefertiti, before I knock hell out of her. And you," he said, pointing to Della, "you stay away from my wife. You've perverted your life, and intend to pervert that boy's. But I won't let you spread your filth to my wife. One day, that boy will see you for what you are, and he'll hate you. Listen, son, your daddy was a man. Masai. I named him myself. Named for a proud warrior tribe. A credit to his name. A credit to me. No matter what lies she tells you."

The boy buried his face in the bear's soft fur.

"Nefertiti," Della began, but her friend shook her head sadly and followed Hassan through the door, "Nefertiti," Della said, "*you* don't have to go." But the woman only reached back quietly to squeeze her hand. She hurried off to catch the man. Della locked the door behind them. She leaned her forehead against the door. Minutes passed. The boy thought he heard her crying. "Mommy . . . ?" He laid down the bear and tugged at her shirt. She picked him up and carried him over to the couch.

"Tim, I don't know what to say. How can I make you understand? Hassan was right about something. I should've told you the truth. You should never have had to find out about your daddy this way. But mothers make mistakes too. And they get scared. I looked at your face and saw your father's, and I was afraid to expose you to anything that might make you bitter, that might make you hate. There was a point tonight when I could have stopped the thing from going so far, but I was just so tired of being manipulated by the past. At some point, I realized that sooner or later someone from the past would tell you about your father, and that if I kept putting it off I could lose you and Max. I feared that more than any threat Hassan or anybody else posed. . . . Listen, I'm probably not making a whole lot of sense. It's very late, Timmy, but if you want to, we can sit here, you, me and the bear, and talk all night. I'll answer any questions you want to ask about your father, about Max . . ."

"You promised her you'd call."

"I will. There are some things I need to say to her too, some things she needs to hear . . . so, do you have any questions about anything? Don't be afraid to ask about your dad. Suddenly, I can think of lots of good things I can tell you about him . . ."

"Like what?"

"Oh, like he'd have been as proud as I that you freed those lizards."

"It *was* about the lizards, Mom; it was about how they felt."

Della laughed. She threw her head back and laughed the way she always did with him and Max, warm and husky. "I know, Sillimylinks, I know. It always is."

ETHEL ROSENBERG: A SESTINA

The charges against you never did make sense.
Did you steal a bomb or merely type
a letter? At City College, did you sit at the table
and listen to young men argue about revolution?
Did you say to yourself, being a woman,
"Why do they think it will be easy?"

You were a person who quickly learned what wasn't easy.
The world nagged and withdrew. Only your daydreams made sense.
There, you sang opera. Otherwise, you were a woman
who never could please her mother, who learned to type,
who finally married—a personal revolution!—
the man who (they claimed) filmed documents on his secret table.

You insisted it was really an ordinary table.
You'd bought it at Macy's. That was too easy
for jury and judge, whose image of revolution
was violent, apocalyptic: wholly devoid of sense,
removed from a world of children, dirty dishes, type-
writers and the unhappiness of men and women.

I picture you in your three-room apartment, a woman
singing snatches of arias to yourself as you set the table,
loving and hating the house. I know the type:
scraping and rearranging; refusing to take things easy.
Foreboding washes over you, an extra sense.
Mopping the floor, you dream of revolution.

In those days, there was only one revolution
going, and though it viewed people as workers, not men and women,
you signed its petitions, sens-
ing that freedom begets more freedom. Let's table
the next, obvious discussion: how few things are easy,
how people usually react according to type.

You hardly appeared at your trial, in spite of the type-
face in the headlines distorting your revolution,
mistranslating you. On the other hand, you weren't easy
to understand, or even to kill. A stubborn woman,
you made them do it twice. And somewhere else, at our table,
we—who believed in last-minute miracles—sat quietly, emptied
of sense.

You've been dead most of my life. I'm the type of woman
who questions what's easy. At night, with crystal and table,
I beg ghosts out of dead revolutions to come to me, to talk sense.

FIFTEEN TO EIGHTEEN

I'd almost know, the nights I snuck in late,
at two, at three, as soon as I had tucked
into myself tucked in, to masturbate
and make happen what hadn't when I fucked,
there'd be the gargled cry, always "God damn
you to hell," to start with, from the other
bedroom: she was in shock again. I swam
to my surface to take care of my mother.
That meant, run for a glass of orange juice,
clamp her shoulders with one arm, try to pour
it down her throat while she screams, "No, God damn
you!" She is stronger than I am
when this happens. If she rolls off on the floor,
I can't/ she won't let me/ lift her up. Fructose
solution, a shot and she'd come around.
At half-past-two, what doctor could I call?
Sometimes I had to call the hospital.
More often, enough orange juice got down,
splashed on us both.
"What are you doing here?
Where were you? Why is my bed in this mess?
How did you get those scratches on your face?
What were you doing, out until this hour?"

AUTUMN 1980

for Judith McDaniel

I spent the night after my mother died
in a farmhouse north of Saratoga Springs
belonging to a thirty-nine-year-old
professor with long, silvered wiry hair,
a lively girl's flushed cheeks and gemstone eyes.
I didn't know that she had died.
Two big bitches and a varying
heap of cats snoozed near a black wood stove
on a rag rug, while, on the spring-shot couch
we talked late over slow glasses of wine.
In the spare room near Saratoga Springs
was a high box bed. My mother died
that morning, of heart failure, finally.
Insulin shocks burned out her memory.
On the bed, a blue early-century
Texas Star, in a room white and blue
as my flannel pajamas. I'd have worn
the same, but smaller, ten years old at home.
Home was the Bronx, on Eastburn Avenue,
miles south of the hermetic not-quite-new
block where they'd sent this morning's ambulance.
Her nurse had telephoned. My coat was on,
my book-stuffed bag already on my back.
She said, "Your mother had another shock.
We'll be taking her to the hospital."
I asked if I should stay. She said, "It's all
right." I named the upstate college where
I'd speak that night. This had happened before.
I knew/ I didn't know: it's not the same.
November cold was in that corner room
upstairs, with a frame window over land
the woman and another woman owned,
–who was away. I thought of her alone
in her wide old bed, me in mine. I turned

the covers back. I didn't know she had died.
The tan dog chased cats; she had to be tied
in the front yard while I went along
on morning errands until, back in town,
I'd catch my bus. November hills were raw
fall after celebratory fall
foliage, reunions, festival.
I blew warmth on my hands in a dark barn
where two shaggy mares whuffled in straw,
dipped steaming velvet muzzles to the pail
of feed. We'd left the pickup's heater on.
It smelled like kapok when we climbed inside.
We both unzipped our parkas for the ride
back to the Saratoga bus station.
I blamed the wind if I felt something wrong.
A shrunken-souled old woman whom I saw
once a month lay on a hospital
slab in the Bronx. Mean or not, that soul
in its cortege of history was gone.
I didn't know that I could never know,
now, the daughtering magic to recall
across two coffee-mugs the clever Young
Socialist whose views would coincide
with mine. I didn't know that she had died.
Not talking much, while weighted sky pressed down,
we climbed the back road's bosom to the all-
night diner doubling as a bus depot.
I brushed my new friend's cool cheek with my own,
and caught the southbound bus from Montreal.
I counted boarded-up racetrack motel
after motel. I couldn't read. I tried
to sleep. I didn't know that she had died.
Hours later, outside Port Authority,
rained on, I zipped and hooded an obscure
ache from my right temple down my shoulder.
Anonymous in the mid-afternoon
crowds, I'd walk, to stretch, I thought, downtown.

I rode on the female wave, typically
into Macy's (where forty-five years
past, qualified by her new M.A.
in Chemistry, she'd sold Fine Lingerie),
to browse in Fall Sale bargains for my child,
aged six, size eight, hung brilliantly or piled
like autumn foliage I'd missed somehow,
and knew what I officially didn't know
and put the bright thing down, scalded with tears.

1974

"I'm pregnant," I wrote to her in delight
from London, thirty, married, in print. A foolscap sheet scrawled slantwise with one miniscule
sentence came back. "I hope your child is white."
I couldn't tear the pieces small enough.
I hoped she'd be black as the ace of spades,
though hybrid beige heredity had made
that as unlikely as the spun-gold stuff
sprouted after her neo-natal fur.
I grudgingly acknowledged her "good hair,"
which wasn't very, from my point of view.
"No tar-brush left," her father's mother said.
"She's Jewish and she's white," from her cranked bed
mine smugly snapped.
She's Black. She is a Jew.

ELLY BULKIN

from "HARD GROUND: JEWISH IDENTITY, RACISM, AND ANTI-SEMITISM"

I. Origins

Origins are rarely simple. Take this article, for instance. It rests solidly in the Bronx, in the lower-middle- and working-class neighborhood where I grew up in the late Forties and early Fifties, where Jewishness and whiteness were the unquestioned norms; where Friday night meant dinner across the hall at the apartment of my grandmother, who would bless the candles before feeding us challah, chopped liver, and bland, overcooked chicken and vegetables; where in my six years of elementary school I had only a single non-Jewish (blonde and blue-eyed) classmate.

The messages I got in those days about being Jewish were mixed. My immigrant grandparents and father, my New York City-born mother, spoke a Yiddish that they did not pass on to my generation, using it in our presence only to keep us from understanding their words. My grandparents, who had emigrated from Austro-Hungary, said prayers which we were not taught and which had no apparent meaning in my parents' lives. We attended Seders designed more to satisfy the older generations than to pass on a culture, a tradition; for the children, they were primarily family get-togethers featuring large meals that could be served only after the rituals. The Ukrainian pogroms that my father had escaped in the century's first decade, the Holocaust that was in its deadly closing stages when I was born in late 1944—these were presented by my parents as something inextricably linked to me, and, at the same time, something past, historical, the product of an anti-Semitism that was no longer a "significant" problem.[1]

Yet my parents' friends were all Ashkenazi Jews, people who experienced the world as they did and had.[2] Each summer my parents vacationed in Jewish resort areas. Year after year, they sent my brother and

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The sections published here introduce a much longer essay that will appear in Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism *by Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Barbara Smith (Long Haul Press, P.O. Box 592, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, NY 11215).*

me to Jewish camps where we learned the Hebrew songs and Friday night and Saturday morning services which were not a part of our home life. And they diligently noted the Jewish identity of every person who achieved something good. The accomplishment was not just of an individual, but of a group, a group that, depending on which silent message I could best hear at a given time, did or did not have something to fear. But definitely a group.

Much remained unspoken when I was young, but I am left with certain photo-sharp images: the absolutely vivid recollection of reading the front-page story about the June 19, 1953 execution of Jews Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, convicted in a display of anti-Communist hysteria; the image of my mother, who never watched television, stopping her afternoon work for the broadcast of the Army-McCarthy hearings during a witch-hunt that swept up a huge number of Jewish progressives.[3]

But if something was equivocal or unexplained about my earliest lessons, there was no doubt as I grew older about the evils of Bull Connor and George Wallace. I was taught that Jews played a positive role in the civil rights movement and that Jews, as oppressed people, had a "special understanding" of Black people. (Other people of color were beyond my parents' range of vision.) Only later did I come to recognize the extent of the paternalism of whites in the civil rights and anti-racist struggles, the oppression of people of color by white Jews.

I learned what I did in the unique crucible of New York City, with its increasing population of people of color–mostly Black, Latino, Asian-American–and the largest Jewish population of any city in the world, two million, about a quarter of the people in the city. Significant numbers of white Jews, second- or third- generation Americans, had achieved some measure of success and some measure of power–in education, in social services, in local government–over the city's Third World population. At times, the conflicts were to become particularly bitter. In 1968, a New York City school strike occurred over the issue of Black community control of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school board and over the rights of long-term teachers, many Jewish, to continue to work in their assigned schools. In 1971, controversy broke out between the largely Jewish home-owners in Forest Hills and those supporting low-income housing in that Queens neighborhood. Over the years, persistent tension between Blacks and Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn has occasionally erupted into life-threatening violence.[4]

As I think about racism and Jewish oppression, geography is critical. I know the extent to which my perceptions of the issues I want to address are shaped by where I have lived for almost all of my life, as well as by my sense of how differently I might see things had I been raised–

or later lived–in some other region of the country–a rural area or suburb, or a city with a different racial and ethnic composition. I know, too, how different my perspective might be had I been older and learned of the Holocaust through newsreels and daily newspapers, among Jews who were trying to comprehend the enormity of what had been done, what non-Jews had allowed to happen to European Jewry.

One of the strongest lessons about the intersection of Jewish oppression and racism grew out of my interactions with some Ashkenazi Jews who had lived through World War II in the United States. Unlike my parents, they saw their lives revolving around their Jewishness, as well as around their relationship to Israel. In the late Sixties, at the Queens home of my husband's parents, who had met at a Zionist youth camp in New Jersey in the late Thirties, raised four kids, and later would settle in Israel, I met some Ashkenazi Jews whose attitudes had a direct effect on my view of how Jews dealt with racism. My husband and I argued that we could condemn the anti-Jewish statements made by some Black community control advocates and still support decentralization in Ocean Hill-Brownsville. Sliding quickly into anti-Black racism, my in laws' friends countered this Black anti-Semitism with remarks that dismissed any validity in the community control of education. On another day, we argued even more angrily as we insisted that the anti-Jewish statements made by some Black Panther leaders did not mean, as our adversaries contended, that the Panther's free breakfast program for children was in itself a bad thing.[5] From this limited contact, I drew a false conclusion that would take me a long time to revise: the greater the concern among Jews about anti-Semitism, the less the concern about racism.

As a lesbian in the Seventies, I worked in some political organizations with Jewish-identified women whose strong opposition to anti-Semitism was not, it seemed to me, accompanied by much more than the acknowledgement that racism was a problem too. Compounded by my own ambivalence about being Jewish, exposure to their politics discouraged me from exploring further my Jewish identity or accepting it as an integral part of my feminist politics. I suspect that the gap in my politics, the fact that I put forward anti-racism as a priority while failing to make an analogous commitment to opposing Jewish oppression similarly discouraged them from incorporating anti-racism fully into their own feminist analysis. We all bought the same general model, I think, though we subscribed to different versions of it. Inadvertently, we supported each other in perpetuating a false distinction which benefited none of us. The construct involved choice, in this case an either-or decision, the selection of racism *or* anti-Semitism as a center of political focus.

In other settings, most notably in the women's center where I worked for five years as assistant to the director, I found considerable support for the position I had chosen. The vast majority of the white women with whom I worked were Jewish and most, like me, had grown up in New York City. We saw our Jewish identities as a given, something that we spoke about at times, but which then formed no *focal* area of consciousness out of which to do our political work: providing battered women's services, legal information, lesbian support groups, welfare advocacy, abortion referrals, crisis counseling, a return-to-school project. We influenced administrative decisions to provide services for poor women, women without access to money, many of them women of color. The decisions themselves came, and I saw them coming, from white Jewish women, mainly lesbians, for whom Jewish identity and anti-Semitism were not major issues, but who would have quickly mentioned meeting the needs of women of color as one of the center's feminist priorities.

Among other things, our politics were shaped by our work in a center in which the majority of the thirty full- and part-time workers were women of color, almost all non-lesbians. They, no doubt, were affected, though in quite a different way, by the Jewish and lesbian identities of the two administrators and of other key white staff members. Initial overt conflicts arose over lesbianism, not over race or ethnicity.

Not until the late Seventies, after the women of color had made racism an open and critical issue and we began to address it more seriously, were anti-Semitism and Jewish identity tentatively explored. When all but one participant at an optional white women's anti-racism workshop for center staff were Jews, we began to talk about the influence our Jewish identities had had on our experiences with and perceptions of racism. Our focus remained on racism, as it did in a subsequent workshop series on Black-Jewish relations, but, at least for me, racism and anti-Semitism became linked in ways that supported my going beyond our discussions to attempt a further understanding and analysis of them.

As a result of my experiences in these groups and a rise in anti-Semitism in this country, I began to rethink my association of anti-racist activism with the lack of a strong Jewish identity. In 1980, I attended a discussion of "Jews and racism" scheduled as one of the New York City Jewish lesbian community meetings (1978-1980). Some of the speakers were very strongly rooted in both their Jewish identities *and* in a radical politics that included anti-Semitism and racism among its primary concerns. I worked on a committee with other white women, several Jewish, to set up a DARE (Dykes Against Racism Everywhere) forum on the rise of the Right that included a Jewish woman who spoke

on the anti-Semitism of the U.S. Labor Party and a Black woman who spoke about the growth of the Klan. At the same time, I was working on an article, "Racism and Writing: Some Implications for White Lesbian Critics." Though I spoke there about how my grandmother's use of the pejorative Yiddish word *schvartze* (black) taught me something early and well about the otherness of Black people (and other people of color), my conscious perspective was that of a white lesbian, not a white Jewish lesbian.[6]

In addition to my individual lack of awareness, I was writing in a political climate that provided relatively little support for me—or other white Jewish women—to work out of both our ethnic and racial identities. While published criticism of "Racism and Writing" upset me at the time, I was far more deeply affected by women who contacted me personally or reported comments they had heard. When one woman said she had heard the article characterized as "very Christian," I did not understand how *anything* I did could possibly be described in that way. A non-Jewish Latina wrote me about her positive feelings about the role of Jewish women in anti-racist activities. An Ashkenazi woman wrote about her particular sense of connection to the article because it was written by a Jew. My Jewish identity was more important to these two women than, on a conscious level, it had been to me as I was writing.

The response, however limited, to a part of my identity which I had not emphasized provided me with an impetus to explore issues I had thought about while writing the article, but was not then ready to tackle. It made me trace some of my grown-up lessons back to those I had been taught as a child, and to look more avidly for the Jewish radical tradition and the Jewish anti-racist tradition that I had been told existed. I realized how deeply I needed models of Jewish women who combine a strong Jewish identity with a deep commitment to opposing both anti-Semitism and racism. I needed also to understand that, if I had been having some difficulty locating such models, it was partly because I had been looking in the wrong places. The question became not which political priority to choose, but how to choose both.

II. Extensions

My motivation for writing this article arises from my need to understand what "choosing both" actually means, not just for me but for other white-skinned Jewish women. Writing pushes me, not to *answers*, but to questions, criticisms, problems, and possible strategies. It intersects with my activism, makes me look even more closely at the political

work I do and why and how I do it.

At the first meeting of the Jewish and Black women who were to publish in 1981 "'The Possibility of Life Between Us': A Dialogue Between Black and Jewish Women," Jewish lesbian Judith Stein said:

> *But none of the things I've read about Black and Jewish relations are by feminists. None of this is by women. So here we are, talk about groundbreaking, and that makes it real scary. Because in some ways I would like to do something that other women can build on, can use and build on.*[1]

I build on what these women have written, and I build on what women have done. I co-facilitated a workshop for Jewish women on "Jewish Identity, Racism and Anti-Semitism" at the 1981 National Women's Studies Association Conference; and, at a panel there on racism in the lesbian community, I spoke about the writers Muriel Rukeyser and Ruth Seid (pen name: Jo Sinclair), two strongly Jewish-identified, anti-racist white lesbians.[2]

These efforts paralleled the work of women in different parts of the country. The issues involved were relatively new for some of us; others had a long history of community activism relating to anti-Semitism *and* racism. Our work took place in various settings. The ad hoc caucus of Jewish women at the 1981 West Coast Women's Music Festival tried to cope with both the racism and anti-Semitism that were divisive at that gathering.[3] The 1982 Jewish feminist conference in San Francisco included workshops on Jewish oppression for women of color and on racism for Jewish women. And in New York City, long-time members of its Jewish lesbian community carried a banner reading "Jewish Lesbians Against Anti-Semitism and Racism" in demonstrations against United States policy in El Salvador and other Third World countries and against the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

At these and other events, workshops on Jewish oppression and racism have sometimes been explosive. The difficulty in confronting these issues at all is evident in "'The Possibility of Life Between Us'." Although based on 11 hours of tape and solicited specifically to address them, the published dialogue did not, as Beverly Smith points out, "*deal directly, in detail with . . . Jewish racism and Black anti-Semitism in this country. Perhaps because the things we did talk about sometimes produced so much pain for us we were reluctant to take this on.*"[4]

The conflicts begin, in fact, not outside the Jewish community, but within it. Although my focus here is primarily on relations between white-skinned Jews and non-Jewish people of color in this country, Jewishness is not, as many assume, equivalent to whiteness.[5] Racism is a significant problem among Jews, most critically at this time in Israel. Variations of culture and skin color among Jews, especially Sephardim –from Syria, Turkey, Ethiopia, Morocco, Spain, India, and elsewhere–

prevent *categorizing* Sephardim as either "Jewish people of color" or "white Jews."[6]

With its tendency to dichotomize, the language available to describe Jews racially, which, lacking any other, I use here, is no more adequate than the common usage of "women of color" to describe an Arab or Latina or Native American whose skin color might be no darker than my own. Without being totally specific about each individual's national identity, country of origin, *and* skin color, I do not do justice to the ways Jews perceive ourselves as members of a particular racial or ethnic group. Similarly I do not sufficiently indicate how these characteristics influence the way Jews are seen–and thereby treated–by others, Jew and non-Jew alike.[7]

The problems of Jewish racism and Black anti-Semitism; of divisions and prejudices among Jews; of Jewish oppression generally, within and outside the women's movement, by whites and by people of color–are all issues which Jewish women are in the process of addressing seriously. The growth of Jewish feminist consciousness in the past few years is related in part to a significant upsurge in anti-Jewish acts in the United States and in other parts of the world. Prior to a slight drop in 1981-1983, a threefold increase in reported anti-Jewish incidents from 1980 to 1981 in this country followed an earlier threefold increase from 1979 to 1980.[8] In the last few years, a rash of bombings and shootings has also occurred in European synagogues and neighborhoods; a woman who visited Amsterdam in the fall of 1982 told me how she had to "prove" she was Jewish before being allowed past the armed guards and into synagogue for Yom Kippur services.

The current Jewish feminist movement has been influenced too by much that is positive and has gone before: Jewish women's consciousness-raising groups going back at least to the very early Seventies; "the first group of articles on Jewish feminism . . . in a special issue of *Davka* magazine in 1971"; the 1971 creation of *Ezrat Nashim*, "perhaps the first group publicly committed to equality for women within Judaism," which appeared before the Rabbinical Assembly convention the following year; the 1972 special *off our backs* issue on Jewish women; the 1973 National Jewish Women's Conference in New York City and the first Midwest Jewish Women's Conference later in that year in Wisconsin; the 1973 publication of *The Jewish Woman: An Anthology*, a 192-page issue of the magazine *Response*, which contains over twenty essays; the 1974 establishment of the Jewish Feminist Organization, "divided into Eastern, Midwestern, Western, and Canadian regions," which led to the 1976 creation of *Lilith: The Jewish Women's Magazine*; the existence of such local pre-1975 groups as the Jewish Lesbian Gang in San Fran-

cisco; the statement prepared by the Jewish Women's Caucus at the 1975 Socialist Feminist Conference at Yellow Springs, Ohio.[9]

Much as the women's movement of the late Sixties and early Seventies had its roots in the earlier civil rights struggle and the New Left, both the increasing number of women who define ourselves as *Jewish* feminists and our growing activism against anti-Semitism within and outside the women's community owe a significant debt as well to the emergence in the last decade of a broad-based Third World feminist movement in this country.[10] Women of color, especially lesbians, have been in the forefront of creating a theory and practice that insist on the importance of differences among women and on the positive aspects of cultures and identities. With "identity politics" as a basis, feminists of color have been able to link analysis with day-to-day political activism, as they lay out a range of ways in which individual and institutional oppression works.

The concept of identity politics has contributed greatly to the political thinking of other women who share both a positive identification and a specific oppression. The concept was first stated in a feminist context in the Combahee River Collective's "A Black Feminist Statement" (1977):

> We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation is us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters, and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work.
>
> This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression.[11]

For feminists as a whole, as well as for distinct groups of feminists–Jewish, Third World women, lesbians, for instance–such self-affirmation has been tremendously valuable in moving women to define and carry out political strategies.

If narrowly conceived, however, "focusing on our own oppression" can have drawbacks, hampering our attempts to understand issues that are necessarily complex and often intertwined. It can, for example, result in what one white woman, at the end of a positive review of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color,* has called the danger of "hunkering down in one's oppression," refusing to look beyond one's identity as an oppressed person and, in some instances, wearing that identity as a mantle of virtue.[12] How much easier it is for someone to say simply that she is oppressed–as a woman, a Black, a lesbian, a low-income woman, a Native American, a Jew, an older woman, an Arab-

American, a Latina–and not to examine the various forms of privilege which so often co-exist with an individual's oppression. Essential as it is for women to explore our particular oppression, I feel keenly the limitations of stopping there, of not filling in the less comfortable contours of a more complete picture in which we might exist as oppressor, as well as oppressed.

Seeing only the partial picture has ramifications for how–or even whether–we can address central political issues. Some women remain silent in response to what a friend has called "oppression privilege," what she sees as the assumption that certain criticisms can be made only by those who share a given identity: that it is unacceptable, for instance, for a non-Jewish woman to criticize a Jewish woman, for a white woman to take issue with a woman of color. In the present political climate within the women's movement, those of us who are white have, for the most part, done little direct questioning, little challenging of women of color. It is therefore especially important for us to be as clear as we can about our motivation, our mode of criticism, and our understanding of both anti-Semitism and racism when we raise issues of Jewish oppression. Obviously, that clarity will not necessarily protect us either from the charge that we are being racist or from the reality that, no matter how accurate we may be in discerning anti-Semitism, how justifiably ready we are to confront it, we might turn out to be racist in the manner in which we do so.

Although the prejudices of one group are often affected by the other's actions, they are not caused by these actions. Each has a life of its own. Each is the inevitable by-product of the society in which we live. If a non-Jewish woman of color responds with anti-Semitism to my racism, she is no less responsible for her words and actions than I am for my own. If I counter her anti-Semitism with my own racism, I play into a cycle that must, at some point, at every point, be broken.[13]

In writing this article, I am very much aware of the difficulty and potential risk of criticizing non-Jewish women of color for specific acts of anti-Semitism. But I assume that *all* non-Jews, even those without institutional power, have internalized the norm of anti-Semitism in this culture and are thereby capable of being anti-Semitic, whether through hostility or ignorance. A detailed analysis of anti-Semitism among women of color needs to come from women of color themselves, Jewish and non-Jewish. But the analysis presented by myself and other white Jewish women should contribute to its development, as white women have gained in working out anti-racist strategies from the words and actions of women of color. Whatever our differences, efforts to address them directly should always be seen as attempts to break down divisions

which are encouraged by—and which benefited—the rich white Christian men who run this country.

I hope that my writing will lead to further thought, discussion, *and* disagreement. I write as part of a dialogue among Jewish women about issues that have been insufficiently explored so far from a feminist, particularly a lesbian-feminist, perspective. The need to clarify relations among women of different racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds seems critical to me in terms of individual understanding, personal relationships, political analysis *and* consequent activism. I believe that within the women's movement, within and between the many communities that comprise it, the goal of criticism and struggle is to engage in concrete political actions against those who wield substantive power, and not to confuse those who are most accessible to us with "the real enemy." Within this framework I want to begin to explore connections and similarities between racism and anti-Semitism, as well as those among people of different "minority" identifications; to distinguish among oppressions in ways that neither rank them nor deny their historical parity, but which acknowledge their dissimilar manifestations at given times and places.

III. Threads

A traditional view of Jewish identity divides the world into "We" and "They." Seeing this as a lesson passed on from mother to child "in all cultures, classes, and societies," Holocaust historian Lucy Dawidowicz describes how "the Jewish mother enlarges the We to embrace all Jews, those living now and those of the past, those living here, there, and everywhere."[1] Certainly I was taught this by parents whose first question about a new friend was, "Is she Jewish?" I relearn it again in hard times: in July, 1982, on our way back from a New Jewish Agenda vigil against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, another Jewish lesbian mentioned that she had simply stopped *talking* to non-Jewish friends about the Middle East; while she shares their objections to Israeli policies on the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Lebanon, as well as their opposition to anti-Arab racism, she cannot cope with the anti-Jewish attitudes which her friends also express.

Although I value greatly the "We" assumed in such conversations, I balk at a framework that sets everything in a context of "We" and "They." As a woman, a lesbian, a Jew, I know that the division expresses both the joy and strength of who "We" are *and* the justified fear and mistrust of a dominant society which views us with hostility, a society which places us outside the boundaries of what it values, even when we

are temporarily safe from its violence. At the same time, while I see sharply my link with the "We" in Dawidowicz' discussion, I also see other "We's" with whom I identify. In each instance, I feel bound by our shared identity and oppression, but also find that, where political views and actions diverge significantly, I experience little sense of commonality. I have learned a tremendous amount from Dawidowicz, for instance, and certainly identify with the "We" in her descriptions of Jew-hating. But I lose that feeling of connection when, in a discussion of the book *Adolescent Prejudice,* she writes, "anti-Semitism and racial prejudice were more prevalent among the poor and *the stupid* (the study characterized them euphemistically as 'the economically and academically disadvantaged') than among *'the privileged'*"[2] (my emphasis), because in the statement her analysis of oppression does not extend beyond the lives of "We" Jews.

The complexities multiply when I consider that the Agenda vigil, held on Tisha B'Av, the anniversary of the Roman destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D., was suddenly set upon by four members of the Jewish Defense League who called us traitors and chanted, "The Nazis had the Judenrat, the Arabs have Agenda."[3] In the long view of Jewish history–the Diaspora, pogroms, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion–Jews are all the same, simply "We."[4] On that evening, the "We" appeared a far fuzzier concept.

The problem as I–and, I think, a great many other Jewish feminists–see it is to embrace the "We" of our Jewish identities without seeing "They" as totally other. We strive to acknowledge Jewish identity and Jewish oppression as fundamental components of our lives and histories, individually and collectively, and, at the same time, to use what we know of being Jewish–as of our other identities and oppressions–to understand generations of experience that have some parallels, yet are different from our own. This process is complicated, and the history between non-Jewish people of color and white Jews has not made it less so.

When I tell a friend, an Ashkenazi Jew, of my plan to write about some similarities between experiences of oppression and about their common roots in theories of "racial" inferiority, she tells me, "Be careful." She knows, as I do, how often such parallels have been used–and continue to be used–by some white Jewish people to discount the oppression of people of color or to imply that "we all have the same understanding, the same daily intimate experience of oppression," thereby suggesting that each oppression does not have its unique aspects. She knows too the frustration of pointing out Jewish oppression to some non-Jewish women of color who, in barely acknowledging its existence

and in refusing to confront it, reflect society's prevalent anti-Semitism.

The problem is societal, not individual. As one Black lesbian-feminist has written:

> I don't feel it's just that we are anti-Semitic because we've had experiences of racism from individual Jews, but because we see these Jews as members of a group that is racist. When white Jews are racist toward people of color, I see them as advancing their privilege as white people. And when I am anti-Semitic in response–i.e., if I can discern their Jewishness–I am advancing my privilege as a non-Jew. Each of us is exploiting the other's vulnerability in a racist, anti-Jewish system, and using our privilege in that system.[5]

Considering both the complexity and the sensitivity of such interactions, I move along rather gingerly. But I remain unwilling to ignore the connections that I do see. I think, for example, of how, since coming to the Americas, to Africa, to Asia, to Australia, to all of the continents where people of color had lived free of whites for thousands of years, white Europeans have attempted–often with success–to exterminate these indigenous peoples. I see similarities going way back to the earliest recorded attempts to enslave Jews, to ghettoize us, to destroy us.

Developed during centuries of Christian political domination, Jew-hating myths provided a basis for "racial" theories propounding Germanic and Anglo-Saxon supremacy which emerged in the mid-1800's and contributed to the Jewish history of the following hundred years. In Germany, virulent political anti-Semitism during the last century continued on into the Nazi era. In the United States, 1920's immigration laws lumped Asians and Blacks and Jews and Latinos together as "undesirable races."[6] Anti-alien laws in the United States remained despite a 1939 attempt to admit 20,000 children from Germany, 2/3 of them Jewish; the American Legion, one of the groups opposed to the Child Refugee Bill, maintained that "it was traditional American policy that home life should be preserved and that the American Legion therefore strongly opposed the breaking up of families."[7] The politics of the Ku Klux Klan of the Twenties with its 3½ to 5 million members continue to be reflected in those of today's Klan, American Neo-Nazis, the Liberty Lobby, and other groups whose platforms violently oppose "mongrelizing" the white Christian "race." These groups clearly deny the rights–even the right to exist–of people of color, Jews, lesbians and gay men. The connections are brought into bold relief by the Invisible Empire of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, whose membership application requires one to "swear that I am a White Person of Non-Jewish ancestry."[8] It is only class which divides these groups from the "respectable" men in business suits who commit the far greater atrocities: the "scientific"

advocates of Anglo-Saxon superiority in the Twenties, the Reagan administration in the Eighties.

If we are uncertain about who our enemies are, they have no doubt as to their prey. For them, hatred of Jews and hatred of people of color dovetail nicely. In writing about "the Boers' extermination of Hottentot tribes, the wild murdering by Carl Peters in German Southeast Africa, the decimation of the peaceful Congo population–from 20 to 40 million reduced to 8 million people" which occurred between 1890 and 1911, Hannah Arendt makes explicit such connections:

> African colonial possessions became the most fertile soil for the flowering of what later was to become the Nazi elite. Here they had seen with their own eyes how people could be converted into race and how, simply by taking the initiative in this process, one might push one's own people into the position of the master race.[9]

I think we can recognize the similarities without blurring the distinctions. The Middle Passage during which rows and rows of enslaved Africans lay chained in their excrement on their way to the "New World"; the cattle cars that crammed Jews standing up, befouled, on their way to Nazi death camps. The U.S. government decision to drop atomic bombs on the "non-white" enemies of the Allies, while people of Japanese–but not German or Italian–ancestry in this country and Canada were "relocated," their property confiscated, as they were forcibly interned.[10] More recently, the Haitian refugees imprisoned for over a year, despite objections, despite multi-racial demonstrations led by Black people, despite the signs of members of Brooklyn New Jewish Agenda: "Our ancestors were held in camps too. Let these people go."

A Native American woman makes these connections from her own perspective. In a letter, she describes reading Helen Epstein's *Children of the Holocaust,* a book about children of survivors, and then passing it on to her mother and sister.[11] Like her, she writes, they have also survived a Holocaust and wonder at their luck, cope with their guilt. Among the 1.3 million surviving Native Americans in a land that once contained ten to twelve million of their people, they find a means to further understand and interpret their own history through a book about some of those who survived a genocide which killed a third of the world's 18 million Jews.

The issue is not only one of physical survival, but of survival as a group of people with a specific culture, language, history, tradition. Here too I can see parts of my own experiences and those of some other Jewish women mirrored in certain experiences of some non-Jewish women of color. One example: I am sitting in a coffee shop with Carmen, a Puerto Rican used to speaking Spanish daily, and Sylvia, a Chicana who

is relearning the Spanish of her parents. Carmen, who works closely with a group of Salvadoran refugee women who have no knowledge of English, describes her frustration at a Chicana colleague who makes little personal contact with them. Her colleague, Carmen tells us, is "not a real Chicana." I start at the word "real," and sense Sylvia stiffen. Carmen explains that, by being unwilling to speak Spanish to the refugees, her co-worker has left them alone, acted inhospitably to other Latinas. Sylvia responds by talking about her own experience as a Chicana who has, to a certain extent, been assimilated, been severed from her roots because she was not raised to speak Spanish fluently.

Days later, I told Sylvia my response to the coffee shop interchange. It reminded me of some Ashkenazi women I know: our ambivalent relationship to Yiddish; the discussion in my Jewish lesbian group three years before about going to a Yom Kippur service–measuring our childhood experiences of religious rituals, our recollections of Hebrew prayers and songs, against the concept of being "a real Jew." It reminded me too of hearing about a Sephardic Jew who "as a child . . . had wanted to learn Yiddish to be part of what she then thought were the 'real Jews'," the Ashkenazim.[12] Sylvia and I do not understand all of the nuances of each other's reactions. But I find some comfort, as I work out the implications of my Jewish identity, in sharing some common ground with a woman of color who is not Jewish and who is also working out her relationship to her own culture and history.

Though our specific experiences differ, depending on class, age, region, and other variables, as well as on racial/ethnic identity, I know that I share with some women of color, non-Jewish and Jewish, as well as with other white Jewish women, a history of assimilation and reclamation. I think, for example, of the history of different Asian-American peoples, sorting out the meaning of both aspects of their self-description–Japanese-American, Korean-American, Chinese-American; the parts of their parents', their grandparents' languages and traditions they have held onto and those they have let go. And I think too of the decisions to celebrate one's identity: for those Native American women, Latinas, and Black women who could "pass" as white; for the Jewish woman whose father changed his name in the Thirties so he could "make it," and raised her, ignorant of her identity, as a Christian; for the Arab-American woman, who, after internalizing her racial oppression, came only in the last few years to identify as a woman of color; for the Jewish-Latina, the Arab-Jewish woman, for any Jewish woman of color who is too often, as one Jamaican-Jewish woman has said, "a token to everybody"; for any woman of color of mixed heritage–Chinese-Korean, Native American-Black, Asian-Black, Chicana; for the Arab-American dyke who

is shunned because she is a lesbian by the only other Arab woman in town, the Jewish lesbian whose family sits *shivah** for her, the "bull-dagger" whose Black community rejects her. All of the women who, told to choose between or among identities, insist on selecting all.

IV. Separations

If I am even to begin to make sense of all this, I need to be aware of these connections on a gut level, not just on an intellectual one. At the same time, I know the danger of leveling oppressions, of failing to recognize the specificity of each. In terms of anti-Semitism and racism, a central problem is how to acknowledge their differences without contributing to the argument that one is "important" and the other is not, one is worthy of serious political attention and the other is not.

Addressing this problem involves distinguishing between oppressions, not treating racism or Jewish oppression, in their various manifestations, as if they operated in exactly the same way within each geographical and historical setting. For example, since the arrival in 1654 of the first Jewish community–Sephardim escaping the spread of the Inquisition to Brazil who were allowed to stay in New Amsterdam despite the objections of Governor Peter Stuyvesant–the history of anti-Semitism in the United States has been significantly different from that in Europe.[1] In *The Holocaust and the Historian,* Lucy Dawidowicz refers to the United States as a country "where anti-Semitism has not been widely prevalent in social life or political thought. . . ."[2] In the introduction to *A Promise to Keep: A Narrative of the American Encounter with Anti-Semitism,* Nathan Belth says:

> Anti-Semitic behavior in America has often reflected European origins, but rarely, in over three centuries of history, have anti-Semitic incidents attained the intensity–and never have they extracted the fearful price–of European bigotry.
>
> Because it had few ideological roots, anti-Semitism in America rarely expressed itself in outbursts of violence.[3]

The critical point here is not that anti-Semitism in this country is not–and has not been–present, serious, and essential to confront, but that the degree of it here must be seen in contrast to the greater intensity of its European forms. Understanding the history of Jews in Europe then is a *prerequisite* for understanding issues of Jewish identity and anti-Semitism in this country. A short fifty years after Hitler assumed power,

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**shivah*–seven-day mourning period after burial observed by the deceased's family.

the scars caused by the Holocaust remain. As Israeli author Amos Oz comments, "late on a hot summer night in Tel Aviv, when it is so insufferably hot and steamy that everyone leaves windows open to catch the slightest possible sea breeze, one can walk the streets of Tel Aviv and hear people having nightmares in twenty different languages."[4]

Among the U.S. population as a whole, stereotypes about Jews continue to prevail that one historian considers to be "strongly reminiscent of the forgeries known as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion . . . concocted by Tsarist officials in the early 1890's."[5] Finding fertile soil in the minds of Christians who had been taught that Jews were killers of Christ, devils, and ritual murderers of Christian children, the Protocols purported to describe a secret Jewish plan to control the world. Fuel for Russian pogroms at the turn of the century and after, they were first published in Germany in 1920 and were "at the very center of Hitler's thinking and of Nazi ideology."[6] They were first published in the United States in the Twenties by Henry Ford and remain a staple of anti-Jewish groups in this country. During the present deteriorating economic period, these continuing stereotypes are especially disturbing. One can readily see historical parallels to periods in Tsarist Russia, Nazi Germany, and other countries when anti-Semitism, particularly violence against those Jews deemed "responsible" for economic hardship or social unrest, markedly increased. According to the 1981 Yankelovich poll, for instance, 43 percent of respondents think that "international banking is pretty much controlled by Jews"; 52 percent think that "Jews always like to be at the head of things"; 37 percent believe that "Jews have too much power in the business world"; 46 percent support the statement, "the movie and television industries are pretty much controlled by Jews"; and 48 percent agree that "Jews are more loyal to Israel than to America."[7]

All of these factors support the position taken by Irena Klepfisz in her article "Anti-Semitism in the Lesbian/Feminist Movement":

> If someone were to ask me did I think a Jewish Holocaust was possible in this country, I would answer immediately: "Of course." Has not America had other Holocausts? Has not America proven what it is capable of? Has not America exterminated others, those it deemed undesirable or those in its way? Are there not Holocausts going on right now in this country? Why should I believe it will forever remain benevolent towards the non-Christian who is the source of all its troubles, the thief of all its wealth, the commie betrayer of its secrets, the hidden juggler of its power, the killer of its god? Why should I believe that given the right circumstances America will prove kind to the Jews? That given enough power to the fascists, the Jew will remain untouched?[8]

In a country in which other Holocausts have taken place, other Holocausts are "going on right now," Jews can, in the long run, expect any-

thing. That, after all, has been one of the prime lessons of Jewish history. Along with the basic awareness that anti-Semitism is simply *wrong*, that lesson should impel feminists, Jewish or not, to be vigilant in opposing Jewish opppression, to make sure that the flashpoint is not again reached where Jews face a newly conceived approach to our genocide.

The power of Jew-hating in the United States is illustrated by four 1983 rifle attacks on Jews affiliated with Yeshiva University in New York City, resulting in several injuries and the death of one non-Jewish woman; riding in a car in front of one containing Yeshiva students, she was accidentally killed by a sniper. A further threat lies in the discovery of "links among small groups of heavily armed right-wing extremists . . . from the Nazi Party and the Ku Klux Klan to radical elements of the farm protest movement"; these groups are joined by teachings like those of the Ministry of Christ Church that "Jews are children of Satan and should be exterminated."[9] The attack on a Jewish restaurant in Paris's Jewish section, The Marais, in which six people, Jewish and non-Jewish, were killed in a response to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, stands as a reminder–if one is needed–of the assumption that Jews–any Jews, anywhere–are fair game, all being equally "culpable" for what is done by any other Jew, all equally dispensable.

I find it easier to enumerate instances of anti-Semitism, current and historical, than to distinguish among them or to distinguish how racism and Jewish oppression operate at different times and places. I can readily understand that the difficulty in making distinctions is compounded when so much effort must go into simply trying to get other women to acknowledge anti-Semitism as more than historical aberration, something past and done. The difficulty is particularly pronounced when one is dealing not only with women who have not thought about, talked about, worked against anti-Semitism, but also with women, Jewish and not, who continue to take the position that the oppression of Jews today is not serious," perhaps arguing additionally that attendance at workshops on internalized anti-Semitism merely reflects self-indulgence.[10] It is further compounded when they argue that work against Jewish oppression necessarily drains energy from the fight against white supremacy, that the presence of racism merits political opposition while the presence of anti-Semitism can be safely ignored. I think it vital to refute these arguments, as Jewish women have done in a range of personal and published responses.[11]

There needs also to be an acknowledgment that, while anti-Semitism has the potential for–and certainly the history of–unleashing violence against Jews, in the United States people of color face the probability of greater physical danger than do Jews. Although this assertion has been

wrongly used by groups such as Women Against Imperialism and the Alliance Against Women's Oppression to dismiss Jewish oppression as a significant political issue, it can be used constructively to put anti-Semitism into an historical and contemporary context. At the beginning of an article on how Jews *are* oppressed in the United States, for example, Aviva Cantor wrote in 1970:

> . . . when we come to consider whether Jews in America are oppressed, we should not be side-tracked by the fact that they happen to be, by and large, economically well-off and not subject at the moment to the kind of physical oppression faced by blacks, Indians, and Chicanos. Oppression in America can be subtle and not easily recognized as such . . .[12]

For women who *assume* the fundamental importance of anti-Semitism, who recognize its life-threatening aspects and history, and who want to look at what happens, what has happened, in this country, the distinctions made in Cantor's article bring some perspective to the relative situations of white Jews and of people of color, Jewish and non-Jewish.

As we develop an analysis of Jewish identity and anti-Semitism within a feminist context, it is essential for us to reject any approach which flattens oppressions, distorting their historical reality in an attempt to argue for their parity in the long run. An example of this "flattening" dynamic appears as a key paragraph in Evelyn Torton Beck's introduction to *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology.* Its analysis of anti-Semitism has significant implications for approaches to both Jewish oppression and racism. Beck writes:

> Why is it often difficult to see parallels? Do we resist seeing them? Need one oppression cancel out another? Would the recognition that it is not *either/or* but *both/and* be too overwhelming? What would happen if we admitted that oppressed groups can themselves be oppressive? In the face of this complexity, a few facts remain clear: *oppression is never less oppressive simply because it takes a different form* [my emphasis]. Success has never protected the Jews from anti-Semitism. Even those Jews who considered themselves more German than Jewish were annihilated by the Nazis. Ironically, when Jews have succeeded in integrating themselves into a society, it has been used against them: suddenly every Jew becomes "the rich Jew," the penny-pinching, exploiting miser. The great American dream, "from rags to riches," is simply not acceptable for Jews, whose success is somehow always tainted. Moreover, if at certain moments in history some Jews have entered into the mainstream, it is only because some powerful groups have "allowed" it: often this is done with the purpose of using Jews as a buffer and/or as an easy scapegoat when one is needed. It is an age-old pattern for Jews—*today*, allowed in, perhaps even encouraged; *tomorrow,* ignominiously thrown out. Many people fail to understand the implications of this recurrent fact of Jewish history, and even some Jews fall for the mirage, taking the surface for the whole, refusing to acknowledge the precariousness of Jewish existence. Is that why, even now, I feel I have to justify my concern? *To prove that any form of anti-Semitism is always a real*

danger?[13]

"The precariousness of Jewish existence" throughout history, the ways in which certain limited economic privilege has been "allowed" Jews by white Christians who benefited from the Jewish role as "buffer" and "scapegoat," "*the real danger*" inherent in "*any form of anti-Semitism*" –all these points are incontrovertible. Each needs to be understood as central to Jewish responses to anti-Semitism.

Yet Beck distorts the nature of anti-Semitism–and, by extension, that of other oppressions–by arguing that "oppression is never less oppressive simply because it takes a different form." It seems far more accurate to me to acknowledge that the degree of oppressiveness *depends* on the form that a given oppression takes at different times, in different locations, and for different individuals. The "form" that anti-Semitism took in Nazi Germany or during the Spanish Inquisition is not the "form" that it has taken at different times in the United States. In turn, current forms of Jewish oppression in the United States differ from those in Ethiopia, where in the last decade, an estimated two thousand of its Jewish community, the Beta Yisroel (Falashas), have been killed and "seven thousand driven off the land," the study of Hebrew forbidden, and Jewish schools closed; in the Soviet Union, almost impossible for Jews to leave, where teaching or studying Jewish history or possessing Jewish books can bring fines, forced labor sentences, and incarceration in mental institutions; or in junta-run Argentina, where Jews were "a full 20% of the reported disappearances, while the Jewish population as a whole is under 1% of the Argentine population."[14]

To suggest that the degree of oppressiveness is equal regardless of its form fails to acknowledge, among other things, the virulence that anti-Semitism *can* attain. Being caught in a pogrom, losing a job because one is a Jew, having swastikas painted on one's house, being beaten by anti-Semites, or feeling invisible within a political movement reflect different degrees of Jewish oppression. As Cherríe Moraga has written about "lesbianism, . . . being brown, . . . being a woman, . . . being just plain poor," it is "*the specificity*" that matters.[15]

Within the Jewish community in this country, a tremendous range of oppression exists which is affected by the variables in the life of each individual. In the United States today, the poor Jew, the working-class Jew, the elderly Jew who subsists on decreasing government subsidy programs, the Jewish woman who is incarcerated in a state mental institution, and the disabled Jew who must rely on the rehabilitative services of a municipal clinic, are far more vulnerable to the anti-Semitism of the people with whom they come into contact than the Jews who are profes-

sionals, entrepreneurs, or government officials.[16] While none is immune to Jewish oppression, its forms differ, as does the extent to which anti-Semitism undermines safety, controls lives, and threatens individual survival. Such distinctions have parallels among people in other groups. Under certain circumstances, for instances, an unemployed Black teenager and Reagan's lone Black Cabinet appointee, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Samuel Pierce, can both be in equal danger of being lynched–as a Black transit worker was a few miles from my home in 1982–but on a day-to-day basis they experience quite different forms of racism.

The hatred motivating such violence is frequently multi-faceted–sometimes indisputably racial, sometimes inextricably linked with woman-hatred, queer-loathing, devaluation of the poor or aged, fear of political radicalism. As it might not be known whether an elderly Jew was beaten because the victim's Jewish identity made for even greater vulnerability, it can often remain unclear whether a lesbian of color raped by a white man was singled out because of her lesbian identity, as well as because of her race.

The issues of economic success, class privilege, and access to money further complicate the picture, but they are pivotal to any examination of Jewish oppression and racism. White Jews in this society are oppressed as Jews, yet privileged as people with white skin, potentially allowed by the white Christian ruling class to attain the level of "middlemen": a buffer between themselves and the poorer and darker, Jews are convenient scapegoats when needed. Yet we possess–and present–an inaccurate picture of Jewish life in the United States if we see financial success *only* as precarious and not also as a source of privilege and power. The tendency to present such a picture is, I think, partly due to the fact that "making it," as Beck says, has been used against Jews to buttress ancient stereotypes and to fuel anti-Jewish acts. At the same time, it reflects a women's movement that has, by and large, been notable for its failure to deal with class background and economic privilege.

Because it distorts the position of Jews in this country, the half-picture, the argument that "success has never protected Jews from anti-Semitism" without any explanation of what success has meant–and does mean–in *positive* terms, interferes with potentially fruitful dialogue with non-Jewish women of color. While the "precariousness of Jewish existence" argument must be made forcefully to explain how anti-Semitism functions, it is only one of several aspects of the relationship between class and white Jews that deserves attention. Among these, it is especially critical to counter vehemently the stereotypic assumption that poor and working-class Jews do not exist. A 1973 study, for instance, found:

1. 272,000 individuals, or 15.1 percent of the Jewish population of 1.8 million in New York [City], are poor or near poor. This figure includes 191,000 poor Jews and 81,000 who are near poor;
2. 190,300 families totaling 432,000 individuals are between the near poverty level and what the Bureau of Labor Statistics calls a moderate level of living. This is almost one quarter of New York City's Jewish population, and constitutes the Jewish working class.[17]

A 1983 study of Chicago Jews, which also found 15 percent to be "economically disadvantaged and vulnerable," suggests that the statistics of a decade ago have not changed markedly. Placed at a higher level than those used by the federal government to determine the poverty line, "the figures are approximately the same in St. Louis, and preliminary analysis of other cities reveals similar patterns."[18]

In addition to such statistical information, any discussion of the class position of Jews must consider that provided by Jewish women who speak out of their own experiences, their own histories: the lesbian whose father supports his family "on the income from a small tomato and banana stand at which he worked six days a week, twelve hours a day"[19]; the over-65 Jewish women who, like elderly women in all racial/ethnic groups, suffer the greatest economic poverty[20]; and the other Jewish women in our communities who live on SSI or food stamps, who work as waitresses or typists, who do not have college degrees, who have few marketable skills or whose skills are clearly "blue-collar," who work hard to survive and get ahead economically. In each instance, the problem is not simply invisibility, but assumptions about Jews and class (held as well by many middle-class Jews) which effectively block from public vision the poor or working-class Jew. As Renee Franco, a Sephardic Jew whose family has lived in Atlanta for years, has written: "I have come to realize that people don't want to know they exist. What could they do with all their myths and stereotypes?"[21]

Emphasizing the existence of poor and working-class Jews can play a useful role in confronting stereotypes. While a large number of Jews are middle-class, the acknowlegment of this fact can be used to perpetuate myths, rather than to clarify what the real economic position of Jews is. Because stereotypes about Jewish success and Jewish privilege often translate into a belief in "Jewish control," it is essential to realize that, with a few token exceptions, Jews are intentionally excluded "from the central position of economic power," are absent from executive positions in large banks, the auto and oil industries, public utilities, and other conglomerates where national and international economic policy is shaped.[22] However, while white Christian men make up the economic and political elite in the United States, a high percentage of white Jewish men have nevertheless achieved a certain level of economic success:

"seventy percent of Jews in the labor force are either professionals (29%) or managers and administrators (41%)."[23] In these fields, many factors–white skin undoubtedly being a highly significant one–have prevailed over both individual and institutional anti-Semitism.[24]

These statistics apply overwhelmingly to Jewish male workers: the 1972 National Jewish Population Study indicates that "only 16 per cent of the employed women were" managers or administrators, and "an estimated 42 per cent of Jewish working women were classified as 'clerical'."[25] Despite the disparity between female and male Jewish workers, statistics relating to Jewish men have direct implications both for Jewish women and for anyone examining the economic position of white Jews and people of color in this society. While it is true that the median income of white women is about half that of white men, the white woman with some ties to a middle-income white man–father, brother, ex-husband, uncle–finds in that connection the potential for some degree of financial access: college tuition, child support, a source of funds for medical or other emergencies, a possible inheritance. The white lesbian in this position, Jewish or not, who for personal or political reasons chooses to sever these ties, excercises a *choice* that is open to far fewer women of color; and, in any event, no such adult decision can undo a range of childhood "privileges"–adequate nutrition, satisfactory health care, safe housing. The disparity is evident from the 1980 Census, which places the following percentage of families in each group below the federal poverty line: Vietnamese, 35.1 percent; Puerto Rican, 34.9 percent; Black, 26.5 percent; Latino, 21.3 percent; white 7.0 percent.[26] And for each of these groups, these statistics have daily implications that need to be considered in relation to racism and anti-Semitism.

My perception of the world around me and my place in it, for example, can easily be distorted as soon as I forget–or disregard–the fact that my freedom to write this article at all rests on assorted privileges I have gained as an Ashkenazi Jew from New York City whose family worked itself into the middle class. These advantages included public school and college teachers, all white and mostly Jewish, who regarded me as "smart"; the fellowship, the part-time teaching jobs, and the salary of my college professor husband, which contributed to putting me through graduate school with almost no debts incurred; the education and work credentials (and, in this economy, the good luck) to have a well-paying part-time job that allows me the flexibility to go to the library and do my own writing. My father came from the Ukraine, poor, with parents who knew no English, and worked in a candy factory while he got the schooling that would qualify him for the life-long civil service job he

secured at a time when newspapers were allowed to specify "Christian" –and "white"–in their employment ads. But he "made it," and I gained from that. My political arguments regarding anti-Semitism and racism have a flimsy foundation if I am not totally clear that neither his achievements nor my own just flowed "naturally" from our individual abilities and fortunes, if I am not prepared to recognize, analyze, and understand how race *has* affected my class prerogatives.

While for Jews, "the great American dream," as Beck writes, " . . . is somehow always tainted," a tremendous gulf separates those who can attain even the semblance of it and those for whom it is simply out of reach. In writing about the achievement of that "American dream" by white Jewish playwright Moss Hart, James Baldwin first quotes from Hart's response to instant success on Broadway as he takes a 3 a.m. taxi ride, and then adds his own comments:

> "It was possible [Hart writes] in this wonderful city for that nameless little boy–for any of its millions–to have a decent chance to scale the walls and achieve what they wished. Wealth, rank, or an imposing name counted for nothing. The only credential the city asked was the boldness to dream."
>
> But this is not true for the Negro [Baldwin says], and not even the most successful or fatuous Negro can really feel this way. His journey will have cost him too much, and the price will be revealed in his estrangement–unless he is very rare and very lucky–from other colored people, and in his continuing isolation from whites. Furthermore, for every Negro boy who achieves such a taxi ride, hundreds, at least, will have perished around him, and not because they lacked the boldness to dream, but because the Republic despises their dreams.[27]

And Beverly Smith has a similar response in "'The Possibility of Life Between Us'," when Judith Stein mentions positively the statement of a Jewish man "who was talking about 'this is how you stay alive in a culture that's totally hostile to you.' You have enough money that it's worth it for people to keep you going." Smith's reply is immediate and vehement: "I've got to say it! See, that sounds like a good idea. Black people don't have that. I feel anger when I hear about being rich as being a survival mechanism. *Running* for Black people was a survival mechanism."[28]

The history of white Jews in the United States needs to be looked at against the violence perpetrated since the late fifteenth century against people of color. At its most fundamental level, the issue comes down to physical survival, to the recognition that, while the pivotal racial ideology in Europe involved Jews and the other "inferior races" located in colonized countries and continents, the dominant racial ideology in the United States has consistently seen skin color as far more central than religion.

White-skinned Jews then need to look at the historical and contemporary intersection of religion/ethnicity and skin color, the confluence of anti-Semitism and white skin privilege, and avoid the tunnel vision that perceives Jewish oppression but not racial prerogatives. During the Civil War, for instance, anti-Semitism emerged from the centuries-old stereotype of the Jew as "financial manipulator" and "shyster," as questionable in loyalty to the state. An 1862 order by Union General Ulysses S. Grant (canceled by President Lincoln) expelled "Jews, as a class'" from the Department of Tennessee which was under his command because of Jewish peddlers' alleged trade with the enemy. The 150,000 Jews, white Northerners and Southerners, had roughly the same attitude toward slavery as white Christians and were well represented in the armed forces of both sides. Judah P. Benjamin, Confederate Secretary of War and Secretary of State, who was essential to the war effort, was the victim of both Southern anti-Jewish attitudes, blaming the economic ills of the area on Jewish "extortionists" whom he supposedly protected *and* Northern ones attacking him *as a Jew* for his role in the War.[29] This anti-Semitism manifested itself–and should be understood–in a society where, for Northern and Southern Blacks, the oppression and the stakes were of an entirely different magnitude.

The case of Leo Frank raises similarly complex issues. Lynched in 1915, Frank, president of the Atlanta Lodge of B'nai B'rith, was the New York-raised manager of his uncle's factory (and therefore easy to pin with the stereotype of the "Jewish outsider," the "Jewish capitalist"). Accused of the 1913 rape and murder of Mary Phagan, a 14-year-old white Christian employee, and convicted while a mob threatened, "'Hang the Jew or we'll hang you'," Frank was lynched as the culmination of an anti-Jewish campaign against him by Tom Watson, Populist leader, racist, anti-Catholic bigot, and later United States Senator, who observed after the murder, "'Jew libertines take notice'."[30] His killing led to threats against the Jewish citizens of Marietta, the site of the lynching; "in the aftermath of terror, about half of the 3,000 Jews in Georgia left the state."[31]

Several things are notable about the Frank case. It contributed to the formation in 1913 of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. The Knights of Mary Phagan reconstituted themselves in 1915 as the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, giving new life to that moribund organization. While the Klan and other such groups have consistently expressed virulent anti-Semitism, Frank's was "only" the second known lynching of a Jew in the United States and the only one in which Jew-hating was *the* central motivation.[32] Although at least as much evidence implicated Black janitor Jim Conley, who was sentenced to one year as an accessory

and admitted his own guilt for the murder to his lawyer, during and after Frank's trial anti-Semitism in many local white Christian people was roused to a level of blood lust that temporarily–and most uncharacteristically–outweighed their capacity for racist violence.

Commenting on the nature of anti-Semitism in the United States, a Jewish friend of Frank's observed that when Frank moved to Atlanta, "violence . . . probably never entered his head . . . in the South violence was reserved for Negroes."[33] No arrests had been made in the brutal deaths in Atlanta of eighteen Black women during the year-and-a-half preceding Phagan's murder.[34] During the month after Frank's lynching, "four Blacks had been lynched in Georgia; two days after the lynching of Frank, three Blacks were lynched in Alabama."[35] The violence feared by Jews in Georgia was a "normal" and constant threat for the region's Black citizens, 1,100 of whom were lynched between 1900 and 1917.[36] During approximately the same period, the Texas Rangers "executed, without due process of law, between one hundred and three hundred Mexican residents of the border counties" *alone*.[37]

The death toll among people of color in this country is limited by neither time nor place. Lakota lesbian Barbara Cameron explains her continuing political activism in terms of "the death of Anna Mae Aquash –Native American freedom fighter–'mysteriously' murdered by a bullet in the head; Raymond Yellow Thunder–forced to dance naked in front of a white VFW club in Nebraska–murdered; Rita Silk-Nauni–imprisoned for life for defending her child; my dear friend Mani Lucas-Papago–shot in the back of the head outside of a gay bar in Phoenix."[38] The list is interminable, differing from community to community. Twelve Black women are murdered in a five-month period of 1979 in Boston.[39] Black, Latino, Native American prisoners or suspects are shot in the back in New York, drowned while handcuffed in Texas, "inexplicably" strangled to death while the Los Angeles police "subdue" suspect after suspect with a chokehold (leading the Los Angeles police chief to suggest that "blacks might be more likely to die from chokeholds because their arteries do not open up as fast as they do on 'normal people'").[40]

Several miles from my Brooklyn home, in June 1982, a group of fifteen to twenty white youths attacked three Black New York City transit workers who had stopped to pick up some food in a white neighborhood on their way home from work. Shouting racial epithets in the true spirit of a lynch mob, the youths kicked to death Willie Turks, the one Black man unable to escape. Unlike nearly all murders of people of color, this one got a lot of attention from the white media in the city. I was shocked by it, both outraged and sickened. Turning on the radio, I picked up a program in the middle and heard Black lesbian activist Joan Gibbs from DARE expressing her anger that so many white people had

responded to this particular killing when, as she said, *it happens all the time.* My reaction to the murder didn't change. But I did add to it, as I had many times before, a further sense of my privilege, as a white person, *not* to see that "it happens all the time." Some days later, at a protest rally at the Black housing project near where Turks had been killed, Reverend Herbert Daughtry, head of the Black United Front, observed, "If it's Blacks today, it'll be Jews the next day. . . ."

The central issue here is physical survival in the face of both overt violence and the shrouded kind, the kind which prevents people from getting enough food, enough heat, enough medical care, and so maims and kills too. Such violence is not the whole of any oppression. Nor does its relative absence negate the pain, the danger, the history, the fear of other aspects of racism and Jewish oppression. But it does help define how close each individual or each group is to oppression's sharpest cutting edge. As I look at anti-Semitism and racism as they have been manifested in the past, and as they operate today, my attention is riveted again and again to the times and the places where that edge presses into the flesh and cuts through the the bone.

August 1982–January 1984

NOTES

Throughout the article I describe actual incidents involving racism and/or Jewish oppression in which I paticipated or which were reported to me by participants. When these are not a matter of public record, I have changed specifics to protect the identities of the individuals involved while not altering the basic nature of the political issues raised.

I. Origins

[1]I use the terms "anti-Semitism" and "Jewish oppression" interchangeably. I see "Jew-hating" as a particularly virulent form of anti-Semitism which is sometimes supported by religious or political ideology. Many anti-Semitic acts are not expressions of "Jew-hating."

I use the term "anti-Semitism" to refer specifically to the oppression of Jews. While an argument against such usage has been made on the grounds that Arabs are also Semitic people, historically the word relates to Jews alone. First used in 1873 by Wilhelm Marr, "anti-Semite" was immediately picked up in Germany and elsewhere by Jew-hating individuals and groups who used it as a positive description of their politics, much as we might use the term "feminist." In the following 75 years, millions of Jews were killed as a consequence of the racist ideology called "anti-Semitism."

In making this semantic distinction, I am not arguing for the continued invisibility of Arab people or for continued indifference of non-Arabs to Arab oppression. Section VIII of "Hard Ground," "Semite vs. Semite/Feminist vs. Feminist," contains an extended discussion of anti-Arab racism.

[2]"Ashkenas is the Hebrew word for Germany, but in actual usage 'Ashkenazic Jew' refers to those Jews (and their descendants) who have lived in either Western or Eastern Europe (except some Sephardic communities within this area)" (Abraham D. Lavender, "Appendix," *A Coat of Many Colors: Jewish Subcommunities in the United States,* ed. Lavender [Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977], p. 317).

[3]For a discussion of the role of anti-Semitism in the Rosenberg case and the response of the Jewish community to it, see Victor S. Navasky, *Naming Names* (New York: Viking, 1980); and Vicki Gabriner, "The Rosenberg Case: We Are All Your Children," in *Chutzpah: A Jewish Liberation Anthology,* ed. Steven Lubet, Jeffry (Shaye) Mallow, et al (San Francisco: New Glide Publications, 1977), pp. 173-180. *The Rosenberg File* by Ronald Radosh and Joyce Milton reveals that after the verdict, an Associated Press reporter found the word "Jude" written on a piece of paper at the seat of the jury foreman ([New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1983], p. 530).

[4]See the articles by Black and Jewish men in Nat Hentoff, ed., *Black Anti-Semitism and Jewish Racism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969); Robert G. Weisbord and Arthur Stein, "The New York School Crisis and Its Aftermath," *Bittersweet Encounter: The Afro-American and the American Jew* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), pp. 161-205; Paul Cowan, "Housing in Forest Hills: But Not Next Door . . .," *The Tribes of America* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), pp. 113-131; and an account of the brutal beating of Black teen-ager Victor Rhodes by Hasidic Jews in June Jordan, "In the Valley of the Shadow of Death (1978)," *Civil Wars* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981), pp. 150-162.

[5]Itzhak Epstein, "Open Letter to the Black Panther Party," *Jewish Radicalism: A Selected Anthology,* ed. Jack Nusan Porter and Peter Dreier (New York: Grove Press, 1973), pp. 64-71; and Albert S. Axelrad and Robert E. Goldburg, Huey Newton, Morris U. Schappes, and George Wald, *The Black Panthers, Jews and Israel* (New York: Jewish Currents, 1971).

[6]Elly Bulkin, "Racism and Writing," *Sinister Wisdom 13* (Spring 1980), pp. 3-22. See also H. Patricia Hynes, "On 'Racism and Writing'," *Sinister Wisdom 15* (Fall 1980), pp. 105-109; letters from Louise Mullaley, Marguerite Fentin, and Andree Collard, *Sinister Wisdom 16* (Spring 1981), pp. 90-93; and my response in issue 16, p. 94.

II. Extensions

[1]Beverly Smith with Judith Stein and Priscilla Golding, eds., "'The Possibility of Life Between Us': A Dialogue Between Black and Jewish Women," *Conditions: Seven* (1981), p. 45.

[2]Of her four novels, see especially Sinclair's *Wasteland* (1946), whose characters include Debby, a white, strongly Jewish-identified lesbian, radical and writer; and *The Changelings* (1955), which focuses on the relationship between two young adolescent girls, one Jewish, the other Black.

[3]Theresa Haynie, "Music Fest: Struggle and Solidarity," *Plexus* (November 1981), pp. 19, 20.

[4]"'The Possibility of Life Between Us'," p. 44.

[5]I use the term "non-Jewish women of color" because of the absence of another, less awkward phrase which does not deny the existence of women of color who are Jewish. Lavender says that "the American Jewish community is

99 percent white" (p. 3); he states that "the estimated number [of Black Jews] nationally ranges from 12,000 (excluding quasi-Jewish black cults) to 100,000" (p. 15).

[6]"Sepharad is the Hebrew word for Spain, but 'Sephardic Jew' refers in a broader sense to those Jews (and their descendants) who lived in Spain and Portugal in the Middle Ages. After being forced out of the Iberian Peninsula by the Inquisition, they settled in France, Holland, England, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Israel, North Africa, the Americas, and a few other localities. 'Sephardic Jews' . . . also refers to those Jews (and their descendants) who have lived in countries of the Middle East and North Africa since the ancient expulsions from Israel" (Lavender, p. 316). Sephardic Jews have been estimated as 2½ percent of the Jewish population of the United States (150,000 of 5,921,000) and 60 percent of Israeli Jewry (World Sephardic Federation); there are an estimated 2 to 2½ million Sephardic Jews in the world (Yeshiva University Sephardic Studies Department) out of a total of 13 million.

[7]I am grateful to Rita Arditti for criticism which led me to consider the issues I raise in this and the preceding paragraphs. In a letter of October 11, 1983, she wrote: "My main problem has to do with the expression 'Jews of color.' I have to say that I still do not know what that means. It seems to me a broad term that derives from the NorthAmerican division between white people in this country and blacks. I do not know who invented the term, but when I first saw it, in Jewish feminist papers, I was surprised. I do not like it at all and I will try to explain why. First of all, it seems to lump together all the Jews who are not "white?" And who are 'white Jews'? Are Ashkenazi Jews white? How about Sephardic Jews from Italy, are they white and Sephardic Jews from Turkey or Morocco Jews of color? I can tell you that my family (Sephardim fromTurkey, Ladino-speaking) would be very surprised to be called 'Jews of color' and certainly they would not understand what you mean? So, who has the power of naming here? Are Jews from Ethiopia 'Jews of color'? And Chinese and Indian Jews? Is that what you mean? In short, it seems to me that the categories of 'white Jews' and 'Jews of color' are NorthAmerican categories that imitate some of the racist divisions of this culture . . . And finally, just to confuse you further, what would you call the Jews from LatinAmerica, 'color,' 'white,' or what? In Argentina, for instance about 25% of the community is Sephardic, with a very broad spectrum, like Jews from Syria, Turkey, Spain, Italy, etc., and the rest are Ashkenazis, mainly from Russia, Poland and Germany . . . Plus, there has been quite a lot of mixing."

[8]References to anti-Jewish incidents in the U.S. come from the 1982 Anti-Defamation League reported cited in Gerald Stillman, "Polling Anti-Semitism," *Jewish Currents* (July-August 1982), p. 9. A 14.9 percent decline in 1981-82 from the 1980-81 figures is reported in "Anti-Semitic Incidents Found to Drop in Year," *New York Times*, January 11, 1983, p. A17; a decline of 19 percent from the 1982 figures is reported in "Anti-Semitic Incidents Down Sharply in 1983," *New York Times*, January 18, 1984, p. A21.

[9]The quote about the *Davka* issue, published in Los Angeles, and the reference to *Erzat Nashim* are from "Introduction," Susannah Heschel, ed., *On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), p. xv. The two Jewish women's conferences are described in Maralee's "A Beginning," *Chutzpah 5* (Summer 1973), p. 5 and "First Midwest Jewish Women's Conference," *Chutzpah 6* (Winter 1974) p. 1. An expanded version of the *Response* issue, edited by Elizabeth Koltun, was published as *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976). The establishment of the Jewish Feminist Organization is described in Anne Lapidus Lerner, "'Who Hast Not Made Me a Man': The Movement for Equal Rights for Women in American Jewry," *American Jewish Yearbook* (1977),

reprinted as a pamphlet by the American Jewish Committee, p. 7; and in Maralee, "Jewish Women Join Forces," *Chutzpah* 7 (Fall 1974), pp. 1, 12. "From Fears to Hope," an article on the Jewish Lesbian Gang by Katz appeared in *Chutzpah 8* (1975), pp. 2, 7. Susan Schechter writes about the Jewish women's statement in "Solidarity and Self-Respect: Coming Out Jewish at the Socialist Feminist Conference," *Chutzpah: A Jewish Liberation Anthology*, pp. 57, 59.

[10]Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

[11]The Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement," *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, ed. Zillah R. Eisenstein (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1979), p. 365.

[12]Jan Clausen, Review of *This Bridge Called My Back, Conditions: Eight* (1982), p. 135.

[13]These interactions are the subject of "Breaking a Cycle," section VII of "Hard Ground."

III. Threads

[1]Lucy S. Dawidowicz, "Jewish Identity: A Matter of Fate, a Matter of Choice," *The Jewish Presence: Essays in Identity and History* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), p. 5.

[2]Dawidowicz, "Can Anti-Semitism Be Measured?" *The Jewish Presence*, p. 196.

[3]The "Judenrat" was "a Jewish council . . . established in each community to carry out the instructions of the Einsatzgruppen," the Nazis special duty groups (SD) or mobile killing squads (Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews: 1933-1945* [New York: Bantam, 1975], p. 155)

[4]First published in Russia in the opening years of the twentieth century, the Protocols, forged by Tsarist officials, revealed an alleged conspiracy by Jews to take over the world.

[5]Cheryl Clarke, personal communication, December 1983.

[6]See John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1966) and Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965).

[7]Arthur D. Morse, *While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy* (New York: Hart Publishing Company, 1967), p. 263.

[8]Connecticut Education Association, Council on Interracial Books for Children, and National Education Association, *The Ku Klux Klan and the Struggle for Equality: An Informational and Instructional Kit* (New York: CIBC, 1981), p. 7.

[9]Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1951), pp. 185, 206.

[10]See Michi Weglyn, *Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps* (New York: Morrow, 1976) and Ken Adachi, *The Enemy That Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976).

[11]Helen Epstein, *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1979).

[12]Quoted in Rita Arditti, "Sephardic Jewry," *Sojourner* (July 1983), p. 3.

IV. Separations

[1]Documents relating to the early settlement of Separdic Jews are included in Morris U. Schappes, *A Documentary History of the Jews in the United States: 1654-1875* (New York: Schocken Books, 1950, 1971).

[2]Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 28. Dawidowicz goes on to point out that in the U.S., "the Jews have been conspicuous by their absence in the history books."

[3]Nathan C. Belth, *A Promise to Keep; A Narrative of the American Encounter with Anti-Semitism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), p. 1.

[4]Quoted in Gordon Fellman, "Redefining the Sides, Reclaiming the Other Zionism," *genesis 2* (September/October 1982), p. 6.

[5]Stillman, p. 13.

[6]Norman Cohn, "The Myth of the Jewish World Conspiracy: A Case Study in Collective Psychopathology," *Commentary* (1966), p. 5. In *The Course of Modern Jewish History*, Howard Morley Sachar notes that "Ukrainian guerilla bands . . . committed no less than 493 pogroms during the year 1919, and had killed upwards of 70,000 Jews" ([New York: Dell, 1958, 1977], p. 302).

[7]Stillman, p. 12. See also Dawidowicz, "Can Anti-Semitism Be Measured?" *The Jewish Presence*, pp. 193-215.

[8]Irena Klepfisz, "Anti-Semitism in the Lesbian/Feminist Movement," *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology*, ed. Evelyn Torton Beck (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1982; reprinted and distributed by Crossing Press), p. 48.

[9]"Link Seen Among Heavily Armed Rightist Groups," *New York Times* (June 11, 1983), pp. 1, 5.

[10]The Alliance Against Women's Oppression objects to the *"vast amounts* of time and energy [which] are *consumed* in workshops sessions devoted to such questions as: relating to non-Jewish lovers; the Southern Jewish experience; eliminating internalized anti-semitism; Judaism before Patriarchy; and reclaiming our Jewish identities" (my emphasis) in "The Jewish Feminist Movement–Limitations of the Politics of Identity," in a pamplet, *Zionism in the Women's Movement–Anti-Imperialist Politics Derailed* (San Francisco: AAWO, 1983). In "Taking Our Stand Against Zionism and White Supremacy," Women Against Imperialism similarly indicates that concern in the women's movement with Jewish oppression is excessive (*off our backs*, July 1982, p. 20); this statement was reprinted widely in feminist periodicals. Also see Sandy Katz, Shelley Kushner, Louise Brotsky, "Zionism/Racism" (letter), *Big Mama Rag* (December 1981), p. 3; Lori Bradford, "'Sisters United' is Racist," *Big Mama Rag* (April 1982), p. 4; Elly Bulkin, "Anti-Semitism" (letter re Bradford's article) and Bradford's response, *Big Mama Rag* (June 1982), p. 3.

[11]Published responses include Anna and Elizabeth, "Jews and Zionism: Fighting Anti-Semitism and Imperialism," *Matrix*, Vol. 3, No. 13 (July 1982), 10-14;

and Di Vilde Chayes, "An Open Letter to the Women's Movement," *off our backs* (July 1982), p. 21. Dated April 22, 1982, Di Vilde Chayes' statement, reprinted widely in feminist periodicals, was signed by Evelyn Torton Beck, Nancy K. Bereano, Gloria Z. Greenfield, Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, Irena Klepfisz, Bernice Mennis, and Adrienne Rich. Publication of the statements by Women Against Imperialism and Di Vilde Chayes was followed by a number of letters, some supportive or critical of one of the two statements, others critical of both. See especially the letter from Janet Gottler in *Gay Community News* (June 19, 1982), p. 4; letters from Rachael Kamel, Morgan Firestar, Sarah Schulman, Rebecca Lesses, Rina Nassim, Bat Deborah, and Chaia Lehrer in *off our backs* (October 1982), pp. 28-30; and letters from Diane Fichtelberg and Sara Miles in *off our backs* (December 1982), p. 25. Also see the letter in response to the Women Against Imperialism statement from PM, JR, and Barbo in *Matrix*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (October 1982), 4-5.

The Alliance Against Women's Oppression statement has thus far been responded to by Jewish Women for a Secular Middle East (xeroxed response, October 1983).

[12]Aviva Cantor Zuckoff, "The Oppression of American Jews," *Jewish Radicalism*, p. 30.

[13]Evelyn Torton Beck, "Why Is This Book Different from All Other Books?" *Nice Jewish Girls*, p. xxii.

[14]Information and quote about the Bete Yisroel is from Dan Ross, *Acts of Faith: A Journey to the Fringes of Jewish Identity* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), p. 158; reference to closing of their Jewish schools is from David Rosenberg, "Fate of Falashas Still in Question," *genesis 2* (May/June 1983), p. 7; quotation about Jewish "disappeared" in Argentina is from Wendy Greenfield, "Mourning and Hope in Argentina," *genesis 2* (May/June 1983), p. 8.

Ross notes that Ethiopia's Black Jews "prefer to call themselves *beta esra'el*– 'House of Israel'," rather than the more commonly used term "Falasha," which "means 'exile' or 'stranger'" (p. 146). They were not recognized as Jews by Israel's rabbinate until the early Seventies and not allowed entry to Israel under the Law of Return until 1975.

[15]Cherrie Moraga, "La Guera," *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981; reprinted and distributed by Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1984), p. 29.

[16]See Naomi Levine and Martin Hochbaum, ed., *Poor Jews: An American Awakening* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1974) and Dorothy Rabinowitz, *The Other Jews: Portraits in Poverty* (New York: Institute of Human Relations Press, 1972); the impact of the current economic situation on Jews is discussed in "New Group of Jewish Poor Surfacing, Study Reveals," *The Jewish Week* (April 1, 1983), p. 9.

[17]Levine and Hochbaum, "Introduction," *Poor Jews*, p. 2.

[18]Evan M. Bayer and Gary A. Tobin, *Jewish Economic Dependency and Dislocation*, American Jewish Committee statement submitted to Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives (November 18, 1983), p. 2.

[19]Bernice Mennis, "Repeating History," *Nice Jewish Girls*, p. 91.

[20]Census Bureau statistics, Council on Interracial Books for Children, *Fact Sheets on Institutional Racism* (New York: CIBC, 1982), p. 3. See also Barbara Myerhoff, *Number Our Days* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978).

[21]Renee Franco, personal communication, August 1983.

[22]Arthur Liebman, *Jews and the Left* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1979), p. 603.

[23]Liebman, p. 603.

[24]Steven M. Cohen writes: "Conventional wisdom has long held that the Jews' cultural heritage was the key factor responsible for their remarkable success in this country (Glazer and Moynihan, 1970; Sowell, 1981). According to this view, the traditional heritage prized education, Jews were possessed of enormous drive and ambition, and they were adept at commerce and handling money. In contrast some have offered explanations which focus on certain structural features as the principal reasons for American Jewish mobility. They cite economic conditions and opportunities open to Jews when they arrived in the United States, and the occupational skills and financial resources they brought with them from the Old Country" (*American Modernity & Jewish Identity* [New York and London: Tavistock Publications, 1983], pp. 76-77). The latter position is developed in Sherry Gorelick, *City College and the Jewish Poor: Education in New York, 1880-1924* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982) and Stephen Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity and Class in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981).

[25]Will Maslow, *The Structure and Functioning of the American Jewish Community* (New York: American Jewish Congress, 1974), p. 9.

[26]The percentage of families below the federally-designated poverty level dropped slightly between the 1970 and 1980 Censuses. In some cases percentages vary significantly within each group, so that the average below the poverty level among Asians and Pacific Islanders, 10.7 percent, is much below the percentage for Vietnamese families.

[27]Baldwin, "Negroes Are Anti-Semitic Because They're Anti-White," *Black Anti-Semitism and Jewish Racism*, pp. 7-8.

[28]"The Possibility of Life Between Us'," p. 40.

[29]Bertram W. Korn discusses Grant's General Order No. 11, Jewish attitudes to slavery, and Judah P. Benjamin in *American Jewry and the Civil War* (New York: Atheneum, 1970). Also see Schappes.

[30]Belth, pp. 64, 67.

[31]Wendell Rawls Jr., "After 69 Years of Silence, Lynching Victim Is Cleared," *New York Times*, March 8, 1982, p. A12.

[32]For the news story about the one previous lynching of a Jew, see Schappes, "Double-Lynching of a Jew and a Negro," pp. 515-517: in Tennessee in 1868, S.A. Bierfield, Russian Jew, Radical Republican, "friendly with the Negro population," and his Black clerk, Lawrence Bowman, were lynched by the Klan. Belth describes Frank's murder as "the only lynching of a Jew in the nation's history" (p. 59). (In his study of the period from 1860 to 1925, Higham mentions the lynching of a number of Italians, singly and in groups as large as 11, including one situation reminiscent of the Bierfield murder: the Louisiana lynching, after a minor quarrel, of "five Sicilian storekeepers [who] disturbed the native whites because the Italians dealt mainly with the Negroes and associated with them nearly on terms of equality" [p. 169]).

[33]Belth, p. 61.

[34]Leonard Dinnerstein, *The Leo Frank Case* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 16.

[35]Morris U. Schappes, "1913 Eye-Witness Confirms Leo Frank's Innocence," *Jewish Currents* (May 1982), p. 24.

[36]Belth, p. 37.

[37]Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1948, 1968), p. 113.

[38]Barbara Cameron, "'Gee, You Don't Seem Like An Indian From the Reservation'," *This Bridge Called My Back,* p. 50.

[39]Combahee River Collective, "Eleven Black Women: Why Did They Die?" (Cambridge, MA: Combahee River Collective, 1979).

[40]"Urban League in Los Angeles Asks Police Chief Suspension," *New York Times,* May 12, 1982, p. A24.

The following are non-commercial publishers and periodicals which are listed in the "Notes." I have only included addresses for material which is still available.

Alliance Against Women's Oppression, The Women's Building, 3543 18th Street, San Francisco, CA 94110.
Big Mama Rag, 1724 Gaylord St., Denver, CO 80206.
Council on Interrracial Books for Children, 1841 Broadway, N.Y., N.Y. 10023.
The Crossing Press, Trumansburg, N.Y. 14886.
Gay Community News, 167 Tremont St., Boston, MA 02111.
genesis 2, 233 Bay State Rd., Boston, MA 02215.
Institute for Human Relations, American Jewish Committee, 165 E. 56 St., N.Y., N.Y. 10022.
Jewish Currents, 22 E. 17 St., N.Y., N.Y. 10003.
The Jewish Week, One Park Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10016.
Kitchen Table Press, P.O. Box 2753, Rockefeller Center Station, N.Y., N.Y. 10185.
Matrix, P.O. Box 7221, Olympia, WA 98507.
Monthly Review Press, 62 W. 14 St., N.Y., N.Y. 10011.
off our backs, 1841 Columbia Rd. N.W., Washington, DC 20009.
Plexus, 545 Athol Ave., Oakland CA 94606.
Sojourner, 143 Albany St., Cambridge, MA 02139.

REVIEWS

GLORIA ANZALDÚA

A GATHERING OF SPIRIT: NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN WOMEN'S ISSUE edited by Beth Brant. *Sinister Wisdom* 22/23, 1983, P.O. Box 1023 Rockland, ME 04841. Distributed by Turtle Grandmother Books, P.O. Box 33964, Detroit, Michigan 48232, (313) 381-3550. 221 pp. $6.50.

THE EXILE AND THE RETURN OF THE INDIGENOUS SPIRIT

The familiar sinking in the pit of my stomach. *I am pushed by rage and the searing wound in my soul.* (95)* as the pain of yet another indigenous woman floods through me. As I put down Beth Brant's anthology, *A Gathering of Spirit,* a *Sinister Wisdom* double issue of poems, tales, stories, letters, photographs and drawings by North American Indian women, I feel their *unseen spirit* (12) in the room with me. I listen to their *Mystery that speaks/of life and death/and rebirth* (42). And I think, *we . . . walk together/you and i* (44), mujer india.

This book has the at-homeness I feel when I read words written in my native tongue, in my native class like those of Elena Poniatowska, the fellowship I feel when I read the writings of Chicanas. I was raised in the indigenous borderlands and the blood of indios on both sides of the border surges in me. And though most of the indio in me comes from across the border, I feel that these American Indians are my people, too. And like Janice Gould (Maidu) and all dispossessed people in this country, I too know that *This is not my land anymore* (58).

I have watched the whiteman, the Spaniard first, hammering down my Indianness, have watched the anglo cutting it away, have watched the mestizo turn his back on it. I agree with you, Raven, the whole system stinks and like you *my sister I'm proof of the corruption* (208). Only you, Raven, *have been sentenced to die* (204), while I, by virtue of half my blood, am allowed to limp along. All darkskinned and oppressed people raise their voices with you in saying, *I'm dieing slowly. I need to feel the earth under my feet. This place resembles a tomb. I'm sealed away from the things that make living, living. I need fresh air and space to move* (207). *Our poverty is that we can't be who we are* (152).

**Italicized passages followed by page numbers in parenthesis are from* A Gathering of Spirit.

When I first opened this book I looked for the thematic divisions, an ordering of some sort in the table of contents. But after I'd read through a quarter of the book I realized that it needed no division of sections. Each poem flowed naturally into the interview, essay or graphic that followed. Each piece inter-connected with what came before, gathering momentum, cresting, reaching a lull. Oceanic, one organism pulsing with one heart, one breath. Integral. Not separate, not divided.

The women in the pages of this book write of what Anita Valerio (Blood/Chicana) calls *the root shaped/by spirits speaking* (210). That root is the ragged bones of the soul repeatedly violated, fiercely fighting repeated attacks of white washing, the theft of its tongues, the theft of its children (which are the future of the Indian nation), the dilution of its blood through marriage with whites. That root is desperately fighting to survive the extermination war, one of the most ignored holocausts committed by man against humanity.

They speak in Indian, in tribal tongue, éstas indias. With words fight *the battle still waged against us* (186), the silent war, the war not heard, ignored. *Bad press. One hundred and fifty years of the most consistently vicious press imaginable* (150), writes Carol Lee Sanchez (Laguna/Sioux/Lebanese), one of the most powerful truth-sayers in a book full of truth-sayers and plain-speakers. There is hate here yes, but there is love too. These indigenous women not only unveil the ugly violations of the spirit and the body, but also pay homage to the wind and the sky. These women do not compromise their words, their passion, their anger, yet they serve compassion from their kettles along with wild rice. Unwavering they stand before the face of the Spirit.

You will get no "literary" book review from me. I will not wield a knife over the text in the interests of objectivity, nor will I try to phantom the heart of its meaning with doses of analysis. I cannot "detach" myself from the writings of these women for they have carved their words in my flesh. These women are poets, weavers of fine-spun words rendering images carnate. Clean, precise, compelling, consciousness moving–these attributes are the hardest for a writer to achieve, these words are the highest compliments one can pay a poet. Through their blood flows generations and generations of story-tellers, of wise women and men. What a rich poetic legacy. These women follow a similar path my ancestors, the Nahuas, followed: *tlilli, tlapalli,* the path of the red and black ink, colors symbolizing wisdom and poetry (painted on codices).[1] And I think, yes, the ancient Aztecs were right, through metaphor and symbol, by means of poetry, truth and communication with the Divine could be attained. It has been attained in *A Gathering of Spirit.*

Estas mujeres, spiritual heroines, are not part of the literati walking

in academe or mainstream halls. They walk the Earth, are deeply rooted to La Madre Tierra, venerate her. Witnesses to a long and difficult survival, these women do not write impersonally nor deal in intellectual word games nor try to impress their audience with, and simultaneously hide behind, abstractions and rhetoric. For some this is their first writing.

A Gathering . . . is a vehicle for Native women, among the least heard and most invisible of all Third World people. What an enormous task it must have been for Beth, working with limited resources to pull these multi-tribal voices together out of the silence and into this breakthrough book in less than a year. There is no splitting of sisterhood or spirit in the tales and songs of these women ages twenty-one to sixty-five, straight and lesbian, urban and rural representing forty Nations in the U.S. and Canada. *A great weaving is going on here, a deep bonding* (118). Explored here are relationships between mother/grandmother and daughter/granddaughter, between Indians and the hostile white environment, between the disillusioned body-soul and the spirit's hope.

The belief in Wholeness, of living in harmony with nature, and the recognition that everything is interconnected are major tenets of Native people. These, along with a recounting of the losses suffered in the continuing holocaust: the violation and murder of a people and their land, of a culture and a spirit, are the major themes of this anthology. These women write of internalized race hatred:

> *. . . She denies/the Indian part, so we're not sure whether our people are Abanaki, Ojibwe, Algonquin, or/Mohawk* (19)
>
> —Mary Moran (Indian/French Canadian)

. . . . .

> Half-breed. *It's just a white man's word.* (37)
>
> —Debra Swallow (Oglala)

. . . . .

> *. . . so many of my own kind/call me names. Say/I betrayed* (15)
>
> —Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna/Sioux/Lebanese)

They write of the loss of their children to the white man and his culture:

> *They want our power. They take the children to remove the inside of them.* (95)
>
> —Beth Brant (Bay of Quinte Mohawk)

. . . . .

> *Donna was growing up different. Like a stranger. She was going to be a white girl. Sullie could already see it in her. In her way of holding tension, of shaking her foot.* (25)
>
> —Linda Hogan (Chickasaw)

. . . . .

. . . education was the highest goal, and it was hard not to assimilate. (204)
–Beth Brant (Bay of Quinte Mohawk)

Winona LaDuke, a Canadian (Ojibway), links the oppression of Native people directly to the subjugation and exploitation of the Earth by white America (52-57). We, white America and its accomplices–and aren't we who live in this system without trying to change it all accomplices no matter what the composition of our blood?–we have used their land and sacred places for bomb practice:

They say no one died/Tiny desert flower/micro beetle bug/are they not life? (50)
–Terri Meyette (Yaqui)

. . . . .

you will walk outside
to gather strawberries
and find instead
a gaping cavern
the ultimate rape (202)
–Marcie Rendon, Awanewquay (Ojibway)

We have made holes in their land to mine first gold, copper, and silver, then oil, then coal, and now uranium. We fed them water contaminated from spills from radioactive material. As a result more and more children of the small numbers surviving birth are being born with under-developed lungs and other birth defects (52-57). Native people have been guinea pigs in our scientific experiments.

And today, *squatting* on Indian land in New York City along with the skyscrapers and everybody else, I sit here writing, the bright light of two lamps shining on the paper and I realize that this country and all of us in it are feeding off the Indian. To keep NYC lights bright, one hundred thousand miles of northern Quebec Indian reserves were flooded (54).

For many who suffer humiliation, feelings of powerlessness, rejection, and cultural genocide through sterilization abuse and other government crimes–a dry, prolonged kind of death–oblivion in the contents of a bottle is preferable. *Cheap, sour wine/comfort/console me/I stand stripped of dignity,/and wise, old ways* (66). For some a quicker death to *feel the blood gush wet/washing us back/into the stream* (74) is preferable. In Canada the suicide rate among Indians is three times the national rate (69).

In the pages of this book, éstas víctimas de la injusticia write of the

holocaust not in melodramatic, fist-beating-breast ways, but simply, approaching understatement. With the truth staring us in the eye, we can no longer ignore the fact that we are parasites.

"El tecolote canta, el indio muere" (the owl sings, an Indian dies) is a famous Mexican refrain. And as I review the slow stages of the Indian holocaust, I think: What a disillusionment! The indigenous people in Meso-America thought the white men were gods; the Indians in North America thought they must be like themselves: just, generous. Then the white hand opened fire with its machines. The brown hand with its spears and respect for nature could not contain it. The black hand manacled in chains was powerless to withstand it. With his sword and his cross the white Spanish conquistador decimated the indigenous cultures of México, Central and South America, the Caribbean. With treaties, dollars and trade goods deliberately smeared with small pox virus, and with bottles of fire water, the white anglo protestant puritan systematically set out to destroy the North American Indian. In North America forty million Indians were murdered in the space of half a century.[2] And the INVISIBLE HOLOCAUST still continues. Think of it: this country is built on the genocide of an entire people, the enslavement of another, and the colonization of yet more.

Chrystos (Menominee), in "I Walk in the History of My People," sums up the whole bloody mess eloquently:

> In the scars on my knee you can see children torn from their families
> bludgeoned into government schools
> You can see through the pins in my bones that we are prisoners
> of a long war
>
> My knee is so badly wounded no one will look at it
> The pus of the past oozes from every pore
> The infection has gone on for at least 300 years
> My sacred beliefs have been made pencils, names of cities, gas stations
> My knee is wounded so badly that I limp constantly
> Anger is my crutch
> I hold myself upright with it
> My knee is wounded
> see
> How I Am Still Walking[3]

There are two simultaneous movements going on. One is the continuation of the systematic, fanatic extermination of el pueblo indio from the Eskimos of North America to the Quechuas of Guatemala to the Aboriginals of Australia and native peoples of Africa. During the second half of the seventies, a backlash in the U.S. arose against Indians and Indian interests.[4] The "land war" intensified. The Sioux, the Navajos, the Mohawks who have not renounced their culture nor their dignity

remain torn from their lands and are still locked in reservations without hope, reservations that get smaller and smaller.

The other movement is a strong indigenist one, a re-indianization of values, a re-birth and a return to the Indian way (with modifications–the buffalo is gone forever. The cold metal of the machine is our reality, but perhaps by following the example of the Indian we can find a way to use it to serve the planet, not to desecrate it.). There's a strong resurgence of Indian activism, a strong renacimiento de los idiomas indígenas, a reclaiming by many half, quarter, one-eighth, and one-sixteenth Indian people of their Indian selves, of their Indian names. Many Chicanos are owning up to their Indian ancestry. Many Indians and non-Indians are embracing the dream of the re-emergence of the Indian way of life in order to halt the demise of the planet Earth.

El pueblo indígeno has lost its land to greed, its children to assimilation, its people to poverty and disease, its world of the sacred to the profane, yet its spirit remains unvanquished. Not even the waters of baptism could tame the free primal spirit. And though the white within and without has done his best to erase our spiritual history by making us ashamed of being Indian or Black; though he has instilled in us so much shame that we dare not incriminate our hands further by reaching out to our spirit roots, how very *odd* that thousands of us are holding fast to those roots, how very *odd* that many of us never lost the Spirit.

> You can't kill the spirit.
> It's like a mountain,
> old and strong. It lives
> on and on.
> –Naomi Littlebear Morena (Chicana)[5]

And the other very *odd* thing is that white people are trying to return to the feeling of the sacred, to adopt the ancient indigenous rituals–the very thing they tried to eradicate by the roots from the indios and the Blacks and from their own origins. Many non-Indian people are beginning to realize that we are kin to the leaf of the coral Indian paintbrush and possession is death.

I want to remind all–especially the Chicano and mexicano–people who have Indian blood of something they may wish to forget: we are part indio. The struggle of the Indian in this country or in México, Southamerica, Canada, or Australia is the struggle of the Chicano, the mexicano. It is the struggle of *all* people because it is the struggle of the entire planet.

> "*Mitakuye oyasin*, all my relatives!" That meant all two-legged ones, all four-legged ones, even those with eight legs or no legs at all. It meant those with wings and those with fins, those with roots and leaves, everything alive, all our relatives.[6]
>
> —Leonard Crow Dog (Lakota Sioux)

We can ask with Marilou Awiakta (Cherokee), *Why should I bother with distant Greeks and their nebulous fables when I have the spirits of the grandmothers, whose roots are struck deep in my native soil*... (119).

> *It is crucial that Native people be heard and understood at this time in history, not only for our own survival, but for the survival of the Earth and its people. We are all relatives. I am responsible to my heritage and for its message.... I personally feel that all of us, Indian and non-Indian alike, could benefit from Native American philosophy* (80).
>
> Rosalie Jones (Blackfoot)

This book is evidence to both the continuing Indian holocaust and to the birth of a modern indigenous impulse and its need for indigenous politics across tribal lines and national borders from Alaska to Australia.

Missing from *A Gathering* . . . are explorations of male-female relationships, relationships between lesbians, and the relationship between artist and creativity. Though I like Rosemary Anderson's artwork, her pencil drawing on the cover fails to capture the dynamism of a storm cloud and of the indigenous spirit—the reproducing process may be at fault here.

The visual art of about a dozen artists: photographs, drawings, paintings, sculpture inserted throughout the book parallels the text and is well integrated. As I look at the tintype from Joy Harjo (Creek) of a boy and a girl (143) or the photograph of the children from St. John's Indian School in South Dakota (90), something in their faces, in the way they hold themselves—pride, sadness, a rock-like adamancy hooks my soul and holds it in a poignancy difficult to name.

I am moved most by the letters exchanged between Raven (Cherokee), a straight woman encarcerated for life, and Beth (Mohawk), a lesbian and the editor of this anthology. "Sex, Class and Race Intersections: Visions of Women of Color," by Carol Lee Sanchez (Laguna/Sioux/Lebanese), the most compelling and powerful essay in the book, is a volcano erupting—vitriolic, purging, inspiriting. We Chicana, Black, Latina, Asian, and white women need this body of work that is *heavy/with emotion/surviving* (202), these direct transmissions of spirit-like injections. We need Raven and the other women in this book *who know*

and accept themselves, and stand in truth, without plastic covers (205). The selected bibliography of books, journals, and newspapers by and about North American Indian women tells us where we can find more native voices.

No I am not "objective" in this review. I love Beth and her strong spirit and the strength to survive that many lesbians of color possess. I too am a lesbian and know first hand *that* word. *That* word burns in the mouths of our people, hardens their eyes. How much more *their* denial of us hurts us when we dare to call ourselves *that*, than all the stones and clubs of others. *Lesbian. The word that makes them panic...* (95).

If in our own communities being lesbian is a liability, our being Indian or Chicana, or Latina, or Black or Asian is still a liability in the feminist community, is still a liability in the greater lesbian community. Fear of lesbianism, of our dark skins—our own fear, the fear of others. Beth writes:

> *I do know myself, but often hate that woman, I am proud to be an Indian, proud to be a lesbian, but I have to constantly fight the hatred, the desperation. My people hate me because I'm a lesbian. Whites hate me because I choose to identify with being Indian.* (206)

When I first met Beth at the Women In Print Conference in Washington D.C. October, 1981, I felt like we were looking at a negative of each other's photograph: I suffered my Indianness and she her whiteness. How sad she was at being the only Indian woman in the entire conference. *Listen, woman! The new word* for strong *is* "Woman-Hearted!" (209).

When I saw her again, at the Second Lesbian and Gay Third World Conference in Chicago a little over a year later, she was excited, nervous. She was to meet Barbara Cameron, she was to meet her *first* Indian lesbian. Now there were two. Last September I saw her again. She had a whole cabin full of Indian lesbians. We were at Malibou, California for the Lesbians of Color Conference. And now they are many. Beth smiled the whole time she was there.

If all the members of the tribes of outcasts and oppressed people could believe like Wendy Rose (Hopi/Miwok):

> *I am still convinced no matter what*
> *that I am stronger than any storm.*
> *Every song straining against the shackles.*
> *I creep the ocean floor and don't believe*
> *anything about me can drown.* (195)

If not only could we survive the long war but thrive, then together we could *pull the death from this river* (42) and *change the color of the*

sky (72) in *the Indian way* (152). But *as long as we don't make the connections between us, we are lost and we will be played by the white man* (206).

We can begin by making the connection to our root-self, that *root you don't/want to hear and the one that hides/from you . . .* (212), the root of *woman's self* (44), the root of man's self. And if we, like Alice Sadongei (Kiowa/Papago), *Stand/alone out here./Don't speak./Listen/to the desert* (40), we may yet *recognize each other. Visible Spirit* (7). Kindred spirit. Sister, brother, *hear me now/let us take this journey together* (202). This book: a gathering of spirit, the seed of that hope, of that strength. May its vision grow to tallness and have many seedlings. May it journey far, may it journey home. Remember, *if you get lost/ touch earth* (43).

Con ustedes en la lucha,
Gloria (Urraca Prieta)

ENDNOTES

[1]Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture,* translated by Jack Emory Davis (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), pp. 19 and 22.

[2]J.M.G. Le Clezio in the article, "Indigenismo y literatura" from the Mexican journal *Vuelta,* #46, September, 1980. My thanks to Randy Conner for giving me this article.

[3]From *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color,* edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (Watertown, Mass., Persephone Press, 1981; republished and distributed by Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, 1984), p. 57.

[4]*Indian Tribes: A Continuing Quest for Survival,* A Report of the United States Commission on Civil Rights, June 1981.

[5]Lyrics from a song from the album, "You Can't Kill the Spirit" by Izquierda.

[6]From Joan Halifax, *Shamanic Voices: A Survey of Visionary Narratives* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1979), p. 82

My thanks to Mirtha Quintanales and the editors of *Conditions* for reading this review and making suggestions.

KEEPER OF ACCOUNTS by Irena Klepfisz. Persephone Press; distributed by Sinister Wisdom, P.O. Box 1023, Rockland, Me. 04841. 1982. 97 pp. $5.95 plus $1.00 postage.

The process of writing this review has been arduous for me, fraught with doubts about my own competence to look at and consider the poetry of a Jewish woman. Can I, as a non-Jew, give these poems their due? Must I be able to understand how every nuance of Irena Klepfisz' experience as a Jew informs *Keeper of Accounts,* her second volume of poetry? Klepfisz and I are connected as poets–and, indeed, I have learned much as a poet from this poetry–as lesbians, and as historically oppressed peoples. However, my own silence on the issue of anti-Semitism and my privilege as a non-Jew–despite the racism I have experienced as a black person–have created barriers to my relationship with the poems. I want to write about the poetry anyway, for my very limitations challenge me to gain an emotional experience from and with these poems. Bashert.

Endurance, repression, survival, exclusion, absurdity, and work are the themes which drive this relentless poetry. Klepfisz is more than equal to the task of translating her formidable consciousness into splendid language. The poetry takes many forms: narrative, sonnet, journal entry, prose. Her sense of place and persona are strong in each poem. She spares us nothing and uses everything, as she was taught by her mother: "Never throw anything out." Turning on itself the abiding and disparaging stereotype of Jews as usurers, bookkeepers, good with money, Klepfisz *is* a keeper of accounts–as poets must be–moving us through monkey cages, the monotony of thankless work, urban and suburban places, and the terrain of Poland during World War II. Her personas are female monkeys, the worker, the outsider, the daughter, Jewish women, the survivor. Though she uses personas, in many of these poems Klepfisz is relentlessly herself, speaking from her own experience as office worker, as daughter, as lover, as teacher, as hair's breadth survivor of the Holocaust.

In her first book of poetry, *periods of stress* (Out & Out Books, 1975), Klepfisz assumes an interpersonal focus. She deals with sex and sexual relationships, first with men and later with women. She focuses

less on specifically Jewish themes, though she does address them in several poems. In *Keeper*, Klepfisz ushers us into her perceptions of the world, of history, of geography, of terrain. While I consider *Keeper* lesbian poetry, because it is the poetry of an avowed lesbian, lesbianism and sexuality are extremely muted themes.

"From the Monkey House and Other Cages," the sequence of poems which opens the volume, is an apt beginning. In these two multi-part poems which are rather like a two-act closet drama, the narrators are female monkeys in captivity since birth. In their respective monologues, from their respective cages, Monkey I dreams of "plain sun and sky" (5) and Monkey II cries over her own "safety" (17). Their language is terse, rhythmic, ironic, humorous, and poignant; the images stark:

> yet she was all
> my comfort: her sharp
> ribs against my cheek
> her bony fingers rough
> in fluffing me dry.
> ("Monkey I," 6)

> there had been much between us
> in gesture. mostly i remember
> her yellowed teeth her attempt
> at tameness.
> ("Monkey II," 23)

The monkeys speak to opposing experiences of the cage, of isolation, of complacency born of captivity, of the terror of being mated, of the trauma of the experimental lab, of their wild cage mates who cannot adapt to the environment of the cage. These amazing narrators can be viewed as metaphors of imprisonment, detention, containment, female inmates of Nazi concentration camps. But they work for me as monkeys and the poet wears the monkey skins well.

With her final statement, "i would lie/down dream of different/ enclosures" (24), Monkey II ushers us into Section II of *Keeper*, "Different Enclosures." Of this section, "Work Sonnets with Notes and Monologue" is a magnficent, three-part sequence of poetry. Klepfisz adapts the old, reliable, elastic sonnet wonderfully to the theme of work–thankless, routine, exhausting. This section is marvelous because of the empathy of the poet, who is both worker and outsider, and who explores the woman worker in the context of the office.

Five of the nine sonnets convey the effect of journal entries. The repetition, the parallel structure, and the directness of the rhythm exemplify the monotony of routine work. The four intervening sonnets–"iceberg," "volcano," "rock," and "dust"–exemplify the worker's

yearning to break free of enclosures, confinement, the drudgery of working for someone else, "to be fluid" (33), "to explode" (35), "to yield" (37), "to form" (39). And there is the characteristic Klepfisz humor—grim, ironic, full of the disparity between self and others.

> today was my day for feeling envy. i envied
> every person who did not have to do what i
> had to do. i envied every person who was rich
> or even had 25 cents more than me or worked
> one hour less. i envied every person who
> had a different job even though i didn't want
> any of them either.
>
> ("vi," 36)

"Notes" and "Monologue About a Dialogue" are prose poems. In "Notes," the narrator, a writer, reveals in journal form her impressions of an office worker:

> Friendly, yet somehow distant. Sometimes I think she's suspicious of me, though I tried to play down my background. . . . Yet, whenever I've had trouble, she's always been ready to help. (40)

As the narrator expresses ambivalence about telling the worker's story in the first or third person, I am reminded of my own ambivalence about writing this review. The narrator admits her own limitations in understanding the "inner life," the "dreams," the "vision" of the worker, but wants "to be inside her. Make the reader feel what she feels. A real dilemma. I feel so outside." (41).

The dilemma of how to transcend the disparity between self and others in order to become empathic seems to be resolved in "Monologue About a Dialogue." Klepfisz assumes the persona of the office worker and allows her to speak in her own voice, to express her anger and resentment at the previous narrator's attempts to know her "inner life":

> ' . . . . Whenever you finish whatever it is you're writing about me and my work, don't count on me to help you out in the final stages. Never count on me, no matter how good the working conditions.' (44)

The next section, "Urban Flowers," is comprised of short poems dealing with several types of relationships. Through the imagery of flowers and houseplants we are given glimpses of why we endure winter: "to transcend/the daily pressing need/longings that one day must flower" ("Lithops," 52). The flowers and house plants are emblems of defiance and persistence. They survive neglect, the seasons, cultivation, love relationships. Defying the cultivated sameness of its environment, the tulip

in the poem, "Royal Pearl," is a celebration of difference, perhaps of lesbianism:

> And each winter there are some
> who dream of a splitting of an inner will
> a wrenching from the designated path
> who dream a purple flower standing solitary
> in a yellow field. (51)

The most expressions of hope reside in this section. Strategically placed, "Urban Flowers" replenishes us for the struggle of the next and final section. The last poem of the section concludes:

> we must burst forth with orange flowers
> with savage hues of our captivity.
> ("Abutilon in Bloom," 57)

From the dramatic monologues of the monkeys, to the pathos of work, through the conceit of flowers and house plants, we are drawn into the narrative force of the last section, "Inhospitable Soil." Klepfisz sharply characterizes terrain. "Glimpses of the Outside," "*Bashert*," and "Solitary Acts" are three long sequences of multi-part and superlative poetry which recapitulate the work's predominant themes.

"Inhospitable Soil" is a tribute to the survivors and to those who did not survive; it is a tribute to Klepfisz' and her mother's escape from Nazi-occupied Poland. These poems make clear her mother's advice to "never throw anything out." So much has been lost and destroyed: a whole population; a culture and tradition obliterated. Of 3.5 million Jews living in Poland in 1939, fifty to seventy thousand survived the Holocaust.

In "A visit," the second poem of the "Glimpses" sequence, Klepfisz recounts the story of her and her mother's escape from the Nazis:

> . . . . When the Germans came for her
> she begged: *Ich habe ein kleines kind.* And when she
> saw the sliver of hesitation in their eyes she
> ran and took her chances. They did not chase or
> shoot just let her go. For months she convinced the
> peasants she was a Pole . . . (65)

Her mother's act was "only the necessary stance of any survivor" (65).

The second sequence, *Bashert*," is one of the poet's many struggles to place her consciousness as a Jew in history. The two poems, "These words are dedicated to those who died" and "These words are dedicated to those who survived," introduce this sequence, and the titles are the first lines of each stanza of the respective poems, creating the effects of

litanies. Klepfisz' terse, banal language as well as the parallelism propel the rhythm of these poems, in which the unglorified are praised in a series of cause and effect verses:

> These words are dedicated to those who died
> because a card was lost and a number skipped
> because a bed was denied
> because a place was filled and no other place was left
> (75)

> These words are dedicated to those who survived
> because they knew how to cut corners
> because they drew attention to themselves . . .
> because they took risks
> because they had no principles and were hard
> (76)

And each poem ends with a stanza that posits the contradictory natures of dying and living.

The last four poems of this sequence are narratives: "Poland, 1944: My mother is walking down a road," "Chicago, 1964: I am walking home alone at midnight," "Brooklyn, 1971: I am almost equidistant from two continents," and "Cherry Plain, 1981: I have become a keeper of accounts." The first three lead up to the "Keeper" poem, the only one set in the present.

"Poland, 1944" and "Chicago, 1964" are both prose poems. The poet gives more details of her and her mother's survival of the Holocaust. In "Poland" the mother and daughter are hiding among peasants and "passing" as Poles. As the mother makes her way among strangers "in this wilderness of occupied Poland" (78) after the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, she encounters a woman with red hair, "grotesque, bloated with hunger, almost savage in her rags" (78) and recognizes her as "a family friend. Another Jew." In her parallel poem, "Chicago," the daughter, Klepfisz, twenty years later, makes her way for the first time "away from a Jewish neighborhood" (79) in the alien city of Chicago. The daughter is moved to thoughts of Elza, a dead relative, who lost both parents in the Holocaust and had been hidden with a Polish woman who posed as her mother. Klepfisz juxtaposes the memory of her mother's encounter with the family friend, who leaves the mother and daughter a package of food, and her own thoughts of Elza, who, twenty years after the Holocaust, kills herself. The family friend and Elza are symbols, respectively, of hope and devastation. While Klepfisz and her mother survive the horrors of the Holocaust, the poet questions in "Chicago" whether there are

moments in history which cannot be escaped or transcended, but which act like time warps permanently trapping all those who are touched by them? (81)

"Brooklyn, 1971: I am almost equidistant from two continents" is a beautiful account of the poet's connection of the histories and legacies of the two continents–Europe and North America. Klepfisz recalls a 1955 service during which "the common Yiddish names" (83) of children who died in the Holocaust are chanted. She associates this memory with the memory of teaching in 1971 and taking class attendance. She calls the common black and Latino names of her students, who "have not met the minimum standards of this college" (83). They, too, are victims of the persecution and devastation which characterize the history of both continents–inhospitable soil. Once again, as she has thoughout this volume, the poet identifies with the suffering of women. A student, a black woman, approaches the teacher, Klepfisz, to speak of her aspirations to medical school, despite the stifling environment. Sensing the teacher's empathy has been influenced by her own background, the student asks, "What are you?" (84). The teacher at first feels the resistance of her mother and Jews throughout history, whose revelation of their identities might mean certain death. She then answers, "A Jew." The students nods in affirmation of a connection, and "in that moment two vast land masses touch" (84).

In the final poem of the "*Bashert*" sequence, "Cherry Plain, 1981: I have become a keeper of accounts," Klepfisz enumerates "the myths that propel our history, that turn fiction into fact" and claims her "despised ancestors," her "legacy" as a Jew. This is my favorite poem of the volume because of its relentlessness, its affirmation, its defiance:

Yes. It's true. I am scrupulously accurate. I keep track of all distinctions. Between past and present. Pain and pleasure. Living and surviving. Resistance and capitulation. Will and circumstance. Between life and death. Yes. I am scrupulously accurate. I have become a keeper of accounts. (85)

And when I read this poem, I nod like that student, and connect my history and experience as a black person to her experience as a Jew. Bashert.

Klepfisz dedicates "Solitary Acts," the last poem of the volume, to her aunt, Gina Klepfisz, who died in 1942 in Poland. Still preoccupied with the human devastation and survival that are the dominant themes of this section, the poet plans her garden in Cherry Plain, turns the

dirt, and remembers other dirt in other places, fertile with those

> . . . whose graves have been overgrown by weeds
> or forests or bulldozed for the sake
> of modern cities or whose bodies were never
> buried . . . (92)

And Klepfisz' repetition of the question "who would say that I have mourned/enough?" (92) implies that none of us has the luxury to forget those who died or our own vulnerability. "Solitary Acts" is the only poem in which Klepfisz claims her own tentative hope:

> So do not ask me to explain
> . . . why today
> my hope is unwavering solid as if
> I'd never lost it. . . .
>
> I need to hope. And do.
> (95)

The poem becomes willing to transcend the horrors—not to forget them or deny their imprint—and

> to sleep a dark rich dreamless sleep
> to shelter in me what is left
> to strengthen myself for what is needed.
> (96)

The organic quality of *Keeper of Accounts* is remarkable. Klepfisz' enunciation of the themes throughout each section, each poem is vivid. Neither human beings nor flowers nor soil nor monkeys are spared her unyielding empathy. She is certainly ambivalent about whatever it is we think we survive for. She is unwilling to claim that our survival of those "moments in history," like the Holocaust—which are not really "moments," but part of a whole continuum of oppression—is any more heroic than that of monkeys in captivity or whales in aquariums or office workers tied to unglorified work or the artist who must do work not her own in order to do her own work. She views everyone's system of survival as she views her mother's, a "necessary stance . . ." or a "pose" which is "part of necessity," i.e. a choice to exist in spite of the danger. And she is ever mindful of the danger—"who would say that I have mourned/enough?"

For Klepfisz the odds are never even. We do not find hope in theoretical postulations of what we could be "if only . . .", but in who we are now and how we live day to day. She gives us no visions of a future free of danger or repression. The color of the poetry is gray and drab brown, except for the passing references to the colors red ("Poland,

1944 . . ."), purple ("Royal Pearl"), and orange ("Abutilon in Bloom") which exemplify defiance and hope. The mood of the poetry is grim, cynical, and ironic. The clarity and simplicity of her language are breath-taking. The rhythm is driving and more than compensates for the lack of variation of tone. There is beauty, tenacity, and hope in *Keeper of Accounts.* Read and read this book.

JUDITH BUTLER

THE POLITICS OF REALITY: ESSAYS IN FEMINIST THEORY by Marilyn Frye. The Crossing Press, Trumansburg, NY 14886. 1983. 176 pp. $7.95.

As I opened Marilyn Frye's *The Politics of Reality: Essays on Feminist Theory,* I was eager to find a philosopher and a feminist who would speak to an audience comprised of lesbian academics and activists, for there are, really, few of us who inhabit both worlds, who see the bridge between them as worth constructing. But as I came to ask to whom she was speaking I realized the audience was disappointingly narrow. As I entered her world of verbal play and conceptual clarification, I felt a nagging fear that academic feminists have become perhaps too comfortable in their clubs and lecture halls, and that the political focus of feminism–the complexity and insistence of oppression–has itself become the occasion for intellectual game-playing accessible only to an academic-feminist elite. Whom is Marilyn Frye trying to reach? I concluded: women like herself. And though I, too, am white, college-educated, lesbian, even a teacher of philosophy and feminism, I felt anxious to exclude myself from her targeted sisterhood.

Frye appears to see the task of the radical feminist philosopher as providing conceptual clarification of the ways in which we ordinarily talk about women's oppression. Her assumption is that a "sharp and sure" definition of oppression will aid the cause of liberation: "I do not want to undertake to prove that women are oppressed (or that men are not), but I want to make clear what is being said when we say it"(2). She presents herself as our go-between, the assumption being that we need her to translate our apparently muddled complaints into the logical prose of analytic philosophy. Through this process of intellectual purification, she endeavors to render oppression real. But for whom are clear and concise verbal definitions a sign that something is real? The clear answer: the white boys of academe and those of us who have adopted their discourse as the one in which reality gets defined. Ironically, while Frye's chosen discourse provides a lesson in assimilation, her message is separatism.

Frye's work is a compilation of nine essays and lectures which she has written over the last eight years. Her first essays are appropriately on "Oppression" and "Sexism"; the latter theme receives more extensive

attention in "The Problem That Has No Name," the article which suggests Frey's ultimate thesis concerning the 'invisibility' of women and of lesbians in particular. Her widely-read "Some Reflections On Separatism And Power" is also included here, as is her most philosophically imaginative piece, "To See And Be Seen: The Politics of Reality." In all of these pieces, her procedure is to examine concepts and words, and her basic assumption is that power is to be discovered and eventually re-covered through the critical work of analysis and the creative work of reappropriating language. Her facility with language and concepts is both her strength and her weakness. As a politcal tactic, her procedure is problematic.

If Frye is right that oppression requires a lucid and sharp definition in order to be known as real, then what do we make of the vast experience of suffering that goes unnamed by the philosopher's pen? In academic talk, this book commits an "intellectualist fallacy." I don't mean to sound anti-theory, but most of us feel pain in our hearts before we are given theoretical definitions of "pain." In *The Politics of Reality* theory is concerned with itself; a definition is good if it fits intellectual requirements of clarity and coherence (Descartes sets the standard for feminist theory!). And yet a feminist theory which claims to be *political* must take the real, diverse, multi-ethnic experience of women as the final measure of its truth: theory needs to be responsible to the world of oppression which it describes, not an abstract understanding of 'clear descriptions' which is received uncritically from the academy. But in Frye's theory, "women" are reduced to concepts, and the very rich and very real experience of women is reduced, neglected, and denied.

Despite the disclaimer in her preface, Frye takes the point of view of the detached and omniscient spectator on reality that has for too long plagued the patriarchal philosophical tradition. In the "Preface" she asserts: "this work is undeniably part of that body of 'white and college-educated' writing. It stands on those privileges and within those limits" (ix). She acknowledges her own cultural bias by stating, "there exists a vast variety of women and women's lives which I know just enough to point to but which I cannot speak from or for" (ix-x). This disclaimer of her right to speak for all women unfortunately does not carry through in the rest of the work. Her references to "women" are rarely qualified by class, color, ethnicity, age or situation. Most often her sentences begin with an imperious "women are caught like this too" or "For women, such accusation is . . .," or "she is obliged" (meaning all women) or "she cannot move. . . ." The problem is not that Frye writes from a white, college-educated perspective, but that she so often assumes that this perspective embraces women's experience.

The danger of this kind of theorizing becomes painfully clear in her

article "On Being White: Thinking Toward A Feminist Understanding Of Race And Race Supremacy." In it, Frye continually assumes that feminists are white, and she repeatedly addresses her own audience as if it were exclusively white. Her language, again, betrays her assumptions. She writes, "women of color have been at feminist conferences . . ." (110), implying that feminist conferences are white and that women of color who attend them are outsiders, guests of some sort. Relating the story of a Black woman who challenged an all-white anti-racist group of which Frye was a member, she writes in a manner which reveals the problem of audience which haunts this book:

> We said we never meant this few weeks of this particular kind of work to be *all* we ever did and told her we had decided at the beginning to organize a group open to all women shortly after our series of white women's meetings came to a close. Well, as some of you know without my telling, we could hardly have said anything less satisfying to our critic. (111-112)

When Frye asserts, "as some of you will know without my telling," I can read her willful restriction of herself to a white audience. The telling of this story becomes an exercise in white-bonding; the "you" she addresses is white women.

Frye stops herself in the midst of this difficult encounter, questioning why she finds the Black woman who is confronting her to be "crazy" (112). She resolves the issue, not by engaging in dialogue or by looking outside herself, but through an act of introspection which keeps her contemplative composure intact:

> What is it that our black woman critic knows? Am I racist when I (a white woman) decide what I shall do is to try to grow and heal the wounds and scars of racism among lesbians and feminists? Am I racist if I decide to do nothing? If I decide to work with other white women on our racism? My deciding, deciding anything, is poison to her. Is this what she knows? (112-113)

Why Frye insists on calling this woman "*our* Black woman" is left unclear, except that it seems natural that the omniscient theorist gets to appropriate her subjects. She recognizes that whiteness *is* a perspective, and that for the most part white people do not even consider themselves to be *of* a particular race. She understands that her opinions inevitably refer back to a matrix of social and political relations which establish her own voice as emerging from privilege. She fails, however, to challenge her privilege, to go beyond the process of merely naming it as such. In the above example, she does not consider what it would mean to construct dialogues, to try and reach common ground, to really listen to another woman's rage. She does not ask what kind of language(s) we all would need in order really to speak across difference, and really, finally,

to hear.

In the concluding sections of "On Being White," Frye considers the following thesis: compulsory motherhood for white women is itself a kind of racist project which is based on the fear of extinction of the white race. She argues further that white men enlist white women as mothers in order to perpetuate the system of white male supremacy, and that in resisting motherhood (assuming that they do) white lesbians are definitionally anti-racist. Her belief: "Race is a tie that binds us to men: 'us' being white women, and 'men' being white men"(125). Here again she does not consider that race is also what ties women of color to men of color. Moreover, in her consideration of "white women" she does not consider the particular circumstance of the Jewish lesbian who may well have political allegiances to both lesbians and Jews, and not necessarily in that order.

Frye's clear assumption here is that racism is derivative of patriarchy, that in turning against the law of the fathers women will be able to form a collective identity which eventually renders race into an arbitrary attribute. Although Frye had said that there is a "vast variety of . . . women's lives . . . which I cannot speak from or for," she feels confident in asserting that gender oppression is more primary than oppression on the basis of color or ethnicity. In the following she is clearly speaking "for" (and against) any woman who refuses to rank the oppressions (color, class, age, ability, ethnicity, sexuality) that she lives. Frye is willing to rank them for us, in spite of us, and she does: "those who fashion this construct of whiteness, who elaborate on these conceptions, are primarily a group of males. It is *their* construct"(114). Such a claim might offer temporary solace to a white lesbian resistant to dealing with racism. However, we need to ask: Does ranking oppressions in this way imply that women of color who refuse this interpretation are themselves instruments of patriarchal ideology?

In "Lesbian Feminism And The Gay Rights Movement: Another View Of Male Supremacy, Another Separatism," Frye raises questions about the viability of entering into political alliances with oppressed men. The article moves from a strident to a more lenient tone. She argues that while "some things might lead one to suppose that there is, in fact, a cultural and political affinity between gay men on the one hand and women–lesbians and/or feminists–on the other," Frye concludes that "I do not share this supposition and assumption"(129). The differences between gay men, supported by a "male-supremacist" culture, and lesbians, who are not, lead her to "cast doubt on the assumption that there is any basic cultural or political affinity here at all upon which alliances could be built" (130). For the most part her objections to male

homosexuality seem to be theoretical: dominant culture is phallocratic and woman-hating, male homosexuals are phallocratic and so must be woman-hating; hence, male homosexuals are aligned with dominant culture, and not its victims. In her words, "If worship of the phallus is central to phallocratic culture, then gay men, by and large, are more like ardent priests than infidels, and the gay rights movement may be the fundamentalism of the global religion which is Patriarchy"(133). In Frye's view, male homosexuality is not only aligned with dominant culture, but epitomizes the male homoeroticism of patriarchy itself; in effect, gay men seem to be worse than straight men insofar as their woman-hating eroticism is more explicit.

Frye's argument is problematic not only because she does not consider the reasons some lesbians have given for forging alliances with gay men but also because she assumes that male homosexuality is always predicated on misogyny. Frye imagines one might *hypothetically* conclude there is a basis for alliance, but fails to consult lesbians who have, in fact, been working successfully with gay men in socialist and Third World organizations, at *Gay Community News*, National Gay Task Force, on issues of political and legal rights, health care, to name a few. Moreover, to assume that (male or female) homosexuality is always predicated on the hatred of the opposite sex is to invoke a basically *heterosexual* paradigm for explaining sexuality. I know that folks who assume I'm lesbian because I hate men are trying to find a way to explain me in heterosexual terms. Because even if I hate men, I am still in that sense related to them. This kind of interpretation always offends me because it fails to acknowledge the strong, positive bonds between women, and if it does, it makes them into a response to a primary relationship to men. I think for this reason lesbians ought to be more careful in bringing such arguments to bear against gay men.

Frye does see some hope for alliances between lesbians and gay men, and toward the conclusion of this essay makes note of their common shift from a consideration of the implicit and explicit misogyny of gay male practices to the common project of gender transformation of both gay men and lesbians. She is willing to entertain the notion that "the gay man's difference can be the source of friction which might mother invention and may provide resources for that invention"(256). And she does seem to see that sexuality freed from the restraints of reproduction may encourage in both lesbians and gay men an exploration of new kinds of sensual pleasure that could make way for a new conception of sexual autonomy: "both gay men and lesbians may have access to knowledge of bodily, sensory, sensuous pleasure that is almost totally blocked out in heterosexual male-supremacist cultures . . . the pursuit of simply bodily

pleasure . . . could nurture very radical, hitherto unthinkable new conceptions of what it can be to live as a male body"(147-148). Although Frye often suggests that gay male sexual practices reflect the predatory character of male sexuality in dominant culture, she also occasionally sees that taking up received gender roles from dominant culture can be a way of re-inventing gender and expanding the possibilities for sexual expression. Her best remarks on this theme, in my view, are to be found in a parenthetical remark. Referring to the "gentler politic" which informs some gay men's "affectation of the feminine," she writes: "this may be the necessarily light-hearted political action of a gender rebel rather than an exercise in masculinity . . . it betrays a potentially revolutionary levity about the serious matter of manhood and thus may express a politics more congenial to feminism than most gay politics"(138).

Frye's efforts to confront the problem of racism and to distinguish lesbian from gay male liberation concerns reveal an overriding desire to distinguish the lesbian as suffering a distinctive form of oppression, and to define the main enemy as male supremacy. Her final article, "To See And Be Seen. The Politics Of Reality," distinguishes the lesbian from other folk by asserting her *invisibility*. The metaphor of sight looms large in her theory because she believes, like the Anglo-American philosophers who trained her, that perception constitutes reality. If reality is oppressive, that is because the oppressors have imposed their "vision" of things on the rest of us; their vision is what constitutes reality and, hence, the realm of legitimacy. They have chosen not to name or see lesbians because we are the beings who would potentially deny them their dominant role.

Although Frye's epistemology–her theory of knowledge and reality –is imaginative and, in certain ways, illuminating, it is a profoundly idealist interpretation of power, politics, and oppression. She never asks what actual institutions of oppression cause men and women to develop the "visions" of the world which she describes; she never asks about the concrete division of labor between the sexes, the history of kinship systems, the organization of public and private life, the requirements of reproduction cross-culturally, the economic situation of women and men generally which has developed the ideologies she describes in order to rationalize its own doings. For her, vision creates the world, the seer defines reality. But I think it fair to ask, who defines the seer, or, rather, what complex historical and cultural situation has produced people who see and define in the way that Marilyn Frye describes? The material world, real human practices, complex and variegated lives are missing from this book. This is the problem when theory takes itself too seriously, when it forgets its proper focus to be *practice*.

Lesbians may be "invisible" according to Marilyn Frye's scheme,

but what, then, do we make of lesbians harassed on the street, lesbians singled out on the job, the barrage of jeers that any "out" lesbian experiences in her daily life? Isn't part of the fear of becoming a lesbian a fear over being exposed, seen, judged? Isn't the real difficulty in leaving behind the position of invisible anonymity which heterosexual life can afford?

Marilyn Frye's book poses some crucial questions for radical feminist theorists, and in this sense it is a bold step which deserves a series of bold replies. Can theory be generated by an individual effort, or must it emerge from a collectivity of experience? Can an individual woman collect and orchestrate the variety of women's voices which clamor to be heard? Or must we remain tied to our perspectives? If we are bound by our perspectives, can we write in such a way that does not, as Frye states, commit the sin of false universalization? My own sense is that we need theories which do not merely translate feminist insights into conventional academic style, but which remain critical toward the political meanings of that style. We need theories which try out different theoretical voices, for theory need not always be a way of distancing ourselves from the world. It can be a form of engagement, and a call to dialogue.

JO COCHRAN

SHE HAD SOME HORSES by Joy Harjo. Thunder's Mouth Press, 242 West 104 Street, New York, New York 10025. 1983. 74 pp. $6.95.

Various forms I've been taught to think in made it hard to begin writing this review. The forms range from reader response stances to lesbian feminist outlooks, to the *Modern Language Association Handbook,* and none of it helps when I want to write a review of another Indian woman's poetry: *She Had Some Horses* by Joy Harjo (Creek). So I went to look for some guidance and found Wendy Rose (Hopi/Miwok), who advises:

> If your idea is based on the Indian-authored works you have read, consider the fact that it is often chosen according to editors' stereotypes. If your idea is based on a solid academic background about tribal literatures, consider that many of us do not speak our native language, were not raised on our ancestral land, and have no literary tradition other than what we received in some classroom. If your idea is based on the observation of certain themes or images, consider that there is no genre of "Indian literature" because we *are* all different. There is only literature that is written by people who are Indian and who, therefore, infuse their work with their own lives the same way that you do.[1]

I think of what it means for me as a halfbreed Lakota lesbian poet to bring my whole life to bear on my work, and for Joy Harjo, Wendy Rose, Paula Gunn Allen, Beth Brant, Chrystos or many others. It means we must speak the truth about our lives. We must speak the truth in order to break the stereotypes, and to create an individual and shared voice that tells the stories of Indian women living. Through the poems in *She Had Some Horses,* Joy Harjo is part of that creating. Therefore this book has become instructive for me. Harjo speaks from the duality of needing to find a mesh between woman and Indian. As poet I have learned a lot from her style, form, rhythm and music.

The book is organized in four sections: "Survivors," "What I Should Have Said," "She Had Some Horses," and "I Give You Back." The first section, "Survivors," is almost half of the entire book. This longer section works well and besides, I like to let the teller choose how the story is told. In poem after poem, Harjo tells full truths of the living she has experienced. This telling is set in motion by the poem "Call It Fear," which sets the tone for the book:

There is this edge where shadows
and bones of some of us walk
backwards.
Talk backwards. There is this edge
call it an ocean of fear in the dark. Or
name it with other songs.

Through the visual stair-stepping of the lines, edges are created. As a reader, I must move backward to catch the sense of line and life in this poem. This movement of line and reality opens memory, alters linear time, and gives Harjo a way to connect the telling of her life into other lives.

Memory is at work in all of Harjo's poems, and it is most present in the portrait poems in this first section: "What Music," "Rain," "Night Out," "Skeleton of Winter," "Connection," "Nandia" and Remember." Most of these poems start as a memory of a person or past event that sparks the poem, and then transforms into the creative voice and force of the rest of the piece. This kind of transformation occurs in "Rain," which starts with a recounting of a friend's death: "Bobby flew out from his body/on Nine Mile Hill." In the second stanza the narrative moves away from the direct embodiment and discussion of Bobby to become, by the last line, what the event and memory have been transformed into over time: "Something has been let loose in the rain;/it is teaching us to love." By talking backwards, by delving into memory or revision of her life, Harjo finds that the truth of our lives can be spoken of even if death is present, or love felt but lost, as in "What Music."

The poem "Night Out" uses an ambiguous "you." This poem's persona could be Harjo, the reader, or some other unknown "you." This creates a collective shared sense of memory and event in the poem. The reader must be active here, as the ambiguous "you" asks us to decide who the poem is being addressed to:

You fight to get out of the sharpest valleys cut down into
the history of living bone.
And you fight to get in.
You are the circle of lost ones
our relatives.
You have paid the cover charge thousands of times over
with your lives
and now you are afraid
you can never get out.

Harjo again finds the transforming element of memory after running the course of her remembered past in "Skeleton of Winter":

A tooth-hard rocking
in my belly comes back,
something echoes
all forgotten dreams,
in winter.

I am memory alive
not just a name
but an intricate part
of this web of motion,
meaning: earth, sky, stars circling
my heart

centrifugal.

I see the poems in the first section as a narrative about a woman, or an event in her life. By mid-point, "Skeleton of Winter," the poet has created a shared history, a past built up between poet and reader. I feel a part of Harjo and how she has lived. There is a hard won power to the words and the assertion that "I am memory alive/not just a name": the power of a woman who has taken these often brutal memories and dreams and converted them into a force for living.

In this section, "Survivors," the poems which best showed me Harjo's capabilities as a writer were "Kansas City," "Heartbeat," and "She Remembers the Future," which all have as a central figure a woman named Noni Daylight. I do not generally like persona poems, because so many folks writing them try so very hard to make their characters mythic. Noni Daylight is not mythic. She is everyday and a little crazy. In "Kansas City" she is an old woman living down by the tracks, who has had children by men who have passed through.

In "Heartbeat" Noni's portrait becomes clearer–she is a woman who has always lived on the edge. Harjo starts that poem on the edge: "Noni Daylight is afraid." There is no nonsense in that line. But it is a line asking for explanation, a story, a reason for that fear. Harjo goes on to write: "The pervasive rhythm/of her mother's heartbeat is a ghostly track/ that follows her." I have some trouble with the word "pervasive," not because I can't imagine it, but because the rest of the poem does a better job, through cadence of line, of giving me a sense of pervasiveness. Noni's fear deepens as the poem continues. Her mother's heartbeat comes to mask her own, and by mid-poem I readily believe that "These nights she wants out." I'm filled with her fear. Yet the cadence slows, and this undermines the tension for me. All of a sudden, I'm getting too much information, when there should be motion. This slowing down is mostly caused by over-use of conjunctions, articles and clauses, for example:

And when Noni is at the edge of skin she slips
out the back door. She goes for the hunt, tracks the
heart sound on the streets
of Albuquerque.

The use of "And when" at this point seems to change the sense of the poem from something immediate, happening, to a past occurrence. I imagine that Harjo is trying to create an ongoing sense of Noni's struggle, but the lines become weighted and prose-like. The last lines pull out of this stumbling and move again:

It is not the moon, or the pistol in her lap
but a fierce anger
that will free her.

I am brought back to the truth of this poem and of Noni Daylight: the confrontation of those things within us which keep us from living.

In "She Remembers the Future," the last poem of the opening section, Noni Daylight speaks in the first person to the narrator and the reader:

She asks,
'Should I dream you afraid
so that you are forced to save
yourself?

Or should you ride colored horses
into the cutting edge of the sky
to know

that we're alive
we are alive.'

Noni lives on the edge; this is her power and way to insight. Her question terrifies me, but that is the essence of the poems in the "Survivors" section. The fear in all of them has risen from the poet's dream and memory, so that a test of living is taking place. The rest of the poems search out what it is to be alive.

The second section, "What I Should Have Said," tells a more personal story, which is also a deeper exploration of what "Survivors" dealt with. In these poems Harjo is still talking backwards and turning fear and memory on herself. These poems, however, are about a love relationship. Therefore, they are centered on a specific "I" and "you." The poems' "you" tends not to be gender specific. Harjo's reticence as to the gender confuses my reading, but doesn't detract so much that I feel the poems suffer overwhelmingly. Still, the confusion in the poems creates distance for me.

"What I Should Have Said" explores a long-distance relationship. Distance has worked against Harjo, as fear or memory did in previous poems. Harjo writes:

> I love you. The words confuse me.
> Maybe they have become a cushion
> keeping us in azure sky and in flight
>
> not there, not here.

Harjo openly states the tensions and restlessness, and accentuates them by the shortness of line. Line length and line breaks are consistently used by Harjo for these kinds of effects. In "Late Summer Leaving" the lines are stair-stepped, producing a sense of hesitance about leaving on the poet's part:

> I am dressed now and see myself walk
> away from you
> in an arc.
> I see a war shield on the wall
> round and feathers leaning out.

Also through this use of stair-stepping Harjo emphasizes the distance between the two. In "Motion" the words sit flush to the lefthand margin, but it is the shortness of line which creates the tension:

> It is moments;
> it is years.
> I am next to you
> in skin and blood
> and then I am not.
> I tremble and grasp
> at the edges of
> myself; I let go
> into you.

This would not work with a longer line. It would stagnate. Harjo knows her best music for this experience, which is as right as the music of Adrienne Rich's sonnet-like "Twenty-One Love Poems." Rich and Harjo share an intensity, and choose their own voices and music to bring this out in words.

Harjo keeps up the pitch of intensity in the poem that follows "Motion." In "Alive" Harjo again uses the shorter line, and the cadence, more than the use of active verbs, moves us through the reading. Harjo's music must be paid attention to:

I like to be sung to:
deep throated music
of the south, horse songs,
of the bare feet sound
of my son walking in his sleep.

The single stressed words create a drumming, like the run of the horses, like the sound of a child walking in sleep. This kind of ear in a poet will always bring pleasure to love and lyric poetry.

"Alive" also speaks to a turning point in the poet's living experience, much like the end lines of "She Remembers the Future." The close of this poem re-asserts the notion that existing in the poem's reality means recognizing the core of living. But, here again it is not Harjo as herself who first makes this observation:

'I tried every escape',
she told me 'Beer and wine
never worked. Then I
decided to look around, see
what was there. And I saw myself
naked. And alive. Would you
believe that?
Alive.'

Again, the voice is of one woman speaking to another. The revelation is powerful. And Harjo carries that power to the close of the poem:

Alive. This music rocks
me. I drive the interstate,
watch faces come and go on either
side. I am free to be sung to;
I am free to sing. This woman
can cross any line.

From within myself I react and understand these lines, this song. I would like to find in myself this woman who is free to sing and cross lines. However from the context of the poem I am unsure what these last lines are about. Perhaps if the poems overall were more gender specific, my confusion might be lessened. But, as a woman and poet, I wish I had written those lines.

Power, music, reality and vision are all elements that weave throughout *She Had Some Horses.* They figure most prominently in the fourth section of the book, "She Had Some Horses." This section is made up of a long, five-part poem. The first of these, titled "She Had Some Horses," is a litany poem. Earlier in the book, Harjo has another poem styled on the litany format which did not work for me. I found this poem, "The Woman Hanging From the Thirteenth Floor Window," to be flat and

almost prosaic in its reading. But the litany "She Had Some Horses" works. The refrain helps to propel the poem on, expanding the poem's ability to define the horses. The theme and images of the horses are threaded lightly throughout the earlier portions of the book. In this poem their definition and vision are fully exposed. We must enter the reality from which the horses rise:

> She had horses who liked Creek Stomp Dance songs.
> She had horses who cried in their beer.
> She had horses who spit at male queens who made
> them afraid of themselves.
> She had horses who said they weren't afraid.
> She had horses who lied.
> She had horses who told the truth, who were stripped
> bare of their tongues.
>
> She had some horses.

These horses are like people, like Indians. Because of the parallelism, the flow and sense of the poem is like that of Judy Grahn's poem in the *She Who* poems, "the woman who." Both poets are writing of different aspects in individual women. Thinking this way, I find it simpler to envision ourselves and the horses, and ourselves in the horses.

In the second poem in this series, "Two Horses," Harjo again writes of a relationship, with many of the same elements present as in the earlier love poems. This poem doesn't reflect the everyday reality of children, teaching, living in different towns, communicating by phone. Instead, "Two Horses" takes its reality from the world of horses:

> My heart is taken by you
> and these mornings since I am a horse running towards
> a cracked sky where there are countless dawns
> breaking simultaneously.
> There are two moons on the horizon
> and for you
> I have broken loose.

Harjo taps into the inner voice, into the horses, and brings that rare happening to the page. A woman, Harjo, has found her way.

The last three poems drew me further into the story and reality of the horses. This kind of vision is also a truth of our lives as Indian women. We are not all visionaries, but we do not necessarily live by western reality. The last poem of the five, "Explosion," finally gives me the full expanse of Harjo's vision of the horses. She says they are perhaps a new people, a new tribe like Indians, but of a new color. Horses and people are now inseparable. And the power these horses have will perhaps save us, will save the ones who will try to see them:

Some will not see them

But some will see the horses with their hearts of sleeping volcanoes
and will be rocked awake
past their bodies

to see who they have become.

And I remember Noni Daylight's words:

'Should I dream you afraid
so that you are forced to save
yourself?

Or should you ride colored horses
into the cutting edge of the sky
to know

that we're alive
we are alive.' ("She Remembers the Future")

The experience of the poems comes around. This is an Indian woman poet telling the truth of her struggle for living and surviving. This is the story Paula Gunn Allen wrote about in an article for *Conditions: Seven:*

> We must not forget the true source of our being, nor its powerfulness, and we must not allow ourselves to be deluded by patriarchal perceptions of power which inexorably rob us of our true power. As Indian women, as Lesbians, we must make the effort to understand clearly what is at stake, and this means that we must reject all beliefs that work against ourselves, however much we have come to cherish them as we have lived among the patriarchs.[2]

The last section of *She Had Some Horses* speaks of giving up one of those things we as Indian women and women have come to cherish, to hold fast to. It is always the last thing to be let go of: fear. "I Give You Back," the single poem in the last section, changes the tone of the book. Harjo is now speaking as a survivor. And she does it in a "give-back" poem, which I think is the right form:

I release you, my beautiful and terrible
fear. I release you. You were my beloved
and hated twin, . . .

She gives back fear with all the sureness and maturity the poems' experiences represent:

I take myself back, fear.
You are not my shadow any longer.
I won't hold you in my hands.
You can't live in my eyes, my ears, my voice
my belly, or in my heart my heart

my heart my heart

But come here, fear
I am alive and you are so afraid
of dying.

This is a woman who has found and speaks from the true source of her being. She is alive, without fear. We have not yet had an Indian woman writer tell her story so fearlessly.

NOTES

1. Kenneth Lincoln, *Native American Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 183-184.
2. Paula Gunn Allen, "Beloved Women: Lesbians in American Indian Cultures," *Conditions: Seven* (1981), p. 84.

TO CONDITIONS MAGAZINE–A LETTER TO CHERYL CLARKE, JEWELLE GOMEZ, EVELYNN HAMMONDS, BONNIE JOHNSON AND LINDA POWELL

Dear Women, I applaud your attempt to examine the dilemmas and responsibility inherent in developing a Black feminist criticism, but I feel that the pentalog in CONDITIONS NINE veered off your stated goals early on in the discussion, and therefore left much to be desired.

Yes, we need to develop and sustain a viable Black feminist criticism and yes, no one decries the absence of it more than those Black women writers, lesbian and non-lesbian, who continued to create our work in the absence of that criticism, flying always into the blinding sun of our own exposures without any audible resonance nor support to tell us we were being heard, used, or even in error. But to confuse literary analysis and textual criticism with personal attacks upon the writer's self or her intentions is to raise serious question about the motivation and function of the examination; is the piece intended to be criticism, from which we can learn, or destruction?

All literary criticism is anchored in a set of aesthetics, certain values which are acknowledged or not. Unless the critic is prepared to recognize, if not discuss, the aesthetic values out of which she is dealing, her judgements of "good" and "bad" lose validity. The need for naming a Black lesbian aesthetic is mentioned but not developed in the pentalog, yet it is Black lesbian writers who come under the most vicious attacks in the discussion, attacks which are a-historical and out of context. Pat Parker's poetry has moved and empowered more Black lesbians than any other Black writer I know, including myself. And by what measure is her work pronounced mediocre?

Of course criticism, like every other writing process, is a learned art. But in any event, for a group of Black women writers to sit around in the name of Black feminist criticism and discuss Black lesbian writers,–not in the necessary context of the strengths as well as the weaknesses of our work,–but rather in terms of personal attack such as "dancing dog" and "mediocre" is to demolish any pretense of a constructive examination of

the worth and meaning of the *work produced,* which is, after all, what is under scrutiny.

It is also to raise the even more disturbing question which faces Black women so often; why do we seem to reserve our most painful and destructive words for those who are most like us?

In the hand of Afrekete,

Audre Lorde

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

GLORIA EVANGELINA ANZALDÚA, b. 1946, South Texas, a tejana Chicana Poet, is co-editor of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color.* Her work which combines the Chicano, the indigenous, and the lesbian-feminist literary traditions has appeared in *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas, Sinister Wisdom,* and *Conditions.*

SY MARGARET BALDWIN, b. 1942, Wolverhampton, England. Sy Margaret Baldwin lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She has worked as firefighter with the U.S. Forest Service for five years, and is currently training as an archaeologist. She is a member of the Feminist Writers Guild.

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

ELLY BULKIN, b. 1944, The Bronx. Editor of *Lesbian Fiction* and co-editor of *Lesbian Poetry*, anthologies now available from The Gay Presses of New York, she is a founding editor of *Conditions.* Her daughter, age 6 when the magazine started, is about to enter high school.

JUDITH BUTLER, b. 1956, Cleveland, Ohio. Judith Butler has been a lesbian and aspiring philosopher since the early stages of youth. She is currently teaching at Wesleyan University.

CHRYSTOS, b. 1946, San Francisco, California. I am deeply grateful to the following women whose work has profoundly shaped my own: Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, Barbara Cameron, Beth Brant, Ada Dear, Canyon Sam, Gloria Anzaldúa, Kate Millett, Sharol Graves and Wendy Cadden.

CHERYL CLARKE, b. 1947, Washington, D.C. Black lesbian feminist. *Conditions* Collective member since 1981 and a contributor since 1979. Author of *Narratives: poems in the tradition of black women,* published by Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press. Currently working on a book of interviews of black women writers with critic Evelynn Hammonds and a new book of poetry.

JO COCHRAN, b. 1958, Seattle, Washington. Lakota Lesbian. Presently finishing graduate work in creative writing and teaching women's studies at the University of Washington. Co-editor of *Gathering Ground: Writings by Northwest Women of Color* (Seal Press, 1984); and of *Backbone*, a new feminist journal in the planning stages in Seattle.

JAN CLAUSEN, b. 1950, North Bend, Oregon. Jan Clausen's most recent publications include *A Movement of Poets: Thoughts on Poetry and Feminism* (essay, Long Haul Press, 1982) and *Duration* (poems and narrative prose, Hanging Loose Press, 1983). *Sinking, Stealing*, recently completed, is in search of a publisher.

ENID DAME, b. 1943, Beaver Hills, Pennsylvania. She now lives in Brooklyn. Her poems have appeared in various magazines, including *13th Moon, Lips*, and *Conditions*. She is co-editor of the poetry tabloid, *Home Planet News*. In 1982, she received a New York State CAPS award.

TOI DERRICOTTE, b. 1941, Detroit, Michigan. Toi Derricotte's second book, *Natural Birth*, was published by Crossing Press in May, 1983. More than seventy of her poems have been published in magazines and anthologies, including *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* and *The Iowa Review*. She has completed more than one hundred poetry residencies for the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

MARILYN HACKER, b. 1942, Bronx, N.Y. Marilyn Hacker's new collection of poetry will be titled Assumptions. She is the author of *Taking Notice, Separations*, and *Presentation Piece*, which received the National Book Award in poetry in 1975. She is the editor of the feminist literary magazine *13th Moon*.

WILLYCE KIM, b. 1946, Honolulu, Hawaii. Willyce Kim has just completed a novel entitled, *Dancer Dawkins and the California Kid* to be published by Alyson Press. She is currently at work on a collection of poems called (tentatively) *Love-notes to the Heartland*.

ANDREA FREUD LOEWENSTEIN, b. 1949, Boston, Massachusetts. Andrea Freud Loewenstein is a lesbian feminist writer and teacher who is now director of a community school she started in a housing project in Cambridge. Her novel, *This Place*, set in a women's prison, will appear this fall with Routledge and Kegan Paul–Pandora Press.

RAYMINA Y. MAYS, b. 1957, Benton Harbor, Michigan. Raymina, a

Black Lesbian Feminist short story writer, has been published in *Azalea, Fireweed, Onyx (BLN), Essence, Feminary* and *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology.* Presently she lives in D.C. where she has begun working on *Between Our Selves,* the first national Women of Color newspaper, P.O. Box 1939, Washington, D.C. 20013.

HONOR MOORE, b. 1945, New York City. Poems appear in *Lesbian Poetry: An Anthology;* a play, *Mourning Pictures* in *The New Women's Theatre.* I'm writing a biography of Margaret Sanger, of which "My Grandmother Who Painted" (in *The Writer on Her Work)* is the beginning.

CRISTINA PERI ROSSI, b. 1941, Montevideo, Uruguay. Having won two major Uruguayan prizes for her fiction and poetry, she is still relatively unknown to American readers. Presently she lives in Barcelona, Spain where she is on the staff of "La Vindicación Feminista."

MAB SEGREST, b. 1949, Birmingham, Alabama. Mab Segrest lives in Durham, North Carolina. For seven years she worked on *Feminary: A Feminist Journal for the South.* Now she works with North Carolinians Against Racist and Religious Violence.

PATRICE TITTERINGTON, b. 1957, Danvers, Massachusetts. A former Army sergeant with a degree in comparative literature, she now resides in New York City. She works in textbook publishing and is a graduate student in antholopology.

LUZMA UMPIERRE, b. 1947, San Juan, Puerto Rico. Poet and critic. Has two collections of poems: *En el país de las maravillas* and *Una puertorriqueña en Penna.* Her works have appeared in *Bilingual Review, Revista Chicana-Riqueña, 13th Moon, Third Woman,* and several anthologies.

Books and anthologies by contributors to CONDITIONS: TEN *include:*

Elly Bulkin, ed. *Lesbian Fiction: An Anthology* (The Gay Presses of New York, P.O. Box 294, New York, N.Y. 10014), 1981, 336 pp., $8.95 plus $1 p/h *Jan Clausen.*

————, *Lesbian Poetry: An Anthology*, Elly Bulkin and Joan Larkin, eds. (GPNY), 1981, 336 pp., $10.95 plus $1 p/h. *Gloria Anzaldúa, Cheryl Clarke, Jan Clausen. Marilyn Hacker, Honor Moore.*

———, *Yours In Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism* (Long Haul Press, P.O. Box 592, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215), 1984, 225 pages, $7.95 plus $.90 p/h.

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

Jan Clausen, *Duration* (Hanging Loose Press, 231 Wyckoff Street, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217), 1983, 90 pp., $5.00.

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

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

———, *Waking at the Bottom of the Dark* (Long Haul Press), 1979, 80 pp., $3 plus $.65 p/h.

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

Toi Derricotte, *Natural Birth,* (Crossing Press, Trumansburg, New York 14886), 1983.

———, *The Empress of the Death House,* (Lotus Press, P.O. Box 601, College Park Station, Detroit, Michigan 48221), 1978.

Marilyn Hacker, *Taking Notice,* chapbook of one 25 poem sequence, (Out & Out Books, distributed by the Crossing Press, Trumansburg, N.Y. 14886), 1980, $2.

———, *Separations* (Knopf), 1976, 109 pp., $3.95.

———, *Presentation Piece* (Viking), 1974, 116 pp. $2.95.

Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology. Barbara Smith, ed. (Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, P.O. Box 2753, Rockefeller Center Station, New York, N.Y. 10185), 1983, 400 pp., $10.95 plus $1 p/h *Barbara Banks, Cheryl Clarke, Toi Derricotte, Raymina Y. Mays.*

Willyce Kim, *Eating Artichokes* (Women's Press Collective), 1971, $3. *Under the Rolling Sky* (Maud Gonne Press), 1976, $4. Both available from author (Willyce Kim, 1647 Edith St., Berkeley, CA. 94703).

Andrea Freud Loewenstein, *Flowers in a Field of Thorns,* Vols. I and II, writing from women in the Jefferson Park Housing Project (The Jefferson Park Writing Center, 38 Jefferson Park, Cambridge, Ma, 02140, ATTN: Andrea Loewenstein), 1982, 1983, 28 pp., $2, no tax or handling charges.

Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color,* (Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, P.O. Box 2753, Rockefeller Center Station, New York, N.Y. 10153), 1983, 261 pp., $8.95 plus $1 p/h *Gloria Anzaldúa, Cheryl Clarke.*

Mab Segrest, *Living in a House I Do Not Own,* (Night Heron Press, 1205 Eva St., Durham, N.C. 27703), 1982, 16 pp., $2.50 plus $.75 p/h.

Luzma Umpierre, *En el país de las maravillas* (Third Woman Press, c/o Chicano-Riqueño Studies, Ballantine Hall, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana 47401), 1982, $4.

————, *Una puertorriqueña en Penna* (order from P.O. Box 1703, New Brunswick, N.J. 08903), 1979, $2.50.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

Sarah Aldridge, *Madame Aurora,* novel (Naiad Press, Inc., P.O. Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302), 1983, 256 pp., $7.95.

Paula Gunn Allen, *The Woman Who Owned The Shadows,* novel, (Spinsters, Ink, 803 De Haro St., San Francisco, CA 94107), 1983, 213 pp., $8.95.

Dodici Azpadu, *Saturday in the Prime of Life,* novel (Aunt Lute Book Company, Iowa City, Iowa), 1983, 95 pp., $5.95.

Sandra Baxter and Marjorie Lansing, *Women and Politics: The Visible Majority* (The University of Michigan Press), 1983, 259 pp. $10.95.

Iris Berman, *Motherlode,* poetry (181 Prospect Park West, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215), 1983, chapbook 11 pp.

Alice Bloch, *The Law of Return,* novel (Alyson Publications, 40 Plympton St., Boston, MA 02118), 1983, 251 pp., $7.95.

Charlotte Bunch and Sandra Pollack, eds., *Learning Our Way: Essays in Feminist Education* (The Crossing Press, Trumansburg, N.Y. 14886), 334 pp., $10.95.

Lynda K. Bundtzen, *Plath's Incarnations: Woman and the Creative Process* (University of Michigan Press), 1983, 284 pp., $25.00.

Jan Clausen, *Duration,* poetry/prose (Hanging Loose Press, 231 Wyckoff St., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217), 1983, 90 pp., $5.

Jane Cooper, Gwen Head, Adalaide Morris, Marcia Southwick, editors *Extended Outlooks* (Collier Books), 1983, 381 pp. $9.95, paper.

Anita Cornwell, *Black Lesbian in White America* (Naiad Press,) 1983, 229 pp., $7.50.

Gina Covina, *The City of Hermits,* (Barn Owl Books, Berkeley), 1983.

Sue Davidson, ed. *The Second Mile: Contemporary Approaches in Counseling Young Women* (New Directions for Young Women, Inc., 738 N. 5th Ave., Tucson, Arizona 85705), 185 pp.

Miranda Davis, ed.; *Third World–Second Sex* (Zed Press Limited, 57 Caledonian Road, London NI 9BU England), 257 pp., no price listed.

Langdon Lynne Faust, *American Women Writers,* abridged volumes 1 & 2, (Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., Inc., 250 Park Ave., South, N.Y. 10003), 1983, Vol. 1: 449 pp., Vol. 2: 456 pp., $14.95.

Barbara Fisher, *Breathing Room,* novel (Brighton Street Press, 53 Falstaff Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14609), 1982, 342 pp., $8.00.

Kathleen Fleming, *Lovers in the Present Afternoon,* novel (The Naiad Press), 1984, 280 pp., $8.50.

Katherine V. Forrest, *Curious Wine,* novel (Naiad Press), 1983, 176 pp., $7.50.

Eric Garber and Lyn Paleo, *Uranian Worlds: a readers' guide to alternative sexuality in science fiction and fantasy.* (GK Hall & Co., 70 Linden St., Boston, MA), 1983.

Gay Rights Writer's Group, *It Could Happen To You: An Account of the Gay Civil Rights Campaign in Eugene, Oregon,* (Alyson Publications), 1983, 95 pp., $3.95.

Sandra Gilbert and Barbara Hazard, *The Summer Kitchen,* poems and drawings, (The Heyeck Press, 25 Patrol Court, Woodside, CA 94062), 1983.

Gerre Goodman, George Lakey, Judy Lashof, Erika Thorne, *No Turning Back: Lesbian and Gay Liberation for the '80's* (New Society Publishers), 1983, 152 pp., $16.95 hardbound/$7.95 paperback.

Rachel Grossman & Jean Sutherland, editors, *Surviving Sexual Assault* (Congdon & Weed, Inc.), 1983, 86 pp., $4.95 paper.

Susan Langhorne Hall, *Touching You With Love,* poetry (Susan's Inc., P.O. Box 690, Bellevue, Washington 98009), 1983, n.p.

Lola Haskins, *Planting the Children,* poetry (The University Presses of Florida, 15 N.W. 15th St., Gainesville, FL 32603), 1983, 71 pp., $8.95.

Hunter College Women's Studies Collective, *Women's Realities, Women's Choices,* (Oxford University Press), 1983, 621 pp., $24.95 cl., $14.95 pb.

Jeanne Joe, *Ying-Ying, Pieces of Childhood,* fiction (East/West Publishing, 838 Grant Ave., San Francisco, CA 94108), 1982, 111 pp.

Susan Krieger, *The Mirror Dance: Identity in a Women's Community* (Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA 19122), 1983, 199 pp., $8.95.

Audre Lorde, *Zami, a new spelling of my name* (Crossing Press, Trumansburg, N.Y. 14886), 1982, 255 pp., $7.95.

Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women with Foreword by Patty Duke Astin, *Surviving Sexual Assault* (Congdon & Weed, Inc. Distributed by St. Martin's Press, 175 Fifth Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10010), 1983, 86 pp., $4.95.

Lee Lynch, *Toothpick House,* novel (Naiad Press), 1983, 264 pp., $7.95.

Paule Marshall, *Reena and Other Stories* (The Feminist Press, Box 334, Old Westbury, N.Y. 11568), 1984, 210 pp., $8.95.

Judith McDaniel, *November Woman,* poetry (Loft Press, 93 Grant Ave., Glen Falls, N.Y. 12801), 1983, 32 pp., $3.

Claire Morgan, *The Price of Salt,* novel (The Naiad Press), 1984, 276 pp., $7.95.

Cherríe Moraga, *Loving in the War Years/ lo que nunca pasó por sus labios,* essays, stories and poems (South End Press, 302 Columbus

Ave., Boston, MA 92116), 1983, 152 pp., $7.00.

Off Their Backs . . . and on our own two feet, (New Society Publishers, 4722 Baltimore Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19143), 1983, $2.45.

Alicia Ostriker, *Writing Like a woman* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor), 1983.

Pat Parker, *Movement in Black* (Crossing Press, Trumansburg, N.Y.), 1983, 157 pp., $5.95.

Adrienne Rich, *Sources,* poems (The Heyeck Press: 25 Patrol Court, Woodside, CA 94062), 1983, 35 pp., $8.50 + .75 postage and handling.

Beah Richards, *A Black Woman Speaks,* poetry (Inner City Press, 1308 So. New Hampshire Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90006), 1974.

Jane Rule, *Against the Season,* novel (The Naiad Press), 1984, 218 pp., $7.95.

Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (University of Texas Press, P.O. Box 7819, Austin, TX 78712), 1983, 159 pp.

Samois, *Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M,* second edition revised and expanded (Alyson Publications, Boston), 1982.

Lisa Schoenfielder and Barb Wieser, eds. *Shadow on a Tightrope–Writings by Women on Fat Oppression* (Aunt Lute Book Company, P.O. Box 2723, Iowa City, Iowa 52244), 1983, 243 pp., $8.95.

Mum Shirl (with Bobbi Sykes), *Mum Shirl: An Autobiography* (Heinemann, 85 Abinger St., Richmond Victoria, Australia 3121), 1981, 115 pp.

Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, eds., *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (Monthly Review Press, 155 W. 23 St., N.Y. 10011), 1983, 489, pp., $12.50.

Jean Swallow, ed. *Out From Under: Sober Dykes and Our Friends* (Spinsters Ink, 803 De Haro St., San Francisco CA 94107), 1983, 239 pp., $8.95.

Janet Todd, ed., *Women Writers Talking* (Holmes & Meier, New York, N.Y.), 1983, 262 pp., $12.50.

Patricia Traxler, *The Glass Woman,* poems (Hanging Loose Press), 1983, 95 pp., $5.00.

Janine Veto, *Iris,* novel (Alyson Publications), 1984, 252 pp., $7.50 (includes postage).

Jess Wells, *A Herstory of Prostitution in Western Europe* (Shameless Hussy Press, P.O. Box 3092, Berkeley, CA 94703), 1982, 96 pp., $4.45.

Yvonne, *Iwilla* (Sunbury Press, N.Y.), 1982.

OLD BOOKS/NEW PUBLISHERS

Conditions has been notified that several books, originally published by Persephone Press and recently reviewed by *Conditions,* are available from the following publishers:

Evelyn Torton Beck, ed., *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology* (The Crossing Press), 1982, 286 pp., $8.95 plus $1 p/h.

Elly Bulkin, ed., *Lesbian Fiction: An Anthology* (The Gay Presses of New York, P.O. Box 294, Village Station, N.Y., N.Y. 10014), 1981, 336 pp., $8.95 plus $1 p/h.

Elly Bulkin and Joan Larkin, eds., *Lesbian Poetry: An Anthology* (GPNY), 1981, $10.95 plus $1 p/h.

Audre Lorde, *Zami: a new spelling of my name,* novel (The Crossing Press), 1982, 256 pp., $7.95 plus $1 p/h.

Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, P.O. Box 2753, Rockefeller Station, N.Y., N.Y. 10185), 1981, 261 pp., $8.95 plus $1 p/h.

CLASSIFIED ADS–ANNOUNCEMENTS

The **FEMINIST ARAB-AMERICAN NETWORK,** an organization of feminists of Arab heritage residing in the United States is interested in collecting: bibliographies on Arab women; personal and family histories; writings on topics of concern to Arab-American feminists; information about local projects and activities in which you are involved. Contact F.A.N., P.O. Box 725, East Lansing MI 48823-0625.

SAGE is a scholarly journal on black women edited by Patricia Bell Scott and Beverly Guy-Sheftall, available for $10 per year ($25 for two years) from P.O. Box 42741, Atlanta GA 30311.

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REVIEWS: *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* by Michele Wallace (reviewed by Linda C. Powell); *The Black Unicorn* by Audre Lorde (reviewed by Fahamisha Shariat); *nappy edges* by Ntozake Shange (reviewed by Cheryl Clarke).

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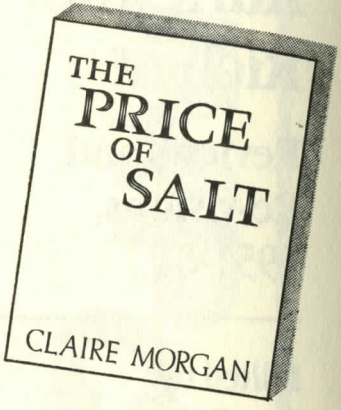

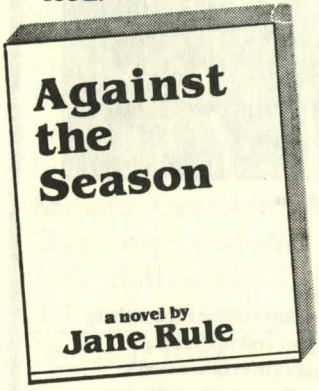

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