

Interview/Reviews



Colleen McKay 1985

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THERE ARE, ALWAYS HAVE BEEN, ALWAYS WILL BE LESBIANS IN INDIA

Khayal, Utsa, and Susan Heske

Edited by Utsa

The following is an interview conducted by Susan Heske with two Indian lesbians, Khayal and Utsa. It was aired on WBAI Radio in New York City on April 29, 1984.

Susan: Maybe we can start out by talking about the history of lesbianism in India. I know when I first met you Khayal, you were in traditional dress. I was somewhat taken aback to find that you were a lesbian. And in thinking about that I realised that as a white woman I have a very narrow minded conception of lesbianism in other societies, especially in "Third World" societies, and that lesbianism is not something that was created in and is confined to so called Western societies. Either one of you can start, Khayal or Utsa.

Khayal: I am glad you brought that up Susan, because I have found that in my four years here, that is one of the things that I have had to struggle with a lot, in that lesbians here cannot believe that I was a lesbian many many years before I came to this country. They have the impression that it is something that I acquired after coming to the Western world. It is even more amazing for them to know that I am not the only one in India, that there are other women who are like me, that I have had relationships with Indian women, and that I am out to my family and friends. It isn't a very easy situation to be in because of the isolation that it involves. Though there are other lesbians in India, there isn't anything like a movement or a community which exists in the Western world. However, at the same time a lot of the ideas and conceptions about lesbianism that prevail here don't really apply to what is going on in India. At this point I would like to say that there are, always have been, and always will be lesbians in India and in fact we have quite a long and rich history and tradition of lesbianism and homosexuality.

There are many references to that in some of the ancient treatises on religion and law in India and I am just going to cite a few that have been observed as early as the 4th century B.C. Kautila, who was a lawmaker for one of the kingdoms around that time has recorded the existence of *Stree Rajya* which means kingdom of women in various parts of the subcontinent. Again, in the 4th century, Kalidas, who was a very famous playwright, writer and poet also made references to such kingdoms. I am quoting directly from this book called *The World of Homosexuals* by Shakuntala Devi, "Mutual relations between the women of those all female realms are reputed to have been characterised by strong homosexual feelings."

However, everything wasn't very easy for lesbians in India, and this book called the *Manu Smriti* which is a treatise written on law by Manu around the

2nd century B.C. outlines punishments which were to be meted out to sodomites. But with lesbians he is even more harsh. He said that any woman who 'pollutes another' should be fined 200 panas* and given ten strokes with the rod. However, if one of the women was a virgin, then the other who dared to commit such an offense was to have her head shaved instantly, have two of her fingers cut off, and placed on an ass and paraded through the town. So even though the references that we have from this are not very positive, we know that lesbianism existed and that it is not something that happened in the last decade or only in the West.

Utsa: I would like to cite a positive reference which dates much earlier than the one Khayal was talking about. This is a collection of poems written by Buddhist nuns and is called the *Teri Gatha*. The quotations that I have here have been translated by Christian missionaries and men, so it is quite likely that much of the material has been lost or distorted. Some of these verses are supposed to have been written by a collective of nuns and not individual women which I find a very interesting concept. I will read out one of these poems. It is called "Freedom" and it was written by a woman called Mutta. She lived somewhere around 520 - 480 B.C.

O free indeed! O gloriously free
Am I in freedom from three crooked things:
From quern, from mortar, from crookbacked lord!
Ay, but I am free from rebirth and from death,
And all that dragged me back is hurled away!

(It maybe hard to think of this as explicitly lesbian poetry, if there is any such thing as that, but it was written by a woman who chose to be free and live with other women.) I wanted to put in this because I felt that what Khayal was saying was perhaps too negative. I feel that came about as a reaction to all the strengths that existed among women before that.

UNTIL THE BRITISH CAME

Khayal: I think that something that we need to point out is that sexuality in India seems to have had freer expression for both men and women until about the time the British came to India and became our colonizers. Much of the art, both painting and sculpture depict sexually explicit images of men and women together as well as women and women together. One of the things that happened as a result of the British influence upon us was a changing of that expression of sexuality, and an imposition of morals and values that were not indigenous to Indian culture.

This also gave rise to very repressive laws against homosexuality and lesbianism. The law against homosexuality was written in 1861 and was based on the then prevalent English law. Under that law, which is still applicable in

* An ancient coin

India today, homosexuality is a criminal offense under section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. This law regards homosexuality as against the order of nature, and punishment can range from imprisonment for ten years to life. Now it is interesting that at the same time that all of these transformations were taking place in Indian society regarding sexuality there were still women who were writing poetry about loving other women and Utsa has examples of this poetry which she will read to you.

Utsa: I have a few poems here. One of them is by a woman called Zeb-un-Nissa.* She was the daughter of the Emperor Aurangzeb and was born in Daulatabad in 1638 A.D. Her mother was a Persian. She was a very talented poet and a great patron of poets and scholars, thus carrying on the tradition of the Mughal emperors. She was a deeply religious woman, a Sufi or mystic unlike her orthodox father. For some years she was imprisoned by him in Delhi and was deprived of a revenue in 1681. She remained in restraint and obscurity until her death in 1702. We have no idea as to why she was imprisoned. This is a poem which she wrote and it is called "Love Mysteries". It is written in Persian. To understand this poem you will have to understand the references she uses. I'll read the poem and explain.

Though I am like Laila, yet my heart loves like Majnun. I wish to keep
my head towards the desert, but modesty chains my feet down. The
nightingale came to sit in the company of the flower in the garden,
because she was my pupil. I am an expert in love matters: even the
moth is my pupil.

This is equivalent to saying that I am like Juliet yet I love like Romeo, and it is possible that it was written for another woman. There is another poem which she has written called "Beauty's Adornment":

I am the daughter of an emperor, yet I have set my face towards
poverty. This is what adorns my beauty, my name is Zeb-un-Nissa.

Bahu Begam is another Urdu poet who lived in the 1800's and perhaps wrote between 1855 and 1865. I'll read from her poem "A Lover's Fear":

At night, when we met
I wished to gaze at her
(She is envied even by the moon!);
And then this fear arose,
Ah, she is delicate:
She may be crushed
By the burden of my adoring looks!

Susan: Maybe you could talk about the conditions that are facing lesbians in India today. Do you want to start Utsa?

Utsa: It is a very difficult question to answer because India is a very big coun-

* *The adorning of women*

try and lesbians in India are all over the country. We are very isolated from each other. A lot of times we don't know who is a lesbian and who is not one. I would like to answer this in the context of our society which on one level is very patriarchal but on another level there is a lot of bonding and warmth between women. When I came to this country, one of the questions that I was asked by a woman was, 'Oh, but it must be so difficult for you out there, for two women to get together'. I told her, 'No, it was much easier for me to get together with other women than it is for me here.'

Within the context of a sex segregated society, it is only natural that a lot of women grow up with other women, loving other women and wishing to live with other women. And I would emphasize this statement 'wishing to live' because to be a lesbian one has to have the economic power to make that choice and for a lot of Indian women that choice does not exist. To put it very simply, you are not given a choice regarding your marriage and you are pushed into a heterosexual arranged marriage by your parents, your relatives and everyone around you. So what happens to women who are lesbians and are most of the time financially dependent on others is that if they choose to remain together, they choose to commit suicide.

Over the past few years we have been seeing newspaper reports which have just two or three lines and they say two women committed suicide and it is reported that they were very good friends. The past four years my active task has been collecting these newspaper reports and keeping them for my sanity, to be reassured that at least women try to live together and die together.

I would also like to read extracts from these letters that were found after two women tried to commit suicide together but were rescued after they tried to jump into a lake in Cochin. * Some post cards that were found had notes from the lovers to one another. These are some of the things that they said, 'Lali, after all everybody knows about our love, so here is a thousand kisses for you in public...' Lalita replies, 'Come to me. I shall take you in my arms. I shall cover you with kisses. You shall sleep in my bosom and afterwards, maybe we shall quarrel a little.' A letter was written before the suicide attempt by Lalita to her parents. She said, 'I cannot part with Malini . . . Now we are destined to go in different directions. I am not pursued by Malini to do this . . . Bury us together.' It is reported that the relatives of the women are still unable to grasp the implications of the relationship. Malini's elder brother is reported to have said that the girls have agreed to 'forget one another.' These are stories we find all the time in little corners of newspapers from different parts of India.

Four years ago we were talking about lesbianism as a political strategy. A lot of us did not want to get married. We wanted to remain single, but we did not make the connection between that and living with other women. We

* A port city in South India.

gradually started making that connection but what has happened today is that because of legal conditions, because of economic pressures, and because of the nature of the women's movement, most of us are scared to bring this up as a political issue. A lot of us believe that in a country like India faced with so much poverty, to say that you are a lesbian, to bring that up as an issue is not deemed important. Women do not see the link between poverty and one's sexuality and I think that that link has to be made. To be able to choose to be a lesbian one has to be able to have a certain amount of economic control and that is linked with poverty.

When someone in the women's movement in India tells me that she cannot raise this issue in the public because we might alienate people, I often tell them, 'Look I have lived in the public for a long time and I was a lesbian all these years although I didn't realize that for a long time. If someone had brought up these issues openly in the public it would have been much easier for me to come out as a lesbian, at least to myself, years ago.' And I am sure that this is true for a lot of other lesbians. When we say that this does not concern poor women, we are making an assumption that poor women do not love each other and that working class and peasant women are not lesbians. What are the escape routes? For a very small, well educated minority it is to go abroad and live in countries where the situation is a *little* better. Or otherwise to live our lives as single women, spinsters, and even as married women.

These are some of the connections that I wish to bring forth. Maybe Khayal has something more to say.

HOTBEDS OF LESBIANS...

Khayal: One of the biggest problems that has happened in the women's movement with regard to lesbianism, and I know this is true in other 'Third World' countries as well is the designation of a lesbian as something that is Western, as *something* that is imported, foreign and alien to our cultures. So when we try to raise the issue among Indian feminists, for example, the answer is, 'Well, it is not a problem in our society. We have got to worry about more important things like death and poverty. You have been influenced by all this Western culture and it is really not relevant to our context.' I think one of the most important things for us to do as lesbians is to start showing how integral to our history and culture lesbianism is. That it is indigenous to our own people and not something that just happens or began in the West.

The other thing I would like to say is that boarding schools are regarded as hotbeds of lesbians because these are places where a lot of women first have their lesbian relationships. It was true for me. I had my first relationship when I was 12 years old in a boarding school and I'll never forget it.

Utsa: I want to add a little bit to what Khayal said about boarding schools. It is also true of single sex schools. We have a lot of single sex schools and colleges in India and I was fortunate enough to be in a single sex school for about 11 years of my life. I was taught by women who were all 'spinsters' and I am sure that many of them were lesbians though one never realised that at the time.

Khayal: Recently, *Manushi*, which is a journal on women and society published in India, had a story called 'Naya Gharvas' which is based on a folk tale from Western India about two lesbians. I am going to give you a very brief summary of this story because it is really beautiful and if you can get your hands on it, I would like you all to read it.

Basically, the story is about two men who are very good friends, who live in adjoining villages and promise each other that they are going to marry their children off to one another. What happens is that both of them have daughters. One of them, because he wants a dowery and because he is ashamed to say he has a daughter, raises his daughter as a boy. Well, come time for the marriage, the father decides to go through with it and the two girls are married off to each other. During the wedding night the bride discovers that her so-called groom is exactly like her. They decide that they still want to live together as married people and in the midst of much bad feeling from the village and their families they leave and go to live in this big haunted house cared for by ghosts. They love each other dearly and they want to live together the rest of their lives, except that towards the end of the story the one that was raised as a boy decides that perhaps, it would be a good thing to be a boy. She asks the ghost to grant her this boon to be changed to a man. The ghost grants her the boon but adds that she can change back to a woman as soon as she wants to. She becomes a man and for a very fleeting eighteen hours perhaps she is very happy being a man. But the entire nature of the relationship changes and the woman who was brought up to be a woman from the beginning is very upset by all of this. Eventually the one who became a man asks to be turned back into a woman and they live happily ever after.

Utsa: I would like to add that this play was performed in Delhi in October 1981 and it was really a good experience watching it.

Khayal: *Manushi*, of course, got a lot of letters back in response to this story and I am going to read some of them: One woman writes, 'Let us not have ridiculous stories like 'Naya Gharvas' but rather human and understanding ones . . . If *Manushi* wishes to cater to school libraries, stories like the former must certainly be out . . . I cannot bring myself to think of men in general as enemies. There are so many nice men I know who would do more for women than many women would.'

On a more positive note, another response came from a woman who writes:

The story 'Naya Gharvas' came as a real surprise. Rarely have I seen women's love celebrated in Indian stories. In my own life I have received emotional and social satisfaction only from women friends. The flaw in the story is that it suggests that women who challenge society's norms and design their own unique lifestyles, will survive only if they receive some supernatural protection, in this case, from the male ghost. Exchanging one sort of dependency for another is not a solution to our problems.

...I AM A LESBIAN...

Susan: I want to ask you if there is any active organizing going on by lesbian groups or if the women's movement in India has taken up the issues that lesbians face.

Utsa: Actually, this question is a little funny because when you talk about lesbian groups I just think of myself sitting alone in my room and reading all these books and thinking of the day when we will have at least one group in Delhi. As far as I know, there is no group which calls itself lesbian in India. There may be isolated groups of women who are meeting together as lesbians just the same way as I have been meeting with some of my friends over the past two or three years talking about these issues

As I said before, the women's movement did come to a point when it was discussing these things. But we have had to face a lot of criticism and attack about the movement being elitist. One of the first things that we try to do when such a thing happens is to try to prove how non-Western we are. In the process, what we end up doing is saying we are not lesbians, we are not anti-men, and we don't hate men as if that is what all lesbians are busy doing.

I would like to talk a little about my own involvement with the movement and my own realization. I have said this before: It was about four years ago when I was working with a women's group in Delhi that we were all talking about this. At that point I had gotten involved with a woman and for me it became a concrete reality. It suddenly struck me that I really was in love with a woman years ago in my school and I was with her for about five years. I was writing things like, "I'm so much in love with her," "I want to kiss her" in in my diary which I hid immediately. So all these things started becoming clear to me and I reached a point where I felt I had to call myself a lesbian.

This is a slow and difficult process. I know that in Delhi for instance, that there are other women who are lesbians, women who have been lesbians before the women's movement and are living with each other. Some of them are part of the women's movement now but do not wish to call themselves lesbian feminists. There are other women in the movement who are becoming lesbians because of the movement. At the same time, none of

us has really gotten down together as a collective group to discuss political strategies.

A few months ago, perhaps a year ago (1983), there was a workshop in Delhi where some women got together to discuss sexuality. One of the things that came out of this workshop is that the women started to talk to each other and realized very soon that they really felt close with other women. But none of them at that point was prepared to say that she was a lesbian. I met one of these women a few months ago and we had a discussion. She felt that it was not the right time to raise this as a public issue, and I disagree with that.

I think that it is important that we make a beginning. It is not as if you wake up some day and you realize that the issues of lesbianism can be brought out into the open. It takes a lot of time and courage on our parts. Still they do think that they are going to meet again and discuss this issue some more.

In this context I would like to add one thing. This woman told me that her group had taken money from a certain funding agency for the workshop and while writing the report for the agency, a lot of controversy arose in their group regarding whether or not they should use the word 'lesbian' for fear it would not give them any more money for doing similar things. I think the fact of whether we are allowed to take up an issue depends so much on the economic dependency and poverty of women's groups in India.

Regarding the male homosexual movement, I do believe there are some activities.* Two years ago I was told there was a conference somewhere on the west coast of India. I tried to find out more about it but I could not. There is a gay subculture in Bombay which is growing and one would assume that there always has been one. But it is becoming more visible. At least the male public does not seem to be so threatened by men as I presume they would be by lesbians.

Dowry has become an important issue around which women are organizing. Unfortunately, what is being done is that everyone deplores the fact that women are being murdered for the sake of money, but nobody questions the fact that this happens because women are forced to get married in the first place. Why is it that this money, which is spent into a daughter's marriage, is not invested in her education, on putting her on her own feet, or making sure that she is independent? I think that this connection needs to be made. And once this connection is made, women have a greater chance to choose their own sexuality. This is one of the areas where I think work needs to be done.

Otherwise, I feel we have to work on our history, on connecting with other lesbians, on recording cases that exist, both positive and negative. I don't

* *Libindia is India's first openly gay organization.*

Based in Delhi, it started functioning in 1984.

know whether we have to work with gay men or not but we have to work towards getting the laws changed. So there is a lot of work to be done, and I feel that this cannot be done without international support.

At this point, I would like to say that I have gained a lot of personal strength from the lesbian movement in this country while I have been in India. I had never been abroad before but I had read a lot of books. I would especially like to mention *This Bridge Called My Back*² which I read sometime in early 1982. A friend of mine in the U.S. had sent this book to me and I wrote back to her saying the book is terrific. I read it about 4 times and underlined practically the whole book. She wrote back to me asking, 'But how come you could connect with the book? I thought it was very specific to Third World women in this country [U.S.].' I said, 'No, there is so much of pain, so much of power and emotion and conflict that I have felt in my life as a lesbian in India that is similar to these women's lives.'

KISSING AND HUGGING AND DOING THINGS WHICH ARE TABOO

Susan: Now that you are here, do you want to talk about your perceptions of the lesbian community?

Utsa: One of the reasons I came to this country was to be a part of a lesbian culture, because I felt that I couldn't be isolated any more. I needed to make contact with lesbians here and with women active in the women's movement. After coming here I have not really participated too much politically. I have met other lesbians in certain contexts like parties.

I find the lesbian culture here a little hard to take. Now I don't know whether this is because I have been isolated as a lesbian for so many years that it is a little hard to see all these women together, kissing and hugging and doing things which are so taboo, which in my culture are so hidden. You close your doors and make sure that no one is around when you make love. Or whether it has to do with the transitory nature of relationships in this country. This is something which has been affecting me a lot because I see people who have met each other for just two days, they jump into bed the third day, the fourth day they are out of bed and that is it. I come from a culture where people have very deep, long standing bonds with each other. For me to look at relationships and friendships in such a short term fashion is very hard. Perhaps Khayal has something to say.

Khayal: Well, I have been in this country for four years now, I was in college for the first three. One of the things that really frustrates me about the women's movement here is the way in which we have adopted certain very heterosexual ways of sexual interaction within the lesbian culture. It is a kind of objectification which happens on two levels. It happens on a sexual plane:

You walk into a bar and everyone is checking you out and everyone is sort of running their hands up and down you. I don't see how that is so much different from walking into a straight bar where men do exactly the same thing to you.

Now I don't know if this is my perception because my attitudes towards sexuality are very different from Western perceptions of sexuality, but it seems so contradictory that on one hand we are talking about objectification of ourselves by men and how much we feel that lesbianism is a political statement on that kind of assumption about sexuality. But we are doing exactly the same things with one another, and it is very depressing to see.

On another level, I feel that that kind of objectification happens because I am not from this country. I walk into a party and not only am I being checked out physically but I am also being put in this position of this strange exotic creature from somewhere else. It makes me very very angry to have to deal with things like that.

On the other hand it is just so good to feel that there is a community, that there are other women like myself all around me, that there are places where I can interact as myself with all these women, that it is difficult to be completely negative about what is going on. Yet I can't be completely positive about what is going on because I feel that there are things we need to question about lesbian culture here that would be strengthening for our movement. There is a lot of pain and destruction involved in the ways we interact with one another, so briefly, so temporarily, so whimsically, almost as if here today, gone tomorrow, let's jump into bed now. It creates destructiveness within the movement when we are trying to work together politically, because there is all of this shit going on in our personal lives and it makes effective work very difficult. I have to constantly be aware of who slept with who, when and how they broke up, and why they don't get along. These kinds of personal interactions get carried into our political work and can really harm some of the struggles that we are engaged in at the moment. I really think that it is important for us to start addressing these kinds of issues.

Utsa: I think Khayal said something very important there. I haven't been in this country for very long and what I miss most is the warmth I get from women in my country. And these are women who may be lesbians, heterosexual or asexual. I can walk into my friend's home and relax. I know I can eat food there or cook food for her and have a chat and laugh. It is that kind of thing that I find lacking here because there is this feeling that somewhere in the relationship there has to be sex.

ANAMIKA

Maybe you both can talk about what your plans are for organizing.

Utsa: My plans for the coming few years are to make contact with as many lesbians here who are interested in working internationally as well as continue meeting other Indian lesbians wherever they might live. I know a few who are living all over the world. When I was in Delhi I was hoping to start a newsletter which would be able to connect all of us who are living in different parts of the world. I believe that it is important at this point that we work together internationally. It is hard to work alone as a lesbian or as a group of lesbians in India or for that matter in a lot of countries.

Khaya!l: Utsa and myself talk for hours and hours and we have many dreams, many hopes. Trying to give concrete form to those dreams and hopes will probably take a lifetime but this newsletter that Utsa just mentioned is something we hope to begin working on very soon in the future. We also want to start writing, start getting articles on lesbianism in India into magazines and periodicals internationally and in India so we can start opening up some forums for discussion in India, to at least start articulating our presence and our lives as they exist. One of the things that we would like to see happen from this interview is to have South Asian lesbians or others who know South Asian lesbians as well as lesbians who are interested in working interntionally to write to us.

Susan: I would like to thank Khaya!l and Utsa for being with us.

Post Script: June '86

It is over two years since we did this interview. We have produced two issues of our newsletter—the first in May '85 and the second in March '86. It is called *Anamika* *. Through it we hope to connect with South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Bhutanese, Nepali, Burmese and Afghani) lesbians living both in South Asia and other countries. Our network is growing. Through personal discussions with women from some of these countries we have come to know of more and more lesbians. Some sections of the women's movement in India are also growing more open to this issue. Another South Asian gay and lesbian journal called *Trikon* is being published by two gay Indian men from California. A South Asian lesbian anthology is being planned which may be published within the next three to four years. *Anamika* has received many enthusiastic responses, and we wish that there was enough time, energy, and financial resources to do all the work that needs to be done. Copies of *Anamika* are available from : *Anamika*, P.O. Box 652, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215, U.S.A. A subscription for three issues cost \$5/- (U.S.) As we send the newsletter free to South Asian countries, we are always in need of money and welcome donations. Checks may be made payable to A.L.O.E.C. for *Anamika*.

* "*Anamika*" is a Sanscrit word meaning anonymity or that which is yet to be named.

NOTES:

— *Manushi*, Vol 3, No. 5 (If in the U.S., Latin America, Canada or from Manushi Distributors, America c/o Estha Janzen 5008 Erringer Place, Philadelphia, Pa. 19166. Otherwise, Manushi, C-1/202, Lajpat Nagar (I, New Delhi, 10026 India.)

² Gloria Anzaluda, Cherrie Moraga, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, New York, 1983. (Bridge is this year's winner of a National Book Award)

ON CALL: POLITICAL ESSAYS by June Jordan. Boston.
South End Press, 1985, 155pp., \$8.00 paper.
Angela Bowen

June Jordan is an amazing writer. She is a profound thinker who is passionately political and actively involved in life. There is nothing narrow about her concerns; they range wide and deep. *On Call* is, as Alice Walker states on the back cover, "one of the most insightful, powerful and internationalist collection of political essays I have ever read."

Internationalist indeed. From the Bahamas to Lebanon to Nicaragua to Israel and South Africa, Jordan moves with the assurance of one who has long held a passionate interest in international affairs. Her discussions touch on class, race, gender (and their correlations); relationships (mother/daughter, father/daughter, husband/wife, teacher/pupil); language and poetry.

One page of the foreword lists where and when each previously published essay appeared. However, in her introduction, Jordan also brings our attention to the essays that have not been previously published, stating, "I am learning first hand about American censorship." In order to illustrate the silence imposed on Black people by the press, she explains that on the day she wrote the introduction, "August 30, 1985 — the South African 'State of Emergency' has been in effect for more than a month. During this period, the *New York Times* has published not a single op-ed on the subject of South Africa by any Afro-American writer in this country: not one." The foreword also carries a note page stating that Jordan will refer to, "that part of the population usually termed Third World as the First World, ... given that they were first to exist on the planet and currently make up the majority."

From the moment we pick up the book, Jordan is dropping wisdom on us. We are constantly reminded of her activist, revolutionary, global politics.

In addition to global politics, Jordan makes unequivocally clear the axiom, "the personal is political" by using her own experiences to bring us her commentaries of interracial marriage, child support by ex-husbands, and responsibilities to students, as well as emotionally searing analyses of her family life. She begins "Many Rivers to Cross" with the words, "When my mother killed herself I was looking for a job. That was 15 years ago. I had no money and no food" ... (19). In this gut-wrenchingly personal essay, her sense of humor helps to alleviate the pain.

My husband and I agreed that he would have the divorce that he wanted, and I would have the child. This ordinary settlement is, as millions of women will testify, as absurd as saying, 'I'll give you a call, you handle everything else' ... according to the law, what a father owes to his child is not serious compared to what a man owes to the bank for a car, or a vacation ... the courts cannot garnish a father's salary, nor

freeze his account, nor sieze his property on behalf of his children. in our society. Apparently this is because a child is not a car or a couch or a boat. (I would suppose this is the very best available definition of the difference between an American child and a car). (20)

Then she moves calmly on. Discussing her relationship with her father, her mother's death and her own reaction to it, she pulls us along as she picks up the pace. Jordan possesses a remarkable ability to relive an event and seduces the reader into the action. In this essay the intense vehemence of her passion left me in the same heightened state of breathless exhaustion as did her description of the Harlem riot in "Letter to Michael" in her first book of political essays, *Civil Wars*. This same passion infuses every essay in the book, including "Nicaragua: Why I had to go there," "Moving Beyond the Enemy: Israel and South Africa," and "Love is not the Problem" (concerning her former interracial marriage). These essays present no abstract discussion of ideas, but passionate and intellectual sharing of her very self with us.

Bringing as personal a touch to her discussion of poetry as to her discussions of family, Jordan, in "For the Sake of People's Poetry/Walt Whitman and the Rest of Us," previously published as the introduction to *Passion* (1980), makes a stunning case for a populist poet whose concerns, language, and art form (being unapologetically indigenous to the U.S. rather than to England) bring him scorn and ridicule. She states that "great poetry" from the past discussed matters that were of interest to the people in their own countries, and that poems from one country would not be mistaken for the poetry of another country or another time.

...one criterion for great poetry used to be the requirements of cultural nationalism... But the New World brought about the change... the phenomenon of a people's poetry, or great poetry and its spontaneous popularity, could no longer be assumed. The physical immensity and the farflung population of this New World decisively separated poets from suitable means to produce and distribute their poetry. Now there would have to be intermediaries—critics and publishers—whose marketplace principles of scarcity would, logically, oppose them to populist traditions of art. (7)

Thus, old world concepts and elitist notions caused an American literary establishment antithetical to the New World meanings of America to take root. This, says Jordan, "is one reason why the 'pre-eminently American white father of American poetry' exists primarily in the realm of caricature and rumor in his own country" (7).

Jordan was luckier than most American students, who don't enter school with a background of Paul Laurence Dunbar's poetry. She learned the poetry of both the Bible and Dunbar as a child at home. Therefore, Jordan knew, even as she was given poetry about, "daffodils in the 17th century" and, "*The Canterbury Tales*" (7) that she was waiting for something more. Where, she wondered, were the Black poets, where were the women? She

kept waiting. And writing. And reading, "apparently underground poetry: poetry kept strictly off campus" (6). And slowly it dawned on her that the poets she was waiting for were already with her. Herself, her friends, her own students—these were the New World poets she was eager to embrace. Still, Jordan is angry at being deprived of the genius of Walt Whitman while being required to read "boring, inaccessible, irrelevant, derivative and pretentious poem(s) ...glued to the marrow of required readings in American classrooms..."(5). She goes on to say,

But I didn't know about Walt Whitman. Yes, I had heard about this bohemian, this homosexual, even, who wrote something about the Captain and The Lilacs in The Hallway, but nobody ever told me to read his work! Not only was Whitman not required reading, he was, on the contrary, presented as a rather hairy buffoon suffering from a childish proclivity for exercise and open air. (6)

Jordan explains that through the study of his poetry and ideas she came to understand, "that racist, sexist, and anti-American predicament that condemns most New World writing to peripheal unpublished manuscript status (6). Abroad, Whitman is considered the quintessential American poet. If you hope to hear about Whitman, she says, you'd best leave home.

Jordan condescends somewhat in defining "New World." It hardly seems necessary for her to tell us that it does not mean "New England." Simply stating that to her it means, "non-European, big, heterogeneous, unknown, free, and an end to feudalism, caste..."(11) would be sufficient. Nevertheless, in this fine essay, Jordan does some 'serious talkin' for this man she calls, "the American white father of American poetry."

This essay was rejected by an unnamed women's magazine, because, as Jordan explains in the introduction, it was not considered "appropriate" or "feminist" enough. She goes on to state in her unequivocal fashion that all of the mainstream press as well as most of the left decide what's appropriate for Black people to address. Since she feels that foreign affairs, nuclear policies, the environment, or any other issues that touch her life are appropriate subjects for her to discuss, she does so. Jordan acknowledges, however, that this would have been an impossible if not suicidal course for, "the first Black human being to be published in America...Phillis 'Miracle' Wheatley" (89).

In, "The Difficult Miracle of Black Poetry in America or Something Like a Sonnet for Phillis Miracle Wheatley," Jordan posits that because of the formalized style Wheatley used and the subjects she wrote about, many of us (I plead guilty) have not bothered to peek between the lines to find her subtle messages, messages which show that Wheatley was concerned with far more than the titles of her poems suggest. For instance, "To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth, His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for North America, etc.," is one of the few poems in which Wheatley refers directly to her blackness, "I, young in life, by seeming cruel of

fate/Was snatch'd from Africs's fancy'd happy seat...'" Jordan makes an eloquent plea for a motherless little girl alone and enslaved in a strange land. "How could you dare," she asks, "to create yourself: a poet?" (87). Pulling on the same theme of indigenouness that she developed in the Whitman piece, Jordan states, "A poet is African in Africa, or Irish in Ireland, or French on the left bank of Paris, or white in Wisconsin. A poet writes in her own language." (87)

Jordan builds that passage impeccably, placing the poet within her language, her country, her house, and knowledgeably and lyrically describing how a poet is free and at home. How, she then asks, should there be Black poets in America? I am reminded of the Countee Cullen poem, "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," in which he bitterly asks how God could make a poet Black and bid him sing. The difference is that Cullen considers it ironic that one who is burdened with blackness should feel there is anything to sing about, while Jordan wants us to be able to find our own language so that we can sing our own songs. Jordan asserts that the miracle of Wheatley is that she is singing her song in a language that is foreign to her. Throughout runs the refrain, "It was not natural. And she was the first" (87).

Phillis Wheatley was a phenomenon. The fact that she was a child and a slave made her poetry non-threatening to the white society of her day, which could treat her as a marvel, a total aberration. Her mistress and "loving patron" died when Wheatley was twenty-one. Four years later, she married John Peters and bore and buried three children. Phillis never stopped writing. "This would have been the poetry of someone who has chosen herself, free, and brave to be free in a land of slavery" (96), states Jordan. But no one has ever seen those poems. Jordan believes that,

We would not have seen them anyway. I believe no one would have published the poetry of Black Phillis Wheatley, that grown woman who stayed with her chosen Black man. I believe that the death of Suzannah Wheatley, coincident with the African poet's twenty-first birthday, signalled, decisively, the end of her status as a child, as a dependent. From there we would hear from an independent Black woman poet in America. Can you imagine that, in 1775? Can you imagine that, today? America has long been tolerant of Black children, compared to its reception of independent Black men and Black women. (96)

The poems from that period of her life have mysteriously disappeared. When thirty-one year old Wheatley died, her husband advertised asking for the return of a manuscript of poems she had given someone. There was no response.

Jordan closes this essay by using Wheatley's style to write a sonnet that she calls, "Something like a Sonnet for Phillis Miracle Wheatley." Naming Wheatley a "Girl from the realm of birds florid and fleet," Jordan ends,

Chosen by whimsy but born to surprise
They taught you to read but you learned how to write

Begging the universe into your eyes:
They dressed you in light but you dreamed with the night.
From Africa singing of justice and grace,
Your early verse sweetens the fame of our race (97).

Jordan's treatment of both Wheatley and Whitman left me feeling that I'd taken a course in poetry appreciation and that I would continue the reading on my own once the class was done. I also felt a sense of deprivation for all of us who have never had such a teacher. Evidence of her teaching skills abound throughout the book. In the essays, "Nobody Mean More to Me Than You And the Future Life of Willie Jordan" and, "Report from the Bahamas," she demonstrates aptly that real teaching takes place on a far deeper level than nourishing a student's mind (a difficult enough task in itself). Opening a student's mind to the possibility therein is a struggle that can be overwhelming to good teachers who are compassionate, have plenty to share and are talented. But only an exceptionally gifted and intuitive teacher, one who embraces and respects the lives of the students, can gain the trust necessary to lead them into new territory and demand the work necessary to a creative learning experience.

In, "Report from the Bahamas," one of her students, a young South African woman, suddenly reveals to Jordan that she is being battered by her alcoholic husband. After fruitlessly calling one person and then another on campus for assistance, Jordan finally reaches another student, a young Irish woman who understands the problem because her father had been an abusive alcoholic also. She accompanies Jordan to the South African woman's apartment. Jordan describes the scene when they have finished visiting and making plans, and are saying goodbye,

I walked behind them, the young Irish woman and the young South African, and I saw them walking as sisters walk, hugging each other, and whispering and sure of each other and I felt how it was not who they were but what they both know and what they were both preparing to do about what they know that was going to make them both free at last. (49)

Jordan's optimistic visions allow us to travel with her across barriers of race, seizing on our similarities to make the life connections that will ultimately save us.

Jordan forges similar connections to another student named Willie Jordan. She feels so strongly connected that she names an essay after him, "Nobody Mean More to Me Than You And the Future Life of Willie Jordan," and dedicates the book to him as well. Willie is the most clearly drawn of all students she introduces to us.

He looked like a wrestler.
He sat dead center in the packed room and,
every time our eyes met, he quickly nodded his
head as though anxious to reassure, and
encourage, me. Short, with strikingly broad
shoulders and long arms, he spoke with a

surprisingly high, soft voice that matched the soft bright movement of his eyes. His name was Willie Jordan. (126)

Willie first shows up in her "Contemporary Women's Poetry" class then becomes part of her class, "The Art of Black English."

Now, let's talk about Black English. In Jordan's previous book of essays, *Civil Wars*, one essay I returned to several times was, "White English/Black English: The Politics of Translation" (WE/BE).¹ I did not return for enjoyment, however, as with the other essays, but in puzzlement. Each time, I had an uneasy response, feeling that I must be missing something. Yes, I thought, *we could use our own language, for our intracommunications—and yes, it made sense, and was simple, natural, indigenous, etc.* But was she advocating our use of it in place of the official language of the U.S.? Was she saying our children didn't need to learn as much of it as she herself had learned? Now that she had the white man's language totally at her command, was she telling our young people to forget it, that it meant nothing while at the same time, she made her living from it? In "WE/BE," she states that, "we do need to acquire competency in the language of the currently powerful,"² she also states, rather unrealistically, that we must insist "that white/standard English be presented simply as the Second Language."³ I was quite furious with her for that stance. And my response is: *Give these youngsters the same choice of tools you have at your disposal.*

In *On Call*, Jordan lays out her case for Black English in, "...Future life of W/J..." but she is now less didactic and more reasonable in her expectations as to what we can hope to accomplish with it, giving us a more complete understanding of her theory and course of study. In this essay, Jordan makes it patently clear that she is not about abandoning the basic education our people must have in order to negotiate this U.S. of A. maze.

She begins with an analytical discussion of White English in America as "Standard English," offering the view that although 35 million Afro-Americans depend on Black English for our discovery of the world, we must learn to "hide our original work habits or surrender our own voices hoping to please those who will never respect anyone different from themselves..." (123). Jordan then discusses assigning Walker's *The Color Purple* to her class, stating that she was "astonished" at the negative response of the students, who were offended by the Black English "Celie" spoke. Jordan charts her course in breaking down their resistance to the language, gaining their trust in class discussions, asserting that "For most of the students, learning Black English required a fallback to patterns and rhythms of speech that many of their parents had beaten out of them. I mean beaten" (128). Together, she and the students devised rules and guidelines for Black English, which she sets down in the essay.

While the class is "learning" Black English, a smack-in-the-face real life horror occurs. Willie's brother dies by police violence. It's a heavy essay, dealing with many elements: the language issue, the ethical dilemma of using that language as a mark of self respect, the powerlessness of a group of oppressed people to rectify yet another intolerable injustice, the past neglect of the educational system. But above all, this is about a teacher—teaching and loving it. With humor, patience and understanding love. Jordan leads, follows, and shares the way to a new understanding of Black English. An altogether dazzling display of teaching and writing!

Jordan is very accessible also as an essayist. Her diction and style are flowing, articulate, beautiful and innovative. Her language is very concrete and present. She is personally present also. When we finish this book, we are aware of who the woman is. We know her, we know some of the people in her life, and some of how she came to be who she is.

On Call is about connections. The personal is political, and the politics are revolutionary, and First World people, poor people, and women are exploited, silenced, and ignored, not to speak of brutalized, raped, maimed, and killed. Yes, it's been said before. But not like this.

Despite the fact that there is no essay that deals directly with Lesbianism, homophobia or sexual preference, there's enough else in this relentless set of essays to bring me to say that this treasure of a book will go on the special shelf over my bed, with Lorde's *Sister Outsider*, Walker's *The Color Purple*, and a few precious others. Thank you, June Jordan.

NOTES

¹ June Jordan, *Civil Wars* (Boston, Ma., Beacon Press 1981).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

BLUE HEAT: A PORTFOLIO OF POEMS AND DRAWINGS by Alexis DeVeaux. Diva Publishing Enterprises. 135 Eastern Parkway, Suite 8-K. Brooklyn, N.Y. 11238. \$7.50. 48 pp
Cheryl Clarke

...This book is for independent publishing. (from the dedication, "If a Poem Could...Then," *Blue Heat*)

A black-woman centered writer, Alexis DeVeaux. Hard-to-hold earth in toxic America. Poet of woman negritude. Visual. Verbal. Vulvar.

Madeleine's dreads
are extensions of shake
shake
shekeres
are hand-dipped
in mythology & double
dutch tournaments

Madeleine's Dreads, (12)

Writers are spies. Believers in the
turning pages. Inside children wait...¹

Bold and clear DeVeaux presented us with *Blue Heat* last fall, a self-published "Portfolio of Poems and Drawings" under the imprint of Diva Publishing Enterprises. Many of the poems have been among her performance repertoire, and we were joyful to receive them set down. Though DeVeaux has major press publications, this act of self-publishing is consistent with her adventurous and rebel spirit. Acts of courage and defiance that any black woman would dare publish herself. An act of love. Also an act of self love. DeVeaux took control of her concept and took the risk of challenging readers' notions of how a "book" should look, read, and be. And as she dedicates *Blue Heat* to "independent publishing," she acknowledges all of us who depart from conventional systems of giving our writing to our communities.

Blue Heat: a light blue portfolio containing leaves of poems. A dark blue ink drawing by DeVeaux of a shock haired, gap tooth, arm raised, clench fist female — but perhaps androgynous — principle with masked angels catching her back dare me to enter. Entering I do more than turn the pages. I hold them — one at a time. I color with red paint the white spaces of the black ink drawings, also by the author, interpolating the text, marking its 23 poems into three sections: "Altars," "Blue Heat," and "Electrified Magnets."

Previous works, *Spirits in the Street* (1973) — black dramatic poetic narrative of street soliloquies, dialogues, and vignettes — and *Don't Explain: A Song of Billie Holiday* (1980) — a book length biographical poem of the

fated jazz artist — mark DeVeaux a poet, fiction, and document artist adept at mixing media, skillful at integrating “text, illustrations, and typography.”* Her experimentations in dramatic art (*Circles, The Tapestry, A Season to Unravel, No*); performance art (Flamboyant Ladies Theatre Company, “Reverberations” in Brooklyn and Amsterdam in 1982); journalism (“Loving the DARK In Me/Dear Aunt Nanadine” and “Black South Africa: This Far by Faith,” the 1985 interview of Nina Simone in *Essence*); literary art for children (*na-ni, An Enchanted Hair Tail*) prove her willing to take risks of form, content, presentation, and audience.

Her poems and stories are spread wide in journals and anthologies, including *Conditions: Five, The Black Women's Issue* (1979) and *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (1983). Her seasonal workshops, in Brooklyn, for black women writers, have borne two anthologies of writings by her students — *Gap Tooth Girlfriends* (1981) and *Gap Tooth Girlfriends, The Third Act* (1986). Her commitment to words is matched by her commitment to political activism and international politics (Nicaragua, Kenya).

“Altars”: poems of family and friendship; “Blue Heat”: poems of revolutionary ethics and resistance, Africa and the oppression of Africans in the U.S. and other third world landscapes, “Reaganomics”; “Electrified Magnets”: poems of black woman identification, bonding, sex, female personification, love and self love — all conveyed in authentic, inventive, comprehensible urban black folk vernacular, deprecating, paradoxical black humor, and the blunt black truth —

the government has some nerve
giving it away
who needs it
I need some: resurrect the cities: outlaw the Klan
some j-o-b
some a your tongue
poems over breakfast
apple on your breath
.
.
.
something else besides
this dry ass cheese

Cheese Poem (17)

References and dedications to, symbols and images of women integrated throughout and the diametric opposition to the prevailing power structure —

question authority
question:
why should trees or rivers or even
stars
Be mega-bombed out of orbit...

And Then She Said (24)

*From the back cover of *Spirits in the Street*.

Eloquent, insightful, poignant statements of family — blood kin and friends —

Rose:
these are the things we inherit
from your softness
your worn tennis shoes
neatly placed
one a child's foot
one a woman's foot
stuffed dolls on a closet shelf
17 pennies
clothes that do not fit...

Praise Song For My Sister, Rose (9)

you have to work
at friendship
like you do any community
or garden.

In Any Language, Bread With Dignity (18)

And for student and friend, Fatima Dike, a hunger to hold onto family across boundaries, oceans, and the "nightmare" of "apartheid" —

and you, my cousin-sister
back home again
with your boot dance
voice...
give me your hand
and let's become
a human barricade.

Cutting the Pattern of This Dream, (20)

Sometimes I am not convinced by the poet's choice of device, though always of her seriousness: relentless dirge/litany/obituary and document — in strophe and antistrophe — of the Atlanta child murders in 1980, "But who got the wings in Atlanta," seems trivialized by the use of the spiritual, "All God's Chillun Got Wings."

And sometimes though I am convinced poetically, I am not convinced politically by what is purported as truth: the puzzling, utopian, and fallacious "Are There No More Prophets" with its mysticism, chaos of images, its hyperbole:

Tonight I will squat in the alleyway of Old
San Juan
and spit out my baby/feet first
...
the ground beneath my city/feet echoes
with the whistle of bullets popping in Zimbabwe
and the trees of Central Park let down their zippers
and their shameless rain
platters me...

But the "feet first" baby, the "she is he...God" offers an uncharacteristically

misleading remonstrance to would-be prophets —

are there no more prophets
to see for us/can we
see for ourselves....
the problem is still whatcolor/whichgender
it is not sex
or what sex you sleep with...(16)

Bowers vs. Hardwick, the Meese Commission on Pornography, the AIDS hysteria: "sex or what sex you sleep with" is only *not* a problem if one is married, monogamous, rightwing, Christian (preferably fundamentalist), preferably white, heterosexual, and male. Prophet, find another...god. Maybe "see" to yosef.

Consummate performance piece, "The Woman Who Lives in the Botanical Gardens," in which the poet reshapes her metaphor of resistance, South Africa, into a woman, though she "is a man" (26) too; the play on androgyny more subtle here than in "...Prophets," —

THE WOMAN WHO LIVES IN THE BOTANICAL GARDENS
wears underneath her
banana ackee leaf petticoat the pants of 3
generations: her grand
father's her father's: her own (26)

Sculpting an icon of revolution. Consecrating the spirit of "red green and gold/rage" (27). The woman "...LIVES. like a guard dog. gums bared. teeth pointed: she snap at the gate..." (27). DeVaux performs this poem with a Caribbean accent; and with its warning, "I AM TAKING OVAH THIS SHIT," mightily convinces me — all up and down Eastern Parkway.

Unrhetorical "Modern Day Living is Hard on Black Women," — one of the best in the collection and one of her most exquisite performance pieces. Cataloguing losses. Countering stereotypes of legendary black woman forbearance. Demanding recognition of our vulnerability to sexual violence against us by black men. Spare, direct, spit punctuated urban African. No sentimentality. No apology. Just dogged pronouncement on the West Africa adaptation of the verb "to be" —

...You could be sleep Sunday morning in your mommas house
in Philly
some teenage boys come in rape you
rape your momma house
they Black you be Black (33)

As South Africa is her metaphor of struggle, so Nicaragua is liberation. Through inverted personification, the Nicaraguan people are metaphors of the cultural, political, organic symbols of their country —

Everyone is rice and beans
everyone is thick milky night
everyone is bales of cotton
the sweet watermelon
the eyes of women:
everyone is the scars of Somoza ...

Everyone is Nicaragua, (29)

Unabashed love poems of chagrin, advice, jealousy, need. My reading of them all: explicitly love between women.

The epigrammatic "Cuntery": a poem of magic and metamorphosis — "...I will make an incense of my/pussy...I will make a fetish of your/love" (36).

The second stanza of "Death of an Idol," with its predominant metaphor of the fragility of love relationships as chipped chinaware and "splintered crystals", flawed by the shift in the stanza's concluding lines: "we all trespass/without meaning/to" (38). Yet the advice is unequivocal.

Nonmonogamy, jealousy — contradictions most feminists avoid — find lyrical expression in "Complications Of The Heart":

...one of us always has another
lover who cuts in
and we stretch our arms
to welcome
each new dancer
and jealousy, I'm told
has no place
in revolutionary love (43)

And in "Hangin' Tuff" — a socio-political love poem — the hope: "to be soft: hungry: wet" (45).

Blue Heat: a journey toward love of self, black love of black self, black woman love of black woman self. A woman centered and woman identified poetics. A torturous journey through alleys, mine fields, refugee camps, bantustans — "it is a labor of love/to love yourself" ("New Body: New Life," 46).

DeVeaux makes that journey and most of the way I go with her.

Notes:

¹ Alexis DeVeaux, *Spirits in the Street*. (Anchor Books, New York, 1973), p. 21.

CALL ME WOMAN by Ellen Kuzwayo

Spinster Ink. 803 De Haro Street, San Francisco,
California 94107. 1985 266 pgs. \$7.95 paper

gale jackson

mmangoana o tshwara thipi ka fa bongaleng
(‘the child’s mother grabs the sharp end of the knife’).

Ellen Kuzwayo

Her story begins in Soweto. Where she works. Where she lives. Soweto, a Black section of Johannesburg South Africa that over 2 million people call home. Home. Soweto. A name, a place which has been synonymous with resistance since its school children — thirteen, fourteen, fifteen year old children, took to its streets demanding that their education be not in Afrikaans and were massacred by South African police. Her story begins in the townships made ungovernable by the state. Her story begins in the center of the South African revolution and like the eye of a storm is fine and wide and deep.

Her story is a history of the years 1914 to the present, a history of South Africa in this century. It is a history of not only one African woman’s life but of many Black South Africans, women, men, children, living with the reality of one of the most oppressive, inhumane states in modern history. Beginning in post colonial South Africa, this one life traces the cementing of the system of white minority rule through apartheid and the response of Black women to their own oppression and that of their children and of their men. Truly the history of South Africa in the twentieth century is a poignant one, a story of protracted civil war, of genocide. Yet for those like Ellen Kuzwayo who, defiantly, call Soweto, call South Africa ‘home’, and are fighting for *that*, this story is the prelude to a victory as imminent as the changing of the day. From this place — Soweto, resistance, victory — come the voice of Ellen Kuzwayo in *Call Me Woman*.

Later, when the book is closed, you realize that hers is a new and familiar and radical voice. Beginning it is slow and steady. Maybe at first to American ears it is stilted, ‘christian’, the voice of a seventy two year old woman with a sociological turn of phrase, but a voice distinctively, definitely African. Slowly the tapestry of her narrative unfolds. Constantly she is naming and praising other Black women, friends, colleagues, fellow students, teachers before, mentors still, mothers, marketwomen, women who brew beer, and women wresting control of their lives from the state, women creating the new South Africa. Her courage, her dignity her power is restrained; looking channeling building her voice recalling for us the stories of extraordinary Black women grappling with the multiple edges of the apartheid knife.

Ellen Kuzwayo was born in 1914 on the farm of her maternal grandfather Jeremiah Makgothi, a African minister and a scholar who translated the new testament into his native language of Serolong, a member of the African National Congress at the beginning, and her grandmother Magedeline Segogoane Makgothi, probably one of the first proud and yet untitled African women who made an impression upon her, in the district of Thaba Nchu in South Africa's Orange Free State. In her chapter entitled, "My Lost Birthright" she writes:

Ellen Kate Cholofelo Nnoseng Mothlalepule are all names I answer to. Please do not ask me why so many. I can only guess that both my paternal and maternal grandparants wanted to have a share in giving me a name to make their mark (55).

The form of landholding under which her family held claim to its land was at that time a common one among the Barolong clans but was later (in 1924) dismantled under apartheid's Group Areas legislation and they, like many other Black families, were dispossessed of their land. Ellen Kuzwayo attended Lovedale College, a school run for Africans by the Scotland Missionary Society, and, unlike Black youth under the present state of apartheid, received a 19th century education on par with many of her white peers. She grew up in an atmosphere and time when, "it was comon practice for families to organize work camps, known as *Matsema*, for major duties such as plowing, reaping, and thrashing (68)" when "children of that era were more seen than heard (63)," when homemade beers were a ritual of community life not an element of community destruction and, alongside the busy missionary trade, traditional social institutions were much in existence.

Her journey as a young woman out from the rural areas and on the road to Soweto is similar in ways to that of millions of other Black South Africans who, in the midst of industrialization and great social upheaval, migrated towards the cities, though it is also startling and important in its specificity. Ellen Kuzwayo lost both her mother and her grandparents by the time she was sixteen. Creating and building on the support of friends and an incredible determination, she completes a rigorous training to teach primary school. At twenty-three she suffers a nervous breakdown which she herself blames on the stresses and pressure she was under to achieve. She goes on to teaching and learning in the rural areas and becoming increasingly involved in community and national issues. She speaks of attending the All-African Convention in 1937 and the first gathering of the National Council of African Women and of the growing number of "highly talented women in the Black community (103)" who made impressions on her during this time. And in her narrative, she calls out a beautiful plethora of women's names.

Her years grow fuller. The ones just ahead see her through painful divisions in her family, the loss of their home, an abusive marriage in which she

had two sons, a near fatal miscarriage, and obtained an extraordinarily courageous divorce. Her social and political activism grows. She gathers herself to begin a painful period of separation from her children. In 1946 she moves to Johannesburg. Of the years 1947 to 1956 she writes:

Within the first three months I had obtained a part time job with the Non European Affairs Department. During the first twelve months of my arrival I had found the leaders of the African National Congress and joined their ranks as a Youth League member and became its secretary. Amidst all these activities, round about 1950, I received a part as an actor in 'Cry the Beloved Country'. In the same year I met a man...who later became my husband and father of my third son (181).

Then there is the growth of her work in urban and rural areas, with South African youth clubs, with native branches of the YWCA, and concurrently her struggle to have her sons "influxed" in (the parlance of apartheid legislation restricting the movement and residence of Black people) into Johannesburg to live with her. The brief coming together of her own family and the steady growth of a network of South Africans dedicated to a new society are among the contrasts that thrust her narrative into the present. The state, faced with growing resistance, presses forward in its program of white supremacy and clamps down on all symbols of African will. Her son, Bakone, is first expelled from the university and then banned for working in the Black consciousness movement. Then Ms. Kuzwayo herself is imprisoned, following the Soweto uprisings, for her work with concerned citizens investigating the causes of student 'unrest'. After her release, continuing to build on a career and a movement ever widening in strength and perspective she became active in township politics and economic self-development.

Ellen Kuzwayo is definitely one of the extraordinary, ordinary African women by which the new society is being built and the form of her narrative is as circular and evocative as the story it tells. Her descriptions of events convey both the 'ordinary' rhythms of a woman's life and the extraordinary response of these women, well known or unknown to us, to the trials of apartheid. Much of her statement contains such complexity. For example, speaking of the mother of that internationally respected young architect of Black consciousness, Steve Biko, she writes:

The normal practice in African communities, whether urban or rural, is for one of the women of the house to clean and clear up both the inside and outside of their home in the morning. Alice Biko would not have departed from this practice. I want to believe that when Major Hansen, head of the security police in Kingwilliamton, arrived in the morning, he would have found Alice sweeping her yard. On his arrival he gave her this message: 'Steve was detained in Port Elizabeth where he fell ill; he was transferred to Pretoria where he died on 12 September' (48).

And later telling of her own son's wedding under a banning order which made it illegal for him to be with more than two people at a time, she writes of the neighborhood women who:

"stood by the communal tradition when they opened their doors to those of our guests who came from outside of Mafikeng. Except for my son's immediate neighbor. I was seeing most of these women for the first time that day. The only person they had known and lived with was my banned son; they did not even know his fiancée at that stage. Yet when the police entered their homes to order them not to house or feed our guests they reacted with unanimous defiance. Here are women who had offered assistance to a neighbor being threatened with arrest for doing so; they took a very firm and resolute stand, unmindful of the cost they could pay for what they did (196)."

From the disarming but full countenance on the jacket cover, to the tone, the language, the leaps in each chapter from personal to social history, Ellen Kuzwayo is constantly revealing to us wrought complexities and layers and layers of oppression and power and struggle and strength known to the Black South African woman. This one autobiography is a strong feminist social and cultural history of the mass movement shaking South Africa today. For the reader unfamiliar with the history of South Africa, this story, with its foreword by Bessie Head and preface by Nadine Gordimer, is an incomparable introduction. For others it holds, still, a wealth of observation and information. Ellen Kuzwayo eloquently reminds us of how crucial it is to recall and document the stories of each life. It is the ritual act of love that is the heart of the struggle for social justice. I came away from this book affirmed in the knowing of such a woman, such women. Through her I am reminded of those women here in the movement, surviving and laying claim to their lives despite the very personal and universal trials of an oppressive country. I am heartened and proud to know another woman, and so many other strong caring women through the writings of Ellen Kuzwayo.

SINKING STEALING. by Jan Clausen. The Crossing Press. Trumanberg, N.Y. 14886. 1985. 270 pp. \$8.95

Randy Lordon

Jan Clausen's first novel, *Sinking Stealing*, makes one thing very obvious—she is a gifted writer. I marveled at her solid imagery, her skill at making me comprehend the characters' emotional lives through compelling physical description, irrepressible humor, and her unparalleled accuracy at recording every day life.

Sinking Stealing is written in four parts. Part I, "The Survivors", is riveting. Through Josie we are introduced to the cast of characters whose histories and nerve-endings are woven and exposed. Josie's lover, Rhea, has recently died in a car accident and Rhea's 10 year old daughter Ericka, whom they have raised together for the last seven years, is now living with Daniel and Brenda (Rhea's ex-husband and his current wife), an upwardly mobile couple of whom Clausen paints a most vivid picture. Through Josie's point of view we see that Daniel is:

... a man of the upper middle classes, and despite his liberal patina, he is as utterly unremarkable in his ideas of fatherhood as he is in patterns of earning and consumption. And yet I retain my capacity for surprise at fresh revelations of his mediocrity. Somehow he always succeeds in holding out the promise of more than he delivers. (12)

At Ericka's birthday party both Brenda, and Josie's discomfiture with her, is exposed.

Why is it that, no matter how trivial her remarks, she always succeeds in rubbing me the wrong way? As she leads me back through the long parlor floor, I'm busy drawing the analogies between her condescending tone and that of the aristocratic mother addressing the cherished retainer, dear old nanny or governess. (18)

Josie's relationship with Ericka is threatened when Daniel decides to move his family to another state. He states a job opportunity is his purpose for moving, but it is apparent that he is also trying to sever the closeness between Josie and Erica. Josie tries to reason with Daniel, to explain that she is Ericka's mother as much as Rhea was and attempts to explore alternative solutions with him. However, Daniel is behind the controls now and unwilling to listen. At the end of her tether, Josie finally explodes.

Somewhere an ill-bred female is screaming this as I rise, inexorable, coldly murderous, to my feet; the plate, crockery, oval, on my palm arching up in one clean economical gesture slammed high to the pillar of his insolent chest; the impact solid, authentic, gratifying as the famous slam of the door of a well-made car. And then I turn,

balletic, springing nimbly clear of soaring pickles and flying grease, hearing crash and shatter reverberate behind me as I seize my coat and flee, threading the tables, in slow motion dreamtime towards the distant door. (109)

Clausen captures Josie's frustration and rage in such clear, powerful, and incisive language that I found myself cheering her onto her scheme for getting Daniel to listen to reason regarding Ericka. She would "kidnap" her. Though I questioned her choice of action at this point, Clausen had so caught me up in the emotional eddy that I sat back to enjoy the journey, for I knew on the next page she and Ericka would be stealing away from Daniel and a new drama would unfold. Now halfway through the book I trusted my guide Clausen with the same simpleheartedness that Ericka trusted Josie.

Unfortunately Part II, "the Outlaws" begins to lose the momentum Clausen has so carefully created, and the tension she has structured in Part I begins to wane as Josie, our previous guide, now takes a backseat to Ericka whose observations are endless. Clausen's use of Ericka's viewpoint is tedious, boring, and sometimes condescending. I had learned to care for our two "outlaws" through the eyes of the intelligent, determined, loving Josie. Under Clausen's treatment, having to focus on Ericka, after the fluidity of Josie, is like starting out on an exciting car trip and then suddenly developing engine trouble.

I guess Daddy will miss me. I don't want him to be mad. (129)

In Part II Clausen flips back and forth between Ericka's viewpoint and Josie's, but now making the transition from the child's necessary simplicity to Josie's lushness, I found myself having to fight for concentration.

Part III, "The Beggars", continues along the same vein as Part II, from the viewpoints of Ericka and Josie. It was at this point that I became aware of a role reversal, intended or not, between the two heroines. I also began to wonder if Clausen herself wasn't a bit lost, constantly posing questions she never answers, and admitting through Josie that she doesn't have the vaguest idea as to where she is headed. Daniel has not responded to Josie's "kidnapping" of Ericka with a change of heart as she had anticipated he might, and now she finds herself and Ericka both fugitives on the West Coast. They become sedentary as do the plot and the writing. Both Clausen and Josie seem desperate to avoid the situation they have created. That Clausen chooses to place Josie working with women in a doughnut shop is prophetic, for this subplot becomes no more than filler in the absence of more decisive action. The affinity of both main character and author for loss of confidence seems most apparent.

Ericka has a right to be concerned. I am playing it by ear. Faking it. And it sometimes does occur to me to wonder - for there's suddenly plenty of time for such reflection - whether I haven't simply made an

enormous fool of myself, committed a blunder so obvious it seems incredible. (236)

and so on and so forth . . . murky matters neither of us will acknowledge beneath our surface affection or surface snappishness. (243)

At this juncture, perhaps Clausen meant for the reader to comprehend the child's motivation now more than Josie's. Perhaps she also meant for the reader to lose confidence and trust in Josie. Whatever, I found myself pulling away from Josie and looking to Erica to move the plot ahead.

Part IV, "Afterwards", the epilogue is as far as I am concerned the most disappointing section of the book. Clausen writes herself into a corner and takes what I feel is a contrived way out. Grandma and Grandpa (Rhea's parents) are suddenly brought back into the picture when, in Part I, it was a logical alternative which was avoided. Suffice it to say that Josie is reduced to nothing more than a bumbler, rescued from the mess she has created by Ericka, who dreams of her mother and as a result calls her grandparents for help.

And that got me angry.

But the fact of the matter is I cared enough to get angry.

Despite my disappointment with *Sinking Stealing*, the images Clausen has created are as vivid as when I first read the book, and in that there is mastery. Jan Clausen is a writer to be followed and admired.

I...RIGOBERTA MENCHU: AN INDIAN WOMAN IN GUATEMALA. Edited and Introduced by Elisabeth Burgos-Debray Translated by Ann Wright. Verso Editions and NLB, London, 1984

First published as *Mi Llamo Rigoberta Menchu Y Así me Nació La Conciencia* by Editorial Argos Vergara, S.A., Barcelona, 1983
Editions Gallimard and Elisabeth Burgos, 1983

Harriet Malinowitz

What hurts Indians most is that our costumes are considered beautiful, but it's as if the person wearing it didn't exist.

—Rigoberta Menchu

We have always lived here: we have the right to go on living where we are happy and where we want to die. Only here can we feel whole; nowhere else would we ever feel complete and our pain would be eternal.

— Popol Vuh, Sacred Mayan Text

Our grandparents say of Coca-Cola: 'Never let your children drink this dreadful stuff because it is something which threatens our culture.' When they talk about the bread, they say: 'In the past, our ancestors grew wheat. Then the Spaniards came and mixed it with egg. It was a mixture, no longer what our ancestors ate. It was White Man's food, and white men are like their bread, they are not wholesome.

—Rigoberta Menchu

For several years I sold crafts made by Guatemalan refugees who had escaped their country's repression and were living in camps along Mexico's southern border. Guatemalan *huipiles* (traditional square-cut blouses), bags, belts, and other handicrafts are very popular internationally for their bright colors and amazingly intricate weaving. Thus, various relief groups were able to establish foreign markets for the artisans' projects which helped these communities in exile to survive.

I tried to make the sale of these crafts in New York as instructive as well as lucrative endeavor, and so I would show my customers photographs of the refugees who had painstakingly fashioned them. First came the pictures of women kneeling on dirt floors before their looms, as summer rains leaked between thatched roofs sparsely beamed, rickety walls. Then came photos of skeletal children with distended bellies, fathers carrying toddlers hooked to crudely fashioned intravenous units, mothers keening over dead infants, rows of wooden crosses over the gentle mounds of remote jungle graves.

The people would be moved by these images; often they would buy an extra belt and say, "What you're doing is very humane."

This remark was very disconcerting to me. Yet it wasn't very different from my own initial response to the Guatemalan refugee situation when I first encountered it, in Mexico in the summer of 1983. The "tempest tossed" of a country's genocidal war against its indigenous population were pouring into Mexico in unprecedented numbers. Many refugee families in flight survived for weeks only on tree bark. The greatest toll of mortality fell on those most vulnerable: the children. I can remember picking up a little girl, about three years old, who seemed glad to snuggle limply and wordlessly against me for hours at a time. Later I found out that she was seven, and had watched a death squad kill her mother.

This and countless others incidents and case histories like it produced much pain in myself and the other *gringos* I was spending time with. Attendant upon that pain came the desire to alleviate it — to "save the children." In fact, a number of humanitarian groups and organizations were attempting to do just that, by delivering truckloads of food and supplies to the camps.

Yet, even at that moment of intervening in crises such as the 1980's have brought to Central America, it seems important to distinguish what is *humanitarian* from what is *political*. Humanitarianism, is fueled by compassion: "You're in bad shape, I'm a good soul in a better position, I'll help you out; I'm inclined to give, and that will last until I'm inclined not to." The political, on the other hand, is fueled by identification: "There but for fortune go I." Political impulses arise out of a holistic sense of justice, an insistent need to set the world's hormones in order — so that as individuals we will benefit from being part of a larger, healthier organism.

Part of the problem, though, lies in identifying all the other parts of this organism which we inhabit. Dependent upon the media for information, we easily remain oblivious to a holocaust such as the one which has racked Guatemala since the 1970's, claiming the lives of thousands of men, women, and children. This is one reason why a remarkable book called *I... Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* is crucial reading for U.S. feminists. By scooping a complex and horrific reality out of obscurity (to us), the story inevitably opens up the boundaries of our political agenda once again.

Rigoberta Menchu is a Quiche Indian woman from northwestern Guatemala, a member of one of the largest of the 22 ethnic groups in the country, all of whom are descendants of the Maya. At the telling of this "as told to" story in 1982, she was 23 years old and had only spoken Spanish for three years. (The story is recorded, transcribed, edited and introduced by Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, a Venezuelan ethnographer living in Paris.) Her account, which is personal throughout, begins with detailed descriptions of her life and traditional practices in a Quiche village and carries us into the history and context of the guerrilla war which in 1986 continues to be fought. She delineates the process by which she, her family, and her community ex-

perience armed attacks by the Guatemalan military and come to understand the violence in a political way. Equally important is how they respond to it — at first in small, makeshift ways, and finally through the development of mass organizations and guerrilla armies.

Rigoberta Menchu's story reminds me in some ways of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*: each presents a culture functioning by its own rules (Achebe writes of Ibo culture in Nigeria), with an internal logic and harmony propelling its mechanisms. Then each culture is disrupted: Achebe's by the advent of the white missionaries who are the first taste of colonization, Menchu's by the government's military forces who represent the interest of the *ladino* landowners. Both interruptions herald the end of a way of life.* For Menchu, a childhood on the *Altiplano* (Guatemalan highlands) in a web of familial and community traditions was punctuated by long months of grueling work on the *fincas*, or plantations, along the fertile coast. Her whole family — parents and children — were forced to work there in order to survive their poverty:

My mother said that she was working down on the *finca* until a month before I was born. She had just twenty days to go when she went up to the mountains, and she gave birth to me all on her own. My father wasn't there because he had to work the month out on the *finca*. (5)

But the *finca*, while an alternative to clear and immediate starvation on the *Altiplano*, doesn't really offer an economic alternative:

I saw my two eldest brothers die from lack of food when we were down in the *fincas*. Most Indian families suffer from malnutrition. Most of them don't ever reach fifteen years old. When children are growing and don't get enough to eat, they're often ill, and this... well... it complicates the situation. (4)

Menchu's strong sense of connection to her community is defined in part by her parents' role in it. They were the village's "representatives" — elected leaders who are there not to rule over the people, but rather to "embody all the values handed down from our ancestors" — because "everything that is done today, is done in memory of those who have passed on" (17). Also:

The birth of a new member is very significant for the community, as it belongs to the community, not just to the parents... This child is the fruit of communal love. (8)

Menchu spends much time explaining birth, marriage, harvest, and other ceremonies, both because they are intrinsically important in Quiche culture, and because it is these as much as the physical lives of the people which are

* An important distinction, though, is that in the case of the Mayan Indians, the "way of life", in its pure sense, ended with the Spanish conquest in the 16th Century.

later violated. Many things in the natural world are sacred: seeds, water, the earth itself. Parts of this world which are not considered sacred are nevertheless respected, so that, for example, animals are not killed: "Our people eat maize, beans, and plants," says Menchu. "We can't eat ham or cheese, or things made with equipment, with machines... Our parents teach us to respect the earth" (56). There is also an identification of people with the source of subsistence: "We believe (and this has been passed down to us by our ancestors) that our people are made of maize" (57). Everything, she says, even that which is not perfect, is cherished as part of nature: "So an animal which didn't turn out right is part of nature, so is a harvest that didn't give a good yield" (6). Another "inconsistency" in nature which is accepted is homosexuality:

Our people don't differentiate between people who are homosexual and people who aren't; that only happens when we go out of our community. We don't have the rejection of homosexuality that the *ladinos* do; they really cannot stand it... It's a phenomenon which arrived with the foreigners. (60)

But the natural balance is inevitably upset when the villagers have to go down to the finca and live according to the values of the *ladinos* who are exploiting their labor at almost slave wages. The community is split up, and Indians find themselves suffering alongside Indians of other ethnic and linguistic groups, so that communication is not possible. Rigoberta at age five was responsible for watching her little brother while her mother worked:

I used to watch my mother, who often had the food ready at three o'clock in the morning for the workers who started work early, and at eleven she had the food for the midday meal ready. At seven in the evening she had to run around again making food for her group. In between times, she worked picking coffee to supplement what she earned. Watching her made me feel useless and weak because I couldn't do anything to help her except look after my brother. That's when my consciousness was born. (34)

A brother dies of intoxication when the coffee is sprayed with pesticide by plane while they work. When Rigoberta is fourteen, her best friend also dies of poisoning after the cotton field where they are working together is sprayed. Agonizing anxiety over the endless cycle of poverty, children, starvation, illness, work on the fincas, and more poverty makes Rigoberta resolve not to get married and have children. Instead, she decides to learn to speak Spanish, and to read and write. The best way to fight back is by appropriating the oppressor's own language; and it is, ironically, the tool that can linguistically unite the many Indian ethnic groups. At the same time, Rigoberta is faced with a classic dilemma of social transformers: fighting for the community means leaving it. Her father is afraid that if she learns she will not come back to the community, that she will be of no use to it. But she has many ideas about their lives that she needs to find a way to express. So she

goes off to be a maid in the house of a rich ladino family in the capital. There she is treated harshly, is underpaid, and suffers from the daily routine of hard work, racism, and loneliness.

Meanwhile, her father has begun to organize the *campesinos*, and winds up in prison. After many years of cultivating their land on the Altiplano, the *campesinos* have finally gotten it to yield harvests, and the ladino landowners quickly move to appropriate it. Rigoberta's father's appeal to the government's agrarian reform agency only casts the onus of subversion on him: "We didn't realize then that going to the Government authorities was the same as going to the landowners. They are the same" (105). The violence begins. In 1967 the Indians in the village are thrown out of their homes for the first time. Their few possessions are destroyed. Legal channels are closed to them because they can't speak Spanish and because legal decisions are based on *mordidas* (bribes). Rigoberta looks back at the first days of the resistance:

Who knows, perhaps if the community had been alone, we would have become *peones* and our land would now be part of a big *finca*. But my father would have none of it. He said 'Even if they kill us, we will do it.' Of course, in those days we didn't have enough political clarity to unite with others and protest about our land. What we did we did as an individual community. (106-107)

Her father is released, then kidnapped, tortured, imprisoned again. In prison and in the hospital he begins to connect with other Indians, to discover commonalities and the hope of common strategies in their lives. He and Rigoberta begin to consider their situation in broader perspective:

We began thinking, with the help of other friends, other *compañeros*, that our enemies were not only the landowners who lived near us, and above all not just the landowners who forced us to work and paid us little. It was not only now we were being killed; they had been killing us since we were children, through malnutrition, hunger, poverty. We started thinking about the roots of the problem and came to the conclusion that everything stemmed from the ownership of land. (116)

The Comité de Unidad Campesina (CUC) (United Peasant Committee) is formed: "It spread like fire among the peasants in Guatemala" (118). Rigoberta, with the beginnings of facility in Spanish, discovers that there are in fact poor ladinos who live in conditions not very different than those of the Indians, and the network widens. Various organizations come into existence: children's and youth groups, women's groups, catechists' groups — and plans are made for them all to learn Spanish. Rigoberta starts to move from community to community, from finca to finca, organizing the peasants.

But resistance meets with increased repression, and the situation escalates into a war between guerrillas and government forces. The people organize

rudimentary self-defense mechanisms, such as "traps" set in front of their doors (large ditches covered over which soldiers fall into if they try to enter a house), a security system involving every adult, child, and dog, and community education. As these are put into effect, Menchu relates episodes which made me simultaneously laugh and cry and which are in any case, deeply moving. As the community ensnares the first few soldiers in its traps, it is faced with meting out punishment for the crime. Essentially non-violent and holding all life in high esteem, the people ask these soldiers — who are sometimes Indians, lured into government service by mercenary or coercive methods — why they are not ashamed of their behavior. After engaging them in political dialogue and "criticism-self-criticism", lecturing and disarming them, the villagers release the soldiers to the prospect of more productive work in a more moral vein. While I was incredulous that they released their carefully captured prey (they did keep the weapons), I was impressed enough to believe that these soldiers, given a new lease on life and a perspective of which they had previously been ignorant, might very well choose a new path.

Finally, the attacks on the village represent greater and greater military might, and Menchu proceeds to describe the sorts of Nazi-like atrocities that occur, e.g. massacres, murders, rapes, and torture. The might of the peasants also increases. Menchu tells of a nineteen year old woman who kills a soldier and revels in her pride about being able to fight back: "I'm so happy. I don't want to die, I want to live again. I killed a soldier." (146)

But the grizzly violence of the landowners and the military becomes overwhelming. A friend of Rigoberta's, Donna Petrona Chona, is married and the mother of two. When she refuses to sleep with the landowner, he sends his bodyguard to hack her into pieces with a machete. Rigoberta's sixteen year old brother is tortured and burnt alive in front of his family and the community in one of the most horrifying scenes I have ever read:

My brother was tortured for more than sixteen days. They cut off his fingernails, they cut off his fingers, they cut off his skin, they burned parts of his skin. Many of the wounds, the first ones, swelled and were infected. He stayed alive. They shaved his head, left just the skin, and also they cut the skin off his head and pulled it down on either side and cut off the fleshy part of his face. My brother suffered tortures on every part of his body, but they took care not to damage the arteries or veins so that he would survive the tortures and not die. They gave him food so that he'd hold out and not die from his wounds. There were twenty men with him who had been tortured or were still undergoing torture. There was also a woman. They had raped her and then tortured her. (174)

He and others are paraded in front of the village, their fate a warning to all others who might try to resist. The event had actually been announced in a public bulletin, which said "that any who didn't go to witness the punishment were themselves accomplices of the guerrillas. That was how they threaten-

ed the people" (175). The rhetoric accompanying the brutality is not a far cry from McCarthyism or Reaganism. Menchu recalls the speech of a presiding officer:

If I remember right, he must have repeated the word communist a hundred times. He started off with the Soviet Union, Cuba, Nicaragua; he said that the same communists from the Soviet Union had moved on to Cuba and then Nicaragua and that now they were in Guatemala. And that those Cubans would die a death like that of these tortured people. Every time he paused in his speech, they forced the tortured up with kicks and blows from their weapons. (177)

This is not the last tragedy in Rigoberta's life. Her father dies in the infamous January 1980 massacre of the Spanish Embassy in Guatemala City, where unarmed revolutionary peasant leaders and others had gone to protest the murders and "disappearances" in El Quiche. Her mother becomes an active and widely respected organizer, and is ultimately kidnapped, raped, tortured, and killed. As the life of one member of her family after another is taken, Rigoberta slips further from engagement with any personal life, and the locus of her political drive widens. Finally, in hiding and hunted by the army, she leaves Guatemala. In the past several years Rigoberta has been speaking extensively abroad, but she has also slipped clandestinely back into Guatemala to be with the *compañeros* in the internal refugee camps. In her efforts to preserve her culture, she does not want to lose contact with it.

Rigoberta Menchu spent a week in Paris telling her story to Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, who reassembled the mass of material in her tape recorder and presented it for public consumption. The story is unique in that it is about a Quiche woman's life—in her own words, which reach our ears—and also a survivor's account of a genocide that continues as of this publication. Even in the U.S.-Central America solidarity movement today, the situation in Guatemala is most often subsumed by the more advanced or realized liberation struggles in El Salvador and Nicaragua. The media is silent on Guatemala, except to herald such "humanitarian advances" as the election of Vinicio Cerezo as president last December — the first civilian president, save one, since the CIA-sponsored coup 31 years ago. Cerezo's presidency will help the U.S. to justify putting the stamp on aid to Guatemala, but he is nevertheless beholden to, and largely passive before, the military forces which constitute the backbone of his office.

For U.S. feminists, Rigoberta Menchu's book takes the cover off a whole new chapter on what "violence against women" means. If rape is socially ingrained here, there it is institutionally mandated. Many of us here have our ethnic legacies of horror, and as such may be better equipped to read Menchu's words as a familiar handwriting on a different wall. In any case, whether we "feel" the affinity or not, we are not such distant relatives. While some 50,000 Indians from the remote Quiche area have been killed in the

last six years, the Reagan Administration is continuing to certify human rights improvements in Guatemala and compile many millions of dollars worth of aid packages.

I... Rigoberta Menchu: an Indian Woman in Guatemala is for anyone who hungers for more than a parochial, U.S.-centered feminism. It also implicitly suggests that a response on our part which is *solely* "humanitarian" misses the point, and will no more resolve Guatemala's problems than "Hands Across America" will end hunger and homelessness. It is most likely to force us to be more honest with ourselves, and to shed facile solutions as we confront what has been rendered partially to totally invisible. Far too often it's as if the world is looking at us through a one-way mirror. Rigoberta helps us to look back and see to the other side.

...Y OTRAS DESGRACIAS/AND OTHER MISFORTUNES by Luz María Umpierre-Herrera. Third Woman Press, 849 Ballantine Hall, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405. 1985. 67pp. \$4.95

Nancy Mandlove

When I was writing the introduction to Luz Maria Umpierre's new book of poems, *...Y otras desgracias/And Other Misfortunes*, in the summer of 1985, I wasn't certain I could do it. I took the manuscript with me to Boston, to the Virgin Islands, to Maine and finally home again to Pennsylvania—hoping to gain enough distance from the poems, from Luzma, from myself most of all, to be able to open the door to the power of this poetry. I have lived with these poems for two years and it is easier now. But make no mistake. This is not an easy book to read.

As the elliptical title implies, *...Y otras desgracias* is a continuation of Umpierre's previous work. These poems document "other misfortunes" here in "*el país de las maravillas*." Like her previous book, *En el país de las maravillas*, *...Y otras desgracias* exposes the racism, hypocrisy and cultural imperialism of North American society through many voices in one. *...Y otras desgracias*, however, shows us a deepening of the cracks in North American life, a widening of the gulf separating the poet — Puerto Rican, feminist, lesbian — from the dominant English speaking culture that surrounds her and shows us, as well, the deepening of the pain and isolation of the poet. The mocking laughter of Alice-Luz Maria as she wanders in "wonderland" becomes, with "other misfortunes," a kind of cosmic "carajada," an ironic roar echoing in empty space somewhere between everything and nothing.

Poetry, for Umpierre, is the instrument of creation and destruction on both the political and the personal levels. In the poem which begins the collection, "In Response," she rejects the traditional role of passive acceptance into which the *latina* has often been cast and says:

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.

Through humor and linguistic play in both Spanish and English, Umpierre reveals and revises nearly everything. Her first target is the astronaut, "a woman who no longer answers to her gender." "In her hundred dollar cardigan," she trips through the office, "hermetically tightening her thighs."

"Never to be seen / in pink or lavender," she is "the man in the moon who is a lady."

In a culture where one needs a stamp of approval for living, Umpierre is careful to renew her poetic license before turning the voices of authority against themselves. "License Renewal," satirizes "official" language and bureaucratic structures while, at the same time, opening the door to the more important theme of creation and destruction which continues throughout the volume. The poet is warned from the start:

Any failure to provide nymformation
any desire to conzeal
any, many, every
in whishever
will result in
denial, refusal, harassing
and the breaking of the point in your own pencil.

The humorous transformation of the language of authority here indicates serious consequences for the poet who conceals or reveals. Either way, it is a double bind. She is subject to harrassment and official censure for revealing or concealing: subject to personal and artistic annihilation for not revealing or concealing.

Poetic license in hand, Umpierre then creates her poems out of broken pieces of authoritarian discourse. Using fragments of language from fairy tales, the Bible, Freud, psychoanalysis, road signs and even fortune cookies, the poet exposes the roots of political oppression, social injustice and hypocrisy on many levels of life in the U.S. In "Cuento sin hadas", ("A Fairy-less Tale," [45]), the perfect cardboard couple disappears in an apocalyptic vision as their house falls down around them, despite their memberships in the Rotary Club and the Ladies Auxiliary. In "Sacrilégio?", (37) Umpierre satirizes the cult of the Virgin and virginity, while in, "El original" a woman is faced with eternity as a washerwoman if the laundry cannot remove the mysterious (and all too familiar) stain on her person.

Throughout the book, Umpierre destroys the voices of authority in order to generate new voices, voices less often heard: the voices of women, the poor, minorities. In a very gentle poem, "To a Beetle" she asks:

¿Quando podre dinamitar estas paredes?
¿Con cual de mis pequenas herramientas
saldre a cazar la raza que me atrapa?
(When will I be able to dynamite these walls?
With which of my small tools
will I go out to hunt the race that traps me? [49])

Poetry itself is the weapon. But, as the warning in "License Renewal" indicates, it cannot be wielded openly and honestly without a price. And Luzma Umpierre has paid that price. The theme of creation and destruction is cen-

tral, not only to the social and political dimensions of the book, but to the poetic and personal as well. As the poet creates the poem, she also creates herself. But the line between creation and destruction is very fine and sometimes the creation of the poem comes out of the destruction of the poet. "The Park beyond the Drive," a meditation on birth and death, fall and falling, is a poem precariously balanced on that line. Standing at the highest elevation on the Skyline Drive Virginia, the poet contemplates the plunge to the abyss (the park beyond the drive). The poet weaves together the autumn landscape, park signs and dictionary definitions of the word fall to produce an interior landscape of dangerous beauty. Again, on the edge, "between the equinox and solstice," everything and nothing, creation and destruction, Umpierre defies the voice of authority that urge us to caution in everything from driving to human rights and love.

Yes, I will defy the masculus
and marve, mervel, mirabilia
from my position on the steer
between the equinox and solstice. (21)

In the poem that ends both the English and Spanish sections of the book, "Creation," Umpierre makes her most powerful statement on the paradoxical relationship between creation and destruction, poetry and the poet. Like many of the poems in *...Y otras desgracias*, "Creation" fuses humor and tragedy to underline the warning issued in "License Renewal": that poetry is both essential and dangerous. She says:

In order not to write poems

 She would not buy paper
 even the toilette kind,
 she would abort boy and girl muses,
 save pens without ink.

But all efforts were...futile; (27)

The poet must write. The poet must reveal. The poet cannot conceal. And in so doing, she runs the risk of losing her balance on that fine line between creation and destruction.

for her to arrange not to write
she penetrated the sea
without leaving a trace or
she deposited her head
on a rack in the oven.
Oh!
in order; not to write (29)

Umpierre links herself and her poem to the tragic history of women's writing

— to Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. For the book begins with the same quotation from Kafka with which Sexton began *All My Pretty Ones*:

The books we need are the kind that act upon us like a misfortune, that make us suffer like the death of someone we love more than ourselves, that make us feel as though we were on the verge of suicide, or lost in a forest remote from all human habitation—a book should serve as the axe for the frozen sea within us.

... *Y otras desgracias* is a book we need. It is a book that will make us laugh and make us suffer — a book that will open the frozen sea within us as we reach for new ways of being.

GAPTOOTH GIRLFRIENDS: THE THIRD ACT

Third Act Press, P.O. Box 763, Adelphi Station, Brooklyn,
NY 11238, \$8.00, \$1.35 Postage & handling

Mosadi

Gaptooth Girlfriends was a changing group of writers and performers who participated in a series of workshops held in the fall for three years, "when our life stories are harvested with the autumn leaves," Alexis DeVeaux, Workshop Director, explains in the introduction to this volume. This third and last group of writers came together in the fall of 1982, calling themselves, Gaptooth Girlfriends: The Third Act, and set about the task of raising money to publish their anthology, the second produced from this writing workshop series.

According to DeVeaux's explanation in her introduction, Gaptooth Girlfriends workshop was established in 1980 so that, "women who write could have a community of other women/writers to belong to ... To explore writing as a catalyst for change ... In the rich textures of our colors. And to explore how we do it: how we construct the forms ... to excavate and personalize our lives as women."

The eight contributors to this volume, Mamie Louise Anderson, Lorraine Currelley, Fatima Dike, Melanie Dyer, Irma Gonzalez, Dorothy Randall Gray, Gwendolen Hardwick, and Sandye L. Wilson, who served as its editors and publishers, primarily use poetry as a construct to convey messages of personal visions and political realities. This is not surprising if the workshops encourage an exploration of the shared personal/cultural experiences of the writers, whom DeVeaux refers to as a "community of Africans," whether they be from the United States, Puerto Rico or the African continent.

Also, poetry is the most intimate and economical written form. An expression of life through art which is sometimes incorporated in daily acts and one which is often inspired by daily routine. This volume is also economical — 123 pages.

The contributors also use short stories, essays, and letters to show the varied dimensions of Black and Hispanic life. These writers explore, criticize, challenge, and rejoice in the ways people of color live and react to the diverse cultures, political systems, and personal circumstances in which we find ourselves.

The reader learns some essential information about the writers through the biographical profiles which serve to both introduce the individual writers and create a tone for that specific section of the book. The majority of the contributors have been active writers for a number of years. Three have recently begun to work at this artform.

The struggle to survive is a theme repeatedly raised by the writers. This most vividly struck me while I read the four poems offered by Fatima Dike, a South African poet and playwright. Most of her poetry chronicles the experiences of the racial oppression of Apartheid from the vantage of an eyewitness. Dike's poetic images evoke the televised nightmare flashes of government violence against the South African people of color one watches on newscasts.

In, "Freedom is Dead," she grimly conveys the despair of an imprisoned and tortured person languishing in solitary confinement and denied the most basic human rights, even the use of the toilet:

Standing on a brick
Two whole days and two nights full
Swaying from the weight
Of my bloated bladder
Suppressing the urge (45)

The two poems which follow, "Me" and "Untitled," also give harsh words to the struggles waged in Southern Africa by people trying to cope with the unmanageable and a government soaked in the weight of its peoples' blood. Dike's strong imagery and metaphor compel the reader to turn attention to a situation requiring immediate solutions. Yet, this is where I felt that the poems fell short. After capturing the reader's attention, she doesn't tell us what her characters or we might do about the problem. I wish that Dike had made some mention of the organized resistance to Apartheid, especially by the South African women. I long to feel *empowered* by her poems rather than merely informed about an intolerable situation.

All of the writers offer works about the survival of people whose humanity is threatened. Their characters, all habitues of the United States, with the exception of Dike's, cope with their devalued status as people of color by employing active and reactive mechanisms in the varied works.

Lorraine Currelley, for instance, includes poems about Black women exploited by a greedy society. In "Even Billie Sang About Strange Fruit," Currelley's blue women triumph when *they* choose what it is *they* want to give others:

and in their thirst to create life
she pulls up her dress
and they think she be teasing
come and get it
but she be serious
and while they be feasting
unknowingly she be
infiltrating their barren souls (35)

Melanie Dyer, a musician whose work is being published for the first time uses some of her eight poems to draw characterizations about survivalists in inhospitable environs. As the title of one of her poems, "Variation on Ur-

ban Madness," implies, the protagonist's response to, "the projection of a twisted reality" (59) that is his life, in a city housing project, is to go crazy.

"Stifia" is a short story about another level of city survival. Irma Gonzalez writes a sad tale about a 16-year Bronx girl who is angry at her hoodlum brothers' violence against her and angry at her slum surroundings. Later we learn that Stifia, like many of the powerless, has internalized her anger to the point of self-destructiveness.

How are our lives intertwined and how responsible are we for other people's lives are two of the questions Dorothy Randall Gray raises in her poem, "To Margie," which is about a young Black woman who stabs her two young sons. The poem sympathetically examines what may happen when a young, single mother has too many pressures. This young mother apparently bases her ability to survive on the death of her sons. Gray seems to make the point that all of us are culpable when such acts of desperation occur.

Gray gives us a more upbeat essay and an optimistic short story with "Southern Chronicle/Grandma Exia" and "Keeper of the Dreamseeds," respectively. "Grandma Exia" is an account of a 1982 visit with her grandmother in Georgia. During the visit, Gray realizes that one of the things that has been essential for her grandmother's survival is the "network/support system of extended family...(96)."

Gray's "Dreamseeds" is primarily a modern-day parable about good versus evil in which the dream of a nine-year-old Harlem boy becomes the reality of a better future for some Black people.

Gwendolen Hardwick's "I Wanted This to be a Love Poem" and "An Open Letter to June Jordan" share similarities of theme in that they speak of challenging personal and political dilemmas when the personal becomes political. In "Love Poem," Hardwick moves from a personal plea to her lover to discuss misunderstandings to worries about increased United States militarism and threats to world survival.

Her letter to June Jordan talks about things political by examining the connections between the poverty in the East Bronx where she works with what is happening in South Africa and other places of revolution. She asks Jordan:

But when will we, en masse, connect with the worldwide struggle?
And how do I make my art responsive to these questions and still live
my life?

The ultimate level of survival is the continuance of one's work after one is dead. Sandye L. Wilson writes about this kind of survival in "For Lorraine Hansberry," an essay which states:

Lorraine Hansberry's desire to live and love life as it was, was fervent...Her works exist now, as ageless, as rich. They exist in libraries, schools, closets, drawers and in hearts (118).

Love, erotic, unrequited, as a force for change, is another prevailing theme in the poetry and fiction in this anthology. Some of the poems are so texturally rich that they draw sentient reactions. Mamie Louise Anderson's short story, "Appearances," also evokes this kind of sensuality in parts. The story, with its underlying narcissism, is partially about a woman who meets her non-biological "twin" and has an epiphany about herself:

"There, in the fine frame of the stranger, I discover...the reasons why my daddy locked me in Saturday nights...(23)

The narrator also discovers that she sexually desires her twin and thinks:

Oh, what luxury! To tangle our long brown limbs. To share a juicy peach. Our skin a drum alive between colored thighs (23).

I would also like to point out the humor in Irma Gonzalez's "Where to Change for a 'B,' 'D,' or An 'F,'" and the musicality of Melanie Dyer's "A Poem for My Father." You can read this poem to a metronome or African drum, because the music jumps out as she presents the past, present, and her family's roots as one whole unit interwoven like her father's straw hat.

While I enjoyed reading this anthology, I wonder why there are no works that deal specifically with any issues concerning Lesbians of color. Perhaps Lesbian issues have been excluded because none of the contributors identifies herself as a Lesbian.

Issues which concern Lesbians of color, and Lesbians themselves, have provided the major impetus for the recent advent of anthologies, small presses, and self-publications. Some notable examples are *This Bridge Called My Back*, *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, *Conditions 5: The Black Woman's Issue*, and *Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press*. I was disappointed that *Gaptooth Girlfriends* didn't continue this current and long overdue recognition and validation of issues facing Lesbians of color — issues which are intermingled with the socioeconomic and political issues facing all people of color.

What is also curious about this collection is that out of 44 works, only six clearly speak about woman-bonding between friends, mothers and-daughters, grandmothers and granddaughters; and only 15 of the 44 pieces are primarily about women.

The works also don't incorporate any overt feminist perspectives, which I believe relates to the omission of any Lesbian theme. Barbara Smith analyzes the perception of feminists in the Black community in "Across the Kitchen Table: A Sister-to-Sister Dialogue" in *This Bridge Called My Back*. She says: "Feminists have been portrayed as nothing but 'Lesbians' to the Black community as well ... Most Black women think that to be a feminist you have to be a Lesbian. And if not that, then at least you have to deal with being around Lesbians (125)."

Self-liberation through the exploration of identity politics and writing

which proposes, as does this anthology, to “excavate and personalize our lives as women,” as DeVeaux states in the introduction, demands that as we come to terms with the many facets of our lives as people of color by examining our roots, our cultures, our religions, our native tongues, our native lands, our class, and color, we also examine our sexual choices and that of those for and about whom we write. One doesn’t have to be a Lesbian to raise Lesbian issues or to create a Lesbian character in a written work. Just as one doesn’t have to be a Black South African to raise the issue of Apartheid, for example.

Despite this personal disappointment with the book, to me the anthology makes some valuable contributions to the needed and growing list of books by and about the “African community” of women. The quality of the works also demonstrates that good writing and good community emanate from the Gaptooth Girlfriends workshops.

**CHAIN, CHAIN, CHANGE: FOR BLACK WOMEN
DEALING WITH PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL ABUSE**

by Evelyn C. White and

**MEJOR SOLA QUE MAL ACOMPAÑADA: FOR THE
LATINA IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP** by Myrna Z.
Zambrano.

The Seal Press. (New Leaf Series) 1985. 312p S. Washington,
Seattle, WA 98104

by *Beth Richie*

My choice to become involved and stay connected to the movement to end violence against women has centered around my experience that here, more than in other groups, there is a place for me. I am able to feel whole as a woman, as a person of color, as an organizer and as a community activist with feminist politics. During the past five years working in the battered women's movement I have witnessed progressive change towards the inclusion of the tremendous skills, diverse experiences and revolutionary perspective women of color have to offer.

The publication of *Chain, Chain, Change* and *Mejor Sola Que Mal Acompañada* is testimony to my belief. Evelyn C. White, former advocate for the Seattle City Attorney's Family Violence Project authored *Chain, Chain, Change* a book for Black women dealing with physical and emotional abuse. A counselor and advocate for Latina battered women, Myrna M. Zambrano wrote the bilingual *Mejor Sola Que Mal Acompañada* for Latinas in abusive relationships. The books are part of the New Life Series of Seal Press and essentially serve as companion manuals to each other and to Ginny N. NiCarthy's successful *Getting Free, A Handbook For Women in Abusive Relationships* published in 1982.

The intention of the series is to provide printed resources for women in violent relationships which may assist them in the process of breaking free from physical, emotional and economic abuse. The books are based upon a prevailing ideology of the battered women's movement; that by providing information to women and offering them an opportunity for self assessment and reflection, and by attributing responsibility for the violence to the perpetrators, women will be able to seek help. In so doing, battered women are able to begin breaking the chains of violence which restrict their lives, to realize that they are better off alone than in an abusive relationship. The styles of the books are in keeping with the self-help philosophy which has proven immensely successful in helping battered women help each other and themselves. *Getting Free* was the first book to incorporate the self help

philosophy into a text for battered women. Although the books vary considerably in length, they cover similar material in a comparable format. Each chapter is self contained and women can begin reading wherever seems most relevant to their situation.

All three books deal specifically with male abuse of women, although they recognize that violence is also an unfortunate part of other intimate relationships. Each author speaks directly to abused women; defining woman abuse, outlining the decision-making process, identifying barriers to reaching out for help, describing options available to battered women and concluding with a hopeful message about the possibilities of violence free lives. With the addition of these two books, the New Leaf Series has begun to address specific cultural considerations affecting battered women, and attempts to give meaning to the specific experiences which characterize the effects of violence on different groups of women.

One of the strengths of both *Chain, Chain, Change* and *Mejor Sola Que Mal Acompanada* is the clear, empowering message to Latina and Black women that permeates the contents. It is evident to readers that women are not responsible for the violence in their lives. Both books state very directly that women do not deserve to be abused, and violent men must be held accountable for their behavior.

As an abused woman, you need not be silent or feel ashamed about the violence in your life any longer. There are many people working to change the forces that make your partner feel he has the right to hit you, as well as to change a society that supports violence of all kinds. Being able to identify and understand (not accept) the physical, emotional, sexual abuse or destructive acts you suffer can help you feel less confused or responsible for your partner's behavior. It's not anything you've done, but rather sexist traditions and attitudes that perpetuate violence against women and children. (White 17)

In keeping with the experiences of battered women I have known, the books support the notion that unless serious legal or social sanctions are applied, or unless women flee, a violent man will not stop being abusive, regardless of how a woman may change her behavior. Perhaps the most valuable message to readers is that despite the limited ability that women have for changing violent men, women can help other women be safe. Abused women reading *Chain, Chain, Change* and *Mejor Sola Que Mal Acompanada* are left feeling that they are not alone; help, support and justice are available.

Although encouraging, the books do not create a false sense of hope. Instead, very realistic information is presented and, in my judgement, the readers are left with an accurate sense of what to expect from family, police officers, and other traditional helping institutions.

Although doctors and nurses work in a professional capacity they may still believe all those myths about battered women that blame the woman for the violence. They may not be sympathetic to your situa-

tion and not be especially sensitive to your emotional state. Moreover, hospital workers, including doctors, may not respect Latinos. They may treat you in an impolite, arrogant, rude manner, especially if it is an all-anglo hospital they may think you are lying, or that you are stupid because you do not speak English or speak with an accent. (Zambrano 175)

Another good example of this is that both White and Zambrano caution women about the very real possibility that battered women's shelters might be full when they call or that if they do leave home for a shelter they are entering into an unusual, often alien environment. The books contain glossaries to help women understand the terminology and process of the legal system, which, as noted by Zambrano, presents particular difficulties for undocumented women. These concrete, informational sections are among the most helpful to battered women, and are clearly one of the books' most outstanding features.

The writing style allows a great deal of information to be conveyed in a manner which is not overwhelming. In *Chain, Chain, Change*, White uses quotes from Black women who are abused while Zambrano devotes a chapter of *Mejor Sola Que Mal Acompañada* to the stories of six battered women. Both strategies which follow myths and facts about abuse, serve to shift the focus from an individual, isolated problem for a few women — a common feeling among battered women — to helping women understand that their problems are part of a larger system of patriarchal control and misogyny, reinforced by current and historical institutions in our society. This affirmation is strengthened by references to the relationship between economic oppression, institutionalized racism, cultural messages about the marginal roles of women in society, to the self hatred among men of color and abuse of Black and Latina women. I am impressed that the authors choose to include these discussions in their books, for, in my experience working with battered women of color and activists in communities of color, these issues are central. They represent obstacles to organizing within our communities, barriers to the involvement of women of color activists in the battered women's movement and life threatening limited access to services for battered women of color.

While I consider the previously discussed features strengths of both books, they also represent my primary concerns. History and experiences have taught me that by disclosing information about women of color and our communities means becoming seriously vulnerable. Over and over again information about our lives has been taken out of context, distorted, and ultimately used against us. My fear is that because the information and ideas about women of color are presented without a full discussion, we are left in an awkward and public position in the battered women's movement.

Instead, in books like *Chain, Chain, Change* and *Mejor Sola Que Mal Acompañada* as we raise questions, we must take responsibility for pro-

viding thorough information. Otherwise, we risk having questions answered for us. For example, when attempting to describe Black and Latina culture, the book failed to recognize the differences between different Latinos (e.g. Puertoriquenos, Chicanos, or Cubanos) and Blacks (North Americans, Caribbeans and Africans). My experience is that these differences matter a great deal and are minimized by not mentioning them. Readers need to understand the great diversity that we, as people of color, even of the same race, represent. Another example is that while White and Zambrano identified those historical considerations and societal factors which leave Latina and Black women in more vulnerable situations when they are abused, such as fewer support services and institutionalized racism, there was no attention given to how, on the other hand, history and culture have enhanced and strengthened family life, community supports, and survival skills.

A second limitation is that the books do not offer a different interpretation of understanding of violence against women of color. Neither author provides a definition of abuse in terms of the experiences of women of color. What they do offer are examples of abuse, which seem to be taken directly from other books, or at least do not reflect the experiences of women of color. I wanted the books to emphasize unique safety strategies which might be helpful to women of color; instead they present those same models which have been successful in white communities. While I acknowledge that there are similarities, my experience working with the Victims Intervention Project in East Harlem has taught me that there are differences which must be considered in order for our programs to be successful. As women of color activists and writers, it is critical that we push ourselves to analyze our experiences and design programs that are our own — incorporating our circumstances and our strengths into our work. If we do not take this approach, we risk “coloring up” existing programs rather than truly creating alternatives. There is a growing number of programs across the country for battered women of color. Arco Iris in rural Arkansas, Casa Julia de Burgos in Puerto Rico, B.I.H.A. Women in Action (Black, Indian, Hispanic and Asian Women In Action) in Minnesota and California Women of Color Against Domestic Violence provide a few examples. I regret that neither White nor Zambrano mention these programs; nor do they affirm the fact that our sisterhood leads women of color to help women of color.

Another troubling example of this reliance upon white models is the authors reliance upon the “cycle of violence theory,” developed by Lenore Walker in her book *Battered Women*. Though this theory has contributed greatly to our understanding of the abuse which women experience, the theory does not answer specific cultural questions about women of color. Neither White nor Zambrano attempt to put the theory into a cultural con-

text; in fact they do not even mention it's limitation as an anglo-oriented theory. My sense is that we must begin to more critically analyze ideas and struggle to refine theories so that we have a body of literature and theory that includes us. I believe that in some very important ways, the nature of violence inflicted upon women of color is different and that women of color experience violence differently, especially as we reach out for help. All of our work must self-consciously raise questions about the differences, and we must begin to develop a body of knowledge which answers these questions. For example, how is the impact of the system different for women of color? Or, does access to weapons differ for different cultural groups, and what does that mean for battered women? What, for example, is the difference between involvement of children of color in violence and involvement of white children? Similarly, it is important to explore the ways which theories such as "the battered women's syndrome" relate (or not relate) to the lives of women of color.

Instead of raising and attempting to respond to these and other questions, *Chain, Chain, Change* and *Mejor Sola Que Mal Acompanada* focus more on services for battered women than the need to strengthen the grassroots movement to end violence against women. While recognizing that their intention is to focus on self help, I kept waiting for mention of the need for organizing as an equally important strategy. The books, therefore, fall short of their potential. There were no calls to action, no suggestions about developing a collective response to the sexism and misogyny which is at the root of violence against women or those racist conditions which make it more difficult for women of color to get help. Perhaps these ideas should become the themes of future books about Black and Latina women. Certainly the popularity of these books support the need for books about other women of color (e.g. Native American Women, Asian Women, Refugee Women, etc.), as well as the need for books about other groups which the mainstream press has ignored. Readers should know that The Seal Press is publishing an anthology on battered lesbians, *Naming the Violence: Speaking Out About Lesbian Battering*, in the fall of 1986, which will begin to fill another serious gap in the literature on battered women.

When considered in the context of available literature about and for battered women, the importance of *Chain, Chain, Change* and *Mejor Sola Que Mal Acompanada* extend beyond their respective strengths and limitations. The mere existence of these two books symbolize progress. That Seal Press chose to publish them speaks to a new political consciousness; the inclusion and respect for cultural differences. The authors have joined the growing presence of women of color who have attempted to document the lives and struggles of women of color and to push the rest of the world to give us our space. These resources, despite shortcomings, will enrich the battered women's movement, for they are the first resources which address the

special issues confronting Black and Latina abused women in our communities.

Chain, Chain, Change and *Mejor Sola Que Mal Acompanada* must be considered important beginnings rather than end products. Now activists must find a way to fit the books into an overall organizing agenda for women of color. They must be made available to battered Black and Latina women and must be used to modify all services for inclusiveness and respect of the experiences of women of color. Additional volumes must be produced to be sure that the growing body of literature on domestic violence reflects the diversity of our movement. We must find the courage to raise the hard questions and the resources to allow us the time and space to develop answers to these questions. In so doing, we will take these books and use them to open up the possibilities for changing the oppressive conditions which limit our lives.

THE LAND OF LOOK BEHIND: Prose and Poetry by Michelle Cliff. Firebrand Books, Ithica, New York, 14850. 119 pp. \$6.95.

Sabrina

Michelle Cliff's most recent work is a journey of discovery, a road she has been on for some time now. In this work she truly begins to discover who she is by untangling the multitude of threads which bound her to a past older than her own, and to an identity and sense of self created by the needs of others. As she attempts to describe and come to grips with the black woman inside her white skin, who she is and where she came from, she takes you back to the place where it all began:

Then: It was never a question of passing. It was a question of hiding.
Behind Black and white perceptions of who we
were—who they thought we were...
I hid from my real sources
But my real sources were also hidden from me. (71)

The work does not unfold smoothly as she weaves her tale in both poetry and prose, sometimes an unpolished joining of the two styles. None the less, we are able to go with her as she uncovers the ideas and actions which denied her herself, and forced her to be accomplice to an order of things without full choice or knowledge:

I am twenty-two and sitting in my mother's kitchen. She is about to inform me "officially."... 'No one wanted to be colored. My cousin was fired from her job in a department store when they found out she was passing. I stopped seeing her because your father was always teasing me about my colored cousin. Things are different now. You're lucky you look the way you do... Anyone says anything to you, tell them your father's white.' (44)

The silence into which she was drawn became a part of her, a thing unto itself to be perpetuated.

Early on I worried about children.
Tales of throwback were common. Tell-tale
hair thick noses and heavy mouths—you
could be given away so easily. Better
remain unbred. (41)

Yet the process is not complete until it goes further into self-hate, perhaps self-destruction.

Pressed into service, moved into the great house
early on
Daughters of the masters/whores of the masters
At one with the great house

XARQUE AND OTHER POEMS by Gayl Jones Lotus Press. P.O. Box 21607, Detroit, MI 48221, (313) 861-1280. 1985. 70 pp \$6.00

THE HERMIT-WOMAN POEMS by Gayl Jones Lotus Press. 1983. 75 pp \$4.00

SONG FOR ANNINHO by Gayl Jones Lotus Press. 1981. 88 pp \$4.50

Sandra D. Shattuck

Zibatra rubs the back of my neck,
rubs my shoulders, and my empty bosom.
She talks of the struggles between
desire and fear.

"What is your relationship to the universe,
and to me?"

She gives me fruit dipped in honey.

She rubs my body in oil.

The mosquitos are getting blood. (*Song for Anninho*, 12-13)

"Cept we dif'rent. We *little* girls. When you git titties you ain't supposed to let a girl do it. That mean you queer. I ain't goin' be queer."

"The Women," *White Rat*¹

As different as these two passages may seem, they nevertheless both come from the creative imagination of Gayl Jones. It is unfair to snatch out lines from any writer's work, but I wanted to indicate the difficulty of talking about and reading Gayl Jones. She is a painful writer. Her novels, *Corregidora* (1975) and *Eva's Man* (1976) and her short stories *White Rat* (1977) searingly depict the sexual oppression of Black women. She is a contradictory writer. Both novels and several of the short stories have women as the central figures around and through whom Jones' fictional presentation and analysis of sexual oppression takes place. However these works are also homophobic in that lesbian characters are frozen into caricatures, and relationships between women as peers are filled with distrust and jealousy. Gayle Jones is also a writer who is being silenced. *Corregidora*, *Eva's Man* and *White Rat*, published by Random House, are all out of print;² and there is no guarantee that these books sit on public or university library shelves. Books that make us uncomfortable, and that is precisely what Gayl Jones' books do, can be silenced not only by keeping them out of print but also through *malign* neglect. This means that they just don't get talked about or written about in classrooms, in journals, at conferences, or in the book review sections of mainstream commercial publications.

It is against this silencing that Lotus Press gives us Gayl Jones' more recent work in the form of three books of poetry. Those of us who followed Jones'

work impatiently awaited the publication of a third novel to be entitled either *Almeyda* or *Palmares*, which was to be about relationships during slavery in seventeenth century Brazil. However, Jones has never been one to fix her works into one particular genre. Her experimentation with form is clear as she speaks in an interview with Claudia Tate about the different versions of *Eva's Man*: "It was a kind of lyrical novel, then it was a short 'dramatic' story, then it was the *Eva's Man* as it is printed in the Random House edition."³ It should have therefore come as no surprise that the expected novel *Palmares* or *Alymeda* became an epic poem published as *Song for Anninho*. It is sung in Alymeda's voice, an escaped slave who survives the destruction of Palmares, the most famous of the "quilombos" (runaway-slave settlements); the poem is signed "Almeyda, Barriga Mountains, 1697" (88). It opens with Almeyda in the healing hands of Zibatra, "the wizard woman" (10) who tends to Almeyda's "empty bosom" (12). In the final destruction of Palmares, a Portuguese soldier chopped off Almeyda's breasts. It is through Zibatra's healing that Almeyda journeys in memory towards Anninho, her male lover in Palmares.

"Xarque" (pronounced "shar-kay"), the title poem of Jones' most recent collection, is a chronological continuation of the epic poem "Song for Anninho" in that it is narrated by Almeyda's granddaughter, Euclida, and is signed "Recife, Brasil 1741" (51). Euclida is a one-handed woman who works in a xarque factory. Xarque is beef jerky, dried or salted beef, "often an important part of the slave diet."⁴ Euclida sings of her "warrior grandmother" (7) and both her mother, Bonifacia, who cooks for the owner of the xarque factory, and their friend, Tirana, an "exotic woman" (19) who "boasts of never/having been a slave to a white person" (18), have voices in her narrative. Although "Xarque" is a chronological continuation of "Song for Anninho," I find that the style and effect are quite different, for reasons I shall discuss later. Unlike *Song for Anninho*, which consists of the one epic prose poem, *Xarque* contains the title poem as well as three other poems ("Composition with Guitar and Apples," "Waiting for the Miracle," and "Marla"), which are not overtly connected with "Xarque" or to each other.

The Hermit-Woman is a strong collection of poetry. Three of the six poems ("The Hermit-Woman," "Wild Figs and Secret Places" and "The Machete Woman") feature imposing powerful women figures, *curandeiras* (healers) and women sorcerers. "Fiction Study," the third poem of the collection is a lyrical encapsulation of Jones' process of writing; you can hear her think her writing. She combines seemingly disjointed dialogue with script-like directions for her own writing. Echoes of all of Jones' women came through in these lines:

I'm trying to remember
a dream once
I had in New Orleans.

Sense of hysteria and threat.
Relate sexual to historical.
Her past before she met him.
Not easily seen.
Trying to remember a dream once.
Four concurrent time periods.
Sometimes she's normal.
When she's crazy,
time speeds up for her.
When she's sane,
she can't remember herself
running,
Identify the problem.
A wayward woman.
How do you make the fiction
interesting?
The woman an intriguing character?
Extraordinary yet ordinary. (18)

"Ensinanca," the only poem in all three books in a man's voice, is about an engineer in Rio who has refused his calling as *curandeiro*. "Stranger," like "Marla" of *Xarque*, is a heterosexual love poem.

There are certainly many strands of continuation as well as change that run through Jones' work of the 80's and that of the 70's. Perhaps the most apparent is her increasing use of Brazil, particularly slavery in Brazil, as locale and generative ground for her characters and creative imagination. This was so obvious that it didn't clearly occur to me that it might be important, until I tried and was unable to name other Afro-American authors who used Brazil in their work. Marshall, Cade Bambara, Lorde, Morrison all use the Caribbean and Africa, both because of their own personal histories and because of a conscious investigation into the linkage of diaspora cultures, religions, images and inspirations. Brazil is not a new topic or motif for Jones; it already exists in her first novel, *Corregidora*, Jones, who has never been to Brazil, mentions in one interview while speaking of *Corregidora*, that her interest comes from extensive reading on slavery in Brazil.

With Lotus Press' publications of Jones' most recent three books, I think that Jones must now be looked at also in context with Latin American and Caribbean writers; this is not only because of her use of Brazil, but also because of her fictional style. She, like many other Caribbean and Latin American writers, is engaged with the breaking through of traditional literary genres; this has to do with trying to get language to say that for which there seems to be no vocabulary. It has to do with putting oral traditions and patterns to print, with an ongoing investigation into and conversation with history, particularly with those histories that do not get told or heard.

Palmares, and more particularly the Zumbi Sueca, the last king of Palmares, are powerful images in Afro-Brazilian literature. By having the heroic king Zumbi as a marginal figure in *Song for Anninho* and by having the story of Palmares told by a woman and through the perspective of a love

story, Jones is criticizing that tradition that says history and literature are the stories of kings, heroes and wars written by men. Nevertheless, it is precisely at this point that Jones could use a feminist approach. She does indeed, as she writes in "Song," "translate the past into a/lover's language (15)," but it is a language that feels claustrophobic to me precisely because it is frozen into traditional heterosexual notions of romantic love, even though that love is situated within slavery and Jones is clear about how that affects relationships (i.e. - the difficulty to be tender in such a time, the impossibility of choice.)

And if I sang you a love song now,
Anninho, it would be the kind that would
hurt your ears. It would set your ears
to bleeding. I would have to change my voice.
I would have to make a new voice,
And it would be a difficult voice.
It would not be romantic.
It would be full of desire without
possibility. It would not be like
the old songs, Anninho. It would be
like none of the old songs. (66)

In "Song" the couple is isolated from the group and thus given privilege over it, and Almeyda's new and "difficult voice" (66) is still that of a lone woman, very much in the tradition of Ursa (*Corregidora*) and Eva (*Eva's Man*). Although none of the three books of poetry contains the overt homophobic language and characterization that can be found in *Corregidora*, *Eva's Man* and *White Rat*, in "Song," Jones's powerful literary vision into sexual/historical connections is nevertheless confined by her inability to create a language of images in which the strength that comes between and among women has a voice.

I believe that one change in Jones' writing of the 70's and that of the 80's is an increasing tension against the claustrophobia of a language that deals almost solely with sexual oppression, a tension that has to do with her increasing use of Myth and religion based in Afro-Brazilian traditions. Jones' use of myth is clear in her last novel, *Eva's Man*, where she constantly plays with images of Medusa, the Queen Bee, and Eve. Here the interplay of images of mythic women and the sexual education of the women in the novel creates a frightening vision. June Jordan calls the novel an "experimental, gruesome narrative."⁵ and Jones herself calls it a "horror story."⁶ As a novel, *Eva's Man* is one of a kind and deserves more attention.

In Jones' new books, I see these powerful but destructive images of women becoming the powerful, critical and healing *macumbeiras*, witch-women, and women sorcerers. They are still lone women, but they point to possibilities that I don't see in Jones' earlier work. Zibatra, the witch-woman in *Song for Anninho*, is the first of these. She speaks in Tupi, (a native South American language), Portuguese, and a language that Almeyda does not

understand, perhaps an African language. She is thus an amalgam of all the layers of culture and genocide that make up the Americas.

'I am Zibatra,' she tells me,
'a mystic and biblical scholar.
I'm an enchantress and a mixer of herbs.
. . .
I know places where the visible
and the invisible meet,
where the human and the divine come together.
I have seen what an ordinary human woman
does not see and know.
I have seen with a third eye,
and a fourth one, and yet another.
I have spoken in tongues, and beyond language.'" (13-14)

What I find interesting is that in the poem, "Xarque," the roles of enchantress, healer, sorcerer, visionary are spread among the different women. And although the "love" stories of Bonifacia and Euclida's father, and of Euclida and the fisherman Feijo are part of the prose poem, those stories are nevertheless by no means the central lens through which we read the women's voices. It is in "Xarque" that Jones for the first time names a Yoruba deity; Euclida refers to herself once as the goddess Yemanja. The grandmothers, who in *Corregidora* can only tell Ursa and her mother the story of their rape and incest in slavery in Brazil and enjoin Ursa to "make generations" so that the story can continue to be told, have become warrior women. Almeyda says, "I am the granddaughter of an African" (17), and Euclida says, "I dream of wild figs/and my warrior grandmother" (7). Euclida speaks to Chui, a warrior woman from Dahomey, who escapes from slavery twice. "Xarque" has a very different feel from "Song." The claustrophobia is broken through by the voices of the many different women we hear speaking to each other.

Both "Song for Anninho" and "Xarque" are very readable prose poems, in that one can hear them being spoken. Perhaps it is that quality of an oral telling of history that makes me want to call them epic poems.

These warrior women and healing-sorcerers are powerful characters in the *Hermit-Woman*. "Wild Figs and Secret Places," the longest poem in the collection, is my favorite piece of all the work in the three books. It is the meeting between a sorcerer hermit-woman, cast out from her own community because of her powers, and a Spanish or Portuguese mapmaker forced to do his job by a captain who destroyed the boat on which his crew came over. This encounter, spoken in this powerful unnamed woman's voice with italicized passages to denote the thoughts of the mapmaker (this is a trademark of Jones' fiction), shakes with the space between them that is not yet genocide, not yet slavery. There is more: the unnamed woman sees through the man to his home in Europe, where the Inquisition is torturing women for being witches. "I see what in your country/is done to such

women/as me./I see them brought before judges./I see indecencies" (31).
The language here flies, gut-wrenching in some of the images, painfully
humor-edged in others.

Memory is a mosquito
pregnant again
and out for blood (20)

There are parts of the map
I will not show.
There are secret places I will
always keep secret.
I will eat the tips of my fingers
to keep them unknown and
unvisited (24)

'Are you a priest or soldier?' I ask.
'I am neither priest nor a soldier.'
you say.
'I'm a mapmaker. A cosmographer.'

I ask you if you can travel
in all directions
at one time.

You say that is an impossibility (26-7).

Before closing this review, I must talk about some other words by Gayl Jones. Although the homophobic language and characterizations in Jones' early works are there for all to read, it is nevertheless a shock to read such a painful sentence as, "The homosexual perverts are not the standard, but the deviants." These are Jones' words on page four of a "Post Script, 'An Acquaintance of Bob Higgins,'" dated Feb. 1, 1985 and contained in a sixty-four page single-spaced typed collection of letters and documents. As of May 24, 1985, the date of the "Introductory Letter" of the package, Jones had been married to Bob Higgins for eight years. (*Song for Anninho* is dedicated to him.) Jones sent this package to various groups and individuals to explain, "my leaving the United States, renouncing my citizenship and cursing the country." This document was made available at the Black Woman Writer and the Diaspora conference held in East Lansing, Michigan in October, 1985. This conference was ground-breaking and exhilarating and proved to be a much needed and appreciated place for networking and information sharing. It was at this conference I was able to buy Jones' new books and there that I heard rumors she had left the country. The rumors, and worse, were soon confirmed in the document.

Anyone who lived in Ann Arbor, where Jones worked as a tenured professor in the University of Michigan English Department, must have heard plenty about the Bob Higgins incident. He himself relates this incident in the package in a piece called, "The Same Issue: The Right of a Black To Defend

Himself Against a White Mob,” dated Jan. 25, 1985. Briefly, he joined “Christian counter-demonstrators” at a gay and lesbian demonstration on June 25, 1985. He left to do errands, returned by the demonstration and left his car to help the Christians who were being attacked by “militant lesbians,” one of whom Higgins punched several times. Higgins says he was attacked by “a white mob,” went to the police and after not getting help, went out and bought a shotgun and returned to the demonstration. He was arrested in his car. Higgins and Jones left the country because even if Higgins had won his trial on the assault charge, he would still have been convicted of carrying a concealed weapon, which would have meant a two year jail sentence.

The document is painful to read because it is filled with so much hate, and because it is a shuddering presentiment of a descent into that insane hatred. The style is so uniform, that I wonder if Jones actually wrote the pieces attributed to her or only signed her name. In any event, her acceptance of Higgins’ virulent homophobia and racism was enough for her to renounce her citizenship and leave the country with him.

There is no such thing as a separation of politics and art, and so it is impossible to read Jones’ “fiction” without hearing the words of her “non-fiction.” Nevertheless, Gayl Jones is still a writer in danger of being silenced. It is out of this urgency that I write about her work. She has taught me much about the intersections of language, sex, history, memory, slavery, about how to tell stories that don’t get told, about how to say things that have no words. I am thankful to Lotus Press for these publications. The only way to talk about the pain Gayl Jones evokes, the contradictions and the craft is to read her and share her words. Lotus Press has helped us to do just that.

NOTES

¹ Gayl Jones, *White Rat* (New York: Random House, 1977) 41.

² This bleak situation has changed a bit. Cheryl Clarke has told me of a reissue of *Corregidora*.

³ Claudia C. Tate, “An Interview with Gayl Jones,” *Black American Literature Forum* 13.4 (1979): 142-48

⁴ Most of my historical information I’ve gotten from Robert Edgar Conrad’s *Children of God’s Fire: A Documentary History of Black Slavery In Brazil*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

⁵ June Jordan. “All about Eva.” Rev. of *Eva’s Man*, by Gayl Jones. *The New York Times Book Review* 16 May 1976: 36

⁶ Michael Harper, “Gayl Jones: an Interview,” *The Massachusetts Review* 18.4 (1977): 701.

FAMILY TIES by Clarice Lispector

University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas. 1984. 156pp.

Ana E. Sisnett

As I prepared to write this essay, I felt that some background information would be in order. Clarice Lispector's collection of short stories, *Family Ties*, is neither new nor published by a small press, nor is it written by a lesser known writer. In fact, Clarice Lispector is one of Brazil's best known writers. There has been substantial critical attention given to her work and her novels have been translated into Spanish, French, German as well as English.¹ Although several of her short stories from other collections have been translated and published separately, *Family Ties* remains her only collection of short stories available in English. Works by lesser known Brazilian women writers are even less available to us in English. So there is a challenge implicit in this essay — that we all make a concerted effort to learn at least one other language, in this case Portuguese, so that we can continue to strengthen ties with even more women of the world. In addition, translations, no matter how great, do not always convey the "feel" of the original — not to mention the damage a poor translation can do. Although I use Giovanni Pontiero's translation, I admit that I feel more pulled into the Portuguese original. At any rate, this does not diminish the strange pleasure I derive from Lispector's works and that is what I hope to share, especially with readers who have never read Brazilian women writers.

Clarice Lispector was born in the Ukraine on December 10, 1925. Two months later her family moved to Brazil. From her early childhood, Lispector had an interest in publishing. A voracious reader and prolific writer, by her teens she had tried her hand at short stories and plays. In 1944, soon after marriage to a fellow student and graduation from law school, Lispector published her first novel, *Perto do Coração Selvagem* (*Close to the Savage Heart*). Her writing continued throughout the years spent abroad with her diplomat husband through motherhood and eventual separation from her husband. She returned to Brazil in 1960, soon after her separation and, following the publication of *Family Ties*, she launched what was to be the most prolific period in her life as a writer. She included children's literature, *crônicas* (essays), and experimental pieces that defy strict categorization along with more novels and short stories. She died of cancer on December 9, 1977.

Lispector's works have traditionally been compared to those of Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and the existentialists, Sartre and Camus. She had particular interest in Katherine Mansfield, the English writer whose works Lispector

stumbled upon as a young woman. Though much has been done to place her works within the context of the male-dominated Latin American and European literary and philosophical traditions, happily, they are receiving feminist re-readings.² Attention from feminist critics place her among the pioneers of the tradition of women's writing in Brazil.³ Feminist perspectives, unlike traditional criticism of Lispector's works, call attention to the unique style and language of her predominantly woman-centered writing through which she reveals acutely perceptive examinations of her own role as a writer, as well as women's traditional socially imposed roles.⁴

The thirteen short stories of the *Family Ties* collection are a disturbing study of epiphanic episodes experienced in moments of intensive revelation. More often than not, the reader is left wondering what the stories were actually about! These troublesome accounts scream "unnameable" from the written page to be given names wherever they touch the reader's experiences. She urges us, as readers, to see ourselves reflected in some way in her works, and perhaps more importantly to respond to life fully with both mind and body. The language and structure of these stories skillfully provoke "sweet nausea," a kind of unnerving, sick feeling combined with the discovery of innermost feelings. The collection is a dense world of animal-like humans, human-like animals, gardens (public and private), awakening emotions, tenuous family ties and shattered routines. In almost all of the stories, the trappings of middle-class life are questioned during almost violent breaks in daily routine. The immediate catalysts for the recognition of life's absurdities are usually commonplace objects or situations and objects of desire that take on strange added significance: "and everything was done in such a manner that each day should smoothly succeed the previous one. And a blind man chewing gum was destroying all this" (42). Specific geographic locations are Rio and Brazilian springtime is a recurrent season; space and time are best seen in terms of their function in the epiphanic episodes themselves. Three of the stories have male central characters, while the remaining ten concern women; one implicitly woman-centered story has a chicken as the central character.

Animals play a significant role in Lispector's works. Their unreflexive, unencumbered lives contrast sharply with the overburdened existence of their human counterparts. Animals convey the powerlessness of the inability to reflect on one's own condition. The dead dog in "The Crime of the Professor of Mathematics" mirrors the absurdity of the professor's "rational existence" as well as his desire to "bury" his guilt rather than face it directly. "The Buffalo" and other animals in a zoo unwittingly help a woman in search of the meaning and power of hate. Of the animal stories, "The Chicken" is the "easiest" to read. Don't be fooled by its apparent simplicity, however. Imagine life as a chicken in that "dangerous" place known as the kitchen, having to literally run for her life, then gaining a reprieve by laying an egg

mistakenly thought of as a sign of love — all the while never knowing when she'll really become Sunday lunch. Though she becomes "queen of the household," she lives within her own apathy and fear and less frequently realizes that "had females been given the power to crow, she would not have crowed but would have felt much happier" (52).

In one story, "Mystery on São Cristóvão," a young girl comes face to face with three intruders masquerading as animals. The rooster, bull, and demon masks strike fear in the girl but leave her physically unharmed. Yet: "It was a dangerous moment for the four images" (136). In "Preciousness," the other story about an adolescent woman's awakening sexuality, sexual awareness is not dangerous in itself but it includes the recognition of potential danger once the men in her world also come to recognize her as a sexual being. The other story of adolescence, "The Beginnings of a Fortune," centers on a boy whose rite of passage is signaled by the real and imagined demands of his social life, and more importantly, the recognition of the power of money.

In addition to "The Crime of the Mathematics Professor," and, "The Beginnings of a Fortune," "The Dinner" also has male protagonists. Though these stories have received much critical attention, for me, they were the least satisfying, especially when contrasted with the range and depth of the emotions expressed in the woman-centered stories.

Women imprisoned by the "wealth of routine" receive the most forceful treatment in *Family Ties*. "The Daydreams of a Drunk Woman," "Love," and "Family Ties" reveal martial strain, alienation from the traditional roles of motherhood, in marriage and love. If only for a moment, the desire to break free motivates these women to use any means enabling them to handle the violence of the rupture in domestic tranquility. Witness the rebellious matriarch of "Happy Birthday" as she is held "hostage" by her family as they dutifully celebrate her 89th birthday:

How could she who had been so strong, have been able to give birth to those weak creatures with their limp arms and anxious faces. . . . She looked at them with senile scorn. They looked like a nest of jostling rats, and this was her family. Irrepressible, she turned her head away and, with unsuspecting force, she spat on the floor. (80)

She is the sad future of trapped housewives.

Of the "housewife" stories, however, "The Imitation of the Rose" is my favorite. This one addresses the fragile existence of a woman whose religious education, friends, husband, doctor, and society in general, all function in opposition to her development. Laura, the protagonist, has recently returned home from an institution and is in the process of re-acquainting herself with her domestic world. The act of giving a bouquet of roses to a friend triggers a tormented contemplation of her friendship, the roses, their beauty and her right to possess them. Laura's "choices" are to

be a perfect wife or to retreat to that place within herself, outside of space and time where no one can touch her. To be "well" is defined by negation:

No longer to feel that alert lack of fatigue. No longer to feel that point — empty, aroused and hideously exhilarating within oneself. No longer to feel that terrible independence. No longer that monstrous and simple facility of not sleeping — neither by day nor by night — which in her discretion had suddenly made her superhuman by comparison with her tired and perplexed husband. (57)

I find this story even more fascinating in Portuguese; the spiraling effect of Laura's ramblings are more evident. In the "housewife" stories, then, mothers, husbands, children, all are equally suspect especially if they stand in the way of the satisfaction of the women's innermost longings.

"The Smallest Woman in the World" is the most problematic form because it is racially charged and for that reason, among others, it is radically different than the other short stories. Here, Lispector as author, is in an ambiguous position as critic/accomplice of racist ideology that holds Africa to be the land of cannibals and pygmies, the reserve of primitive freedom from the ills of Western society — "the end of the line" (89). In the heart of equatorial Africa, Marcel Pretre, French "hunter and man of the world" (83), Great White Father, as it were, stumbles across "the smallest woman in the world." She is a pregnant pygmy tree dweller measuring about a foot and a half (her people are the smallest in the world and she is the smallest of them all). The explorer (*explorador* in Portuguese can mean either "explorer" or "exploiter") has her full-size photograph published in the color supplement (obvious pun) of the Sunday paper — "As black as a monkey," (89) he informs the newspapers. In homes far from the lush vegetation and precarious existence in Africa, readers react to the photo with fear, "perverse tenderness," memories of the grotesque, and blatant racism: "Just imagine her waiting table here in the house. And with her swollen little belly" (90-93). Back in Africa, the Frenchman names the tiny woman "Little Flower" out of his need to "give a name to what exists" (89). He moves from the initial "delicacy of feeling" (90) to discomfort when Little Flower "scratches herself where one never scratches oneself" (90). Trapped in his own historical position as white male intruder he is unable to accept the emotions he witnesses in Little Flower, for example the warmth of feeling her child stirs within her. She is capable of feeling love for that "yellow explorer" (94); she adores his boots and his ring: "It is that the unique thing itself felt her breast warm with that which might be called love. . . . one can even say her 'deep love,' because without the other resources she was reduced to depth... (94)." Marcel Pretre, meanwhile, goes from being yellow to a "greenish pink hue, like a lime in the morning light. He must be sour (95)." Lispector is at her "nauseating" best with her use of the language and her imagery of racism,

the point of view of the outsider, and critic of racism not only in Brazil but everywhere. The story's fable tone ironically speaks more directly to the history of slavery and exploitation of Africa though the critical stance is simultaneously less evident in the initial readings. The story is set in Africa (not the streets of Rio) and the animal-like Black woman stands in direct contrast to the other heroines: "Her nose was flat, her face black, her eyes deep-set, and her feet splayed. She looked just like a dog (90)." Africa and Africans are all too often convenient devices used to mirror the ugliness in humanity and this hits too close to home to sit entirely well with me. The ambiguities of the language and imagery overshadow the critical stance.

And yet, although Little Flower and her people are stereotypes like no others in the collection — black, child-like, tree-dwellers, primitive, 'natural,' unbound by social convention — these are all positive attributes here as in all of Lispector's fiction. Lispector never offers clear answers. She submerges herself fearlessly and consciously through her writing into the complexities of racial/sexual politics, exposing their ugly aspects; all this in search of the beauty and love that must emerge against all odds. The ideal Lispector woman, problematically characterized by Little Flower in this story, stands before a threatening world, totally naked, silent and smiling in her child/animal-like sensuality (able to "scratch herself") — having nothing to lose and everything to offer. Within the context of Lispector's fiction, the least is the most — capable of disarming those who would tower over her:

Little Flower blinked with love and smiled, warm, small, pregnant and warm.

The explorer tried to smile back at her, without knowing to which charm he was replying, and then became disturbed as only a grown man becomes disturbed... It was probably upon adjusting his symbolic helmet that the explorer called himself to order...(95)

While I am not convinced that the racial language and the imagery of this story can ever be fully disentangled from the other philosophical concerns developed in this story, it must also be seen within the context of Lispector's works.

The *Family Ties* collection is but a small example of Clarice Lispector's fiction. Her writing, fiction and nonfiction alike, will yield no easy answers to the countless issues she raises. Dominant values, whether they concern love, marriage, emotions, racial attitudes or any other aspect of daily existence are all revealed to have contradictory, strange, often ugly underpinnings. With the economy of language and often misleading simplicity of tone and structure, Lispector's predominantly woman-centered writing reveals paradoxical, epiphanic flashes of insight into human existence. As her readers, it is essential that we bring our own feminist readings to her

works. With mind and body, every sense must be summoned to capture the raw, naked joys to be found through the discovery of our innermost selves — “sweet nausea.” I invite you to *taste* for yourselves.

NOTES

¹ See the comprehensive critical study by Earl Fitz, *Clarice Lispector*, Twayne World Author Series (Boston: C.K. Hall & Co., 1985). Included is a useful listing of Lispector's works, a selected annotated bibliography as well as published and forthcoming English translations. Among the novels or portions of novels: *The Apple in the Dark*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: Knopf, 1977); an excerpt of *The Passion According to G.H.*, trans. Jack Tomlins in *The Borzoi Anthology of Latin American Literature* (New York: Knopf, 1977); of the short fiction and essays (*cronicas*) of a more experimental nature: “Excerpts from the *Chronicles of the Foreign Legion*,” trans. Giovanni Pontiero *Review* 24, 37-43 (New York: Center for Inter-American Relations, 1979); “Pig Latin,” trans. Alexis Levitin, *Ms.* (July 1984), 68-69. In addition, see the recently published, *The Hour of the Star*, trans. Giovanni Pontiero (New York: Carcanet Press, 1986), Lispector's ingenious penultimate novel and last to be published before her death.

² The bilingual publication of Helene Gixous's *Vivre l'orange/To Live the Orange*, trans. Ann Liddle and Sarah Cornell (Paris: Editions des femmes, 1979) is a French feminist's account of her fascination with and readings of Lispector and her works. For an interesting (and clarifying) critique of Gixous's interest in Lispector's “woman's text,” see Carol Armbruster's “Helene-Clarice: Nouvelle Voix,” in *Contemporary Literature*, 24, No. 2 (Summer 1983) 145-157.

³ Marta Peixoto, “Family Ties: Female Development in Clarice Lispector,” in *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, eds. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland (Hanover: Univ. Press of New England, 1983), p. 287; a very useful feminist reading and analysis of issues in feminist criticism raised in the collection.

⁴ Naomi Lindstrom, “A Feminist Discourse Analysis of Clarice Lispector's ‘Daydream of a Drunken Housewife’,” *Latin American Literary Review*, 10, No. 19 (Fall-Winter 1981), 7-16.

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pgs., \$8.95

Torun Willits

Once, just as we were in the process of coming out, my first lover and I went camping together on Catalina Island. A vacation stow-away that she borrowed from the school library for our mutual edification and intrigue, was an original edition of *The Lesbian Path*. I suppose, since she was aware of her "wayward ways" earlier in life but lacked feminist support, she became a practiced information hunter in search of clues that would affirm and inform a developing lesbian identity. I suffered a lesser identity crisis since I confronted lesbianism later and in a supportive feminist community. Perhaps this is why library searches were absent from my experience and why I thought I'd be uninterested in research finds, in this case, *The Lesbian Path*. Despite my initial indifference, we devoured *The Lesbian Path* together, reading a snatch here and there in our spare moments between hikes and meals and even by flashlight at night.

Like the first edition of *The Lesbian Path*, the second edition remains primarily a collection of personal narratives in which new stories appear alongside originals. In these accounts, which range in length from one to ten pages, lesbians describe aspects of their lives. Most relay their experiences narrative style, though one interview and some poetry also appear. Tone and content range from the irreverent, humorous, and anecdotal to the sober and analytical. Readers will recognize many contributors, among them Judy Grahn, Joan Nestle, Pat Parker, Susan Griffin, Audre Lorde, Jane Rule, Nancy Manahan, Rosemary Curb, Barbara Grier, to name a handful. Though the selections admittedly overrepresent academics and former nuns, they also include lesbians who are poets, therapists, novelists, lawyers, editors, organizers, activists, or combinations thereof.

Editor Margaret Cruikshank conceived and began to collect stories for *The Lesbian Path* in 1975 when, "for the first time I had a circle of lesbian friends and thus could hear my first stories of lesbians' lives...I wanted my students to have the book I never had, true stories of strong, women-identified women." In the words of *Lesbian Path* editor Cruikshank, contributors provide their stories, "Remembering our isolation and believing that this book, if it had existed in the 1950s, would have made our self-discoveries less painful." Thus, she concludes, "we are naturally eager to record something of our lives," (introduction to the 1980 edition of *The Lesbian Path*.)

Although *The Lesbian Path* presents diverse issues and experiences, the twin concerns common to most accounts are the search for information about lesbians, and the struggle to form and support Lesbian identity. Many narrators recall feeling suspiciously different from their peers. Isolated and rendered uneasy by public silence on the subject of intimate relationships between women, many turned to the only sources of information they could find: pulp fiction and abnormal psychology texts. Often interchangeable in that both typically broke silence with lies, "science" and fiction informed lesbian existence in various ways. Before the resurgence of the women's movement in the 1960s women delighted in locating any record of lesbian existence, treasured positive images, and rejected the negative. Some women who could not possibly identify with the characters depicted in pulp or science fiction, determined that *they* could not possibly be lesbians, yet continued to pursue intimate relationships with women. Others spent decades denying and eventually accepting the fact that they were lesbians.

Having withstood greater and lesser trials, as Judy Grahn puts it in her poem, "The History of Lesbianism," most *Lesbian Path* narrators now devote themselves to establishing and maintaining lesbian/feminist institutions and traditions which record their own experience and affirm those of others. Such efforts, including those which produce *The Lesbian Path*, make possible scenarios like mine — ones in which women find and shape lesbian identity in the company of lesbians with the aid of feminist understanding.

Although issues of self-identification and development predominate, a number of accounts also tell of joyous or troubled relationships with parents, siblings, lovers, husbands, and children. Homophobia-induced difficulties pursuing religious, academic and government employment, lesbian motherhood, custody issues, and police harassment are also recounted. Other topics include aging, lesbian life in the army, rape, discussions of individuals' work, activism, and descriptions of adventurous recreations and occupations. Alcoholism receives an excellent gender analysis in an essay by Susan Madden, entitled, "On Keeping Ourselves Down," in which she concludes, "I want freedom and power for myself, and to achieve them, I must give up alcohol. I want freedom and power for you, my sisters, and to achieve them I want you to give up whatever is keeping you down (p.88)." Though Cruikshank is to be commended for the racial and experiential diversity of contributors to *The Lesbian Path*, class, age, and race receive little explicit attention.

Collectively, experiences shared in *The Lesbian Path* span decades of the twentieth century, though most narrators tell of the late fifties, the sixties, and the seventies. Elsa Gidlow, in a selection called "France," recalls having met Radclyffe Hall in the late nineteen-twenties. A number remember for us, though incidentally, the thirties and forties. "An Old Story," by Joan Nestle,

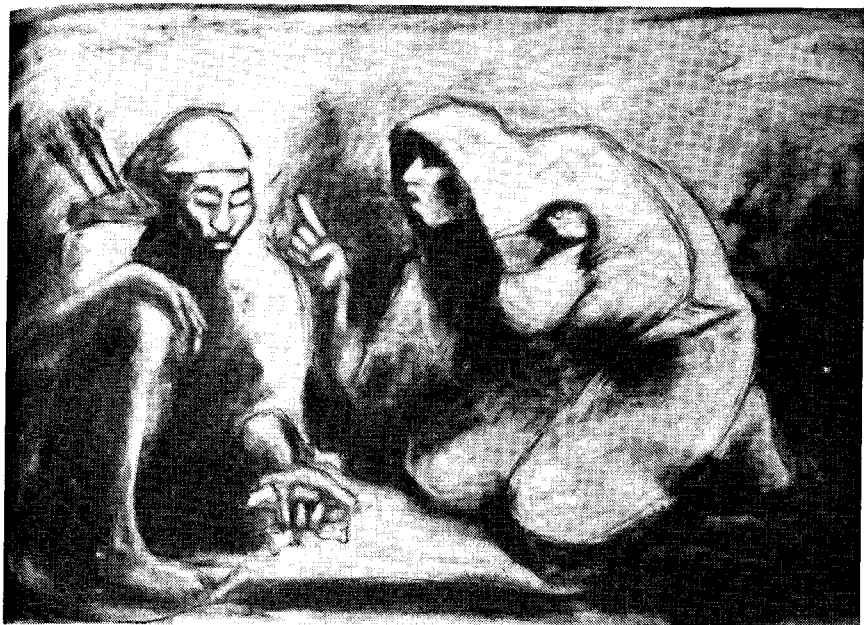
describes aspects of "butch-fem" and bar cultures in the fifties. In "An Incident in the 1950s," Monika Kehoe recounts a 1954 McCarthy-inspired homophobic inquisition into her personal life that resulted in her dismissal from a civil service post.

Individuals discuss decades of experience past and plans for times to come. In, "A Conversation With May Sarton," an interview conducted by Cruikshank, Sarton covers a lot of territory, including what, for her, it is like to be seventy. "I always had this conflict between art and life," Sarton remarks, "Now I know that [my] work has helped a great many people...I know I'm useful...I don't have to worry about doing something else...I don't have to worry about doing what I do as well as I can (p. 117)." many plan to establish and maintain lesbian/feminist institutions and traditions. In "Lavendar Jane Loves Women," musician Alix Dobkin stresses the need to institutionalize lesbian culture: "I wanted lesbians to finally have tangible musical proof of their existence (p. 169.)"

"Anniversary," a prose selection by Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, best evokes a sense of the historical cultural, legal, attitudinal change sought in the last thirty years by politically active lesbians. "Anniversary" captures the profound sense of accomplishment felt by those who have long sought and have finally seen change, and awes those of us just now surveying our personal and political heritage. *The Lesbian Path* simultaneously celebrates the social change that has touched many women, and in its very existence recognizes that persistent silence. Exacerbated by accidents of time, geography and the absence of literature that silence still frustrates lesbian's struggle with identity. Many of the narratives show that even once we have come to terms with lesbianism, we daily face the exhilaration and trauma of coming out, subjecting ourselves to and challenging the negative consequences of making ourselves known in a heterosexist/homophobic culture.

For my lover and I, some years ago, *The Lesbian Path* served well the supportive role which editor Margaret Cruikshank and contributors intended. No doubt, the second edition will serve similarly. *The Lesbian Path* engages those more settled and certain in the time-honored tradition of comparing notes on coming out. A product and catalyst of change, narratives in *The Lesbian Path* gives voice to the real authorities on lesbianism so that gay and straight alike learn about lesbians — not from sordid fiction or abnormal psychology texts — but by making our personal acquaintance and by learning of our experiences first-hand.

Ads & Info



Turtle-Bear 1986

Charcoal drawing (photographed by Annette Pelaez)

Contributor's Notes

Marjorie Agosin, b. 1955, Santiago Chile, Raised in Chile and educated in the USA. She is a poet, literary critic and activist for the defense of human rights.

Annharte b. 1942, Winnipeg Canada. Dual heritage, Irish and Saulteaux, makes her more than a "halfbreed". Struggling to live and laugh at misspent political energy. Knowing that clan mothers communicate, she tries. Gran-ma's gentle influence helps her counsel. Mending her ways quilting.

Angela Bowen b. 1936, Boston. A Black Lesbian Feminist mother and activist, she began writing three years ago. She spent her first career as a dancer, teacher and choreographer. She lives in Cambridge.

Abena P.A. Busia b 1953, Accra, Ghana. Poet and teacher. Brought up in Ghana, Holland, Mexico and England before landing in New Brunswick, N.J. Home and exile inspire my work, faith and love sustain me. Even in the English Dept. basement of Rutgers, I am blessed.

Eva Claeson b. 1925, Germany. Lived in Belgium, Cuba, U.S. and Sweden. Have written since childhood — up until recent years for desk drawer. Am primarily a literary translator at present. (Swedish - English). At the moment working on short stories (own) and translation of poetry by Margareta Ekström.

Cheryl Clarke b. 1947 Wash., D.C., has been a member of the **conditions** Editorial Collective since 1981. I am the author of *Narratives: poems in the tradition of black women* (1983) *Living as a Lesbian*. (1986). I have enjoyed working with **conditions** in all its incarnations and am equally happy working with the new Collective. I congratulate us on the most recent issue and I promise to give up cigarettes when this issue pays for itself.

Rachel Guido deVries b. 9/9/47, Paterson N.J. Rachel co-directs the Community Writer's Project in Syracuse, N.Y. She's a poet and novelist. *Tender Warriors*, her novel, is available through Firebrand Books. She lives in Cazenovia, N.Y., and is working on a novel set in Kenya, East Africa.

Linda Lou Ease b. 1945 florida, panhandle. southern, white, lower middle class. through many changes (some of them miracles) she now identifies as a radical dyke separatist poet — believer in lesbian magic and change.

Karen Elias b. 1940, Chicago, Illinois. Teaches English and Womens Studies at SUNY Oswego and is currently working on a collection of poems, *Late Gestation*, and a book of critical essays on Medusa as a metaphor for women's creative power.

Mayne Ellis b. 1954, Van Couver, B.C. She traveled extensively in Canada and adventured elsewhere in the world (England, California, etc.) She is often distracted from her writing by Peri the cat, but manages to provide book reviews for *Angles*, poetry and short articles for *A Web of Crones*, as well as searching for a publisher for a novella, and carving out blocks of time to devote to a second novel.

Dorothy Randall Gray I was born, of that I'm sure. Davisboro Georgia spit me out like a watermelon seed. Took root in Chinatown aka Lower East Side aka Little Italy. My writings are guided by my place of origin. Polaris (the North Star), from whence I'm convinced also came my predilection for writing on subways, after midnight during rainstorms.

Pauline Guillermo, b. 1957, New York, also known as Turtle Bear, is a Latina lesbian artist living in New York City.

Marilyn Hacker b. 11/27/42, Bronx, N.Y. Presently lives in Manhattan with her daughter, Iva. She is the author of five books of poetry: most recently, *Assumptions*, (Knopf, 1985) and *Love, Death and the Changing of the Seasons*, a (lesbian) novel in sonnets, to be published by Arbor House in late 1986.

Jessica Hagedorn b. 1949, Manila, Philippines. Now living in New York City. Author of, *Dangerous Music*, and the award-winning, *Pet Food and Tropical Apparitions*, both published by Momo's Press. Most recently completed a novel about the Philippines, *Dogeaters*, from which "The Weeping Bride" has been excerpted.

Susan Heske b. 1953, Bridgeport, Ct. Susan Heske has finally found her passion in life, media and social change. For several years she was a member of "Woman In Your Ear", a women's radio collective in Hartford, Ct. Currently she is a member of the Women's Radio Collective of WBAI-Pacifica in NYC.

gale jackson b. 1958, Newark N.J. gale jackson is a poet writer storyteller and children's librarian.

Jean Johnston b. 1954, Queens N.Y. While completing her final year at Hunter College, she co-edits *The Returning Woman*, (a newsletter for women returning to school). She lives in Brooklyn with her lover and her three daughters.

Khayal b. 1962 Calcutta, India. She had her first lesbian experience at a boarding school in North India when she was twelve years old. She has worked actively with the ALOEC, and is also a co-founder of *Anamika*, a newsletter for South Asian Lesbians.

Jacqueline Lapidus b. 1941, New York City. After more than twenty years abroad, she returned to the States in 1985. She is on the staff of *Womantide*, the lesbian magazine of Provincetown, and looking for a job and a publisher.

Anna Livia b. 1955 Dublin. Childhood in Africa, adolescence in London, Mother in Australia. Taught English and French at University of Avignon. Disillusioned with Ackademia. Lesbian radical feminist. Member of Onlywomen Press Collective since 1983, and co-editor of *GOSSIP a journal of lesbian feminist ethics*.

Randye Lordon b. 1954, Chicago. Randye has been writing mystery for the past four years and is currently working on a fantasy-mystery book for children.

Nancy Mandlove b. 1941 Cincinnati, Ohio. Now lives in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania and teaches Spanish and Latin American literature at Westminster College.

Harriet Malinowitz b. 1954, New York City. Harriet Malinowitz writes stories about relationships and articles about politics. She has lived for short periods of time in Mexico and Nicaragua. She teaches writing courses at Hunter College and New York University.

Donna Masini b. 1954, Brooklyn, N.Y. Lives on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Her poems have appeared in *Thirteenth Moon*, *Earth's Daughters* and *Slow motion Magazine*. A member of Bloodstone, a women's poetry collective, she teaches writing at Hunter College.

Colleen McKay b. 1946, Rochester, New York. A lesbian-feminist since the early 70's. Staff photographer of IKON magazine, she specializes in portrait and documentary photography, particularly of women. She is currently putting together an exhibit of photographs from Bluefields, Nicaragua where she taught a photography workshop in 1985 and where she plans to return in December.

Mosadi (Valorie Caffee) b. 3/27/47, Trenton, New Jersey. A Black lesbian feminist, she tries to bridge the gap between political theory and activism. Mosadi earns money by working as a publicist and writes short stories, poetry and essays to sustain her soul and that of those who read her work. She is currently working on a collection of short stories.

Achy Obejas b. 1956, Havana, Cuba. Achy came to the United States in 1963. She spent most of her childhood in Indiana, writing poetry and listening to rock'n'roll. After moving to Chicago she embarked on a semi-serious writing career which has included stints as a reporter at the Chicago Sun Times and public relations writer for the Board of Education. She has been published in the *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Revista Chicano-Queena*, *Sinister Wisdom*, *Helicon Nine*, *Samisdat* and dozens of others. She has also written for the stage and television. A recent recipient of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, she has a book, *Alphabetical Order*, forthcoming from O Press.

Alicia Ostriker b. 1937, N.Y.C. The poems in this issue are from her forthcoming volume *The Imaginary Lover* (U. of Pittsburgh Press). She is also the author of *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* and *The Mother/Child Papers* (both from Beacon).

Annette Peláez b. 1953, N.Y. Taurus. Mixed blood. Tries always to consider more than three dimensions and questions everything, sometimes too late. Anti-imperialist. First love, music. Photography earns her living. Loves art but doesn't care to own it. Needs solitude, needs to move. Grateful to have met Turtle-Bear.

Grace Poore b. 1955, Malaysia. Second generation Malaysian Indian, I spent six months in India studying the Maharashtrian culture three years ago. "Mangoes and Lentils" was inspired by the slum dwellers I befriended for an

A/V economics project, particularly by the little girl whom I passed daily on my way to classes.

Linda Quinlan b. 1947, Boston, Massachusetts. Linda is a working class Lesbian mother who for the last two years has been living in Madison Wisconsin. She has been published in *Sinister Wisdom*, *Sing Heavenly Muse*, *The Poet*, *South of the Northwoods*, and will also be in the upcoming issue of a *Lesbian Mother's Anthology*. Besides poetry she is working on a collection of short stories.

Elizabeth Rees b. 1959, Minneapolis, MN. Elizabeth Rose Reese has had work in *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Ironwood*, *Helicon Nine*, *The Partisan Review*, among others. After living in Manhattan for the past three years, she will be moving to Boston to finish a masters in creative writing.

Beth Richie b. 1957, Cleveland, Ohio is a long-time activist in the anti-violence against women movement. She is currently working at a victims service agency in East Harlem. She is also on the board of directors of the New York Women Against Rape. Her specific area of concern, as a black woman, is how violence affects women of color.

ruthann robson b. 1956, USA. Living in South Florida with a small child and a large dog, working as a poverty attorney concentrating on battered women and employment discrimination issues. Writings have recently appeared in many feminist and alternative publications including *Calyx*, *Kalliope*, *Labyris*, *Moving Out*, *Socian Anarchism*, *Room of One's Own* and others.

Kathryn Ryan b. 1951, New York, She is a visual artist and writer.

Sabrina Emigrated to the East Coast of the United States in the year Martin Luther King was assassinated. she has worked and continues to work to integrate the lessons learned from her natal and adoptive cultures into a life which bespeaks a woman of principles and compassion.

Sapphire b. 8/4/50, Ft. Ord. Ca.

i don't teach at college
or get grants
i am on my knees
cleaning your mother's house
sucking your daddy's dick
i am enslaved but free
its getting late
stop bullshitting
listen to me
learn.

i am a 35 year old ex-whore / currently working as a domestic worker. i am black. i am a lesbian. i am a writer.

Sandra D. Shattuck b. 1954, Midwest U.S. The smell of oceans and deserts are in my soul. I am a gratefully recovering alcoholic and adult child who is learning how to rewrite the scripts of dysfunction into discovery.

Ana E. Sisnett b. 1952, Panama City, Panama. She is a Black woman learning and growing in the company of women. "Paradise" (Paraiso, C.Z.) was home until age 12. She studies Latin American literature with emphasis on Brazil. Ana misses Panama, California and her granny Sophie.

Mary Jane Sullivan b. 1950, Baltimore Md. Grew up in Maryland and Pennsylvania and resides in Brooklyn, New York. She is the author of a book of poems entitled *Geogrpahy Within Limits* and is completing the film on Northern Irish Women.

Christina Sunley recently moved from New York City to the Land of Enchantment. She also works in film and poetry. "Careynell" is her first published work.

M.S. Taraba b. 1955, Princeton, N.J., is a lesbian and a librarian. Her geographical history is cyclical; she has moved from NC to CT to Germany to NM to NYC, and back again. Durham NC is her current home.

Tremor (aka Madeline Landauer) b. 5714, Chicago, has been a playwright, student, sandwich-seller, snowpea gardener, comedy ensemble, 60's radical, matriarchal villager, whiptale lizard, tuffed duck, Greater California Lesbian, troublemaker, kumquat, and adherent to the culture of eco-Judaism. All simultaneously.

Luz María Umpierre is a Puerto Rican poet and critic. She has published three collections of poetry and is an Associate Editor of *Third Woman*. She also holds two books of literary criticism as it relates to Puerto Rican literature. She is an Associate Professor at Rutgers University.

Utsa b. 1959, India. Has live most of her life in India. While in India, she was active in organizing around issues of violence against women. Currently she lives and works in New York, She is one of the women involved in bringing out *Anamika*, a South Asian lesbian newsletter.

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

Shay Youngblood b. 1959, Columbus, Georgia...has almost finished a collection of related short stories about growing up Black and female in the South. She plans to live in Paris for the next year compiling research for a novel-in-progress on Third World literary exiles.

Books &Anthologies by Contributors

Marjorie Agosin, *Witches and Other Things* (Literary Review Press, P.O. Box 8385, Pittsburgh Penn. 15218).

Eva Claeson, Translation of *Death's Midwives* by Margareta Ekström (Ontario Press, order from; Persea Books Inc., 225 Lafayette Street, N.Y., N.Y. 10012) 1985, 149 pp.

----, translation of *Return to Kashgar*, a memoir by Gunnar Jarring (Duke University Press, 6697 College Station, Durham, N.C. 27708) 249 pp.

----, "Early Morning" Poem, *Dan River Anthology*, 1984

----, "Independence", short story, *Short Story International*, No. 49.

Rachael Guido deVries, *Tender Warriors* (Firebrand Books, 141 The Commons, Ithaca, N.Y. 14850) 192 pp., \$7.95 paper; \$16.95 cloth. Add \$1.25 for postage.

----, *Blueline* Vol. VII, Number 2. "Burning the Bed," (poem). (Blueline, Blue Mountain Lake, New York, 12812) Subscriptions \$5.00

----, "Talking Turkey," in *The Greene County Council on the Arts Literary Supplement* Volume 10, No 5 Sept/Oct '85 (Greene County Council on the Arts, 398 Main St., Catskill, N.Y. 12414

Dorothy Randall Gray, *Gaptooth Girlfriends; The Third Act* (Third Act Press, P.O. Box 763, Adelphi Station, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11238) 1985, \$8.00 plus \$1.00 p/h.

----, *Three Hundred and Sixty Degrees of Blackness* (5X Publishing Company, P.O. Box 463, Manhattanville Station, N.Y., N.Y. 10031) 190 pp., \$4.00.

----, *Glowchild* (The Third Press, Joseph Okpaku Publishing Company, Inc., 444 Central Park West, N.Y., N.Y. 10025) 111 pp., \$4.95.

Marilyn Hacker, *Love, Death, and the Changing of the Seasons* (Arbor House, 235 E. 45th St., N.Y., N.Y. 10017) 1986, 206 pp., \$6.95 paper, plus sales tax if applicable, \$1.50 p/h.

----, *Assumptions* (Alfred Knopf Inc., 201 E. 50th St., N.Y., N.Y. 10021) 1985, 96 pp., \$8.95 plus \$1.50 p/h. Please order through Womanbooks, 201 W. 92nd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10025.

----, *Taking Notice*, (Knopf Inc., May be ordered directly from author at 230 W. 105th St., N.Y., N.Y. 10025), 1980, 122 pp., \$5.00, plus \$1.50 p/h.

----, *Separations*, (Knopf Inc., May be ordered directly from author at 230 W. 105th St., N.Y., N.Y. 10025), 1976, 110 pp., \$5.00, plus \$1.50 p/h.

Jessica Hagedorn, *Dangerous Music* (Momo's Press, P.O. Box 14061, SF, CA, 94114) \$4.00.

----, *Pet Food & Tropical Apparitions* (Momo's Press, P.O. Box 14061, SF, CA, 94119) \$5.95.

gale jackson, *Art Against Apartheid: Works for Freedom* (Ikon, P.O. Box 1355, Stuyvesant Station, N.Y., N.Y., 10009) 1986, 184 pp., \$7.50 plus 75¢ p/h.

Jacqueline Lapidus, *Ready to Survive* (Hanging Loose Books, 231 Wycoff Street, Brooklyn., N.Y. 12117) 1975, 30 pp., \$2.50 plus tax.

----, *Starting Over* (Out & Out Books, available from Inland Books, 22 Hemingway Avenue, East Haven, CT., 06512) 1977, 64 pp., \$3.00.

----, *Yantras of Womanlove* (with photos by Tee Corinne), (Naiad Press) 1981, \$6.95.

----, Poems in the following anthologies: *Against Infinity* (Primary Press, 1979), *Lesbian Poetry; An Anthology* (Persephone Press, 1981), *The Lesbian Reader* (Amazon Press, 1975), *New Lesbian Writing* (Grey Fox Press, 1984).

Anna Livia, *Relatively Norma* (Onlywomen Press, Inland Book 6, 22 Hemingway Avenue, East Haven, CT., 06512, also available from Giovanni's Room, 345 S. 12th Street, Philadelphia, PA, 19107) 1982, 220 pp., \$7.95.

----, *Accommodation Offered* (Women's Press, 34 Great Sutton St., London, EC1V 0DX, England) 1985, 182 pp., \$8.95.

----, *Incidents Involving Warmth* (Onlywomen Press, avail. from Inland Book 6, 22 Hemingway Ave., Howen CT., 96512 and Giovanni's Room, 345 S. 12th St., Philadelphia, PA, 19107) 173 pp., \$7.95.

Alicia Ostriker, *Once More Out of Darkness and Other Poems* (Berkeley Poets Co-op, P.O. Box 459, Berkeley, CA, 94701) 1974, rpt 1976, \$4.00

Luz Maria Umpiere, *En el país de las maravillas*, (Third Woman Press, Ballantine Hall, Indiana University, Bloomington, Ind., 47405) 1982, 38 pp., \$4.00.

Barbara Wilson, *Thin Ice and Other Stories* (Seal Press, 312 S. Washington, Seattle, WA 98104), 1981, 125 pp., \$0.95 plus \$1.00 p/h.

----, *Walking On The Moon* (Seal Press) 1983, 161 pp., \$5.95.

----, *Ambitions Women* Seal Press, distributed by Spinsters Ink., 803 DeHaro, S.F., CA 94107), 1983, 228 pp., \$7.95.

----, *Murder In the Collective* (Seal Press), 1984, 181 pp., \$7.95.

Publications Received

Jill Abramson, Barbara Franklin, *Where They Are Now: The Story Of The Women Of Harvard Law 1974*, (Doubleday & Co., Inc., 245 Park Ave., New York, N.Y. 10167), 1986, 309pp., \$17.95.

Margo Adair, *Working Inside Out: Tools For Change*, (Wingbow Press, 2929 Fifth Street, Berkeley CA 94710), 1985, 427pp., \$9.95.

Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering The Feminine in American Indian Traditions*, (Beacon Press, 25 Beacon St., Boston, MA 02108), 1986, 311pp., \$24.95.

Lonnie Barbach, Ph.D, ed., *Pleasure: Women Write Erotica, Stories* (Harper & Row)), 1984, 345pp., \$6.95.

Judith Barrington, *Trying To Be An Honest Woman*, Poetry (The Eighth Mountain Press, 624 Southeast 29th Ave., Portland, Oregon 97214), 1985, 77pp., \$6.95.

Alexander, Berrow, Domitrovich, Donnelly, Mclean, eds., *Women And Aging: An Anthology by Women*, (Calyx, P.O. Box B, Corvallis, OR 97339), 1986, 262pp., \$12.00.

Lynda Birke, *Women, Feminism and Biology: The Feminist Challenge*, (Methuen, Inc., 29 W. 33rd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10001), 1986, 210pp., \$11.95.

Olga Broumas, Jane Miller, *Black Holes, Black Stockings*, poems (Wesleyan University Press, 110 Mt. Vernon St., Middletown, Connecticut 06457), 1985, 86pp., \$8.95.

Jannie Canan, *Her Magnificent Body*, New and Selected Poems (Manroot, Box 982, So. San Francisco, CA. 94080), 1986, 104pp.

Susan Cavin, *Lesbian Origins*, Feminist Theory (Isis Press, Inc. P.O. Box 12447, San Francisco, CA 94112), 1985, 288pp., \$9.00.

Denise Chavez, *The Last of the Menu Girls*, (Arte Publico Press, University Of Houston, Houston, Texas 77004), 1986, 119pp., \$8.50.

Jan Clausen, *Sinking, Stealing*, (The Crossing Press, P.O. Box 640, Main Street, Trumansburg, N.Y. 14886), 1985, 288pp., \$8.95.

Michelle Cliff, *The Land Of Look Behind*, prose, poetry, (Firebrand Books, 141 The Commons, Ithaca, New York 14850), 1985, 119pp., \$6.95.

Jane Cooper, *Scaffolding: New and Selected Poems*, (Anvil Press Poetry, c/o Small Press Distribution Inc., 1784 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley, CA 94709), 1985, 144pp., \$7.95.

Gene Corea, *The Mother Machine: Reproductive Technologies from Artificial Insemination to Artificial Wombs*, (Harper & Row, 10 E. 53rd St., New York, N.Y. 10022), 1986, 374pp., \$7.95.

Margaret Cruikshank ed., *The Lesbian Path*, (Grey Fox Press, P.O. Box 31190, San Francisco, CA 94131), November 1985, 219pp., \$8.95.

Rosemary Curb and Nancy Manahan, eds., *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence*, (Naiad Press, Inc. P.O. Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302), 1985, 383pp., \$9.95.

- Carol Boyce Davies, Anne Adams Graves, eds, *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*, (Africa World Press, Inc., P.O. Box 1892, Trenton, N.J. 08607), 1986.
- Susan Dambroof, *Memory In Bone*, poems, (Black Oyster Press, 821 Hampshire St., San Francisco, CA 94110), 1984, \$8.00.
- Cecil Dawkins, *Charleyhorse*, Novel, (Viking Penguin, Inc., 40 West 23rd St., New York, N.Y. 10010), 1985, 250pp., \$15.95.
- Jean Devanny, *Paradise Flow*, (Hecate Press, P.O. Box 99, St. Lucia, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia), 1985, 56pp.
- Elizabeth De Vegh, *Lime Valley*, Novel, (Arrowhead Press, 3005 Fulton Street, Berkeley, CA 94705), 1985, 343pp., \$6.50.
- Rachel Guido de Vries, *Tender Warriors*, (Firebrand Books, 151 The Commons, Ithaca, NY 14850), 1986, 192pp., \$7.95.
- Sarah Dreher, *Stoner McTavish*, Novel, (New Victoria Publishers, Inc., 7 Bank Street, Lebanon, New Hampshire 03766), 1985, 204pp., \$7.95.
- Myriam Diaz-Diocarte, Iris Zavala, eds., *Women, Feminist Identity and Society in the 1980's*, (John Benjamins Publishing Co., Amsterdam/Philadelphia), 1985
- Angel & Kate Flores, eds., *The Defiant Must: Hispanic Feminist Poems From The Middle Ages To The Present*, (The Feminist Press, City University Of New York, 311 E. 94th St., N.Y., N.Y. 10128), 1986, 145pp., \$29.95.
- Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, ed., *SIGNS: Journal Of Women In Culture And Society*, Journal, (University Of Chicago Press, 5801 S. Ellis Ave., Chicago, Il. 60637), 1985, 208pp., \$4.00.
- Margaret K. Gray, ed., *Margaret Oliphant, Selected Short Stories Of The Supernatural*, (Scottish Academic Press, 33 Montgomery St., Edinburgh FH75JX), 1986, 256pp., \$18.50.
- Frances Green, ed., *Gayellow Pages: The National Edition*, (Renaissance House, Box 292, Village Station, New York, N.Y. 10014), 1986, 256pp., \$8.95.
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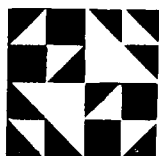
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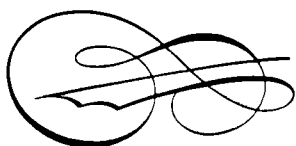
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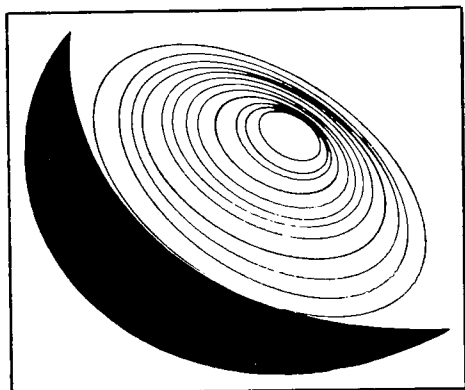
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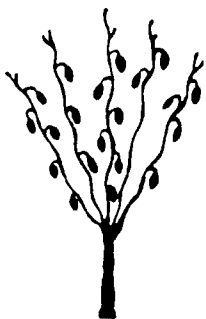
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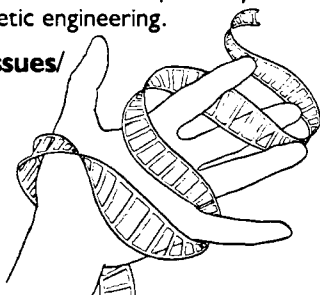
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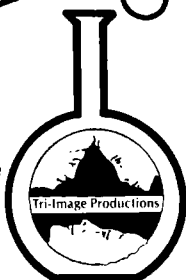
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