# it's like this

poems by doris davenport

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Introduction by doris diosa davenport



doris davenport reads from *it's like this* at the Venice Jail the night the book was printed

### Ascension: 35 Years of Alternate Realities (Howling with the Wind & Dancing in Moonlight)

It is so wonderful to be a part of living Herstory. As a working class twoheaded Obeah womon, lesbian-feminist separatist vegetarian alcoholic poet-writer from the hills of Northeast Georgia. As an unpublished poet who seriously intended to be. In the late 1970's and 1980's this is how i proudly (quietly or adamantly or whatever, as required) introduced and manifested my selves. Also a dance- exercise enthusiast and PhD [literature] student. Now in 2013 i recognize all these identities in *it's like this*: passionate idealist; cynical activist, avid poetry practitioner and "speculative fiction" humorist. Underneath and intermixed, i see, too, the syncretic spirituality of Goddess believer and Yoruba, Voudun practitioner. The poetry is not entirely messy self-indulgence like many first books and i am glad for that.



doris reading at the Venice Jail

Although i was always a performance poetwriter, the poems grew primarily from the contexts of the worlds i inhabited in 1976-1985 in Los Angeles, from our attempts to recreate \*the\* world or at least create an alternative world of sacred, safe wimmin's space. We lived in alternatives conjured daily from dreams, committed actions, and mutual support. While grounded in my L.A. wimmin's community, i

relied on the national and international phenomena of wimmin's writing for constant inspiration. This preface is an extended note of gratitude, an acknowledgement and compressed summary of the past 35 years. This preface has

\* \* \* \* \* \*

also become an entry in a much longer ongoing autobiographical piece; maybe an interactive "Lesbian Feminist Time Travel" essay, so i apologize to anyone who is inadvertently omitted here. (Translation: It was a long time ago; my memory ain't what it used to be.)



doris reading at the Women's Building, 1980



N. Esfeld's Califia tent

The book would not have existed without generous gifts and investments of money, time, love and energy from wimmin like Dani Adams and Yolanda the Terrible (Y the T) Retter, Sherry Stoll, Cheryl D., Vivian Price, Jean Parks and bella; the members of the Lesbians of Color organization; Ntianu, Linda Luke, Marilyn R., Maria & Lois & Linda B. (Yolanda's then-lover), among many others. Yolanda named us all "Diosa" meaning "Goddess" in Spanish she decided, a term of endearment and empowerment. We worked through and moved beyond sometimes

unconscious institutionalized whitemale supremacy in groups and many individuals. We attended Califia Collective retreats where the white wimmin, irene Weiss and Marilyn Murphy and "Sergeant" Betty Brooks had us work on inclusivity, issues of gender-



doris & Yolanda the Terrible (Y the T) Retter

race-class-spirituality and self-defense! There, Yolanda's dogmatic love for Cris Williamson's "Song of the Soul" gave us headaches and a richer connection to each other.

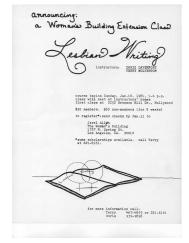
On every level, we supported, created, struggled (lots of fights), and tried to act in solidarity to improve our lives, locally, and all wimmin's, globally. Looking back, we were terminally "PC" (politically correct). We made sure events were wheelchair accessible, had signers for the hearing challenged, and often provided childcare, as well. We were deliberately multi-cultural and multi-ethnic. On every level: cultural, social, political, we created and existed in an alternative wimmin's reality, from feminist therapy to a feminist automotive shop, and pioneering

wimmin in the trades (electricians, plumbers, etc). Thus, i met Mitsuye Yamada, wonderful poet, good friend, and my (self-identified) WASP "West Coast Mommy," Katharine Newman, the now deceased creator of MELUS (The Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literature of the



Asungi, Sheila Machado & Norma Esfeld observe a Tarot Reading at Califia

United States). Tee Corrine and Jean Weisinger were two of my favorite photographers. And Jean later attended and "documented" my 50th birthday celebration and poetry performance in Oakland, CA.



Woman's Building. The course split into two groups; mine included Vivian Price, Jean Parks, bella and Lora Zumwalt, an incredibly dynamic and politically active group of white wimmin, who instantly became part of my Needed-for-Survival group, a part of my family.

In 1981, I co-taught a creative writing course, via the

flyer for writing workshop at The Women's Building

We struggled with our own contradictions, as well as against the grid of interlocking "isms" of the external

world. Yolanda truly advocated "come to your life / like a warrior." The ever present Presence of Asungi's art, the emerging "Goddess Series" enhanced my Afracentric basis for wimmin's spirituality. In turn, Asungi introduced me to the works of Octavia Butler, whose visionary syfy profoundly affected all my subsequent perceptions.





V. Price at the Writing Workshop

Then too, Varnette Honeywood's art, her everyday-life collages, contributed to many of my poems. All of that visionary, contradictory, dichotomous, amorphous, generative energy was distilled in *it's like this*. One poem, "121 Soque Street," led eventually to an entire book about Soque Street. The seeds of everything I write

were (or seemed to be) in *it's like this*.

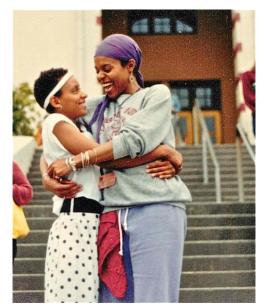
Reading a Heath anthology of American Literature recently, i was pleased and proud because my beloved mentor (for graduate school) and friend, Richard Y.

is one of the main editors. The engaging, inclusive, introduction to "Modernism" (just before seeing "Django Unchained" a second time) made me a little envious: it must have been fun to be in that movement(s); how i wld love to be part of OH DUH! - - - i was a part of a major literary-cultural movement. (Teaching mainly GE courses, composition



Just passed my PhD qualifying exams, 1985, being hugged by Sherley Anne Williams as Asungi looks on

and lower division lit courses for the past 7-10 years, my weary brain is often on "obliviate," or hibernate.) i am a part of Movements. The Black Cultural Movement (BAM) of the 1960's. Wimmin's literary-cultural movements from the mid 1970's- to this present moment. The LGBT (lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgendered) movement from the 1990's to the present . . .



i am a part of all that, although it often seems my work and ideas have been overlooked, neglected, trivialized. Even deliberately "erased" as Julie mentioned, until i sometimes forget my own words and legacies in these amnesia-inducing times but i was there, a contributing, catalytic force. And a participant in that "movement" of wimmin in academe

who relentlessly pursued PhDs as well as politically

Jean Weisinger & me, 1980-2 (?)

active global communities. (And i am still a student and teacher, still, as Y the T observed, enamored of and in my Black Ivory Tower of passionate scholarly erudition.) i am so/ all of that. And so is my poetry. Then and now.

Anyone might erroneously think that having such diverse attributes and talents would make my work well-known, well-taught and well-sold. After all, i am a multi-genre writer: essays, reviews, articles, stories, plays and poetry. But no. Each group had and probably still has its own "party line" of editorial and personal biases. In the late 1960's it seemed a writer had to be adamantly - even angrily urban

"Black" to be published (and in some instances, male or totally male-identified). i did not fit, particularly since i am (adamantly) Southern, country, small town, Appalachian. The mid-late 1970's saw the proliferation of "speak bitterness"



flyer for reading at womon's bookstore in Oakland 1982

publications against institutionalized phallocratic sexism. That made (and makes) sense, especially for truly complicitously oppressed, male-identified wimmin, but i could not totally subscribe to that worldview either.

Lesbians of Color Cultural Event Program: May16,1981 Marilyn Rodriguez Aeisha Jones Graciela Wonda Coleman Doris Davenport sion\_\_\_\_ 10 minutes Dee Dee accompanied by pianist Intermission \_ Thelma Thomas Halimah Brooks Emma Perez Marilyn Rodriguez Raffle Drawing Remarks ! Annoucements

flyer for reading, May 198 1

In the early 1980's many white wimmin's publications could not easily hear any criticism of whites. Heteterosexuals of any race rejected nonproblematical depictions of lesbian love and related issues while that was \*all\* that lesbian-feminists wanted, for awhile! Too, i would not, and will not, write from pathology or "victimology." (Zora Neale Hurston was and is a penultimate role model and Spirit Guide: i am truly not

the genre bias: as Barbara Grier (of Naiad Press) always lovingly told me, with a huge grin and hug, she did NOT publish poetry. Yolanda would quip, "What's a sister to do?!" Me, i kept writing, and insisting on writing from all the me's that i am, at all times.

Even if or when i "tailor" my performances to particular audiences, the work attempts to be holistic. My poetry and all my work comes from a place of inclusivity, of egalitarian truth; it is intended to be, as needed, and by design, a catalyst for positive change; an insight into another (alternative) reality; a source of renewed brain oxygen and inspiration. And also, it is meant to be enjoyed. For example, in the last book, *ascent*, at least 1/3 of the poems were composed as i learned to textmessage on a new smartphone, while walking around a lake, avoiding ducks and huge tree roots, in Albany, Georgia. Some of these poems, do not even try to "make sense": it's all about fun with form and sound. My work is eclectic; a full - body and mind workout; rhythmical, visionary;



doris and Norma

boundary-stretching; mind-bending; like the 1st chords of Nina Simone's "To Be Young Gifted & Black" or Jimi's "Foxy Lady." My writings, my publications, my performances (with music, movement, sometimes singing and always an altar) are, in short, intended to *affect* audiences.

Politics, then and now, determine publication; it is amazing that i ever had anything published. (Sincere gratitude to all of you who did publish my work.) Still i wonder

if most folk read my poetry as poetry: "OMG. She just worked that alliteration with a mountain twang." Or "Do, really consider the imagery in that compressed Haiku drumbeat. The unyielding rhythm-of-ideas." Like that. By the 1990's, as an itinerant gypsy poet-scholar, subconsciously, i



Reading at a Womon's Bookstore in Oakland 1999

may have begun to censor / fragment/erase parts of my being but seriously? Since i write for readers & audiences, rarely for me alone, i want(ed) to share the intensity and passion of poetry. So in a room of mostly straight (heterosexual) people i might not mention the L word. In Northeast Georgia, i honestly am all about our shared realities as eccentric "mountaineers." Instead of self censorship, it's fine and finely tuned audience awareness. i get a larger audience; they get affirmations & new insights on the known universe. Or, minimally, refreshing insights into our shared realities.

Of my eight books, six are selfpublished. One was published by the Sautee-Nacoochee Community Association of Sautee-Nacoochee, Georgia. Ten



Reading at a Womon's Bookstore in Oakland 1999 years later, Louisiana State Univ. Press published a version of that same book, thanks to Kathryn Stripling Byer (my sistah-poet, a white womon from SouthWest Georgia; a widely published, very well-known, former Poet Laureate of North Carolina). There is an (limited edition) Italian translation of my second book, eat thunder & drink rain. The most recent books, sometimes i wonder (2010) and ascent (2012) are PODs (digital print on demand). Of these, i am in hiatus from battling the first "publisher" for ownership of my poetry / copyright. The second POD company, after long, maddening delays, at last made the book available on amazon.com. Always the ongoing issues of publication, copyright rights,

accessibility & ownership. Still, i write poetry daily, and will self-publish another book soon.

i am smiling as i write now because from distanced time, much of this is rather amusing, albeit sad and wasteful. To my knowledge only one person (a lifelong friend, James Miller) has written anything close to a "critical" assessment of my poetry, although i did recently find a 1985 review of *eat thunder*. For most of my innumerable colleagues in academe, it seems my work just does not exist by their criteria. The same goes for many of my equally numerable poetry-writing colleagues. Yet, to be objectively honest, my poetry and performances are some of the best in the last 35 years. Luckily and fortunately, there are and have always been some wonderful exceptions to those exclusive editors and approaches: *SUNBURY*, *Sinister Wisdom*, the editor of *Day Tonight / Night Today*; the *Women's Review of Books*, *Feminary* and more recently, the *North Carolina Literary Review*, and a sweet list, actually, of writers and editors, including the Azalea collective. (Again - absolute gratitude to all of you.)



1999, my 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration, arranged by Jean Parks & Crew (LOL). From left, Right: Bella, Vivian, me, Alicia, Jean

\*\*\*\*\*

It is, i repeat, wonderful, to be a part of Herstory wo/manifested (saluting Mary Daly) in the feminist-lesbian-wimmin-writers self-publishing movement. The "Let's create and give birth to ourselves by writing ourselves into existence, now" movement. LindaJean Brown of the NY writing collective that published *Azalea: a Magazine by & for Third World Lesbians* (1977-1984) motivated me most. LindaJean had self-published and made it seem doable and desirable. Then, a convergence of astrological signs, adventurous & talented wimmin, and Goddess blessings led to the publication of it's like this.

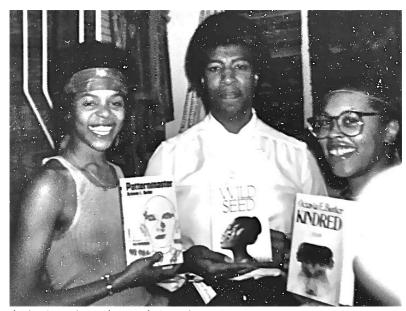


In 1980 i met Sheila Machado thru our mutual friend, my then-lover and Sheila's former teacher, Norma Esfeld (Amrita Yachana). Sheila's father owned a printing company. Sheila said she thought we could; she wanted to try it, wanted to see me with a book. *QED*. Again and again i thank \*my \* Norma (now deceased, as is Yolanda Retter). My Norma, an Aires who tried to make every second a new experience.

Sheila Machado, circa 1982

And Sheila. And all of you, all of us.

Finally, we were there, one Saturday afternoon in 1981, in that endless monoseason in Southern California, at Printing impressions in Gardenia, CA. The excitement, bliss, giddy ecstasy of our mini-assembly line, printing, collating, stapling and singing along with Nina (Simone), Heart, Joan Armatrading, Cris Williamson. i remember Sheila & her lover, Karen M.; my Norma & me, and it seems at least two other wimmin, frantic with a deadline of a poetry reading at 8 p.m. that night at the Old Venice Jail in Venice, CA. Between songs, we time-checked, chanting versions of "We GOT this! We can do this!" About 6:30 p.m. we finished and loaded up that first limited print run of 250 copies (and we only paid for the



doris, Octavia Butler, and Asungi

paper, if that) with a stapled spine of 48 pages, for \$2.50 a copy. The experience was priceless. That book is priceless. Both hooked me forever on self-publication.

For years, i was secure in the knowledge

that i had at least 10 remaining copies of that book. A few weeks ago, however, i found only one clean copy. (Amazon has one for \$100.00) Scanning that copy, i remembered there are two versions for some reason but the dedication & contents page is missing from the front in some copies, with the copyright page on the inside back cover. Still, we ran all those 250 (or, close to it) copies that evening, until time to feverishly rush home, change and get to the Old Venice Jail (sponsored by the Beyond Baroque Foundation). We were late, but when i explained why, i received a loud, rowdy round of applause and cheering. i could not stop grinning, with my Norma there on the front row (as she always was) taking photos. We could not stop grinning. Even when, that night, i read "f\*ck you" in-yr-face poems about some of the major issues / evils of the day, i could not stop smiling and grinning. i'm still grinning. (And writing.)

That communal collective effort; the ritual of wimmin working for a common goal with completely focused energy, without discussion or "processing." i love it that i did my own drawings for the book and the cover design. That the poems were typed on a Corona portable blue & grey typewriter (with lots of whiteout and maybe a manual return). "About the author" was written by my bio-sister Maggie (5 yrs younger than i). My Norma took the photos on the back and inside cover. Several months later a critical reader (a "hater") pointed out that the poems were double-spaced (instead of correctly single-spaced); blinded by happiness, i'd missed that. All i knew, what i saw, was a book created with wimmin's energies, with love & affection & determination & laughter by one Latina, one African American & 2 Anglo American lesbian-feminists b/c we were about creating an alternate reality. And we did. We did.

Such a wonderful time. Such a wonderful book. "Let somebody else say it," those who front false modesty for females, might say or think. Like we too stupid too know when we did a good job on anything from makeup to winning gold Olympic medals to being nominated for Secretary of State. Like that. (Get oh do get over it. Just stop. Too tedious.)

Dani was so right; that time and place was (a) home. Many wimmin were self-publishing then and so many wonderful wimmin bought *it's like this* just to be supportive, some saying how they did not like or read (or publish) poetry. i carried a copy in my backpack as i rode that ole funky yellow bus from midtown Los Angeles to downtown University of Southern California. Then, i Reading poetry in Cornelia, Georgia, February 2012



believed i could fly. i believed we all could. i believe we did for awhile. And we have *it's like this* to prove it. i still believe most wimmin can fly / or at least have the ability to grow wings, to find the Goddess somewhere deep inside.

Now, at age 64, thirty five and more years later i greet the young womon i was then, the wimmin we all were, in these poems, with a huge smile of admiration, pride, humility and love. A hug of endless gratitude for our daring, courage & fierce visionary beings. Because of her, because of all of us, i am the writer, the person(s) that i now manifest. Usually now, i present myself to the "general public" simply as "Educator / Writer / Performance Poet," with a well-developed, experientiallybased sense of irony and humor. But in other contexts : as literary/performance poet; lesbian-feminist bisexual working class (non-smoking recovering alcoholic) Affrilachian with a PhD in African American wimmin's poetry and - regardless of audience, AND with eight (8) published books of poetry. And all that started with *it's like this*.

Namaste. Ahshay. ModueQue. And Tepit Nefrit (Supreme Peace) and Eternal Gratitude. Especially to Sheila Machado, and to Julie Enszer who cared enough to ask and to do, this project.

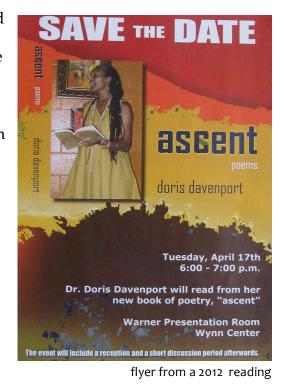
> doris diosa davenport September 2013 Tuscaloosa, AL

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#### About doris davenport

doris davenport is a writer, educator, and literary & performance poet who grew up in the Appalachian foothills of Habersham County (Cornelia) Georgia. She has earned degrees from Paine College (B.A. English), State Univ. of Buffalo (SUNY), New York (M.A. English) and the University of Southern California (PhD Literature). davenport has been a writer since about age eleven and the first book she recalls reading and loving - at age 6 - was *Alice in Wonderland* 



Wonderland. davenport has done numerous performances and workshops and taught at schools from Los Angeles to New Haven, CT. From Aug. 2007 - May 2011, she was an Associate Professor of English at Albany State University (Albany, GA), where she coordinated the Annual Poetry Festival, for four consecutive years. In June 2011, she did a collaborative performance ("Conversations With Time") at ROOTSfest in Baltimore, MD (www.alternateroots.org) and received an Artistic Assistance Grant from Alternate ROOTS, which partly funded the publication of *ascent: poems*. In August 2011 she returned to teach at Stillman in Tuscaloosa, Alabama as Associate Professor of English. At Stillman, in September 2011, and again in September 2012, she coordinated an open mic for the international event, "100,000 Poets for Change." davenport has published book reviews, articles, essays, and books of poetry. *ascent* is her eighth book of poetry.

Available for lectures, workshops, readings, performances, collaborations:

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RECENT PUBLICATIONS: "Mary's Children (syfy poem for Octavia)" in *Strange Matings: Science Fiction, Feminism, African American Voices, and Octavia E. Butler* eds. Rebecca J. Holden and Nisi Shawl. Aqueduct Pr, Seattle, WA: July 2013. http://www.aqueductpress.com/books/StrangeMatings.html



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Amrita Yachana (Norma Esfeld) March 21, 1937 - September 25, 2009

In loving memory



Yolanda Retter Vargas 1947 - Aug. 18, 2007

# it's like this

poems by doris davenport

# it's like this

poems by doris davenport

Some of these poems have previously been published in FRESHTONES, Vol.1, <u>Obras</u> and <u>Azalea:A Magazine for Third World Lesbians</u> (Vol.3,No.2).

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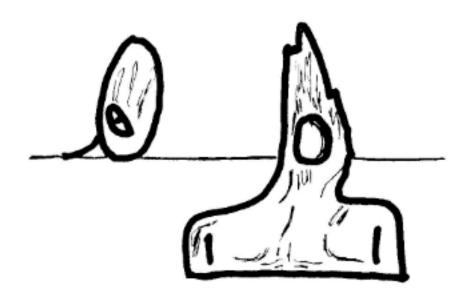
#### it's like this

monologue: the sister on the RTD / 1 . . . and backgammon (for Judith) / 2Sojourner, you shouldn't have done that / 4 the toilet tissue theory of life / 6 121 Soque Street / 7 unlike this, Maxine / 8 Renita Juanita Maria Theresa Jones / 10 4.3.80 / 12 i'm tired of being abstract / 13 Vision I:Genesis for Wimmin of Color / 14 two-headed woman / 16 it's like this / 17 spiritual orgasms lavender lady / 18 for Tanya / 19 The Voodoo Lady / 20 c.r. for nice girls and 4w's / 22 Unattachment / 24 theory no. 777 / 25 portrait of the artist as a young girl / 27 Maggie's poem / 29 check this out / 30 MAMBO / 31 the rewards of suffering / 32 spiritual orgasms / 33 Iansa Oyé Iansa Oyé / 35 for everyone born from 1944-1950 / 36

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it's like this

1.114



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### monologue : the sister on the RTD, talking to herself

this ride keeps getting longer and the days keep getting shorter and my back keeps getting tireder and my knees give out too.

my patience gets thinner. and my bugs got plants. nights get longer and shorter at the same time

my money is so very funny it laughs at me all night. my purpose gets obscurer and mornings are never right.

cigarettes are tasteless. the job is so trite. my lover is kinda tiresome and oh lord, my jaws are tight. . . . and backgammon (for Judith)

personally, i detest it. although it's the national pasttime. it's what folk say instead of hello. what they eat at lunch instead of food. sometimes the sets of leather and wood are pretty but personally, i detest backgammon. the game is so serious, folk carry around the sets even when they don't play. they pay money to learn how to play. and they look at you like you smell funny if you can't play. but i, for one, won't. it's a silly game.

this game you play is sillier, although the rules are simpler.

2

just agree to whatever you say.

i might play, but i don't lie.

i will keep your couch, and treat it lovingly.

wear the shoes that hurt my feet. use the oversized cups that make your tea get cold - i will even advocate your mediocre art but i will not tolerate you.

before i'd carry on with you, i'd carry around a backgammon set. Sojourner, you shouldn't have done that. . .

you told them what was what, i guess. you really made your point. you stood 'em on their heads but

i got one question. why did you bare your chest? you set an awesome precedent. now, everytime they see us coming,

they get ready for a show. they get ready for a comedy. or a tragedy, to some. but entertainment, to most. and if we don't bare our chests,

they come right up and rip off the dress pull out our hair pull off a tit, sometimes, in the enthusiasm.

(i don't know which metaphor is worse: the mule of the world, or a mule trying to prove her sex?)

the second strength to represent the

4

you told them the truth, Sojourner, we knew you a were a womon, too but all black wimmin inherited your theatrics. so now

what are we sposed to do???????

each day is

another leaf.

a year,

a whole roll.

except for exceptional instances, just good for

wiping



## 121 Soque Street

memories

turn into

dreams.

dreams

into

memories.



### unlike this, Maxine

i would prefer to be whipped 50 lashes or 100 across the back hard lashes with something like corded silk so as not to scar my back i'm rather vain about my back because in the gym in the sauna, sisters look and smile saying my you have a pretty back so i wouldn't want it scarred but i would prefer

being whipped

viciously and at length with something that would give a physical pain a concrete pain that would hurt and anguish and leave me well again,

unlike this, Maxine. Renita Juanita Maria Theresa Jones

because she wants to dance with everyone she has to dance alone.

always late getting somewhere but years ahead of her time. always behind "the" times:years ahead

of mine

california was the place to be ten years ago. everyone who was coming, came, and left. here she is. ten years later. even earthquakes don't come here any more.

outcast from reality, what else does she have, but fantasy? her entire life is an

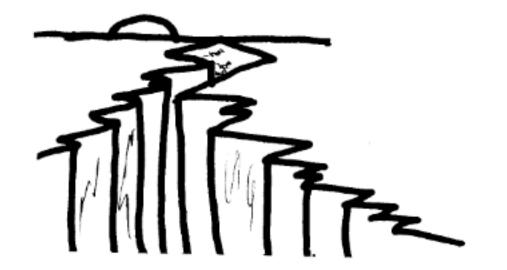
extended

ironic

statement.

her sense of humor

is so intact



4.3.80

see	see	see
won't	you	please
look	at	me
my	me	tro
nome	bo	dy
keep	ing	time
to	your	
	madness.	

i'm tired of being abstract . .

this thing about ink and red blood ink flows blood flows ink flows ink gives life blood equals life ink gives blood ink can't be stopped why not?

a brain clot can kill. a blood clot can scare an ink clot? a dried up ink pen? is that the same as menopause? why ain't it called meno-stop, it never starts again, like ink. especially permanent black. and people do just what they meant to do anyway. Vision I : Genesis for Wimmin of Color

1.

white boys run america.

black boys run, period.

white girls run the wimmin's movement & everyone runs over and from black wimmin.

listen.

they said - your place is not here. they said - you have no place. they are wrong. listen.

2.

in the beginning was the Goddess who chose not to speak at that time, knowing her words would be plagiarized, resented, mis-represented, denied. in the beginning was the Goddess. she chose not to speak, but to do. practicing, and drinking wine, she made men. alone to wimmin she

gave the powers : 2 heads. to us she gave the sign : the moon. alone to us her divine power : life. for us she created the earth and

all upon it, then sat down and waited for us to make it good but we blew it: words were invented and abused. but

when wimmin started to speak the Goddess stood up. we spoke too slow and she shook her head. she waits : omnipotent but wordless. she waits. knowing we are The Word.

3.

listen:

two-headed woman

they call me a

two-headed woman,

but sometimes i got three. they call me a two-headed lady,

but usually,

i got three.

one to see what you see, one to see what you will never see, and another one, just to protect me.

## it's like this

from 3 p.m. we wait for dark.

from then, we wait for morning.

in the morning, we long for 3 p.m.

# spiritual orgasms



#### lavender lady

lavender lady light purple little girl introduce me to you invite me to your world

lavender lady with a golden glow or rather, a reddish gold aura

it was you i was waiting for. not the tambourine man.

play the drums for me as i play your flute

## for Tanya

every day i repeatedly give birth to me. sometimes prematurely sometimes stillborn sometimes in the morning or later on. not just once a day. sometimes as many as ten. after awhile, i'm having reincarnations less messy, but they feel the same.

one day i had me 300 times, each time different except the last when i became what i was at first to provide some continuity and point of reference.

法收益费 的复数离 网络蕨



#### The Voodoo Lady

I she looked at my hand and back at me real quick and said i can see you have suffered and lotion won't do it no good but anyway, listen to this.

#### II

if you spend too much time with yourself

you start to think you are everybody.

that is called

the microscopic fallacy.

## IIII

if you're being consumed you ought to at least complain. bowels and brains need privacy to function.

crowds are constipating.

#### ΙV

one last thing, she said, as i was walking away, it's best to leave things that are forgotten and packed away in boxes, forgotten and packed away in boxes.

plus,

you got to be firm with children, dogs, and men.

c.r. for nice girls and 4w's

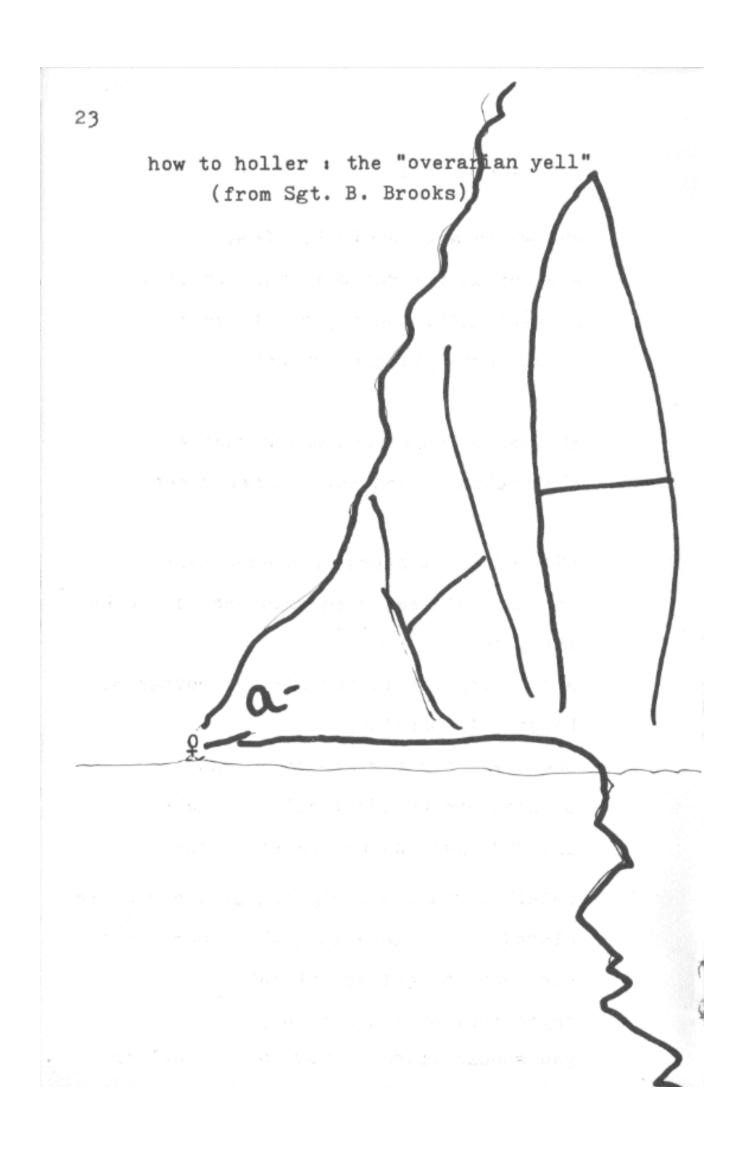
she would ask permission from a voice on the radio to turn it off. or wait until the person finished or apologize if she couldn't.

she was so quiet and unobstrusive she wouldn't even talk in her sleep.

she left left-overs from each meal so she could eat them cold and not bother the pots.

she apologized to herself for bothering herself to breathe.

she died in her sleep one night. because she wouldn't yell for help. she did, yet, no one beleives the details: she had a nightmare. the vampire closed in. before it grabbed her & bit her near the collar, it said: maybe this will teach you, you should learn how to holler:



Unattachment (to Ric Masten/for the womon-with-no-knees)

. . . if you called right this second, i'd probably break both my legs doing a 1 second sprint hurdle out of the tub to get to the phone



theory no. 777

is that

nature has to be female. because if it were a father nature, there would be seasons, but for a price. they would not come naturally & gradually but abruptly. all at once. the sun would rise, but with a toll for each person, each town, each country.

the present sun situation would appear to a father nature as a welfare state.

if nature were male, trees would grow, but leaves would all have thorns. some would be aluminum foil, some synthetic. instead of parks, we would get outdoor laboratories.

the moon would still get full, but equipped with a voice shouting i'm up; i'm up; i'm up. adore and worship me - i am <u>bad</u>. it would jump up and down testorically instead of serenely floating by. air would be licquid. oceans would be solid salt substitute.

but and if nature would be male, everyone might be more comfortable, since men would not suffer from

envy.

)

portrait of the artist as a young girl

"go make up the bed or sweep the floor. and what you lookin' at me like that for you always got your head stuck in a book. DO something."

she did. she looked from the book to the horizon. saw tiny specs that had no name except another kind of blue. smiled, made up the bed again and swept one spot.

"you mean/you already 12 & don't know how to cook? you better learn. yo'momma need somebody to help her with all them kids. you the oldest, aincha?/I hear you smart in school? you better learn how to cook for a man / don't, you just be a educated fool aha, aha, aha."

she didn't. she learned that if that's how

you got married,

she'd make sure she never did.

she'd learn how to paint water colors instead.

"who painted <u>that</u>? the ones with the woods and waterfall? / it must have been a boy - girls just draw flowers, after all hee hee.

she did it? I didn't know those people could paint. she better learn some manners.( she better learn what she ain't.)

CARLER & CARLES OF STREET

the second second second

she did. but she didn't Maggie's Poem

some people have guardian angels. all you got is me, but i'm on my job. i don't just guard you

when you get depressed, i cry when you feel bad, i take aspirin if you're hungry, my stomach growls. if you get constipated, my stomach swells.

when you stomp your toe
i holler.
when you get drunk, i hang over.
when you overeat, i get fat.
and if you're happy,
i laugh all day now ain't

that loving you?

check this out

when i was sixteen

i was strangely engaged to a star football player. he played with my new breasts like they were old stitched leather. grabbed them like he was headed for a touchdown. however, i thought i was too little to be analogous to a football field.

well, check this out: some wimmin i know must have played on that same football team.

₽₽

i keep dancing just outside y'r frame of reference like day-glo white paint on a black canvas in a dark room lit by candles

Historia Educ d manue

like a faint body smell of natural funk that almost stinks yet you like it spiritual truth, physical deterioration, insomnia, migraine headaches and poems about suffering, and inspiration to keep suffering and being a sucker to inspiration and the idea that the rewards of suffering are inspirational and spiritual

## spiritual orgasms

1

love me enough to run errands with me, or better still, for me,

and enjoy it.

2

the rain, on Broderick Street, the sunsets on the seventh day, walk six inches above ground.

3

and dance on rice paper without tearing it,

forever



## Iansa Oyé

tiny specks flew through the air, orangish red, tiny pinpoints of orangish real fire tips of the fires the tiniest edge of flames always dis appearing because she cut them off. to collect the ends.

when she opened the bag full of flame they flew thru the air on their own breezes like waves crest she stood in the middle and smiled, of the tiny flames swirling unburning gently around her body ebony black long corn rows beaded with flame red pinpricks of flame dancing. for everyone born from 1944-1950, especially, and for everyone living, born before 1944

you have to be

thirty

(or a little more) to really realize how young it is, how sweet is is, how wrong it was, to ever think otherwise.

besides,

we're all cartoon characters anyway

the abolitionist, 9979

i want to free your minds from centuries of slime semantic disenfranchisement and semen.

from seeing yourselves as others do free you from the prisons of the penis people.

i want to loosen the chains of pettiness, pretense, & distorted perceptions.

i need to see you free. see you running thinking flying being

so i will have some company.

Stomp Me, Damballah\*

stomp me, Damballah.

slap me all over the sidewalk. drag me by the head, an arm, a leg. knock off my wig. break my face. play like i'm a rubber ball, i will bounce for you. i can crawl. i am a snake. i am whatever you say, i ain't nothing but you can make me be you'll see. i'm a horse. i can ride you, well. make it real sweet. i am your crossroad. you can be my car ride me on away from here

do it now. do it good. real hard, real funky.

dance on me.

sing to me in tongues, in zulu, in gullah in anything i don't speak but i can understand.

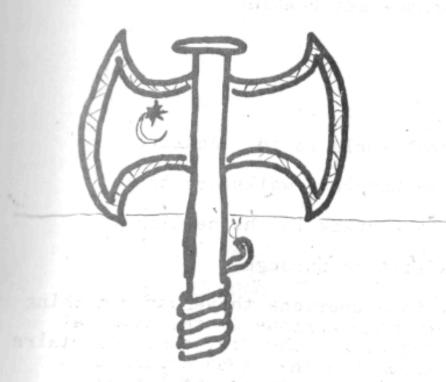
touch me like lightning.

i ain't worthy

but lord, i'm ready. whenever you are,

stomp me,

Damballah.



\*Damballah / Chango is the deity of . . .

sky, the life-principle, thunder & lightning, and serpents, among other things

#### The Mambo Speaks

Ι

i have felt my strangeness return as youth left taken by a hill that tried to be a mountain ahead of its time my strangeness remains

II

the real world is to Reality what my bathroom walls are to me. there's a crack in the ceiling. let's slip on through

(they told everyone there was something Important & Serious in the rooms at the top of all the grey concrete stairs but also told them they couldn't go up, until the Leaders got through, all the people waited a long, long time until word got around, they had a Right to go up there, so the people stormed the steps but i ran out and yelled stop. there is NOTHING up there, and look how many steps - just to keep you climbing and exhausted. and they stopped. They stopped.)

it feels strange,

to be so strange, but it feels so right.

### III

in total chaos there is peace and in chaos, relief. release.

#### ΙV

part my hair in the middle to make their entrance easier make my body an invocation if they find me ready they will come.

## and another thing

the sun does not rise each morning just to show people how to get to work, so that somebody can show somebody how her cuticles need fixing.

althing ent of high yes they

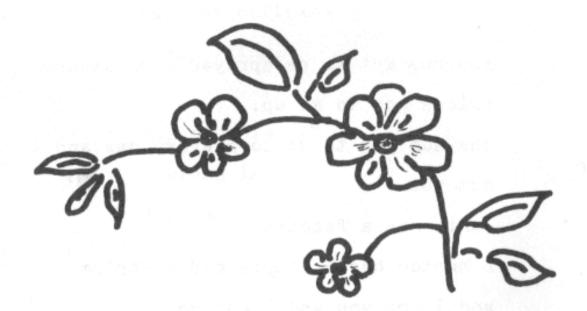
the moon is not a stand in for simonex. the last poem (11.22.80, esp. for Aisha)

boxers got trainers. politicians got power. dancers got to sweat and i got you. rich folk got money. basketball teams got coaches. artists get art supplies. singers gotta sing and i got you.

roaches got to be sprayed - or smoked. prices got to go up. the sun got to go down every day and i got you.

Janie had a Teacake. Langston had s Simple and a Harlem. and i got you and i got you. we all got to pay dues, and taxes. black folk got to be free. wimmin got to be liberated. foreigners got to learn american. chances got to roll around. children got to grow up. people got to hope and i got you. and what you got? you got

me.



## dedication

to all the editors who rejected my poems to all the people who accepted them

for all my people in Cornelia, Ga. to all my folks from Paine

to all my sisters in Los Angeles who kept me insane & otherwise,

in short, to everyone i ever knew (including those i want to forget) & especially & especially

Sheila M. Ethel Mae Elvira Avis Virginia S. Louisah T. Y the T & Linda Maria Diosa & Lois AZALEA &

Yemaye



## about the author?

well, she's always had big bright eyes (even after 24 hours of no sleep & tequila), and there's always a book in front of them . . . any kind of book.

but what she ain't is the kind of writer who makes what she reads her subjects. she likes real things like mountains and trees and stars and old people. ('specially Moma Elvie and Daddy John). because she listens with her eyes better than most people can see, and old people still know what's real.

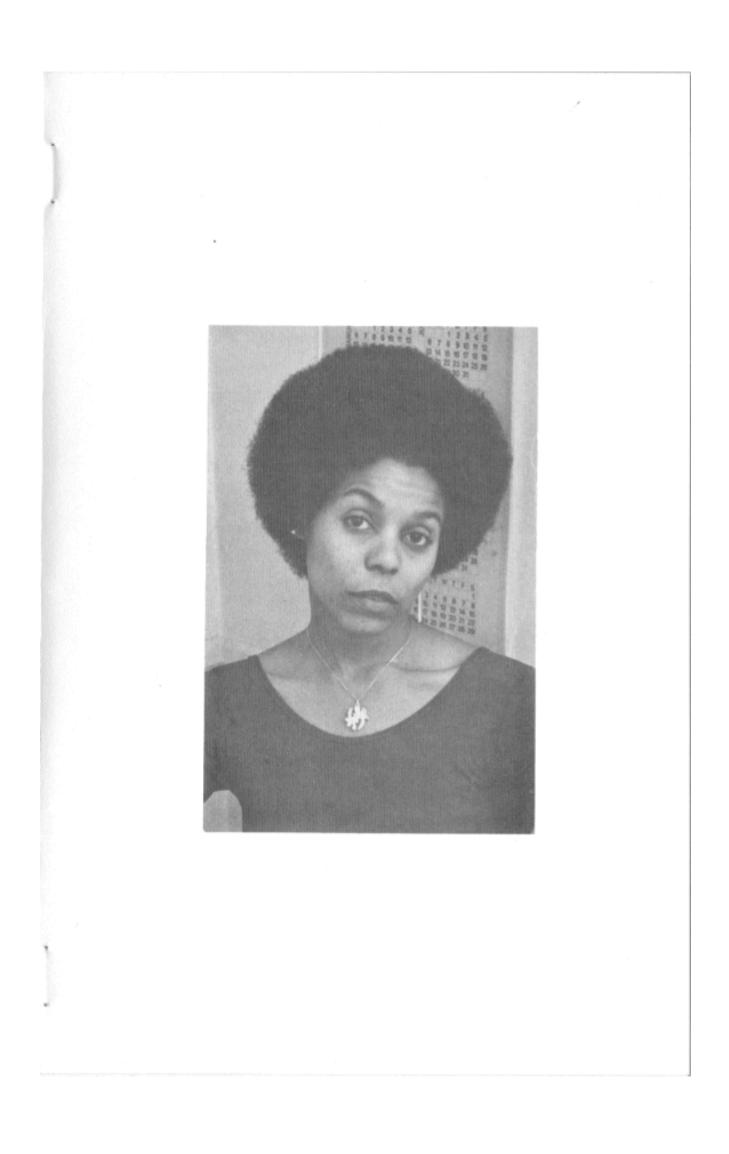
she tells the truth. Harsh and a bit incisive sometimes but her message is always clear: Loving and Living always and only. Not in the sexual or lustful sense, but pure unadulterated real love.

That's why she has those big bright eyes. Being the <u>original</u> two-headed woman, she sees what most of us will never see. Also, unlike most of us, she has to share it. she's a seer who happens to be a good writer whose most personal poems become your own.

This is her first book of poems. read then with your eyes just slightly open and by the time you've finished the last poem she will have illumined you as she has those of us who know her.

finally, for those of us who still find it problematic, what she does is give us lessons on living. But, as I am certainly one in the number, what do I know. I am only,

Maggie Davenport





Reading, Rereading, and Celebrating doris davenport's it's like this

doris davenport is a poet of extraordinary passion and humor. Digitizing her first chapbook, *it's like this* (1981), is an invitation for new readers to explore davenport's *oeuvre*. In the more than thirty years since her debut, she consistently has produced poetry that delights and enlightens, poetry that entertains and challenges. *it's like this* foregrounds four aspects of davenport's work. The chapbook demonstrates the handcrafted nature of davenport's work; it introduces key themes and ideas that davenport explores throughout her work; it establishes the structural and linguistic creativity that become a hallmark of davenport's work; finally, *it's like this* conveys crucial theoretical feminist insights. Re-reading *it's like this* today helps us to see davenport as a poet worthy of re-consideration in contemporary poetics. davenport deserves consideration, in particular, as a crucial voice in feminist and African-American poetry from the 1980s and 1990s.

In the Introduction to this electronic edition, davenport describes the creation of the original chapbook: *it's like this* was a labor of love that occurred in a dynamic and generative lesbian-feminist community in Southern California. Like many lesbian-feminist self-publishers at the time, davenport, and her friends and comrades, contributed all of the labor and money to bring the book into the world. davenport wrote the poems and created the artwork. She created the typeset pages and oversaw the printing and collation. She produced an object that was an expression of her being and a physical manifestation of her love for her community. The work did not stop there, however. davenport sold the chapbooks, giving some away to the friends and colleagues who helped her, selling many others at readings, feminist gatherings, and other poetry events. *it's like this* is a chapbook that existed and circulated in lesbian-feminist communities. Like many other books produced during the heady days of women's liberation, *it's like this* is a vision, a promise, a hope, a dream and the blood (menstrual and veinal), sweat, and tears of women's labor.

For many feminist poets including Judy Grahn, Pat Parker, Jan Clausen, Joan Larkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Cheryl Clarke, the creation and distribution of their own handmade chapbook was a launching pad that secured more mainstream publishing opportunities. Generally, that has not been the case for davenport. Although she has published prose and many poems through more "traditional" means, throughout her creative life, davenport has taken primary responsibility for printing, publishing, and distributing her own work. This reality exemplifies her extraordinary belief in the value of her poetry as well as her commitment to her artistic life and to sharing her vision with the world. davenport has suffered marginalization as a result of primarily self-publishing but also has reaped the benefits of freedom that self-publishing offers.

davenport is not alone, however, in building a significant corpus of work primarily through self-publishing. During the 1980s and 1990s, San Francisco-based novelist Red Arboteau self-published her novels, and like davenport, now uses print on demand platforms to publish and circulate her work. Today, enabled by an increasingly wired and networked world, literary artists have more options for selfpublication. In fact, some of the most exciting new work by LGBT literary artists continues to be self-published and self-promoted, including Mia McKenzie's extraordinary debut novel, *The Summer We Got Free*, which just won a Lambda Literary Award. For these literary artists, self-publishing is a strategy to ensure that their voices exist in public conversations, as well as a strategy to ensure control over their work. While self-publishing has important benefits for literary artists, particularly marginalized writers, self-publishing can limit exposure to broader audiences, and it unjustly continues to carry stigma among many literary critics. doris davenport's work invites readers and critics to reassess self-publishing as a necessary and bold action that challenges silences and erasures.

How davenport published her work is an important part of the handcrafted nature of her work, but handcrafted does not simply mean self-published. Handcrafted also means attention to corporeality; handcrafted links the cerebral life of words with the physical life of poems. For davenport, handcrafted connects the mind and the body. Physicality and corporeality are insistent elements of davenport's work. Each poem is handcrafted, like a wooden bench, a small batch of bourbon, an embroidered kitchen towel. Like a pot thrown on a wheel by the potter that forever bears the marks of its maker's body, davenport marks her poems with her body. Consider the intermingling of an ink pen and menstrual blood in "i'm tired of being abstract. . ." or the "reddish gold aura" in the "lavender lady." The body in davenport's poems is always present, intruding on the mind of the reader, insisting on its presence and significance, and amplifying meaning in the poems. The amaranthine body reminds us that these poems are made by hand.

Handcrafted is not only verbal in davenport's work, but also visual. Her poems exist side by side with her artwork. Sometimes the artwork is representational as in "121 Soque Street;" in other examples the art work is evocative as in "how to holler : the "overarian yell"." Hand-drawn visuals are common in chapbooks published by feminist poets during the women's liberation movement of the 1970s and 1980s. Artists could not contain the visions for women's liberation and the energy generated from these visions and from communities of women in words. Their creative productivity spilled on the page to include visual elements and into physical performances of the work. In *it's like this*, the handiness and handcrafted represent davenport's work with words and images, implicating equally the body and the mind in the poems and in the production of the chapbook.

The handcrafted nature of davenport's work foregrounds one key thematic element: the body. davenport repeatedly and insistently reminds readers of inhabited bodies, of the corporeal demands of bodies. Often, she does this with humor. In the delightful poem, "the toilet tissue theory of life," davenport philosophizes about the passage of time and the persistent need to wipe shit. While the body makes many powerful appearances in this collection, davenport also is concerned with a variety of situated standpoints—working class, lesbian, feminist, vegetarian, rural, southern. These descriptors, however, cannot contain nor even evoke the complexity of the embodied person who creates the poems. They simply suggest various windows through which we might see the poet and various themes through which we might try to understand her work. These situated standpoints are another thematic element of davenport's work.

While davenport embraces a variety of regional, cultural, spiritual, and imagined identities, she also resists strict, or rigid, identitarian practices. davenport's sense of play, her sense of humor resists rigidity or facile categorization. In fact, davenport valorizes resistance in *it's like this*. In the poem "sojourner, you shouldn't have done that," davenport articulates an apparent ambivalence to a singular iconic figures like Sojourner Truth. The poem explains how such an icon can narrowly circumscribe and limit others' expectations of the lives and roles of black women.

all black wimmin inherited your theatrics. so now what we we supposed to do??????? davenport speaks back to truth, both received truth and the historical Sojourner Truth. She creates a dialogue between the poet and the historical character and a dialogue among the poet, Sojourner Truth, and the reader. This type of intimate dialogue is another hallmark of her work; davenport invites continued conversation.

*it's like this* begins to explore the structural and linguistic creativity that is a hallmark of davenport's work. For instance, visual inventiveness is evident in the poem "4.3.80" when she describes

my	me	tro
nome	bo	dy

Davenport visually evokes a metronome through the arrangements of syllables on the page. Then, punning with metronome, she uses metonymy as the central conceit of the poem: the sound of the metronome stands in for the body. "4.3.80" is one poem in *its like this* that demonstrates how davenport mobilizes visual and sonic elements to layer meaning.

Alternate spelling and capitalization that davenport uses are also present in *it's like this*. I first met doris through email when I published a few of her poems in *Sinister Wisdom*. In the very first email she sent, she gently but insistently told me, "Right off, my name should be always in all lower case letters, okay!!???" davenport's control of the English language, of her name, of how she wants to appear on the page is invigorating. Typography, diction, capitalization, and punctuation all carry specific and idiosyncratic meanings for davenport. Encountering davenport, readers learn immediately that while we may share English as our common language, she is using it in different ways to challenge our sense of meaning, stability, privilege, and reality.

Like many other chapbooks and poetry collections by lesbian-feminist poets, davenport's poetry expresses the vibrant emergence of new feminist theories. In "theory no. 777," davenport reflects on the divide between nature and culture as gendered:

nature has to be female. because if it were a father nature, there would be seasons, but for a price. they would not come naturally & gradually but abruptly. all at once. the sun would rise, but with a toll for each person, each town, each country. the present sun situation would appear to a father nature as a welfare state.

In "c.r. For nice girls and 4w's," davenport quips, "she was so quiet and unobstrusive/she wouldn't even talk in her sleep." Published the same year as the first edition of *This Bridge Called My Back* (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981), in which davenport has an essay, "The Pathology of Racism," *it's like this* expresses emergent theories about feminism as defined by women of color, foregrounding crucial theoretical feminist insights about multiple consciousness. In "Stomp Me, Damballah," davenport writes, "sing to me in tongues, in zulu, in gullah/in anything I don't speak but I can/understand." Finally, in "two-headed woman," davenport grounds the poem in "the voodoo/conjure womon tradition." This poem became davenport's signature poem and it expresses her personal credo. Here is "two-headed woman" in its entirety:

they call me a two-headed woman, but sometimes i got three. they call me a two-headed lady, but usually, i got three.

one to see what you see, one to see what you will never see, and another one, just to protect me.

In subsequent work, davenport continues to elaborate feminist theories and woman of color subjectivities.

*it's like this* emerges from vibrant feminist communities and poetry communities in Los Angeles. Scholars and artists have written about Los Angeles feminist communities extensively, although more frequently examining the relationships between visual art and activism in works like Terry Wolverton's *Insurgent Muse: Life and art at the Woman's Building* (San Francisco: City Lights Publishing, 2002) and Judy Chicago's *Through the Flower: My Life as a Woman Artists* (New York: Doubleday, 1975). The poetry scene in Los Angeles, however, was equally vibrant as Bill Mohr's *Hold Outs: The Los Angeles Poetry Renaissance, 1948-1992* (Cedar Rapids: University of Iowa Press, 2011) wonderfully documents. davenport's work emerges alongside other prominent Los Angeles poets including Wanda Coleman and Eloise Klein Healy.

Sadly, davenport's work has been neglected in contemporary literary criticism and in retrospectives of poetry from the black arts movement and from the women's liberation movement. At a moment when poetry from women's liberation movements and the Black Arts Movement (BAM) is gaining attention and being canonized, as in Honor Moore's *Poems from the Women's Movement* (Library of America, 2009), Joanne V. Gabbin's *Furious Flower: African American Poetry from the Black Arts Movement to the Present* (University of Virginia Press, 2004), and Charles Henry Rowell's *Angles of Ascent: A Norton Anthology of Contemporary African American Poetry* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013), doris davenport's work is ripe to re-visit and re-appraise. An Affrilachian poet, working before Frank X. Walker coined the word, an early performance/spoken word poet before the spoken word movement became popular, an early lesbian and feminist, davenport exemplifies multiple poetic communities. Contemporary poets like Patricia Smith, Sapphire, Stacyann Chinn, R. Erica Doyle, and Alexis Pauline Gumbs are heir to doris davenport and her early groundbreaking work.

Re-appraisals of davenport may begin anywhere within *it's like this*. Here are three moments from this chapbook that I treasure. First, "The Abolitionist 9979." davenport suggests her futuristic visions in the title and the surprise ending, with its powerful rhetorical call, satisfies enormously.

i want to free your minds from centuries of slime semantic disenfranchisement and semen. from seeing yourselves as others do free you from the prisons of the penis people. i want to loosen the chains of pettiness, pretense, & distorted perceptions.

i need to see you free. see you running thinking flying being

so I will have some company.

davenport's yearning for freedom in this poem generatively combines with her humor. The image of her living free, running, thinking, flying, and being, is exuberant and celebratory.

"the last poem 11.22.80, esp. For Aisha" demonstrates davenport's intellectual stakes, situating her squarely within feminist and African-American intellectual traditions. Within the poem davenport writes,

Janie had a Teacake Langston had s Simple and a Harlem. And I got you and I got you. We all got to pay dues, and taxes. Black folk got to be free. Wimmin got to be liberated.

At the end of *it's like this*, "the last poem" synthesizes many of the intellectual conversations that davenport initiates in the collection and continues throughout her literary work.

Finally, davenport's poem "Vision I : Genesis for Wimmin of Color" is the type of iconic poem that deserves a wider audience and great circulation.

1. white boys run america. black boys run, period. white girls run the wimmin's movement & everyone runs over and from black wimmin. listen. they said - your place is not here. they said - you have no place. they are wrong. listen.

2.

in the beginning was the Goddess who chose not to speak at that time, knowing her words would be plagiarized, resented, mis-represented, denied. in the beginning was the Goddess. she chose not to speak, but to do. practicing, and drinking wine, she made men. alone to wimmin she

gave the powers : 2 heads. to us she gave the sign : the moon. alone to us her divine power : life. for us she created the earth and

all upon it, then sat down and waited for us to make it good but we blew it: words were invented and abused. But

when wimmin started to speak the Goddess stood up. We spoke too slow and she shook her head. she waits : omnipotent but wordless

```
she waits. Knowing
we are The Word.
3.
listen:
```

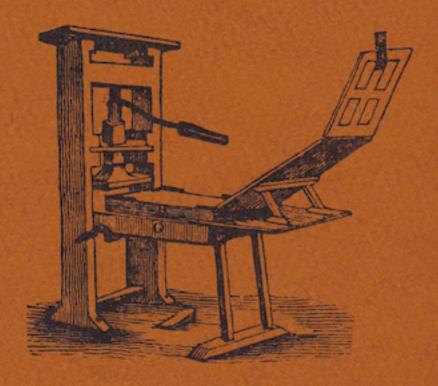
Listen, listen, indeed.

**Julie R. Enszer**, PhD is the executive editor of the Lesbian Poetry Archives. She is the author of *Handmade Love* (A Midsummer Night's Press, 2010) and *Sisterhood* (Sibling Rivalry Press, 2013) and the editor of *Milk & Honey: a Celebration of Jewish Lesbian Poetry*. A white, lesbian-feminist, Enszer was raised in Michigan and now lives in Maryland with her wife.

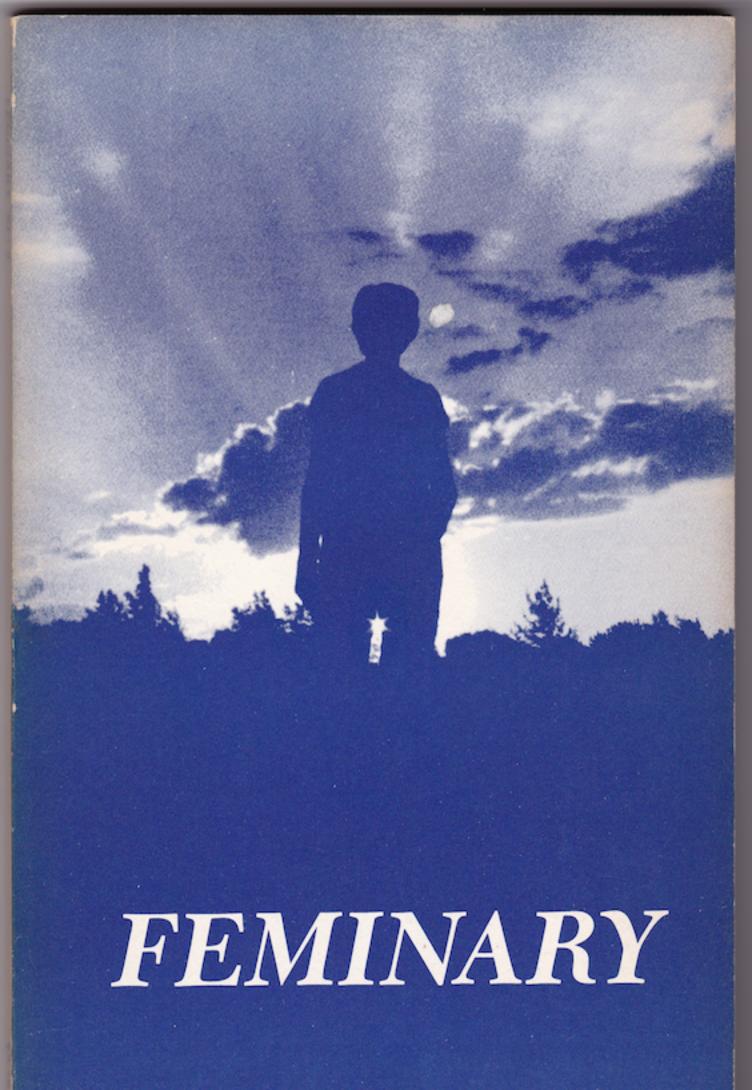
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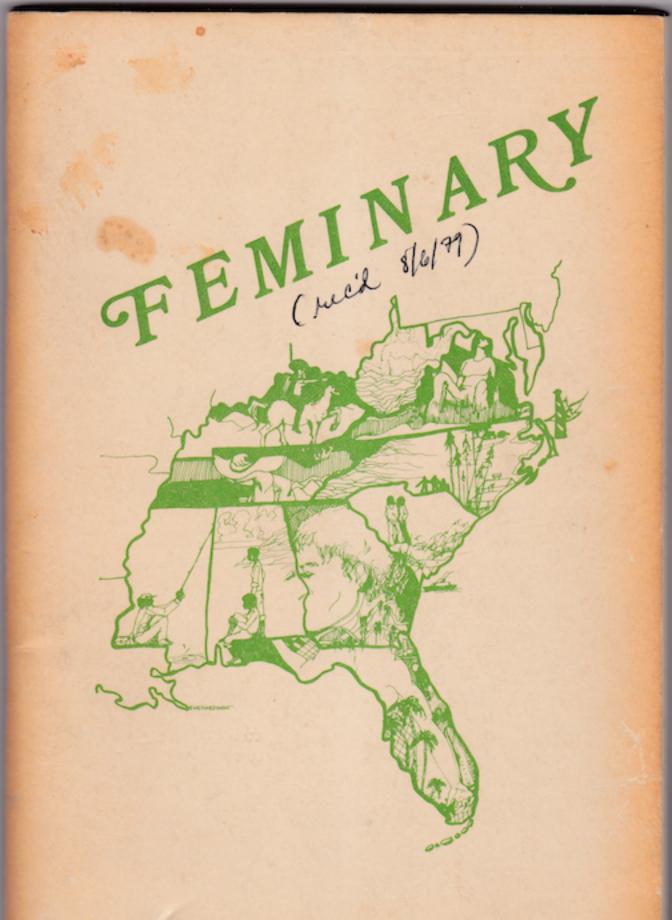


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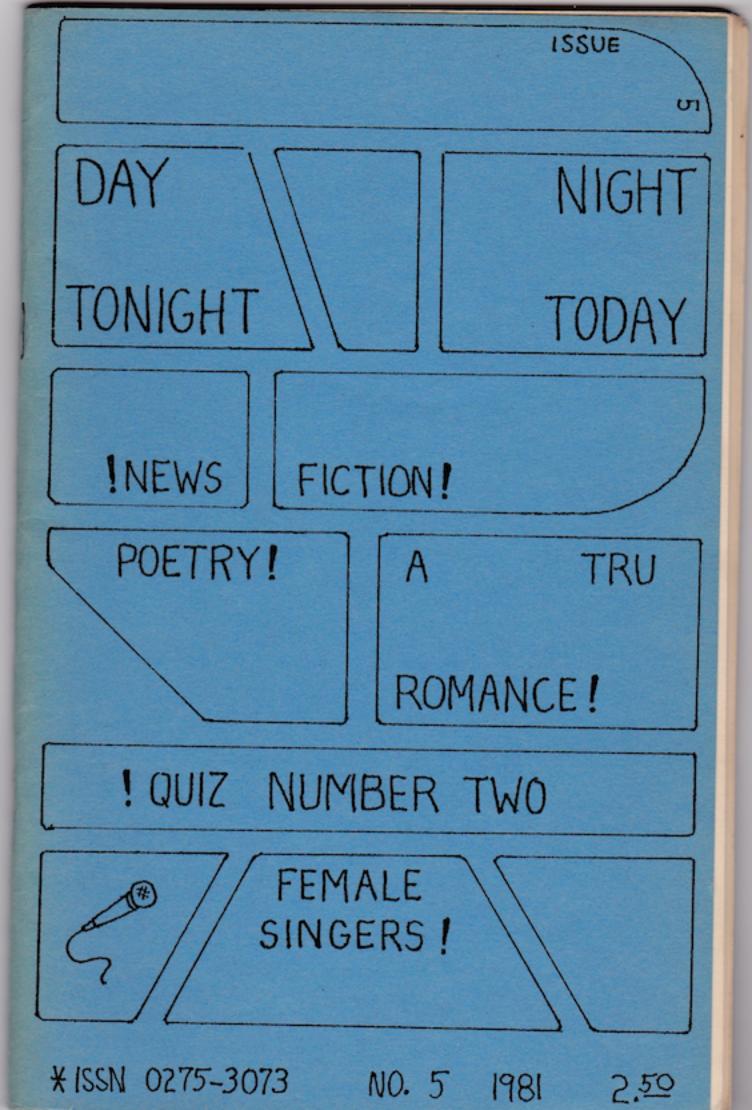
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Meridel LeSueur: NOTES FROM CRETE

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1981



Day Tonight Night Today

Feminist Dialogue

Angela Peckenpaugh Donna Prinzmetal Doris Davenport Jacquelyn Nicholson

0

S.R. Jade Shelly Zaikus Wendy Glenn The Peacock

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No. Twenty-One: DORIS DAVENPORT

