



Love Song
to the
Warriors

by Oriethyia

Table of Contents

Introduction	i
Author Biography	vii
Love Song to the Warriors	
“Heart Dance” from <i>Sinister Wisdom</i> 14	

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Based on a work at www.LesbianPoetryArchive.org

Introduction

The fifth e-book in the Lesbian Poetry Archive's series of classic lesbian-feminist chapbooks is Oriethyia's *Love Song to the Warriors*. It is a pleasure to present a facsimile edition of this important chapbook. *Love Song to the Warriors* is significant to the history of lesbian-feminist poetry in three ways: first, its mode of production is emblematic of feminist culture-making in the 1970s. Second, *Love Song to the Warriors* captures thematically the spirit and excitement of feminism during the late 1960s and 1970s. Finally, *Love Song to the Warriors* demonstrates the intertwining of culture and politics during this period. This chapbook is a vital artifact of poetry and lesbian-feminism, worthy of greater attention by readers and writers.

Lenachild Press first published *Love Song to the Warriors* in 1977. The name of the press captures one of the activist statements of radical feminists in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Critical of patriarchy, women rejected the system of patronymic naming. Some women adopted as surnames the names of their mothers, compounded with child, to demonstrate matriarchal lineages. Kathie Sarachild of the Redstockings and New York Radical Women is one feminist who took this action. Other lesbian-feminists modified their names in different ways; Karla Jay took her last name from part of her middle name; Elana Dykewomon created her own last name challenging all to address her with the power of the word dyke. Oriethyia, as the publisher of *Love Song to the Warriors*, named the press with her mother's middle name, Lena, hence Lenachild Press. After the first edition was completely distributed, Lenachild Press released a second printing in August 1978 to sell at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. Two editions of the book demonstrate the demand for these types of cultural products. This facsimile edition is from a copy of the second printing of the chapbook.

Chapbooks in particular and poetry more

generally were one way that women communicated with one another during the Women's Liberation Movement. Poetry prompted vibrant conversations in growing feminist communities. *Love Song to the Warriors* demonstrates explicitly how these conversations happened. Oriethya composed three poems in response to "an incident that took place at a woman's conference in California." At the conference, a woman experienced a period of "heightened madness" and stayed as a conference participant with support from a community of women around her. Some conference attendees wished for her to leave and not interrupt their conference experience. In a brief preface to the poems, Oriethya explains the circumstances; in the poems, she explores the issues and ideas at stake within the conflict and her responses. Oriethya disavows the women who want to exile the woman from the conference in the poem "Surface Tension," she writes: "my tribe has yet to form, / my community has yet to take shape." The repudiation of the community at the conference is also an invitation to create a new one; these lines are an invocation for a new community to come into being. This search for community is dynamic. The poet writes, "we are still moving, searching, / testing ourselves, / being tested". She concludes this poem,

It reminds me that i have
the rest of my life
to finish this work.
And the anger and frustration
tell me
how important it is
that the work continue.

With these lines, the poet affirms the significance of the role of conflict and process in feminist communities and her own commitment to participating in feminist work. Concluding with the word 'continue' suggests the conversational nature of this poem—and of lesbian-feminist poetry broadly.

In the second poem in the series, "A Three Piece

Symphony for Fury, Frustration, and Fear,” Oriethya uses the experience at the conference to explore other ways that women encounter these difficult emotions, particularly how the emotions emerge to isolate and threaten women. The final poem of the cycle, “I Reserve the Right to Bitch,” affirms the value of critique and demonstrates how self-critique is a tool for building feminist movements. Collectively, these three poems demonstrate how conflict was both productive and poetic in feminist communities. Their publication in this chapbook demonstrates the role of print culture in feminist communities to examine and resolve conflicts.

Thematically, the poems of *Love Song to the Warriors* cover an array of feminist issues, demonstrating the breadth of feminist visions and concerns. Three themes emerge as particularly salient: revolution, mythology, and historical reclamation. Much has been written about mythology and historical reclamation in relationship to feminist poetry (see for example the work of Mary DeShazer, Mary E. Galvan, Judy Grahn, Germaine Greer, Alicia Ostriker and Kim Whitehead). Oriethya’s work confirms the significance of these themes and demonstrates how pervasive they were. Women embraced histories about Amazons and witches as feminist foremothers—and included their imagined world in poetry. They also rewrote contemporary mythology as in “For Super-Hero Fans” where Oriethya imagines

Wouldn't it be wild
if jill jonston was right,
if Lois Lane was in fact,
a dyke?

Jill Johnston, the Village Voice reporter and author of *Lesbian Nation*, was widely known as a feminist provocateur. Here she is linked with Lois Lane creating a new type of mythological fandom for lesbian writers.

What electrified me about *Love Song to the Warriors* the first time I read it was how immediate revolution is in these poems. The third poem, “On the

Eve of the Official Bicentennial, and in Honor of the Third Amerikan Revolution,” includes the line, “If there is to be a revolution, / let it begin here.” The conditional if seems a hollow gesture to skeptics even this early in the text. The title offers the framework that the speaker is in fact in the midst of a third Amerikan revolution—feminism. The poem concludes:

It has begun.
The first fires have been lit.

And in this camp,
You were the spark.

Later in *Love Song to the Warriors*, in the poem “Passing in the Patriarchy, Oriethyia writes,

if every belly dancer
was a revolutionary,
every hooker,
the revolution would be over
tomorrow.

This passage affirms both the immediacy and viability of revolution and the type of organizing necessary to facilitate it.

In “Compromise,” the poet affirms a vision for a different kind of revolution.

I want to wake up tomorrow
to the news that the
revolution is over,
quiet, bloodless, and over.

Feminists reworked traditional ideas about revolution in their theoretical and creative productions. Oriethyia follows this powerful quatrain with these two lines: “We won’t be divided / ever again.” While feminists critique the vision of a unified sisterhood, both concurrent to its promotion and in its afterlife, the sisterhood vision offered here is striking in its power and hopefulness.

For me, lesbian-feminist critical thinking must honor both the critique and the appeal of the vision of sisterhood.

The reimagining of women and revolution is also evident in the poem, “To Hanah Senesh, Angela Davis, Pat Swinton, Susan Saxe, Kathy Power, Assata Shakur, Joan of Arc, The Witches, Bodicea, Oreithyia, and Every Pre-Revolutionary Chinese Mother who Refused to Have Her Daughters Feet Bound.” Through the concatenation of multiple women who defied societal conventions, this poem invokes women’s power in spine-tingling ways in the final tercet.

Blessed is she who’s death
brings the end of all fear
one step closer

Similarly, in “Song to a Celtic Warrior,” Oriethyia writes:

our love will join our rage
and we will strike
and we will strike
and we will strike
and we will win

The possibility of immediate revolution inspired feminists and lesbians to imagine a bold new world and work to create that world, free from oppression. Reading these poems today reminds me of the passion and excitement of feminism and lesbian-feminism in the 1970s. Revolution was at hand. What if we lived with such fervor today?

In a present state of revolution, aiding and abetting the revolution could be done both politically and culturally. Observations about the world in these poems are political, deeply grounded in seeing and addressing power. For instance in “Earthquake,” the speaker describes how unsettling it will be for men when women rise up: “like an earthquake.” The speaker notes that men “can either learn to walk / with us / or

grovel forever.” In “Compromise,” the speaker describes

taking my place within the
ranks
of the millions of women
blocking all streets
with our sheer numbers

These lines affirm the significance of direct political action.

In *Love Song to the Warriors*, activist politics grounds revolutionary zeal. Culture, mythology, and imagination are tools for social transformation. The existence of these two strands of thinking about change—concrete activist politics and cultural production—is emblematic of this period of feminism. Women connected politics and artistic production in meaningful ways. Ruptures between the political and the cultural—and histories that suggest that they were at odds—emerge later. Conflict and contestation were part of the feminist métier, but dichotomous and exclusionary portrayals of politics and cultural are inaccurate—as readers will note in *Love Song to the Warriors*.

By publishing this facsimile edition of *Love Song to the Warriors*, I invite new readers to join me in finding delight in these poems—and considering what contributions they make to discussions about the legacy of lesbian-feminist poetry and cultural production.

Julie R. Enszer
May 2016

Editor note: Thank you to Asma Neblett and Sarah Greaney for assistance in digitizing *Love Song to the Warriors*.

Author Biography

Oriethya is still a radical lesbian-feminist. She still dreams of a revolution of hearts and minds, one powerful enough to break the underpinnings of patriarchy and all of its constructs and cronies.

In addition to *Love Song to the Warriors*, she released an audio tape of *Kisses and Revolution* in 1984 (re-mothered from the original reel to reel in 2016 and now available as a CD) and *A Murder of Crows* in 1993.

Read more about her work at www.oriethya.org or www.oriethya.blogspot.com.



Love Song
to the
Warriors

by Oriethyia

**LOVE SONG
TO
THE
WARRIORS**

Oriethyia

Graphics by Gillian Booth.

I want to give my special thanks to Irene Weinberger and Eileen Kelly. Without their constant support and encouragement, this collection would never have made it to the printer.

The last poem in this collection is especially dedicated to Martha Courtot. Her energy runs through me and it was that energy that carried me through the writing of "Love Song . . .".

Special thanks to the sisters of AFWIC (Aid for Women in Chile), to Gillian Booth, Barbara Ebreinreich, and Char Sky, all of whom elevate my consciousness to a global level.

And to Regan. She has been here for all the revisions, hysteria, changes, madness and joy. I hope there are enough days to make you know how important you are to me.

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Love Song to the Warriors

is dedicated to

the women of Long Island:

*Irene Weinberger, Susan McGrath,
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Adair Lifset, Susan LeBow, Barbara
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to my friend: *Cynthia Grabam.*

to *Danielle* and *Nicolle* for reminding me
that i am allowed to be a child some-
times.

and to the two most important women in
my life:

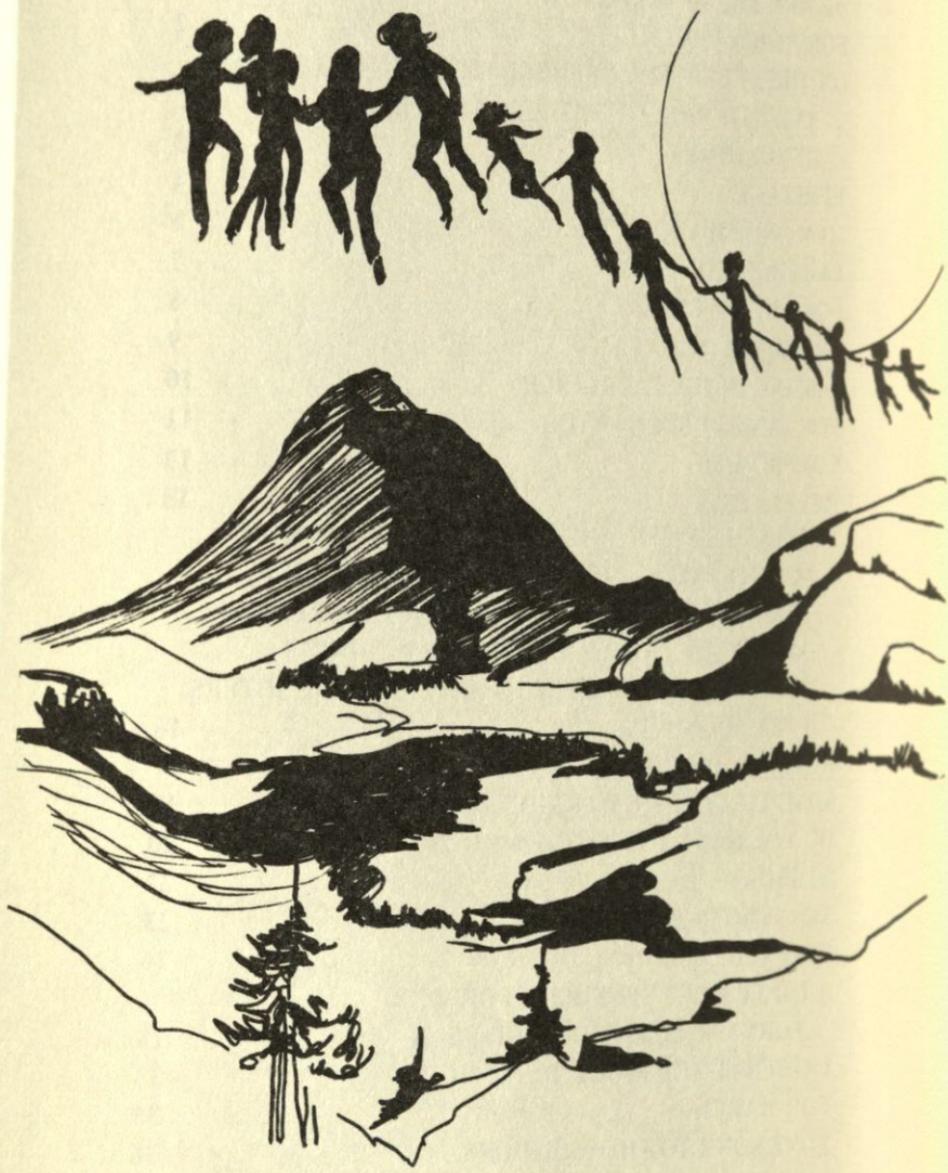
Regan (who shares my soul)
and
Catherine (my mother and friend)

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CONTENTS

WE ARE THE HEALERS	1
FOR ROBIN FRE	2
ON THE EVE OF THE OFFICIAL BICENTENNIAL, AND IN HONOR OF THE THIRD AMERIKAN REVOLUTION	3
HERITAGE	4
MEN AND CHILDREN FIRST	6
EARTHQUAKE	7
FOR THE WITCHES	8
FOR SUPER-HERO FANS	9
PASSING IN THE PATRIARCHY	10
FOR JANE AT SIX MONTHS	11
COMPROMISE	12
REVELATION	13
TO HANAH SENESH, ANGELA DAVIS, PAT SWINTON, SUSAN SAXE, KATHY POWER, ASSATA SHAKUR, JOAN OF ARC, THE WITCHES, BODICEA, OREITHYIA, AND EVERY PRE-REVOLUTIONARY CHINESE MOTHER WHO REFUSED TO HAVE HER DAUGHTERS FEET BOUND	16
RICHARD, at age nine	17
SONG TO A CELTIC WARRIOR	19
DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE THE MOON	20
SOMEDAY	22
TRANSMUTATION	23
SURFACE TENSION	26
A THREE PIECE SYMPHONY FOR FURY, FRUSTRATION, AND FEAR	28
I RESERVE THE RIGHT TO BITCH	33
FOR MARCIA	35
LOVE SONG TO THE WARRIORS	36



BPM

WE ARE THE HEALERS

We are the healers
we take the purifying herbs
and apply them to the body
the body hovering
on the edge of death;

We are the herbs
we purify the body
we pull out the death cells
we strike from the body
the parasites that kill;

We are the body
the body that hurts
the body crippled
immobilized by parasites
the body now being purged
now purging itself;

We are the healers

FOR ROBIN FRE

Sweet sister,
you are so beautiful,
sister,
i love your laugh,
sister,
you who run with Hecate
take care,

they would burn you at the stake
if they could.

ON THE EVE OF THE OFFICIAL
BICENTENNIAL, AND IN HONOR
OF THE THIRD AMERIKAN REVOLUTION.

For Gillian

Interesting,
the sign hanging quietly
behind your desk reads:

“If there is to be a revolution,
let it begin here”.

Your supervisor laughs
as he walks past
in his custom tailored suit,
color co-ordinated shirt,
tie, handkerchief, socks, and
white patent leather,
pointy-toed shoes.

He thinks it a joke;
his biggest mistake.

Your coworkers watch you,
watch you watching him,
watch the smile that
steals across
your waiting face.

“If there is to be a revolution,
let it begin here”.

They smile,
with you this time.
It has begun.
The first fires have been lit.

And in this camp,
You were the spark.

HERITAGE

For Martha Courtot

“And the women sit in circles.
How else should women sit”,
she said,
“but in circles”.

Sister long hair,
your truth is so simple,
and so essential.

Were you in the room,
i wonder,
when your daughter looked
across at us and said:

“did you know,
my great great grandfather
was a gardener
at Buckingham Palace”.

I wanted to shake her,
point her to you,
say:

“did you know,
womanchild,
that your mother speaks
with the tongue
of our mother’s mothers,
speaks with the face
of the Native American
healing women
who birthed
and healed
and planted
and reaped
and spread her magik hands
across the sky
across the earth
and joined them
and made them whole.

did you know
you are her daughter?”

But soon she will know.
soon the knowledge will
pass to her
as it was passed to you.

Sister long hair,
may your spirit
feel the earth
feel the water
feel the air
feel the fire;
may your journey continue,
may your daughter's begin.

MEN AND CHILDREN FIRST

"Men and children first"
she says
then stands, and, triumphant,
throws herself
over the railing
and into the
swirling waters.

In a culture that demands
the psychic suicide
of its women,
drowning is ultimately
less painful
than saying
"how about me".

EARTHQUAKE

how uncomfortable it must be,
will be,
for you who have
lived your lives
feeding from our breasts
now that we suckle you
no more.

what must it be like
to feel our necks moving
from under your feet,
how like an earthquake.

you will fall to your knees
and we will get up off
our backs
and you can either learn to walk
with us
or grovel forever in the
memory
of the soft womanflesh
you once used
as your platform.

your choice matters not to us
any longer.

walk or grovel
it's up to you,
but we,
regardless of your decision
will move,
and moving,
shall cause the earth
to tremble.

FOR THE WITCHES

So many have forgotten
but we cannot.

We carry the memory
of the nine million;
We harbor their spirits;
We call on their knowledge
for healing;
We savor their secret-
the life principle.

We will bring it back
for all those
who will share.

So many have forgotten,
we cannot.

We will recall forever
their glorious faces,

And we must never forget,
nor let you,

the smell
of
burning flesh

FOR SUPER-HERO FANS

(a poem that will **not** be read at the
next International Comic Book Convention)

Wouldn't it be wild
if jill jonston was right,
if Lois Lane was in fact,
a dyke?

Wouldn't it be Marvelous
if all those half successful attempts
on the sex-life of
the Man of Steel
(did he, i wonder, have a chromed
cock?)
were simply her cover,
her, shall we say, closet door?

Wouldn't it be great
if every day
on leaving the Daily Planet
our roving reporter
boarded one invisible robot plane
winging her way to Paradise Island
to live laugh play and
make love with
Wonder Woman?!

Stick *that* in your phone booth,
Clark Kent.

PASSING IN THE PATRIARCHY

Walking among them
unnoticed,
our cover intact
if only because
of their ignorance.

Dinner with another warrior.
the restaurant offers up,
not quite on a silver platter,
a belly dancer.

She presents her gift,
displays her art,
and, probably for survival,
aims her fluid body
to elicit money from the pigs
as they dig into their pockets
deeper and deeper
and faster than the next,
each extracting as payment
a chance to touch
her sacred body.

We know that it is our task
to aim for the groin.

This lesson reminds us
that we must use their weakness
as the lure as well.

We who are already living the
struggle know,
that if every belly dancer
was a revolutionary,
every hooker,
the revolution would be over
tomorrow.

FOR JANE AT SIX MONTHS

Sweet sister,
there is a Japanese saying:
“the gift best given is the one that
once belonged to you”

the necklace is mine
i give it to you
it was my amulet
my talisman
my protection
my shield.

for my leavetaking
the others of the tribe
have given me a new one,
i wear it because it comes from them
because it carries their energy.

I give you the first with these wishes:

may our energies never be parted
may it protect you as it has me
may it see you safely through the changes
that none of us are expected to
weather
may it keep you safe in unsafe places
may our energies touch one another
in the dance
that all of us are beginning
and continuing
and continuing
and may we all have the strength
to never end.

COMPROMISE

I want to wake up tomorrow
to the news that the
revolution is over;
quiet, bloodless, and over.

We should wake tomorrow
to the news that
the ERA is not even needed,
that there is no such thing
as a "non traditional job",
that universal, non-sexist childcare
is available to all,
that the concept of people before
property is a reality,
that the control of our bodies
is once again ours
and the AMA has been
forcibly disbanded,
that entire communities of
women and children exist
without fear,
and that woman-loving has replaced
misogyny.

That's what I want.
Here's what I'll settle for.
I'll settle for waking up
tomorrow,
opening my door,
and taking my place within the
ranks
of the millions of women
blocking all streets
with our sheer numbers,
letting the other 47.9% know
that we won't be divided
ever again.

REVELATION

You smirk,
secure in your smug safety:
“how can they talk revolution,”
you laugh,
“when they can’t even run
the tractors”.

But you’re wrong.

Everday, in the hills
away from your watchful stare,
there are women who have learned,
sharing the knowledge
with yet another sister.

And every time your magazines
interview a
“woman in a non-traditional job”,
you are speaking to another
revolutionary.

Is that concern I see on your face?

Revolution, baby,
you heard me right;
but not the kind you’re used to.
This one will not begin
with gunshot or mortar blast;

It will be silent,

It will begin in early morning
long before you wake.

It will begin with each woman
pulling a simple suitcase
out of its long waiting niche,
taking the children,

strangely silent this early
(until you realize that they,
too, are conspirators),

and moving feline
across the tiled kitchen floor
to the rear door
and out into the street.
She will walk to the curbs edge
and reach out her hand to
her neighbor,
woman next door,
yet another.

Does all this seem too well planned,
too smoothly executed?

It should.

Many years of strategy
goes into this exodus,
gathering
teaching
learning
building
and subsequent return.

Many years of
precise, almost
militaristic plotting.

Surprised?

Why so?

Our mothers were the Amazons
and they almost defeated Athens.

Years of planning
sitting in kitchens,
hair under scarves.

Now, had you bothered
to look closer,
you'd have seen
that those metallic
hair rollers and curlers
were, in fact,
transmitters and receivers;

that's right,
an entire nation of women
linked, daily, to one another
right under your nose.
camouflaged.
and didn't you ever notice
how they changed the subject
as you approached,
a glimmer in their eyes
as they pat you on the ass
and say,
"now honey,
you'd only be bored,
you know,
girl talk".

Too fantastic to believe?
Well, perhaps you're right.
Nothing worth losing sleep over.
Sleep well in fact.
It's what we've counted on
through all those years
of careful plotting,
precise planning.

Funny,
all this time,
you called it
a coffee-klatch.

TO HANAH SENESH, ANGELA DAVIS, PAT SWINTON,
SUSAN SAXE, KATHY POWER, ASSATA SHAKUR,
JOAN OF ARC, THE WITCHES, BODICEA, OREITHYIA,
AND EVERY PRE-REVOLUTIONARY CHINESE MOTHER
WHO REFUSED TO HAVE HER DAUGHTERS FEET BOUND

Blessed are they who demand,
knowing they invite death;
Blessed are they who resist,
when to resist is to attract death;
Blessed are they who sharpen their minds,
when to think is to excite creation,
which in this culture is to
threaten the structure,
which is to entice death;
Blessed are they who rage on
knowing full well that they face death;
Blessed is she who in her
revolutionary thought,
who in her revolutionary pride,
who in her revolutionary vision,
who in her revolutionary life,

Strips Death of his horror
by facing him,
her eyes fixed defiantly on his,
her mind still unshackled,
still free,
this one last moment
before his minions,
finally,
pull the trigger.

Blessed is she who's death
brings the end of all fear
one step closer.

RICHARD, at age nine

(dedicated to the children of lesbian mothers)

Richard, at age nine

has already begun learning the rules,
not by choice, but by force.

Has already learned that if you are
male you win,
that if you are female, you lose,
that if you are a female who
loves women,
you don't even get to play.

Heavy lessons for a nine year old,
but he'd better learn them fast,
they will be repeated all his life.

In later years he will play chess
and immediately identify with the pawn,
it is the part he plays now.

"The game is a lie", he will say;
"they claim that the Queen can move
as far as she wants and in
any direction; not so.

They claim that the King can move only
one space at a time. True. But that's
all the movement he needs."

The bishops, in their judicial robes
have more freedom of motion than most,
yet they insist on moving along
confusing, illogical, and
misogynist diagonals,
perhaps because of the King in each
of their own crowns.

But it is the pawn that Richard,
now nine, will understand best.

King to Queens pawn nine;
King takes Queens pawn.
King takes Queens knight
King takes Queens heart
King takes Queens child
King takes Queens son, Richard,
now nine, who, if I had my way
would, at age ten, see his mother's
sister Amazons
set fire to the chessboard

("If lust is politically incorrect, I'm in the wrong revolution")

SONG TO A CELTIC WARRIOR

Woman,

when it comes time to face
 the snarling, sharp-fanged pack,
 it is you i want
 guarding my back;
 when it comes time to pick up
 shield, sword, sagaris, or bow,
 it is your tactical precision i want
 helping me decide on the correct
 choice of weapon, and
 more important,
 of target.

On the eve of the battle

it is with you that i will lie,
 talking hours upon hours
 discussing strategies and tactics
 and how and where and when
 and most important,
 why.

And we will plan

and we will talk
 and we will make love,
 our bodies and spirits moving
 in the dance as one,
 our strengths, our auras blending,
 surrounding one another, merging.

And in the morning

our loves will be one,
 our rage will meet and be one,
 our love will join our rage
 and we will strike
 and we will strike
 and we will strike
 and we will win.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE THE MOON

I really understood
 when you said you had to go
so i talked
 for a while
 to the wind.

Now she brushes my cheeks
 with her ice-tipped fingers
so i won't miss the feel
 of your face against mine. . .

hey,
do you have to take your face
 when you go?

Now the earth wraps me
 in her strong soft arms
and tries to make me forget
 the feel of your skin against mine,
breasts and bellies touching,
arms and thighs and fingers locking;

And the evening fire tries to
 hold my gaze
by dancing and playing before me,
 but i stray to the times
we've talked and laughed and played
 and cried
and said nothing aloud
 but stared sweet and silent
into each others souls;

The water from my shower
tries to tease and tickle and
 pleasure me
but i haven't got the energy,
 not since you've left,
not when i remember how we
 drew each other through
whole worlds of pleasure.

You know,
I really understand
when you have to leave,
but, hey,
do you have to take the moon
when you go?

SOMEDAY

i will stop wanting to write
love poems to you;
someday
i will stop wanting to
hold you every night
wake next to you
every morning
see the sleep fluttering away
from your celtic green eyes;
someday
i will stop wanting to
touch your face
watch the candlelight flicker
playing in shadows on your skin
let my anxious fingers
find your mouth your fingers
your eyes your breasts
your womanspace
the delicious warm wet soft
feel and taste and smell of you;
someday
i will not need to make love to you
not need to touch and taste
and smell you
to watch your eyes watching me
to feel you loving me
feel you needing me
feel you moving with me
feel you touching me
feel you driving me crazy
with you loving;
someday
i will need none of these
and someday
the moon will rise majenta
in a lime green sky
and the blood of my body
will freeze.

TRANSMUTATION

I take on the mask
of Morgan Le Fey,
take on the task
of taunting Arthur
out of his castles safe keep
out into the forest
the moor
the swamp
the heath

all these my territories
all these my home
unlocked by walls
by stones piled one on one
by wood cut down destroyed
to ensquare
not encircle;

their fear of me is of my power,
the earth free and unrestrained.

I ride forward now
on my own energy,
ride now with the demons
i have called up;
demons are the wild free
parts of ourselves
the unfettered parts
the un-ensquared parts.

I, free,
run with the others, free,
darting before and behind them,
sparks of our fury hitting
first his armor,
then his stone ensquared spaces,
then his weapon.

They say that the mask of
Morgan Le Fey
covers her terrible ugliness,
not so;
the mask covers my terrible beauty,
the face of Kali
wrapped in snakes
Medusa, in another
womanifestation
turning men to stone
or destroying them
according to their own
greater fear.

My mask hides the
blinding beauty
of the mother
who, knowing her responsibility
and her strength,
slays her monster sons,
no longer able to watch the rape
of her own
whole
round
body.

Pregnant,
She begins again.

CALIFORNIA

The next three pieces were written after an incident that took place at a woman's conference in California. I will try to explain here, and briefly, my perceptions of the incident.

At the conference, which was to last one week, a woman began to go through a period of "heightened madness". As she wanted to stay at the conference, a group of women came together who were willing to care for her through the duration of the week and help set up some system of after-care for her.

As this group was beginning its work, many of the other women were having a lot of trouble with her presence. These women wanted both the "mad one" and her support group to leave and do this supportive work somewhere else (i.e., away from them). Eventually, after she had been asked to leave, the woman realized that she was not in a completely supportive environment. She left the conference with some women who agreed to care for her for the rest of that week. The rest of the support group stayed and worked out plans for her continued care.

The following three poems ("Surface Tension," "A three piece symphony for Fury, Frustration, and Fear," and "I reserve the right to bitch,") have all come out of that experience.

SURFACE TENSION

How incredibly painful
after all this time,
after all this energy,
to come to the realization
that these, after all,
are not my people.

To understand in the passing
of one awful day
that an assemblage of
women and children
is not necessarily
a community;
to see that not every community
is mine.

And yet we learn from this.

I learn that i must trust
actions over rhetoric,
experience over expectations,
and my own perceptions
over others perceptions of me.

A painful lesson.

Akin to working feverishly
as though our lives depended on it,
(this, a truth)
to construct a house
to be home to us all. . .
only to watch the inhabitants
quarrel over responsibility
and accountability
while claiming neither
for themselves.

To realize that this house is not home,
that this group is not my tribe,
to leave the structure, only to realize
later
that in fact it had no
floors walls or roof.
that it was never a safe place.
this is a hard one to admit.

But do not mistake my disappointment,
intense though it may be,
for despair.

You see,
this lesson is also a reminder:
that my tribe has yet to form,
my community has yet to take shape,
I know somewhere, somehow, somewhen,
the women who will
share it with me.

We are still moving, searching,
testing ourselves,
being tested.

It reminds me that i have
the rest of my life
to finish this work.

And the anger and frustration
tell me
how important it is
that the work continue.

A THREE PIECE SYMPHONY FOR FURY, FRUSTRATION, AND FEAR

1. Fury

Do not sit there
listening to my poetry
you who would have refused
 to witness the process,
you who would have run from me
 while i screamed.

Do not come here
reveling in my blood
dipping your arms in it
crimson dripping from your fingers .
you who so carefully
stepped around it
as it formed in pools
all around me.

Do not speak to me later
on the beauty of my words
you who will only hear them
when it is comfortable
here in some safe space. . . .

 this is not a poem about safe spaces.

11. quotations, translation, response

“helping this one woman will not help
 all the others so let us focus on
 all the others”

(read: I am frightened. we are not strong
 enough. we must divert. i am frightened.)

I say: I am frightened. we are strong enough.
 we must not divert. i am frightened.

“I didn’t come here to listen to a woman
 screaming in the woods.”

(read: I don’t want to recognize the woman
 who screams in me. don’t remind me.
 i am frightened.)

I say: I recognize the woman who screams
in me. we have finally been intro-
duced. we must not lose contact.
i am frightened.

“The children are freaking out. It must stop”
(read: the child in me is confused. please
make it stop. i am frightened.)

I say: where were you when the children
laughed with her, cried with her,
held her. where were you when they
joined the healing circle. recognize
that it is the child in you, the
child in me that is confused. know
that the children’s confusion did
not translate to fear.

i say: i hear your child crying. she is
frightened. hold her. but recognize
who it is that you hold.

“Of course I agree we all need safe spaces,
but this is not the time or the place
to help this woman”

(read: of course i believe in racial equality/
just don’t move in next door.

read: of course there are lesbians in the
movement/ but if you don’t keep it
quiet you’ll give us all a bad name.

read: of course it’s a shame that some
women can’t afford to join us/ but
i question that class is a feminist issue)

I say: we must learn not to forget
from one learning to the next.

111. Fear

So tell me,
where will you send me
when my years number 80?
After marching and
picketing and
making demands,

After lecturing and
teaching and
being taught,
After dreaming and
organizing and
building the visions,
where will you send me away?

I long to be 80 in a
circle of children,
answering their questions
and telling them stories,
want to be 80 in a
circle of women
sitting by a fire or
an open window
reminiscing with a friend or lover.

I want to be there for younger women
to come and ask
which herb is best for this or that.

There should be several of us,
tribal elders
to serve as living heritage
of tactics & strategies &
relaxation techniques,
psychic healing & herbal remedies &
political critiques;

do you know what we lose every day,
how many women there are already
who need us
and we them?
and where are they
and where will you send me?

I picture a large house
full of women and children
and cats and dogs
and a fireplace and a common room.

I see a sweet/strong womanchild
bringing me tea by the fire
and in her hand a paint tray

and she tells me its the
winter solstice
and she draws a crescent moon
over my left breast
and a pentacle here on my cheek
and then she hands me the
tray
and i paint her,
and then she helps me to my feet
and walks with me
to the dinner table
where each of us,
this special tribe,
renew our vows to one another
thank the goddess for her favor
bless the earth for her gifts
and we sit together to eat.

And then i open my eyes,
awake from this much needed dream,
and my senses clock my surroundings:
sterile walls
electric heater
one chair one bed one lamp,
and into my room comes a
sweet/strong womanchild
in stiff and starch white.
she reminds me that it is
christmas eve
and she pulls from her pocket
a paint tray
and over my protestations
she paints me red at the lips
and bluegreen at the eyes
and takes me to the
dinner table.

I see the table
filled with plastic flowers
(where are the herbs)
and the flesh of dead animals
(we love our animals and so do not eat
them)
and the overcooked, canned, and
frozen vegetables
(this food is not blessed, sweet
mother forgive them)
and i want to scream
but they will call it
senility.

I RESERVE THE RIGHT TO BITCH

I reserve the right to bitch
when women retreat into their
nice, little, warm, cozy nests
and won't come out in
support of our work
for fear of losing that niche
or their minds
or their homes
or their jobs
or themselves.

I reserve the right to bitch
when i'm breaking my ass
trying to help keep some woman
sane, or legal, or fed,
none of which i can get paid for
without compromising effectiveness,
and the so-called feminists in the
neighborhood
who told me how
oh, so necessary this work is,
won't lift a finger to
stop an eviction
that i can't afford to prevent.
(in other words,
i reserve the right to bitch
when those who've got
won't share it long enough
for those who ain't
to be able to effect
any kind of change).

I reserve the right to bitch
when women say
"Right On"

and then disappear into the
cities or suburbs or colleges or
studios or anywhere,
leaving a few women the job
of analyzing the need,
recruiting the workers,
and organizaing the whole fucking thing
with little to no support
a g a i n.

And i especially reserve the right to
bitch
when some woman calls herself a
feminist, sister, or revolutionary,
and does nothing whatsoever
to back that up;

Cause, baby,
some of us ARE working,
and,
“more-radical-than-thou”
though this may sound,
i sure do get pissed
watching your
lack
of movement.

FOR MARCIA

There is a woman
somewhere
who thinks me
a revolutionary.

A woman somewhere
with four beautiful children,
a slowly wakening smile,
and soft brown hair
i used to stare at sometimes.

There is a woman,
this woman
somewhere
who gave me comfort
when i needed it
held me when i
wanted it.

There is a woman
somewhere
who thinks me strong,
an Amazon,
and a good poet.

There is a woman
somewhere
who thinks me
a revolutionary:
And now,
through these struggles,
it helps
somewhat
to remember that.

LOVE SONG TO THE WARRIORS

Having spent the last
few thousand years
in learning the ways of their
power,
we are now ready to call
a council of war.

In this hemisphere
the Valkyries descend from
the north
riding their monster winged horses
over mountains
over rivers,
joining the Amazons of Thessaly
these marching silently
over mountains
over rivers,
converging with the
Amazons of Libya
riding, weapons in hand
over mountains
over rivers,
all these arriving finally
at that sacred place
once the seat of our power
Anatolia,
symbol: the crescent moon and star,
this, now co-opted
this, now used to represent
the flag of the man-state
that occupies this land.

they go too far.

In this hemisphere
are the wise women called,
the sages of all time,
the matriarches of Tibet,
these who held the vision
long before their sons,

these who travel with their minds,
visions, spirits reaching out
like fingers
over mountains
over rivers
groping, finally touching
upon the tips of those
of their native american
sisters,
these, the healers,
these, the wild women
of earth and fire,
these, the proud souls
who knew, loved and understood
the mountain lion
the coyote
the sparrow.

They converge in the
north american southwest,
home of these,
these who watched in
careful, painful silence
as the pale ones
struck down the bison
from locomotive windows.

The sacred symbol,
the eagle,
stolen now,
now used to connote
the pale ones power.

they dare too far.

In this hemisphere
come the witches
the sorceresses
the conjurors,
these who call up the
unseen aspects
of the mothers life,
these who paid for their knowledge

with their lives,
these who cried out,
flames licking guiltily
along their flesh,
flames, begging forgiveness
with each new fibre
of death,
flames, bent against their will
to do the other's
ugly business.

They converge on the peak
of Machu Pichu,
this sacred place
symbol of an entire culture
ravaged by the armed ones
for the gold
for the copper.

The rape continues.
Now the conquistadores
wear their heraldry
on the sides
of their cars:

ITT
CHASE MANHATTAN
FIRST NATIONAL CITY BANK
ANACONDA COPPER

they push too far.

In this hemisphere
we finally join all together,
finally sitting in huge
concentric circles
within and around
the parameters
of this sacred place
Stonehenge,
this, divinator of the Druids,
these, Celtic sisters
who combined
the strength and tactics

of the warriors,
the wisdom and healing knowledge
of the sages,
the conjuring magic
of the witches,
these, who's very symbol,
The Celtic Cross,
two wands crossing one another,
each wand flowing equidistant
from the center,
this symbol taken by the sly ones,
contorted to become the symbol
of that awful tree
upon which the father,
in some sado-masochistic orgy
of self-denigration,
hangs his son;
this, in their convoluted sense
of logic,
to become a symbol
of compassion.

they dare assume too much.

We speak finally,
each clan-by-craft
choosing one member
to share the knowledge
that the entire clan
has assembled,
the knowledge that each woman
now owns.

Kendra speaks for the sages
Hepseba for the witches
Oriethyia for the warriors
Bodicea for the Celts.

These four walk to the center
join hands
link minds
and rock

first slowly
then more quickly
then more smoothly
then more sure-footed
their feet rooted in the soil
of this sacred earth
their bodies swaying
 first to this side
 then to this side
to the left
to the right
to the left
 each time swaying farther
until their bodies
 brush the earth
with each subsequent swing,
and then the rocking locks
into this rythm,
 the cycle continues,
continues as the mind-blending
 becomes pure energy
 spreads itself around
the women seated in
 circles within circles,
the knowledge pouring into
 their brain cells
a deluge that only these chosen
 could possibly survive,
and then the combined knowledge
 of these gathered
moves up higher and higher,
circles within circles of energy
 riding the air higher,
rising up over the tops of the stone
 that is both open
 and enclosing,
rising up over the treetops
rising up over the mountains
rising up high enough to
 spread out now

the circle widening
the energy growing
spreading itself around
the enormity of
the earth

becoming stronger
becoming harder
becoming sharper
becoming the double edged axe
of the Amazons
becoming the double edged sword
of the Valkyries
becoming the sharp merciful talons
of the eagle
becoming the claws of the
witches' cat
becoming the purifying herbs
of the healers,
all merging finally
into the equilateral cross
of the Celts,
this released now from
the merging,
striking here
lashing out there
energy directed
unleashed
shattering their parliaments
destroying their congresses
leveling their basilicas
no mansions left standing
no corporate headquarters
to be seen
no palaces remaining to house
the oppressors
and the oppressed
all rubble now,
all ruins;

And when the cleansing is complete,
when the cancer has been cut out,
the healing begins.

Each woman
gathered there among the many
sets out on foot
to some wounded area
to begin the task
of mending the flesh
of healing the spirit
each secure in the knowledge
that she holds all knowledge,
each ready now
to begin the long
painful process
of sharing that
with those who will
hear,
and secure, too, in the knowledge
that those who won't
will go slowly mad
with starvation,
the unhealing cancer cells
killing only themselves,
leaving the body intact
ready to learn again
how to breathe.

LENACHILD
press
21 Detmer Road
E. Setauket, N.Y. 11733

Sinister Wisdom



fourteen

HEART DANCE

She thought as she lay there about the fact that she was dying. Not the way she had been dying since the moment of her birth; not even the way she had been dying since learning of the sickness that was raging like an august brushfire throughout her body. But dying. Really dying. Within minutes, half an hour at the most, this life, her only remembered life, would be ended.

She refused to spend these last few moments going over, again, the scene at the hospital: her refusing treatments, her father cursing, her mother trying to understand. It was her brothers who had walked her to the parking lot. They didn't agree with her, they said, but it was her life. She had laughed. They corrected themselves. Her death. They hugged.

Her lover waited in the car. She had said that she just couldn't be part of what would go on in that consultation room; knew as well as her cancer-filled friend how the family, the physician, would respond

She forced the memories from her mind, chided herself for wasting time on what was already. I must think about what is, only what is. What was doesn't matter any more, nor what will be. The future, now, is defined as whatever happens in the next twenty minutes.

The pressure on her chest brought her back to her immediate reality. Kira, Kira who had been with her since she had come, crying, to her back door, a seven-week-old kitten. Kira on her chest purring, kneading, nuzzling against her cheek. The familiarity was almost devastating. The simpleness. The warmth.

She opened her eyes, stroking Kira under the chin, starting at the base of the neck. She looked around the circle she lay in, looked one by one at the faces of her friends, and smiled. Several smiled back. They had red, wet eyes. And smiled. A warm, friend smile. Their smiles said

i will miss you i love you
i don't want this i respect this i love you
i miss you don't leave me i love you
their mouths did not move.

There was a drum beating. A long slow beat. Not sad. Not mournful. Constant. Like the beating of a heart set to music. She liked that.

She thought of what it was like to be dying. Truly dying. In her circle of friends. Some of these women had been lovers. Some had been co-workers. All were close. All people whom she had loved and cared about. All people who cared for her. Years ago they had taken to calling each other family. Month by month, crisis after crisis, sharing after sharing, the naming had created a reality. They *were* family. In ways that amused and touched and shook them. Family when one of them needed money; family when one needed a safe place to heal, a safe place to be ill; family when one needed to be held, go crazy, stop being crazy, give birth.

And now, she thought, to give death.

Not one of them had given an excuse. Not one of them had refused her invitation. She had called, written, to each woman in this circle. And they

had come. From all over the continent. She had told them each that she could not explain this thing, this need, to them one at a time. She did not have the energy. She said that she needed them to come together, all at once, and she would speak to them of her need, her fantasy, her desire. They came. They came because they loved her; they came responding as much to their trust in her, in each other, in their connection, as to the urgency, the intensity, of her request.

To die, not in a sterile, white, arrogant, soul-less cubicle in some hospital. but in a circle of trees. in a field. outside. under a sun-lit sky. in a circle of trees. a circle of friends. a circle within a circle.

They had asked questions: was her death certain. yes. how long. another month, maybe. a slow month. a painful month. no control. no power. They understood.

She asked questions: are you prepared to deal with the legal red-tape. yes. even if accused of negligent homicide. yes. will you give the burial instructions to my parents. yes. will you help me find the best way, something fast, painless, an easy, gentle death. yes. will you sit with me while i take it. yes. while i die. yes.

They met for the rest of that week. Sometimes with her, sometimes without her, talking, exploring their feelings about what they were agreeing to. How they felt about her dying, about not trying to stop her, not trying to convince her, force her to try something, anything else. They began to truly deal with her death, what it meant to each of them, the fact that she would no longer be accessible to them in this familiar, physical way. They spent their days, their nights, discussing all of this; discussing, too, that there would be need of more and continued discussion when she had, in fact, died.

They came together on the day she had chosen. She gave them information: the car goes to joann. the books go to the new women's library. the journals to whoever, here, wants to read them, then on to anyone who would use them in some way.

Her parents had been informed of her wishes in terms of the funeral. They had already agreed, verbally, to all her demands. They had agreed to help with any legal problems. They knew that she was sending a notarized statement via her friends. Her final bit of control. The written version of what they had agreed to: no christian ceremony. something tribal. leave it to the women. they will know.

The drum continued. There was another sound, a gourd with its seeds being shaken about. And a flute. A tambourine. The voices of the women she loved. They sang. She listened.

She looked at all of their wide open faces. She cried a little. They cried more than a little. They sang. She listened. The drum continued, a heart-beat set to music. The drum will beat after i have stopped. They had promised her this.

The sun shone. The grass tickled her arms. Kira purred. The drum beat on. She looked around the circle; wondered at the opening and closing of the mouths of living creatures making noise, singing songs. She watched the hands that beat on drums, fingered flutes, shook tambourines, rattled gourds. The drum continued, a heartbeat set to music, drawing her own heart into a dance, a dance that would be carried by each of the women here; a dance that would last as long as the circle, the family, continued.