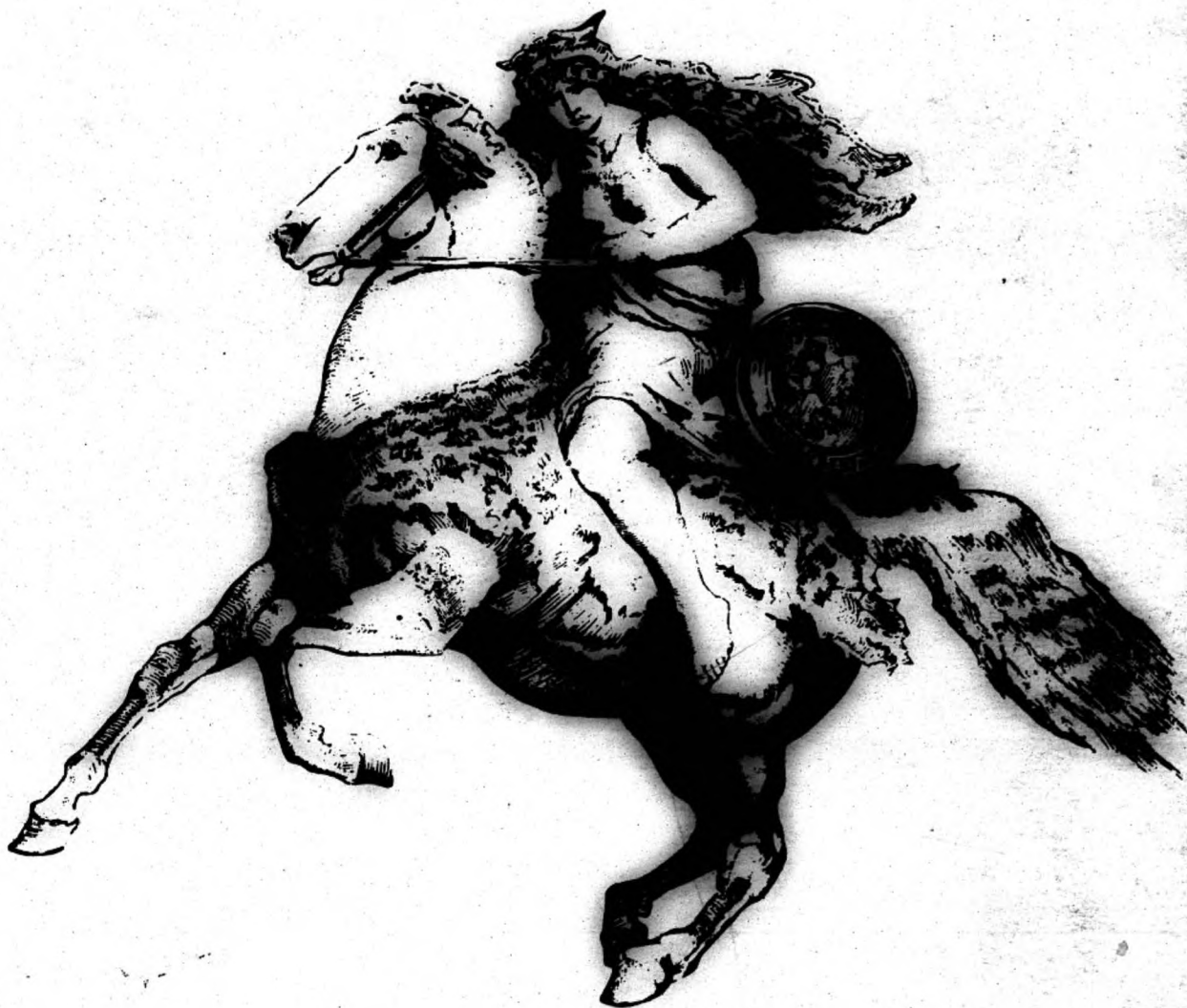


AMAZON QUARTERLY  
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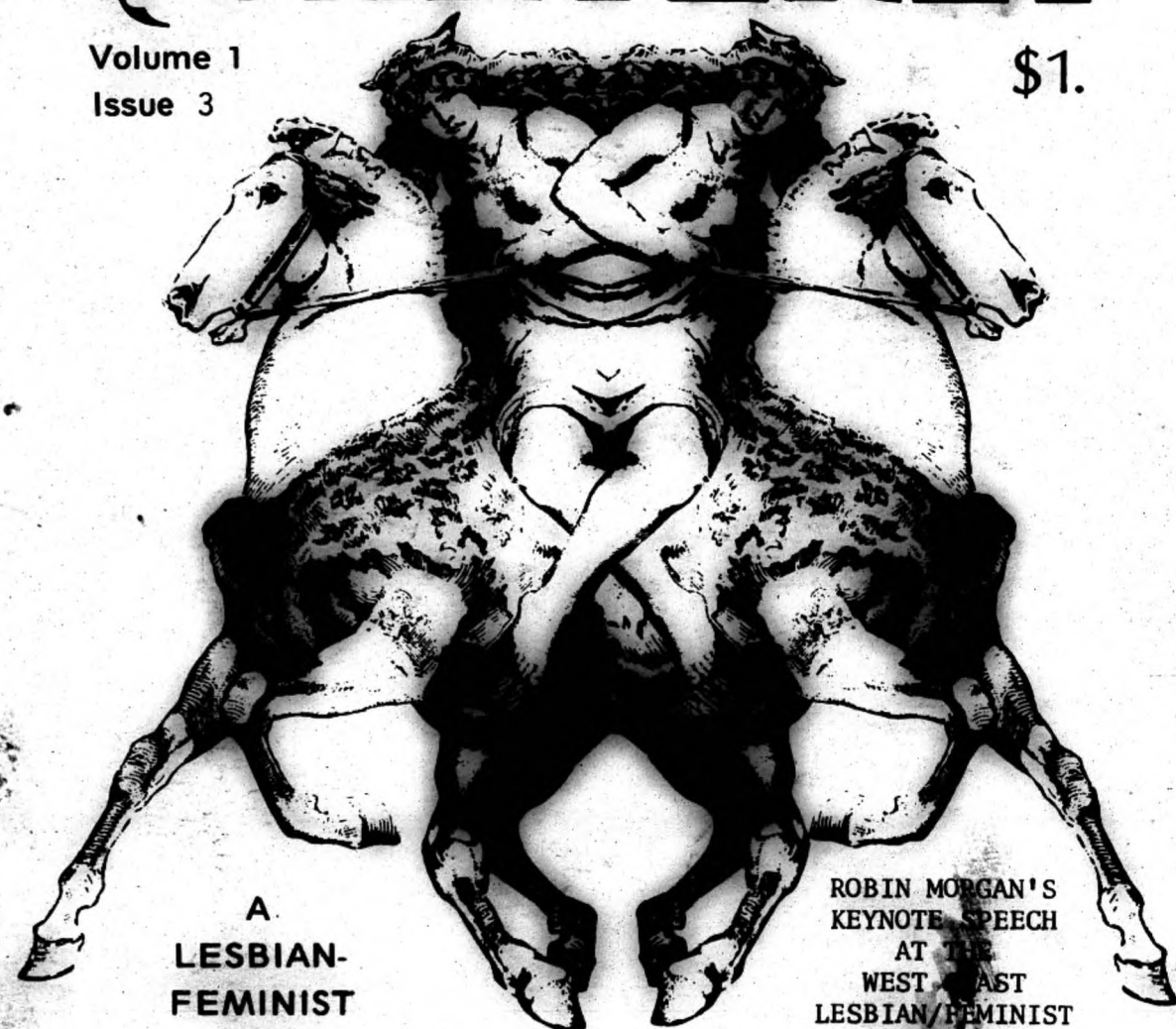


*New Alexandria Library*

FOR WOMEN  
**AMAZON**  
*June*  
**QUARTERLY**

Volume 1  
Issue 3

\$1.



A  
LESBIAN-  
FEMINIST  
ARTS  
JOURNAL

ROBIN MORGAN'S  
KEYNOTE SPEECH  
AT THE  
WEST COAST  
LESBIAN/FEMINIST  
CONFERENCE  
COMPLETE  
IN THIS ISSUE

## love letters

What a fine magazine you're putting out! -- Country Women

*...more humanist and in that way more mature than any Lesbian publication I have seen.* -- Sarah Whitworth (New Jersey)

One approaches the magazine with respect because of the care and dignity of its presentation. -- Elsa Gidlow (Marin County, Ca.)

*There is nothing else of quality since The Ladder died. It is such a damned good magazine.* -- Robin Morgan (New York City)

I read lots of magazines, feminist, dyke and otherwise, but AQ is the best I've seen in ages.... I loved every story, poem and essay and drawing. That's never happened to me before, usually one or two pieces turn me on and the rest I think are mediocre or crap, but I loved everything in AQ. -- Liza (New York City)

*I want to congratulate you on your magazine. Already it's had an impact--and the attention paid to quality can only help us all in the movement take ourselves and our sisters more seriously. Cheers!*  
Rita Mae Brown (Washington D.C.)

I was wrestling with the possibility that I might be a lesbian when I read your first issue. I felt a tug in my heart and tears in my eyes when I recognized my own feelings about women and life in Emily Carr's journals, in Gina's drawings, in "Priapus Paresis," in "The Disappearance." I felt proud and happy, bewildered and cursed. I look back on the women I have known and loved without daring to say it, without daring to even think of expressing that love. Your magazine helps me to imagine a full, rich, challenging, loving life as a lesbian. -- Jan (Washington)

*I received Ms and AQ at the same time. Read AQ first -- that's faith, and well rewarded. Congratulations on a fine issue.*  
Gloria (New Mexico)

# AMAZON QUARTERLY

VOLUME ONE      ISSUE THREE

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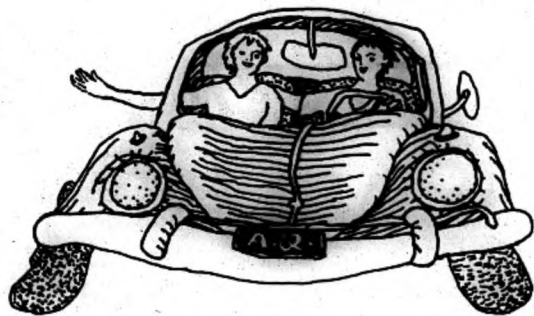
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# WHAT'S WHAT?



This is going to be a big potpourri of what's what with Amazon Quarterly:

First of all, we would like to remind those of you who were our charter subscribers to please, please renew your subscriptions as soon as you can. Almost 500 subscriptions will "run out" next issue, and if there is to be a Volume Two, they must be renewed.

Next, we want to take this opportunity to come out of what a few readers thought was a "closet." It never occurred to us that not using our last (patriarchal) names could be construed as hiding anything; we simply didn't want to give any special credit to the men whose names are attached to ours. But for the record: it's Gina Roberson and Laurel Holliday (father) Akers (ex-husband). Living in the Berkeley area has made us almost forget the problems of "coming out" -- it really hasn't been an issue for us here.

Next we want to unveil a marvelous dream we have -- a dream you can help come true: We want to do a very special fourth issue devoted to our readers, about our readers, and with you. We know from our mail and local reaction that Miss Q's followers are a richly diverse group of people -- just how diverse we would like to find out. How? By meeting you, talking, sharing some time together. What??

Well, it's hard to explain how we can be so impractical (foolhardy really), but we have this fantasy that if our 61 VW bug can make it we can spend a couple of months this summer touring the U.S. and Canada visiting readers who wouldn't mind getting to know us.

Then, we'll put together a "lesbians around the country" section in the fourth issue with the latest word on what it's like being the only lesbian in Yoknapatowa, Mississippi, or living in a commune in Oregon, or with the multifarious possibilities of NYC.

We think we've all got some pretty funny myths about "the lesbian nation" which Amazon Quarterly could help to clarify. What are the

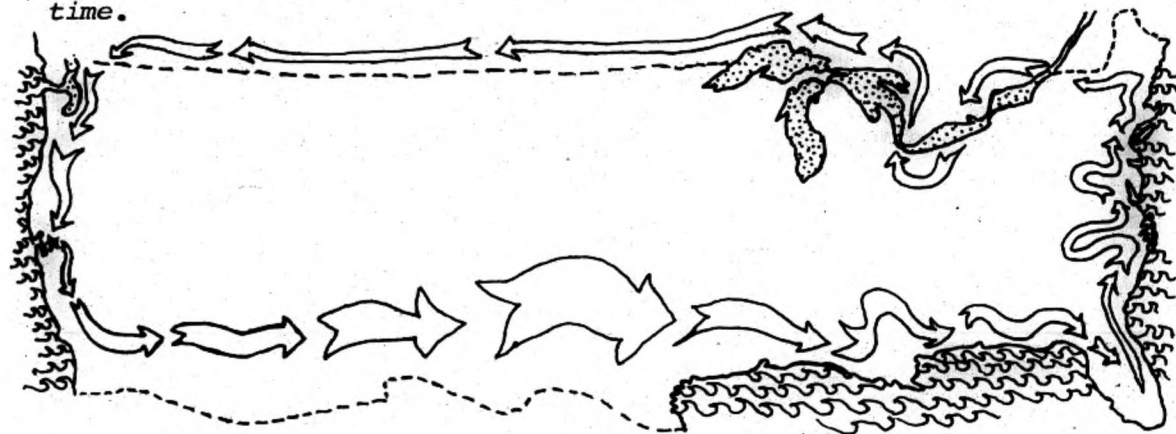
"issues" in Boston, Vancouver, Washington D.C.? -- are they the same as in Gainesville, Florida, Birmingham, Alabama, Bar Harbor, Maine? How about the social life? Better in New York, San Francisco, or maybe Vermont? All preconceptions AWAY!!

We want to share stories of self-discovery, coming out, being lesbians in extremely different surroundings. We'll talk to older women, middle-aged women, and the very young from California, to N.Y., from Texas to Canada about their work, play, relationships . . . with parents, friends, lovers, etc. We hope to talk with married lesbians, lesbian mothers . . . black, white, green and purple lesbians ---- it's all up to you.

If you like our fantasy and you'd like to help make it come true write and invite us to visit. See our fantasy map below -- if you live in any of the states bordering the oceans, we'll be passing through your neighborhood with fresh tales of California and lots of news we've accumulated along the way. (Of course we want to assure anyone who wants it total anonymity. We are meticulously scrupulous about this and always will be.) We'll be leaving sometime in June, so please write now to allow us to plan ahead.

We know this is ambitious -- far beyond our means -- (can you believe we're both unemployed and on food stamps?) but we think such a cumulative picture of lesbians has never been attempted and it's high time we got to know one another. If you can spare it, please won't you send us a contribution earmarked for the "Lesbians Around the Country" special issue. If we get enough for gas and car repairs we'll be on our way.

So, if you can, please invite us to tea in your parlor, lemonade on your veranda, or beer in your garret -- it's sure to be a good time.





## Dear Miss Quarterly,

I am writing in regard to the pictures in *Amazon Quarterly*. Though I realize that the pictures were not meant to be offensive, this was their effect on me. I am not questioning your artist's talent. It is what she draws that I find offensive.

The majority of straight people are still walking around under the assumption that we Lesbians have fish heads, six toes, and four eyes. Yes, that is quite an exaggeration, but for those of us who have "straight arrow" parents, or have encountered the many "normal" people with antediluvian thinking, it is an exaggeration easily related to. In effect, what I am trying to say is that I feel very hurt when my own gay sisters depict themselves and myself as freaks. I cannot relate to a picture of a creature.

I am very proud that I am a Lesbian. Being that I am so proud, I would like very much to show my only Lesbian literature to my straight friends. As it is, I feel ashamed, because the pictures are not of women, but of creatures. I cannot honestly say, "That is what I am so proud to be." Do you realize that to adopt that kind of thinking would be inviting the outmoded straights to laugh at us for finally accepting what they have always thought us to be?

--Sincerely, Marilyn Kay

I want to commend two drawings that especially reached me: the dot drawing and accompanying text just inside Vol. 1, Issue 1 and Gina's drawing, pg. 4 same issue. Of all the art in the two issues I've seen, these were the only two I could get any aesthetic reaction from. I don't understand these pictures of ladies as frogs and things: I mean, I guess I really missed out somewhere in my learning about art: they must be symbolism that I can't read because, boy --they sort of repulse me.

--Ginger Lox (Oklahoma)

I was nearly asphyxiated by my own gasp of incredulous joy upon seeing my favorite reptiles playing my favorite game on the first page of my favorite mag. Gina, are you sure you haven't been eavesdropping on my fantasies?

--Rachel (Pennsylvania)

AQ - 2 is here and I was pleased to see some familiar names--Jane Rule and Rita Mae Brown. And I laugh everytime I open the book to the first page. Gina's sense of humor is worth the whole book. The frogs are something special.... Living here away from the urban multitudes, I get the idea that Community does exist in some places. I think it would be great to participate in it. But not the kind of communities you write of in "Distinctions." Is it city living that has made people so desperate and different from people I know? I find it appalling to imagine a group of women rallying to the dyke image. It bothers me to see you write (p. 32) that violence may at some time be the only means of ending sexism. (Yes, I see the "but"). Otherwise, I appreciate that your article is anti-separatist. There can't be any way in this world that somebody can make her own way better (permanently) by putting down somebody else. Or at least that's the myth to which I like to (idealistically?) subscribe. --Martha (Virginia)

Your magazine is really great--a breath of fresh human-ness amongst the torrents of impersonal rhetoric. It gave me so much energy that I'm giving a subscription as a gift to a friend. I had thought before I read the magazine that I was sick of reading lesbian literature because it was so repetitious, and only spoke to me as a lesbian feminist in the narrowest way. I absolutely loved the article about the strange and the familiar--my lover and I were up half the night talking about it. --Roberta (New York)

Wow. I just read your first issue and I thought it was fantastic. I'm glad the *Amazon Quarterly* exists--and I'm superglad the format and contents are so flexible.

One of the most important things to me as a human and as a Lesbian is freedom of lifestyle. I feel that variation in stimuli and ideas helps keep me free because I won't get bogged down in one particular pattern of thinking. And I feel that offering a variation of stimuli is a beautiful, wonderful function of communication for an art journal. --Nancy (West Virginia)

If the getting better rate of issue 3 is as high as 2 over 1 then A.Q. is shooting for the stars, might get uppity and fire her loyal editors. --Jennie (Oregon)



by Sonia and Pat

by ROBIN MORGAN

## LESBIANISM and FEMINISM: SYNONYMS or CONTRADICTIONS?

KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT THE WEST COAST LESBIAN-FEMINIST CONFERENCE  
LOS ANGELES APRIL 14, 1973

Very Dear Sisters:

It seems important to begin by affirming who, how, and why, we are. We all know the male mass media stereotype of the Women's Movement: "If you've seen one Women's Libber, you've seen 'em all--they each have two heads, a pair of horns, and are fire-spouting, man-hating, neurotic, crazy, frigid, castrating-bitch, aggressive, Lesbian, broom-riding Witches." So I want to start by saying that this shocking stereotype is absolutely true. The days of women asking politely for a crumb of human dignity are over. Most men say, "But you've become so hostile," to which one good retort is a quote from a nineteenth century Feminist who said, "First men put us in chains, and then, when we writhe in agony, they deplore our not behaving prettily." Well, enough of that. We are the women that men have warned us about.

That settled, I want to talk about a number of difficult and dangerous themes relating to what others have variously called "The Lesbian-Straight Split," "Lesbian Separatism from Straight Women," and even "The Lesbian-Feminist Split." This is the first speech, talk, what-have-you, that I have ever written down and then read--and it may be the last. I have done so because the content can so easily be misunderstood or wilfully distorted, because misquoting is a common occurrence, because the risks I will take today are too vital for me to chance such misrepresentation. If there are disagreements with what I have to say, at least let them be based on what I do say, and not on some people's out-of-context mis-memory of what they thought I meant. So, for the record, one copy of this talk is lodged at the offices of *The Lesbian Tide*, another with sisters from *Amazon Quarterly*, and still another in a secret safe-deposit box



guarded night and day by the spirits of Stanton and Anthony, Joan and Haiviette, and a full collective of Labyris-wielding Amazons. I also want to add that the lack of a question-discussion scene when I finish was decided upon not by me but by the conference organizers, for lack of time and in light of the necessity to get on with the Agenda.

Before I go any further, I feel it is also necessary to deal with who, how, and why I am here. As far back as a month ago, I began hearing a few rumbles of confusion or criticism about my "keynoting" this conference--all from predictable people, and none, of course, expressed directly to my face. "Is she or isn't she?" was their main thrust. "Know anyone who's been to bed with her lately? Well, if we can't prove she's a Lesbian, then what right has she to address a Lesbian-Feminist Conference?" Now, such charges hardly devastate me, having been straight-bated before. So. It is credential time once again.

I am a woman. I am a Feminist, a radical feminist, yea, a militant feminist. I am a Witch. I identify as a Lesbian because I love the People of Women and certain individual women with my life's blood. Yes, I live with a man--as does my sister Kate Millett. Yes, I am a Mother--as is my sister Del Martin. The man is a Faggot-Effeminate, and we are together the biological as well as the nurturant parents of our child. This confuses a lot of people--it not infrequently confuses us. But there it is. Most of all, I am a Monster--and I am proud.

Now all of the above credentials qualify me, I feel, to speak from concrete experience on: Feminism, Lesbianism, Motherhood, "Gay Male Movements" versus Faggot-Effeminate consciousness about women, Tactics for the Women's Revolution, and a Vision of the Female Cosmos. I am an expert with the scars to prove it, having been, in my time, not only straight-bated, but also dyke-bated, red-bated, violence-bated, mother-bated, and artist-bated. As you can see, the above credentials further qualify me for being an excellent target, available not only to the male rulers but also to any woman just dying to practice--even on a sister.

But, finally, to the subject. In order to talk intelligently about the so-called "Split," it is necessary to recap history a little. In the early days of the current Women's Movement, many of us were a bit schizoid. The very first consciousness-raising session I ever went to, for example, gave me the warning. We were talking about sexuality, and I described myself as a bisexual (this was even before the birth of the first Gay Liberation Front, and long before bisexual became a naughty or cop-out word--besides, it did seem an accurate way of describing my situation). Every woman in the room moved, almost imperceptibly, an inch or so away from me. Wow, I thought. It was not the last time I was to have such an articulate reaction.

Later, with the creation of GLF, a few of us Jewish Mother types spent a lot of time running back and forth between the two movements, telling the straight women that the Lesbians weren't ogres and telling the Lesbians that the straight women weren't creeps. Simultaneously, the intense misogyny coming against Lesbians from gay men drove many women out of the "gay movement" and into the Women's Movement. There was a brief and glorious sisterhood-glazed honeymoon period among all women in our Movement. Then, those contradictions began. For example, a personal one: I had announced my Lesbian identification in The New

York Times (which is a fairly public place, after all) in 1968, before the first GLF had been founded. Then, in 1970, one group of Radicalesbians in New York said to me, "Don't you dare call yourself a Lesbian--you live with a man and have a child." Now, while I might (defensively) argue the low-consciousness logic of this, since statistically most Lesbians are married to men and have children, I had nonetheless learned one important thing from all my previous years in the Left: *guilt*. So all my knee-jerk reflexes went into action, and I obeyed. Six months later, another group of Radicalesbians confronted me. "We notice you've stopped calling yourself a Lesbian," they said, "What's the matter--you gone back in the closet? You afraid?" Meanwhile, the monosexual straight women were still inching away from my presence. Wow, I thought, repeatedly.

The lines began to be drawn, thick, heavy. Friedan trained her cannon on "the Lesbian Menace." (In a show of consistent terror and hatred of Lesbians, and indeed of women, one might say, she only recently announced in The New York Times that the Lesbians and radical feminists in the Movement were CIA infiltrators. We met her attack with a firm political counterattack in the press, never descending to a level of personal vilification or giving the media the cat-fight which they were trying to foment.) In 1970, backlash began, starting in NOW and infecting radical feminist groups as well. The bigotry was intense and wore many faces: outright hatred and revulsion of Lesbian women; "experimentation"--using a Lesbian for an interesting experiment and then dumping her afterward: curiosity about the freaks, dismissal of another woman's particular pain if it did not fall within the "common" experience, and many other examples.

Meanwhile, Lesbians, reeling from the hatred expressed by the gay male movement and the fear expressed by the Women's Liberation Movement, began to organize separately. Of course, a great many Lesbians had been in the Women's Movement since its beginning--a great many had, in fact, begun it. These included some women who were active in Daughters of Bilitis under other names, not only to keep jobs and homes and custody of their children, but also so as not to "embarrass" NOW, which they had built. In addition, a great many formerly heterosexual or asexual women were declaring themselves Lesbians, as they found the support to "Come Out" of their kitchens and communes as well as their closets. Some women were pressured, not necessarily, although certainly sometimes, by Lesbians. The pressure came mostly from confusion, contradictions, pulls in different directions, paths which each might have led to a united Feminism but which the Man exploited into warring factions; he was aided, of course, by the internecine hostility of any oppressed people--tearing at each other is painful, but it is after all safer than tearing at the real enemy. Oh, people *did* struggle sincerely, hour upon hour of struggle to understand and relate--but the flaw still widened to a crack and then to a split, created by our collective false consciousness. We are now teetering on the brink of an abyss, but one very different from what we have been led to expect.

At present, there are supposedly two factions. On one side, those labeled heterosexual, bisexual, asexual, and celibate women. On the other, those labeled Lesbians. Not that the latter group is monolithic--far from it, although monosexual straight women can, in their fear, try to hide their bigotry behind such a belief. No, there are some Lesbians who work politically with gay men;

some work politically with straight men; some work politically with other Lesbians; some work politically with only certain other Lesbians (age, race, class distinctions); some work politically with all Feminists (Lesbians, heterosexuals, etc.); and some, of course, don't work politically at all. As Laurel has pointed out in an incisive and witty article in the current *Amazon Quarterly*, there are sub-sub-sub-divisions, between gay women, Lesbians, Lesbian-Feminists, dykes, dyke-feminists, dyke-separatists, Old Dykes, butch dykes, bar dykes, and killer dykes. In New York, there were divisions between Political Lesbians and Real Lesbians and Nouveau Lesbians. Hera help the woman who is unaware of these fine political distinctions and who wanders into a meeting for the first time, thinking she maybe has a right to be there because she likes women.

Still, the same energy which created *The Ladder* almost twenty years ago (and we mourn its demise last year and we all hope for its resurrection this summer) --that same energy is now evident in the dynamism of *The Lesbian Tide*, the dedication to the fine points of struggle and contradiction in *Ain't I A Woman?*, in the analytical attempts of *The Furies*, and in the aesthetic excellence and serious political probings of the new *Amazon Quarterly*, to name only a few such publications. That energy, contorted into hiding and working under false pretenses for so long, has exploded in the beautiful and organized anger of groups like Lesbian Mothers (begun in San Francisco and now spreading across the country), to defend and protect the rights of the Lesbian and her children, and, by extension, to stand as guardian for all women who, the moment we embrace our own strength, rage, and politics, face the danger of having our children seized from us physically by the patriarchy which daily attempts to kidnap their minds and souls. The development of this consciousness, so tied in with ancient Mother-Right, is, I think, of profound importance to Lesbian Mothers, all Mothers, indeed all women--it is one of the basic building blocks in our creation of a Feminist Revolution. And again, that energy, which drove my sister Ivy Bottini to almost single-handedly keep the New York NOW chapter afloat for several years (despite the ministrations of Betty Friedan) has now impelled her and other sisters to create Wollstonecraft, Inc. here in Los Angeles, the first major over-ground national Feminist publishing house; to say nothing of Shameless Hussy Press, Diana Press, Momma, and other small radical Lesbian-Feminist presses. That woman-loving-woman energy, freed into open expression and in fact into totally new forms of relationship by the existence of the *Feminist Movement*, has exploded in marches and demonstrations and dances and films and theater groups and crisis centers and so on and on--a whole affirmative new world within the world of women.

And yet.

A funny thing happened to me on the way to the Feminist Revolution: both Betty Friedan and Rita Mae Brown condemned me for being a "man-hater." Both *Ms.* magazine and *The Furies* began to call for alliances with men, *The Furies* at one point implying that Lesbians should band together with gay and straight males (preferably working-class) in a coalition against the enemy: straight women. Indeed, in one by now infamous statement, Rita Mae declared that Lesbians were the only women capable of really loving men. Now of course this did come as a shock to many a Lesbian who was obviously under the misguided impression that one had become a Lesbian because she in fact loved women, and was indifferent-

to-enraged on the subject of men. But now that the "correct line" had fallen from heaven, one was supposed to penitently dismiss such counterrevolutionary attitudes, learning to look at them and other women who still clung to them with contempt. One was also supposed to place issues such as the Vietnam War, political coalition with men, warmed-over marxian class analyses, life-style differences, and other such un-lavender herrings in the path, in order to divide and polarize women. While doing all this, one was further supposed to hoist the new banner of the Vanguard. You know, the Vanguard--Lenin leading the shlemiels.

Before we get into Vanguarditis, we have to backtrack a little, take some dramamine for our nausea, and talk about men--and male influence, and male attempts to destroy the united Women's Movement. This is such an old subject that it bores and depresses me to once more have to wade through it. I feel that "man-hating" is an honorable and viable political act, that the oppressed have a right to a class-hatred against the class that is oppressing them. And although there are exceptions (in everything), i.e., men who are trying to be traitors to their own male class, most men cheerfully affirm their deadly class privileges and power. And I hate that class. I wrote my "Goodbye To All That" to the male Left in 1970--and thought I was done with it. Del Martin wrote her now classic article "If That's All There Is" as a farewell to the male gay movement soon after--and said it all again. We were both touchingly naive if we thought that sufficient.

Because there is now upon us yet another massive wave of male interference, and it is coming, this time, from both gay men and their straight brothers. Boys will be boys, the old saying goes--and boys will indulge in that little thing called male bonding--and all boys in a patriarchal culture have more options and power than do any women.

Gay men first, since they were the ones we all thought were incipient allies with women, because of their own oppression under sexism. I won't go into the facts or the manners of the male-dominated Gay Liberation Movement, since Del did all that superbly and since most women have left the "Gay Movement" a long time ago. But I will, for the sake of those sisters still locked into indentured servitude there, run through a few more recent examples of the "new changing high consciousness about male supremacy" among gay organizations and gay male heavies. Are we to forgive and forget the Gay Activist Alliance dances only a few months ago (with, as usual, a token ten percent attendance by women), at which New York GAA showed stag movies of nude men raping nude women? Are we to forgive and forget the remark of gay leader and "martyr" Jim Fouratt, who told Susan Silverwoman, a founder of New York GLF, that she could not represent GLF at a press conference because she saw herself too much as a woman, as a Feminist? Are we to forgive the editors of the gay male issue of *Motive* magazine for deliberately setting women against women, deliberately attempting to exacerbate what they see as the Lesbian-Straight Split, deliberately attempting to divide and conquer--are we to forgive the following:

Once, when I was telling one of the *Motive* editors, you Roy Eddy, about the estimated nine million Wicca (witches) who were burned to death during the Middle Ages--something that appeared to be news to you--you paused for a moment, and then asked me, "But how many of those nine million women were ac-



tually lesbians?" For a moment, I missed your meaning completely as a variety of sick jokes raced through my mind: How many of the six million Jews were Zionists; how many of the napalmed Indochinese babies could be said to have lived outside the nuclear family?

Then it hit me: you had actually expressed a particle of your intense hatred for all women by asking how many of the nine million were lesbians, so that you would know how many of these victims to mourn, because YOU DIDN'T OBJECT TO WHAT WAS DONE TO THE OTHER WOMEN! This is as close as I have ever heard a man come to saying in so many words that he didn't object to men torturing and incinerating millions of women (provided only that they met his standards for burnability).

--this is a quote from the second issue of *Double-F, A Magazine of Effeminism*, in which even the faggot-effeminist males declare their Declaration of Independence from Gay Liberation and all other Male Ideologies.

Or are we, out of the compassion in which we have been positively forced to drown as women, are we yet again going to defend the male supremacist yes-osity of male transvestitism? How many of us will try to explain away--or permit into our organizations, even--men who deliberately re-emphasize gender roles, and who parody female oppression and suffering as "camp"? Maybe it seems that we, in our "liberated" combat boots and jeans aren't being mocked. No? Then is it "merely" our mothers, and their mothers, who had no other choice, who wore hobbling dresses and torture-stiletto-heels to survive, to keep jobs, or to keep husbands because they themselves could get no jobs. No, I will not call a male "she"; thirty-two years of suffering in this androcentric society, and of surviving, have earned me the name "woman"; one walk down the street by a male transvestite, five minutes of his being hassled (which he may enjoy), and then he dares, he dares to think he understands our pain? No, in our mothers' names and in our own, we must not call him sister. We know what's at work when whites wear blackface; the same thing is at work when men wear drag.

And what of the straight men, the rulers, the rapists, the right-on radicals? What of the men of the Socialist Workers' Party, for example, who a short two years ago refused membership to all homosexual people on the grounds that homosexuality was a decadent sickness, an evil of capitalism, a perversion that must be rooted out in all "correct socialist thinking"--who now, upon opportunistically seeing a large movement out there with a lot of bodies to organize like pawns into their purposes, speedily change their official line (but not their central-committee attitude on homosexuality), and send "their" women out to teach these poor sheep some real politics? Are we to forgive, forget, ignore? Or struggle endlessly through precious energy-robbing hours with these women, because they are after all *women, sisters*, even if they're collaborating with a politics and a party based on straight white male rule? We must save our struggle for elsewhere. But it hurts--because they are women.

And this is the tragedy. That the straight men, the gay men, the transvestite men, the male politics, the male styles, the male attitudes toward sexuality are being arrayed once more against us, and they are, in fact, making new headway this time, using women as their standard-bearers.

Every woman here knows in her gut the vast differences between her sexuality and that of any patriarchally trained male's--gay or straight. That has, in

fact, always been a source of pride to the Lesbian community, even in its greatest suffering. That the emphasis on genital sexuality, objectification, promiscuity, non-emotional involvement, and tough invulnerability, were the male style, and that we, as women, placed greater trust in love, sensuality, humor, tenderness, strength, commitment, Then what but male style is happening when we accept the male transvestite who chooses to wear women's dresses and make-up, but sneer at the female who is still forced to wear them for survival? What is happening when "Street Fighting Woman," a New York all-woman bar band, dresses in black leather and motorcycle chains, and sings and plays a lot of the Rolling Stones, including the high priest of sadistic cock-rock Jagger's racist, sexist song "Brown Sugar"--with lines like, "Old slaver knows he's doin' all right/ hear him whip the women just about midnight/ Hey, Brown Sugar, how come you taste so good?" What is happening when, in a mid-west city with a strong Lesbian-Feminist community, men raped a woman in the university dormitory, and murdered her by the repeated ramming of a broom-handle into her vagina until she died of massive internal hemorrhage--and the Lesbian activists there can't relate to taking any political action pertaining to the crime because, according to one of them, there was no evidence that the victim was a Lesbian? But the same community can, at a women's dance less than a week later, proudly play Jagger's recorded voice singing "Midnight Rambler"--a song which glorifies the Boston Strangler?

What has happened when women, in escaping the patriarchally enforced role of noxious "femininity" adopt instead the patriarch's own style, to get drunk and swaggering just like one of the boys, to write of tits and ass as if a sister were no more than a collection of chicken parts, to spit at the lifetime commitment of other Lesbian couples, and refer to them contemptuously as "monogs"? For the record, the anti-monogamy line originated with men, Leftist men, Weathermen in particular, in order to guilt-trip the women in their "alternative culture" into being more available victims of a dominance-based gang-rape sexuality. And from where but the male Left male "hip" culture have we been infected with the obsession to anti-intellectualism and downward mobility? Genuinely poor people see no romanticism in their poverty; those really forced into illiteracy hardly glorify their condition. The oppressed want out of that condition--and it is contemptuous of real people's real pain to parasitically imitate it, and hypocritical to play the more-oppressed-than-thou game instead of ordering our lives so as to try and meet our basic and just needs, so that we can get on with the more important but often forgotten business of making a Feminist Revolution.

What about the life-style cop-out? The one invented by two straight white young males, Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman, for the benefit of other unoppressed straight white young males? What about the elite isolation, the incestuous preoccupation with one's own clique or group or commune, one's own bar/dance/tripping, which led one Lesbian to announce that the revolution has already been won, that she isn't compelled, like the rest of us, to live in a man's world anymore? As Jeanne Cordova has written in *The Lesbian Tide*, "An example of these politics is Jill Johnston's calling for tribes of women capable of sustaining themselves independent of the male species. How very beautiful! Truth, justice, and the womanly way! How very unreal." And Cordova is right in pointing out that this is the "personal solution" error--the deadly trap into which

so many heterosexual women have fallen. It should be obvious how painfully much everyone wants even a little happiness, peace, joy, in her life--and should have that right. But to remain convinced that your own personal mirage is a real oasis while a sandstorm is rising in the desert is both selfish and suicidal. There is a war going on, sisters. Women are being killed. And the rapist doesn't stop to ask whether his victim is straight or Lesbian.

But the epidemic of male style among women doesn't stop there. No, it is driving its *reformist* wedge through our ranks as well: women breaking their backs working for McGovern (only to have him laugh in their faces); women in the Lesbian community especially breaking their backs to elect almost invariably male gay legislators, or lobbying to pass bills which will, in practice, primarily profit men. Myself, I have never been able to get excited over Tokenism, whether it was Margaret Chase Smith in the Senate or Bernadine Dohrn in the Weather Underground, let alone a few women to give GAA a good front (which women, by the way, are finally getting wise to and leaving), or to serve as periodic good niggers for the cheap porn reportage of *The Advocate*, *Gay*, *Gay Sunshine*, and the like.

Susan Silverwoman, a New York-based Lesbian Feminist active for years in the Women's Movement and at one time in GLF, has written a moving and courageous paper called "Finding Allies: The Lesbian Dilemma" which is available for 25¢ by writing to Labyris Books, 33 Barrow Street, New York City 10014. In it she writes, "Men have traditionally maintained power over women by keeping us separated. Gay men capitalized on the split between feminists and lesbians by suggesting and insisting that we [lesbians] were somehow better, basically different from straight women... Gay men preferred to think of us not as women, but as female gay men." She goes on to say, "It is imperative that we identify with the total feminist issue...if we continue to define straight women as the enemy, rather than sisters...we rob from ourselves a movement which must be part of ourselves. We are choosing false allies when we align politically with gay men who can never understand the female experience and who, as men, have a great deal of privilege to lose by a complete liberation of women. Whether or not straight feminists come out, as potential lesbians they are far more likely to understand our experience."

Language itself is one powerful barometer of influence. More and more women use Lesbian proudly in self-description, calling on the history of that word, dating from an age and an island where women were great artists and political figures. Why do any of us still use "gay" to describe ourselves at all--that trivializing, male-invented, and male defining term? If we are serious about our politics, then we must be responsible about the ways in which we communicate them to others, creating new language when necessary to express new concepts. But the sloppy thinking and lazy rhetoric of the straight and gay male movements pollutes our speech, and when Jill Johnston in one column claims Betty Friedan as a Lesbian and then, a few months later, after Friedan's attack in the *Times*, calls Friedan a man--I, for one, get confused. And angry. Because the soggy sentimentality of the first statement and the rank stupidity of the second mean nothing politically. The point is, very regrettably, that Friedan is a woman. And can stand as one of many examples of the insidious and devastating effect of male politics.

There is a war going on. And people get damaged in a war, badly damaged. Our casualties are rising. To say that any woman has escaped--or can escape--damage in this day on this planet is to march under the self-satisfied flags of smug false consciousness. And get gunned down anyway for her pains.

Personally, I detest "vanguarditis." I never liked it in the Left, and I find it especially distasteful weaseling its way into the Women's Movement. I think that if anything like a "vanguard" exists at all, it continually shifts and changes from group to group within a movement, depending on the specific strategies and contradictions that arise at given times, and on which groups are best equipped and placed to meet and deal with them--when and if called for by the movement as a whole. The responsibility of a vanguard, by the way, is to speak from, for, and to all of the people who gave it birth. Lesbian Nation cannot be the Feminist solution, much less a vanguard, when it ignores these facts. And it won't do to blame the straight women who wouldn't cooperate--after all, it is the vanguard's responsibility as leadership to hear messages in the silence or even hostility of all its people, and to reply creatively, no matter how lengthy or painful that dialogue is. A willingness to do this--and then to act on the message--is what makes the vanguard the vanguard.

I don't like more-radical-than-thou games any better than more-oppressed-than-thou games. I don't like credentials games, intimidation-between-women games, or "you are who you sleep with" games. I don't like people being judged by their class background, their sexual preference, their race, choice of religion, marital status, motherhood or rejection of it, or any other vicious standard of categorization. I hate such judgements in the male power system, and I hate them in the Women's Movement. If there must be judgments at all, let them be not on where a woman is coming from, but on what she is moving toward; let them be based on her seriousness, her level of risk, her commitment, her endurance.

And by those standards, yes, there could be a Lesbian vanguard. I think it would be women like Barbara Grier and Phyllis Lyons and Del Martin and Sten Russell, and others like them who, at the height of the Fifties' McCarthyism, stood up and formed a Lesbian civil-rights movement, and whose courage, commitment, and staying power are ignored by the vulgar minds of certain younger women, newly Lesbian from two months or two years back, who presume to dismiss such brave women as "oldies" or "life-style straights" or, again, "hopeless monogs."

There is a new smell of fear in the Women's Movement. It is in the air when groups calling themselves killer-dyke-separatists trash Lesbian Feminists who work with that anathema, straight women--trash these Lesbian Feminists as "pawns, dupes, and suckers-up to the enemy." It is in the air when Peggy Allegro writes in *Amazon Quarterly* that "at a certain point, flags can begin to dominate people. For instance, women are oppressed by the flag of the freak feminist dyke. There are all kinds of rules, shoulds and shouldn'ts, in this community, that result because of the image's power. We must beware the tendency to merely impose a new hierarchy...a new ideal ego image to persecute people." It is in the air when ultra-egalitarianism usurps organic collectivity, or when one woman is genuinely scared to confront another about the latter's use of "chick" to describe her lover. It was in the air when I trembled to wrench the Stones'



record from the phonograph at a women's dance, and when I was accused of being up-tight, a bring-down, puritanical, draggy, and of course, doubtless, a hung-up man-hating "straight" for doing that. The words are familiar, but the voices used to be male. And the smell of fear was in my gut, writing this talk, and is in my nostrils now, risking the saying of these things, taking a crazy leap of faith that our own shared and potentially ecstatic womanhood will bind across all criticism--and that a lot more Feminists in the Lesbian Movement will come out of their closets today.

Because polarization does exist. Already. And when I first thought about this talk, I wanted to call for unity. But I cannot. I am struck dumb before the dead body of a broomhandle-raped and murdered woman, and anyway, my voice wouldn't dent the rape-sound of the Rolling Stones. So instead, my purpose in this talk here today is to call for further polarization, but on different grounds.

Not the Lesbian-Straight Split, nor the Lesbian-Feminist Split, but the Feminist-Collaborator Split.

The war outside, between women and male power, is getting murderous; they are trying to kill us, literally, spiritually, infiltratively. It is time, past time, we drew new lines and knew which women were serious, which women were really committed to loving women (whether that included sexual credentials or not), and, on the other side, which women thought Feminism meant pure fun, or a chance to bring back a body count to their male Trot party leaders, or those who saw Feminist Revolution as any particular life-style, correct class line, pacifist-change-your-head-love-daisy-chain, or easy lay. We know that the personal is political. But if the political is solely personal, then those of us at the barricades will be in big trouble. And if a woman isn't there when the crunch comes--and it is coming--then I for one won't give a damn whether she is at home in bed with a woman, a man, or her own wise fingers. If she's in bed at all at that moment, others of us are in our coffins. I'd appreciate the polarization now instead of then.

I am talking about the rise of attempted gynocide. I am talking about survival. Susan Stein, a Lesbian Feminist with a genius for coining aphorisms, has said, "Lesbianism is in danger of being co-opted by Lesbians." Lesbians are a minority. Women are a majority. And since it is awfully hard to be a Lesbian without being a woman first, the choice seems pretty clear to me.

There are a lot of women involved in that war out there, most of them not even active in the Women's Movement yet. They include the hundreds of thousands of housewives who created and sustained the meat boycott in the most formidable show of women's strength in recent years. Those women, Feminists or not, were moving because of Feminism--such a nationwide women's action would have been thought impossible five years ago. They are mostly housewives, and mothers, and heterosexuals. There are asexual and celibate women out there, too, who are tired of being told that they are sick. Because this society has said that everybody should fuck a lot, and too many people in the Women's Movement have echoed, "Yeah, fuck with women or even with men, but for god's sake fuck or you're really perverted." And there are also genuine functioning bisexuals out there. I'm not referring to people who have used the word as a coward's way to avoid dealing honestly with homosexuality, or to avoid commit-

ment. We all know that ploy. I agree with Kate Millett when she says that she "believes that all people are inherently bisexual"--and I also know that to fight a system one must dare to identify with the most vulnerable aspect of one's oppression--and women are put in prison for being Lesbians, not bisexuals or heterosexuals *per se*. So that is why I have identified myself as I have--in the *Times* in 1968 and here today. Although the Man will probably want to get me for hating men before he gets me for loving women.

We have enough trouble on our hands. Isn't it way past time that we stopped settling for blaming each other, stopped blaming heterosexual women and middle-class women and married women and Lesbian women and white women and any women for the structure of sexism, racism, classism, and ageism, that no woman is to blame for because we have none of us had the power to create those structures. They are patriarchal creations, not ours. And if we are collaborating with any of them for any reason, we must begin to stop. The time is short, and the self-indulgence is getting dangerous. We must stop settling for anything less than we deserve.

All women have a right to each other as women. All women have a right to our sense of ourselves as a People. All women have a right to live with and make love with whom we choose when we choose. We have a right to bear and raise children if we choose, and not to if we don't. We have a right to freedom and yes, power. Power to change our entire species into something that might for the first time approach being human. We have a right, each of us, to a Great Love.

And this is the final risk I will take here today. By the right to a great love I don't mean romanticism in the Hollywood sense, and I don't mean a cheap joke or cynical satire. I mean a great love--a committed, secure, nurturing, sensual, aesthetic, revolutionary, holy, ecstatic love. That need, that right, is at the heart of our revolution. It is in the heart of the woman stereotyped by others as being a butch bar dyke who cruises for a cute piece, however much she herself might laugh at the Lesbian couple who have lived together for decades. It is in their hearts, too. It is in the heart of the woman who jet-sets from one desperate heterosexual affair to another. It is in the heart of a woman who wants to find--or stay with--a man she can love and be loved by in what she has a right to demand are non-oppressive ways. It is in the heart of every woman here today, if we dare admit it to ourselves and recognize it in each other, and in all women. It is each her right. Let no one, female or male, of whatever sexual or political choice, dare deny that, for to deny it is to settle. To deny it is to speak with the words of the real enemy.

If we can open ourselves to ourselves and each other, as women, only then can we begin to fight for and create, in fact reclaim, not Lesbian Nation or Amazon Nation--let alone some false State of equality--but a real Feminist Revolution, a proud gynocratic world that runs on the power of women. Not in the male sense of power, but in the sense of a power plant--producing energy. And to each, that longing for, the right to, great love, filled in reality, for all women, and children, and men and animals and trees and water and all life. An exquisite diversity in unity. That world breathed and exulted on this planet some twelve thousand years ago, before the patriarchy arose to crush it.

If we risk this task then, our pride, our history, our culture, our past, our future, all vibrate before us. Let those who will dare, begin.

In the spirit of that task, I want to end this talk in a strange and new, although time-out-of-mind-ancient manner. Earlier, I "came out" in this talk as a Witch, and I did not mean that as a solely political affiliation. I affirm the past and the present spirit of the Wicca (the anglo-saxon word for witch, or wise woman), affirm it not only in the smoke of our nine million martyrs, but also in the thread of real woman-power and real Goddess-worship dating back beyond Crete to the dawn of the planet. In the ruling male culture, they have degraded our ritual by beginning conferences and conventions with a black-coated male, sometimes in full priestly drag, nasally droning his stultifying pronouncements to the assemblage. Let us reclaim our own for ourselves, then, and in that process, also extend an embrace to those Lesbians who, because they go to church, are held in disrepute by counterculture Lesbians. And to those women of whatever sexual identification who kneel in novenas or murmur in quiet moments to, oh irony, a male god for alleviation of the agony caused by male supremacy.

The short passage I am about to read is from The Charge of the Goddess, still used reverently in living Wiccan Covens, usually spoken by the High Priestess at the initiation of a new member. I ask that each woman join hands with those next to her.

I ask your respect for the oldest faith known to human beings, and for the ecstatic vision of freedom that lies hidden in each of your own precious, miraculous brains.

*Listen to the words of the Great Mother. She says:*

*"Whenever ye have need of anything, once in the month, and better it be when the moon is full, then shall ye assemble in some secret place... to these I will teach things that are yet unknown. AND YE SHALL BE FREE FROM ALL SLAVERY ... Keep pure your highest ideal; strive ever toward it. LET NAUGHT STOP YOU NOR TURN YOU ASIDE... Mine is the cup of the wine of life and the cauldron of Ceridwen... I am the Mother of all living, and my love is poured out upon the Earth... I am the beauty of the Green Earth, and the White Moon among the stars, and the Mystery of the Waters, AND THE DESIRE IN THE HEART OF WOMAN... Before my face, let thine innermost self be enfolded in the raptures of the Infinite... Know the Mystery, that if that which thou seekest thou findest not within thee, thou wilt never find it without thee... For behold, I HAVE BEEN WITH THEE FROM THE BEGINNING. And I await you now."*

Dear Sisters,

As we in the Craft say, Blessed Be.

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Robin wrote a short addition to her speech the night before she addressed the conference. It was not available to us at press time.

by Pat Pomerleau

This fifth year's November  
I drive through vineyards and Redwoods  
chasing flickering memories of you  
up Highway One Oh One  
recalling how you sang Christopher Robin songs  
while this old Pooh Bear  
skated one excellent VW  
down  
over the Donner Pass  
knowing all the while  
that one day  
inevitably  
like Piglet --  
the more and more I  
looked  
the more and more  
you wouldn't  
be  
here.



by JANE ALDEN

## TRACKING THE WOOLF

A book review of *Virginia Woolf: A Biography* by Quentin Bell; Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich, Inc.; New York; 1972. \$12.50

Quentin Bell is the younger son (born 1910) of Virginia Woolf's sister Vanessa, who had married the art critic Clive Bell. He was, thereby, privileged to have known Virginia from his cradle until her suicide, a span of 31 years. In addition, a multitude of mutual friends and relatives have contributed facts and their views of her life.

One of Bell's best sources is the New York Public Library's Berg Collection, which contains the bulk of her personal writings: 27 manuscript volumes of her diaries from 1915-1941; eight early notebook diaries; and four series of letter from Virginia Stephen Woolf to Vanessa Bell, Violet Dickinson, Victoria Sackville-West, and Ethel Smyth. The biography is very well documented and contains a most helpful family tree, many fine photographs, and a short bibliography.

This is a detailed chronology of Virginia Woolf's life, giving the who's, what's, when's and where's of her existence -- but shying away from the why's and the wherefore's. Bell extensively quotes but sometimes warily speculates. As a result, she never quite takes on a full, lifelike dimension. She remains shadowy and enigmatic. To the degree that her writing is immediate and vivid, her life as presented in Bell's biography is distant and pallid. She emerges from these pages as an introverted, often insane eunuch, whose artful gossip entertained the Bloomsbury "harem."

At times there are odd juxtapositions of facts. For example,

Bell describes Katherine Mansfield's death in one paragraph and immediately follows it with: "Berta Ruck was also dead. She had been killed in *Jacob's Room*." Berta Ruck? The lady, it turns out, greatly resented the fact that Virginia Woolf had written of her demise in *Jacob's Room* when she was actually very much alive. Indeed, she was writing such fiction as *Lad with Wings*, *Sir or Madam*, and *The Dancing Star*. (Who was Berta Ruck? These titles sound distinctly gay!)

Bell warms most to his task when describing his mother, Vanessa Bell. This leads one to speculate that perhaps the biography should better have been titled *Virginia Woolf: Sister of Vanessa Bell*.

Another factor that detracts from the overall quality of his biography is Bell's desire to protect the living by deleting certain references to the past. This is in the manner of Leonard Woolf, who edited Virginia Woolf's diaries (published in 1953) with such a heavy hand. Toward the latter part of Volume Two (p. 210), for example, Bell writes: "Virginia wrote one of the gayest and one of the most hilarious of her letters to Vanessa at the height of the Munich crisis. Unfortunately it is not a letter which can, at present, be published."

To his credit, there are extensive references to the pervasive homosexuality of the Bloomsbury group that would have been considered too damaging to publish a few years ago. Polysexual activities abounded and are treated with frankness and, at times, humor.

There are four components of Virginia Woolf's life and art that I find of particular interest, and I shall comment on Quentin Bell's treatment of them in his biography: a critical view of her writing; her involvement in feminist activities; her insanity; and her sexual character.

### *Literary Criticism*

Bell states in his foreword that the purpose of his biography "is purely historical; and although I hope that I may assist those who attempt to explain and to assess the writing of Virginia Woolf, I can do so only by presenting facts which hitherto have not been generally known and by providing what will, I hope, be a clear and truthful account of the character and personal development of my subject. In no other way can I contribute to literary criticism."

So much for that! For readers who are especially interested

in a critical assessment of her art, I recommend Jean Guiguet's *Virginia Woolf and Her Works*, Hogarth Press, London, 1965. This book is not listed in Bell's short bibliography. For a more comprehensive (but dated) listing, there is B. J. Kirkpatrick's *Bibliography of Virginia Woolf*, Rupert Hart-Davis, London, 1957.

#### *Feminist Activities*

Most important of Virginia Woolf's essays and books written from a feminist viewpoint are *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* (the latter nearly being published as *On Being Despised*). These books are as relevant today as when she wrote them and nicely express what men apparently won't understand: why women aren't satisfied with what they've got and how they can go about changing the situation.

*A Room of One's Own* is based upon two lectures Virginia Woolf gave at Cambridge University in October 1928, concerned with women and fiction. It argues that woman is handicapped economically and socially and therefore lacks the freedom and independence of her brothers. "The lack of this economic freedom breeds resentment, the noisy assertive resentment of the male, who insists on claiming his superiority, and the shrill nagging resentment of the female who clamours for her rights. Both produce bad literature -- fiction that is --demands a comprehensive sympathy which transcends and comprehends the feelings of both sexes. The great artist is Androgynous." (Vol. 2, p. 144)

In addition to books and essays championing woman's rights, she devoted much of her time to the Richmond Branch of the Women's Co-operative Guild in England. She presided over monthly meetings held in her home over a period of four years and was responsible for providing a speaker for these meetings. Her diary entry of April 18, 1918, records that "They wish me to get them a speaker on Sex Education, Mrs. Hiscoke telling us that she had had to get a friend to explain the period to her daughter, and she still feels shy if the daughter is in the room when sexual subjects are discussed. She's 23 years old." (Vol. 2, p. 36)

Yet Mrs. Woolf was also skittish about discussing "periods," let alone of mentioning her menopause, which she refers to as the "T of L" (for Time of Life). In this, as in many of her approaches to things physical, she was Victorian. The one taboo she thoroughly enjoyed flaunting was discussing "buggery" in mixed company. This

was a guaranteed shocker in those times, as it is today in some circles.

Bell believes that Virginia Woolf's involvement with the feminist cause was ridiculous, especially so during the 1930's, when Hitler's threat to England was ominously growing. He writes, "To me the wonderful thing is not that she was the object of criticism, but that these criticisms were for the most part so mild and so limited. For her manner of writing was not one to arouse the enthusiasms of young people in the thirties. To many she must have ap-



peared as an angular, remote, odd, perhaps rather intimidating figure, a fragile middle-aged poetess, a sexless Sappho and, as the crisis of the decade drew to its terrible conclusion, oddly irrelevant -- a distressed gentlewoman caught in the tempest and making little effort either to fight against it or to sail before it." (Vol. 2, p. 185)

I think that she saw the utter futility of "fighting against it," just as she would finally perceive the impossibility of vanquishing her dreaded, lifelong enemy, insanity.



## Insanity

Bell describes Virginia Woolf's bouts of madness and her slow recoveries in good detail. He attributes several of her early breakdowns to the shock of family tragedies -- the death of her mother when she was 13; of her father, four years later; and of her brother Thoby two years after that. A second and more frequent cause was the extreme mental and emotional exhaustion that followed her high-pitched bursts of creativity. Immediately before and after writing a book, she was left totally drained of energy and was emotionally a wreck.

These mental and physical breakdowns forced her to refrain from writing and social activities. Her doctors recommended that she get plenty of rest, fresh air, and milk; and she took long walks in the country, especially in her beloved Cornwall. But what if more precise, skilled psychiatrists had treated her? What if, as a result of newly acquired Freudian analysis as therapy, she could have been cured of her hellish visions and voices?

In *Recollections of Virginia Woolf by Her Contemporaries*, edited by Joan Russell Noble; Wm. Morrow & Co., Inc.; New York; 1972, p. 117, Alix Strachey, a psychoanalyst and friend of Virginia's, writes, "Virginia's imagination, apart from her artistic creativeness, was so interwoven with her fantasies -- and indeed with her madness -- that if you had stopped the madness you might have stopped the creativeness too. It seems to me quite a reasonable judgment for Leonard (Woolf) to have made, if he did so. (Not to submit Virginia to psychoanalysis.) It may be preferable to be mad and be creative than to be treated by analysis and become ordinary. Virginia's breakdowns were brought on partly by exhaustion after finishing a novel, but largely by the fact that she had intensified her fantasies while writing it, to such an extent that they had probably become uncontrollable. It is likely that this tendency was born in her and, the more she concentrated on her work, the more exaggerated it became."

What of Virginia Woolf's own description of her insanity? She created a fictional counterpart of herself in *Mrs. Dalloway* by portraying Septimus Warren Smith as an insane (shell-shocked) ex-soldier who commits suicide rather than allowing himself to be committed to an asylum. Smith's doctor, Sir William Bradshaw, is characterized as a pompous ass whose professional ineptitude has resulted in the suicide.

It took extraordinary courage to delve into her madness for the Smith-Bradshaw portions of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Of this harrowing task, she writes in her diary of June 19, 1923, ". . . the mad part tries me so much, makes my mind squirt so badly that I can hardly face spending the next weeks on it."

This theme of madness and death reveals Virginia's growing belief that suicide was probably the only "solution" for her insanity. Just prior to her suicide, she wrote that she was once again hearing voices and that she believed she could never recover from this madness. On March 28, 1941, she walked to the River Ouse, determined to drown herself. Bell records, ". . . she forced a large stone into the pocket of her coat. Then she went to her death, 'the one experience,' as she had said to Vita, 'I shall never describe.'" (Vol. 2, p. 226)

## Her Sexual Character

In Virginia Woolf's suicide note to her husband, Leonard, she wrote, "What I want to say is I owe all the happiness of my life to you. You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good. I want to say that -- everybody knows it. If anybody could have saved me it would have been you. Everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness. I can't go on spoiling your life any longer. I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been."

Well, yes, Leonard was nearly always patient and good, a very taciturn male nurse who tried ineffectually to protect her from over-exhaustion when it became apparent she was heading for a breakdown. But this function could have been performed by anyone familiar with her mental and physical health. Leonard apparently failed to supply (if indeed it was wanted) the sexual component one usually associates with a husband. Bell relates that Virginia was frigid in her relations with Leonard. In addition, they had early agreed that having children was out of the question because of Virginia's precarious health. Apparently marital sexual activities were ruled out by mutual agreement.

Into this sexual vacuum appeared Mrs. Harold Nicolson, Victoria ("Vita") Sackville-West. This blue-blooded, rather masculine woman appealed to Virginia's snobbery and romanticism. Vita was to become

the hero-heroine Orlando, in Virginia's book of that name.

On December 21, 1925, Virginia wrote to her sister Vanessa (whom she greatly envied for her lusty sexual adventures and maternity), "Vita is now arriving to spend 2 nights alone with me . . . the June nights are long and warm; the roses flowering; and the garden full of lust and bees, mingling on the asparagus beds."

Bell speculates that "there may have been -- on balance I think there probably was -- some caressing, some bedding together." (Vol. 2, p. 119) He describes Vita as "a frank and unequivocal Sapphist," and he acknowledges that Vita was the most important person -- apart from Leonard and Vanessa -- in Virginia's life.

"What should or does one imply if one quite boldly says: 'Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West had a love affair between, shall we say, 1925 and 1929'? Vita was very much in love with Virginia and being, I suspect, of an ardent temperament, loved her as a man might have loved her, with a masculine impatience for some kind of physical satisfaction -- even though Virginia was in her forties (Vita was in her thirties) and, although extremely beautiful, without the charm of her youth, and even though Vita herself was a little in awe of her. . . . Virginia felt as a lover feels -- she desponded when she fancied herself neglected, despaired when Vita was away, waited anxiously for her letters, needed Vita's company and lived in that strange mixture of elation and despair which lovers -- and one could have supposed only lovers -- can experience. All this she had done and felt for Katherine (Mansfield), but she never refers to Katherine, never writes of her as she does of Vita." (Vol. 2, pp. 116-117)

Vita, of course, had absolutely no doubt of her feelings toward Virginia. She wrote Clive Bell, after meeting Virginia, "I would go to the ends of the earth for your sister-in-law." (Vol. 2, p. 117, note) Later, both women journeyed to France together, without Leonard's oppressive company. Of this idyl Bell writes, "Virginia had . . . identified herself with the cause of homosexuality by spending a week in France along with Vita." (Vol. 2, p. 139) He adds, "the husbands took it all with admirable calm."

But by the end of 1934, their close relationship had come to a close. "Virginia realised that their passionate friendship was over. There had been no quarrel, no outward sign of coolness, no bitterness, but the love affair -- or whatever we are to call it -- had for some time been quietly evaporating, and that particular ex-

citement had gone out of her life, leaving a blankness, a dullness." (Vol. 2, p. 183)

Bell's biography also chronicles Virginia Woolf's fond, perhaps even lesbian, relationships at various times of her life with Madge Symonds ("Sally" in *Mrs. Dalloway*), Violet Dickinson and Katherine Mansfield. He includes a comic/sad account of Ethel Smyth's loudly proclaimed infatuation with Virginia, which began when Miss Smyth was 71 and Virginia, a mere 48! Virginia records in her diary entry of May 14, 1930, "It is at once hideous and horrid and melancholy-sad. It is like being caught by a giant crab."

She adroitly side-stepped this entanglement and concentrated instead on finishing her masterpiece, *The Waves*. On February 7, 1931, she completed this very difficult book and wrote, "Here in the few minutes that remain, I must record, heaven be praised, the end of *The Waves*. I wrote *O Death* fifteen minutes ago, having reeled across the last ten pages with some moments of such intensity and intoxication that I seemed only to stumble after my own voice, or almost, after some sort of speaker (as when I was mad). I was almost afraid, remembering the voices that used to fly ahead. Anyhow, it is done; and I have been sitting these 15 minutes in a state of glory, and calm, and some tears, thinking of Toby, and if I could write Julian Toby Stephen 1881-1906 on the first page. I suppose not. (She didn't.) How physical the sense of triumph and relief is!" (Vol. 2, p. 157)

A little more than ten years later, on March 28, 1941, the voices pursued her for the last time to the banks of the River Ouse. Distraught beyond fear or pain, she stepped into the icy water, weighed heavy with stone.

"The waves broke on the shore."



by LAUREL

# MARGARET ANDERSON

This final volume of Margaret Anderson's three volume autobiography, *The Strange Necessity*, is perhaps not as exciting as *My Thirty Years War* and *The Firey Fountains*. Instead of Margaret in action, discovering the "art of life," we have the mature Margaret summing up what she has learned about living. It is a book of collected wisdom about art, life, and dying.

Not without reason, Margaret Anderson by the time she begins this book has exiled herself from America, from cities, and from all she finds detestable in the modern world:

*It is now my immense pleasure and privilege to live outside the grave new world of today, far from the vehemence of cities and the violence of events.*

She lives in a tiny house overlooking the ocean two miles up a hill from Cannes, France. It is the same house where she and Georgette had lived together, and where Georgette had died. Three of Margaret's "great loves" died in this house, and Margaret, at least in 1968, had every intension of staying on alone in the Chalet Rose until she dies.

This book is divided really into two major sections: the first is about great art and the second is a nostalgic summing up of a great life, Margaret's own. Her taste was very defined by the time she wrote this book -- enough so that she titles one of her chapters "Permanent Criteria." Margaret regards herself as a "touchstone" -- a person who was born with the capacity to distinguish art from non-art. She writes at length in the first half of the book about her system for doing this, including copious examples of both. I find much of this section tiresome and some of her categories very ambiguous, but it is a thoroughly documented account of a "touchstone."

Much of this going on about art is devoted to music. I recommend the music section highly to anyone who is in revolt against the intellectualization of the critics. Margaret elucidates her tastes *thoroughly* here, even providing a complete menu for a record concert. That is, she gives a long list of just the right records to play in the right order to enthrall your friends.

The portions of the book entitled "The Art of Life" and "The Art of Love" are really much more interesting, although they repeat a few of the episodes covered in the first two volumes of the autobiography. It is not a continuous story of the last part of Margaret's life, but instead, small sketches to illustrate the many ways that hers has been "a life of perfection."

I especially like the parts where she discusses the elements of good conversation, great friendships, and love:

*In a perfect friendship, conversations don't go on too long. Each friend has learned something about quintessence, and this assures quality. It's like the difference between good writing and great literature: an extra element -- something rare, unimagined by anyone else -- enters the situation: the element of art.*

*Great friendships don't happen every day. They happened to me five times in fifty years. The first time, the friend I found was in advance of me, and it took me a long time to catch up (if I ever have). (No, I haven't.) The third time we were equal. The fourth time I was ahead and she caught up. The other two times we were delicately balanced; sometimes one was ahead, sometimes the other.*

*If you ask me what I consider the supreme reward in friendship-love, I will answer: its absence of conflict. It may contain challenge, criticism, controversy, the exhilaration of disagreement, but between friends conflict is senseless. It may be all right between the sexes; it is all wrong between friends. Those rages and reconciliations on which lovers seem to thrive are abomination to me.*

*I know today that even if I live twenty years longer, the chances are that I won't find a new (a great) friend. Why? Because I know too much about the long, long time necessary to build such a relationship -- unless it happens that the two natures are of the same emotional age. Otherwise you must have years in front of you to bring about this miracle of communication. But if the miracle happens, it will be all perfection. As Georgette said, "If it were not perfect, it would not be."*

One of the qualities that Margaret valued most in her relationship with Georgette was freedom. She devotes a chapter to it:

*Once upon a time, long ago, I lived for a few years without freedom. I made efforts during those years to adjust to a way of life that wasn't my own. You do this because you love someone, because you want your friend to be happy. You are willing to do it for months, not for years. And you always hope that sooner or later you can make the person you love understand your need of freedom -- and, you hope, hers.*

Don't hope. If freedom isn't there in the beginning it will never be there. No one ever understands the idea, the need, or the feel, of freedom who doesn't start with the need as ultimate.

I never talk of freedom as a demand to have one's own way. No one can have his own way. No one can escape adjustments, concessions, the welcomed responsibilities of love. But if you can feel free, even while you adjust and concede, you are saved. . . . Georgette and I did feel free, and we felt it in spite of differing temperaments and idiosyncrasies. And neither of us ever found it in relation to anyone else.

After a few days of communal living, I must have a rest from it. I can no longer be a unit with anyone; I am myself, separate; I must again become the master of my own impulses. If not, I begin to disintegrate.

Freedom is the only bond that could ever utterly bind me to another human being.

The really new information in this volume is about Margaret's relationship with Dorothy Caruso. (Enrico Caruso had formerly been her husband.) Dorothy and Margaret first met on a boat enroute to America. They lived together from this time on 'til Dorothy's death at age 62 in 1955. She died in the room where Georgette had died in the Chalet Rose, and of the same cause, cancer.

Part Two of the book begins here then, when Margaret has buried her last great love and turns to happily remembering the past in solitude. She isn't bitter, nor dispirited:

How I long not to die -- to continue in an endlessness of days I have already lived. What is it that so allures me? What is it that I do when I do nothing? I wait, I expect to be exalted. I take a walk, I stand in a window, I look at a view. I should by now be "growing old," but I don't believe in it; I am still looking and feeling and thinking with an endless energy that is like an exercise in delight.

Margaret thinks of all she has been and how, of course, she might have been different. She has been accused of being egotistical -- but she protests, no, she really wasn't enough of an "egoist":

Yes, I have been an egoist. My shortcoming is that I've never become a great egoist. A great egoist is a person who refuses to be eaten alive; and who also arranges not to eat others. I have often yielded to being eaten rather than to eat others, but I don't believe in such submission. I disapprove of cannibalism in all its forms.

Mostly, Margaret remembers a great life and ends her book with a profound gratitude to her friends and to her chosen country, France. The last section is a eulogy "To France, with love":

How I love this country where I have found such a deep and active peace. Spaceships surround the earth, but I sit in a room where I am surrounded by tuberoses; their white and perfumed life vibrates in the air. I have a fire, I have a cup of coffee, I am conscious of living a minute at a time -- minute after minute of lighting a cigarette, of holding out my hands to the fire. Minute by minute, by these small acts, I push aside for an hour those recurrent thoughts of destruction and death that are now much with me.

If I have more years to live, I hope they will be lived in this place. And so I say:

To France, with love. With gratitude for all that has happened to me here; for all that I may still be allowed to feel, to think, to remember and to celebrate in what remains for me of a life on earth.

Le Cannet, Alpes Maritimes, France

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## THE WOMAN WHO LOVED THE TRUTH

Once there was a woman who taught Latin. Her work suited her, because she cared about accuracy and order. And above all, arching over her other concerns and drawing them together, she had what was almost a passion for the truth. More than one of her friends had remarked that she was never satisfied until she understood a thing for what it was, or at least knew that it was not as it seemed.

Because she had no husband and few relatives, and those few far away, the woman's friends took the place of family in her life. She was fortunate in having as many close friends as a person could expect to have, as well as many others who were not so close, but good company no less. Her days were full.

One November afternoon, she was at lunch with somebody she had known about half a year, an easygoing woman who raised collies and liked the outdoors. The woman who loved the truth felt comfortable with her; she grew tired, sometimes, of her own exactness. In time, she felt, they might become close. She was not one to rush these things.

The easygoing woman proposed a camping trip. "Say, in a couple of weeks. It's fun camping in the winter," and she beamed all over her pink face. "We can work out the details later on."

The woman pulled out her appointment book and wrote "camping?" in the space marked out for the weekend after next. The question mark did not stand only for her friend's "say" and her comment about working out the details. One day during the summer, not long after they had first met, the easygoing woman had said, "Let's go camping in a couple of weeks." And the woman who loved the truth took her at her word and saved the weekend in question, although it meant refusing one or two invitations she would have liked to accept. The weekend came and went, but she heard nothing more about the subject of camping. Nor did it come up the next time they met. It was as if the easygoing woman had never had the idea, much less sug-

gested it. The woman who loved the truth decided that she must have misunderstood her new friend, mistaking a passing thought, spoken aloud, for a definite invitation. On this afternoon, then, when she reserved the space in her appointment book for the weekend after next, she added a cautionary question mark.

The conversation turned to other things. The woman who loved the truth had a piece of news: her sister, who lived three states away, had a new baby, and she wanted her to come and see him before he grew any older. They began to speak of their own childhoods, and of their school days.

The easygoing woman said, "I was bored most of the time."

"But you liked Latin," said the woman who loved the truth, recalling an earlier conversation.

"I never studied Latin," said her friend.

"That's funny. I thought you did." The woman remembered that detail from the first time they'd met, with the clarity that comes when first impressions are being made and received. Besides, it stayed in her mind, because it was something that happened to her now and then: people would tell her about their own experiences with Latin, once they found out what she did for a living.

"Not me," said the other. "All I had was two years of French."

The woman who loved the truth gave her an odd look, but she kept it very short. She cared for other people's feelings almost as much as she cared for the truth, having learned early in life that she would have to respect both, or else neither, if she was to live in this world. So she changed the subject. It was only a slight change, in fact merely a shift, and not likely to be obvious to anyone who was not extremely close to her. After all, now that the truth was out, there was no need to announce its presence with a fanfare of trumpets. Instead, she told about the cab driver in Chicago who nearly made her miss her plane, complaining about the year of Latin he'd been made to endure in high school. The woman had told the story before, and had developed the funny side of the incident. In a few minutes they were laughing and trading stories again.

But when she returned home that evening, the woman who loved the truth picked up the telephone and called her sister, three states away. Then she opened her appointment book. From a certain page, she erased the word "camping?", and in the newly cleared space, wrote her sister's name.

# NATALIE CLIFFORD BARNEY

A New Translation From  
TRAITS ET PORTRAITS

by Gabrielle

Natalie Clifford Barney was one of the most colorful of the American expatriate artists, writers, and patrons of the arts to settle in Paris during the first part of the century. For 62 years, til her death in 1972, her home in the Rue Jacob was an oasis known to every artist, writer, or composer in Paris. Especially apparent at her entertainments were the lesbian writers and artists, including Renee Vivien, Romaine Brooks, Radclyffe Hall, Wanda Landowska, Marie Laurencin, Liane de Pougy, Elizabeth de Gramont, Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas.

Miss Barney herself was only incidentally a writer, preferring to live artfully and extravagantly rather than write about life -- as a friend of hers said, "Natalie gives rather more to her friends than she gives to her readers."

Barney's notoriety was to a great extent due to her outspoken lesbianism. She

suggested that her epitaph read, "She was the friend of men and the lover of women," adding that "It isn't because I don't think of men that I don't love them but because I do think of them."

Barney was by no means a feminist. The conspicuous wealth of her family enabled her to be open about her lesbian sexuality without fear of censure, and enabled her also to think of herself as having a freedom and power that usually is only available to men. She was in some ways sexist. But her uncompromising pride in her sexual identification (and the incidents it led to, such as her famous for-women-only parties) make her worth remembering.

In a future issue we'll take a longer look at Natalie Barney's life. Here, she describes herself:

N. belongs to a category of beings of which the species will become, perhaps, less rare when the old earthly couple, definitively discredited, will permit to each one to keep or to rediscover his entity.

At that moment of human evolution, there will be no more "marriages," but only associations of tenderness and passion. Antennae infinitely more delicate will lead the play of affinities. These comings and goings will shake up space.

The cessation of fidelity,

that dead point of union, will be replaced by a perpetual becoming.

While awaiting this victory of the whole being, the "thirds" hang between the two extremes: "Being neither alone, nor together."

From never succeeding at forming a couple they bear, however, a very real anguish: from their state of isolated, of intermediary. Having enough traits in common with "their similars who are not their same" to find themselves in them but not enough to identify with them, lose themselves in them and abide.

To reassure about N., this third who has nothing of the fictive, one must know that from all other points of view, she is more than human.

But the couple will always be her enemy, as much that couple of which she forms part as that from which she is excluded -- for the enemy, is it not that one who is necessary to us and is contrary to us?

This odd, this singular, works at the destruction of the couple, and the couple toward the destruction of the odd, the singular.

This third does not seek a complement, a conjoint, but a similar -- a companion of love, a variety of her kind, variable to the infinite -- from the most inveterate homosexual to the angelic pair of wings!

What she wishes for, while awaiting celestial joys, are those which resemble them to the point of being mistaken for them.

Epicurean in the exalted sense, and gifted with this quality of joy which cannot avoid martyrdom, she suffers apart with rage and

patience.

Astonished, bruised and repulsed always in the same fashion. Imaginative, trusting, wiles and inducements escape her when, too passionately devoted to others, she becomes incapable of observing it with profit. Sincere to the point of cruelty, tender, subtle and fervent with modesty, disciplined, polite to the point of cowardice, no one has ever seen her suffer, no one has ever pitied nor succored her.

Besides, whoever would approach her at such a moment would have quickly carried away a showy of sarcasms and an impression of cynicism rather than of sorrow. For tears crystallize into diamonds of irony to slash whoever dares to commiserate.

The third hardly stops to watch herself suffer; if there is a mirror, it is always for contemplating the others.

Attentive to outsiders, it is only in solitude that she regains her forces and recharges her batteries.

Very little coquette. Around her, an apparent disorder where she alone knows how to recover herself. She does not care to follow the fashion, nor that the fashion should follow her.

A somber voice that rises to the surface, vibrant with authority or grave with tenderness.

A weak, tenacious heart; some unsuspected callousness. Nerves of an intractable metal. Sociable but impossible to live with. Courtesy towards strangers, frank toward those close to her. A good enough opinion of herself to by-pass flattery. Absence of



humility, taste for notoriety that her laziness prevents her from pursuing. Few beings or things are sacred to her. She tramples underfoot the maladroit; this treatment in the manner of a slave-trader renders them still more awkward. Without convictions, her point of view varies according to what she finds in it. She values rectitude less in herself than as a rule of the game. Versatile and sophisticated, she scorns justice as much as do those who make a profession of it. Her judgement is a sign of vengeance. She takes pleasure in dominating and tires quickly of that which she dominates.

Nature of a prey, but who seeks no advantage. People have believed her a miser, taking for avarice the faculty of managing her affairs or the affairs of others, without reflecting on them further. One finds her in case of need, but one finds her shrewd. She spends her ingenuity rather than her money -- in this commerce, both augment.

The balance of her in-common characteristics would be able to appear on one of those leaflets, too green, too blue or too yellow, that a beggar's parakeet, in the Gardens of the Tuileries, used to distribute in olden days by way of instructions to those curious about themselves. But does one not recognize oneself in that which is distinctive rather than similar? Useless to enumerate that this third personage can be unjust, jealous and petty more than no-matter who. Disinterested and without hind-thought, then apprehensive and distrustful of everything --

except of that which ought to happen. Her intelligence is merely a precision instrument which applies itself abstractly and without effectiveness in human commerce.

Dealings wherein good faith is well the worst kind of faith -- for there where all the world cheats, dishonesty consists in playing fair. Sharpened, however, by the defects that her conquests have proved worth to her, it aims itself at another ideal out of reach.

A brain which gallops and devises, not taking account of contingencies, finds no brake to its activity because it exercises itself in some imaginary region -- and that until the least reality arrives to thwart it. After this excitement, too often for nothing, when the heart beats to no purpose, it reaps -- in slow motion -- that which it has lived, and lingers there where there is no more fruit in the orchard.

Exceptional among events which never happen to resemble it, it collides with strange acts and participates in a novel which never seems to be its own.

Sufficient that it seeks a being so that this other being, put in motion by warm well-being, seeks again, for its part, soon or late, its complement and its home elsewhere -- and finishes by rejecting as a quantity unknown or suspect, this "womb outside" as the Normans say of one who appears to wish to remain with them.

They feel, the others, that this third is not of themselves, and that according to Shelley:

"...it will never make itself part of any sect.... Their home closes about itself and each delights in the choice of a friend and condemns to oblivion all other beautiful and wise."

This third, this odd, this singular, this isolated, this unmatched, this unpaired, this solitary in the midst of the mated, this locked outside is generally represented as a Seducer and not as the victim of her free state -- that which, by

nature rather than inclination, obliges her to differentiate herself from others without being able to free herself.

And is it not due to her contacts, which are only an instant of joy and of understanding or of mistake, all of a life turned aside out of the way where it expiates in solitude its taste for strange familiars? For such beings it seems less hazardous to produce rather than to reproduce.

by Willyce Kim

Look,  
I am huddled  
on your door-step.  
The gloves that cover  
my hands pretend  
to keep my fingers warm.  
The coat that I am wearing  
has failed  
to keep the rain  
off my skin.  
The scarf that is wound  
around my neck  
feels like a thick rope;  
a hangman's bad joke.  
I am trapped -  
lashed in by the grimness of this day.  
When you open the door  
I will fix myself  
some coffee  
pretending that this is  
all I want  
this is all I came for.

by Gina

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by DONNA MARTIN

## THE LESBIAN LOVE ETHIC

"For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." (I Cor. 13:12)  
Thus does St. Paul formulate one of the conditions of perfect happiness: to be known fully. Each of us suffers from the abyss between a self-perceived rich complexity and the various grids imposed by the external eye. Among them, probably the most rigid and universal of categories is that imposed by sex. In no human society is it better to be female than male, but our's is among the most repressive in terms of female courting behavior and sexual expression. Even for the lesbian, while flouting society's "sacred" heterosexual norm, these expectations continue to exercise profound and often negative effects.

In the beginning everything seems beautiful. The fledgling lesbian embarks on her new life with an exhilarating expectation of freedom - the freedom to be herself! No longer has she to exchange in a basic kind of barter - acceptance by the boyfriend in exchange for sexual privileges from her. Nor is she any longer locked into the expectation of marriage as the only truly valid justification of intercourse. Indeed, the young lesbian can now, she feels, respond to another emotionally, sexually, and in every way as an equal, society having made no rules for two women as it has for the male/female couple.

Now she can dress more with an eye to comfort than to male standards of decorativeness, much of which includes teasing revelations of the more seductive parts of the anatomy. Now she can function as an active human being, rather than a helpless mannequin required to remain in passive attendance while doors are opened for her, cigarettes lighted for her, and meals ordered for her. And she can refuse a sexual overture more easily, being able to more honestly



state her reasons, whether due to mood, emotional disinclination, or physical indisposition. Mind you, everyone likes attention, likes to be waited on, and in addition, likes the feeling of worth which sexual pursuit implies; even the most feminine of us have to - there is some kind of accolade involved in most sexual advances short of rape. But human nature being as plastic as it is, no one welcomes a rigid role of any kind - least of all one of passivity, which in our culture is generally equated with powerlessness. If she chooses, the lesbian, unlike almost all "respectable women" can now assume an active role: can open doors for another, order drinks, ask someone to dance, and even - and this can be a wildly wonderful feeling - make sexual overtures to someone else.

But it is in just this sexual area, where the budding lesbian most keenly feels her heady new freedom, that it is most subject to subversion. The snake in the garden, ironically, derives from her very rejection of the degrading aura of male/female sex and its replacement with a highly idealistic code - a "lesbian love ethic," so to speak.

In the game of sex all women find themselves on the defensive in reaction to the axiomatic offensive position of the male. It is the man who calls the shots in the dating-marriage game - makes the rules, has the tactical advantages - and the woman who competes as best she can. In fact, most women with little prodding can be brought to admit their resentment at their tactical concessions made for gains - acceptance and, hopefully, marriage - in a game whose winner, nonetheless, is recognized by both as preordained. For the latent lesbian the game becomes a battle whose cause compels her not at all: she neither feels erotic arousal for the male, nor desires the moderate victory - marriage - settled for by her straight sisters. She participates for a time only because society offers her little else but matrimony in the way of a vocation. In addition, in trying to ensure her allegiance to this goal, society acculturates her so intensively in this direction that she is far less likely than her male counterpart to explore other possibilities - whether vocational or sexual. Thus, far more often than is true for the male homosexual, the potential lesbian goes along with the heterosexual mating game. Understandably, she incurs thereby far more injuries to her sensibilities than do her straight sisters. Their guilt is for her compounded manifold because her compliance lacks that key quality which she has been well indoctrinated to believe is the only possible sanction for sex other than marriage - a strong emotional attraction.

The upshot of all this for pairing in the lesbian world is this. Disappointed, if not disgusted, with her past performance with male partners, resolved never again to engage in such sordid and devious tactics, the lesbian upon coming out resolves to create a brave new world for herself. Not only will her relationships be blessedly free of caste decreed privileges, they will in addition be infused with a lofty idealism unsmirched by the wheeling and dealing which sees a legal contract as the ultimate goal. Central to all this, utilitarian, guilt-tainted sex will be replaced by sex freely entered into and, most importantly, engaged in only as a natural outgrowth of love. Charlotte Wolff in her recent book, *Love Between Women*, attests to this typical response on the part of lesbians by making a strong case for seeing "homoemotionality" rather than "homosexuality" at the core of women's love for one another.

*The sex act is, however, always secondary with them. It is only a manifestation of their emotional love, but for this very reason they attach so much importance to it. Sexual embraces symbolize for lesbians a kind of oath, a commitment to one another.* (pp. 70-71)

What the lesbian fails to note, and sadly this applies as generally to the novice as to the veteran, is that while jettisoning some of the distorted preliminary conditions to mature mating, she has held onto one which gravely threatens the felicity of her projected paradise. And like all really serious temptations, this one assumes a noble guise and is thus all the more dangerous. What in fact the lesbian is all too commonly prone to in relating to another woman is appropriating the society's insistent equation of sex and permanence, applied, of course, with most thoroughness to the female of the species. As we shall see, its rigorous appropriation by a majority of lesbians, especially those over thirty, frequently backfires on them.

The fact of the matter is that sex is a far more casual matter for male/female than female/female couples in the courting situation. It is of course the male's more casual attitude toward sex which makes for that difference. For the heterosexual couple, his greater readiness for sex divorced from emotional involvement and commitment typically results in a steady undertow of sexual aggressiveness on his part and concessions on the female's part. So pervasive is this pattern that most girls indulge in a fair amount of sexual activity in their dating years, often simultaneously with a number of different boyfriends, and frequently with considerable pleasure as well. In spite of some reluctance and guilt, the practical necessity of granting some favors to the male partially excuses an evasion of societal norms about female sexual behavior - in short, gets them off the moral hook so that, in part, they can feel free to satisfy their sexual needs.

But the lesbian boxes herself into a situation which rules out any such exploratory and casual sex. Partly in reaction to the tawdriness of male/female sex, as she sees it, and partly in compliance with a strongly inculcated code of female sexual behavior, she finds herself embracing a tripartate equation: sex is permissible, sanctified so to speak, only as a flowering of love, which in turn naturally entails commitment. Not for her the easy indulgence in sex of the straight world: for the lesbian, it's Romeo and Juliet, or rather Sappho and Atthis - or nothing! An inspiring paradigm, however, should like some perfumes, be applied but sparingly, and this one especially so, as the observation of the actual facts of lesbian mating makes abundantly clear.

Ironically, this ideal misserves the lesbian in its frequent function as an excuse for sexual activity. Those of us who have been able to gain some perspective in these matters realize that we are attracted to various people in various ways, as well as differently to the same person at different times. Gut-level sex is one of these kinds of attraction, and let's not kid ourselves, women experience this just as men do. But more commonly, women are drawn to someone when emotion enters the picture, and this of course implies some familiarity with the total person of the other. Lastly, love, however defined, may miraculously happen to a couple. It implies commitment, though the two realize it isn't something they can resolve upon; experientially, it means a

large interpenetration of selves, something that involves empathy, sharing, tolerance - all of which usually emerges out of a long, close relationship. The lesbian, however, has decreed for herself this never common condition between two people as the condition for sexual involvement. She must convince herself that LOVE exists, or at least an intensity of emotion that verily promises LOVE as its fruition, before allowing herself the delicious delights of bedding down with someone. For the woman coming out, but also for the many who never learn from experience, love is not a long-term-growing-together, but a holy word which can be appropriated for the frothy ecstasy of sexual/emotional excitement. In reality, more often than not, that term "love" is really only a useful rationalization for that burning drive for bodily contact.)

In short, there is a strong tendency for lesbians when subject to the sexual imperative, to give themselves permission to yield by glossing over the reality and renaming it LOVE. Naturally, this propensity for gazing at the stars while stumbling in the ditch is not unique to the lesbian. Alas, it's all too common among all manner of men, regardless of class, sex, or intelligence. And, although it is the sort of situation rich in wonderful fodder for the acerbic wit of an Aristophanes or Swift, sadly, for the lesbian it often involves domestic tragedy. For those subject to this befuddling folly, there is all too often a bleak denouement of disenchantment.

Generally the lesbian couple feels committed to each other often from the first handholding and kiss, and almost always after that peak of the drama, when they first make love to one another. As this sweet turbulence subsides, however, is when they really get to know one another; that is when some sobriety, some realistic mutual assessment is finally allowed to filter through. The marvelous exchanges of confidence so often attendant on the lowering of barriers with sexual congress (a very important part of its pleasure for women) is now followed by a slower and longer, but equally important period of personal disclosure. Now is when the truth of that old proverb, "Action speaks louder than words" strikes home, especially if the couple has decided that their passion warrants their setting up housekeeping together. But whatever their living arrangements, this is when the two women gradually come to know each other as participants in the real world and each other in their everyday colors, not as actors in a highly charged drama. It is only from such data that a realistic decision for permanence can be made, but, willy-nilly, that decision too often has already been made, generally without benefit of such input.

Not unexpectedly, the results are often sad, if not disastrous, the women frequently finding themselves bound to each other in the absence of basic compatibility. Committed to a morality of their own devising and thus even more dedicated to prove its rightness, such a couple really finds themselves committed to endurance, rather than each other. To this end they slog through storms of heated abrasiveness or calms of equally unendurable boredom in a determined effort to maintain the relationship.

For the single lesbian who has lived through a number of such affairs and has come to realize their dynamics, this general expectation of (sex entailing permanence) among her sisters presents such problems that some enterprising person might well earn herself a few bucks by writing a *Sex and the Single Lesbian*. In brief, it constitutes a suffocating straitjacket to her maneuverability.

Hopefully, in the process of intimate involvement with various people she has come to know herself better, her desires and needs regarding a permanent partner. Undoubtedly therefore, she has become more selective, has come to realize that not every attractive, pleasant woman will suit her for life. Out of a maturity wrested from hard experience she now has a better idea of what other qualities are essential for her. In short, she may well have become somewhat fussy and recognizes that finding that right somebody may necessitate much sifting and winnowing. But by the rules of the lesbian mating game, this becomes an especially difficult process, and particularly so if she is at all sensitive to other people. Because physical contacts are generally understood as the prelude to permanence, she seems to be relegated to a de facto celibacy. She can look, she can converse, but she cannot touch, except when dancing, an activity which, mercifully, is exempt from the rules. That is, unless she is willing to acquire a bad name for herself among her comrades by hopping in and out of beds, and importantly also, unless she is inured to inflicting much emotional devastation on others expecting commitment from such activity. Ironically, what she is denied is the relative freedom of mutual exploration, including sexual, that is allowed her straight sisters. She may finally awaken to the fact that though they differ, rules and expectations cripple her courtship period no less than that of the straight woman.

What is common to both situations is the heavy load of significance that our culture has foisted on sex. But like many things in this badly organized world, that meaning has come to apply more strongly to one group than to another. Shrewdly, the male, by ensuring property rights through sexual restrictions, managed to get away with placing the major burden for strict fidelity on the female. As guarantee, when he didn't condemn sex outright (as St. Paul just barely escapes doing), he loaded it with great symbolic meaning. It is either a holy act cementing the bond between the husband and wife, analogous to that of Christ and the Church; or, in a non-religious context, it is the ecstatic culminating intimacy of a lengthy, increasingly close relationship (as propounded in the classic sex manuals). Traditionally then, because of her inferior status, the female has pretty generally subscribed to both the doctrine and its noble aura, while its fabricator (and her oppressor), the male, has operated far more independently of it.

In swallowing this line, most people have failed to observe that human beings don't operate like some neat novel with its clearly defined stages of build-up and climax, and that, in fact, these schemes for regulating and defining human sexuality are being imposed on a reality that is far less orderly and potentially, far more varied. It may be argued that such expectations of behavior are necessary for maintaining the stability of marriage and the family, though as to whether this holds today is a subject of much dispute among current observers of modern society. Clearly, however, lesbians have no such obligations. (In a very real sense, then, we are far freer to fashion new and richly rewarding life styles.)

For anyone who has experienced the combination of contentment and excitement of a one-to-one mutually loving relationship, or has known couples of this type,



or has even just read about some, its priority in terms of total human satisfaction is, I think, undeniable. The blending of erotic passion and devoted friendship among two such people witnesses to a total response of self to another which, basically, all of us deeply long for. Thus incidentally but also importantly, I feel that the lesbian life style is far more potentially fulfilling than is the male homosexual pattern; the former is generally informed by a fuller response to the other person than is the latter, which all too often is focused on an amputated self, a severed, isolated sexual mechanism. But, nonetheless, the evidence points to the odds against such fulfillment: the couples, whether heterosexual or homosexual, who are so blessed have always been a rather small minority. And our own age, while according unalloyed approval to the love match, presents other hazards to its achievement. Most notable, to my mind, is the fact of the increased emergence of complex individuality, fostered by such probes to self discovery as greater education, leisure, and the current cultural ethos which puts a high premium on self-expression. When people cease to be simple cubes, emerging instead as multifaceted polyhedrons, it's simply far less likely for an individual to meet up with someone else whose equally complex configuration can combine with his or her own in a new, harmonious figure.

The question then for the lesbian, for whom societal mores do not operate as a cohesion to programmed monogamy and who thus would seem to be freer to seek a truly satisfying mate, is how to operate in the meantime. And that "meantime" can be a long time indeed, a lifetime for some - the time when she is earnestly seeking a soul mate, or perhaps has more or less concluded, after a number of hopeful essays in that direction, that such a prospect for her seems rather unlikely. Should the lesbian indeed resign herself to celibacy, in spite of the fact that she continues to feel sexual desire, but equally important, simply needs to hold and be held by a sympathetic person now and then? Or should she, on the other hand, opt for the equally desiccating pattern of one night stands, brief sexual encounters which for the female are not only generally accompanied by guilt, but are seen as unsavory and dehumanizing? I would like to propose a *modus vivendi*, a middle way which avoids both extremes while permitting, indeed promoting, humane, if not permanent and excessively charged relationships.

Like many of my sisters, inspired by emotional/sexual hurricanes, I too have plunged into a goodly number of relationships and pledged myself to permanence. But after the passion passed, and I was beached on the dry land of sober assessment I found myself, nonetheless, very often desiring and indeed cultivating the friendships of former lovers. Simply because the ecstasy couldn't be sustained didn't, in my mind, mean that we had nothing going for us: indeed, there was often a great deal. This led me to tentatively grope my way toward concluding that (sex was possible, permissible, and desirable even between people who don't foresee a great future together.) That is, if they can free themselves of that great burden of significance attached to sex which is our culture's loving legacy to the female.

As I am able to see it today, sex is both an often nearly uncontrollable drive, but also, one of many ways of communicating with another person. What this means in real life is that regardless of the consequences, frequently the

charge between two people increases to such a voltage that unless they break off relations completely, sexual contact is virtually unavoidable. In other words, it is a stage that simply must be lived through. This sounds perhaps like an ignoble capitulation to "base desires" (in Biblical parlance), but for myself, finally unfettered from this life-denying association, I would counter that, on the contrary, it can function as a most rewarding outreach to another. When entered into with moderate honesty on the part of both, it ministers to many needs, not the least of which is the communication engendered by the trust implied in giving one's body to another. Naturally, as an average, well-indoc-trinated female, but also as a fairly put-together, all around human being, I see such mutual surrender as an extension of prior friendship and knowledge. Indeed it is one gateway, but an important one, to the new entity created when two people engage in the dynamics of revealing each to the other and thereby also discovering new layers and pockets of themselves. And because it is often such a rapid revealer of self, it may occasionally happen that the real other so quickly exposed is markedly different from the social creature. Women emerging from this descent to the depths so sadly enlightened are surely justified in a decision to separate at this point, but their brief experience should not be confused with an encounter which from the beginning was intended as only a short sexual fling. This matter of intent, I feel, is the crucial ingredient which distinguishes most short term lesbian affairs from their male homosexual counterparts.

Now I'm keenly sensitive to the barriers to honesty about real feelings between any two women who almost surely have been brainwashed into the conviction that the price of sex is nothing less than undying devotion. And, I'm well aware that in almost all relationships, one is more involved than the other, and that therefore there is always the prospect of one of the women emerging from this passionate stage somewhat scathed. But as adults we must realize that regardless of the nature of the relationship, where the emotions are involved, this is a hazard one must anticipate and be prepared to cope with.

What I would again like to point out on the plus side is that my modest proposal has many things going for it. As noted earlier, people relate to others in an amazing kaleidoscope of ways: some you only care to exchange civilities with; others you like to discuss work, or politics, or books with; still others you enjoy partying with; some you can open your feelings to; some, in addition to other attractions, you find yourself attracted to physically. Ideally, we'd all like to find that one person we could relate to in all of these ways - but miracles don't seem to happen too often these days. So in the interim, most of us trudge along making do with second best. Except that for most of us, it's third or fourth best - or worse. But (gay life) affords its devotees opportunities for escaping the rigid maze imprisoning heterosexuals, the rules, as well as the expectations about masculine and feminine models of behavior that tend, so severely, to devitalize life.

And lesbians, I believe, are in the best position of all - if they can shuck off that hallowed but antiquated equivalence between sex and permanence.

For, far more than their gay brothers, they are inclined to the belief that sex is not only more responsible, but more fulfilling and fun, when linked with some of the other aspects of the whole human being. In my opinion, and that of most of my lesbian friends, focusing on the oversize cock and well-muscled torso is like scraping off the frosting, but ignoring the large remainder of a luscious cake. I think most compassionate lesbians must feel rather sad about this prevalent pattern among gay men - and their heterosexual brothers - who are either so uninterested in or frightened by the prospects of intimacy that they become largely dominated by their penises. For though the adventure in intimacy always entails great risks, it is, as every woman instinctively knows, one of the most potentially rewarding of life's riches. Indeed, it is probably the fundamental one since, in so totally engaging the self in interpenetration with another, it thereby lends meaning to the whole of one's life. It provides a kind of home base of belonging and satisfaction which energises all of one's other ventures into life. Here then is a great opportunity for lesbians - not to utterly reject that larger society which has so shamefully rejected them, but to appropriate its best ideals of honesty and consideration for others in the pursuit of meaningful, though not necessarily permanent and perfect relationships.





by LAUREL

## asterisk

Ella stood behind the last pew for a moment while her eyes adjusted to the darkness of the chapel. Another world it seemed to her: vaulted ceilings, black velvet drapes framing the stained glass, and the thick wine carpet muffling her steps. Only a moment before as she sloshed through the mud on the sidewalks, the noises of the city had surrounded her. It's nice she thought . . . if it just weren't a church it would be very nice.

She took a deep breath of the cleaner air slightly fragrant with incense and started down the aisle touching the back of each pew as she had when she was a child forced to go to church every Sunday. Would it make her lucky if she touched each one? Slowly, slowly. It was important to appear collected, organized, not too desperate. Look around, notice things she warned herself. The stained glass windows seemed to tell a story. Starting at the back they moved through Old Testament stories . . . Abraham and Isaac on the mountain, Joseph with his coat of many colors, Moses opening the Red Sea and the Israelites walking across. Would she make it across?

She was almost to the altar when they came in from behind the choir loft. Were they religious? Had they chosen this place on purpose, she wondered.

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We watched her come to us. Down the aisle with perhaps too much of a lilt to her gait. She's a young one we thought. But we might be wrong.

She was nervous. They all would be, but some will show it openly and others will cover it. This one pretended.

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They hovered there waiting for her, not smiling, no not really welcoming her; they gestured for her to sit between them on the first pew. She ran her fingers through her hair and tried to shake it free of the clinging damp.

"It's pouring outside" she said. "But it's very nice in here. Have you

lived here long?"

They said yes, together in one voice. "Oh yes, a very long time."

But they aren't so old really she assured herself. Not really. It's the atmosphere. They'd look different outside on the street.

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There was a tiger chasing her . . . even after we had sat quietly for a while the noise of the busses and planes, the jackhammers drilling into the pavement, the subway look, did not leave her face.

We could not let her in. She would bring it with her. We will let you know we said, but it was only a small lie to protect her. A week from now she will have forgotten her eagerness and perhaps she will have found somewhere else to live.

We have tried harder since. We have patiently and in great detail explained our situation. We have not lied. There is a nightmare you must not bring with you we said. That is our only requirement.

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Benjamin tried to roll a cigarette sitting with them on the front pew. It was awkward . . . too dark to even see if he spilled any tobacco. Christ, he thought, all this just to find a lousy place to live. Give them what they want -- that's all he could do -- try to figure out what they wanted and be agreeable. His fingers shook as he lifted the wrinkly cigarette to his lips.

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We had never thought of a man. No, that had never occurred to us. We tried harder than before. Clearly we told him how we must take in a roomer to help us with the rent. The Church had fewer and fewer contributors . . . they had to raise our rent on the tower to meet the expenses of the chapel. All this we told him, but we knew from the beginning that a man would never be the one.

The days passed. The outside came closer. One by one they came to the chapel bringing it in on their coat sleeves, breathing it into our air. We had been careful to keep them in the chapel; not one had come upstairs to see the room itself. First, we said, first we must know about you.

Some left at that. Some, weary from searching, stayed and tried to please us. Was it wrong we wondered to not tell them at the beginning that their faces had already told us all we needed to know?

When we had almost given up hope a young one with a quiet face came in the evening. She didn't begin by explaining why she had come. She said, "There are two women who live here who I would like to know very much."

"We live here" we said, but perhaps she did not hear us. Her smile never changed nor the look in her eyes -- as though she expected a miracle and nothing must cause her to miss it.

We shook ourselves free of her beauty, the richness of her voice. "Would you like to see the room?" we asked her.

She turned to us and said, "Have you seen them?" Do you know the artists here?"

\* \* \*

Laura had seen their paintings first in a Mexican restaurant hung in a dismal row at the back like wash on a line. She had imagined then that children with sticky jelly fingers and drunks with oily hair would touch them. Or that just the grease in the air, hamburger and french fry smells, would ruin their color.

She didn't argue with the surly owner. She paid what he asked and carried them home with her balanced safely on her head.

Maybe, she thought, she loved them because they were waifs, like a batch of kittens at the SPCA who she had rescued from the gas chamber. They had no place to call their own; they belonged to nobody. . . . First she painted her walls white, carefully spackling the holes in the crumbly plaster even though the paintings would cover them. She cleaned the windows inside and out so that all the meager light could reach them. Finishing off nearly her week's salary she bought picture wire and simple wooden frames and spent her evenings measuring and figuring the length of the walls, the length of the wire, finding precisely the best place for each one.

She laughed and chided herself for all the trouble and expense she was going to -- the same childish sentimentality which had caused her to rescue baby birds and feed them with eye droppers until they could fly. Her wanting to find helpless things and to nurse them -- it was that which was driving her to such lengths -- not really the pictures.

But each day when she came home they were there to welcome her. A little spot of beauty in an ugly world -- something that the smog and the garish neon light outside would not change.

She fought the impulse at first. I'm a child still she thought, but she wanted more.

She went back to the restaurant and as clearly as she could she asked the Mexican at the bar where the pictures had come from.

"What pictures? This is a restaurant not an art gallery," he told her. She must surely be mistaken. Even though she could not hear him she could see the snide tone in the tightness of his face.

"But" she insisted "a week ago, only a week ago . . ."

"Are you blind?" she saw him shape the words.

She could not resist. "No -- deaf," she smiled. "I can not hear a word you say."

He threw up his hands and turned away.

It came to her later that the pictures must be stolen. Her paintings belonged to someone else. When she got home a pang of disappointment went through her. It was as though the women in the pictures had changed. Their mystery became secrecy, the rich melancholy a reflection of the owner's loss.

The paintings had held a promise before -- she had been certain she would come to know the artists. There was something in the paintings meant especially for her, she had thought.

She had almost put the whole thing out of her mind when the strange pictures appeared again at another cheap lunch cafe. Maybe that was it, she thought. Against such a background any touch of creativity would be startling and of course instantly attract her attention. Would she even have noticed them among others in a gallery? Were the faces really so unusual -- was there really a secret for her in the shadows?

As she paid for her lunch she couldn't help asking the owner about them.

There was a story, quite a story, behind them he assured her. "They were exchanged for take out dinners -- barter system like in the old country" he laughed. Two women had brought in the pictures and offered them in exchange for three months of his dinners.

"I'm no artist, no time for that kind of thing," he sighed, "but they are very pretty, don't you think?"

She asked for their address.

"That, that my dear, is the strangest part of the story," he said. "I promised never to tell anyone but my delivery boy. But it is not necessary -- you want to buy one -- you can but it from me."

No, she told herself firmly. She would buy no more until she had seen the artists. When she got home she looked at the paintings with a new curiosity. What could she tell from them about the artists?

Theirs were the colors she loved: magenta, deep green, greyed blue. They misted every hollow. The eyesockets, the tiny crease above the lips, the cleft between the women's breasts. She loved the shadows. The depth of the women's feeling for one another depended on their interplay. Where the women hesitated, did not touch, the shadows merged betraying them. These were women she had never seen. She desperately wanted to know the artists who could make her feel so much from them with such simplicity.

It really was not so difficult. The delivery boy had only a few dinners to deliver that evening. She followed his bicycle on foot. Two of the dinners went to men and with only two left she knew she was at the right place when he led her into a darkened church.

As he disappeared behind the choir loft she sat in a pew midway down the chapel and waited to see that he came back empty-handed. The darkness melted away as her eyes adjusted and a warm glow came in through the stained glass.

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She was not like the others. As she turned first to one of us and then the other, she was letting go words she had sung to herself like gently flinging a baby robin into the air to fall or to fly. Our paintings had nourished her, revived her when the world outside had sucked her dry. Was she wrong she would ask, hesitating ever so often before plunging further into what she felt from them.

She was not wrong. We could never bear interpreting, analyzing, but this was the purest music, as though she were a mirror set before our souls.



As we led her up the stairs to see the rest of our work we held each other's eyes for a moment confirming, yes, she is the one, but she hadn't come for that.

She flowed from room to room absorbing them, almost as though she were memorizing every detail of the paintings, the furnishings, the very form of our lives. We followed her seeing our memories: a pillow here, a vase, the piano -- all of them momentos of our love. Was she seeing that too? Could she feel which things we cherished? Would she understand without the sullyng, deadening explanations we had dreaded?

We are two women who love each other we had planned to say. Neither of us has found anything in the world to cherish but our painting and each other. We had rehearsed these speeches in our night thoughts. Said them to ourselves to blunt the pain of their intrusion into our lives. There is a nightmare you must not bring with you. It will show in the lines of your face, the rhythm of your step. We have built a world without it.

We could not imagine the person who could live in such rarified air. Who would live in our tower of silence without reminders of the world below?

Laura was the one. As she moved delicately absorbing our lives we knew that surely she must live with us. Her eyes held back at first, there was some uncertainty clouding their blue, but we knew she would come to us. She said "I will let you know," as though there were a question, but the next evening she appeared in the chapel with white muslin draped paintings, one tucked under each ar.

"I have brought them home" she smiled. "They will be happier now." She told us how sad she had been when she thought they were stolen . . . that someone who had loved them as she did might have lost them. With the tenderness of a little child she unwrapped each one and gave them to us to hang. It was a miracle we thought like Christ multiplying the fish and the loaves. We had given these away so we could be free to paint more and now they were returned to us. Out of the hideous mouth of the city they had come back protected and loved into our hands.

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Laura felt such a joy. For the first time in her life a hope moved in her, life stirred: she was about to be born, she thought. Their studio was a crystal palace and she a lady who could abandon herself to a world apart from the daytime. At night she took off her false smile she must wear all day, her adding machine, her typewriter. She threw them in a heap with her clothes and her high heels.

They, seeing, understanding, began to make her a lavish robe to erase her daytimes. She came home each evening to find them still at work piecing together exquisite old satin and lace into a graceful bodice, a delicately blown sleeve.

She brought the food for their supper at night and like an intricate fugue they blended their tastes in the kitchen. She couldn't bear to think of them trading away any more of their precious paintings for the greasy Mexican food.

Then, after supper, she watched them paint. For hours she could lie immersed in the colors, the dance of their lines going down simultaneously onto the canvas. Without her even realizing, she was still enough to be their model. They painted her with their easels back to back, not looking at one another's work, sometimes going on for hours, even after she had stumbled off to bed.

The next morning as she got ready for work she would find the paintings, reminders of her night time self she could not take with her outside the tower. The paintings were often remarkably alike, but other times they interpreted her differently; it was almost as if there were a split in her and each of them saw a different side.

She had to rush off to work, a lady of disguises pretending to hear the voices when she could only see the moving lips, pretending a cheerfulness, an efficiency to smooth over her difference. The beat of her heels on the sidewalk as she left the chapel each morning seemed to signal her descent into a vacuous netherworld. With each step she moved further from herself. She drew her coat around her and tightened her scarf against the damp fall winds, hurrying to catch the bus uptown.

When she got on the bus, going or coming home from work, it was as though she were on a grotesque ferry crossing the river Styx. The faces were distorted with fear and pain, people shoved and pushed as if their very lives depended on getting a seat. Men rubbed against her, children clung to her legs thinking she was the mother they had lost. It was the most frightening time of the day.

She came home very tired, as though the day had eaten her energy, but then the night times would restore it . . . she didn't really awaken until she got home. The ritual of their meal together seemed to lead her back into the passageways of herself. She was renewed each evening and able to do the things she had never thought she could. She drew countless pictures of the two of them painting at their easels or bent over sitting on the floor working on her beautiful robe.

She was happier than she had ever been. At last she had a home -- a place where she needn't pretend to be anything she was not . . . a place where her difference seemed to only make her the more special in their eyes. They said they thought that she was beautiful, that her face was light and free of the nightmare, because none of the noises of the city had reached her. They said that the noises were the worst -- the tone in people's voices, the screech of tires, the wail of the sirens -- that even in one's house one couldn't escape them. Sights, smells, all of these could be disguised . . . but the sounds of the city . . . the sounds were the most dangerous. And even though she missed lovely things, the gurgle of a stream or the cry of the wind in a storm, or music -- that they would gladly exchange places with her -- she who had never known the horror of the noise.

One night, the night they finished the robe, they painted to music, music she could not hear; but they touched her wrist and tapped out the rhythm explaining that this was passionate music capable of inspiring them to paint all night. She fell asleep as they painted, still wrapped in the folds of her

robe. She awakened when they lowered her into their bed.

They said that she had become all beauty as she slept, that they could hardly paint for wanting to touch her, to caress her as she lay draped in the satin robe. They lit a candle in the bedroom so she could see the words on their lips. But she didn't need to. Their touch on her face, her shoulders, their whispered breath against her neck told her like the dampness in the air before rain.

She felt herself open . . . open to a terrible fear and a terrible love. They drew her close and covered her. They covered her lips with theirs, they threw a mantle around her fear and beckoned her on.

She touched first one, then the other, questioning their flesh with her fingers. She must know. She must understand. Before she had known only the gropings of men, men who had taken her in lust and tossed her back into the ugliness. What did they mean -- these fingers which traced delicate lines of fire through her body? Could they love her? Could she love them both?

\* \* \*

The next morning they got up early to have breakfast with her. She had expected the veil of morning penitence: she had thought they would lower their heads against the glare of the new day, but instead they brought the night with them. They held her with their words of reassurance, they caressed her with their reflections on the night.

They said it was a beautiful first night, a renewal of their own first night together. Seeing her uncertainty they made bridges for her, little poems to quell her fear. It was like the promise of a rainbow they said, a rainbow after a terrifying storm. They too must risk, they too must struggle to open their arms so long locked about each other. But it would be impossible to turn back now. They must all reach into their strength and help one another to float above the fear.

They said that fears were like stepping stones. Each fear if we come to know it, to name it rightly, leads us onto another. One risk, and then another, and then . . . then we are stronger knowing we can navigate through them.

She was late leaving, too late to catch her bus . . . and late to work. But she didn't care. She wore their love like a cloak against the time. She pulled it around her to make the world invisible: the bus, the ugly buildings, the office. She smelled the scent of their hair, the warmth of them, and she hugged it to her like a talisman.

\* \* \*

Never had we seen our happiness, the intensity of our joy in the face of a another. It was a miracle, we thought, that one could come to us out of the belly of the city, one who had to reenter it daily, and yet that she should be so free of its horror. As we stroked her hair, touched her face we looked for clues to explain how she had done it. Did she know some secret passages -- could she move from the outer to the inner with a grace we had not found?



by Gina



When she came to us each evening she was wholly ours. Not a shadow of the city clung to her. In her satin robe she was a pure novice beginning the vows of her love. As we taught her the delights of her body she carried us into a purity we had found only with each other. Her love was the simplicity of a child's smile, the wisdom of a saint.

\* \* \*

Riding on the bus, walking home under the grey autumn skies, a cypher in the five o'clock crowd, she thought that she wanted to give them something: she wanted to work on something for a long time as they had on her robe and then surprise them with it. Her robe, the remnants of the clothes they had made for each other over the years, was like a composite of their life together -- like a map. She wanted somehow to make a record of the time and the change since she had moved into the tower and to give it to them to show them her love.

At first she could only make rough sketches -- there seemed to be too much to fit into one painting. She wanted the feeling of their breakfasts together, the intimacy of their evenings, and the excitement of the night. Part of her wanted hearts and flowers and patterned wallpaper with the glow of copper kitchenware and chintz curtains and then another part of her wanted to echo the feeling of the satin robe, the luxurious, the exotic part of their lives.

And she wanted to show how it had changed her. She wanted to show her metamorphosis like a cross-section of the earth: her before she knew them, her as she moved into the tower, and finally her since she had become their lover. In six weeks she had evolved from some formless fish creature to one who could fly.

Finally, she decided on a series of drawings. She had no idea where they would end -- she only knew the beginning. She could start with what it was like before she knew them. She went back to the landscape of her old apartment: the bare walls, the stark cold squares which were her rooms before she brought home the paintings. She tried to remember not only the setting, but what she had been like then. She wanted them to know who she was before -- how much she had changed.

But she didn't tell them what she was doing. Each night after dinner when they had begun to paint she went to her room to draw. Her pencil shook, it was as though she had never drawn before, even though she'd been doing it all her life. Her knowledge of perspective failed her -- nothing seemed as easy as it should have been -- least of all drawing herself as she had been before.

She could not see herself as she had been. She could think of nothing but the trappings of her unhappiness -- the shiny patent leather purse and high heel shoes tossed on the floor, the nylons like her wrinkly molted skin hanging always in the bathroom, the alarm clock -- harbinger of the day ahead.

Nothing about her old place seemed a part of her until she brought home the paintings. Was there a "her" she wondered? She could piece together the scenes of her childhood -- she had images of things and people -- her parents, the children at the deaf school, college -- but was there anything that was

really her?

The first drawing was a series of white empty boxes overlapping at peculiar angles. Inside the farthest one was a small black dot -- an asterisk with six tiny spokes that seemed to be her with many arms reaching out for help. She laughed when she thought of giving this to anyone. How ridiculous! But it was the closest she could come to who she had been.

Night after night she closed herself off in her room after dinner and worked on the drawings. The asterisk's metamorphosis was gradual, painful -- at night it would grow, it would stretch its spindly arms and start to become -- but then the next day she would shrivel, pull her coat around her, tighten her scarf and enter the daytime. She would have to start all over again.

Only at night after she had stopped drawing and gone in to be with them did she feel completely there. As their arms twined around one another, as they stroked her hair and entered the hollows of her body she had images of her tiny asterisk swelling and bursting open to a world, a dark black world where there were stars like pinpoint jewels in a kaleidoscope. They drew her on . . . up . . . until she became the stars and shattered then like bits of colored glass falling through the blackness.

Next day she would enter the world as a tiny asterisk once again.

She sat behind the typewriter being a good machine, but ever so often she would amuse herself by typing a whole page of asterisks. It wasn't much of a rebellion. Why did she go on with this day after day? It wasn't really just the money. If she quit the string would be untied and she would float away like a helium balloon.

They had quit long ago. They had as little to do with the world as possible -- and now that she was there it could be less than ever. They never had to leave the tower, never had to come out onto the filthy streets, into the garish green smog light -- only the sounds, as they said, could reach them.

When she received a letter from the deaf school she had gone to, saying that they would like her to consider a position they had available, Laura felt the chasm opening wide.

She had begun to know that she could not with impunity continue to cross the River Styx each day. There was a price she paid for the love she had found . . . it had awakened her to wanting more . . . more from her days than a typewriter and a hole for her knees.

The deaf school had terrified her as a child; but now from the perspective of the city, the green rolling hills, the few cars ambling down the red clay roads, and the lumbering old house all looked like a dream. It would be a job she could feel good about . . . teaching children to hear with their eyes.

She carried the letter to work with her, rereading, touching, asking it questions she couldn't yet ask herself. Could she be happy there? Could she live without the love she had only just found, now for the first time in her life? Did she have the strength to go away without them?

She gave herself a week to decide . . . to listen to her fears and her own desires and to see the path they might show her. This, like her drawings for them, was something she didn't want to share. It was her decision . . . she

must reach into herself for the strength it would take.

She went on to work as usual, came back into their arms at night, but she felt like an observer . . . from a position outside she watched the tiny asterisk heaving, tossed back and forth . . . only a key on her typewriter by day and then a cartwheeling jewel at night.

\* \* \*

The day the rent was due they asked her to take more of their paintings back to the Mexican cafe. This time she should ask him for money. He should know by now that the paintings would sell . . . she should ask for the equivalent of three months of meals.

She carried their paintings on the bus with her, she protected them from the cracked grey elbows of school girls, the sharp corners of the briefcases -- she kept the small children from clutching at the muslin covers. She put them in the knee hole of her desk where she could feel them against her legs -- a comfort -- an assurance of the other world . . . and the letter too . . . tucked inside her coat.

When the lunch bell rang and the hundred desks on her floor had emptied she put the paintings under her arms and took the service elevator alone down to the street. She felt important. It was like when she had carried her sister's flute for her and a few people at least, a few people who didn't know them, must have thought that she could play it -- that she could at least hear what it played.

She was almost sorry to reach the cafe. Someone else would buy these, not her this time, and they would be lost.

The Mexican was at the back of the bar wiping glasses. She was early. The rest of the lunch crowd hadn't gotten there yet. She squared herself for his reaction to her. Snide, suspicious, he probably would think she had come to return the painting she had bought from him a few months before. "No deal lady," he would say. "No exchanges, no returns. You bought 'em, you keep 'em." She had a lot to explain.

He began to speak before he turned to face her. But when she could see him, he was smiling and saying how glad he was to see her.

"Where's your partner?" he beamed. "You ladies are going to make me a fortune. Didn't have your last ones in here two days before some broad came in and bought them all. How many you got, sweetheart? You girls should start a factory."

She couldn't think where to begin. Her hands trembling, she began to tug at the strings loosening the covers on the paintings.

"Oh -- I don't have to see them to like them" he crooned. "I know you two got quality goods by now."

Finally she looked him in the eye. "But I'm not them" she said, "I'm just bringing them in for them."

He tossed his head back and held the rolls of his belly laughing. "You girls are a scream. What you hiding up there in that tower, lady? You think I don't recognize you?"

No! A frightened voice inside of her screamed. No! I don't look anything like them. "I am not them" she pleaded with him.

"Please just take the paintings. They want the money this time. Three months worth -- please -- it's not like you think."

"O.k., sweetheart. But someday I'm going to figure you two out. Reminds me of this show on t.v. where two chicks were smuggling heroin inside the frames of their pictures. But this ain't even got frames. Shit! I'll give you two hundred for these -- and you just crank out some more as soon as you can. They're selling faster than tacos."

She left them leaning against the counter still wrapped in their muslin covers. She couldn't count the money -- she couldn't think. There was a blank spot in her vision; she could hardly see to catch the bus. She was going home. Not going back to work. Not going to sit at that desk, not going to poke her knees into the tiny hole. She was going home. She clutched the letter in her pocket, and her quarter, a quarter for the bus, and braced herself again . . . one last time . . . for the ride back to the tower.

\* \* \*

As quickly as she came, and as silently, Laura has left us. We were wrong in thinking that she could with magic move between our world and the world outside. She needed the robe more than we knew . . . and, of course, it was not enough.

She left it with us, smiling through her tears, saying she hoped she wouldn't need it where she was going. Then she gave us her drawings which she assured us were ridiculous . . . but in time she would send more, and then perhaps she could show us what our love had meant to her . . . how it had strengthened her . . . and given her back herself.

"The more I love you, the more clearly I know I must go," she said. "You have given me a gift more precious than yourselves."

\* \* \*

There was a silence where Laura had been, our arms which had opened wide to receive her circled an emptiness . . . and we cried in pain and fury that we had been so blind as to think that Laura could magically move between our world and the nightmare of the city. We had seen only what we had wanted to see . . . but even so, we gave her sight as she did to us. We know now that our escape cannot be complete without those we love . . . and there may be more than we had thought. Women, wearing the face we hate, the obsequious, hunted look of trapped animals, . . . they may be Laura . . . Laura who has stayed too long in a hideous job, a painful marriage, an empty life . . . or Laura too long a rider of busses, walker of sidewalks, too long in an office, the prisoner of men.

We are explaining again. We tell them about the rent, about our quiet life and we ask if they think they would like it, but we needn't choose so carefully now. We are stronger than we had thought. Laura gave us that.



And we have healed . . . we have moved through our pain and our sorrow just as we have moved through fear . . . free to risk, free to grow.

\* \* \*

Carol came toward us with a lilting step, childlike, touching the back of each pew as she swung down the aisle. She was smiling nervously, uncertain if she were in the right place. We said yes she was.

"Have you lived here long?" she asked.

"Yes," we said and she seemed to be reassured.

"Would you like to see the room?" we asked.

"Oh, yes," she sighed, "I'm sure I'll like it."

"Yes," we said, "we hope you will."

---

## CONTRIBUTORS

Donna Martin

I have a strong academic background in both the medical sciences and English literature; am currently a science and business librarian at Milwaukee (Wisconsin) Public Library.

Gabrielle

Studied French at Marquette University, Los Angeles City College and Alliance Francaise, Paris. Translations of Renee Vivien appeared in *The Ladder*, 1968. Presently editor of newsletter for Tres Femmes, San Diego Lesbian group.

Gina

Just graduated from California College of Arts and Crafts and I'm not feeling any different.

Jane Alden

A former government employee (GS-11), I came out late.... I write/edit publications for a retail chain in Virginia and N. Carolina.

Karen Feinberg

Lives in Cincinnati, Ohio, where she teaches Greek and Latin at an all-male Catholic seminary.

Laurel

I'm burrowing into fiction enough now that my endings surprise even me. This is my most recently written story.

Michele

My photographs tell my own evolution.

Patricia

Tobacco Forrester

Earned degrees from Smith College and Yale University: she received a Guggenheim Fellowship in printmaking in 1967. She exhibits nationally.

Robin Morgan

Editor of *Sisterhood Is Powerful* and author of a new book of poetry, *Monster*.

Willyce Kim

Willyce Kim has written a book of poems entitled *Eating Artichokes* which has been printed by the Women's Press Collective in Oakland.

## and more letters...

Congratulations on your existence!!! I am absolutely ecstatic to have discovered you, lying on a desk in the Female Liberation office waiting to be reviewed by the *Second Wave*. I just read your first issue cover-to-cover, which I almost never do, and have been raving about you to everybody I know....

What particularly impresses me is not only the high quality of your literature and graphics, but the political-personal orientation of *Amazon Quarterly*.... I'm also really glad to see the lesbian-feminist perspective articulated clearly in a publication. I have been really frustrated by the token recognition of lesbianism as a viable political perspective/life-style within predominantly non-gay organizations and the lack of substantial analysis of it; also, by the limitations of the totally personal approach to lesbianism that I see in many lesbian publications. --Joan (Boston)

I am impressed. I have just read your first issue, Fall 1972, and find the quality of writing excellent. The subject matter is so full of life I am tingling. Found Laurel's "Conversation" one of the best articles I have ever read anywhere, and Emily Carr's diary just made me move deeper into all that is important about human beings.

It seems to me that no one is pushing anything--the articles are both personal and more than personal. No defences, no "aren't we wonderful because we're lesbians," just a giving, and a making use of where people are. --Ann (New Hampshire)

*Amazon Quarterly!?!*

*Such vibes I've hardly felt less for.*

*After all,*

*I've never known a bow I'd give a breast for.*

. . . . .

*But,*

*Under whatever name --*

*I wish you success*

*And achievements of fame.*

*I send you four dollars*

*Anticipating the works of your scholars;*

*And --from my "closet" --*

*Smirking here in the arms of my lover --*

*One dollar*

*For that plain, brown cover. (Virginia)*