



Love Song  
to the  
Warriors

by Oriethyia

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Based on a work at [www.LesbianPoetryArchive.org](http://www.LesbianPoetryArchive.org)

## Introduction

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

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

Chapbooks in particular and poetry more

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It has begun.  
The first fires have been lit.

And in this camp,  
You were the spark.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

These lines affirm the significance of direct political action.

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

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

Julie R. Enszer  
May 2016

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



## Author Biography

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

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

Read more about her work at [www.oriethya.org](http://www.oriethya.org) or [www.oriethya.blogspot.com](http://www.oriethya.blogspot.com).



Love Song  
to the  
Warriors

by Oriethyia



**LOVE SONG  
TO  
THE  
WARRIORS**

**Oriethyia**



*Graphics by Gillian Booth.*

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

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

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

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

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## Love Song to the Warriors

is dedicated to

the women of Long Island:

*Irene Weinberger, Susan McGrath,  
Elaine Hendrie, Barbara St. Aubrey,  
Ellen Cooperperson, Sue Ross, Sue Saltz,  
Adair Lifset, Susan LeBow, Barbara  
Randazzo, Su Jacobs, Mary Porchino,  
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the women of Albany:

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times.

and to the two most important women in  
my life:

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

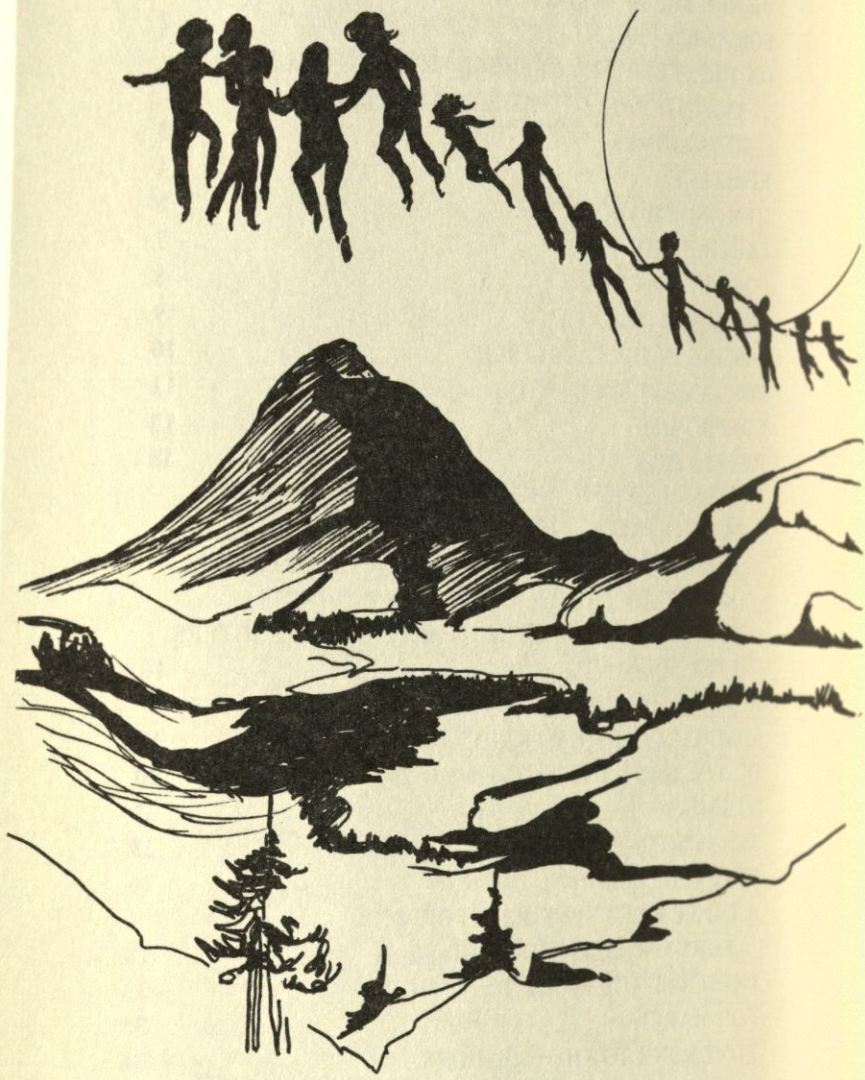
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BPM

## WE ARE THE HEALERS

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

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

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

We are the healers

FOR ROBIN FRE

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

they would burn you at the stake  
if they could.

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

*For Gillian*

Interesting,  
the sign hanging quietly  
behind your desk reads:

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

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

He thinks it a joke;  
his biggest mistake.

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

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

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

And in this camp,  
You were the spark.

## HERITAGE

*For Martha Courtot*

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

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

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

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

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

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

did you know  
you are her daughter?"

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

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

## MEN AND CHILDREN FIRST

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

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



## EARTHQUAKE

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

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

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

your choice matters not to us  
any longer.

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

## FOR THE WITCHES

So many have forgotten  
but we cannot.

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

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

So many have forgotten,  
we cannot.

We will recall forever  
their glorious faces,

And we must never forget,  
nor let you,

the smell  
of  
burning flesh

## FOR SUPER-HERO FANS

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

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

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

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

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

## PASSING IN THE PATRIARCHY

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

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

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

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

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

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

## FOR JANE AT SIX MONTHS

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

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

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

I give you the first with these wishes:

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

## COMPROMISE

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

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

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

## REVELATION

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

But you’re wrong.

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

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

Is that concern I see on your face?

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

It will be silent,

It will begin in early morning  
long before you wake.

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

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

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

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

It should.

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

Many years of  
precise, almost  
militaristic plotting.

Surprised?

Why so?

Our mothers were the Amazons  
and they almost defeated Athens.

Years of planning  
sitting in kitchens,  
hair under scarves.  
Now, had you bothered  
to look closer,  
you'd have seen  
that those metallic  
hair rollers and curlers  
were, in fact,  
transmitters and receivers;



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RICHARD, at age nine

*(dedicated to the children of lesbian mothers)*

Richard, at age nine

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## SONG TO A CELTIC WARRIOR

Woman,

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

On the eve of the battle

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

And we will plan

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

And in the morning

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

## DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE THE MOON

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## SOMEDAY

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



## TRANSMUTATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pregnant,  
She begins again.

## CALIFORNIA

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

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

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

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

## SURFACE TENSION

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

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

And yet we learn from this.

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

A painful lesson.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## A THREE PIECE SYMPHONY FOR FURY, FRUSTRATION, AND FEAR

### 1. Fury

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

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

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

    this is not a poem about safe spaces.

### 11. quotations, translation, response

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 111. Fear

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

## I RESERVE THE RIGHT TO BITCH

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

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

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

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

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

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

## FOR MARCIA

There is a woman  
somewhere  
who thinks me  
a revolutionary.

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

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

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

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

## LOVE SONG TO THE WARRIORS

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

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

they go too far.

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

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

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

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

they dare too far.

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

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

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

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

ITT  
CHASE MANHATTAN  
FIRST NATIONAL CITY BANK  
ANACONDA COPPER

they push too far.

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



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

they dare assume too much.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Sinister Wisdom



fourteen

## HEART DANCE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And now, she thought, to give death.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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