

SINISTER WISDOM



Thirteen



# SINISTER WISDOM 13

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**See Important Announcement, inside back cover**

## CLAUDIA SCOTT

October 31, 1948–December 22, 1979



Claudia Scott, a personal friend of many and a friend of the gay community at large, died on Saturday, December 22, 1979. Her death, by suicide, was a painful shock to all of us who knew her.

Since moving to Philadelphia from Chicago in the fall of 1976, Claudia was influential in many community organizations and projects. She was central to the functioning of the Sisterspace Lesbian Hotline, serving as a volunteer since its beginning, conducting training sessions, and helping to write the handbook.

A skilled carpenter, Claudia was in the process of renovating her own home. She shared her knowledge by teaching courses in woodworking and home repair for The Free Women's School. Her friends knew she could be called on for help or advice with projects in their homes, and she devoted a lot of time and energy to reconstruction work at the new location of Giovanni's Room bookstore.

Many of us knew Claudia as a poet, through hearing her read at local poetry readings or seeing her work in publications such as *Lavendar Woman* and *Sinister Wisdom*. She conducted writing workshops at the annual lesbian writers' conference in Chicago, and was a member of the Philadelphia Rose Writers' Group. Her book of poems, *Portrait*, was published in 1974 by Lavendar Press.

In addition to the activities for which she was well known, Claudia's interests ranged from bicycling to collecting railroad memorabilia. Because she was unpretentious about her skills, even her close friends didn't know the extent and diversity of them. Few of us knew that she had a pilot's license, or that she could read Latin and Greek (she graduated with a degree in classical studies from Washington University in 1970). She loved all kinds of graphic arts, puzzles and games, and travelling.

Only a brief time has passed since Claudia's death, but her absence in our lives is deeply felt. Because of her dedication to the Sisterspace hotline, we feel it would be fitting as a token of remembrance to send donations to help further their work. Contributions can be sent to Sisterspace, 3601 Locust Walk, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104.

—The Friends of Claudia Scott

# THEORY

## Racism and Writing

### Some Implications for White Lesbian Critics

by Elly Bulkin

Wherever  
we protest  
we will go planting  
—Muriel Rukeyser\*

#### I

Some months ago I began work on an article entitled "Homophobia and Heterosexual Feminists." I had begun the article out of a few years' accumulated anger at having to deal with homophobia in the "feminist" world of publishing, teaching, and conferences. I wrote barely two pages before that title seemed inadequate, and I stuck in the word "white" before the word "heterosexual." If I—as a white lesbian—was so invisible to these white heterosexual feminists, how much more invisible were lesbians of color. Given the general insensitivity of these writers/editors to women of color regardless of sexual and affectional preference, insisting that they deal with their homophobia confronted only part of the problem. Though my concern here is not their homophobia, it—combined with their racism—served as a catalyst for my own exploration of racism.

For in nearly every instance of homophobia I planned to cite, racism was at least as identifiable. While The Feminist Press' *Out of the Bleachers: Writings on Women and Sport* distinguishes itself by its total failure to include material about lesbians, it also contains a paragraph in which a white woman writer congratulates a Black woman athlete for speaking not "black lingo," but "perfectly enunciated formal English prose."<sup>1</sup> The special *Frontiers* issue "Mothers and Daughters" and the *Feminist Studies* one, "A Feminist Theory of Motherhood," each includes only a single poem written from an identifiable lesbian perspective and no critical or personal articles about lesbian motherhood or co-parenthood at all. Neither contains any work about Third World mothers.<sup>2</sup>

Ellen Moers, whose *Literary Women: The Great Writers* has been called "a model of feminist criticism"<sup>3</sup> and gets cited positively at women's studies conferences, places lesbians under the heading of "freaks,"<sup>4</sup> considers lesbianism one of the "worst scandals" that can be attributed to a dead woman writer "under the respectable heading of literary scholarship,"<sup>5</sup> and lets less than a dozen lines about Lorraine Hansberry stand as her sole discussion of Third World women writers.<sup>6</sup> And *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets*, with the exception of Gloria T. Hull's two-page discussion of Audre Lorde, completely ignores lesbian writers as a force in contemporary women's poetry. At the same time, it holds with stubborn perverseness to its title, despite the opening sentence of Hull's survey of Afro-American women poets: "Black women poets are not 'Shakespeare's sisters'."<sup>7</sup>

I find that my almost invariable initial response to what I read and what I hear is to the issue of homophobia; then, sometimes right after, sometimes after a significant time lapse, I become aware of the existence of racism. At last fall's The Second Sex Conference: Simone DeBeauvoir 30 Years Later, I attended a workshop on women's writing led by Rachel Blau DuPlessis, editor of *Feminist Studies*, and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, co-editors of *Shakespeare's Sisters*. While DuPlessis at least specified that she was speaking only about *heterosexual* romance, Gilbert and Gubar just spoke as if all women writers—with the exception of Alice Walker—were both heterosexual and white. Adrienne Rich was mentioned, but not as a lesbian; Alice Walker was praised, but seen only within the context of a *white* women's literary tradition. After some discussion, I objected to the heterosexism of the presentations and met first with embarrassed silence and then with the assurance that, of course, they were all well aware of lesbian writing—it just didn't happen to receive attention in these particular papers. Going home on the subway, I realized that I could well have objected to the white solipsism of the presentations and didn't—caught as I was in the immediacy of my anger at my own oppression. The following day, given a chance to speak at an open mike, I made the connections I had failed to make the day before.

## II

I mention this particular example as neither mea culpa nor simple success story, but as a way of beginning to look at the dynamics and socializing factors that interfere with our confronting racism, both in ourselves and in other white women. For I assume that I/we do not have to be non-racist in order to be anti-racist. For me this has been a crucial realization. As a vocal critic of heterosexism, I have been able to raise my voice confident in the knowledge that my own actions, my own words do not reflect that very bias. In taking an anti-racist position, I can make no such claim. Yet I can hardly wait to take these positions until the day when I will be free of all I have been taught about race and when I will no longer reap the benefits of having a white skin in this particular society. Increasingly, I am aware that such deferring of anti-racist actions effectively silences me.

I think it is essential that as white women, as white lesbians, we break out of that silence, that inaction, that wait for the never-never-day when we

will be blameless enough to speak. In part, I see the process of doing this as investing with inescapable concreteness the concept of racism. Rich has written in "Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynephobia":

The concept of racism itself is often intellectualized by white feminists. For some, a conscientious, obligatory mention of "racism-and-classism" allows it to be assumed that deep qualitative differences in female experience have been taken into account, where in fact intellectual analysis has been trusted to do the work of emotional apprehension, *which it cannot do*. (We all recognize the same phenomenon where male analyses of sexism are concerned.) It is possible to make obeisance to the abstract existence of racism, even to work politically on issues of immediate concern to black and Third World women, such as sterilization abuse, out of an intellectual right-mindedness which actually distances us from the point where black and white women have to begin together. I have more than once felt anger at abstractly "correct" language wielded by self-described political feminists: a language, it seemed to me, which sprang from learned analysis rather than from that synthesis of reflection and feeling, personal struggle and critical thinking, which is at the core of feminist process.<sup>8</sup>

Much of what I have learned about racism comes from my participation in several anti-racism workshops, a white women's anti-racism consciousness-raising group, and a series of meetings on Black-Jewish relations. Both by recalling my own experience and listening to those of other white women, I learned how pervasive racism is in each of us and how it creeps in even when I am most conscious of avoiding it (perhaps too in this article). Yet exploring my own memories allows me to begin to undo my racism, to start to rouse from the inertia it fosters in me. Asked to recall my earliest awareness that there were differences between people of color and white people, I remembered two instances which symbolize for me some of the complexity of transcending my own racism to take clearly anti-racist positions. I recall my immigrant grandmother, who died before I was 6, referring to Black people as "schwartzes," dropping a word of Yiddish into a stream of English sentences and thereby impressing on me without further explanation that "they" (and, by extension, other people of color) were so alien to my white world that their very existence could not be acknowledged in my own language. Years later, in the mid-fifties, I remember my parents speaking with the simple superiority of Northern liberals about civil rights for Black people in the South, and thereby impressing upon me both that prejudice was a terrible thing and that it could be defined in terms of basic civil rights and the *intellectual* concept of racial equality. For them, racism was floating around someplace out there—certainly in Birmingham and Little Rock; and if I only *believed* in the equality of all people, I would be forever safe from the corrosion in my grandmother's message.

In the past few years, I have learned better. I have not, after all, escaped. Had I not these particular stories of the origins of my racism, I would have others that would have cut equally deep. The issue, I think, is not to belabor this reality, but to explore what can, in fact, still be done in spite of it.

If we haven't already done so, I think we need to be involved in anti-racist c-r groups.<sup>9</sup> As white women, we need to use supportive formats developed

by women looking at patriarchal oppression and adapt them so that we can look at how we have been taught racist attitudes and at how we perpetuate them, despite our honest desire not to do so. It seems especially insupportable for those of us who rage daily against the bias of heterosexuals and insist that they explore where they're coming from and do something about it to refuse to take the same steps with regard to racism. If we were willing to spend an evening learning how men (and nonlesbian women) oppress us, we should be willing to devote at least as much time exploring how and why we function as oppressors—and how we can stop playing that role or, at the very least, how to minimize it. In doing this we can learn too how racism circumscribes our own lives.

The other half of this self-education project involves filling the informational, cultural, political, and general historical gaps left by years of schooling that either omitted or distorted material about women/people of color. Due both to a flowering of writing by women of color and to their persistent struggle against racism and sexism to make their work visible, an increasing amount of it has been published during the past few years in both (white) feminist publications and (nonfeminist) Third World ones. While special focus issues (on racism, Third World women, Black women) have appeared in the white feminist press in the past year or so, at least as important has been the general increase in some publications of writing by women of color. At the same time, nonfeminist Third World publications (*HooDoo; Callaloo, a Black South Journal of Arts and Letters; Bridge, The Asian American Perspective; De Colores, Journal of Emerging Raza Philosophies*) have put out issues dealing with Asian American, Black, and Chicana women, while *Freedomways: A Quarterly Review of the Freedom Movement* has just printed a whole issue about Lorraine Hansberry. One result of multiple oppression, Third World women's general lack of access to financial resources, has drastically limited the number of Third World feminist publications, though *Azalea: A Magazine for Third World Lesbians* and *Sojourner: A Third World Women's Research Newsletter* have been appearing on an ongoing basis.<sup>10</sup>

Those of us who have entirely or largely given up reading work by and/or about men will find a growing amount of woman-focused material, but ultimately will find it impossible to learn about the lives of women of color while holding to strictly separatist principles. Studying historical background alone, we will find the lives of women of color often linked, at times inextricably, with those of Third World men: in slavery; in World War II concentration camps built for Japanese-American citizens; in the government slaughter and forced settlement "reservations" of Native Americans; in land annexed (Texas and other Southwestern states) and colonized (Puerto Rico); in institutions that systematically have scorned the languages, cultures, and abilities of people of color. As the Combahee River Collective has written in "A Black Feminist Statement": "Our situation as Black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race."<sup>11</sup>

Even when the perspective is non-feminist or anti-feminist, work that explores the general situation of women and men of color and the dynamics between them can be valuable, in part because it indicates the obstacles faced by women of color who are—or would be—feminists.<sup>12</sup> So it can be helpful

to read *Shantih's* "Native American Issue"; *The Black Scholar's* two special issues on "Blacks and the Sexual Revolution" and "The Black Sexism Debate"; *Sunbury's American Born and Foreign: An Anthology of Asian American Poetry*; alternate press and mass market periodicals and books by/for Third World people; and weekly or daily newspapers focusing on Third World communities. And each of these contains references of more things to read, listings of lectures and political and cultural events that are most often open to white women, if we choose to go. As the world in which women of color spend each day becomes increasingly three-dimensional to us as white lesbian-feminists, we move further and further out of the white enclave of thought and interaction in which most of us live, and begin to see its limitations—and its oppressiveness—in sharper perspective.

In addition, we have to begin much more seriously than I think we have thus far to apply anti-racist criteria to work by other white women. In part, I see our failure to do this as an aspect of our larger failure to be seriously critical, though supportive, of each other's work. Too often we are so excited by the appearance of a work that raises important issues and is positive about (white) lesbians that we fail to consider the aspects of the book in which the author does not push far enough in her own consciousness. It is, of course, more comfortable to do this; none of us likes to be told where we have failed or not been as successful as we might; we find it difficult to resist identifying with the writer whose work we criticize (and who perhaps will then spare us when the critical tables are turned). Yet I think this approach—which can lead to puffing or sliding over serious problems because they seem too volatile to discuss—shows little respect for our ability to learn and grow as a result of serious criticism.

A few years ago, in an interview I did and then edited, Adrienne Rich referred to an anthology that "included blacks and other minorities; but women and homosexuals were not included."<sup>13</sup> Though it was certainly not her conscious intent—nor mine in editing the interview—the wording sets up blacks and other minorities *and* women and homosexuals as separate groups and makes the existence of Black women or Hispanic lesbians a verbal impossibility. The appropriate criticism that we received from Flying Clouds as a result helped sensitize us to the issues involved. A consequence of the criticism was my own increased ability to monitor my own work for racist language and assumptions. Talking about criticism in that same interview, Rich has said: "We need a kind of pointing toward what isn't being dealt with, what is creating silences and evasions. . . . We don't explore our capacity until we're challenged."<sup>14</sup>

Those of us who feel frustrated by the continual failure of all but a handful of nonlesbian women to speak out on issues of homophobia need to ourselves challenge racism and not leave it to be the task of women/lesbians of color, one that all too often remains undone if they are absent. Those of us who automatically flip to the table of contents or to a book's index to see if lesbians are included need to teach ourselves to look automatically for the inclusion of women of color; if we check whether "homophobia" is in the index, we need to look for "racism" too. When we edit work, we need to do active outreach for work by women of color, rather than waiting for them to take the first step. It is not ok to run a special lesbian issue (as *Heresies* has done) that is all white or to acknowledge that "lesbians and women of

color are not adequately represented," as *Frontiers* has done most recently in an issue devoted to "Who Speaks for the Women's Movement?" when, in fact, we/they are not represented at all; nor is it acceptable for *Frontiers* to run a lesbian history issue which includes a questionnaire response from a Black lesbian and a short performance piece by an Asian-American lesbian—who is *not* included in the table of contents—as its only recognition of the herstory of lesbians of color.<sup>15</sup> While it is crucial to include work by women of color, we should not leave it to them alone to raise issues of racism and to explore the implications of any issue for women of color. The responsibility for doing this lies also with us as white women.

### III

As critics—and readers—we must not forget the vital interconnection between words and the everyday of women's lives. Minnie Bruce Pratt makes this connection in her lengthy letter to *Chrysalis* protesting Carol Fox Schmucker's "Has Anyone Read *Gone with the Wind* Lately?" which discusses Scarlett O'Hara as "a strong, active, *alive* woman with a very healthy self-love" in a novel "filled with powerful women, including older women who serve as role-models."<sup>16</sup> At the end of her article, Schmucker talks briefly about *GWTW* as a racist novel, whose author's "racial consciousness . . . mars her vision" (my emphasis) but which has, nonetheless, "been kept alive by its appeal to women."<sup>17</sup> Speaking as a Southern white woman who grew up in the fifties, Pratt writes:

We were able to participate vicariously and comfortably in her rebellion because Scarlett broke no major taboos of her culture, of Mitchells's culture, of my mother's culture, or of mine; she, above all, did not break the racial taboo. For me, to read *GWTW* as a Southern white woman was to enjoy the pleasures of revolt without having to consider what actual rebellion against social taboo, against the racial taboo would mean in my life.

When the movie *Gone with the Wind* came to my hometown every four years during my girlhood, I would go down to the Ritz, stare at the posters where Vivien swooned against Clark in vivid tempura colors, pay my 25¢ and go into the theater through the swinging door to the left of the ticket booth. To the right of the booth was another door; it led up steep stairs to the balcony where the black people of the town sat when they came to the movies. Schmucker's failure to discuss forthrightly the racism in *GWTW* makes me think of that balcony. She cites comments from other sources (A. Rich, A.F. Scott) to prove that Southern white women have positive attitudes toward black women and men. She does not point out that by 1936, the year of *GWTW*'s publication, *black women and men were still being lynched* both in the South and elsewhere (see "Lynching" in the *NY Times Index*, 1930-) and that Mitchell reproduces the very excuses used by lynch mobs to justify their actions. . . . In chapter 37, when Scarlett hears of the rise of Klan activity during Reconstruction and of the black man murdered by a white "gentleman," supposedly in defense of white women, Scarlett is said to feel for the first time "a kinship with the people about her." . . . She identifies with the determination of *the men* that the South was "too dear a homeland to be turned over to ignorant Negroes drunk with whiskey and freedom." Mitchell, in writing a "historical" romance that condones the worst actions of racism, actions that continued at the very time of her writing,

evades a struggle with significant moral issues. She, like her heroine Scarlett, participates in, and agrees with, the immoral actions of white men. Can we then discuss Mitchell as an author of a "serious piece of work"? . . . To fail to see that GWTW offers us a heroine who is reactionary, not revolutionary, to fail to see in what way Mitchell's endorsement of racism may have actually increased or sustained the novel's appeal to white women readers, is to continue to accept this racism.<sup>18</sup>

Pratt continues:

If we are to read GWTW nowadays, we should read it with the knowledge that white terrorism reigned in this country from the 1890's through the 1930's (and later), with the knowledge that Klan activity is rising today, with incidents reported from California to Colorado to New Jersey (UPI, 10/21/79), with the knowledge that white men at West Point have dressed in Klan regalia and harassed black students "for a joke" (AP, 11/79), that the Klan runs a summer day camp for white children in Decatur, Alabama (and doubtless elsewhere) where white boys and girls are given lessons in white supremacy and target shooting (WBRC, Birmingham). If we read GWTW now, we should consider that this fall people participating in an anti-Klan rally in Greensboro, North Carolina, were gunned down by the Klan and six, black and white, were killed (AP, 11/6/79). A woman who was married to one of the killers, said, "I knew he was in the Klan, but I don't know what he did when he left home." If we are white women, we must ask what is going on outside our "home," outside our familiar, accustomed view. To analyze GWTW as if the racial and sexual attitudes that are expressed in it no longer exist is to evade a moral responsibility, just as Margaret Mitchell did.

I have quoted Minnie Bruce Pratt's letter at such length because it seems to me to model the type of anti-racist criticism that I think we—as white lesbians who are feminists—need to do more of. She takes her early life and uses it as a means of analyzing racism and filling in the gaps left in Schucker's description of the white Southern female response to GWTW. She incorporates an analysis of the impact of racism into her evaluation of Scarlett, GWTW as a whole, and the white Southern response to it, rather than tacking it on as something of an afterthought, a rather unpleasant fact that must be acknowledged someplace in the article without interfering with its overall thesis.

Equally important, I think, she has taken the responsibility as a white woman to "ask what is going on outside our 'home,' outside our familiar, accustomed view." As a result, she is able to bring to her analysis the kind of *informed* critical sense that allows her to place both the book and the article in a concrete historical context of lynching and other forms of white terrorism. By having learned that history, she is able to approach racism in terms of its very real connection to people's lives, not as an abstraction which it is somehow "good" to oppose.

In fact, Minnie Bruce Pratt responded to the *Chrysalis* article shortly after the Greensboro killings and while her students were writing their responses to them. In a letter to me, she wrote about that experience:

One of the older black women in my freshman comp class (in her forties) delayed and delayed handing in the assignment on the Klan. She discussed with me how writing about her experience brought back dreadful memories and anger and pain—and she didn't *want* to bring it all up—she finally turned

the paper in—it told of her family being driven off land that they had owned for five generations—and implied that she had seen her mother raped, perhaps beaten by the Klan—told of her responsibility as the oldest for hiding the other children during the Klan visits when her mother pleaded with them to leave, but they came and searched the house—watching them tramp through from her hiding place.

(December 29, 1979)

Even as this description helps put into perspective both Schmucker's article and *Chrysalis'* decision to print it, it also underscores the extent to which racism and sexism are interconnected. Whereas the rape of the student's mother was possible because she was a woman, the specific attack—the entry of her house by the Klan—took place only because she was Black.

I see Pratt's response to the Schmucker article as emerging from a consciousness honed by her own openness to the type of concrete experience she mentions in her letter to me. It emerges, in part, from what Rich has described as crossing "barriers of age and condition . . . sensing our way into another's skin, if only in a moment's apprehension."<sup>19</sup> If we accept the premise that writing—our own and others'—can both reflect and perpetuate racism, if we know—or know of—women of color who have been deeply hurt by racist writing by white people, including white lesbian-feminists, the impetus for developing and applying anti-racist criteria becomes compelling.

#### IV

When I first picked up Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* in galleys nearly a year and a half ago, I found myself in full agreement with her that "the oppression of women knows no ethnic, national, or religious bounds," that it is, in short, "planetary."<sup>20</sup> I agreed too that *all* facets of this oppression should be thoroughly researched and strenuously opposed. Still, I was concerned with her use of white Western sources that seemed likely to be, for the most part, not just sexist but also racist, and about her avoidance of race and class as substantive issues in her chapter on American gynecology. Ultimately I felt that her failure to consider the biases in many of her sources and to explore more than tentatively the ways in which race and class influence the nature and extent of women's oppression seriously undercuts the effectiveness of her argument and the reliability of her research.

I waited patiently for feminist reviews that would, in some way, reflect my concerns. But, except for Mariana Valverde's comment in Canada's *The Body Politic* that Daly "is quite insensitive to the peculiarities of ethnic groups and historical periods," none appeared.<sup>21</sup> Instead, review after review in feminist periodicals sounded the same note. In *off our backs*, Susanna J. Sturgis wrote:

*Gyn/Ecology* is written to us, for us, from our experience, about us, the untamed, the Hags. . . . *Gyn/Ecology*, this wonderful, brilliant, amazing Hysterical book, spins itself beyond the words that Mary Daly wrote. It is a creation, the work of a revolutionary feminist; it is a vision of strength and integrity of sisterhood.<sup>22</sup>

And Susan Leigh Star said in *Sinister Wisdom*:

This book is the total confluence of method and content, of the personal and the historical, of the reach for change and the unflinching examination

of suffering, that I have come to know as feminism. Where this book is, there is feminism. . . . *Gyn/Ecology*, by specifying more broadly than any scholarship to date, the background, origins, and assumptions of patriarchal scholarship, creates for the first time a feminist sociology of knowledge.<sup>23</sup>

The critical word—lesbian-feminist variety—was in, and *Gyn/Ecology* receded into the recent past as a Great Event in lesbian-feminist history.

The reviews upset me. Only my discussions with other lesbian-feminists I know prevent me from discounting my own perceptions—my own decision *not* to “gynuflect”—as some sort of craziness on my part. The issue, it seems to me, goes far beyond the book itself to its implications for the lesbian community, especially the lesbian writing community. Will we accept as a veritable sacred text a theoretical book written by a white lesbian feminist that excludes the concerns about racism expressed repeatedly by Third World feminists? Will we consider how the lesbian community—Third World and white—suffers from again finding total acceptance by white lesbians for a book that excludes these concerns? Will we accept without question scholarship as unbiased simply because it is put together by a (white) lesbian-feminist academic whose tone assumes great authority?<sup>24</sup>

I am, for example, disturbed as I read through the Second Passage chapters on Indian suttee, Chinese footbinding, and African genital mutilation by Daly's almost entirely uncritical use of *white Western* sources, nearly all male, and by her failure to acknowledge the racism both in passages she quotes in *Gyn/Ecology* and in those she omits from her book. Although she finally does discuss the “unabashed” (172) racism of *Dark Rapture: The Sex Life of the African Negro*, she consistently ignores possible racist bias in her focus on the plight of women (who are, after all, both female and Third World).

She cites, for instance, the words of Joseph Campbell on Indian suttee or widow-burning:

In spite of the suffering and even panic in the actual moment of the pain of suffocation, we should certainly not think of the mental state and experience of these individuals after any model of our own more or less imaginable reactions to such a fate. For these sacrifices were not properly, in fact, individuals at all; that is to say, they were not particular beings, distinguished from a class or group by virtue of any sense or realization of a personal, individual destiny of responsibility. (116-17)

Daly comments: “I have not italicized any of the words in this citation because it seemed necessary to stress *every* word. It is impossible to make any adequate comment” (117). While adequate comment is certainly difficult to make, Daly consistently focuses in these chapters on the incredible misogyny of men *to the exclusion* of anything else, including the potential racism of her sources. So the bias in Campbell's perception of *our* “reactions,” the reactions of white Westerners, as innately different from those of Asians slips through Daly's pages without comment. I have heard too many Hollywood and television descriptions of Japanese kamikazee pilots, Chinese “hordes” invading North Korea, and “fanatically” single-minded (North) Vietnamese which assume that “life is cheap in the Orient—they don't value life as much as we do”—not to recognize this particular racist attitude when I read it.

Yet Daly is not through discussing Campbell. She writes:

After describing the live burial of a young widow which took place in 1818, this devotee of the rites of de-tached scholarship describes the event as “an *illuminating*, though *somewhat* appalling, glimpse into the deep, silent pool of the Oriental, archaic soul [emphases Daly’s] . . . . What eludes the scholar is the fact that the “archaic soul” was a woman’s destroyed by Patriarchal Religion (in which he is a true believer), which demands female sacrifice.

(119)

Here her objection is *explicitly* to the misogyny which is both clearly present and appalling. But Daly does not confront the other half of the bias evident in Campbell’s words, which reveal someone who believes in the stereotype of the “inscrutable Oriental” (“deep, silent pool of the Oriental, archaic soul”).

The existence of this racism in Daly’s sources *in no way* mitigates the woman-hating. But I do question chapters that cite source after source written about women *of color* by men who are white and Western with no overall look by the author at what their whiteness, their Western background, the racism of their anthropological field, mean in their reports of these atrocities.<sup>25</sup> Daly gives us valuable information about the horrors perpetrated against these women, but she essentially ignores that part of the authors’ blindness that comes from an angle of vision that is white and Western *as well as* male. Certainly their attitudes reflect their patriarchal devaluation of women. But that is only part of the story.

Even more disturbing in certain ways is Daly’s failure to mention the incredibly blatant racism of American writer Katherine Mayo. Daly uses *Mother India* (1927) as a source for her discussion of Indian child brides who are forced to marry, have intercourse, and bear children. Daly describes the book by the American writer as “an excellent work” (119) which occasioned strenuous attack from women-hating critics. “Feminist Seekers/Spinsters,” she writes, “should search out and claim such sisters as Katherine Mayo. . . . We must learn to name our true sisters. . . . In the process of seeking out these sister Seekers/Spinsters, it is essential to look at *their own writing*” (emphasis Daly’s, 129-30), rather than at their male detractors’.

So I looked at *Mother India* itself. And found Mary Daly doing to Third World people exactly what she (accurately) charges men of doing to women. In a reference to a misogynist writer who discusses Chinese footbinding, Daly says: “The author either concurs in the erasure or didn’t notice it. All of this boils down to about the same thing: doublethink or de-tachment from women’s oppression” (144). In Daly’s non-response to Mayo’s racism, in her wholehearted lauding of her book, we have an analogous phenomenon. Early in her book, Mayo writes:

The British administration of India, be it good, bad, or indifferent, has nothing whatever to do with the conditions above indicated. Inertia, helplessness, lack of initiative and originality, lack of staying power and of sustained loyalties, sterility of enthusiasm, weakness of life-vigor itself—all are traits that truly characterize the Indian not only of today, but of long-past history. All, furthermore, will continue to characterize him in increasing degree, until he admits their causes and with his own two hands uproots them. No agency but a new spirit within his own breast can set him free. And his arraignments of outside elements, past, present, or to come, serve only to deceive his own mind and to put off the day of his deliverance.<sup>26</sup>

Indians are, Mayo says on the next page, "a huge population, mainly rural, illiterate, and *loving their illiteracy*" (my emphasis).<sup>27</sup> In *Mother India*'s third chapter, "'Slave Mentality,'" Mayo maintains:

The *whole pyramid* of the Hindu's woes, material and spiritual—poverty, sickness, ignorance, political minority, melancholy, ineffectiveness, not forgetting that subconscious conviction of inferiority which he forever bares and advertises by his gnawing and imaginative alertness to social affronts—rests upon a rock-bottom physical base. This base is, simply, his manner of getting into the world [as offspring of a child bride] and his sex-life thenceforward [my emphasis].<sup>28</sup>

You can "find them," Mayo concludes the chapter, "at the age when the Anglo-Saxon is just coming into full glory of manhood, broken-nerved, low-spirited, petulant ancients; and need you, while this remains unchanged, seek for other reasons why they are poor and sick and dying and why their hands are too weak, too fluttering, to seize or to hold the reins of government?"<sup>29</sup>

These words were, we should note, written thirty years before Indian independence, after centuries of British rule, and during a decade when American immigration laws were increasingly being tightened to keep out Asians and other "non-Anglo-Saxons."<sup>30</sup> If Mayo's words are those of a "true sister," whom I/we "should search out and claim," Daly and I certainly have different standards. While the societally supported practice that Mayo reveals of taking child brides who are then forced to have intercourse by their husbands is unquestionably loathesome, it can hardly explain "the whole pyramid of the Hindu's woes." I do not know, of course, whether Daly read the comments by Mayo without registering them as racist or whether she consciously chose not to include them in her discussion of *Mother India*. But the result is effectively the same: judgment offered, information presented, as if racism were beyond notice, beneath mention.

Another kind of "erasure" occurs in Daly's chapter on American gynecology, in which she seems to me equally unwilling to admit and explore the extent to which women of color and poor women of all races are victims of *white male professionals*. Repeatedly in this chapter, Daly has the opportunity to use "graphic and detailed material" to describe "the horrible physical reality" (150) of the impact on women of color and poor women of the white, male gynecological establishment. Writing about G. Marion Sims, a nineteenth-century gynecologist, she says: "He began his life's work 'humbly,' performing dangerous sexual surgery on black female slaves housed in a small building in his yard" (225). In a note at the bottom of the page, she states: "Mary Smith, an Irish indigent, suffered thirty of his operations between 1856 and 1859. The black slave Anarcha had suffered the same number in his backyard stable a decade before" (225). This information is, in itself, upsetting. Yet that "graphic" detail that Daly correctly berates male scholars for omitting when writing about footbinding is conspicuously absent here. Daly's source, G. J. Barker-Benfield's *The Horrors of the Half-Known Life: Male Attitudes toward Women and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century America*, is far more explicit:

Although anesthesia had first been invented at the time (the 1840s), Sims did not know of it. . . . His first patients endured years of almost unbeliev-

able agonies. . . . Sims scoured the countryside for appropriate surgical subjects. Significantly, given the need for their endurance, passivity, and utter helplessness, they were black female slaves, some of whom Sims bought expressly for his experiments—that is, when the owner was skeptical about Sim's methods. He built his own private hospital in his backyard to house them. Rumors circulated in Montgomery that Sims was using human beings as guinea pigs for his surgical ambitions. The rumors were accurate. As long as he was in Montgomery, "it was far harder to operate on white women than on Negroes" because white women were more in a position to express their will in the relationship with Sims. "The pain was so terrific that Mrs. H. could not stand it and I was foiled completely." So the black slaves served as "adequate material" in Sims's "storing" of experience, "finding out more about the applicability of . . . silver sutures" until the invention of anesthesia and of Listerism dissolved the resistance of wealthy white women and Sims could apply to their bodies the techniques he had perfected on the bodies of blacks.<sup>31</sup>

Daly's characterization of his practices as "brutal" (225) seems hardly adequate to describe these series of operations *done without anesthesia* on women who because of their race and consequent slave status or their combined poverty and recent immigrant status had no recourse. I was, quite simply, shocked that, while Daly is perfectly willing to numb the reader with the agonies of women of color in other countries, she seems consistently reluctant to do so closer to home.

This *pattern* of mentioning American women of color and poor women as gynecological guinea pigs and *immediately* insisting that their race and/or class is not pivotal in their selection (or that they are not the "intended" targets), and then moving on to a discussion of white middle-class women ultimately erases race and class as significant. Daly writes:

This blatant statement legitimates the use of women as uninformed guinea pigs for such drugs as The Pill and the morning-after pill. The temptation might be to imagine that such destructive experimentation is confined to a particular time (the past) or to particular segments of the female population (e.g., low-income and nonwhite). *While* the latter are victimized in *a special way*, their "higher-class" sisters are taken care of in *a different way*. Thus well-educated (mis-educated) upper-middle-class women who "willingly" subject themselves (are subjected) to mutilating surgery and estrogen replacement therapy are uninformed objects in a refined sense.  
(my emphasis, 259)

Daly's use of parallel terms and the verbal speed with which she moves from poor women and women of color to middle-class women (overwhelmingly white) is remarkable. Her parallel phrases ("in a special way" and "in a different way") give equal weight to the oppression of each group and has the ultimate effect of ignoring the suffering of women that is determined/affected by their race and/or degree of economic privilege.

Rather than detailing this suffering, Daly moves on to a string of statistics which, though informational, lack the immediacy which concrete examples could bring to her study—and which she is perfectly willing to use in her discussions of Chinese, Indian, and African women. Here, as elsewhere in her chapter on American gynecology, she follows the admission that women of

color and poor women are “targeted” (269) for sterilization only with statistics and an immediate disclaimer: “It would be simplistic, however,” Daly writes, “to conclude that poor women are the essential targets of the *intent* of gynecological gynocide” (emphasis Daly’s, 270).

Several pages later she demonstrates the same reluctance to look closely at the impact on different groups of women of gynecological experimentation and mistreatment:

From the inception of their profession, gynecologists have used black, immigrant, and other poor women as guinea pigs, experimenting upon them without their informed consent, in order to later use the “expertise” thus gained in lucrative private practice. *Yet* a class analysis is inadequate here for it falls short of explaining *all* of the dimensions of autocratic atrocities. *The fact is* that experimentation is part of the routine procedure of gynecology for women of all classes. As I have already indicated, poor and nonwhite women are *usually* totally uninformed of how they are being used for “study.” *So also* middle- and upper-class women are *often* simply not told anything, or when they are given “information,” their miseducation gives them the illusion of informed consent. (my emphasis, 269)

This paragraph is strikingly similar to the one I have just discussed on “women as uninformed guinea pigs.” Again Daly uses parallel terms (“usually” and often”) that effectively eliminate any real difference in the quality of health care these groups of women receive, as well as in their *potential* access to both adequate health care and feminist health information. Her quick dismissal of a class analysis because it doesn’t explain “all of the dimensions of autocratic atrocities” erases too women’s economic position as a determinant in the quality of health care they can receive: while private gynecologists can mistreat women horribly, certainly the woman who can afford to be both a private consumer and purchaser of health services is in a far better position to have her needs met than the woman who is forced to rely on clinics that will accept medicaid or medicare or, in the absence of both health insurance and cash, will accept installment payments.

Daly’s leveling of difference—even after her brief verbal acknowledgment of it—finds no support in the work done by feminist healthcare workers and researchers, as reflected in the monthly health news columns and regular articles in *off our backs* and other women’s periodicals; the publications of such groups as CARASA (Committee against Restrictions on Abortion and Sterilization Abuse), CESA (Committee to End Sterilization Abuse), Feminist Alliance against Rape, and Women Free Women in Prison; the writings of such Daly sources as Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English; material listed in the syllabus on Black women’s healthcare put together by Beverly Smith; and in other feminist health publications.<sup>32</sup> Since extensive, thoroughly detailed feminist material demonstrates overwhelmingly the degree to which women of color and poor women of all races are used as medical guinea pigs in ways that (predominantly white) middle- and upper-class women are not, I fail to understand why Daly chooses not to document their sufferings in this chapter. I cannot help but wonder about the connection between the absence of serious recognition of this situation and the validity of Daly’s contention that “the potential object of such studies is Everywoman” (259).

I find that the erasures in Daly’s book ultimately form a pattern. For that

reason, I think it worthwhile to consider these many examples. They are not isolated, random omissions. Daly writes with regard to male scholarship of how "pattern-detecting—the development of a kind of positive paranoia—is essential for every feminist Searcher, so that she can resist the sort of mind-poisoning to which she must expose herself in the very process of seeking out necessary information" (125). While we should follow her advice and develop "pattern-detecting" with regard to all forms of gynocidal patriarchy, we should also consistently apply such criteria, as she does not, with regard to racism and classism. They too are forms of "mind-poisoning." The kind of overall pattern that I detect in *Gyn/Ecology*, one that can only be described accurately as racist, compels, I think, a re-evaluation of the book as a whole.

## V

If, as white feminists, we prefer to ignore the pervasiveness of racist oppression in the lives of women of color and to see women—or lesbians alone—as a fairly homogeneous group, our preference emerges directly from our white-skin privilege. If I can go through a whole day without a sharp awareness of racism, if I can put together—or think someone else can put together—a viable piece of feminist criticism or theory whose base is the thought and writing of white women/lesbians and expect that an analysis of racism can be tacked on or dealt with later as a useful addition, it is a measure of the extent to which I partake of that white privilege. If I can read a book like Daly's that says in its preface that it uses "Big Words . . . for it is written for big, strong women, out of respect for strength" (xiv) and simply relish my identification with those women, I have perhaps forgotten how, in this society, learning the skills to do such reading has far more to do with having been among the token women able/allowed to overcome barriers of sex and race and class than with any innate or acquired "strength."<sup>33</sup>

We need instead writing/criticism that signals that we have been listening to women of color and understanding what they experience. Examples of racist incidents abound. My morning paper carries an article about two white California men convicted of randomly killing a deaf Black man because they hadn't shot a deer on their hunting trip; the white woman who had accompanied them had already been convicted of second-degree murder. In the course of their spree, one of the convicted men "tried to shoot at three black men standing by a truck, but their rifle misfired. He then tried to shoot a young black woman in the face . . . but missed at point-blank range."<sup>34</sup> Spared by luck, the young woman was clearly a victim of racism, not of gynocidal patriarchy (though, perhaps on another day, that too will target her). She just happened to be a woman. Her race and her near-victim status, however, were no accident. Nor was the slain Black man saved because of his male sex. The incident has its countless parallels in communities of people of color all over the United States—and, where white people have power, elsewhere in the world. Truly, a planetary phenomenon.

The interconnectedness of oppressions—rather than their "hierarchy"—in the lives of women of color gets stressed in the Combahee River Collective's "A Black Feminist Statement":

We . . . often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously.

We know that there is such a thing as a racial-sexual oppression which is neither solely racial nor solely sexual, e.g., the history of rape of black women by white men as a weapon of political oppression.<sup>35</sup>

The development of feminist theory and criticism by white women that incorporates this type of ongoing recognition of the role of racism in the lives of all women of color and of economic powerlessness in the lives of the vast majority of them is a requisite for truly empowering ourselves as feminists. We can, of course, see this kind of inclusion in negative terms—we don't want to oppress women of color. But we can see it far better as a positive step that underscores a healthy growth and complexity in a feminist vision of change for *all* women, not just for white middle-class ones.

## VI

It might be helpful, in attempting to develop such an anti-racist approach, to begin to work out a list of guideline questions that, although open-ended, can help us formulate a critical position toward what we write and what we read. I developed the following specifically with non-fiction prose and collections of prose in mind, though it would be important also to formulate such questions in relationship to other genres and collections. Though my list is necessarily incomplete, I hope it will serve as a starting point in the development of a comprehensive one:

### *Representation*

—To what extent are works included by women of color who represent different racial and cultural backgrounds?

—Are women of color represented by work dealing with race and racism *and* with topics not *primarily* focused on race (relationships with family, sexuality, work, aging, etc.)?

—Does work by white women consider the implications of their subjects for women of color?

### *Audience*

—Does the writer make any assumptions about the race of her audience and, if so, what implications do they have for women of color?

### *Language*

—Does she use terms connecting “black” to evil and negativity (blacklist, blackout, black sheep; “it was a black day for her when her mother died”) and “white” to goodness and innocence (white lie, whitewash)?

—Does she use terms to describe people of color that assume whiteness to be the norm (i.e., nonwhite)?

### *Critical Attitudes/Assumptions*

—Does she give equal value to women of color and white women?

—When she speaks about “women,” “lesbians,” “feminists,” are her statements applicable to white women and women of color?

—Does she recognize the differences in experience between women of color and white women?

—Does she recognize differences among various racial and cultural groups (i.e., Puerto Ricans, Chicanas, Cuban-American) and among individual members of each group?

—Does she consider the class implications of being a woman of color in a country where white people/men have the economic power?

—Does she incorporate race and racism into her analysis/evaluation or simply mention/list it?

- Does she acknowledge the effect of race and/or class privilege?
- How does she perceive women of color who have defined their political commitment in terms of their own Third World community/people?
- Does she show an awareness of the impact of racism on men of color?
- Does she show an understanding and knowledge of the historical framework in which racism has developed and of the histories of different groups of people of color in this country?
- Does she show an awareness of her own limitations as a white woman in discussing women of color and racism?
- How does she view women of color who do not speak "standard" (white, middle class) English?

### Sources

- Has she considered the racial and cultural background of the author of any sources she has used in terms of possible racial bias?
- Do her sources accurately reflect the experiences and perceptions of women/people of color?
- Has she used sources written by women of color (and men of color if she is using male sources) and observed any differences in approach and perception between Third World and white sources?
- Has she been creative and persistent in finding sources reflecting the experience of women of color when such sources were not immediately available to her?
- Does she show an awareness of work done in her field by women of color and include that work in her bibliography?

## VII

I am certainly under no illusion that developing and applying such criteria is a simple matter. As I venture out in the guise of an anti-racist critic, I cannot help but know how open to countercharge I leave myself—by white women expressing their own anti-racist concerns and perhaps seeing far more clearly than I; by women of color who understand the issues as I cannot and will necessarily see me as "representing the group" oppressing them.<sup>36</sup> Their right—their obligation—to raise their own criticism of what I say or fail to say is undeniable. It emphasizes, in fact, the crucial issue of accountability. On all levels, the options are clear: to remain passive and silent or to act with the awareness that doing so is a necessary business.

The option to speak out now finds support in recent anti-racist writing by other white lesbians: Carol Ann Douglas' "Impressions and Confessions about Racism"; Deb Friedman's "Rape, Racism and Reality"; Minnie Bruce Pratt's letter to *Chrysalis*; Adrienne Rich's "Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynephobia"; Mab Segrest's "Southern Women Writing: Toward a Literature of Wholeness"; the contributions of white women to *Top Ranking: A Collection of Essays on Racism and Classism in the Lesbian Community*.<sup>37</sup> And behind them stand the anti-racist poetry of Muriel Rukeyser, the essays and fiction of Lillian Smith, the novels of Jo Sinclair.<sup>38</sup>

As feminists standing outside the patriarchal worldview, as lesbians standing outside the circle that all but the exceptional non-lesbian has drawn about herself, we have learned much about the chasm between intentions and acts. As feminists, as lesbians, as white-skinned people in a racist society, we can read Adrienne Rich's words from several perspectives:

*I try to understand*

18 he said

what will you undertake  
she said

will you punish me for history  
he said

what will you undertake  
she said<sup>39</sup>

Put in a context other than its original one, but still framing a dialogue between oppressor and oppressed, her poem can be seen to ask us—as white lesbian-feminists committed to anti-racism—the most basic of questions: *What will we undertake?*

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*A Note about Language:* Throughout my article I use the terms “Third World women” and “women of color” interchangeably as positive terms adopted by such women themselves. I find myself in something of a politico-linguistic transition period: usage of “women of color” is increasing, though it is still used more by feminists in the Western U.S. than in the East, where I live. Perhaps in a few years we will have a more generally agreed-upon term. In addition, it is important to recognize that “women of color,” especially Latina women—who belong to no single racial group—can be as white-skinned as I am, while still being victims of racism. My characterization of other women and myself as “white” refers, in fact, to a complicated intersection of racial and ethnic identity. The term “Third World” on the other hand seems to imply the priority of “first” and “second” worlds in which white people form the majority. Though it is not my subject, I think it important within the framework of my topic to acknowledge the complexity of the language I/we use.

## NOTES

\*Rukeyser, “Wherever,” *Breaking Open* (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 59.

1. Pat Jordan, “Sweet Home: Willye B. White,” *Out of the Bleachers*, ed. Stephanie L. Twin (Old Westbury: The Feminist Press and McGraw-Hill, 1979), p. 86. For a copy of the petition protesting the book’s racism and homophobia and a letter written by Rena Grasso Patterson and me in response to the press’ reply to the petition, see *Matrices*, vol. 3, no. 2 (February 1980), pp. 3-5.

2. *Frontiers*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Summer 1978); *Feminist Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2 (June 1978). The *Frontiers* issue contains one article by a woman whose biographical note indicates that she is probably Black, “Motherhood in the Novels of Margaret Drabble” by Ann Rayson, a teacher of Afro-American studies.

3. Ellen G. Hawkes, “Private Female Resentments” (review of *Literary Women*), *Ms.*, vol. 5, no. 1 (July 1976), p. 104. A blurb on the inside cover of the paperback edition (Garden City, NY: Doubleday/Anchor, 1977) quotes Tillie Olsen as saying: “*Literary Women* is a catalyst, a landmark book. Authoritatively establishes the scope, depth, variety, of literature written by women.”

4. Moers, pp. 164, 166.

5. Moers, p. 220.

6. Moers, p. xviii. For Alice Walker’s comments on Moers’ discussion of Hansberry, see “One Child of One’s Own: An Essay on Creativity,” *Ms.*, vol. 7, no. 2 (August 1979), pp. 72-73. See also Gloria Hull, “Afro-American Women Poets: A Bio-Critical Survey,” *Shakespeare’s Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), p. 181.

7. Hull, p. 165.
8. Rich, *On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978* (New York: Norton, 1979), pp. 303-4. (Originally published in *Chrysalis* 7, 1979).
9. "Face-to-face, Day-to-day Racism CR" (guidelines for CR groups), Tia Cross, Freada Klein, Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, *Sojourner* (May 1979), p. 11; reprinted in *Women's Studies Newsletter*, vol. 7, no. 1 (Winter 1980), pp. 27-28; and in *Top Ranking: A Collection of Articles on Racism and Classism in the Lesbian Community*, ed. Sara Bennett and Joan Gibbs (Brooklyn: February 3rd Press, 1980). See also "Lesbians Struggle with Racism," interview by Cindy Stein, *Gay Community News* (March 1, 1980), pp. 10-11, 14.
10. Publications mentioned here and in the following paragraph are listed, with ordering information, in the Selected Reading List.
11. Combahee River Collective, in *Capitalist Patriarchy: A Case for Socialist Feminism*, ed. Zillah Eisenstein (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), p. 365.
12. See also Barbara Smith's letter, *Sojourner* (September 1979), p. 2.
13. Elly Bulkin, "An Interview with Adrienne Rich: Part I," *Conditions: One* (April 1977), p. 59.
14. Bulkin, "An Interview with Adrienne Rich: Part II," *Conditions: Two* (October 1977), p. 62.
15. "Lesbian Art and Artists," *Heresies* 3 (Fall 1977); Editorial Collective, "To Our Readers," vol. 4, no. 1 (Spring 1979), p. iv; "Lesbian History Issue," *Frontiers*, vol. 4, no. 3 (Fall 1979). See Barbara Smith's responses in Judith Schwarz' "Questionnaire on Issues in Lesbian History," pp. 1-12; and Christine Wong's "Yellow Queer," p. 53.
16. Schmucker, *Chrysalis* 9 (Fall 1979), pp. 63, 64.
17. Schmucker, p. 69.
18. Pratt, letter to *Chrysalis*, December 27, 1979; printed in *Top Ranking*.
19. "Disloyal to Civilization," p. 307.
20. Daly, *Gyn/Ecology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 111. All page references are to this edition.
21. Valverde, "Beyond Equal Rights: Mary Daly's Gynocentric Vision," *The Body Politic* (October 1979), p. 32.
22. Sturgis, review of "Gyn/Ecology," *off our backs* (March 1979), pp. 18-19.
23. Star, "To Dwell among Ourselves," *Sinister Wisdom* 8 (Winter 1979), pp. 87-88.
24. For the response of a Black lesbian-feminist to *Gyn/Ecology*, see Audre Lorde's "An Open Letter to Mary Daly," May 6, 1979; printed in *Top Ranking*; for a more general discussion of the issues involved, see Barbara Smith's "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," *Conditions: Two* (Fall 1977), pp. 25-44.
25. For a discussion of the issues raised by white anthropologists doing fieldwork in Third World countries, see William S. Willis, Jr., "Skeletons in the Anthropological Closet," *Reinventing Anthropology*, ed. Dell Hymes (New York: Vintage, 1974), pp. 121-52.
26. Katherine Mayo, *Mother India* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927), p. 16. Although the publisher differs from the one Daly lists (Blue Ribbon), the text and pagination appear to correspond exactly.
27. Mayo, p. 17.
28. Mayo, p. 22. Mayo takes her chapter title from a reference to the British "to whose oppressive presence the Indian attributes what he himself describes as the 'slave mentality' of 247,000,000 human beings" (p. 21).
29. Mayo, p. 32.
30. For a discussion of American attitudes about race at the time Mayo wrote *Mother India*, see Thomas F. Gossett's *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (New York: Schocken, 1963).
31. Barker-Benfield, *The Horrors of the Half-Known Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 101. In her review of Daly's book, Joanna Russ says: "This section would be more telling if Daly remembered to remind us that J. Marion Sims . . . [operated] *without anesthesia*" (her emphasis); *Frontiers*, vol. 4, no. 1 (Spring 1979), p. 69. However, she does not consider the implications of this omission.
32. CARASA, 386 Park Ave. South, NY, NY 10016; CESA, Box A 244, Cooper Station, NY, NY 10003; FAAR, P.O. Box 21033, Washington, DC 20009; Women Free Women in

Prison, P.O. Box 283, Nyack, NY 10994; Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (Garden City, NY: Anchor/Doubleday, 1979) and, for a detailed discussion of the dumping in Third World countries of drugs even the FDA thought unsafe for American women, Barbara Ehrenreich, Mark Dowie, Stephen Minkin, "The Charge: Gynocide / The Accused: The U.S. Government," *Mother Jones* (November 1979); Beverly Smith, "Black Women's Health: A Syllabus," unpublished (I am grateful to Beverly Smith for sending me a copy of the syllabus and annotated bibliography.)

33. Daly's words have, I think, the impact of either flattering the woman who can easily understand them or degrading the one who cannot. Cris South, a working-class lesbian who is on the *Feminary* collective, writes: "I read only to the part where Daly gives her warning about 'Big Words' and I stopped. The statement infuriated and insulted me. The implication to me was that only those women able to understand 'Big Words' were worthy to read the book. (I have no objection to occasionally consulting a dictionary.) But I found Daly's words particularly offensive when I read that the words were written out of respect for 'big, strong women.' I don't feel that a woman's inability to understand 'Big Words' make her any less strong or intelligent. Daly's comments alienated me drastically from her whole message and, on certain levels, from her as any model of a 'feminist' theoretician. I put the book down for months, unable to resolve my anger in any way that would allow me to finish it. I did finally finish *Gyn/Ecology* but only very recently." (letter to the author, March 21, 1980).

34. Wallace Turner, "2 White Men Get 25 Years in Random Murder of a Black," *New York Times* (February 28, 1980), p. 16A.

35. Combahee River Collective, p. 365.

36. Nancy Hoffman writes in "White Woman, Black Women: Inventing an Adequate Pedagogy": "Only sometimes will your own anti-racism and your solidarity with other women protect you from representing the group oppressing black women"; *Women's Studies Newsletter*, vol. 5, nos. 1 and 2 (Winter/Spring 1977), p. 22.

37. Douglas, *off our backs* (November 1979), pp. 16-17, 20; Friedman, *Quest* (Summer 1979), pp. 40-52; Segrest, *Feminary*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1979), pp. 28-43.

38. See, for example, Muriel Rukeyser's "The Trial" (part 3 of "The Lynchings of Jesus") about the 1931 Scottsboro trial; Lillian Smith's essays in *The Winner Names the Age* (1978), edited by Michelle Cliff; Jo Sinclair's *The Changelings* (1955), as well as her political (and positive) depiction of Debby, the lesbian in *Wasteland* (1946).

39. Rich, "From an Old House in America," *Poems, Selected and New, 1950-1974* (New York: Norton, 1975), p. 243.

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*Chrysalis*, 1727 N. Spring St., Los Angeles, CA 90012 (\$4.50; \$13/4 issues).

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*Feminary*, P.O. Box 954, Chapel Hill, NC 27514 (\$2; \$5/3 issues).

*Feminist Studies*, Women's Studies Program, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742 (\$4; \$10/3 issues).

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## A SHORT READING LIST ON WOMEN/PEOPLE OF COLOR AND RACISM

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## Culture Making: Lesbian Classics in the Year 2000?

by Melanie Kaye

when beth hedges asked me if i'd write something on lesbian classics in the year 2000, i laughed. the concept of *classics* has for some time seemed to me one more way in which *they* get to be pompous and *we* get robbed of our own taste: what do you *mean* you don't like *Idylls of the King*? it's a *classic!* laughed—

and got intrigued. i thought of my favorite books—but what *would become* a classic? it seemed megalomaniacal to assume that whatever mechanism says *make it, get known, sell, be heard, get requested, reprinted, endure* would coincide with my personal taste.

so what is a classic?

\*\*\*

judgment.

the mechanism.

a classic is a book that stays in print?

who decides what stays in print, what gets remaindered, what makes it into paper, onto the supermarket paperback displays, back into hardbound collected works?

toni morrison's first novel—the *bluest eye*—is out of print; *sula* is available only in hardbound.<sup>1</sup>

alice walker's first novel—the *third life of grange copeland*—was out of print for 7 years (reissued 1977).<sup>2</sup>

come to think of it, how much of aphra behn, emily dickinson, christina rossetti, willa cather, gertrude stein, h.d., virginia woolf, etc., were out of print before the women's liberation movement?

besides, while few books stay in print, fewer still get into print in the first place.

so a classic is a book that at least gets published?

the masterpieces—mistresspieces—sisterpieces—the

language intervenes, throwing some inadvertent light on the subject—a book no one reads has no chance of becoming a classic, no matter how wonderful.

so if my book is printed and distributed and well-read and liked by many

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note: since in writing this i didn't use upper case letters, it seemed stupid to add them, sort of like wearing makeup for company. also, i decided to give full publication information for small press books, since these are less widely distributed; and for large press books to give only dates, since i don't feel like giving credit to businesses smart enough to make money off us.

people, it will become a classic?

printed by whom? distributed how? (take a moment to mourn the demise of WIND—women in distribution—which will seriously affect our question.)

but even if we assume the book gets printed and read, the answer is: sure, if those people who read and like it include an editor from doubleday, a critic from the *ny review of books*, several professors of literature at prestigious schools who will mention your book in their lectures and their books, include you on their reading lists and class syllabi, encourage their graduate students to write dissertations on you and on those around you, start sessions about you at the MLA where they have heated discussions about your imagery and fictional *persona*.<sup>3</sup>

*in fact, even if no one likes your book except for editors, critics, and professors, your book stands a good chance of becoming a classic.*

**(Does getting your own classics comic make you a classic?)**

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a historical digression, by way of explanation.

shakespeare in his own time was extremely popular, the best. his popularity occurred in the context of a popular theater, a whole audience accustomed to regular play-going, a “hot” audience with a shared and growing frame of reference, like the audience for rock in the late sixties, or (on a smaller scale) women’s poetry in the early seventies, exploding with mass energy and creativity. shakespeare’s popularity meant that many of his contemporaries were familiar with his work, language, ideation. thus elizabethan/jacobean culture—at least around london<sup>4</sup>—theater, language, literature incorporated his work so that he went on being familiar. the cultural web around him spun larger and he was part of it. he schooled the ears of those who shaped the language. he gave the story tellers his version of stories which interested him.

today his sentences sound “poetic,” while ben jonson’s—a gifted contemporary—seem peculiar, because jonson’s rhythms and even vocabulary are unfamiliar. the intrigues of *volpone* (one of jonson’s better plays) are harder to handle than those of *romeo & juliet*, who have at least on the level of stereotype passed into mainstream culture. so questions of “greatness” aside (including the question of why shakespeare *was* more popular than jonson), no one today approaches the work of shakespeare and jonson with an equal headset (shakespeare is another word for “great writer”: *who do you think you are, shakespeare?*; or familiarity (*volpone, volpone, wherefore art thou volpone?*)).

it’s not that a classic is necessarily *good*—what’s *good*? it’s that something large and encompassing grows from it. a classic is a book, a writer, chosen—and it is also an institution.

as an institution, a classic is hard to avoid. it will be crashed into here and there, openly or covertly. we breathe it. a signpost of a culture, or one of its common foods. a classic knits a connection among people of a culture, so that many many people can respond with a kind of intimacy and knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

and those who don’t respond, unfamiliar with the signal or reference? a classic in a given culture always has a supportive relationship to the culture and to those empowered by that culture.

that is, a classic may praise or critique—but never ignore—what the empowered think is important. it doesn't matter much what shakespeare says about heterosexual love and marriage, or the death of kings. that his plays ask us to obsess on these subjects is enough indication that male elizabethans (and contemporary anglos) take heterosexual coupling and royal deaths very seriously. furthermore, though marriage is considered an adequate conclusion for the majority of elizabethan plays (called comedies); and royal death ends most of the other plays (called tragedies); contemporary male anglo culture has managed to avoid the obvious question: what does it mean when people can envision only two possible ends to any story?<sup>6</sup>

“but,” says the innocent, she-who-trusts-good-will-triumph, the idealist<sup>7</sup> who buys the *cream* theory of greatness (greatness rises to the top, like cream on milk), “isn't it different with lesbians? none of us runs the *ny review* or random house; we aren't owned by shell oil; some (few) of us are college teachers but not all of us go to college. many of us have other, freer connections with the printed word. so won't *our* great works survive?

assuming they get written and published, that is.”

it's true that lesbian culture—like any culture that matters to people, if not suppressed and driven underground—thrives outside universities and other traditional institutions of cultural production and evaluation. we exchange, are inspired by, learn from, hear about each others' works in a variety of feminist publications, bookstores, word of mouth, women's studies classes, etc.

though we have often had to fight for visibility, as lesbians.

these feminist institutions exist because of the strength of lesbian feminist culture, just as the culture is nourished in and through these institutions. only because of this dynamic, nourishing relationship does the concept of a *lesbian classic* even arise.

but we should recognize some things.

to the extent that lesbian culture represents the experience, insights, values and interest of most lesbians, *it will have a combative relationship to those in power*—because lesbians, still, are hideously oppressed.

*rubyfruit jungle* doesn't change this fact, though it may just change a few minds, or give a bit of hope (at least to those white working-class lesbians who are perfectly brilliant, beautiful, untroubled by self-doubt and self-hate, politically astute in the face of massive mystification).

so lesbian culture—for it to be *ours*, belong to and represent most lesbians—will be antipatriarchal, antiracist and anticapitalist, one cultural edge of a revolution we require.<sup>8</sup>

*i* require.

a sign of the times: even among lesbians, the word *we* sounds presumptuous; the word “*revolution*” seems pretentious. these are political problems as much as linguistic observations.

this means that lesbian culture will always be in danger of repression, co-optation, and absorption in tricky ways<sup>9</sup> until such time as lesbians have control of our own lives.

a society that takes creative work as unseriously as the US<sup>10</sup> can always

tolerate a few clear thinkers, even revolutionary artists: put them on panels, anthologize their sappiest work. or isolate them, make them stars, interview them on TV, deprive them of the deep popular connection which fed their work in the first place and gave them support, information, and, above all, honest criticism. when all else fails, destroy their presses—or encourage them to destroy each other's presses—publish their books and don't promote them, buy film rights to their books and don't film them, or film and distort them.<sup>11</sup>

but apart from them, is the THEM in us, the daddy's good-girl, she-who-really-does-think-like-them. the fact: that whenever we are not consciously fighting against the hierarchies we were born into, we will imitate these hierarchies and reinforce the oppression of other women. but we can say this more simply; how many lesbian feminist publications are controlled by women of color? by women of working-class background or without college training? by women who are poor?<sup>12</sup>

white middleclass lesbian culture can ignore, coopt, or patronize poor lesbians and lesbians of color. this happens not mysteriously or through moral flaw, but through the facts of oppression. the less oppressed tend to have more access to money, education, and other resources required for cultural nourishment, production, and control; and to old-girl networks which influence such decisions as what gets printed, heard about, sold, who gets invited to speak at what college on which panel, who gets money to fly to the opposite coast to appear at which conference, who wins which fellow(sic)/ships and grants or gets teaching positions where.

the effect of this is much larger than the particular women who do and don't get to make a living off their creative work—though this is large enough.

it's a question of which lesbians will lesbian culture honor and support? whose experience will come to be represented in the books women will read years from now? which languages will be preserved—

the barbadian-brooklyn english of paule marshall's characters in *brown girl, brownstones*? the working class inflections of sharon isabell's *yesterday's lessons*?<sup>13</sup>

\*

if i taught everyone to talk, future generations would not find a brooklyn jewish accent unpoetic or comical or hard to understand.

but if someone from the british aristocracy schools our poetic sensibilities, my voice will *never* sound classic.<sup>14</sup>

\*

the questions extend to include, what kind of consciousness will women have when they pick up which books in which language representing whose experience? who will they *be*, choosing *great/not great*?

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when i got beth's letter i was in the middle of a book by maricla moyano called *beginning book*.<sup>15</sup> it had already been reprinted once, though i'd never heard of it before i picked it up in women's works, a bookstore in brooklyn.

which existed because of the women's movement; because there was/is a demand for women's books; because women realized that without our own bookstores, we'd be slighted.

on the back there was a quote from ti-grace atkinson. "i loved it. it's beautiful. i think it the most beautiful writing to come out of the new women's literature."

ti-grace—feminist theorist and leader. i know her name—her name is a name—because there has been a women's movement. her blurb asks me to read moyano in a context of feminism and rebellion. without a women's movement no one could have placed moyano's work in this context; there would have been no such context.<sup>16</sup>

so i bought the book, read it, liked it. it's a coming out story, with a childhood narrative, broken and juxtaposed against passages which seem to leap out of moyano's current (at time of writing) journal: process notes, wit, a lively perception, and, an emerging narrative of its own, moyano's abandonment of her male lover and commitment to a woman.

because the story of how we came to this silenced invisible unthinkable and obvious love is so central to who we are, coming out—commitment as well as discovery—will be a central event in our classics.<sup>17</sup>

in fact, whenever women matter to each other; or choose women; or reject and betray women with a consciousness of pain or necessity; we're looking at lesbian possibility, fulfilled or choked or somewhere between.<sup>18</sup>

on the first page, it says: "These writings were put together in Paris and New York in 1962. Nothing has been changed."

but the date of first publication is 1973. think how many works emerged from drawers and dusty boxes through the women's movement; so many writers out of the closet; so many dykes out of the closet into an open space cleared by others.<sup>19</sup>

when jan clausen concludes the title poem in *after touch*, "i am a lesbian," we know we are somehow providing protection for at least some women. when lorraine bethel and barbara smith write that one lesbian publishing in *conditions: five, the black women's issue*, felt the need to use a pseudonym, we know we have not provided enough protection yet.<sup>20</sup>

as the childhood story is told, as the father dies and is mourned, moyano concludes *beginning book*:

I have left Juan definitely. I left him on August 24, 1962. He is moving out of the loft this week. My books are still there and must be moved. About five days before the final fight, explosion with Juan, I had written to Francesca—the first attempt at reconciliation. Since then we have been writing back and forth. I called her on the phone there in Grenoble, through Patricia who had to go out and find her, and spent sixty dollars on that or more, which I payed with a check from TIME magazine and by hocking my typewriter.

I am very concerned with leading again a morally clean life, an orderly life. That is why somehow I feel it is almost a duty to offer myself whole, my life, to Francesca, with whatever painful implications or consequences that might have. If I love her, which I do, and if I love her sexually, which I have, I must offer her the full commitment of my love which is my life.

That I have never cared so irrefutably for another person, or had with them so satisfying or fascinating an exchange, is true. That it always leads, in me, to an urge to fuse further, to fuse finally, to fuse sexually brings in all the complications and is to the world (in which I live) morally reprehensible and "unhealthy." It must all be rooted in the almost total fusion I had with Mother as a child. So that I cannot conceive of that with a man, and if I do, begin to feel the emotional entrapment, the claustrophobia of being tied to a man. I felt often claustrophobic with Francesca, but that was out of frustration mostly, I think. I don't know. I don't know what will happen between us next, or what should. I also don't know how much the claustrophobia has to do with my blind fury, incapacity to be subservient to a man, to be the "second sex."

i quote at length for two reasons. because the passage—the mind at work/play—gives me pleasure

at least in part because i've been prepared by the incredible emergence of women writers via women's liberation to welcome new voices, to value clarity, accuracy, and honesty—because we need each other's accurate stories. (my entire graduate training made fun of the concept of "sincerity" in art.)

also i quote at length in order to introduce the readers of this essay to a book i liked.

as a woman with access to print, i can bring women's works into the larger circle of awareness.<sup>21</sup> i know that if moyano's book is widely read by lesbians, and loved, and used to inspire other writings; or is critiqued and responded to in that often useful way—that's not how it was, here's *my* story—then *beginning book* some 20 to 50 years from now may be considered a classic. and, conversely, if no one reads it . . .

in this way i exert some small influence on the making of lesbian culture. so do any of us with access to print, publishers (eyes or ears), or classrooms.

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in talking of classics, then, i mean who, what will come to seem central to who we become and what our culture becomes.

and we can't know these things yet

though we know that we will become partly *through* our culture; our classics will be "chosen" partly because *they* have made us become.

and we can suspect. adrienne rich's *women and honor: some notes on lying* filled such a need and has been taken instantly into the culture<sup>22</sup>—how many of us have given a new lover a copy, either to start things off right, or after the first big fight? a value: to be honorable with each other. a form: women and . . . susan griffin's *woman and nature*; a piece i wrote (for *SW* 9), "women & violence."<sup>23</sup> all of us asking to be read in a context of: let women be the lens on the world.

monique wittig's *les guérillères* seems another core work—the tribal voice ("the women say . . .") made possible—it seems—the collective voice in *woman and nature*, as well as the non-linear form of griffin's book and much of my

own writing and that of other women. so that although wittig's work seemed strange to many women when it first was getting passed around (early 70s), it seems less strange now.

nowhere is this process more evident than in the work of virginia woolf. . as women readers have articulated not just separate taste, a separate list of bestsellers, favorites; but also a developing network we can call culture, woolf's role in this culture becomes clearer, more obviously key. she wrote about textured lives, the secret currents between women, towards each other, against men, even against each other but always in terms of male and female. many of us have imitated/will imitate woolf to discover what she has to offer in the way of style and vision. and since so many women use woolf, her work becomes more familiar, "easier."

judy grahn, on the other hand, accessible from the start—language, subject, price—reclaimed the word "common" (a reclamation that continues to echo through our literature; rich's dream of a common language; myself, "are we ready to name / with a common tongue?"<sup>24</sup>) as her language honors the speech of ordinary women: "the common woman is as common / as a rattlesnake." has a sentence ever crackled so across a page?<sup>25</sup> tillie olsen's silences, broken; alice walker's mother's garden.<sup>26</sup> as long as we cherish the creativity of ordinary women and value what women themselves have valued (instead of depending on a patriarchal and snobbish art establishment to determine value for us), we center exactly on the passionately egalitarian vision named in "women's liberation."

now if those who control what gets passed on are antagonistic to this vision and therefore claim that grahn's language is flat and a bit rhetorical (instead of powerful and clear and incantatory, which is what i think); or that rich has lost something (clarity of form? compelling imagery) by bringing her work progressively towards clarity of thought, accessibility to the vast majority; or that walker has unfortunately fallen prey to white feminist manhating in her last two splendid articles in *ms*;<sup>27</sup> then rich, grahn, and walker may appear in literary history—if at all—as minor writers. and since "lesser" writers whose work connected with theirs will be excluded altogether, none of them will be read in a context of like-minded peers, and their work will seem eccentric rather than central; and will become marginal to the culture which passes on.<sup>28</sup>

conversely, if black and white feminists and lesbians confront—in life and in art—the substance of what is between us, historically and currently, separating as well as joining us, so that a genuine bi- or multi-racial antiracist tradition is incorporated into lesbian culture, then the relationship between meridian and lynn in alice walker's *meridian*; or that between lillian hellman and sophronia in *an unfinished woman*; will be explored as painful beginnings.<sup>29</sup>

or, when audre lorde tells a room full of women, many lesbians, many black women, though not so many of either as there should be, might be were the MLA not the MLA, "your silence will not protect you." tears shock my eyes;<sup>30</sup> and gloria hull writes "poem" *for audre*, which concludes:

Dear Eshu's Audre  
please keep on  
teaching us

how  
to speak  
to know  
that now  
"our labor is  
more important than  
our silence"

and this poem is chosen to introduce *conditions: five, the black women's issue*; we know we're in the presence of something classic. the invocation.<sup>31</sup> the passionate connection. the exhortation to speak.

similarly, muriel rukeyser, recently dead and one of our great poets, celebrating kätthe kollwitz: "What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? / The world would split open";<sup>32</sup> and louise bernikow picks up on this to title an anthology of women's poetry over 400 years, and one which makes a point of including women's blues, prison and work poems—as much truth as she could find.<sup>33</sup>

or *conditions: five* i have already referred to five times, a sign of its impact. the method of production—control by black women, massive solicitation of material including much previously unpublished writing (and writers), as well as the high quality of the gathered work—so that *C5* not only records the emerging black feminist/lesbian culture but has helped to evoke it—these things make *C5* a model for lesbian/feminist institutions willing to put their money where their mouth is: journals, anthologies, women's studies programs, presses, coffeehouses which host poetry readings, galleries where women show work. *off our backs* and *heresies* have published this year issues for and by women of color; these and *C5* and *azalea* will have been groundbreakers or one-shot aberrations depending on what happens next. we have seen again and again that what women—lesbians, poor women, women of color—need in order to be represented, is not special favors, but simply access to information, resources, and *space*. as asian, native american, and chicana lesbians, and lesbians in the new immigrant cultures—vietnamese, cuban, haitian, and those yet to come to this country—articulate their cultures, those of us with access to feminist resources can welcome the opportunity to move on over and expand our circle; or we have betrayed our best visions.

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if lesbian culture includes all possibilities among women, *lesbian* comes to mean very much the same thing as *feminist*—which is what lesbian feminists have often claimed, to the dismay of homophobes. as dolores noll pointed out some years ago, many dykes feel a clear need for a name that means "women who sleep with women"—how else do you know who won't put you down for wanting her? in fact, while love between women has been mocked, discouraged, and often punished, sex between women has been made unthinkable.<sup>34</sup> in light of this it's surprising how little we find in our art that's explicitly sexual, as if we're embarrassed by the *sexualness* of lesbian sexuality—oceans, flowers, caves, and revolution, ok, but *sex*—?<sup>35</sup> if we remember that some of our people lived—and live—sexless, in terror, we will be careful to ex-

pand protection for sexual freedom and honesty as we fight to rid our lives of horrible violent offensive porn, art, junk, and other things we don't want around. "to some people, our very existence is pornographic."<sup>36</sup> and one way to expand protection for sexual freedom is to assert it. if our culture supports and encourages explicit lesbian sex in our art, then explicitly sexual art and literature—tee corinne's work, for example—will perhaps replace exclusively floral interpretations of our cunts. june arnold's *sister gin*<sup>37</sup> will reverberate for us not only as a celebration of female love and middle-aged sexuality and integrity but also as a depiction of explicit lesbian sexuality; as will this incredible poem of stephanie byrd's:

I can feel it in my lips  
My ass moves towards warmth  
Press warmth upon my buttocks  
my breasts  
rub my crotch the lips  
I am warmed, hot water in a bath  
I can feel breath in my throat  
I choke up phlegm  
Lick my chest, the lips  
Dart in to make me choke again  
I can feel sight in my eyes  
Push sight into my eyes, the eyelets  
I see writhing eyelets clearer  
Eat me  
Eat me  
Eat me  
alive<sup>38</sup>

if we continue to self-define; to value solidarity (to revive another word with a slightly old-fashioned ring); "the courage to be there when another woman needs you";<sup>39</sup> "Any woman's death diminishes me";<sup>40</sup> then lesbians will read judy grahn's *a woman is talking to death* a bit the way the greeks—they say—sat around listening to homer. it will be key in our culture, not just because it is (let's face it) great, but because the values it embodies will be our cultural values—and because grahn will have helped to make them ours. to remember what we do with each other was called *indecent*. to redefine *indecent*.

Have you ever committed any indecent acts with women?

Yes, many. I am guilty of allowing suicidal women to die before my eyes or in my ears or under my hands because I thought I could do nothing, I am guilty of leaving a prostitute who held a knife to my friend's throat to keep us from leaving, because we would not sleep with her, we thought she was old and fat and ugly; I am guilty of not loving her who needed me; I regret all the women I have not slept with or comforted, who pulled themselves away from me for lack of something I had not the courage to fight for, for us, our life, our planet, our city, our meat and potatoes, our love. These are indecent acts, lacking courage, lacking a certain fire behind the eyes, which is the symbol, the raised fist, the sharing of resources, the resistance that tells death he will starve for lack of the fat of us, our extra. Yes I have committed acts of indecency with women and most of them were acts of omission. I regret them bitterly.<sup>41</sup>

## NOTES

1. morrison, *the bluest eye* (1970); *sula* (1973).
2. walker, *third life* (1970), in paper (1977).
3. the MLA, for that vast majority of lesbians who could care less, is the modern language association, a professional association of college teachers of language and literature; they hold a yearly convention at which jobs and reputations are sought. for the last several years, feminists and lesbians have had some (hard-won) programs at the MLA.  
louise bernikow's introduction to her anthology, *the world split open, four centuries of women poets in england and america, 1552-1950* (1974), gives a lively and accurate description of how literary history (the history of the literature of white upper and middle class men) gets made. bernikow's essay, incidentally, i'd call a classic, though at this point in the essay, it's begging the question.
4. just as now, a writer, even one of ours, who lives in NY, boston, SF, maybe LA, has more chance of impacting on the culture than one living in oshkosh.
5. for example: it's not just that the rolling stones wouldn't have named it "let it bleed" without the beatles' "let it be" (i'm indebted to page du bois for the observation and the parallel with elizabethan theater); it's also, what would "let it bleed" mean without the beatles' echo?
6. as with religious parallels of salvation and damnation. that contemporary culture for the most part values the "death" plays as higher art than the "marriage" plays suggests that the tragedies embody and were used to tutor us toward the assumptions of individualism and capitalism (*my* life and what's *mine* matters) and away from the (also sexist) assumptions of communalism (marriage means birth; life goes on). in more recent literature, the new blend that emerges as individuals feel way too powerless to matter, is the romantic story—where the individual matters, at least to one other person.
7. by *idealist*, i don't mean "visionary"; a visionary should be clear-sighted. i mean she-who-in-us-thinks-as-she-was-taught, in terms of essences; who sees reality as static rather than dynamic; who fails to recognize that what we think of as "great" is a historical phenomenon; that *we* are a historical phenomenon.
8. anti-imperialist as well; gertrude stein spoke perhaps more in-citefully than she intended: "Patriarchal Poetry is the same as Patriotic poetry" (excerpts from *patriarchal poetry* are reprinted in bernikow's anthology).
9. virginia woolf pointed out that dangerous books are often absorbed into the literary canon as "children's books"—she cites *gulliver's travels* and *moby dick*; i was assigned emily dickinson's "i'm nobody" in grade school, and along with all NY public high school english students, read cather and george eliot (50s and early 60s). think about lesbian books getting shunted off onto children!
10. that is, a racist society which makes a best seller of, e.g., baldwin's *the fire next time* must have a bizarre and indirect relationship to the content of creative work. one of the new perspectives brought to american culture by the liberation movements of the 60s and early 70s, including the women's movement, was that content mattered. the white male intellectual elite had revolted against meaning-in-art because (1) a new generation needed new theories to publish new books, create a new set of dogma, etc.; (2) they were suspicious of any political implications, especially possible tinges of communism (post-war mccarthyism); and (3) they knew somehow that *they* had nothing to say. see susan sontag, "on style," in *against interpretation* (1966), for an intelligent version of the argument against paying attention to content (if you're sensually [emotionally/spiritually/morally] dead, the priority is to *wake up*).
11. i don't spend a lot of time figuring out how powerful men think, and i'm not naive enough to think conspiratorial control of culture is this explicit or even conscious. still, it goes on almost as if it were.
12. i have heard only of *azalea*, a publication for lesbians of color; see below, discussion of *conditions: five*.
13. marshall (1959); isabell (1974), the women's press collective, 5251 broadway, oakland, ca. 94618. see judy grahn's "murdering the king's english," the introduction to vol. 1 of *true to life adventure stories*, ed. grahn (1978), diana press, 4400 market st., oakland, ca. 94608 (and the stories themselves, many of which are written in language usually excluded from literature).

14. the first time i heard muriel rukeyser read—she was a large woman with a loud NY jewish voice—my heart sang; i realized i needed to hear her voice as i had needed to hear women's voices against a drone of male ones. the implications of this bear on all oppressed cultures.

15. published by magic circle printing, spring-summer 1979 (1st pub., 1973); all comments, queries, orders to m. moyano, c/o war resisters league, 339 lafayette st., nyc 10012.

16. i owe this insight—that the blur on a book jacket helps to place the book in the context in which it was meant to be read—to blanche boyd, novelist, who was explaining why she especially wanted tillie olsen to write something for the jacket of her second novel.

17. some possibilities, favorites of mine: joan larkin's "some unsaid things," in *housework* (out & out books, 1975); olga broumas, "sleeping beauty," in *beginning with o* (1977); sandy boucher's "mountain radio," in *assaults and rituals* (mama's press, 4500 market st., oakland, ca. 94607, 1975).

18. i'm invoking barbara smith's classic, yes, insight that among black women writers, a lesbian perspective emerges when we look for the primary female connections, "towards a black feminist criticism," published in *conditions: two* (oct. 1977) and now as a chapbook for out & out books (1980).

19. many women's first books, published in the early 70s, were written at an earlier date (in some cases, much earlier: the mercator's world poems in jane cooper's *maps & windows* (1974) were written between 1947-51). but women's books had little context, support, or possibility for publishing. more recently grahn, editing *true adventure stories*, and bethel and smith, editing *conditions: five* (autumn 1979), actively recruited closet writers, with the result that many working class and black women writers "came out."

20. see also the editors' dedication in *amazon poetry*, eds. joan larkin and elly bulkin (out & out books, 1975; last i heard they were intending to put out a new expanded edition). clausen, *after touch* out & out books, 1975).

21. to demystify my particular access to print—or how it happens that beth asked me to write this: at the MLA lesbian caucus in 1974 i heard about, and then contributed to, the lesbian literature issue of *margins* which beth edited in 1975 (an instant classic in its own right).

22. rich, originally printed in *heresies 1*; as a chapbook by motherroot publications (214 dewey st., pittsburgh, pa. 15218; 1977); and reprinted in the volume *on lies, secrets, and silence, selected prose, 1966-1978. women and honor* was adopted without—as michaele pointed out to me—even a critical response, exploring those situations in which we *do* lie. sometimes the instant leap into usage encourages the development of jargon, almost pass-words. when women talk about "spinning" as a political activity without awareness that they're using a metaphor, i know something's a bit out of control (*spinning*, from mary daly, *gyn/ecology*, 1978); but there's no mistaking the need for our own namings.

23. griffin (1978). in a class i taught with paula king, we gave an assignment with interesting results: "after reading *women and honor*, keep notes in your journal for 3 weeks focused on *women and* \_\_\_\_\_ (you fill in the blank). shape these notes into some form." (*women as creative artists*, portland state univ. (oregon) women's studies, fall, 1978.)

24. "naming" in *we speak in code* (motherroot publications, 1980).

25. that these lines barely require citation shows how they've taken hold; but early lesbian publishing efforts should be recorded: "the common woman" was distributed in 10 ¢ mimeo'd copies; printed by the oakland women's press collective in the early 70s (undated), with *edward the dyke and other poems* for only \$1.25; and now appears in grahn's collected poems, *the work of a common woman* (diana press, 1978).

26. olsen, *silences* (1978); walker, "in search of our mother's gardens," *ms.* (may 1974).

27. walker, "confronting pornography at home—a fable," *ms.* (feb. 1980); "breaking chains and encouraging life," a review of *conditions: five* and a tribute to the courage of black lesbians, *ms.* (april 1980).

28. for example, tillie olsen tells of returning to writing after decades of abstinence and discovering that josephine herbst (an older contemporary and another rare woman writer on the left) was out of print and virtually unknown; in her day, tillie reports, jo herbst was as popular and as major a writer as hemingway, or odets. i have this information *via* elinor langer who's writing herbst's biography.

29. walker, *meridian* (1976); hellman (1969).

30. a talk given at the lesbians and literature panel of the 1977 MLA, december, chicago; panel entitled "the transformation of silence into language and action," published in *sinister wisdom* 6.

31. for example, i discover that mitsuye yamada and i each have written a poem "from tillie olsen": yamada, "homecoming" in *camp notes and other poems*, shameless hussy press, box 424, san lorenzo, ca. 94580, (1976) . (s.h. press deserves a tribute of its own, as does alta, its founder); kaye, "bastille day: mary moody emerson speaks" (which also celebrates mme), in *we speak in code*.

32. "kathe kollwitz" in *the speed of darkness* (1968).

33. bernikow, *the world split open*, see above.

34. see a. rich, talk on panel, cited above with lorde, published in *sw* 6.

35. i discuss some reasons for this in "sexual power" (fall 1979) which i hope will appear in the *heresies* issue on sexuality. it's interesting that most of our best-known lesbian-feminist writers were not out 10 years ago. what this means is that lesbian feminist literary culture—at least—is largely being defined by post-feminist lesbians; and the experience of dykes who came out prior to women's liberation is under-represented. i wonder if this downplaying of explicit sex in our culture is connected to this underrepresentation. on proofreading this essay, i suddenly realize i've neglected to mention *the ladder*!—one indication that i too am a post-feminist lesbian who didn't for years depend on *the ladder* as my connection to lesbian culture. barbara grier and coletta reid have edited three volumes gleaned from *the ladder*, all published by diana press in 1976: *the lavender herring: lesbian essays from the ladder*; *lesbian lives*; and *lesbians' home journal: stories from the ladder* (i especially love this last title). getting information on these volumes from my local santa fe library was very interesting; i discreetly, cowardly, asked for "stories from *the ladder*" and got back titles blazing the word *lesbian*." no more masks! no more closets!

36. michaelae, conversation, fall 1979.

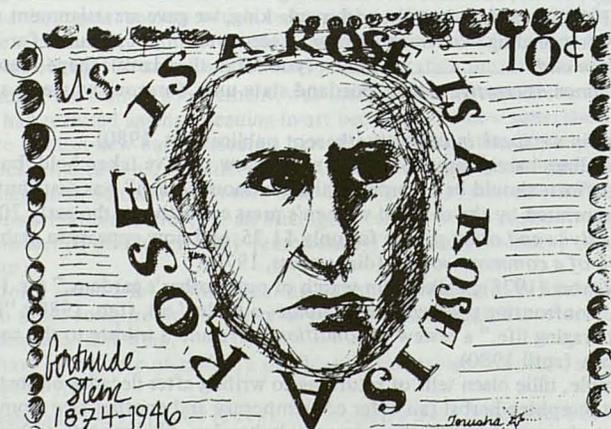
37. arnold, daughters, inc., 22 charles st., nyc 10014 (1975).

38. byrd, in *25 years of malcontent*, good gay poets press, p.o. box 277, astor station, boston, ma. 02123 (1976).

39. michaelae, defining womanhood at a woman's meeting, spring 1979.

40. a. rich, the last line of "from an old house in america," the last poem in *poems, selected and new, 1950-1974*.

41. grahn, *a woman is talking to death*, with graphics by karen sjoholm, the women's press collective (1974); reprinted in *the work of a common woman*.



# VIEWS



*Barbara Smith* photo by *Tia Cross*

**publishers**

**readers**

**writers**

**editors**



*Stephanie Byrd*

photo by *Susan Fleischmann*

## WHOM DO YOU WRITE FOR? A COLLAGE

*I write for people who feel that they are alone with their feelings. I also write for my friends, lovers and strangers. Right now I am writing for myself.*

—Stephanie Byrd

*My "audience" has been women, in most cases, women who identify themselves as feminists, but also women who respond to the Judaism or the suburban experience in my work. Finally, I write for myself, from a need to grapple with my sister, my friends, my lover, my job. Though I'm certain I want my work to reach BEYOND my own typewriter.*

—Robin Becker

*Basically, I've always written for myself. My lifetime attempt to make sense out of a situation that makes very little sense, i. e., life under white-boy patriarchy. When I began my journals my first year of college, I was creating a voice that understood somewhat better than I did the destructive chaos around me.*

*I write for other Black women who know first hand the chaos of which I speak and who are struggling in beautiful ways to change it. I also write for the Black women in my family who raised me and who did not have the chance to write themselves. Although I know that they would not necessarily agree with what I write, I am sure they would feel proud that I am a writer.*

—Barbara Smith

*I write for myself five years hence, as a critical guard against fine-sounding images and impressive general statements that will make no sense to me later. My mother keeps saying plaintively, "I wish you'd write one book I could give my friends." I suspect my ideal reader is one who is already giving my books to her friends. I have no ambition to be socially acceptable or politically correct since the job of fiction is to deal with what is rather than what ought to be.*

—Jane Rule

*I write for anybody who elects to read my work. I do this with the hope that the message I am trying to impart, for there is always one, will come through clearly, and cause readers to think more perceptively, try to initiate changes, and learn to accept different races, as well as individuals within them.*

—Ann Allen Shockley

*"If God is a curious green cat—then She shall see what She shall see." I write for a curious green cat, I think. I write for a part of the self. Since words can be received by different parts, I speak to a special part of the self—even when I am angry, remonstrating or some such—a self that is most pure, most honest, most sensuously aware or sensibly aware. An intermittent self, idealized perhaps but there somewhere in all us green cats. I'm pretty sure that in writing to this*

*self I don't write for women only. But if I write for men it is not to please them.*

—Jane Gapen

*I feel I know Renee Vivien deeply from her poetry and am obligated to try to translate her work as well as possible. This I do for Her and for Lesbians who do not read French, and for anyone else who enjoys beautiful poetry.*

—Margaret A. Porter

*A long time ago an English teacher warned my class that we shouldn't think about going into writing seriously unless we craved it as much as we craved food and sleep. Ha! I crave it as much as I crave vacuuming.*

*I honestly never intended to become a writer, but then I never intended to become a lesbian either, so it's interesting that one has followed from the other. I'm a writer because I'm a lesbian.*

—Ruth Baetz

*I write now for myself and for my sisters. If a few men can hear what I write, I am glad. Why do I still talk with men at all? (as in my book of dialogues, Remembering Who We Are). Because they sometimes put to me questions which I want to know my answers to. And because I do persist in believing that there is "a ghostly woman in every man" (as Adrienne Rich once wrote, though she now questions the term). It is a ghost unbelieved in by most men, of course. But when that ghost seems to me to put in an appearance, I talk with it.*

—Barbara Deming

*I write for other members of the various oppressed groups that I identify with. I write for women, primarily. Perhaps some of my writing is also for gay men. Among women, much of my writing is specifically for lesbians, some is specifically for black women, and some specifically for black lesbians. Sometimes I write a poem that is just for one other person. And of course I write for me, too.*

*I don't mind being read by people who are not members of the oppressed groups I am writing for, but they will have to make the effort. I'm not so concerned with trying to raise their consciousness as I am with providing material for us, for our culture, for our creation of a lesbian-feminist reality.*

—Becky Birtha

*I write for the woman who sent me a letter saying, "Your poems make me work so hard, but it's always worth it."*

—Susan Wood-Thompson

*I write for my daughter. I know no fiercer demand for truth than hers, and through hers, my students' and all our children's instinct and demand for it. I write for my responsibility to her: a strategy of words, that earth and life and difference continue.*

—Joan Larkin

## SORRY

we cannot accept  
inform you of our decision  
sorry your poem/s  
reason checked below

—we only liked 1 of the 5 poems you sent  
but sorry kept the others for months  
while we looked for our favorite  
it was eaten by the copy machine

—love is not a political tool  
does not sorry foster the revolution  
(suggestion: send it to “gay romance”)

—we feel this would be a better poem  
if you cut the first 2 and the last 3  
sorry lines of each stanza and changed  
the title to The Stripper

—it took a year for all the members of our collective  
to read your story sorry oh so sorry we  
wanted to publish it but by then only  
2 pages were left open in the book and your story  
was too sorry

—although we advertise for the not-so-perfect  
writing that shows potential we only publish  
marge, adrienne, olga, ellen, audre and joanna

—we do not accept poems that spell wimmin patriarchally

—we do not accept poems with non-standardized spellings

—we have an overabundance of lesbian shoveling snow poems

—because poetry is a losing  
business we have changed our format to give  
priority to the sorry booming  
sport of lesbian ice hockey

please let us  
sorry  
further help  
remember  
struggle for all of us

in sorryhood

The first lesbian book I ever read was *Patience and Sarah*. I was married at the time and had just had my second child. I was also in love with a woman who was engaged to be married. We called our love friendship. It was a deeply emotional and an extremely painful relationship because we could not recognize what we felt. Lesbian literature was hard to find on the library bookshelves. It was five years before I read *Rubyfruit Jungle*. I had moved to Florida, leaving behind that relationship which had been destroying us both.

I read *Rubyfruit* to my husband who enjoyed Rita Mae Brown's humor almost as much as I; but while he was laughing, I was slowly absorbing what Rita Mae was saying: "It's O.K., in fact, it's great!" Now *that* was a whole new thought for me! She used a word that I heard and knew the meaning of but had never thought of in relation to myself or what I felt—lesbian. She made me question my choice of mate and regret that I had not followed my desires five years earlier.

Two more wasted years passed and then the phone rang. With her first word it all came back, the pain and the fear and the love that I had tried so hard to forget. After a couple of months and ridiculous phone bills, she came for a visit. The years had taught both what we wanted. My search for words became serious as did my awareness of myself as a woman. Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood Is Powerful* gave me places to look for answers. One step led to another and slowly the hidden world of women revealed itself—lesbian centers, bookstores, resorts, bars, and other women's books, magazines, and newspapers. The discovery that I was not alone made me high for months. I remember the first time that I went to a Lesbian center. I called on the phone, and they said they had a bookstore. I was terrified, but I had to go. I do not know what I was afraid of, maybe of being thought of as a lesbian, or maybe of the women themselves. Whatever it was, I knew I had to get those books. I went and bought as many as I could carry. On the way home I was filled with a curious new feeling of pride. With my husband in the other room, I opened my treasures. Hungry for knowledge and understanding, desperate to touch this new world ahead of me, I read every word and wanted more.

The next year was one of doubt and certainty, confusion and discovery as my woman lover and I sorted out our lives and ourselves to finally "be together." I read *Sinister Wisdom* in the bathtub; I have read it while riding in the car at night by the passing street lights, on supermarket lines, and in bed with my morning tea. I have re-read every issue and every word. I read *The Notebooks That Emma Gave Me* while I waited four hours on line at the driver's license torture chambers, and I have read it while walking to the store. I have read like a starving person eats. The words gave life to my reality and block out this imaginary place where my body resides.

For years I read words that were not written for me, that ignored my very existence, blatantly and without apology; words that referred to all beings as

he, to all thought as *his*, to all people as *man* and to spirit and soul as *man's*. The effort to translate is beyond me at this point; I am deaf to their words as they are to mine.

I look at my bookshelf and see Sarah Aldridge, Rita Mae Brown, Barbara Grier, Coletta Reid, Andrea Dworkin, Mary Daly, Jane Rule, and Adrienne Rich. I read and with every word I feel a deepening gratitude for the women who have the courage, strength, and love to write these words for me. Their gift has given me the strength to think and feel and love as a woman, as a lesbian, and as a writer. Every time I read the words of a lesbian I say a silent thank you.

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## CRIS SOUTH

### FEMINARY: OUR NEW SOUTHERN FACE

*As Southerners, as lesbians, and as women, we need to explore with others how our lives fit into a region about which we have great ambivalences—to share our anger and our love . . . We want to provide an audience for Southern lesbians who may not think of themselves as writers but who have important stories to tell — stories that will help us fill the silences that have obscured the truth about our lives and kept us isolated from each other . . . We want to know who we are . . . We want to change women's lives.*

from the *FEMINARY* collective statement

You don't think of concepts being brought to life in the midst of fruit salad, tea glasses, and sandy bare feet, on the screened porch of a beach cottage. I have always imagined the "birthing" of new ideas as taking place in a more ethereal, glamorous setting and manner. Perhaps the new concept for *FEMINARY*, as a Southern literary journal rather than a local feminist publication, came into existence because of our own stubborn ways of being and doing; two native Alabamians, two native North Carolinians, all devotedly, doggedly Southern in our outlooks and attitudes. So four collective members, Mab, Susan, Minnie Bruce, and I, sat among the bowls of food, propped ourselves in fold-up chairs on the porch of a rented beach cottage, in the hot, humid summer air, and made the decision to radically change the depth and focus of *FEMINARY* in an effort to reflect and preserve this part of the country and our Southern sisters, to all of which we are so attached by both our collective heritage, and by our individual emotional ties.

The South has been an embroiled, tumultuous area from the days of plantations and slavery of the 1700-1800s, to the civil rights movements of the 1960s,

but in the midst of the stereotyping and problems, a powerful tradition of Southern womanhood is being seen and felt. And all of us on the collective have felt a strong need to pull the lives, the thoughts, the stories, and the visions of Southern women out of the murky, weak, scatter-brained image most people have of us. A point of reclamation is at hand for many of us and in spite of our own ambivalences about this area in which we live, we all feel an immense pride in and love for the women around us, our friends, lovers, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, cousins, sisters, for the stories we have heard and have re-told, for the particular sort of richness we have found in our own lives and backgrounds.

However, the fact that we had conceived of *FEMINARY*, a feminist journal with emphasis on lesbian vision, didn't mean the journal sprang into being easily. All of us, as individual women from varying backgrounds, had different approaches to the same loose concept. We shared experience only to a certain point and then our personal outlooks and ideas about Southern life and Southern voice diverged. Mab had an intense vision of a new Southern literature; Minnie Bruce was a devoted Southern rebel, breaking the silences head-on; Susan embraced the surfacing stories and bonds with calm, gentle caring; and I was searching for coherence and a sense of Southern herstory. We overlapped, moved apart, became excited, laughed, dropped with exhaustion, worried over money, worked long hours, held what felt like millions of meetings, and began to turn our very broad original concept into a more defined, clear reality. The women on the collective grew more securely defined as a group, caring for and supporting one another, becoming more accepting of one another's limitations, approaches, ideas, and ways of getting things done. We began to trade off the tedious parts of maintaining the magazine, such as coordinating meetings and production sessions, handling the business, and answering letters and queries. We began to organize the ever-mounting correspondence and details. During this time, Helen, a part-time collective member, reaffirmed her desire to continue to work as a fringe member, organizing the collating and mailings of each issue. And Deborah, a Black lesbian/feminist from Greensboro, joined the collective with fresh ideas and insights.

After nearly two years together as a collective, problems still exist that we haven't completely solved or resolved. Communication still breaks down occasionally; production often lags or stops completely; we are often behind schedule. We are constantly looking for ways to become better organized and to make the work on the magazine less pressured and difficult for each of us. I think, after watching all of us grow and change over the past couple of years, that we have constantly defined and redefined *FEMINARY* and our relationship to it. I have watched each of us examine and explore our own Southernness, from inside the magazine and from without. I believe we are still searching for radical new ways to represent Southern women and Southern vision. I have developed a more intense pride and attachment to this area and to the other women who live here. There is a certain downhome quality in each of us on the collective as well as with the magazine that we embrace and love, that we want to preserve.

Probably, if you asked each of us what we want the magazine to be and what *FEMINARY* means to us, you would still get six different answers, from six different Southern lesbian women. Our visions are still growing. We still want to know who we are.

## FELICE NEWMAN

Much of my writing was done early. I was the person I was to become, and I was hell-bent, pushing myself, willing my skin to mature, arrive, be done with it. I made my life in my parent's house, by the third floor window, on a steep European street where I could see a part, and beyond it, a sign flashing the weather atop the Gulf Oil Building in downtown Pittsburgh. I had much to say, and even talked aloud to myself as I wrote poems, an occasional essay, and many letters. But my written voice could not satisfy the insistence of my spoken voice, could not hold all I wanted to tell. I spoke out loud -- to anyone I could nail down for an hour. To Anne, whose activism persisted, year after year. To Anita, my teacher, my muse, my sweet friend kicked ass-forward out of the University. To Janet, my closest companion, whose discipline and craft I admired, at times envied. When I could not write anymore, I felt defeated, got sick, got lost. I'd disappointed myself, and this seemingly self-invoked failure was more than my stubborn heart could hold. I stopped trying, and my voice grew awkward from disuse. Each attempt to write poetry became more painful. Successfully, I wrote about *that*. It was something, at least. But more than a sign of productivity, that writing was an essay I am still quite proud of ("To Use the Using Usefully," *Motherroot Journal*, 1978).

Much of my writing has come from a need to be thoroughly effective, deeply known, understood. That Gulf Oil sign, flashing red and blue over my childhood bed, angered and inspired me. The fact of corporate life in Pittsburgh, headquarters of not only Gulf, but U. S. Steel, Alcoa, Heinz . . . was impossible to miss. New Directions, whose publications at 17 I thought were the height of the literary avant garde, at 18 I discovered was owned by Jones & Laughlin Steel, who also had a sign, along the parkway, over-looking the Allegheny or the Monongahela (I could never remember which was which). I must have been pure, because I believed in my tough will.

I have lived with Frederique, my companion, *copine*, my love, for the past year and a half. We are frighteningly alike -- at times impossibly so -- at times impossibly different. I feel challenged and comforted by her friendship, and once again, am driven to work. Together we are beginning Cleis Press, a feminist publishing company.\* In the spring, in between visits from Mary Winfrey, who is eager to help us finance our venture, and Roberta Arnold, whose passionate feminism could thaw the northern boundary waters, and Frederique's mother, Nina, who is coming from France—we will be pricing typesetting machines, dreaming of a printing press. We are finding skills gathered in us like fruit. We live so rarely in concert as now.

I am obsessed with the notion that for women to continue depending upon the corporate publishers will be disastrous. Let the men be left with their own self-indulgent creations, and let them go bankrupt. We are looking forward to publishing serious feminist work. For the past year, Alexandra Grilikhes and I have been corresponding about a collection of her poems

written to specific women artists -- Marina Tsvetaeva, Barbara Blondeau, Viola Farber, Simone Signoret, Carolyn Brown, her sister, Moira. I'm excited about this gathering of forms, this dismantling of something so arbitrary as "genre". Alexandra is a favorite poet; if I had a house and unlimited money, I would send her off, writing.

*Cleis Press welcomes fiction and nonfiction book manuscripts from feminists—especially lesbian feminists; send to Felice Newman, 3141 Pleasant Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN55408*

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## ANITA CORNWELL

### **To the Sisters of the Azalea Collective and Lesbians Rising—A Thank You Note for the Second Annual Third World Lesbian Writers' Conference on April 12, 1980, at Hunter College, New York, New York**

It has been said that no writer is ever any good until she finds the audience she wants to write for. To the layperson, I suppose that may seem somewhat arty or even faintly absurd. But to a serious writer, that assertion is absolute gospel.

One of the major problems facing the Black writer in America is the constant hassles that come from dealing with a white publishing industry. Because, as Alice Walker wrote in her foreword to Robert Hemenway's biography of Zora Neale Hurston, "America does not support or honor us as human beings, let alone as blacks, women, or artists."

Thus, it's not surprising that the Black Lesbian writer in this society is more often ignored or vilified rather than given even minimal acceptance. "Nobody wants to read about stuff like that," the popular wisdom declares. And so our ideas, hopes, and dreams remain buried or shamelessly exploited in the most insulting fashion.

Most of us know from long and bitter experience that listening to "the popular wisdom" is at best a losing proposition. But still, how is one to know the other side of the story when that aspect is almost completely submerged?

Consequently, it was with both anxiety and great anticipation that I accepted your invitation to be a member of the panel discussion at your conference along with Candice Boyce, Linda Brown, Michelle Cliff, Joan Gibbs, and Audre Lorde.

But even before the panel discussion began, I had received my first major surprise when a Sister greeted me with, "It's so good to meet you. I've enjoyed reading your work for years."

Then, noting the amazed expression on my face, the Sister went on to say that she wasn't too surprised by my reaction. That often she had thought of writing to a Sister whose work she had admired, expressing her appreciation, but had refrained from doing so, fearing she might be regarded as something of a bore.

During the panel discussion, I tried to elaborate on the idea that no writer ever considers the thoughtful reader a bore when she tries to express her feelings regarding a certain work.

But, of course, the highlight of that session was the stirring message from novelist Ann Allen Shockley, read by the poet Audre Lorde, which urged us to create and promote our own "publishing modus operandi, markets and readership. . . . The time is ripe, the hour is here . . ." she reminded us.

The final shock of pleasure came for me that evening with the Sisters at Salsa Soul where we had gathered to read our work, eat, and dance far into the morning hours.

I had casually given one Sister a batch of my work—that I had hastily gathered and brought along on second thought. And when I returned to that side of the lounge, I could hardly believe my senses when I saw several other Sisters earnestly reading those tattered copies as though they were indeed food for the soul.

The readings that night were truly inspiring. Perhaps one of the most poignant presentations was the dramatization of the events leading up to the suicide of a fourteen-year-old Sister, by Sapphire and Carletta Walker.

To sum up, that was a day and night I shall always be grateful for because I was given the most precious gift a writer can receive, the knowledge that she is not alone.

In the future, whenever doubts assail me and I think, "Well, who the hell gives a damn if I never put pen to paper again?" I will remember the *Second Annual Third World Lesbian Writers Conference*, and remind myself, "*They care.*"

## conditions: five the black women's issue

Available August, 1979

*Conditions* is a magazine of women's writing with an emphasis on writing by lesbians. *Conditions: Five* is an issue devoted entirely to writing by Black women, guest edited by Lorraine Bethel and Barbara Smith.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES (three issues): regular, \$8; students and unemployed, \$6; supporting subscriptions, \$15, \$20, \$25; institutional, \$15; single issue, \$3. Overseas air-mail, add \$4.80/subscription, \$1.60/single issue. Back issues still available.

CONDITIONS, P.O. Box 56, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, NY 11215.

# LINDA J. BROWN

## Dark Horse: A View of Writing and Publishing by Dark Lesbians

When I was asked to pen something on writing and publishing by dark lesbians<sup>1</sup> for *Sinister Wisdom*, one of the first things I did was to fish thru my stacks of books for the copy of the first issue done by them (also edited by Beth Hodges) on lesbian writing/publishing. Thinking that this was a good way to begin, by seeing our (dark lesbians') partial literary growth in the last four years (the issue was put out in 1976), I leafed thru the many pages, searching for words.

On the first page (after titles and introductions), was Audre Lorde's poem "The Old Days" speaking reverently, graciously, of foundations and beginnings. Later, past many pages, Audre's comments were also included in an interview.

Were it not for Audre, I thought, dark lesbians would have had no place in the issue.

I "came out" as a lesbian in the fall of 1975; as a lesbian writer shortly after. I've written most of my life, but had not focused my style . . . energies . . . message . . . responsibilities . . . to any particular thing, until that time I finally focused my self. In 1976, when the issue was published, I was penning my first thin lines of love poetry to womyn.

During these past four years, dark lesbian writers—once hardly visible right in front of our own faces—have made a definite impact on womyn's literature. I don't quite know where to begin to tell about dark womyn who write and publish their work. Happily, there are many different avenues to walk down.

I would use, as my first priority, dark womyn who are *lesbians* who are writers. This is of major importance to me, as I feel we are the hardest to see. There are many dark womyn writers whose work appears in various places, but we're often left wondering whether or not a particular woman is a lesbian. As being a lesbian in our society today (still) is not an accepted fact of life—and as dark womyn are already the targets of the *most serious* oppressions aimed at any segment of society—it stands to reason that we may be the least eager to present ourselves as lesbians. Or to present that part of our work which is woman-identified. Herstorically (as well as historically), dark lesbian writers have not been recognized. Not coming from the privileged roots of the early white lesbian writers, dark womyn had to struggle—to write and live—as dark people and also as womyn. Perhaps the struggle to also write as open lesbians was too great. That's why it's important to me, now, to gather and document—promote and celebrate—ourselves as dark lesbian writers. It's

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A "dark horse" candidate in the political arena is one who comes from behind, unexpectedly building support, ultimately winning the race.

important for me to work with a new kind of support network. I feel that dark lesbians who are writing today should keep their lesbian perspective in their work, regardless of what they're writing. It's important that we don't "disappear."

While it may be easier, nowadays, for dark womyn to write, the politics of publishing remain another matter. Dark lesbians generally have little or no resources (\$\$\$, presses, distributors, etc.) to produce our own work. Generally and traditionally, dark lesbians have had their work published in places where other people have had the physical, artistic, and political control.

In the past few years, some existing womyn's and lesbian-oriented publications have produced "special" issues devoted to the work of dark womyn. The work that has been featured in these "special" issues has been wonderful to see and to read, but what usually follows is nothing. By that I mean, after the issue has been circulated (and they sell well, as people are interested these days in what dark womyn have to say), the womyn whose work is used are rarely heard from again. The publishers of the various magazines, don't retain commitments to the dark womyn writers: not the commitment to publish their work again, or to share any profits (\$\$\$ or otherwise) with them. These publishers seem to feel they have "done their part" by producing the "special" issue in the first place. But nothing really changes.

Dark lesbians are beginning to turn to self-publishing. Many are producing their work by simple means (offset, mimeographing, xeroxing) and distributing the works themselves to womyn's bookstores and throughout the lesbian community.

As a person (and a writer) who generally works outside of existing, traditional structure (as they usually don't relate to me as who I am), I feel it's important to make and support our own institutions: power originating from self-definition and determination.

I think most dark lesbians write about dark lesbians—what it means to be; what it feels like; what we think, see, do, want, feel. . . . This fact is tremendously supportive to me. It speaks loudly of cultural celebration and identification; with no imitations.

Poetry, following our oral and rhythmic traditions, is what dark lesbians are writing most of these days. The imagery, tone, color, and freedom of poetry may appeal more at this time to dark womyn than other styles of writing. Our cultural and linguistic traditions have deep roots in poetic style.

Performing written work (readings, theatre) is also an area where dark lesbians are heavily concentrated. For me, there is little to compare with seeing womyn's words come alive thru their voices and bodies: the excitement of combining the written, oral, and visual into one goes beyond the definitions of art or performance—letting us become celebrants of the total experience.

However, the performing aspect of dark lesbian literary achievements is often praised while the literary merit is ignored. I've often heard womyn lauding the performance of a particular group or individual with words that have a condescending twist, that play heavily on racist stereotypes of dark people being good only at "dancing and singing" (or having to do with our sense of "natural rhythm").

While poetry and performances may be the easiest things to see right now, there are a substantial number of dark lesbians who are novelists, critics, journalists, political theorists, and playwrights (who, interestingly enough, don't receive a lot of recognition in the womyn's community—even tho it is *their* plays being performed) doing major work in these areas. Fine, inspiring, beautiful work.

But it's my feeling (from being a novelist and journalist myself; also from talking with other womyn who are novelists and journalists) that we work primarily in solitude. There aren't (to my knowledge) support groups for dark lesbians (or white lesbians, for that matter) who do this kind of writing.<sup>2</sup>

Also, Ann Allen Shockley (*Loving Her*)<sup>3</sup> is the only dark lesbian—who admits to being so—I know who has *published* a novel about lesbians, or anything else.

It's important here to understand some more of the politics of publishing for dark lesbians. To publish work, especially a "novel-length" publication, costs \$\$\$ (for typesetting, printing, graphic & layout work). In order to get the work out, you must have a good distributor (to contact bookstores, to collect and pay you your fees) or you must have the time, knowledge, and resources to do this yourself. Most dark lesbian writers work full time at another job in order to eat, pay rent, stay clothed. The economic situation of dark people (here, as well as in many parts of the world) dictates this as a way of life.

So there is little or no time to undertake the production and distribution of a *long* work.

In most cases it's necessary to solicit someone to publish the work for you. There don't seem to be many offers made to dark lesbians to do this.

Also, understand the politics of having to (in most cases) give up control—artistic and otherwise—of your work to someone who possibly doesn't understand what you are saying. I (and other dark lesbian writers I know) have had a substantial number of articles, etc. accepted for publication, whose major body has ended up on the floors of editing rooms, edited by various publishers for "clarity."

The network among dark lesbians who write and publish their own work is at its very beginning stages because the *concept* is still all too new. Being an "out" lesbian who writes womon-identified material, and then taking that writing and publishing it yourself (or in such a way that guarantees you the artistic, political, and financial control over your own work) are things that dark womyn have just begun to explore. Many womyn (dark and white, alike), upon catching a piece of news of the network in the air, are understandably hungry for more information of and more voice from it. But, oftentimes, supplying the information or documenting the voice is not a simple matter. In attempting to gather things together about ourselves as writers and publishers, I have met obstacles that cannot be overcome or dealt with in short spaces of time. One is the reluctance of womyn to be "out" about who they are as lesbians, and so they don't want their names revealed, although they may *sometimes* feel safe exploring themselves in a particular small community or circle of friends where trust has already been established. But for many womyn the thought of nation-wide (or even city-wide) exposure is still very

frightening. This is particularly true for writers who are working in isolated situations. Even when there are a substantial number of womyn working together in a particular place, often things like financial limitations and not being able to locate sisters in other areas, make it hard to continuously build the network.

I would urge all sisters to seek out one another and send information out to others about yourself/your group. Hopefully, someday in the near future there will be a network of dark lesbians that can begin to put together and distribute information/resources pertaining to dark lesbians who write and publish.

I would also like to encourage womyn to avoid the pitfalls of what I call "star-making" and "star-tripping." This is the promotion of one womyn's/group's work over another. Often, true to the "american way," the womyn who are already well known are the only ones who receive any support (the ones whose readings are well attended, or whose books are bought, or whose work is published). I would remind womyn that support is a necessary thing every woman needs to grow, to work.

Some writing and performing groups and work collectives *have* been formed among dark lesbians to deal with the different aspects of writing/publishing, and to support our own work. The list:<sup>4</sup>

#### *Writing and Performing Groups*

*Naps*, Black lesbian performing ensemble, contact Donna Allegra, 60 East 4th Street/no. 18, NY, NY 10003.

*Flamboyant Ladies Theatre Co.*, 135 Eastern Pky/8K, Bklyn, NY 11238.

*Study Group* on Black lesbians, contact Brooks, c/o LHA, Box 1258, NYC 10001.

#### *Political Groups with Newsletters/Position Papers*

*Lesbians of Color Caucus* newsletter, *Lesbians of Color*, LCC, 1824 -12th Avenue, Seattle, Washington 98122.

*Lesbians of Color* newsletter, *Lesbians of Color*, Box 5077, San Diego, CA 92105.

*Salsa-Soul Sisters*, 3rd world gay women's organization, newsletter *3rd World Women's Gayzette*, contact Candice Boyce, editor, 41-11 Parsons Blvd./no. 616, Flushing, NY 11355.

*Combahee River Collective*, 3rd world lesbian feminists, contact Beverly Smith, 149 Windsor St./no. 3, Cambridge, Mass. 02139.

*Committee for the Visibility of the Other Black Woman: The Black Lesbian*, contact CVOBW, c/o Brooks, Box M564, Hoboken, NJ 07030.

*National Coalition of Black Gays*, proposed newsletter, NCBG, Box 548, Columbia, MD 21045.

#### *Publications*

*Azalea: a magazine by and for 3rd World Lesbians*, writing, graphics, photos by 3rd World Lesbians, published quarterly:

306 Lafayette Avenue, Bklyn, NY 11238

314 East 91st St./5E, NY, NY 10028

1000 Grand Concourse/7B, Bronx, NY 10451

*Jemima: From the Heart*, poems by the Jemima Writers' Workshop members, Yvonne Flowers, 271 Sullivan Pl., Bklyn., NY 11215.

*Other Publications* (not published by dark lesbians, but including their work)

*Brown Sister*, publication by dark womyn, includes some writing by dark lesbians, Brown Sister, Schneider College Center, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Mass. 02181, quarterly.

*off our backs* "special issue by & about wimmin of color," produced by the *Ain't I a Woman?* collective, a collective of womyn of color, vol. 9, no. 6, June 1979, includes writing, photos, art by lesbians of color, oob, 1724 20th St. NW, Washington, DC 20009.

*Heresies: 3rd World Women*, issue 8, includes writing, art by 3rd World womyn, including some work by lesbians, editorial collective of dark womyn for this issue, Heresies, Box 766, Canal St. Station, NY, NY 10013.

*Conditions: Five, the Black Women's Issue*, includes writing by Black lesbians, edited by Black lesbian-feminists Lorraine Bethel and Barbara Smith, Conditions, Box 56, Van Brunt Station, Bklyn, NY 11215.

*Dyke* (not publishing anymore) special issue on ethnic lesbians, no. 5, Fall 1977, includes some writing, art, info by and about 3rd world lesbians. Tomato Publications, 70 Barrow St., NY, NY 10014.

#### *Individual Self-Published Writers*<sup>5</sup>

Joan Gibbs, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, poetry and a prose piece, February 3rd Press, NYC, 1979, J. Gibbs/306 Lafayette Ave./Bklyn, NY 11238.

Robin Christian, *Lady, These Are for You*, poems, NYC, 1978, R. Christian/314 East 91st St./NYC 10028.

Rose Marulanda, *Toni; A New Day; Death*, poems published in small booklets, NYC, 1974, R. Marulanda/1433 Coney Island Ave./Bklyn, NY 11230.

Linda Brown, *To Be More Real*, poems, NYC, 1976; *Kiwi*, journal pieces, NYC, 1978, L. Brown/314 East 91st St./NYC 10028.

I have been fortunate (perhaps privileged) in being able to do a lot of my own work, and to find other dark sister-writers whom I can work with. For a time I was a member of the Jemima Writers' Workshop—a group of black lesbian writers in the NYC area who came together to do work around writing and reading our material.

Presently, I am one of the editors of *Azalea: a magazine by and for 3rd World Lesbians*. We publish quarterly-(articles, fiction, poetry, commentary, reviews, graphics, photos) and have been for a little over two years. We use an alternative structure; working collectively and rotating the editorship with each issue to insure the division of work and the sharing of skills and the avoidance of unchecked power. Our editorial policy is structured to allow all dark lesbians an opportunity and space to have their work published. We print all things we are sent by dark lesbians (except of course those things that may degrade us as dark womyn). Printing, layout, and distribution are done solely by the collective, so we have maximum input into publishing the work of dark lesbians.

Also, I have published two small books myself—one poetry, *To Be More Real*, NYC, 1976; and the other a book of journal excerpts, *Kiwi*, NYC, 1978. I am currently preparing a book of short stories, *The Rainbow River*, that will be released at the end of May 1980.

In closing, I would like to thank all my dark lesbian writer sisters for the

work you're doing. Thank you for being there: a tangible force to identify with and learn from; a well of support I (and I'm sure so many others of our sisters) desperately need to continue to be strong. To do my work. To be who I am.

the shape  
long un-identifiable  
has come into focus  
clearly . . .  
this is the year for victory  
for coming into our own  
writing our own poems  
knowing our herstory.<sup>6</sup>

#### NOTES

1. I prefer the term "dark lesbians" to "3rd world lesbians" because I feel it more accurately speaks of who we are in this society, this country.

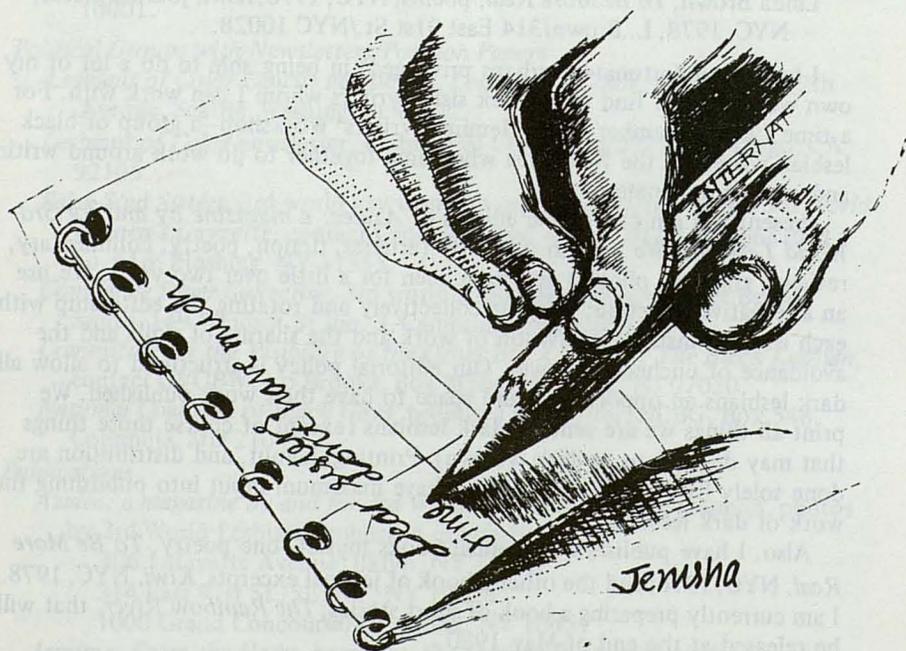
2. I am constantly seeking feedback and conversation about my work. I'd appreciate your comments on this article. Please write: L.J. Brown/314 East 91st St., 5E/NY, NY 10028. Thanks.

3. Ann Allen Shockley, *Loving Her* (Avon), 1978.

4. All references listed are based on my own knowledge (which is admittedly limited, me being centered in the northeast, in NYC). There may be other groups forming as I write this. The network is new and developing.

5. Again, very limited, based on my knowledge of local womyn.

6. from "another poem for the victory of women," in *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* by Joan Gibbs, February 3rd Press, New York City, 1979.



# REVIEWS



*Six Contributors to Conditions: Five l. to r., standing: Hillary Kay, Barbara Smith, Donna Kate Rushin, Fahamisha Sharriet Brown; l. to r., sitting: Beverly Smith, Brenda Haywood photograph by Susan Fleischmann*

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A review of *Conditions: Five, the Black Women's Issue*, coedited by Lorraine Bethel and Barbara Smith, 1979. Available from *Conditions*, P.O. Box 56, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215, \$3.00.

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Reading *Conditions: Five*, I felt there was particular significance in the arrangement, especially in the placement of the opening pieces, both by Gloria T. Hull.

In "Poem" Hull raises an issue that is at the core of the Black woman's existence, that is, silence. Why are we silent? Because of our heritage and present existence, we are silent out of fear—fear of being looked at too closely, and thus being found lacking, fear of being looked at wrongly and thus being misunderstood, fear of being looked at at all, and thus becoming visible. Visibility is not easily accepted when one is not considered the "norm." But Black Lesbians are, and must remain, visible in order for our heritage to be maintained.

Hull states that "'our labor *is* / more important than / our silence.'" The Black Lesbian writer needs to keep writing because of the scarcity of published work available even approximating her true existence. Hull's essay "Under the Days" gives an example of what happens when a writer, out of fear of visibility, cannot (or will not) write fully from herself.

"Under the Days" could have been written about any number of Black Lesbian writers. It is about Angelina Weld Grimké, a Black Lesbian who lived and wrote in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thwarted by her race and sex, stifled by her sexuality and inability to express it openly, her creativity was crippled. Her work was never able to hold its true meaning. It was never fully expressed or understood. Because she had to hide behind innuendos, her work was muted, melancholy, and many of her pieces she never dared try to have published because of the obvious woman-identified subject matter. Eventually, she ceased even trying to produce work.

Hull's essay and poem are aptly placed at the beginning of *Conditions: Five*, almost in explanation of why this issue is so badly needed: to help end the silence of Black women, to help make Black Lesbian writers more visible. *Conditions: Five* shows that there are Black Lesbians alive and writing and talented enough to be read.

Though there is a lot of poetry, I didn't find this imbalanced the book.

The prose poem "The Sisters" by Alexis de Veaux is one of the most touching and erotic woman-plus-woman stories I've read in a long while. This poem is lyrical, magical, titillating. It shows two women loving each other within the limitations of their environment. There is so little material by Lesbians dealing with the sensual, romantic part of Lesbian life and love, one begins to feel that we forget that our feelings for each other are not purely political.

In the poem "Among the Things That Use To Be" Willie Coleman looks at beauty parlors from a different point of view: "Lots more got taken care of / than hair / we came together / to share / and share / and share." Coleman's

language is simple and direct. She looks at a very counterrevolutionary place as a potential setting for fostering change. What better place for a revolution than a beauty parlor where we Black women gathered because of our dissatisfaction with our non-European looks. Now we are proud of our naps, but we still do not use our gatherings to foster revolution.

*Conditions: Five* includes journals, essays, fiction, reviews. The inclusion of song lyrics is unique. Each song deals with different issues of being a woman, from the differences in our lifestyles to our need to come together as people sharing the same experiences.

The most inspiring piece in the book is Lorraine Bethel's poem "What Chou Mean *We*, White Girl?" It is a scathing reproof of the blatant racism-disguised-as-feminism that exists in the Feminist community. Bethel hits so many sore spots in her poem, I'm sure she has gotten plenty of flak as well as pats on the back because of it. The essence of the poem is expressed in these lines: "We're not doing that kind of work anymore / . . . letting lesbian/ feminist racial transvestites / . . . with no libations for black female spirits / pick our brains steal our culture, style, identities / for free or below the minimum wage . . . / while we wonder where the next real job . . . / the *first* car . . . / are going to come from."

This sentiment is the main reason Black women need to band together to help build up some strength so we may, in the future, not *have* to have a 'Black Women's Issue' in order to show people we are around. There would be no need to be legitimized by anyone before we are taken seriously.

*Conditions: Five* is an important literary work that, because of its contents, origins, statements by and about Black women, should be read by everyone who feels she (or he) *knows* what Black Lesbians are about. It shows Black Lesbians for the diverse people we are with a multitude of talents and ways of expressing those talents. This is just one step in the journey toward finally ridding ourselves of the silence pervading our existence.

—Ruth Farmer

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A review of *Mother, Sister, Daughter, Lover: Stories by Jan Clausen*, The Crossing Press, Trumansburg, N.Y. 14886, May 1980.

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Jan Clausen is best known to many of us as a poet. Now, with the publication of *Mother, Sister, Daughter, Lover* she will undoubtedly become just as highly thought of as a short story writer.

Clausen's voice is still the expressive tongue of the poet, equally effective whether she is describing a ten-year-old girl or a borough in New York City:

. . . she is wearing a tube top the color of those violent pink artificially flavored ices you buy in pizza stores . . .

Behind her is Brooklyn, a habit, a tropical nightmare she takes for reality, a street of heat and heroin, ailanthus, open hydrants and women in advanced states of pregnancy pushing strollers. (from "Children's Liberation")

The nine short stories in this collection are about lesbians: lesbians and their children, their lovers, their friends, their sisters and their mothers. Most of the stories are set in New York City. We meet street-wise women here: women who know judo and attend political demonstrations; women who know how to cope with stubborn landlords and with unemployment offices; women who are invited to "alternative" publicity parties in fashionable SoHo lofts. But these stories reflect the reality of the lives of non-urban lesbians as well. We may not all be lesbian mothers living in Brooklyn walk-ups but we have all been daughters and many of us have sisters, friends and lovers.

Four of the stories deal with the fragile, ever-shifting relations between mothers and children; specifically between lesbians and their own or their lover's daughters. "Daddy," with its deceptively simple style, could almost be a model for the "Stories For Free Children" section of *Ms.* magazine. But it is only on a superficial level that this story can be read as a modern-day tale for children. The words may appear to be licking at you, but in fact they are biting you to the bone. This is a painfully brutal representation of the reality of a divorce, with the child struggling to ride a ridiculously unbalanced seesaw.

"Children's Liberation" tackles the difficulties a daughter faces in accepting her mother's lesbianism. Lisa, from the self-righteous vantage point of the young, desperately seeks "normalcy" for herself and for her mother, Chris. The two women are locked into a painful battle. Chris has a vision of "little apartments all over the city, single mothers trapped in there with their kids, like one of those tortures where people are shut up with rats. Except in our case it's mutual." And Lisa, from the depths of her desire to be like everyone else, cries out, "Other people's mothers aren't lesbians. Why do I have to have a fucking lesbian for a mother." Again, as in "Daddy," we are not given a prettied-up ending: the daughters of Amazons may not be ready to take up the shield themselves . . . not yet.

I was surprised at how easy it was to pick up the rhythm of the continuous, fragmented sentences that Clausen uses in "The Warsaw Ghetto," a story which records a day in the life of a non-biological lesbian mother. I found myself re-reading parts of this story, aware that I'd overlooked something special by treating this as if it were linear narrative. There are probably more examples of obvious poetry here than in any other story in this collection. One of my favorite lines is: "Back in bed safe with her hair her warmth her cunt wet the fact that she loves me i touch gentle but later knead the flesh knot like dough it swells tough resilient under my hand."

"Today Is the First Day of the Rest of Your Life" traces the actions and thoughts of Alice, a lesbian who lives in a Brooklyn railroad flat with her nine-year-old daughter, Jackie. "I am myself," Alice thinks upon waking; but then she faces a day in which she must constantly weigh her own needs and desires against the demands of others. She wonders what would happen if, for just one day, she did precisely what she wanted. ("No one would ever speak to me again, that's what.") Her relationship with Jackie is portrayed with realism and sensitivity. Alice lives through the bleak moments of the early morning. ("Nothing is so dismal as eating breakfast with children . . .") and progresses to more hopeful thoughts: "I manage; I guide; we pass through

the moments of anger, misunderstanding, on the other side come together. It will be all right."

"Depending," "Blood/Milk," and "Thesis: Antithesis" are each concerned with various issues of lesbian politics. "Depending" portrays "single" lesbians who are plagued with questions like "... whatever happened to simple friendship?" and complain about the incestuous quality of lesbian communities, wondering "where the others are in this infernal web of relationships." The action of "Blood/Milk" takes place at a party for Nadine Grossman, a feminist writer whose "confessional" novel has just been published by Random House. Some women have come to celebrate the author's "womanenergy" and others to condemn her commercialized exhibitionism. We view the party, complete with self-conscious feminist ritual, through the eyes of Nadine's former lover: ("She used to take vacations, ... I was one of her vacations.") In both "Depending" and "Blood/Milk" Clausen demonstrates her finely-honed sense of humor. She never gives way to cruel put-downs but she *does* point out the absurdities we are so often faced with: lesbian dances where you find yourself dancing with your ex-lover's ex-lover; endless and heated discussions about "big names" who have sold out; face-to-face encounters with former lovers at political demonstrations or crowded parties.

Although I recognize it as an ambitious and important piece, "Thesis: Antithesis" seems to me the least successful of these stories. It is presented as a pseudo case-study: a "political" rather than a "personal" interpretation of a death of a friendship. The "narrator's" use of a self-imposed objectivity and sense of distance prevented my feeling any real investment with the characters.

The final two stories, "Yellow Jackets" and "Three-Part Invention," are concerned with biological families: families that have nothing to do with chosen alliances and allegiances. These stories are about birth-connections that bind with invisible and permanent ties. Reading them is like looking through another family's photograph album: an album that has fallen to the floor, randomly scattering all the snapshots. Although it will take time to make sense out of the images, you somehow know it will be worth it.

In "Yellow Jackets," seventy-seven-year-old Laura Biehler discusses her family: her dead mother, husband and son; her middle-aged daughters; her confusing, often exasperating granddaughters. Clausen involves us so fully with the characters that it's disappointing when the story comes to an abrupt end. I was left wanting to know more about everyone. In some ways "Three-Part Invention" continues where "Yellow Jackets" leaves off. The names are different and the "photos" may even be of different women. But we are once more enmeshed in the inter-dependencies of blood-ties. The three sisters in this story run along parallel tracks that intersect only occasionally. They would probably never be friends, and would certainly never be "sisters-in-the movement." And yet their relationship is such that each one's life somehow defines the reality of the others'.

*Mother, Sister, Daughter, Lover* is a brave collection. Clausen's writing is never static: she takes risks, both in her chosen subject matter and in her styles. Her story-telling techniques vary. Sometimes we are aware that there is a technique; at other times, we are too absorbed in the story to even notice.

—Irene Zahava

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A review of *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* by Joan Gibbs, February 3rd Press, \$2.00. Books may be ordered from the author at 306 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11238.

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In "Notes on Speechlessness" (SW 5) I talked about Simone Weil's concept of affliction, the condition of powerlessness, which is primarily characterized by speechlessness. I said that this state of speechlessness is used by the powerful to maintain that status of powerlessness, that speechlessness creates an implosive rather than an explosive reaction--that is, it is she who does not speak who is the victim. Ultimately, to not speak, is to not exist.

The poems and prose piece which make up Joan Gibbs's heroic and powerful book are diametrically opposed to powerlessness and to speechlessness, and examine both conditions through a fine language and with an unflinching eye. These are works of politics and anger. Of love and history. Of knowledge and understanding. These are the works of a black lesbian feminist woman who has refused the silences proffered her. Joan Gibbs speaks about maintaining speech within her own struggle:

sometimes  
I think of dropping out  
pitching a tent  
beside some lonely stream  
that nobody passes  
fishing

I wouldn't have to worry  
about being "politically correct"  
trying to work  
with Black men  
and  
white women  
for the sake of unity  
or sisterhood

But something happens:  
the rent is due  
the phone's about to be cut off  
a brother on the street  
calls me a "bulldagger"  
or  
a white lesbian says,  
"I'm just as oppressed as you are."

Then I'm reminded  
of what Mama always says,  
"You can run but  
you sure can't hide."

("Untitled Poem for My Sisters")

These works deal with the multiplicity of black women's oppression, of black lesbian oppression--and recognize the necessity of confronting this oppression in all its forms, and of connecting the forms to define the oppression. Gibbs talks of many women: of the "woman on the corner":

the man in the store says  
she's been there for three hours  
saying,  
"Don't believe everything you hear--  
the world has already ended!"

saying,  
"David, bring back the stereo."

saying,  
"Denise, I did the best I could." ("The Woman on the Corner")

of her mother responding to two white men, who come to ask for the poet's  
sister, "a month after her death"--

Her voice  
full of "yes and no sirs"  
without anger or smiles  
just answers  
automatically.

one hand touching the face  
in the other ("One of the Pains")

of an "old maid" in a southern town:

across the street  
Ms. Selby's alone now:  
her parents  
brothers and sisters  
all dead:  
has young girls,  
women teachers  
staying with her

from time to time  
you can still hear  
old and young folks say  
"What a shame--a life wasted." ("Thinking South")

There are others. What Gibbs has done is to take the speechlessness of these women--whether the "madness" of the "woman on the corner," the quiet acquiescence of the poet's mother, the silent testimony of Ms. Selby, who takes in young girls and women teachers--and render it in her language, the language of a black lesbian feminist poet, allowing us knowledge of these women's lives, which allows them a certain power.

The necessity to recognize and describe oppression in language is a prerequisite for the language which will change that oppression--perhaps; eventually; in some way. In the poem--almost an incantation--"To the True Witches Among Us," Joan Gibbs takes on the various false transcendences which would deny real political action. The "true witches among us," like our foresisters who gathered around campfires plotting action, do not "gather in dark cafes/read tarot cards/watch stars"; they do not "talk about us behind our backs/at private parties/in free spaces"; they do not "gather in dark cafes/scare your own kind/watch stars"--

Please!  
If you are who you say you are  
and can do what you say you can  
fight for us

....

Organize  
revenge yourselves  
Please? ("To the True Witches Among Us")

Joan Gibbs is mindful of the past--mindful of the false promises of liberation--aware that knowledge of the past is necessary for change.

yes . . . yes  
everyone says they understand  
"It's a small matter."  
the lives of Blacks,  
women,  
Blacklesbianwomen  
have always been hard--

"Don't you know . . .  
Joan Little put to death  
the white man  
that dared assume control of her body."

My thoughts are old,  
unoriginal,  
this morning  
I woke up thinking of  
pecan trees,  
the smell of honey suckles  
corn growing. ("Sunday Thoughts")

This is an important book. I have merely touched on its importance.

—Michelle Cliff

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A review of *The Black Unicorn* by Audre Lorde (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978), paperback \$3.95, 122 pp.

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### SWEET MEDICINE

I have been trying for a long time to understand why Audre Lorde's poems are as powerful as they are. One way to understand poetry is to figure out how it works: what the problems are that the poet sets herself, what artistic means she uses to resolve them. I don't know how to begin analyzing a poem in this way, and I don't think Audre Lorde's poems are particularly amenable to that kind of literary criticism. Her language always seemed to me wild and just on the edge between something English and not-English, her poems not so much crafted as evoked. Chances are that she does write them line by line

at a desk, but my mental picture of it is more romantic: the sky fills with lightning and thunder, flames leap up at her feet, she falls into trance and speaks whole poems at a time.

Romance aside, it seemed the only way for me to say anything about *The Black Unicorn* was to place it in a context and hope that thereby some of the things the poems do would be illuminated.

In Navajo the word for "healer" means, literally, "singer." Traditional Navajo medicine, traditional Navajo storytelling and song, and traditional Navajo religion are inseparable; they are like the faces of the triple goddess—distinct in form, single in source. They draw upon each other. The healer, for instance, diagnoses disease in an almost metaphorical fashion and then prepares the appropriate ceremony (with song and dance) to exorcise it: a psychic healing for a physical agony that is seen as originating in psychic imbalance, an out-of-whackness with natural forces. The basis of Navajo religion, like all Native American religions of the Far West, is the spirit quest, which is essentially a search for balance, a dangerous journey undertaken alone, but with the blessing of the tribe, toward wholeness, toward the moment when inner and outer forces merge, when one moves in harmony with the powers of the wind, the stones, the animals, the sun and moon. Finally, Navajo storytelling is a communal pleasure, a time filled with laughter, but a time also that is religious and serious: for it is the stories that enable children to become good, and it is the stories which make all things possible.<sup>1</sup>

Navajo culture, in other words, provides one example of a context in which poetry makes medical, religious, and esthetic sense.

Before white men littered the prairies with the bones of children and buffalo, the Native American healer-singer-poet could draw on hundreds of years of unbroken tradition to effect her cures. She was a woman equipped to deal with her fate and the fate of those she cared for. As we—in this culture of institutionalized violence and manipulated passivity—are not, having been institutionalized ourselves from birth in hospitals, schools, factories, offices, prisons, asylums.<sup>2</sup>

But Audre Lorde is a more vivid diagnostician:

I am trapped on a desert of raw gunshot wounds  
and a dead child dragging his shattered black  
face off the edge of my sleep  
blood from his punctured cheeks and shoulders  
is the only liquid for miles and my stomach  
churns at the imagined taste while  
my mouth splits into dry lips  
without loyalty or reason  
thirsting for the wetness of his blood  
as it sinks into the whiteness  
of the desert where I am lost  
without imagery or magic  
trying to make power out of hatred and destruction  
(“Power,” p. 108)

but look at the skeleton children  
advancing against us  
beneath their faces there is no sunlight

no darkness remains  
no legends  
to bring them back as women  
into their bodies at dawn.

("Chain," p. 22)

Loss of imagery, loss of magic, loss of legends, loss of the knowledge essential to power and independence, loss of heart. Audre Lorde's picture of our shattered selves is as accurate as the nightmare which wakes us with the knowledge that the thing most dreaded has already happened.

The recovery of essential knowledge begins, like all knowledge, with images. And here it is, I think, that Audre Lorde makes her most profound move. She reaches back across an ocean and centuries of atrocity to the country of the Dahomeyan Amazons, a homeland rife with imagery, with magic, with legend, with female Power.

It was in Abomey that I felt  
the full blood of my fathers' wars  
and where I found my mother  
Seboulisa  
standing with outstretched palms hip high  
one breast eaten away by worms of sorrow

("Dahomey," p. 10)

my sisters  
witches in Dahomey  
wear me inside their coiled cloths  
as our mother did  
mourning.

I have been woman  
for a long time  
beware my smile  
I am treacherous with old magic  
and the noon's new fury  
with all your wide futures  
promised  
I am  
woman .  
and not white.

("A Woman Speaks," pp. 4-5)

She knows, too, and does not forget, the history of what has intervened, and how it has stolen the power of African women:

before we were broken apart  
we dreamed the crossed swords  
of warrior queens  
while we avoided each other's eyes  
and we learned to know lonely  
as the earth learns to know dead

("Harriet," p. 21)

The "true nature of poetry," as Adrienne Rich names it in "Origins and History of Consciousness," is "the drive / to connect. The dream of a common language."<sup>3</sup> *The Black Unicorn* connects black women with each other through the common imagery of their finest past, the Dahomeyan Amazons, witches,

warrior queens of the southern continent, the first home of human culture.

If Audre Lorde stopped there, she would be politically powerful enough. But she goes on to envision the tentative beginnings of a common language between black women and white women, according to the prophecies of the Dahomeyan mother of the *Vodu*, "high over halfway between your world and mine / rimmed with full moon and no more excuses . . ."

When we meet again  
will you put your hands upon me  
will I ride you over our lands  
will we sleep beneath trees in the rain?  
You shall get young as I lick your stomach  
hot and at rest before we move off again  
you will be white fury in my navel  
I will be sweeping night  
Mawulisa foretells our bodies  
as our hands touch and learn  
from each others hurt.

...  
we have high time for work and another meeting  
women exchanging blood  
in the innermost rooms of moment  
we must taste of each other's fruit  
at least once  
before we shall both be slain.

("Meet," pp. 33-34)

I suppose that the only women who would long to lie together "for a season out of the judging rain" are lesbians—the common language conjured up by *The Black Unicorn* is an Amazon tongue. It is also a language which bespeaks a longed-for, dreamed-of culture of wholeness, a context in which a poetry that heals, exalts, and caresses makes eminent practical sense—in which the healer is, literally, a singer.

The Navajo songs and stories which teach children to be good and make all things possible are primarily songs and stories of culture heroes. A culture hero is one who makes the world and the things in it thinkable, one who makes actions possible. Culture heroes often do funny things, sometimes even ridiculous or destructive things; they are certainly not worshipped as gods. But they are sung about and spoken about, quoted in song and story, and given their due as forerunners, as those who go before and mark the ways. If we are ever going to experience a lesbian culture that grows out of the strengths of all the places we come from, I think we had better start by acknowledging what we owe our culture heroes, Audre Lorde among them, as well as journeying at least awhile along the ways on which they have left their mark.

In "The Erotic as Power" Audre Lorde defines the "erotic" as "a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our deepest feelings," and describes its significance as a touchstone: "Once having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognized its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves."<sup>4</sup> *The Black Unicorn*, in Audre's own way of using words, is erotic poetry—healing, exalting, caressing,

the fruit of a spirit quest aimed at the reconstruction of essential knowledge, at the moment when inner and outer forces merge and we move in harmony with the powers of the wind, the stones, the animals, the sun and moon. Again, in the words of Adrienne Rich (their poems seem to go together), "*We will not live / to settle for less We have dreamed of this / all our lives.*"<sup>5</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Barre Toelken and Tacheeni Scott, "Poetic Retranslation and the 'Pretty Languages' of Yellowman," in *Traditional Literatures of the American Indian*, edited by Karl Kroeber (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, forthcoming).

2. Arthur Evans, *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture* (Boston: Fag Rag Books, 1978), p. 87. The passage continues: "There are very few of us who can do what the majority of people throughout history have always regarded as essential human activities: grow our own food, make our own clothing, build our own homes, make our own medicines, create our own gods."

3. *The Dream of a Common Language* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978), p. 7.

4. In *Chrysalis* 9 (Fall 1979), p. 29.

5. "Phantasia for Elvira Shatayev," in *Dream of a Common Language*, p. 6.

—Harriet Desmoines



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A review of *Lesbian Peoples: Material for a Dictionary*, by Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig, Avon Books, 1979, paperback, \$5.95, translated by the authors. Originally published as *Brouillon pour un Dictionnaire des Amantes*, Paris, Grasset, 1976.

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"Dictionary: The assemblage of words, what dictated their choice, the fiction of the fables . . . constitute lacunae and therefore are acting upon reality."

Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig's rough draft ("brouillon") sketches out a lesbian utopia which might be the worlds of Wittig's *Les Guérillères* (Avon, 1973) and *The Lesbian Body* (Avon, 1976) combined. Certainly its three hundred and forty-seven lexical entries provide a welcome gloss for those works; but more than that, they extend them. They cover the globe with widely diverse mythical lesbian communities living in a Glorious Age one step beyond our own, which Wittig and Zeig call The Concrete Age or The High-Speed Steel Age.

What I especially enjoy about *Lesbian Peoples* is its immense good humor.

The Glorious Age began when half the population "took a powder" and "both parties forgot each other," bringing to a close many dark ages (Stone, Bronze, Iron, Steam, and Concrete/Steel). During those awful times the nomadic amazons of the original Golden Age were reduced to the final degradations: they became "woman" and "mother." Lest you angrily (and wrongly) conclude that Wittig and Zeig delight in metaphoric potshots at the masses of real-life women, I hasten to add that, on the contrary, the authors wish to call our attention to the literal "belonging to another" of etymological wo-man *and* real wife, and to the isolation from other amazons, the community at large, and daughters which the category "mother" institutes. Among the "companion lovers" such distinctions disappear because they are no longer functional; their only purpose was to create oppression during the dark ages, and the amazons have created a world in which great differences exist without causing dissension or struggles for power over others.

For such utopian vision Wittig and Zeig will undoubtedly be chastised. They do not give us a prescription for action, a literal way out of poverty, battery, or sexual slavery to men. They give us magic, new myths (along with some mighty handy versions of the old ones), and, most important of all, a visionary lesbian history and language. For they believe that reclaiming or creating history while projecting into the future, both with a lesbian's eye view and combined with the resolute chiseling out of our own understandings of what words mean, that these endeavors *do* change reality. And that proposition is at least worth expending some lesbian energy to evaluate.

"History" is in fact the longest entry in *Lesbian Peoples*, while historical accounts often verge on the cryptic. Some history is even self-evident; the heading "Sappho" is followed by an entire blank page. Most of what we currently call by that name is irrelevant; under "Germany" we read: "Late in the Concrete Age an international lesbian front was created in a German city. Some companion lovers say that the idea of making half of the population take a powder originated amidst this front." All history is certified by those who wish to see themselves as its focus and essence and who have the power among themselves to create that perspective: "If an affirmation is repeated

two times, on the third it becomes a scientific truth."

History is a text and men have choked off, invalidated, or destroyed lesbian words for two thousand chaotic years. So "Language" is *Lesbian Peoples'* second longest entry, its history forming a crucial part of the first. Wittig and Zeig clear the space to tell our stories and fill it with words consonant with our cultures. They say some amazons of the Golden Age's harmonious garden wandered to cities and dissension arose when many stayed there to do nothing but watch their abdomens swell. The mothers and the amazons developed separate languages; the mothers, having foregone physical exercise and the carrying of weapons, fell into servitude, while the amazons scattered until the Glorious Age. But then, the authors tell us, not everyone agrees with this interpretation. Some say there's no way to know what happened.

Indeed, we will never speak the ancient amazons' magical "language of letters and numbers" which, like the Hebrew patriarch's beginning "Word," could spawn life and strike death. The city mothers permanently deformed its immediate power into representation, for unlike their amazon sisters, they did not live in direct contact with nature, but walled themselves indoors, making it necessary to re-present reality in order to communicate. Thus language has become a recapturing rather than an experiencing.

But even in its fallen state (of approximation) language can be reactivated so it operates on our lesbian realities. Our stories can be told, our culture celebrated. The Golden Age may be over. But there are among us lesbian peoples who say that if we bear our fables, forge our weapons, and wage our wars, our rage and laughter will ring in the Glorious one.

—Suzanne Relyea

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A review of *True to Life Adventure Stories, Vol. 1*, edited by Judy Grahn, Diana Press, Oakland, Calif., 224 pp., \$5.00.

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Before its demise as a book publisher, Diana Press brought out *True to Life Adventure Stories, Vol. 1*, an anthology of writings collected and edited by poet Judy Grahn. This first volume of a projected three-part series painfully reminds us of the loss our culture suffers when our presses cease to roll. Here are published many working-class lesbian writers who are not valued or recognized by mainstream publishers catering to middle-class heterosexual standards. As Grahn wrote in her introduction to the stories, "Our language like our lives should belong to us," and so must our presses if our language and lives are to be authentically voiced and shared with one another.

Fortunately we do have this first volume in which editor Grahn effectively bonds together a diversity of stories and characters whose experiences are those of working-class women. They are lesbians mothers on welfare; they are older women; they are children; they are black and white and they are Jewish. They work in offices, live in the wilderness and in the cities; they get put in jail, are prostitutes, and go to college. They struggle alone and together, and they learn to survive as best they can in a world indifferent, if not adverse, to their survival.

Perhaps it is Grahn's political vision more than any other factor which brings these stories together. In her challenging and provocative introduction, "Murdering the King's English," Grahn identifies commonalities in content and form. The stories, she says, are "true to life," that is, "they are based on information which is close to, or is, the original source of the story." Most stories show women "realistically grappling with real life situations." Grahn believes that if women's writing is to be useful to other women, it must work in our interest, it must not divide us nor provide false information which could be used against us. Grahn applies this concept of "true to life" to form as well as content, two elements not to be separated. "How a thing is said," contends Grahn, "has everything to do with what is said." Thus stories by and about working-class women in order to be "true," authentic, and useful must be told in working-class language. In these stories, Grahn and Diana Press have chosen to preserve and validate the integrity of working-class language by not "translating" Common English into Standard English. Still Grahn does not totally throw out the idea of "standards." Her standards, rooted in feminism, are clarity, unsentimentality, and integrity. Stories were chosen because they "provoke, teach, arouse strong emotion, reveal women to other women, and redefine."

Among the contributors are the previously published Sandy Boucher, Sharon Isabell, Linda Marie, Pat Parker, and Judy Grahn, while others are not widely known. Twenty "stories" of differing styles and forms are offered. Technically, some are not "short stories" but are poems like the intensely moving "In Memoriam: Carolyn Johnson" by Chris Llewelyn. In this memorial from one secretary to another secretary who has died, Llewelyn's integration of sound and meaning makes for a powerful, effective piece best read aloud. "Poem" becomes "language" rather than "writing form."

Styles of writing range widely from realistic literal prose narratives (which most of the stories are) to symbolic fantasy portrayals (Nancy Green's "Mirrors and Masks") to fables ("Woman Fables, 1-12" by Dell Fitzgerald-Richards.) The first time I read them, the fables and fantasies were difficult to relate to as "true to life adventures" and seemed to stand apart from the general fabric of the collection. Yet many of us will readily recognize as our own the pain and elation Era feels in "Mirrors and Masks" as she peels off one by one all the stereotypical masks of social conformity and expectation hiding her true woman self beneath. And what lesbian will not identify with the female rabbit in the fable "The Rabbit Who Wouldn't" who refuses to submit to compulsory motherhood and heterosexuality. Through the use of animal characters, the traditional people's fable, and symbolic fantasy, the authors are able to simply and clearly reveal and teach us about our lives and struggles as women.

A few stories aren't as effective as others, possibly due to lack of development. Often these stories have potential in terms of characters and plot but aren't developed enough (Ruth Babcock's "Three Bears"), or not enough is revealed about the changes or growth characters are going through (Linnea A. Due's "The Light.") And we are left not quite satisfied.

Most stories dramatize women or woman children struggling with a certain set of obstacles or experiences: childhood sexual abuse, unequal and dependent relationships with men, complex, painful relationships with women, with family, defining one's identity, surviving "the system," i.e., courts, prisons.

unjust economic system, welfare system and oppressive work situations, coming to terms with death and dying—experiences which many of us are confronted with during our life times. Some stories express the anger and rage we feel when some of us in fact don't survive. What is inspiring and strengthening is how women alone and together are able to challenge, overcome, and learn from those situations which could potentially harm, destroy, or keep them from self-actualization and self-respect, even when the cards are stacked against them. Sadly too, as young Frances learns in "The Shoes," survival sometimes comes at great costs—the suppression, and denial of one's own needs, desires, and emotions.

Like the mockingbirds in Dell Fitzgerald-Richard's fable who confront their traditional enemy the cats, we dare to confront and conquer the enemy, the oppression, the fear, and then in our own voices to name it and to reveal it to each other thereby demystifying its power over us so that we and the women after us might better learn to survive it. "Whatever their reasons, they (the mockingbirds) feathered their nests with the soft warm (cat) fur while their young grew stronger each day and even less afraid than they."

—JR Roberts



# HOME GROWN PUBLISHING

Art by Kaymarion, 1960-1980

It all started with xmas cards; every year for five winters, 1965-69. The first one was a line drawing I traced in red+green ball point pens. Later ones were printed by silkscreen or linoleum block. They were small editions for my family only, 3-34 copies. ~~BLESSINGS~~ ★★☆☆★  
 They were "non-denominational", cards I

Other small editions for friends and family.  
 Paper construction Valentines, Cat-letter birth announcements, anniversary party invitations, wrapping paper. time honored womanarts ★★☆☆★



xmas card 1966 silkscreen

- ★☆☆★ PURPLE BITTO
- ★☆☆★ MIMEOGRAPH
- ★☆☆★ STENCIL
- ★☆☆★ TRACINGS
- ★☆☆★ CARBON COPIES
- ★☆☆★ MACHINES FOUND IN CHURCHES
- ★☆☆★ ELEMENTARY SCHOOL OFFICE
- ★☆☆★ POTATO PRINT
- ★☆☆★ LINOLEUM BLOCK
- ★☆☆★ WOOD CUT
- ★☆☆★ LEAF PRINT
- ★☆☆★ MADE BY HAND
- ★☆☆★ HOME MADE

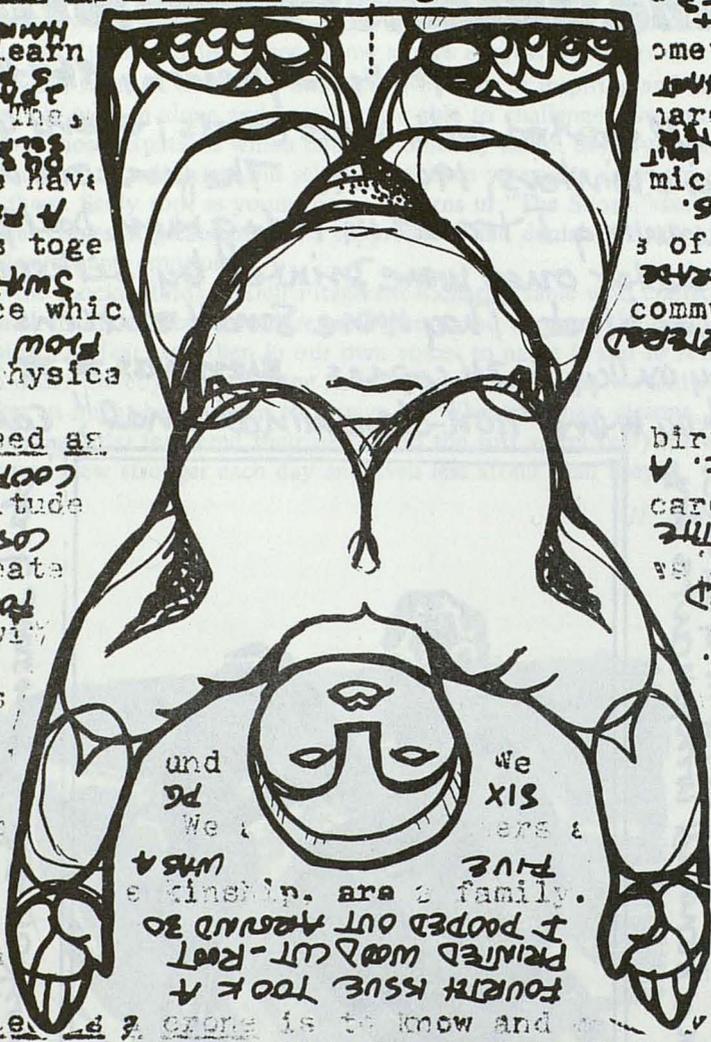
could send to grandmother and Jewish friends and atheist gay lovers. Whatever the belief it's been a way of fenceling, showing light in the dark season's hibernation. Greetings of Joy ★★☆☆★

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 Weather forecasts and 30-40 printing and supplies.  
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Road my bike around town and hand deliv. and ered. ♀ to ♀.

4-7 HOT SHOWERS HOT SHIMMERS

1-3 HOT MUDGY CLEAR HOT 4-7 HOT SHOWERS HOT SHIMMERS

1-3 HOT MUDGY CLEAR HOT 4-7 HOT SHOWERS HOT SHIMMERS

1-3 HOT MUDGY CLEAR HOT 4-7 HOT SHOWERS HOT SHIMMERS

1-3 HOT MUDGY CLEAR HOT 4-7 HOT SHOWERS HOT SHIMMERS

8-10 SUNNY SHOWERS

11-3 COLEE BRIDES STORM 11-17 SUNNY SPARKLES SOUND

**HOT MOON!**      **JULY-AUG 1979**

**ORACULAR**  
 STRENGTH - DEVOTION  
 (LET OTHER FORMS EXIST) I RULE -

**ADVISE**  
 I AM THAT AND LEO SELF-TALK  
 THAT I AM.

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11-3 HOT THUNDER

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50-60 MOONS

ADD PRESS LABELS POSTAGE

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There was all- to print the always \$\$\$ to  
 way enough next one and share these issues with.

The mailing list gets too big. I return to letters as a way to touch more personally. and at home-visits. Paperwork bog downs lead me to new changes - forms of greeting passing on - sharing the love.

Away to spin a pattern of knowing within around our neighborhoods, communities, kitchen klatches.

In these days  
 we accept  
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 our way - see  
 whatever we  
 have access to. ★

Prepare for the electric  
 lights to go out. I have  
 dreams of a flatbed press  
 with wooden type. And peoples,  
 poster walls + news boards.

Neighborhood greetings + issues -  
 And cards to get well, blessed

birthdays  
 draw the  
 with color  
 like I love  
 it on -

FULL MOON

celebrate  
 lines fill  
 sounds  
 you - pass  
 harvest-  
 results:  
 - 3RD QUARTER

Seed vision:  
1ST QUARTER



plans for  
 gatherings  
2ND QUARTER  
 ideas initiate

SEE IT THIS WAY  
 I am the mother,  
 and the child;

value feels  
 how it feels  
 weigh -  
 finish:  
4TH QUARTER

I goddess,  
 I matter am.

(the Tibetan)

ESTABLISH PRACTICE

DARK MOON



Love, Kaymanum  
 maid's courage. mother's compassion. crone turns

# PRINTERS & PUBLISHERS

## Frances Doughty Talks to Charlotte Bunch about Women's Publishing

*F:* Will you talk about why you think reading and writing—which some think are becoming obsolete arts these days—may be more important than television, speeches, tours, and other kinds of media?

*C:* My interest in print per se grows out of my sense that the basic tools of thinking, for being able to think imaginatively, for being able to think for yourself, grow out of people being able to read and write. I think it's not surprising that most revolutionary movements have always seen literacy as one of the tools of revolution because the first process of literacy enables people, in this case women, to understand what our situation is; it also gives us words for our experience and helps us to figure out what we want to do and how things could be different.

The stories that we all grew up with are still very true—the stories of women who grew up in environments where reading was their only access to any other reality than the one they lived in. And their ability to imagine that their life could be different was based on what they could get to read. Now occasionally you can get 15 minutes on TV. But if you get 15 minutes on TV, it goes on when they want it on, and there's no way that an ordinary woman can have that for herself to repeat. It's not permanent, and it's not under the woman's control. One thing that's nice about the printed medium is that once we get out our books and our magazines, the women who have them can do whatever they want with them. We have control in producing books and magazines that we don't have in other mediums. And we also have control in using them that the other mediums don't lend themselves to as well. There's very little equipment, very little expense involved in the printed word compared to other media, so it's accessible to a wider range of women from different backgrounds. I think the other media lend themselves to controlling people much more completely, and that our whole sense of existence is tied up with the ability of people to think differently than what the mass culture

tells them. The ability to create your own reality, to create new space—print is very important to that. It's also important to theory, which requires the process of thinking through and putting out ideas. You can do films, you can do art that's based on that same set of ideas and communicate them in a different fashion, but I still think that we need the ABC process of reading and writing as the basis for taking other mediums and developing them further.

*F:* So you would say that print is our primary vehicle for the development of an educated feminist movement, educated in the sense of being able to reach conclusions for oneself, being able to digest different messages, interpret them, and see what they lead to, in both action and theory?

*C:* I think that other vehicles may be primary to first reaching someone with an idea. But print is still the primary vehicle for the development of that and expansion of it.

*F:* For those of us who weren't directly involved in it, the Women in Print Conference has a legendary aura about it as a place where many important things happened, but I'm not sure what they are.

*C:* For background, the Women in Print Conference was held in Omaha, Nebraska, at a Campfire Girls' campsite in August of 1976. It was the vision of June Arnold that women involved in publishing, including presses, journals, newspapers, bookstores, and distributors—all aspects of women in print—should come together from around the country and discuss what we had learned and how we could cooperate better. She took the initiative and was the driving force to get the rest of us to help organize and make it happen. It was a real landmark—slightly over 100 women came from around the country. We spent a week together with the grasshoppers and the duststorms. You can't say there is any one result because the emphasis of the conference was on what is now called networking with each other and developing resources for cooperating more. A lot of the people who were there are no longer working in print and some of the groups no longer exist, which in itself isn't an important statement. But one of the things the conference did was to end the isolation a lot of people felt in their own particular work, and it enabled us to see how mammoth the women-in-print movement was. It was a magnificent feeling you had—that early women's liberation sense of everybody finding each other, finding the people who had the same problems and were working on the same issues you were. Most of the people who came were working on projects that, on the average, had four to six people in them. Most of the projects survived by a very small number of people sticking together over a long time to work very long hours in underpaid conditions to create whatever part of the process they were doing in print. You become so involved in the survival of the project you're doing that without special effort you can also begin to feel it's you against the world and to lose track of the fact that you're a part of a larger movement and that the problems you face are not yours alone and are not because you're failing to do it right. It's funny that in 1976, after years with women's liberation ideology in which we learned that the society oppressed us, in which we learned that society was a capitalist patriarchy, that big business and multinational corporations control, that small businesses were, in fact, on the way out, we nonetheless all still felt that if we just worked harder, if we just did it better, our projects would survive. Some of that mythology broke down at the Women in Print Conference because when we sat down and

talked about some of the problems in getting out a journal—things like the fact that no matter what price you set your journal at, even though you kept thinking it cost too much, you still couldn't make it financially—we learned that no publication survived solely on selling its product—that they're all either subsidized by major corporations or they're subsidized by universities or they're publications of organizations whose membership subsidizes them. We had a lot to learn about publishing in America.

*F:* Did you find that discovery liberating, energizing, depressing? What effect did it have on you?

*C:* It liberated us from individual guilt. I don't know whether it was energizing. It was energizing to look for other solutions. In another way it was like reality crashing in on you. It was not going to get better just by working hard for a couple of more years. The mythical break-even point where this particular bad period would be over was never going to come. I think it meant that each of us had to make more realistic decisions about what we were going to do. Some of the realistic decisions were for some publications and groups to close and to stop trying. Others began to develop other structures to try to survive. Or to accept, as a couple of the journals and newspapers have, the less standardized version of reality as an OK way to be: that if you didn't come out four times a year, but you still produced interesting issues that were valuable, it was OK—that we didn't have to meet the standards of the main culture's publishing world to still be a valuable enterprise.

A turning point for me was that I faced the limitation of the small press world much more harshly than I had been willing to before that. I had to realize that we were not going to become *the* press instead of the alternate press. Some of the exciting, idealistic theory we had put forward was simply not true. If I was going to continue to work in that press, I would have to work there because it was still what I wanted to do and not with the illusion that it would reach the masses of people or become the popular culture. If I wanted to reach the popular culture in that way, I would have to be more willing than I had been up until that time to deal with some of the mainstream presses and publications, although not necessarily to the exclusion of women's presses, but in addition to that. I think that was a clear choice that I began to see—I think other people did too—from that experience.

*F:* So when you're talking about popular culture, you're talking about mainstream American popular culture. I've been wondering whether within the lesbian feminist world we're also developing some kind of split between popular lesbian feminist culture and a somewhat less widely spread culture of people who are more interested in theory than in, say, music. Did you feel any of that kind of split when you were working with *Quest*?

*C:* Definitely. *Quest* started at the same time that Olivia Records started, for example. We were friends. We both started in Washington. A few of us were ex-Furies members. It was very interesting to me to observe the difference in the development of those two projects which came out of relatively similar politics and yet took two very different media to develop. It was sometimes hard to watch Olivia Records—which I liked and I was glad to see succeed—take off in the popular culture of the lesbian movement in the way that theory did not. Yes, there are those divisions. I think that we at *Quest*

have had to keep reaffirming that the ideas you work on in a small place do begin to spread out in other ways and in other forms. That was one division. The other division is with the mainstream culture. For me, joining the mainstream is to write in *Ms Magazine*, yet *Ms Magazine* is still not the mainstream.

I made a decision that I would try to write for more of the mainstream women's movement, for *Ms Magazine* and for *NOW Times*, which reaches 100,000 NOW members, I would try to take what we were developing in the women-in-print subculture into at least the broader sphere of the organized established women's groups. The next step which I haven't taken personally but I would consider is how to take that into the popular culture beyond those places. Certainly Kathy Barry's article in *Redbook* which took some of the themes she had developed in *Chrysalis* a few years before was a good example of that. I think we need more of that because otherwise what we end up having is a set of professional feminist writers who haven't had the experience of the women's press movement. If no one from the feminist press ever does that, then the division will become greater and greater.

F: How have you seen the women's presses go on since the women in print conference?

C: I don't think any of us that week realized the effect that being there was going to have on us. I didn't realize the implications for the questions I was concerned with. At the end of the Women in Print Conference we were on a high. But the seeds had been sown for a more realistic assessment. that came after that. For example, Women In Distribution (WIND) was a distribution network that had been started by a couple of women. They found themselves a year and a half after the Women In Print conference further in debt than they had been when they started. They did a very careful financial analysis whereby they were able to project that in the next year or two they would not be able to break even. Furthermore, if they went out of existence at that moment, they would owe everybody a certain amount of money, but if they kept on they would owe more money, and therefore would have taken more money away from women's presses and that they couldn't do that. There were two central issues. One was that they had not chosen to involve more people in the project, so they didn't really have a new group to take over. The other was that financially they couldn't see any way out—any way that they could responsibly go on existing, that wouldn't take so much energy and money from so many women. They went out of existence.

The other real thing that a lot of us did after Women In Print was to recognize that we couldn't go on at the same standards we had wanted. We began to scale down our operations in terms of the quality of paper, in terms of the amount of money we spent on production, such as one-color or no-color covers instead of three-color covers, or newsprint instead of nicer paper. All of which were goals a lot of us had set out with: to create products that looked the way the society expected them to look.

I think the real question that has never been answered is do feminists consider the existence of their own presses and publications important enough to subsidize them? Because unless the women's movement does subsidize those,

most of them will not go on existing. Most of them are right now subsidized by a small group of people giving volunteer labor and money. Most of the presses survive on the money that comes from people working outside jobs. A lot of presses now do pay a small token salary, but to live off those salaries you usually have to have had some savings or have a lover or friends who are willing to help you get by.

So there's a number of different ways we're indirectly subsidizing the presses and the publications. But we have to decide if they're important enough to become more systematic about subsidies so it isn't simply the ones with the best hustling ability or the best connections or the most endurance who can do it--which is what determines it now in most cases.

*F:* Not only are women making 57 cents to the men's dollar these days, but many women have children to support. When you're talking about trying to subsidize feminist presses you're also talking about a much smaller pool for the money to come from than there is in the mainstream society, which is one of those things that's both liberating and depressing at the same time. I think what I'm hearing is not so much that the vision failed, but that the realities got it.

*C:* You're put it in a nutshell. I don't think the vision failed at all. The heart of the vision was that in order to build a movement and bring change we have to have some kind of vehicle for our own words, our own expression, our own graphics, our art, our own institutions. The vision of both producing our own institutions and particularly the importance of producing them in the area of publishing as a tool for communication as well as for developing ideas--all of that vision has not failed. The vision that we would be able to do it better if we controlled it ourselves is still true. Certainly the brief experiences I've had in publishing situations that are not primarily controlled by feminists have led me to believe that we were absolutely right about the kind of indirect censorship, the slight distortion of your ideas that goes on, and that that's still true. The part of the vision that failed was the part of the vision that had to do with reality. It had to do with, what does it take to make that vision possible? At Omaha, in an indirect way, we faced the fact that our vision that we would become the main culture was probably not realistic.

*F:* I think one thing it does is let us see ourselves, instead of going back to that total invisibility from which we emerged with such a struggle. Print in particular is important for that sense that there is a community out there beyond individual problems.

*C:* Right, for example you walk into any library and see the amount of feminist work that is available. It's a real high. I walk into your study and even though I know these books exist, just seeing them, seeing the magazines piled up, it still can give me a lift. And that's even more important in more isolated places than Brooklyn, NY. I've now seen it on an international scale. I've worked with women who're putting out a radical feminist magazine in India. One of the women from that magazine came to NY a few weeks ago. I wanted to give her everything I could. I wanted to send her back with brief cases full because every single publication, every single book she saw gave her such a thrill. And there is that visible product sense of your reality that is even more important when times are bad and even more important to women

who are very isolated. In my traveling the dog-eared copies I've seen of the things we sometimes take for granted have been a good reminder, not to speak of Barbara Grier's library which can inspire all of us to realize that we continued to exist through the 30's, 40's, 50's and we didn't even know it. The history of our existence... The Lesbian Herstory Archives--the vision does become slightly different in the 80's, and it has to be more of the vision of what it means to survive with economic realities.

We also have to recycle our energy. We have to recognize much more than we did in the 70s the necessary process of what I call moving in and out. Each of us has to have that both individually and as a movement.

For example, I see myself moving out into a popular culture place. I felt isolated; I felt at a certain point that the subculture was stifling me in what I needed to know about making change. I had to get out there and interact more with women who were not committed feminists, but who were at least friendly. I had to get out in the world and see what we were up against in a different way and try my ideas out in more hostile environments. That wasn't just my missionary impulse to go out and convert them, which is also always at work, but it was because my own work was suffering from lack of that exposure. I think that it's time, and I think we need to allow each feminist more space for her own rhythm, more space to say, "This is the period where I am consolidating my ideas within the subculture, and this is the period when I'm trying them out in the popular culture, whether that's in writing, or in projects, or in activism in all different forms.

*F:* Something I've been wishing we could get written for people to think about is a developmental psychology of being in the movement because I think we really need it. I think we need an overt recognition of things we all know, that people's chronological age or even the period of the movement at which you enter determine a lot of things, but also some things seem to be determined by a natural life rhythm that takes place once you're in the movement. There's a burst of energy and a lot of commitment, then a pulling back. I think that's the place where a lot of people drop out. I think if we recognized that that was an ongoing life process and made space for people to do that instead of saying, "Oh forget her, she's not working this year," I think we'd have a much wider based movement and a lot longer life.

*C:* I think that also affects projects, that there's a cycle for projects as well. There are new presses, Persephone Press, for example, that have come up and are taking the role that say Diana or Daughters Press had five years ago, of being the new press willing to experiment, to hold the vision up. Perhaps they'll do it more realistically, but even if they're not more realistic, even if they simply do it for a while, I'm beginning to see that a particular project or group or person or even country may carry the forward edge of feminism at a given moment, while the rest of us may be doing something that keeps it alive.

*F:* Do you have any last words for the future or the past or our current readers.

*C:* I think my last words for the future are to draw from the past--which is giving me a lot more sustenance lately. When I think about some of the

hard times that we seem to be in for in the 80s, I'm always sustained by remembering not only our heroines of the past, the Gertrude Steins and the Eleanor Roosevelts that we've dug up, but perhaps even more by remembering the Daughters of Bilitis, starting their organizations in the 50s during the McCarthy era and particularly--when we're talking about print--starting the publication *The Ladder* which existed from 1956 to 1972--years during which very little existed for lesbians to read, but they kept that alive for all of us. They could go out of existence in 1972 because of the present wave of feminism and lesbian writing, but without their existence I don't know that we would have had the present wave of lesbian writing. My final words are to remember that history and our own work ebb and flow, but that keeping alive the core of what we are about through those hard times has been done by women in our past and they can serve as guideposts for us in facing the future.

*F*: Sometimes I think of us as a river. And sometimes we're flowing underground and sometimes we're getting out there in public.

—transcribed and edited by the Boston staff

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## SPINSTERS, INK

**an interview with Maureen Brady and Judith McDaniel**

**by Irena Klepfisz**

*IRENA*: I know that your histories as writers and your involvement in the lesbian/feminist literary movement are quite different. I wonder if each of you would give a brief biography up to the point you decided to establish Spinsters, Ink.

*MAUREEN*: I started writing when I was already 26. I was living in New York and working as a physical therapist. Initially I took some courses at the New School. Then I got involved in a women's writing workshop--which was also a CR group. That was around '69 or '70. I'd say it took at least 3 or 4 years before I built up to the idea of writing a novel--which is when I began *Give Me Your Good Ear*. I wrote it over a long, extended period because I had to earn a living and I couldn't write full time.

*JUDITH*: All my life I knew I wanted to write, but somehow it was difficult for me to get myself to write. I became an academic instead. But in graduate school [1966] I took a poetry writing course and actually made myself try to write. Later, as I became a feminist during the early seventies my journals became important to me. I wrote a lot about relationships, but more about how I wanted to write but couldn't. Other things seemed to always take my time away--real things--my dissertation, classes to prepare

and teach, at one point a child to care for. But even when I had time, I'd sit at my desk and stare. It was incredibly frustrating and I didn't understand it.

Finally, it was the first of January, I opened my journal to a blank page and wrote one word: lesbian. Then I stared. I felt like: oh, shit, now it's down and I can't take it back. I knew something would have to change. I was living with a man and raising his child--and all I could see was that word "lesbian." That was the year I began to do my own creative work again. It was the year I met Maureen.

*M:* Judith was very encouraging about my writing and my novel. And about getting it published. We were frequently, at that time, in touch with people who were beginning to do their own publishing--usually poetry. But I thought it was easier to publish poetry than fiction because fiction must have justified margins and is more pages--

*J:* --and you were wrong!

*M:* Yes, fiction is much easier to market and distribute. But I didn't know that. So I spent a lot of time and energy trying to get the novel published by feminist and commercial presses. But there were always people who would ask, Why don't you do it yourself? I kept replying that I didn't have the energy. I had to earn a living--and besides I wanted to be a writer, not a publisher. But it finally just sunk in. I began to feel--after enough rejections and enough passivity--that self-publishing was the only direction to go in.

*J:* We talked to Catherine and Harriet of *SW*, who were very supportive and very helpful. And it was then we thought of our name, Spinsters, Ink. And after you've got a name--

*I:* You've got a place in the world. How did you begin setting up?

*J:* I have to admit I was reluctant at first. I think I was terrified of sending out letters asking people for donations.

*M:* We were broke--

*J:* We really didn't have a choice. If we were going to publish the novel, we had to do it. We'd heard about *Womanfriends* asking for loans. We decided if they could get loans, we could get donations for seed money. We did, and we received an incredibly fine response from feminists.

*I:* And since then have you drawn any income from what you've published?

*M:* No, in fact we've put money in every month--\$1500 in the last six months. You go to the post office and take \$1.50 out of your wallet and--

*J:* --and pay for the gasoline to get to the post office--

*M:* We end up accounting for that in our books. But we don't come back home and take \$1.50 out of SI.

*I:* I understand that kind of operation real well. It makes a guessing game out of any attempt to define terms like "breaking even" or "profit."

*J:* How do you define "breaking even" when you're not being paid, or "profit" when no one even expects to get paid?

*I:* And yet it has all the trappings of "business." We go out and get business papers; we file tax returns, etc.

*M:* A lot of people in general just don't understand why you'd work for nothing, to say nothing of putting in your own money.

*J:* Of course, in an enterprise like this, we're not the only ones working for nothing. We had friends and women we didn't even know come and give us information and help.

*I:* How do you feel about your distribution?

*J:* It was a real challenge for me. I think we've done really well with that—we have to reprint double of both our books within the year.

*I:* Who's carrying the books?

*M:* Primarily feminist, women's bookstores. We've tried a list of literary bookstores and we've gotten very low return on that, maybe two orders and two inquiries. On the other hand, we found that when we took the books directly to stores, we had no trouble placing them. That's of course the real value of a distributor—we simply can't go schlepping around the country, saying, Look, here's our product.

*I:* One of the things I find disturbing is that women's studies departments generally don't emphasize feminist presses. The focus is primarily on material that is coming out of the commercial presses. There doesn't seem to be a consciousness about either supporting or even disseminating information and materials that are available *only* through feminist presses.

*M:* I think that many women teaching in women's studies programs are not educated about the necessities and hardships of the feminist presses. They don't know the economics and the politics.

*I:* What exactly don't they know?

*M:* Well—the politics of publishing. There are many women who still believe that if you write a good book, even though it's written from a woman's point of view—if it's *really* a good book—then it'll get published.

*I:* I think it's amazing that despite the women's movement so many people still believe the myth that a talented writer is bound to be published—eventually—in the big time.

*M:* It's always being reinforced even as we try to counter it. For example, someone was quoted in *Chrysalis* as saying now that women are publishing their books through commercial presses they're available in regular bookstores. That doesn't in any way research the question of what kinds of women's perspectives are coming out of those books, and consequently it only goes to reinforce the notion: if it's a good book, then it'll be available not only through commercial presses but in regular bookstores. Other stuff is obviously not deserving.

*I:* When I taught women's studies this summer—I purposely put together a reading list which was predominantly made up of feminist or small press books. Interestingly—I found that only 3 out of 18 students had ever heard of—been in—a woman's bookstore. This is New York City—where there are three women's bookstores!

*M:* Reaching women—the distribution—is really difficult. What are we going to do in terms of reaching women who don't even know that women's bookstores exist? Or who live in a place where there is no bookstore to go to—who have to travel to major cities to reach one? It's frustrating. That's why I wish women's studies courses showed more of a commitment to women's presses in general. That's one way of spreading the word—and educating at the same time.

I: You mentioned earlier how you'd hoped to be able to publish other people's work.

J: Yes. We have reached that point. We're not going to be self-publishers anymore.

I: I think that's a really interesting switch in process, and I know that when I started working on *Conditions*, I had a very different feeling of having to make public decisions and judgments about other people's works.

J: That doesn't scare me.

I: I don't necessarily mean scary. But that it's different.

J: It *is* different. But we made judgments about our own work—what we would use—that kind of thing—and was our own work ready for publication. I think what concerns me more is putting energy and time into work that's not my own or Maureen's. There is a certain kind of labor and money that's being spent that is difficult to classify. I mean, where do you begin to draw guidelines for what you've put in? How can you measure it in terms of money? How do you begin thinking about doing this for someone else? What do you charge for it? We're of course very glad to see some other women's work being published—now that we have some of the resources to do that—but—

M: What we're experiencing now is a transition period—recognizing that we're going to be publishing someone else's work and doing all that extra work for *them*—and yet keeping in mind that it's also for us and for our company. But we need to get used to that idea.

I: It sounds as if up to now you've identified more with the books themselves, rather than with Spinsters, Ink.

M: Yes, I think that's true. Spinsters, Ink has been *Give Me Your Good Ear* and *Reconstituting the World*. Now it's going to be something else. I think we're both excited and a little bit frightened by that process.

There is another thing I feel very strongly about. I don't want to be in a position where suddenly people begin to look at us and say: oh, you could publish my book. As a writer I went around for years thinking: oh, good, there's another feminist press—they're going to be the ones to publish my book. That didn't happen. I only now understand what feminist publishers meant when they wrote a rejection letter and said our resources are extremely limited. That's a really important point for all women writers to understand. I know we're going to get more than one good work of fiction. Which of course doesn't mean that everything we turn down is no good or unpublishable.

I: You're planning to publish two more works: fiction and a monograph type. Can you tell me anymore about that?

J: Well, the fiction will be a novel. The monograph—we'd like to be either of women's studies importance or of feminist political importance. We figure we've already put in a certain amount of time and energy into establishing an audience. We feel that as long as we've been able to keep contact with our market—we know it's there for us. We know the kind of reputation we've begun to establish. We would just like to be able to become more solid as a company by repeating the kinds of works we've already done—before we take any additional risks in terms of publishing something different.

# PERSEPHONE PRESS

an interview by CYNTHIA RICH

*The women of Persephone Press are Gloria Greenfield, Pat McGloin, and Deborah Snow. The address of the press is P.O. Box 7222, Watertown, Mass. 02172.*

*Cynthia:* In four short years, and with a staff of three women, Persephone Press is becoming more and more visible as a publishing house that combines integrity, risk-taking, and also notable success in making lesbian-feminist work widely available. Will you tell us a little about the very beginnings of Persephone?

*Gloria:* Well, the first book that we published was *A Feminist Tarot*, and more than our choosing to publish it, it was given to us as a catalyst for the development of Persephone Press.

*Pat:* In April of 1976, as Pomegranate Productions, we produced the first National Women's Spirituality Conference in Boston, at which Sally Gearhart and Susan Rennie were speakers. We had limited financial resources, and in order to defray the cost of the conference they gave us their manuscript to publish and we did—300 copies.

*P:* It sold out at the conference—in one day—and got an enormous reception. That's how we were born.

*C:* You didn't see yourself as a press at that time?

*G:* We had intended to become a publishing house—

The founders of Persephone were involved in Women's Studies. We were very aware of the repression of feminist thought through censorship, and in our research we had come across a lot of writings from the nineteenth century that were more radical than the writings we have today. One of our dreams or goals was to reissue these nineteenth century writings, and we had decided that at some point we would devote the time to learning how to do that. When *A Feminist Tarot* was handed to us, we realized that it was no longer some day we were going to take the time to learn, that we were actually just going to jump in and do it.

*C:* Who was "we" at that point?

*G:* At that point it was Pat McGloin, Marianne Rubenstein, Carol Cain, and myself. By June, Carol Cain had left. We reissued a second edition of *A Feminist Tarot* in the summer of 1976. We had 1000 copies printed, and they sold in approximately six months. By then we had decided to publish our second book, *The Fourteenth Witch*, and that's when Deborah became involved in Persephone. The book contains her photographs and poetry by Shelley Blue. Deborah came out from California to work on the book, and within a month we asked her to join us. We had been living in Monticello, New York, and we moved back to Watertown, and with that move the development of Persephone sped up. We released the first printed edition of *A Feminist Tarot*, 5000 copies, which again sold out rapidly.

And then we published *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women* by Sally Gearhart. After the release of that book, Marianne left Persephone. We released *The Wanderground* in February of 1979. It sold out in eight months, and in November we released the second edition of 15,000 copies.

D: We started out with desire, dedication, and energy, but not a real good understanding of how publishing works. I mean, starting with pamphlets—300 and then 1000—and 1000 seemed big, and then the next edition of the *Tarot* was 5000 and that seemed huge, you know. And the finances of that seemed huge, and the work to get that out seemed a lot. Then we did *The Wanderground*, and by that time we were doing perfect-bound glossy covers. It's been a continual learning process.

C: How did you finance?

G: The seed money to start Persephone came from our personal salaries. We worked other jobs and put our salaries into Persephone, and our families, who come from lower-class backgrounds, gave us money. They gave us \$1000 here and there, and it was their support that kept us going. We were surviving on an unbelievable cash flow. There was no cash flow.

At that time we didn't understand budgets, all we understood was that we needed x amount of money to pay for postage. We didn't even realize that it was not our responsibility to pay for the postage! Persephone for two years was a project that we paid for by housecleaning, by typing, by teaching, and by doing whatever we could to raise money. As we developed and became more skilled in business, we realized that there were other options, that feminist credit unions could loan us money, and we took on loans under personal liability. Along the way there were about five or six women who made loans to us at no interest, and that was a help. At that time a loan of \$250 was a lot of money.

D: A loan of \$25 wasn't bad.

P: Mind you, we had hardly any food, we weren't even eating much. And we were getting sick.

D: But we had to get the book out.

G: I believe that's why Persephone is now becoming successful. The first three years of a business are the most crucial, and you either make it or not during those first three years, and those three years we did whatever we needed to do to raise Persephone. And we raised her. Now we're at the point we have to be concerned about a lot of money. Now 5000 copies of a book isn't a huge enterprise.

P: It's just an automatic first printing.

G: And \$250 isn't a lot of money to us any more. We appreciate \$250, but we know it isn't going to get us to the post office. And we can no longer function as a volunteer project. We are working more than full time—we work up to sixteen hours a day, sometimes more than that.

P: I think that a real turning point for Persephone was September, when we decided that we would, on a trial basis, salary ourselves and work full time. We tried it for a month, and we were successful. We have continued to this point to be salaried, and the increase in productivity has been enormous. The whole focus has changed. Now we can visualize projects, things that need to be done, outreaches that we can do, and get them done, it's not an impossibility. Our vision has expanded greatly, and I think that our growth is expanding also.

C: What are the ways you feel your vision has expanded?

G: When *The Wanderground* came out, it changed us a lot because we had published a very hot book. The reviews were wonderful—there were some good criticisms, but it was a book that the lesbian and feminist communities wanted and needed. It is one of the most important books that came out in the 70s. We knew we had a responsibility to it, and it was a book that we were very proud of publishing. It supported our commitment to lesbian publishing.

D: I think it focused us more on the kinds of things we wanted to publish. We want to continue to strive toward being innovative, never stagnating, and publishing books that take our experiences, our realities, and our fantasies, and give us new thoughts about them.

C: Are you looking particularly for manuscripts that you think the establishment press, the boys, wouldn't take?

G: No. We look for books that provoke women into thinking. We don't say, "We won't publish that because they'd do it," but, "We want to publish that because it's important and because by publishing it, we will help that work affect women's lives; we will participate in making that work have an impact." I feel the work we are producing is revolutionary, and that the way we are going about creating a lesbian business is revolutionary. Every step we take requires a lot of consideration of ethics and redefining financial concepts.

C: I know that you have a strong commitment, stated in your contract, that you won't sell rights to the male publishing houses.

G: That's a major issue that I feel every woman in the lesbian and feminist communities has to deal with—whether we use each other as stepping stones or whether we see each other as the real thing. And we of course strongly believe that we are reality; we are what's happening; and we do not want our sisters to perceive us as an elementary experience before the real thing. Unfortunately, many lesbian and feminist writers have not dealt with those issues. They have not considered what it means to publish with men, what it means to hand over their creativity to patriarchal zoo-keepers or tamers.

D: We've made a decision not to do that. Where would we be? What would we become? And where are the lesbian writers who have been sold that way?

G: The fact is that we have revolutionary intentions. It's true that we would not have to worry about whether we could go shopping for food next week if we sold *The Wanderground* or the *Tarot* to any patriarchal press. We could definitely sell it; but if we sold it, we would be selling ourselves. Our intention is to build an autonomous lesbian network in publishing. So what we're saying to our authors or editors is: this is who we are, right out front, this is what you're dealing with. And when we all work together, the authors are making a very important political commitment that goes beyond "fame and fortune."

C: Patriarchal fame and fortune.

D: Yeah, which is patriarchal credibility. In reality, they probably have as good a chance for fortune with us as they do with any other publishing house.

C: Yes. I know that a lot of women assume that if they're just published by Beacon Press or Viking, if they can just get that manuscript between establishment covers, they will have good distribution, good publicity, and at least a little money to live on. But so often that's not the case.

What, in fact, are the kinds of assurances that you can give prospective authors?

G: Ninety percent of all books published, whether by small or major houses, do not sell 5000 copies, and I think it's important to note that three out of four of Persephone's books have sold more than 5000 copies in record time. Persephone has a commitment when we buy a book to get it out there, to make women aware, to make everyone aware that the book exists. And the books have sold, not because of some kind of sleazy rapport with chain bookstores, but because we have successfully outreached to readers, we have made them understand that these books are important, these books will affect their lives in a good way.

A lot of writers say to us, "But you can't give me a \$5000 advance." Well, the truth is that if we had given the author a \$5000 advance and 10 percent of the retail price, she would have gotten \$7500 for that edition of her book. In publishing with us, she got no advance, but 50 percent of the royalties. She got \$16,000 from that edition. What we're asking writers to do is to take the risk with us.

C: You've obviously been successful in promoting the work of your authors. But I see your promotional events as more than just that. I think of Sally Gearhart engaging a room of 250 women in dialogue when she came to promote *The Wanderground*. Or the 500 women who came to participate in Julia Stanley and Susan Wolfe's celebration of *The Coming Out Stories*. These are opportunities for lesbians to come together and experience the culture that we're building together.

G: Yes. Surely the goal is not that every woman could read a lesbian book or share coming out experiences, but that those experiences, those readings and sharing experiences, will help strengthen lesbian communities to rise up and to have a major impact on society by changing it, by taking control.

C: *Sinister Wisdom's* last issue on writing and publishing came out four years ago. Since then several of the most promising lesbian feminist presses have stopped publishing. Do you have any sense of why they failed, or what you have that is different to make you succeed?

G: Because we are not one of the first lesbian publishing houses, we have the privilege of studying what happened with previous lesbian publishing houses. And seeing the mistakes, we can avoid them, we can analyze them and go beyond them.

D: And some of those publishing houses have shared information.

G: Diana Press was very supportive to our process throughout their difficult times. And we can see the mistakes that they made, and see what happened to them because of being overworked, because of the resentment that naturally occurs when you're overworked and you don't feel like you're getting the kind of support that you need from the community, the breakdowns in communication that occur. That acts as a reminder to us to keep clear and not to get involved in those traps. We're also able to look at other publishing houses that are failing or that have failed, and to see at what point they sold out their initial principle and then lost that drive, that spirit that was involved in lesbian publishing.

D: Another thing—we really are out front about who we are. We say we're lesbian publishers.

G: We're a lesbian feminist publishing house, and to pretend that we aren't would require a lot of energy.

P: I'd like to talk about what public relations means to us because there's an idea in a lot of people's minds that you create an image of yourself that is other than who you are. We are who we are, and we become clearer every day about what Persephone Press is. We transmit that information clearly to women, and we get back energy. It has nothing to do with creating false images.

C: What about the economic questions of survival—the rising costs of labor and silver and paper?

G: I think that radical businesses are not feeling the effect as much as mainstream businesses are. Lesbians are not used to having so many privileges. It's always been a survival struggle for us. Outfront lesbian business haven't ever been able to go to a bank and say, "I'm an outfront lesbian business, give me a loan." We have always depended on alternative means to get capital. And while it is true that many of our production costs are going up, dramatically, I feel that we will be able to survive because of the political commitment and the political support that we have from the women we are working for. Women are not going to decide not to think any longer, not to share ideas any longer, because of the recession we're going into. Women are going to want to read even more.

C: I think so too. How does Persephone plan to meet that need?

P: Gloria mentioned that before Persephone started, one of our goals was to reissue some nineteenth century feminist work that is very radical. We're excited now about releasing *Woman, Church and State* by Matilda Joslyn Gage, which is the original exposé of male collaboration against the female sex. It's a work that's comparable to *The First Sex* by Elizabeth Gould Davis.

G: Another book we plan to release within the forthcoming year is an anthology, edited by Evelyn Torton Beck, on Jewish lesbians and the significance of the interaction between lesbianism and Judaism. We're hoping to publish—we're still waiting to hear from the editors—an anthology of Third World lesbians. In the fall we're releasing Deborah Snow's collection of photographs of lesbian sensuality.

D: And we will be releasing a book dealing with death from a lesbian perspective. The writer deals with the death of family—a death caused by cancer—and also separation of family, leaving those people even as they're dying to maintain her lesbian integrity. So it really is a book on death and life and coming out and confronting the basic fears.

G: We're also looking forward to publishing a book on lesbian mothers by Susan Wolfe.

D: And also a book on lesbian relationships that will deal with the often unspoken realities of women loving women.

G: In accepting these books, it's not a question of will this book sell? But will it be important, will it have an impact on our community? If it's thought-provoking, if it's nonoppressive, if it breaks through barriers, filling gaps that we have—that's the kind of book that Persephone wants to publish. That's what we're about, we're about helping to foster provocative and innovative writings and thought with a lesbian sensibility. With an intention of recreating the world.

*Jo Anne Prather and Yvonne MacManus, founders of Timely Books, have both previously worked as editors and between them have approximately 40 years experience in book and magazine publishing. In April 1978 they published reprints of Paula Christian's The Edge of Twilight and This Side of Love, followed in October by Patte Wheat's By Sanction of the Victim, a book on child abuse. The third in a projected collection of six Paula Christian novels, Love Is Where You Find It, came out in August 1979. The following interview about Timely Books was with Celeste Charles, publicist for the company.*

*Why did you begin by reprinting old novels rather than publishing original material?*

We felt that the feminist publishers were covering the field effectively in areas of nonfiction, poetry, and contemporary fiction. We noted that very little was available about what it used to be like for lesbians in the "bad ol' days," and we felt that many younger lesbians were deeply interested in learning about lesbian life in the 1950s and 60s. Many older readers remember and identify with Paula's portrayal of that period. Our younger readers see a lesbian heritage emerging from her novels, although some balk at the lack of specific sex scenes, at the wearing of bras, and at the word *girl*, and so forth.

*Do you try to do business with lesbian/feminists whenever possible?*

Definitely! We'd love to and have made efforts to, but it simply hasn't worked out thus far. Unfortunately, most lesbian/feminist printers are not equipped to handle the type of production we want. When they can, the covers have to be farmed out, or the binding, or some other aspect of production. This forces them to charge prices that are astronomical in comparison to the big printing companies, and we just can't afford the difference.

*Has distribution been a problem?*

Yes, somewhat. The usual distributors aren't interested in handling our books because we're small and can't promise x-number of books per year. We were about to sign with WIND when they folded—much to our regret.

*After you started Timely, were there any surprises?*

Yes! We had a printer in Michigan who did the first two of Paula's books. Both books stated in the front and backmatter that they are novels of lesbian love and romance. The printer accepted the job, and it was delivered to us. Then, when we sent in the third title for a printing estimate, the company declined to bid "due to the subject matter"! They informed us they didn't want to do anything that might offend their employees. We pointed out that they had done the first two, but they remained adamant.

*Were there other surprises?*

We've been tremendously impressed by the honesty of the women we deal with. Not a single individual has stung us, and only one feminist bookstore has left us holding the bag. We've been stung by men who have bookstores, and we've put them *all* on a prepaid basis.

Women have volunteered to do our addressing, to get xerox copies in quantity, to help with keeping the books, to spread the word of our existence, etc. We feel like we're part of a very large family.

*It's rumored that Paula Christian repudiated her lesbianism and worked in porno.*

She never repudiated her lesbianism or worked in pornography. That rumor has caused us grief with sales, and with editors of various publications who declined to run reviews of Paula's books. I wish our sisters wouldn't believe things like that without substantiating the things they hear. If they had taken the trouble to *ask* us, we could've cleared the air. And I'm grateful to have the opportunity to do that here.

*After the Paula Christian novel series what books do you want to publish?*

Our main goal is to survive, and then to succeed. Publishing is a very risky business; we depend on the sale of each book to finance the publication of the next. In the first year practically all of our efforts were spent in letting women know that we existed. In the future we would like to publish original material, but that takes much more capital than we presently have.

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## HELAINÉ VICTORIA PRESS

an interview by MAIDA TILCHEN

*Helaine Victoria is an unusual women's press. While most lesbian and/or feminist presses print books and pamphlets, concentrating on words and content, the Helaine Victoria Press has been printing picture postcards, and has emphasized the process of printing itself. They mainly use the old-fashioned method of printing called letterpress, in which each letter is a separate piece of type to be individually set by hand. They have produced a large selection of postcards with photos and illustrations of about 100 women important to feminist history, plus some posters, notecards, bookplates, and greeting cards, all with a feminist theme. The women on their cards include Amelia Earhart, Eleanor Roosevelt, Radclyffe Hall, Sojourner Truth, Rosa Luxembourg, Belle Starr, Gertrude Stein, George Sand, and Harriet Tubman. They also have sets of postcards on the topics of women's history, women in the American labor movement, and women in ecology.*

*Nancy Taylor Victoria Poore and Jocelyn Helaine Cohen are the owners and entire staff of Helaine Victoria Press. They started their business in California in 1973, and in 1976 moved to a rustic cottage in the backwoods of southern Indiana. Their printing facilities fill the garage. On their 12-acre rented homestead they have an organic garden, a pond, woods, and a meadow. The not-too-nearby town of Martinsville has the notorious reputation of being a conservative fundamentalist stronghold.*

*I interviewed Nancy and Jocelyn in December 1979. I went expecting to hear about the joys of escaping to the land and the ecological value of using an eighty-year old press. Instead, I was surprised by their skepticism about the political value of living in the country. Their comments on why they prefer the process of letterpress printing clearly ties in with what feminists are saying in almost every area of culture, that they feel a need to be involved with every aspect of the process of their work.*

*If you're going to any big East Coast or Midwestern feminist conference or music festival, you're likely to see Jocelyn and Nancy and their display of postcards, postage stamps with a feminist theme, prints, and posters. Their catalog*

for mail orders can be obtained by writing to Helaine Victoria Press, 4080 Dynasty Lane, Martinsville, Indiana 46151. Send a couple of postage stamps if possible.



*Ida B. Wells-Barnett*

*Maida:* How did you begin your press?

*Nancy:* We had met in 1973 at Womanspace, the women's independent co-op art gallery in Los Angeles. Jocey was in art school and I was in public relations. We were both interested in the women's movement in general, in women's history, and in women's art and woman artists. We both used postcards a lot because a phone call to the next block in Los Angeles is a long-distance call. We liked postcards and the pictures. Inevitably the thought came up that with all the beautiful reproduction postcards, there was no art by women, no pictures of women. So then we got into thinking, 'Wouldn't it be great if we could design and print some?' At first we were just going to select our own pictures and go to an outside printer.

*Jocey:* We found that we couldn't afford printers. We also found we had very little control over what we were doing. Most printers were men, and they had the attitude that they were doing us a favor. We only used them once, for a series of eight cards.

*M:* Did either of you have a background in printing?

*N:* My dad was a painter and graphic designer, and I have always been involved with art. I was always interested in design, and every chance I had I spent time at the printers. I tried to get into printing school when I got out of college, but they weren't letting women in.

Jocey was enrolled at the California Institute of Arts, and she had a woman graphics instructor. I stopped by a lot, and the instructor caught on that we wanted to work on postcards together. She very kindly gave us a key to the graphics lab, so that we could use it after midnight. Now we're both better camera people and printers than most, and it came from being left a-

lone to just do it, with no instructor.

*M:* You learned on an offset press, why did you switch to letterpress?

*J:* It took me a long time to really get into printing. Offset made my stomach hurt a lot. I didn't like the way that offset treats the design, as a real separate element. I'm not a designer so much as I am a painter. Every step in the offset process seemed to separate the original material further away from the end product. Offset can be a really alienating method—strictly a job, like fixing a car. Usually the designer and the printer and the plate-maker are separate people, and they don't know much about what each other's job is. To have any control over the end product, you can do it all by yourself, which we did. But even then I found the materials I was working with separate from each other. Not everybody feels this way, some women do love offset printing.

*M:* What are the joys of letterpress?

*J:* It's real "potchkeying." I'm sort of a perfectionist, and letterpress is perfect for that. It must be perfect, or it looks like it's not. Using a letterpress, I feel less alienated. I feel always connected. For example, a bookstore in New York wanted bookmarks made. I felt from the start that there was an original concept, and I followed it all the way through. I never felt that there was any part of it that I wasn't part of, either setting up, designing, or printing.

The materials have their own possibilities and limitations. Two people can start with a paintbox full of colors and come up with completely different things. The same is true of type.

*M:* Do you plan the whole design and then set it?

*N:* Some people do that, but we don't always. There was a time when printers were the designers, and they designed as they went along to fit the space, the needs of the job, and the colors. On letterpress you can do that because you can always pull out a letter and change it. With offset, once you've made the plate, if you need a change you have to make the whole plate again.

*M:* What's a feminist press doing near a rural town in Indiana?

*J:* I was dying of pneumonia in Los Angeles. I'd had it with the city. We wanted to move to the country and change to letterpress printing. I called home to Indianapolis and found out my brother wanted to rent a cottage he owned, so I thought I'd like to live there.

*N:* I came home that evening, and Jocey had written me this long letter of all the reasons to move.

*M:* Were you opposed to the idea?

*N:* Not at all. I wasn't exactly thriving on the local atmosphere, and I'm a native midwesterner myself, from Chicago. We had two or three days to decide. Luckily, we hadn't bought a letterpress yet. When we got to Indiana, it took a few months to set up. We found the press by putting an ad in a printer's journal, and bought it for about \$150. At that time it wasn't too hard to get type, but right now there's an antique craze for large type and the drawers the type comes in, so it's much harder to get.

*M:* Where do you find all the wonderful photos on your cards?

*N:* We go to a lot of places, general collections and specialized archives, also some private and personal collections. Either we come in with something we're looking for, or we run across something. We often start with a theme,

such as our series on "Women in the American Labor Movement." For that we went to the Reuther Archives at Wayne State, which is on labor history. Jocey spent a lot of time at the Library of Congress and the National Archives. We look mostly at manuscript and photograph collections, things that are obscure and not published yet.

*M:* What does it do to your consciousness to look through hundreds of thousands of photographs of women?

*N:* I find it incredibly moving. I think of the vast numbers of women—a whole procession through history. I find it really touching, the sheer impact of it, the cumulative effect.

*M:* How do you like the selling aspect of your work? Would you rather be printing than selling?

*J:* It's nice to have some variety. At some of these conferences we meet interesting people, and there are other women who make and sell their own stuff that we look forward to seeing. We've had a hard time finding our niche for customers. We're making postcards, which isn't done much anymore. And when we started, doing women's history, it wasn't very popular. So we've had a really hard time just drumming up interest in what we do. Bookstores would say that cards should go in a gift store. Gift stores would say that we were educational and political, and that they wouldn't carry us. At our first really big academic conference, I was afraid the academics would find us not academic enough. I think if that had happened we would have quit. The amazing thing was that that was our niche. The academics loved our cards.

*M:* Do you feel like you're fulfilling that American dream of moving to the country and having your own business?

*N:* We both have this naive conviction that there's possibly something we can do to make a difference in the world. We hope by mixing neglected archival materials with the art of letterpress, a feminist perspective, and the power of the press, some new thoughts, ideas, and feelings will result from our work.



*Amelia & Eleanor*

# METIS PRESS

*It's been a long four years since the crazy womyn of Metis Press ran screaming circles around their second-hand, cantankerous Multilith 1250 and declared that they were going to experience "Instant Success!" but Metis Ernestine (as their press is affectionately known) and the womyn still exist in the lesbian/feminist heart of Chicago.*

*Chris Straayer (writer, storyteller, dyke womon) and Chris Johnson (printer, illustrator, lovely lesbian) recently joined by Janet Soule (thinker, writer, Amazon) are the Metis womyn. Some do think they are crazy, for in addition to their full-time employment to pay the rent, they spend countless hours in translating their vision to reality.*

*It's a powerful womondream that has propelled them to a kind of compulsive obsession . . . But let's listen to them explain. They love to talk about it.*

js: *How do you define Metis Press?*

cs: Metis is a lesbian/feminist publisher *and* press. Many places will say "womon's press" when they really aren't doing the printing; they are mainly publishing. We are also an integral part of the feminist movement; we're a link in the feminist literary network. In comparison to the traditional industry where printers, publishers, and bookstores keep their territories marked off (true to the male-oriented competitive sense of business), we try to overlap. We're aware of what's happening in womonprint and have friends in feminist bookstores who share the common goal of womoncelebration, fusing the separate roles of the womyn-into-print process and demystifying the publisher.

cj: We encourage women to further invest in their work by sharing control and even participating in the actual production of their work into print.

cs: That is, we encourage a womyn to control her work as it is published. We try to act as the editor only in so far as getting the best out of a womon. We feel that she will benefit from our suggestions, but basically she will be the main voice, the main politics. Once we understand that our lesbian/feminist stance is shared by her, then it is her political voice coming through.

cj: We do production ourselves in cooperation with authors, and we teach self-publishing skills because it relieves the author from being dependent on big publishers and editors who take over the control—so that if there is a time that no one will publish your book, *you* can publish yourself and that's a hell of a lot of power!

cs: Commerical publishers make decisions based on financial repercussions. We are trying not to put our emphasis there. Instead, we are trying to find ways to allow for books that sell slowly. Having a children's book will perhaps give us income to hold us over while another book is selling slowly.

js: *Do you try to influence the actual distribution?*

cs: Yes. For instance, *A Book of One's Own: Guide to Self-Publishing* is written to womyn. We're hoping that it will be used by feminists, and that the knowledge will go to womyn through the small-press bookstores. But

with lesbian books, we have mainly restricted sales to womon-owned or feminist-oriented bookstores or else to bookstores that have a local reputation for stocking feminist works and where we are reasonably sure that the work will go into the hands of lesbians. We want feminists and lesbians to communicate with one another, to own and improve this communication, and therefore to develop their politics.

But sometimes we get worried about what's going to happen. We don't get any money, we get very little recognition, we get almost no support from the local feminist community, no communication, no shoulders to lean on, we get no applause, and our personal lives suffer. Sometimes, I think that we *are* crazy for doing it.

*cj*: How can we work so hard now when in two years it might be gone? It's perplexing in a way, but really what else would I do?

*cs*: When I first became identified as a lesbian/feminist, I was *very* idealistic! I believed that I loved all women and that they all loved me and we were going to form a perfect world. Soon I realized that that was not really the picture. I transferred my idealism to lesbians. I thought I could count on lesbians to care about certain political issues; I would work for all the causes of all lesbians, and they would all be willing to share my cause. Eventually, that ideology fell through as well. At that point, I trusted only political lesbian/feminists, then only my friends, and finally, it boiled down to me. But I still feel that idealism, that sisterhood dream. . . . Metis Press is my participation in that dream.

*cj*: Being involved in the feminist literary network allows me to reevaluate the world I grew up with. Feminist books have helped me sort things out, and I participate in Metis to make even more of those books.

*js*: *Do you think your goals have changed significantly since you first conceptualized Metis Press?*

*cj*: I think we are much more realistic in terms of production. The first printing job we took on was a book that took us an entire year to do.

*cs*: We have become more specific by limiting our goals. For instance, at one time we thought we would be a job shop. We decided for several reasons, though, that that was not a beneficial goal. For Metis, it was economically unfeasible to start a business at that time. We were learning our skills as we progressed. More importantly, our reward for work was emotional, and it was very important not to destroy that by having to deal, as a budding lesbian press, with off-the-street straight traffic as a job shop. We felt we would not exist for six more months if that emotional reward was diminished. Also when we first started, we were unrealistic about how much energy, money and learning was required to print. With every book we learn something. We attempt something new in every product and are then better prepared for the next project. But I had no idea what I was getting into. I thought that we would just publish books one after another. Now in fact I think that what we wanted to happen *is* happening, but at one-tenth the rate!! The inside picture of a woman's press is struggle and sacrifice. No small feminist press is really making it financially. It's a lot of work, and risk taking.

Unrealistic expectations within the community isolate a feminist press. It feel to me like people think that we are an important element and leaders in the feminist community; however, our communication with the community is almost nil. We are always working!! I think they feel that we are already appreciated by definition and therefore don't need their comments or support.

*cj:* Every few months, I get a phone call or letter from somebody who has been referred to us asking for a job. They're asking us for a job when we are volunteers!! But our situation *is* changing. At one time we had dreams of books, but had no books. Now, although we are a small press even in the womyn's publishing industry, our books are on shelves across the country.

*js:* *We should talk about the beginning stages of the press.*

*cs:* The first official thing we did was to go to the Womyn in Print Conference in 1976. We wrote them and said we were a beginning press, even though we had printed nothing besides some stationery. We were very pleased to attend that conference. Brainstorming that took place there is still influencing the feminist literary network.

The WIP Conference opened up communication for the first time between the womyn in different facets of feminist literature. We started seeing each other's individual problems, as feminist bookstores, publishers and magazines. At that time, even though a bookstore was feminist, they still had not worked through assumptions that society makes about publishers. For example, they would expect a small womyn's press to provide them and every other bookstore with a review copy! Of course we can't do this without taking away our complete profit margin!! It was very important that this dialogue be started, so that they don't expect the same thing from us that they do from traditional publishers.

*cj:* Next time, we need to include the feminist writers because they need to be educated about feminist publishers. They have the same expectations of the feminist publishers that they have of the established, moneyed industry publishers, and that is just totally unrealistic.

After that conference, sometimes womyn from other womyn's presses would come visit us, which was really flattering but also really embarrassing because I felt like apologizing. They said, "Don't apologize. Don't say that it is *just* a press in the basement. Say rather that *this is your press!!*" They understand; they come from the same place.

*cs:* We can see our growth. Small as it is, it is still something far beyond the *nothing* with which we started! We like our books! And we still believe in our original goals. After all, we didn't start this press for community recognition. We started it because one day we looked around and realized that there was no shop in all of Chicago that was woman owned and operated. We wanted to make books touched only by womyn's hands!

*cj:* It's exciting to me that our skills are still increasing. I just printed 17,000 sheets in one day. There was a time when it took us 3 days to print 1,000 sheets! I'm still thrilled everytime we get an order, whether it's from another country or from an individual in some small midwest town. It's that

occasional order from Cherry Grove, USA, that isolated woman out there waiting, reaching for one of our books . . . .

*Metis offerings to date:*

*Wild Womyn Don't Get the Blues* by Barbara Emrys

Stories that cut to the bare bone of Woman's survival. \$3.00

*Shedevils* by Barbara Sheen

Biting, provocative stories that require a decision from you. \$3.50

*The Secret Witch* by Linda Stem Johnson

Strong womynchildren in action. \$4.00, 8-12 yrs.

*A Book of One's Own: Guide to Self-Publishing* by Chris Straayer and Chris Johnson

Comprehensive guide to owning and printing your own words. \$4.00

*Hurin' and Healin' and Talkin' It Over* by Chris Straayer

Stories to captivate, haunt, and remind you. \$5.00

*The Rock and Me Immediately* by Chris Straayer

Put on your pajamas and galoshes and discover the Rock. \$5.00

For tough kids. 8-12 yrs.

Available to womyn's bookstores or from:

Metis Press

P.O. Box 25187

Chicago, IL 60625

Please include 75 cents postage.



photo by Army Christine Straayer

*The Aprons of Metis Press*

## NAIAD PRESS

The Naiad Press is a lesbian feminist press which has previously published nine lesbian novels, as well as two Renée Vivien books in translation; a volume of book reviews from the famed grandmother of lesbian publications, *The Ladder*; and a comprehensive 96-page bibliography, *The Lesbian in Literature*, an updated and expanded version of which is now in preparation.

Their books scheduled for 1980 release are:

Ann Allen Shockley, *The Black and the White of It*, paperback, \$5.95, now available. Stories of black and white lesbians by the author of *Loving Her* and "The Black Lesbian in Literature."

*Lesbian-Feminism in Turn-of-the-Century Germany: An Anthology*, translated and with a substantive introduction by Lillian Faderman and Brigitte Erikson, paperback, \$5.95. Never before published in English, these essays and excerpts from novels fill in a large chapter in the history of lesbian and feminist activism and literature.

Pat Califia, *Sapphistry: The Book of Lesbian Sexuality*, with photographs by Tee Corinne, paperback, \$6.95. A detailed lesbian sex manual.

Mail orders are welcomed. Send to The Naiad Press, 7800 Westside Drive, Weatherby Lake, Missouri 64152; include 15% postage.

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## OUT & OUT BOOKS

(An interview with Jane Creighton, Joan Larkin, and Ellen Shapiro of *Out & Out Books*, will appear in an upcoming issue of SW.)

### ON STRIKE AGAINST GOD

prose by Joanna Russ

### CERES IN AN OPEN FIELD

poems by Jane Creighton

xerox prints by Martha Gever

\$3.50 ea. plus 65¢ mailing cost  
(N.Y. residents add 8% sales tax)

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### OUT & OUT BOOKS

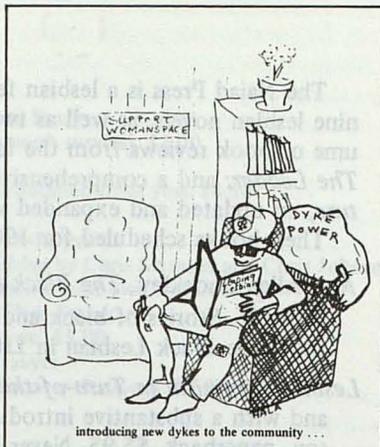
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Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215

The Story of  
**The LEAPING LESBIAN**

cartoons by Hala



bringing people together in the workplace ...



introducing new dykes to the community ...



production work ...



trying to sell them



subscription increase

# ALTERNATIVES TO PRINT

## On the Other Hand

by a Friend (with Kim Schive and Nancy Becker)

"I had a subscription to *Gay Community News*. I won't renew it probably. Why? Because reading it is too hard for me. I look at *GCN*. 'What does that mean?' 'What does that mean?' And I throw it away." Nancy, who is speaking to me through an interpreter, is a bright woman and an educated one. She has earned a Master's degree and she teaches at Northeastern University. Still, she finds *GCN* largely unintelligible. How can this be? Though she grew up in an English-speaking family, Nancy is not a native speaker of English. For Nancy was born deaf. And her native language is American Sign Language (ASL). ASL is a language distinct from English in modality—being visual/spatial rather than auditory/spoken—and distinct in grammar, syntax and linguistic structure.

Put yourself in Nancy's situation and try to imagine coming out as a lesbian and learning about feminism. For years you've been sent to oral schools where the emphasis has been on learning to speak and lipread, on learning to perform as if you were a hearing person (an impossibility, because you are *not* hearing). Secretly (because it was forbidden) you learned sign language from the deaf kids who had deaf parents. And ASL became your native language.

What you know of the world is limited to what you can see of it. You don't know there's a women's movement. How is it possible to come out as a lesbian when you know only what you can see and, from all you can see, there is no such thing? It would be as easy to come out as a unicorn. But suppose, somehow—even if there is no such thing—you did decide you were a unicorn, who would you tell? The deaf community is extremely conservative, being limited to what they can see, and in that community you don't know who you can talk to and who you can trust. Besides, you think you are nuts, having feelings that no one ever had.

And the matter of becoming a feminist. You don't listen to the radio, read *Ms.* magazine, overhear women's conversations—you can't—so you don't have any ground for becoming a feminist. Besides that, you've been unaware of an oppression closer to home: your oppression as a deaf person. And before you can understand that you are oppressed as a woman, you have to understand that you are oppressed as a deaf person.

But say you begin to get a feminist consciousness. Where do you go for a political education? You can't read theory; even the newspaper is difficult for you. And unlike hearing women, you don't have access to CR groups or work groups or to discussions with women who may be more politically sophisticated.

Kim, who has not always been deaf,\* explains how difficult it is for a woman born deaf to gain a political understanding of feminism. "It would be like putting an English-speaking person into a sound-proof booth and asking her to learn to read, write, and speak Japanese, and then telling her she had to learn political theory through a book written in Japanese."

According to Kim, the vast majority of women born deaf never become completely bi-lingual. For them English will always be a second language, and they will always be "print-handicapped." If hearing women are to broaden the movement to include deaf women, we must:

1) open our meetings, starting with CR. This means that groups must look at attitudes toward the handicapped and decide to make meetings accessible, engage and pay interpreters for the deaf. It means also being patient, understanding that there won't be an immediate response. We can't have an interpreter once and be satisfied that we have done our part. We have to invite, publicize, ask deaf feminists to get other deaf women to the meetings. We also have to be willing to deal with the ambivalence of deaf women toward hearing women—that while deaf women want and need to be included, they are angry (and rightfully) to be there by the hearing women's "charity" and always on the others' terms.

2) learn sign language. Not as a lark, but as a serious responsibility. This means that we don't ask our deaf friends to teach us (unless one is offering a class and we pay her). This means that we don't get tired and give up after a few weeks. As Kim says: "It's easier for you to learn sign language than for a deaf person to learn to hear."

3) see to it that after deaf women have been involved in CR discussions and feminist work projects for a few years, feminist lectures are interpreted for the deaf as a matter of course.

Nancy adds. "Remember that deaf lesbian women will need a lot of time to learn about feminism and a lot of support from you. In return, deaf women will support you to understand about deafness, to learn sign language and to locate interpreters."

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\*Therefore she is a minority in both the deaf and the hearing community, and totally at home in neither, having to seek support for her deafness in the deaf community and support for her feminism in the hearing community (and always dealing with hearing women on unequal terms).

## DIFFERENT AND EQUAL

by Kathy Hagen

Slowly over the years I began to ask myself if I was a lesbian. I felt vast discomfort when considering such a possibility. I knew I'd be a fool to explore such an idea. After all, I had enough problems being different as a blind person. I thought maybe I should read about it. Then I learned how devastating it is to have no privacy. There were no books or magazines readily available in the mid-1970's about feminism at all, let alone lesbianism--particularly to someone who was afraid to ask about such literature or to admit that she was considering the possibility of being a lesbian. I found it hard to find lesbians at all because I was not privy to the print notices and brochures used to advertise their meeting. When I did drag myself into a women's bookstore to buy books, I had to ask whatever clerk was available what books she thought were good, and take her judgment on buying a good book to read. However, when I got the book home, I didn't have the nerve to ask anyone to read it to me anyway.

This was the state of affairs I was in when I move to Minneapolis. In Minneapolis, however, I was lucky enough to meet another blind woman who considered herself to be going through the same process of coming out. She was in a women's studies program at the University of Minnesota and had managed through that program to get some feminist and lesbian literature taped. I began to read avidly. We also began and have continued over the past two years to pool our resources to get things brailled and taped. We have started a newsletter to inform other blind women about what is available. We have found other blind lesbians across the country, and we have met Kady Van Deurs, a lesbian author and a one-woman dynamo, who has taken it upon herself to help us find resources for getting more books recorded.

Our newsletter is entitled the *Women's Issues Newsletter*. It is issued quarterly, and a yearly subscription costs \$2.50. It is available in print, large print, and in braille. In this newsletter we cover issues which blind women have fewer chances to read about than do sighted women because of the lack of literature on feminist issues in braille or recorded format. We publish articles written by other blind women. Some samples of articles we have included are: 1) an article written by a blind woman who was raped about how she coped afterwards; 2) an article written by a blind woman about the tremendous discrimination she received in the hospital when she bore her daughter; 3) an article from a blind lesbian about her coming out process; 4) an interview with a woman who has taught self defense classes to blind women. We also recommend books which we have read and feel

would be helpful to others if these books are recorded or brailled. We also include scathing reviews of some of the literature the Library of Congress makes readily available to us--literature which portrays disabled women either very negatively or, at the very least, ineffectually. Anyone wishing to subscribe or to contribute articles should write to either: Kathy Hagen, 2701 Harriet Ave. S., Apt. 102, Minneapolis, MN 55408 or Marj Schneider, 1615 S. 4th St., Apt. 2506, Minneapolis, MN 55454.

## CATALOGUE FOR WOMEN WHO ARE BLIND

by Kady van Deurs & Eileen Pagan

We have just finished a catalog called *WOMANBOOKS FOR WOMEN WHO ARE BLIND AND/OR PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED*. We made this catalog because women who are blind told us they could not find the books they need in existing catalogs. They said they could not find feminist books and lesbian books in format for the blind. We ran a list of 7,000 books (the holdings of *WOMANBOOKS* Bookstore in NYC) against 25,000 titles at National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. and against 45,000 titles at Recording for the Blind, NYC.

At the Library of Congress there are 80 million books for those of us with sight. There are only 25 thousand for those of us who are blind. Of these, only a few hundred might help women become aware of (and thus begin to break free of) our 5 thousand years of slavery.

In our catalog, books are arranged by 37 subjects--subjects like feminism, lesbian, rape, abortion--categories that do not appear in existing catalogs from Recording for the Blind and National Library Service. Books from both RFB and NLS are gathered together in one catalog to make it easier for women who are blind. There is an author index, too. We have read the catalog onto 7 tracks. A beep system indicates subjects and also letters of the alphabet in the author index.

Women who need the catalog can get it by sending \$3 or two high quality 90-minute cassettes to: Gay and Lesbian Blind, Suite 502, 110 East 23 Street, New York, New York 10010. Sighted women can help by sending dollars or tapes to make the catalog available to women who cannot afford \$3.

I am a blind woman interested in beginning to collect our history as blind women. Through interviewing and corresponding with women, I hope to gather enough material to put together a book. If you are interested in participating, or if you know anyone who would be, please write or call: Kathy Hagen, 2701 Harriet Ave. S., Apt. 102, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55408. (612) 825-0605.

## Preserving Our Words and Pictures

*This is part two of Beth Hodge's interview with Joan Nestle and Deborah Edel of the Lesbian Herstory Archives. Part one appeared in SW 11 (Fall 1979).*

*Beth:* Being a media person, I'm struck by Barbara Smith's observation about the materials of an art form, what she sees Black women's quilting and lesbian publishing to have in common. Will you tell that story again?

*Joan:* Both because of our personal interest and because we recognized it as a major event, when the First Annual Third World Lesbian Writers' Conference was being organized by women of this area, we called and offered to tape and photograph; and they said yes, because they wouldn't have enough free womanpower to do it.

Barbara Smith and Lorraine Bethel were facilitating a discussion on Black lesbian feminist literary criticism. Barbara made the point that you can tell what access a people has to survival tools by the materials they use in an art form. She'd gone to see a quilt exhibit in which there were works of white women and Black women. In all the reviews no one remarked upon the difference in the material the two groups of women had access to. She said the Black women's quilting was done with very different quality of material, and the backing was plain brown wrapping paper because they couldn't get sturdier materials.

Then Barbara came that weekend to the Archives. She pointed out something we had not seen. She was looking around the room and she said, "You see how we have to use staples for most of our publications, and so many of our materials are mimeographed," that how things were being produced was a comment on how we used what material we had, to do what we had to do.

She also thought the Archives was wonderful. She had a complete understanding of what it means to do something grassroots. Which is the vision behind the Archives.

*B:* Will you talk about your determination to keep the Archives a grassroots operation, independent and uncompromised?

*Deborah:* Women say to us, 'Are you going to apply for big governmental grants?' No. It's been important that we take our time to build up trust, knowing that the money will come when we need it and when we can handle it, and that we spend our time now building a base that isn't dependent on governmental funds, but is built on what women can give of their own lives. We always need money, but we want it to come from women who believe in our work.

*J:* Something we need to free for ourselves—and this is a controversial issue—is the hold of academic institutions over cultural collections. We must not be tempted to take money from them, not be tempted to install the collection on

a university, even if it's a woman's university. We must not be fooled into forgetting that these institutions, which seem to be devoted to learning, are part of the military industrial complex that makes the world impossible for most people, as well as for lesbians.

We've been called parochial in an article that I wrote a response to. Whenever a people say that they want their own land, they're called parochial by the group that moved them out of geography in the first place. Everything is suspect that we do not do ourselves. Any offers from the patriarchy are suspect.

I know that this is a purist vision, but you can't preserve a culture and turn it over to be protected, or to be cared for, by the heads and hands of those who ruled us out of culture in the first place.

*B:* What is your vision of the Lesbian Herstory Archives?

*J:* Our concept is a living grassroots Archives that is open to all its people, the Lesbian people, that creates culture and supports the people's struggles while it preserves their memories.

We cherish the stories and the materials of all women at all stages of their lives, from all political persuasions. One of our principles is giving access without judgment. Personally, all of us on the Archives collective have strong and varied political positions, but the Archives is a healing place—there is no "right line," all women are welcome. No woman is refused and no woman's work is refused. And that suits us very well.

*B:* You wanted to talk about the Archives being for the women whose names are not famous?

*J:* Yes. For example, a woman who is ill started by writing to us about the Archives. She asked us if we'd be interested in her poetry, and we've been exchanging letters ever since. Her letters have become her gift to the Archives. What the Archives has meant to her is a place to send her unpublished poetry, a way of sharing her work.

I think that's the sacred purpose of the Archives, to get the hidden voices, the voices that live every day but don't have access to being published.

We get letters from women living in isolation who say, 'I'm just a lesbian woman. Is it really *me* that you care about?' And the wonderful joy it is to be able to say, 'Yes!' It's such a relief to be able to say *yes*, and I think it's a relief to the whole community.

*B:* Do you want to talk about your commitment to representing all women?

*J:* Part of the Archives vision is the destruction of myths. One of our special commitments is making sure that within the lesbian community all our faces are visible, all our bodies are visible, all words are visible. Also multilanguages—we want the collection to be not just in English, because we speak all languages. We have a wonderful collection of love poetry in Spanish from a woman who was very active in Pa Fuera. We also have materials in French, Italian, Hebrew, German, Dutch, and Norwegian.

We want to promote research in Black lesbian history. The first lesbian woman I knew was a Black woman. We know there's a huge rich tradition of cultural groups, organizations, sisterhoods, where Black lesbian women spent much of their time and from which they got great strength. The work of lifting the layers of privacy can best be done by third world women, but it is not their responsibility alone. The Archives is a collective of Black and white women, and it is our task

to make sure all women feel comfortable with and a part of the Archives collection and process.

*B:* How are you getting work from disabled lesbians?

*J:* We heard that a group of disabled lesbians were speaking. For personal reasons we've become sensitized to some of the issues of illness and disability, and we realized it was very important for the Archives to have a tape of their speech.

We asked Gwen and Lyn, who are two blind lesbian women, their permission to tape and they were very happy to give it. And that got us onto many other topics and we learned what they couldn't take for granted and the ways we could all work together to make life a little more easy, like reading mail, going to events together, just being available.

I'm aware of how hard we have to work to be inclusive of all our experiences in our Archives. If a woman is disabled and cannot use a typewriter or cannot use a tape, we have to find ways for her to record her life. We have to make sure that we don't duplicate the invisibilities of the other society. The building that someday will house the Archives must be accessible to disabled women; and it must have special equipment for disabled women, such as braille labeling and good audio equipment. And we will have an interpreter for the deaf.

*B:* What about older lesbians?

*J:* When we speak and I look around at the audiences, or we go to women's centers, I see grey-haired women—women in their fifties and sixties. I know the incredible stories they have to tell and the struggles they have had to go through. If the women who read this interview who never thought of their lives as absolutely necessary to our movement—to the lesbian feminist movement, the women's movement, the gay movement—if they would just *know* that the Archives is reaching out to them. Get in touch with us, or make a tape, or take a photograph. Just increase our knowledge and awareness.

I want the Archives to give us back our generational connections, to deepen our understanding of how we survived, and the courage of each generation.

Whenever we speak we call on *all* women who hear us to send something to the Archives. We do the outreach that we can personally. But if every woman takes it upon herself—as an act of caring—to become part of the Archives, then by definition we will end the silences. Because we are all of all peoples.

*B:* Who are the members of the Archives collective?

*J:* Deborah Edel, Georgia Brooks, Judith Schwarz, Valerie Itnyre, and myself. Mabel Hampton is our guiding spirit. Other women like Arissa Reed, Carol, and our lesbian lawyer are close and working friends of the Archives.

*B:* What are the responsibilities of each collective member?

*D:* The first thing to remember is that we all have full-time jobs besides the Archives...which is another full-time job...We all work on everything and are learning all the skills involved, though we may rotate responsibilities at different times. Every Tuesday evening we have a collective meeting to share the week's happenings and plan the coming weeks. Every day we give tours, help women find the information they need, file materials, pick up the mail, answer letters, and keep the room in order. Then there are projects like developing special-interest bibliographies, working on the next newsletter, cataloguing our holdings, organizing Archives events, and developing slide shows. Besides that, we are cultural missionaries, which means we do slide shows, publish a newsletter and bibliographies, and obsessively speak about the Archives.

*B:* Do you ever feel invisible in your role as archivist?

*D:* Yes, I have talked sometimes about the loneliness of the long-distance archivist and the ambivalence that I experience. I think you've expressed it more, Joan, and I think you feel it even more strongly because you're a writer. It's this feeling of 'here we are, doing the collecting,' the collecting and the preserving and the day-to-day stuff, and there's no time for me to read much of what's going on. But it is because of the Archives that women are doing this incredibly fascinating research. They're spending five weeks at this library and three weeks at that library, taking the time to dig into women's lives. They are writing up their research, and they're publishing their articles. There's a visibility to what they're doing, but there isn't for us.

*J:* There is a loneliness to being the cherisher of everyone else's voice. We have our own voices that sometimes we want to express.

Part of the problem is that this is the first time that something like this has been done. Regional archives are being set up more and more, but we have no community yet of other women that we can sit around with and just complain or share problems.

*B:* What kinds of grassroots archiving and researching projects are going on now?

*J:* There's the New Alexandria Lesbian Library in Chicago [now in Huntington, Mass.] that has done library and archival work for a long time for the midwest area. There's the Circle of Lesbian Indexers who've taken on the incredible task of indexing many of our lesbian journals. JR Roberts and Clare Potter are two of the indexers. JR is also working on a bibliography of black lesbians. In Buffalo Liz Kennedy, Madeline Davis, and Avra Michelson are conducting an oral history project, researching the lesbian community there back to the 1920s. Also there's the Lesbian and Gay History Project in San Francisco, and the beginning of a regional archives in Tennessee.

*Matrices*, the lesbian research newsletter, is another important part of the network, and a way of breaking down the isolation, the competition over ideas, and a way of breaking down academic control.

*B:* What question does the Archives get asked most frequently?

*J:* I think most asked-for is information about lesbians in other cultures. Which is a response to the feeling of 'you see, it's an American or western decadent phenomenon.' And we know that's not true. We see the Archives as political activism, to destroy myths, to give us the data—both for our psychological stamina and for cultural warfare.

*B:* Are you ever afraid of something happening to the Archives—say a fire being set?

*D:* Yes, we're worried about safety. But we feel there's a certain security to having the Archives in our house because it's set in a big apartment building. I know that if it were a house alone, unguarded at night, it would be much more vulnerable to fire bombing. But here it would be much harder, since people are coming and going from the building and from our apartment at all hours of the day and night.

*B:* Has anything ever disappeared from the Archives?

*D:* Sometimes women misfile things, and we have a moment of panic when we can't find something. But nothing has ever been taken, either from the collection or from our house.

*J:* We're not paranoid in any way about our own community. But the F.B.I.—both Deb and I have been involved in radical politics for almost our whole adult lives. We haven't written asking for our F.B.I. folders, but I wouldn't be surprised if they were there. It doesn't upset me because I just proceed as if we were at war with the society. They're not going to stop me from doing what I'm doing, through fear of surveillance.

I'm concerned with paranoia in another way, that the F.B.I. has gotten its message across so well to our community. If women are petrified of having photographs taken, of making tapes, if we don't document what we are doing, they are achieving the same purpose. Either way, by destroying our materials or by terrorizing us so that we don't preserve materials. And since one of the greatest burdens of oppression for the lesbian woman in the past has been invisibility—this lack of fullness of history, of 'who-I-was' besides Sappho and Gertrude Stein—we must take the risk of being known. I think we are losing more by running in terror than we would by documenting our conferences and our groups.

*D:* I also think it's a myth to believe that somehow you can remain invulnerable to F.B.I. surveillance. With social security numbers on Centrex and everything centralized, we just have to see ourselves as at war, and proceed from there. And do what we can when women ask us to protect their names or not put their papers in. To respect whatever confidentiality women ask for.

*B:* Do you have a closing message?

*J:* If all the women who hear us or read about us just take it to heart and say, "I have a right to *be* in that collection," so many of our old problems will disappear. Because there isn't any rule of access to the Archives, and there isn't any selection policy. As many voices as speak will be here. We want to turn cultural deprivation into cultural celebration.

I do think the Archives summarizes a lot of the sinister wisdom that we've collected as a people. That is really its root. There's a kind of root wit, there's a mother wit involved in it, there's a cunning.

With all our interest in reclaiming our language, I looked up *archives* in a small Webster's dictionary. For the root of the word, it gave *arche*, 'beginning,' 'power.' And I thought, 'I often see the Archives as an archway, a beginning, as a portal.' The beginning and then the next word is power, which is exactly how we see the Archives. It means our power of control over our beginnings and our continuing. So there's a wonderful three visions of the archway, the beginning, and power.

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You may reach the Lesbian Herstory Archives at P.O. Box 1258, New York, NY 10001, 212-874-7232 or 873-9443.

## RESPONSE

In March 1975, when I completed the introductory notes to the second edition of my bibliography, *The Lesbian in Literature*, I dedicated in a sense the entire work to a character from one of Joanna Russ's stories, the now very famous story "When It Changed." In that dedication I made explicitly clear my opinion of the quality of her work and its importance to all women in this movement. That opinion has not altered.

As a publisher (Naiad Press, Inc.) I am precluded from replying to her vicious attack in the form of a review on one of our latest novels, *Retreat: As It Was!*, by Donna J. Young, which appeared in *Sinister Wisdom* no. 12, with the exception of one statement which verges on libel. I quote: "*Retreat* was written out of sheer starvation, published ditto (unless we're to believe that Naiad is simply being opportunistic) . . ."

Naiad Press, Inc. has been publishing Lesbian feminist material since 1974 and has published thirteen titles through the end of 1979. Our original position was to be a Lesbian feminist publisher of fiction only. We have varied from that slightly, in that we have published some literature-related nonfiction and two works of poetry in our series of works by Renée Vivien (whom we are attempting to rescue from literary oblivion). We have not varied from our rigid and intentional position of publishing only Lesbian/feminist material.

Having been one of the two women primarily responsible for selecting our published material, my one real sorrow is that about two years ago I was unable in good conscience to publish the book of short stories that I feel is the most important work (in terms sheerly of *good writing*) to come out of the women's movement, *Out Somewhere and Back Again: The Kansas Stories* by Nancy Stockwell. Despite its brilliance, her talent, her skills, to say nothing of my personal fondness for her, I could not in good conscience publish a book of short stories of which only one was specifically Lesbian and two others could be so interpreted. As a good opportunist, I would surely have published them.

A few months ago, Joanna Russ wrote to me and asked me to consider publishing one of her works of children's fiction. I pleasantly declined, explaining that we were simply not covering that area. Do I need to add that even a deaf, blind, and dumb opportunist would snatch at the chance to publish her work if publishing for aggrandizement were one's goal.

—Barbara Grier

(note: On September 1, 1980, Naiad Press will be bringing out two new books, *Lesbian Feminism in Turn-of-the-Century Germany: An Anthology*, translated and with an introduction by Lillian Faderman and Brigitte Eriksson; and *Sapphisty: The Book of Lesbian Sexuality* by Pat Califia. In May, Naiad published Ann Allen Shockley's *The Black and White of It*.)

## CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

**Nancy V. Becker** is a workaholic, loves people who appreciate themselves, and adores anyone who offers her raw chocolate chip cookies.

**Linda J. Brown**, writer, photographer, graphic artist, lives and works in New York City.

**Elly Bulkin**, writer and editor, is active in DARE (Dykes against Racism Everywhere) and she facilitates anti-racism workshops for white women.

**Michelle Cliff** is a writer and editor living in western Massachusetts.

**Michele Connelly** is presently fighting fires in New Mexico.

**Anita Cornwell**: My work has appeared in *Hera*, *Wicca*, *Women: A Journal of Liberation*, *Negro Digest*, *Lesbians Speak Out*, and *The Ladder*, among others.

**Tia Cross** is a Lesbian Feminist photographer who has produced slide shows which chronicle the history of lesbian photographers.

**Harriet Desmoines** copy-edits and typesets for a living.

**Frances Doughty**, activist and writer, lives in Brooklyn, New York.

**Ruth Farmer** is a writer of poetry and short stories living in Brooklyn.

**Susan Fleischmann** is a Boston-based freelance photographer whose work appears frequently in the *Gay Community News*.

**Barbara Grier** is editor of Naiad Press, the largest feminist press in the United States.

**Kathy Hagen**: "My message to blind women and any reader of *Sinister Wisdom*: the most important thing is to learn to accept and love yourself, and ignore society's attempts to annihilate anyone who is different."

**Hala's** cartoons have frequently appeared in *The Leaping Lesbian*, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

**Ran Hall**: "Lesbian writing and publishing is the most important part of my life."

**Beth Hodges** teaches women's writing workshops in Brookline, Massachusetts.

**Jerusha** is Hebrew for in her stance.

**Melanie Kaye's** book of poems, *We Speak in Code*, is due momentarily from Motherroot Publications, and she and Michaela are working on a book about women and violence.

**Kaymarion**: "Take the mystique out of publishing and share pictures." She lives in Northampton with a tabby Banana cat.

**Lee Kinard** lives, works, and tries to write in Orlando, Florida.

**Irena Klepfisz**, a founder and editor of *Conditions*, has self-published a collection of her poems, *periods of stress*.

**Felice Newman**: "Cleis Press is anxious to receive prose manuscripts from lesbians."

**Suzanne Reylea** is a writer, critic, and teacher.

**Cynthia Rich** is a writer living in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

**JR Roberts** is self-publishing a Black lesbian bibliography.

**Kim Schive** is infamous in Boston for her nice teeth, good credit rating, great tzimmes, and the chandelier in her bedroom.

**Janet Soule** is a lesbian dreamer who spends her time thinking, writing, and studying.

**Chris South**, an editor of *Feminary*, describes herself as a "die-hard Southerner."

**Maida Tilchen** has moved to Boston where she is promotions manager for *Gay Community News*.

**Irene Zahava** is a librarian and free-lance reviewer who lives in a farmhouse in upstate New York.

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## SW BACK ISSUES, WHILE THEY LAST

**Issue 4** (Fall 1977): stories of mothers and daughters and witches and lovers; Joanna Russ's tale for the girlchild in all of us; Lesbian separatism from the inside; photo-essay; interview; reviews, letters and poetry. 96 pp., \$2.25.

**Issue 5** (Winter 1978): Susan Leigh Star, "Lesbian Feminism as an Altered State of Consciousness"; Judith Schwarz, "Researching Lesbian History"; Michelle Cliff on speechlessness; Lesbian Day speech by Barbara Grier; fiction; poetry; photo-essay; reviews; interview. 104 pp., \$2.25.

**Issue 7** (Fall 1978): myths, monsters, teeth, etc. Jane Caputi on patriarchal fish stories; Judith Schwarz on being physically different; self-portraits in prose and poetry by Alice Bloch and Susan Wood-Thompson; feminist musings by Melanie Kaye; plus a wealth of fiction, poetry, reviews, drawings, and photographs. 104 pp., \$2.50

**Issue 8** (Winter 1979): "did you say lu-uv?"; storytelling by Sherry Thomas and Audre Lorde; photographs by Deborah Snow; poetry by Judy Grahn; notes on deafness; essay on "that place where nothing is"; interview; reviews; "Scrambled Eggs"; and much more poetry and fiction. 104 pp. \$2.50.

**Issue 9** (Spring 1979): JR Roberts on the history of *dyke*, Michelle Cliff on anonymity, Melanie Kaye on violence, Susan Cavin on Lesbian origins, Bertha Harris, Harriet Desmoines, and Irena Klepfisz on Lesbian literature; fiction by Becky Birtha, Jan Clausen, Linda Marie, Kathryn Missett, Ann Shockley, Pearl Time'sChild; an outpouring of fine poetry; photography; reviews; and a puzzle. 104 pp. \$2.50.

**Issue 10** (Summer 1979): Special issue on being old and age, guest-edited by Susan Leigh Star. Includes Barbara Macdonald and Baba Copper on their 65th and 59th year, respectively; Audre Lorde on surviving cancer; interview with Mabel Hampton; essays on nursing home women, the time trip, being under 21; poetry; photo-essay; fiction. 104 pp. \$2.50.

**Issue 11** (Fall 1979): Inside the Lesbian Herstory Archives; fantasy and true story; Susan Yarbrough on lesbian celibacy; Andrée Collard on victimization; Joyce Trebilcot, "Conceiving Women"; responses; reviews; poetry. 104 pp. \$2.50.

(Add 60 cents postage for every 1-2 copies ordered)

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Evelyn Torton Beck is seeking material for an anthology on *Jewish Lesbians* to be published by Persephone Press for use in Women's Studies classes. Essays of a historical, analytic, and theoretical nature are especially needed; poetry, fiction, photographs, and other art forms are also welcome. Send abstracts, queries, and/or completed materials to Evelyn Torton Beck, c/o Women's Studies Program, University of Wisconsin, 209 North Brooks St., Madison, Wis. 53706, or call (608) 263-4703. (If you leave a number, your call will be returned.)

*Broomstick* is a national feminist magazine by, for, and about women over forty. We print articles by midlife women discussing our experiences from a feminist political perspective. We also feature articles about events, books, organizations, and periodicals of relevance to women over forty.

**PRICES:** Individual yearly subscription: \$7.50, U.S.; \$10, Canada; \$15, overseas. Institutions: \$15. Women's and alternative bookstores: discounts of 40 percent and more; write for details. A sample issue will be sent for fifty cents in stamps or coins.

*Broomstick*, San Francisco Women's Centers, 3543 -18th Street, San Francisco, Calif. 94110.

### Addresses Not Given in Text:

*Feminary*, P.O. Box 954, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514.

*Leaping Lesbian*, Box 7715, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107.

*Spinsters, Ink*, RD 1, Argyle, NY 12809.

*Timely Books*, P.O. Box 267-4B, New Milford, Connecticut 06776.

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SPECIAL ISSUE—SW 15

**LESBIANS AND PORNOGRAPHY.** Guest edited by **Sarah Hoagland & Julia Penelope.** We are seeking poems, articles, and short stories that deal with any of the issues of pornography and violence and the ways in which these facets of patriarchal culture affect Lesbian lives, the way we define ourselves, our sexuality, our relationships with other women, racism and pornography, classism and pornography, incest as a specific form of sexual violence in the lives of Lesbians, the "compromise" distinction between "pornography" and "erotic," the use of pseudo-Lesbian imagery in advertising (to whom do such ads appeal?). Also of interest, in contrast, would be articles and fiction that explore Lesbian sensuality as it is evolving now.

Address all correspondence and manuscripts (include an SASE)

to

Julia Penelope

box 30541

Lincoln, NE68503

**DEADLINE: September 1, 1980**

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**SINISTER WISDOM POSTER STILL AVAILABLE**

In the spring of 1977, a Tee Corinne solarized photograph of two women making love appeared on the cover of *Sinister Wisdom* 3, followed by a deluge of requests for a poster. The poster was printed in the summer of 1977: a duplicate of that cover, black on gray, 17" x 22". You can have your own for a contribution of \$3.00 toward the survival of *Sinister Wisdom* plus 50 cents to cover mailing costs. (They make nice gifts for friends, too; bulk rates available.)

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We are very happy to announce that next year the new editors and publishers of *Sinister Wisdom* will be Michelle Cliff and Adrienne Rich. Adrienne and Michelle will begin reading manuscripts on January 1, 1981. In the meantime we have selected enough prose, and Leigh Star has accepted enough poetry, to fill up the last issues to be edited by the three of us and C. Colette, numbers 14 and 16. Julia Penelope and Sarah Hoagland, however, still need manuscripts for their issue, *SW 15*, on lesbian views of pornography and violence. We ask you please to wait until January first to send more poetry, prose, or artwork to *Sinister Wisdom* **unless it is meant for issue 15.**

It is now four days before this issue goes to press, and there's no time or room for all the things we'd like to say; but we do hope you will be as pleased as we are that *Sinister Wisdom* will continue and grow stronger, and we ask your patience during these long and complicated adoption proceedings. We'll be publishing more on this change, including the reasons we've been very much wanting it, in upcoming issues.

—Catherine and Harriet

\$3

lesbian  
writing  
& publishing



edited by Beth Hodges