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SINISTER WISDOM

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SINISTER WISDOM 3

a journal
of words and
pictures for
the lesbian
imagination in
all women.

Catherine Nicholson
Harriet Desmoines, editors

Cover photograph by Tee Corinne

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

If you have just opened this journal and are wondering whether to buy it, or if you have already bought it and are wondering whether to read it, here are some hors d'oeuvres to whet your appetite:

"Do I hate the 20th century? Someone suggested (with horror) that I am a shocking, unregenerate, and socially unuseful combination of the 19th and 21st centuries. I don't find that so bad." (page 11)

"Fear. Fear is an incredibly powerful political reality. And the degree to which we hardly talk about it, indicates the degree to which we are lying about it." (page 12)

"Whenever I hear this race-species-superiority trip it makes me sick. When I hear it from lesbians, it makes me want to a) throw up, b) go straight and have babies, c) abandon the human race and be a hermit." (page 14)

"Mary, Mary quite contrary
to oedipal expectations
grows silver bells
in her garden" (page 53)

"Our universe of discourse has only begun to expand, evolving out of our struggles and exploration, and much of our language is still in quotation marks." (page 94)

"Self-realizing women are not mental hermaphrodites, Earth mothers, yin, androgynes, free animae relating to their animi, "in touch with their bisexual nature." (page 44)

"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?" (page 5)

"It is the lesbian in us who drives us to feel imaginatively, render in language, grasp, the full connection between woman and woman." (page 7)

meet

Woman when we met on the solstice
high over halfway between your world and mine
rimmed with full moon and no more excuses
your red hair burned my fingers as I spread you
down to sweetness
and I forgot to tell you
I have heard you calling
across this land in my blood
before meeting
and I greet you again
on the beaches in mines
lying on platforms
in trees full of tail-tail birds flicking and
deep deep in your caves of decomposed granite
even over my own laterite hills after a long journey
licking your sons
while you wrinkle your nose at the stench

Coming to rest
in open mirrors of your demanded body
I will be black light as you lie against me
I will be heavy as August over your hair
our rivers flow from the same sea
and I promise to leave you again
full of amazement and our illuminations
dealt through the short tongues of colour
or the taste of each others skin when it hung
from our childhood mouths.

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 your night

Mawulisa foretells our bodies
as our hands touch and learn from each others hurt.
Taste my milk in the ditches of Chile and Ouagadougou
in Tema's bright port while the priestess of Larteh
protects us
in the peppery markets of Allada and Abomey-Calavi
now you are my child and my mother
we have always been sisters in pain.

Come in the curve of the lion's bulging stomach
lie for a season out of the judging rain
we have mated we have cubbed
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.

-Audre Lorde

'It is the lesbian in us ...'

—adrienne rich

I was born in 1929. In that year, Virginia Woolf was writing of the necessity for a literature that would reveal "that vast chamber where nobody has been"--the realm of relationships between women.

Whatever is unnamed, undepicted in images, whatever is omitted from biography, censored in collections of letters, whatever is misnamed as something else, made difficult-to-come-by, whatever is buried in the memory by the collapse of meaning under an inadequate or lying language--this will become, not merely unspoken, but *unspeakable*.

Two women, one white, one Black, were the first persons I loved and who I knew loved me. Both of them sang me my first songs, told me my first stories, became my first knowledge of tenderness, passion, and, finally, rejection. Each of them, over time, surrendered me to the judgment and disposition of my father and my father's culture: white and male. My love for the white woman and the Black woman became blurred with anger, contempt and guilt. I did not know which of them had injured me; they became merged together in my inarticulate fury. I did not know that neither of them had had a choice. Nor did I know that what had happened between us--and among us--was important. It was *unspeakable*.

My father's library I felt as the source and site of his power. I was right. It contained Plutarch and Havelock Ellis, Ovid and Spinoza, Swinburne and Emerson. In that library I came to believe--a child's belief, but also a poet's--that language, writing, those pages of print, could teach me how to live, could tell me *what was possible*. But, on the subject of woman-to-woman relationships, in Emily Dickinson's words: "My Classics veiled their faces". (And still, in most literature courses, most libraries, syllabi, curricula, young women are handed classics that veil, not only what might be possible, but what has been going on all along.)

In a striking essay, the novelist Bertha Harris has written of the silence surrounding the lesbian:

The lesbian, without a literature, is without life. Sometimes pornographic, sometimes a mark of fear, sometimes a sentimental flourish, she...floats in space...without that attachment to earth where growth is composed.

Reading her essay, I found she had described to me for the first time my own searches through literature in the past, in pursuit of a flickering, often disguised reality which came and went throughout women's books. That reality was nothing so simple and dismissible as the fact that two women might go to bed together. It was a sense of desiring oneself, above all, of choosing oneself; it was also a primary intensity between women, an intensity which in the world at large was trivialized, caricatured, or invested with evil.

Even before I wholly knew I was a lesbian, it was the lesbian in me who pursued that elusive configuration. And I believe it is the lesbian in every woman who is compelled by female energy, who gravitates toward strong women, who seeks a literature that will express that energy and strength. It is the lesbian in us who drives us to feel imaginatively, render in language, grasp, the full connection between woman and woman. It is the lesbian in us who is creative, for the dutiful daughter of the fathers in us is only a hack.

It was the lesbian in me, more than the civil libertarian or even the feminist, that pursued the memory of the first Black woman I loved before I was taught whiteness, before we were forced to betray each other. And that relationship-- mutual knowledge, fear, guilt, jealousy, anger, longing-- between Black and white women, I did not find, have not yet found, in literature, except perhaps, as a beginning, in Alice Walker's *Meridian*, and in some of Audre Lorde's poems. I found no Black women at all in literature, only fantasies of them by whites, or by Black men. But some women writers are now beginning to dare enter that particular chamber of the "unspeakable" and to breathe word of what we are finding there.

I go on believing in the power of literature, and also in the politics of literature. The experience of the Black woman *as woman*, of the white and Black woman cast as antagonists in the patriarchal drama, and of Black and white women as lesbians, has been kept invisible for good reason. Our hidden, yet omnipresent lives have served some purpose by remaining hidden: not only in the white patriarchal world but within both the Black and feminist communities, on the part both of Black male critics, scholars and editors and of institutions like the Feminist Press. Both Black Studies and Women's Studies have shied away from this core of our experience, thus reinforcing the very silence out of which

they have had to assert themselves. But it is the subjects, the conversations, the facts we shy away from, which claim us in the form of writer's block, as mere rhetoric, as hysteria, insomnia, and constriction of the throat.

AFTER-NOTE

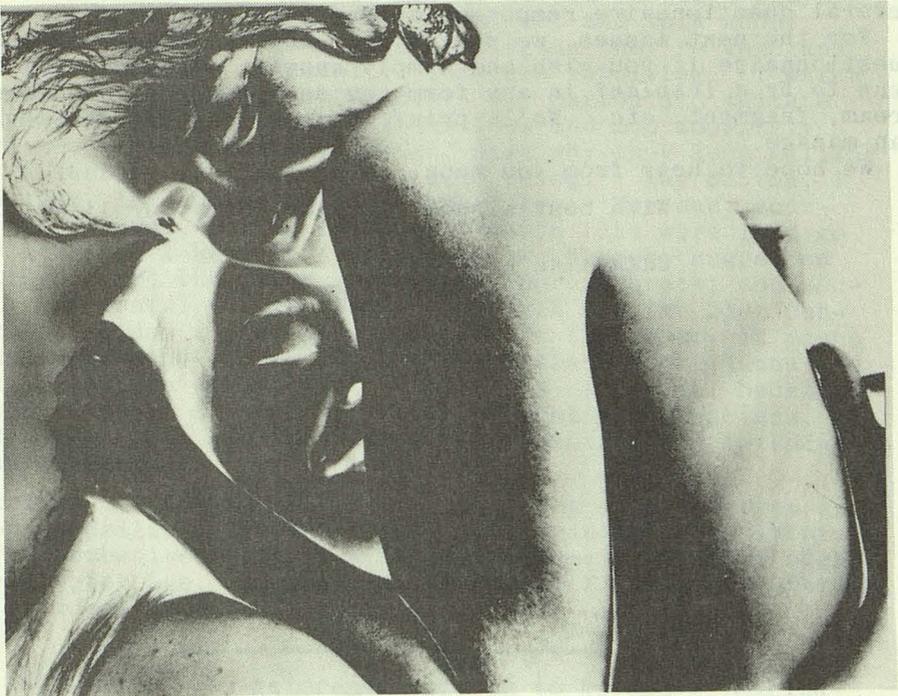
These remarks were read at the Modern Language Association, December 28, 1976, at an Evening Event co-sponsored by the Women's Commission and the Gay Caucus. The four panelists were June Jordan, Audre Lorde, Honor Moore, and myself. The purpose of the panel was to open up to a large audience issues of racism and homophobia in the teaching of literature, issues with which the Women's Commission had been struggling collectively for over a year. (The full text of the panel is being published by the Women's Commission of the MLA.)

When I finished speaking, there was immediate reaction to my statement that "It is the lesbian in us who is creative, for the dutiful daughter of the fathers in us is only a hack." It became clear during the ensuing discussion that different women had heard this sentence in different ways. Some women asserted that they created out of their bisexuality, not their "female side"; others, that they created out of their commitment to Black struggle; and others out of their love for their children as much as out of love for women. One lesbian asserted that if "the lesbian in us" was to become a figurative term, she, as a woman who had been oppressed for physically loving women, wanted another name for who she was. Some women heard me as saying that all creation has a sexual basis (*vide* Freud) and that women can create only out of erotic experience with other women. My intention was, of course, to say something broader.

I believe that I failed, in preparing my remarks, to allow for the intense charge of the word *lesbian*, and for all its deliquescences of meaning, ranging from "man-hater" and "pervert" to the concepts I was trying to invoke, of the self-chosen woman, the forbidden "primary intensity" between women, and also of the woman who refuses to obey, who has said "no" to the fathers. I probably over-simplified the issue, given limits of time, and therefore obscured it. This experience made me more conscious than ever of the degree to which, even for lesbians, the word *lesbian* has many resonances. Some would destroy the word altogether, others would transform it, still others eagerly claim and speak it after years of being unable to utter it. Some feminists have been made to fear that they will be perceived and discredited as lesbians; some lesbians have withdrawn or been forced into non-feminist enclaves which reject and denigrate "straight" women.

The lesbian/feminist lives in a very complex, demanding realm of linguistic and relational distinctions. One of the tasks ahead of us is to begin trying to define those distinctions (and the overlap of female experience that accompanies them). It would be easier for some if all lesbians could be labelled "separatists," implying that our politics and self-definitions proceed first out of hatred and rejection of others (whether men or "straight" women). It would be easier, but destructive to feminism, and finally a denial of our complexity. We have constantly to ask ourselves whether we are more concerned with what we are saying "no" to than with the "yes" we are saying to ourselves and to other women. The word "lesbian" must be affirmed because to discard it is to collaborate with silence and lying about our very existence, the closet-game, the creation of the *unspeakable*.

Adrienne Rich



WHAT IS A LESBIAN?

Dear Reader,

For some time we've been thinking about the meaning and power of the word "Lesbian"...what happens to a woman when she identifies herself or her work by that word, what happens when she doesn't, what we mean by the word, what is meant by the word when it is used against us.

To help our own thinking, we mailed out twenty copies of the following questionnaire:

1. How do you define the word "Lesbian"? Does it mean more than "a homosexual woman"?
2. Some people have defined "feminism" as "humanism applied to women." Are feminist Lesbians really humanists?
3. Are there patterns in the lives of women that indicate Lesbians might be an "emerging species"?
4. How do you respond to "Go Tell Aunt Rhody" (*Sinister Wisdom* 1)?

Several questionnaire responses appear in this issue.

For the next issues, we'd like your answer. Ignore the questionnaire if you wish and simply answer, *What does it mean to be a Lesbian?* in any form you desire--story, letter, dream, fragment, etc. We'll print as many responses as we can manage.

We hope to hear from you soon.

With best wishes for your work/your life,

Catherine and Harriet

Bertha Harris

I haven't thought anything new about "lesbian" since the stuff in the *QUEST* "Leadership" issue.* Like everyone else, I guess, I almost always have a round of conflicting and oddly-proportioned thoughts/feelings/images on the ideas (definitions) you're suggesting. I suppose it's important to believe that "lesbian" is someone in revolt against patriarchy. But certainly my revolt ain't necessarily every lesbian's revolt. And certainly, frankly, I find many lesbians' revolts revolting. I have attained the privilege of doing so by living almost entirely outside the "real" world and making up one as I go along. I therefore live in a complete world of smart dykes, dumb dykes, literate dykes, illiterate dykes, etc. The "real" world is populated by straight people/men/women. A "lesbian" to me does not look and seem better than those others because I seldom recognize those others except through a dim haze and only clearly when they're trying to take something away from me and/or being particularly offensive. Most lesbians, I see, do not enjoy this particular facility of mine; indeed, I watch them live in the "real" world all the time. For example, I see many of them go off to EST meetings and/or sauna baths and learn how to touch&feel and talk about "discharging" feeling--and these imagine they're lesbians and that they are in revolt. They are revolting. I watch many of them honor (slobber over) May Sarton and agitate to give her 1,000 dollar lecture fees and moo 'adoringly when she, with great refinement, asks why they keep calling her a lesbian when she is "a human being." May Sarton, I conclude, is just as stupid as they are. You can, yourselves, I know, follow the line I would take were I to go further. Do I hate the 20th Century? Someone suggested (with horror) that I am a shocking, unregenerate, and socially un-useful combination of the 19th and the 21st centuries. I don't find that so bad. At the least, it means I spend my money on gin and books instead of marijuana and gucci. At the worst, that I am vulgar, snobbish, backward, uncontrite. I do not believe in psychology. Lesbians, by and large, do. And I mean both statements to be *sweeping generalizations*.

Lesbians are sharks, vampires, creatures from the deep lagoon, godzillas, hydrogen bombs, inventions of the laboratory, werewolves--all of whom stalk Beverly Hills by night. Christopher Lee, in drag, in the Hammar Films middle-period, is my ideal lesbian.

*Editor's note: The reference here is to Bertha's imaginative article "THE LESBIAN: The Workmaker, the Leader" (*Quest*, II, 4, Spring, 1976) in which she proves to our complete satisfaction that Dionysus is/was a lesbian.

Mia Albright

1) First, lesbianism, even technically sexually, is not "homosexual" it is gynosexual. And second, being a woman-identified-woman, a lesbian, is: opposing the male sex and everything it represents, realistically, and opposing the masculinization of the female sex.

2) "Humanist" is a term controlled by malist liberals and their malized counterparts in the female sex. Feminism is the only universal due to the politics of the economics of reproduction.

3) This question feels irrelevant to me. The female sex has always been the female sex and has never needed the male sex, in the lethal numbers in which it has always existed, to reproduce ourselves. Are we an "emerging political species"? I would say it's about time.

4) This very fine passage has this problem with it; all that precedes the last phrase, "a woman in total revolt against the patriarchy," is a detrimental confusion of that phrase. Further, I prefer "male sex" to "patriarchy" because it prevents confusion. The malist regimes, malized societies, are not just rule by father, but rule by son, brother, anything and everything male. If we understand that our enemy is the male sex, a very real parasite living off our reproduction of ourselves, we keep ourselves ideologically realistic, which is the only soil in which any real strategy will grow.

To add one thing to your questionnaire. My primary fear, is that the female sex is afraid to admit that the male sex is its enemy, and that we will lie in absolutely any way we have to, to prevent understanding this.

This is why hundreds of women are ideologically satisfied with struggling for an amendment to a male constitution. It is why women don't want to hear theory about the male sex, and as I said in a recent essay, will accept rhetoric about the female sex as criticism and reject criticism of the male sex as rhetoric.

Fear. Fear is an incredibly powerful political reality. And the degree to which we hardly talk about it, indicates the degree to which we are lying about it.

Even as I write this I can feel most women hating my guts for saying where we all are. An unarmed female sex stuck on the same planet with a totally armed male sex. The irony is that I can hardly blame you. I don't like knowing what I know either, but to me the God(dess) is the power of intelligence everywhere, and that's that. Ultimately, you frustrate me for the same reasons I frustrate you--you can't defend me from the male sex, and I can't defend you from the male sex. At least, not now.

Lesbianism is women trusting women for our very physical survival. Not pretending to trust one another. Personally I have met with nothing but disaster when I trusted women, and saw it as the dyke (butch) take-over of lesbianism and

felt and still feel the femmes should rise up in revolt against the butches. It's the masculine-feminine struggle within the female sex. And when I'm told that struggle doesn't exist, you might as well be telling me reality doesn't exist. You are telling me that.

Okay. Perhaps this outlines the contours of my space. I hope it won't excommunicate me from the female sex, but I can't live lies.

Barbara Grier

The word *LESBIAN* has many definitions. Most of the definitions are inadequate and/or misleading. It is a very proud word. Many years ago in the pages of *THE LADDER* there was a lengthy debate series on the use of the word and many discussions about "dropping" it in favor of some other phrase. I was then on the side of keeping and, if anything, trumpeting it from the housetops.

Yes, the word means far more than merely "a homosexual woman." That is a very limiting phrase. It is not inaccurate, since certainly the true meaning of homosexual is not, as is so often misconstrued, the love of a man for a man but the love of one of the same sex for another of the same sex. But a Lesbian is a Lesbian. In my mind it means a superior being...a woman of course...but a superior woman, someone beyond and above...almost a goal to be achieved. I knew at an early age that I was a superior being and that most of the things that I encountered that seemed to me to be obstacles in my life (this was at age 7,8,9,10) were because of this nebulous superiority. I did not know until I was nearly 12 that I was a Lesbian, but as soon as I discovered this fact of my existence the rest fell into place at once. After that I had few problems in my life...I attribute this to the fact of living within the responsibility of that definition. I knew (instinctively?) that I could do anything I wanted to do and be anything I wanted to be and that the reason that this was so was that I was a Lesbian. I also felt, at about the same time, that it meant a tremendous weight of responsibility upon me in my behavior, that I needed to be in every way superior to my surroundings...that is, that I had no choice in this, that it was to be expected and fulfilled.

In a sense, then, yes, Lesbians must be humanists. If we accept that there is a world responsibility, then certainly Lesbians are responsible for the world. We are best fitted to be, so we almost would have to be. I believe that if the world (if the human race) is to survive, then Lesbians will lead the way.

We are too close to this minute phase of the women's movement to be certain of saying that there is some thing that is described by you in your third question as an "emerging species." One view of the question is that it is too general to reply intelligently. Another view is that it simply is too limiting. I am not certain what you mean by

"emerging species." I believe that women would automatically be Lesbians given social choice to be. It is, after all, so preferable a way to be, to live, that I cannot imagine anyone thinking for a moment of any other choice given the facts. What has not been available on a mass scale is this information...this sense of exhilaration. -This excitement of life. There are probably no more Lesbians than there were 10 or 20 or 30 years ago...there are just more surfacing Lesbians. That this surfacing will increase for at least the foreseeable future seems clear. What is not clear is what must be done to insure that it goes on. Having spent my life trying to get this done, I still do not know how precisely to make certain that it will be done.

Lastly, how to react to the reprinted section of your last page from the first issue...Language, as law, develops separately from the formal designations. It evolves through popular usage, popular demand. If we are to achieve these goals as you outline them, we are bound to live a hell of a long time longer than any woman reading this will live. If we go on insisting that we have to be defined by patriarchy and by men in general then we may not ever succeed. Dealing with, living with, existing with women are what we are about. We have to live with women...in every sense. Our goals are with women. I do not know why men will fade out in such a world, but I know that they will. Why assume that Lesbians are cast out? Cast out of whose world? Not out of mine, my dear; the only world I live in is filled with Lesbians. My world is the real world.

Martha Shelley

1) I define a lesbian as a woman whose primary sexual and emotional needs are focused on women. I guess it only means a "homosexual woman" to me, then--the word *lesbian* does not automatically imply feminist or anything else.

2) There are lots of ways to define feminism. That's why you can have feminist socialists, feminist capitalists, feminist anarchists, lesbian feminist matriarchists, etc. I'm an anarchist. I don't know what "humanism" means.

3) I think this question is dangerous. Once we start regarding ourselves as a separate species, a new "uber-mensch"--superior to males and heterosexual women--we are no better politically than the Nazi party or the Ku Klux Klan.

4) I think I answered that in question 3). Just to make my position clearer, I have been a lesbian feminist for a long time and in fact was one of the founders of the Gay Liberation Front. I am also a Jew. Whenever I hear this race-species-superiority trip it makes me sick. When I hear it from lesbians, it makes me want to a) throw up, b) go straight and have babies, c) abandon the human race and be a hermit. It makes me sick when I hear stories about anti-Arab racism in Israel. In both cases, I feel somehow involved and responsible, and I ask myself, what were we fighting for?



WOMEN'S STORIES

FIRST SKETCH FOR A CHARACTER

— Elana Dykewoman

Gloria Lemming: who has it written on the ceiling of her kitchen, heading towards the door, in semicircles which enclose each other: gloria lemming, lesbian, lives here who moves towards all openings just so while denying it has anything to do with the symbol her name makes of her.

There it ends. The writing on the wall, spilling of words towards the door, fading with grease and smoke, soot from the city, far inland. Actually, she is a slow moving woman, each word written out painstakingly. Black ink in the creases between her knuckles. She thinks before she talks, which has led her to the uncomfortable position of not having anyone much to talk to. She does like to go out to dinner, and buy chances on the lottery, but that is not symbolic of anything besides a certain kind of self-conscious poverty.

Where is her ocean, and where her traveling companions? Could it be, about lemmings, if they were all separated from each other, they would live forever and never throw themselves into the great sea? And would that be because solitude would return their sanity--or because they would be so lonely that they could not move? Once moving, quick and excited with their own, the great adventure of it, light, squealing, so much chatter among them, so many grasses and valleys to feel against their small paws, they outrun themselves, not meaning to head for the ocean, but once there, no reason to stop--who could stop, then, and say: well, we've seen the pacific, time to go home, gang? No, it doesn't make sense to stop--in great joy they dive, one on top of the other, rolling in the great waves, lemming belly on lemming back, home at last. Pity the lemming left behind.

SOMETHING MOVING

by nancy stockwell

I was forbidden to fish on Big Bull Creek because bums jumped off the trains out there and then camped up and down its high, overgrown banks. The Big Bull ran hidden, west of Myola, moving southeast behind the low hill to meet the waters of the long, flat and deceptive Marais des Cynes. It was too far to go anyway. I fished on the Little Peoria.

The Little Peoria which was close to home lay low, brown and all but motionless from mid-June until it froze over in January. Its banks were not steep or likely to crumble like the Big Bull's. Instead they sloped gradually and then dropped only two or three feet to the water. They held that way year after year because of the long, woven roots of elms, oaks, and blue beeches and the red sumac underbrush. And the Little Peoria only swelled in the spring. It did not flood like the big creeks.

When the brick street turned into a dirt road after the last house, there was a vantage point, or a place where I could see how far I had to go. To the right of the road, off to the south, were two fields. One rested higher than the other, its chickweed and dandelion lazy from idleness, spying on the one below, mindlessly, as if for no other reason than simply to watch. When it finally slipped away from itself, the whole earth seemed to shift and shrug, letting the second field fall as a long, empty hill to the fair barns planted at the bottom, a mile from where I stood. After that the land disappeared between the trees which lined the creek, marking its direction and width, and leaning over the water itself just beyond them.

The humidity cloyed as a warm, damp blanket around me. There was a stirring in the ground. The hum of it gathered around my feet and I used it as a friction against the slope of the long hill. It held me protectively as if I might fall and roll forwards, holding me as it held the earth. And the wind had not picked up yet. It waited to blow as it always did later in the morning.

I squatted after I had pumped out enough water to soak the ground around a trough behind one of the barns. I waited for the dirt to soften before I turned large chunks of it with the trowel and picked out the biggest earthworms. I took seven, packing them in mud in the corner of a shoebox and then walked between the empty, squat, white-washed, open ended animal barns towards the creek.

I pulled the worm apart and baited the hook. I ran the bobber two feet up the black line and waved the end of the cane pole over the water. The sinker hit with a thump, breaking between two short whistles of a mother cardinal, and the cork settled out ahead of me, near the middle of the creek but closer to the other side. I waited tensely in the next moments as I always did, for a strike, a lucky one, the muscles of my arms ready. But like always the bobber sat undisturbed for the next hour, twisting slightly as hope and desire played tricks on it imperceptibly through the eye or as something moved lightly now and then below the shadow of the creek bank.

She never came until after seven, though I could never be sure of the time without a watch. I wanted her to come today, very badly. I hoped for it. The time didn't matter really; the waiting was a game with me to see if she came at about the same time each time I fished here, like a test of patience, but even more indefinite with her, like waiting on time that hangs before it is scattered, or the edges of it made ragged, by the wind.

I stuck the end of my pole in a snake hole and lay on my side with my arm folded under my head. She would come, I knew, if I stared at the bobber. I lay so that my head was slightly lower than my feet. My mouth fell open and my cheek was warm against the soft skin of my upper arm.

As I watched out of one eye, the six o'clock sun on the Little Peoria made yellow, dark green and hazel spots on the light brown surface of the water where it reflected the leaves of the trees on the opposite bank. Their shapes became less defined in the creek's slow running and in the cool of their own shadows. The serrated edges of a small slippery elm leaf were bevelled away and the three rounded lobes of a post oak became only a large mitten on the water. When the haze burned off, each leaf would make an exact representation of itself and the genus of a tree could be named by looking into the water. The kind of its bark would show in every detail, identifiable because of the heat on the small, still Peoria, as clear as a white cloud in a hot sky resting on its surface.

My vision would blur soon, I knew. And she would come. Would she tell me things I did not understand? This year, I might be able to understand them better.

It was not exactly questions that I asked her. I only wondered about things when she came near me--not in my head, but through my body. And I never spoke. I only looked at her, that is, at some part of her; I had never seen her fully. And she knew. She could feel my wondering. I cannot say exactly how. It was not like a spoken conversation.

Once last year it was a stone in the bracelet she was wearing. I had looked at it, barely able to see it, seeing only its color, the pink and hazel striated end of the glazed, flat oval part of it. She had said a name. It was a word I did not know. I found a picture of the stone in a

book later. It was a kind of chalcedony, but much more prized. It was a Jasper quartz.

She had looked at me, looked at me somehow not with her eyes, to tell me its name. But all I could understand was that the stone had come out of the ground somewhere on this low hill in Cloud County where the town is, this low hill between the fork and the divide of the Little Peoria and Big Bull creeks, though the book had said that this opaque crystal comes from farther north, is rare, and if cut at a precise angle to its axis can exert its own pressure, enough to create a small electrical charge, that a Jasper quartz can transmit short lightwaves.

And the strap at her waist I had not recognized either, the last time she had come. It was not the same color or thickness as the leather of saddles or bridle reins. I looked at it and she told me without words that it was from a small animal. I could not understand the name.

I did not know her name either. I only knew she was a Piankashaw. I knew because she had told me without words that she lived here, had always lived here, where I live.

I lay with my back to the trees, facing the creek. She had walked up from far down the creek last time, not from the direction of town and I had watched her come slowly along the edges of the underbrush.

I thought it was my hair, somehow, that brought her to the creek bank. My hair was black like hers, though mine was curly and not as thick.

I lay this way for some time, staring at the water in the creek. And when I felt my hair move, not from the air, but from some heat or the sun as if it were growing, I knew she was standing above me. I did not move but brought my eyes away from the water and looked at the triangle of ground just beyond my elbow. I saw only the toes of her bare, dirty foot and the hardened toenails. I waited. I could not look away from her.

She stood near my head but above a little so that I could not see all of her without moving. I lay still, straining my eyes to look behind me without turning my head. I could smell her dress; the odor was not familiar and I smelled it, trying to match it in another part of my mind with something I knew. It was a damp, cool, pulpy smell. Smooth and blue-grey. Like beech bark. No. Like the smell of a fish at the moment it is pulled from the water. The fish smells beautifully of its own self, almost warm, for one instant and then its smell falls away with the water dropping off its scales, back down into the creek. Yes, she smelled like the fish in that one moment.

She was close now, squatting or sitting I could not tell. I saw her arm or a part of it, stretching towards me. Then I felt her hand slipping between my palm and my fingers which curled limply, embryonic on the ground. It was like touching a horse or cow, rough and warm and tight with blood running close to the surface of the hide.

I stayed this way not tightening the grip, though I wanted a much stronger touch, to reach back for her, to hold her steady, realized. *Do not make me guess. Become something to me. I want and I do not know.*

As I strained to see her my cheek pulled down against my arm even more, making the air look askew as if the trees grew on their sides and the creek flowed uphill, curving off in a place where it does not. I could see only the skin of her upper arm and shoulder, darker than my own. I could not move, even closer or towards her; the balance must stay. And then in a single moment of uncalculable time I felt her enclose me, not with her arms, but altogether.

And time waited. And stretched. Time was only this, this laying with her and feeling great waters somewhere but not here where the little creek pressed against the damp bank I lay on.

I pressed close to her. She was heavy across the chest and her shoulder was broad. Her collar bone came away from her short neck and the skin which stretched between was speckled and shiny from the reflection of the glancing water. I felt her hand again, then, the pressure of it, lightly as a reminder, resting as lightly as a leaf floating in the water. And she said *the water...the water*. It was not spoken.

Did she want me to look at the water or into it? I did not understand. I did not want to look away from her. I wanted to see more of her, to get closer, to lay with her holding me this way; I did not want her to leave, I wanted her smell near me, I wanted her and more time and more.

I kept my eyes at her shoulder or near it. She would tell me the answer. I knew she would tell me somehow. But then I felt an unexpected movement from her and knew she was turning her head away to something behind us.

A tiny sound broke in the brush. I felt her turning. I heard the sound. And then I saw. I saw beneath her arm as she turned, what I had never seen before, the hair I had never seen before. I suddenly felt the sun burning my face and shoulder. I was distracted against my will by the sensation of it. I fought it, widening my eyes to see her again but I could not. She was gone.

She cannot be gone. She is here. She is somewhere here. Why did she leave? I jerked forward with fear now, of everything. I sat up and looked for her again, behind me and on each side. I searched for her and called to her but I could not bring her back and the fear congealed itself in my stomach and traveled to my arms and my arms became light as air and they shook, trembling and then not trembling, the excitement curling like two arms around my neck and shoulders, hugging me from behind, clinging to me.

I lay clenched with my eyes shut, feeling and not feeling, seeing what I knew I had not seen before, seeing the hair, the long, brown hair, straight and heavy like the eyelashes of a large animal, hair I had never seen before, under the arm of a woman.

I stood up suddenly. I could not understand what had happened or why. And why was she gone? I stood in a moment of electrical charge, watching myself, while the unknown bargained with reality. The sunlight turned an eerie shade of yellow and the creek became a smaller world whose boundaries could not stretch beyond my vision.

I looked at the bobber and at the creek. Nothing moved. I stared into the water and saw the eye of a large blue perch staring back, seeing me through the prism of the water as if I were the one caught in an invisible net that surrounded me like the criss-crossed shadows of the trees behind me. And the eye of the fish receded and withdrew and moved away, slowly, watching me until it was gone.

I took the pole and wound the black line around it until I could grab the bobber. I fixed the hook and sinker in the wet line so it would not swing as I walked. I passed the animal barns and went up the hill through the green, wet weeds which had not yet yellowed, which would not yellow and toughen until late July.

It would be another month yet before the grasshoppers were large and easy to catch, before great wads of their brown juice fell from them as they flew, and before tiny black arachnids hid in the dark cracks of the dry ground to camouflage themselves from the eyes of meadowlarks and other sharp, accurate beaks. And later, in August, the cicadas, the katydids, would crawl up the elms and leave their brown, tissue-thin, monstrous shells attached to the bark of the trunks before they sang in the trees at night to give the only impression, beyond human sighs for a breath of air, of a wind when there would be none.

I crossed the flat acre to the road, still picturing the images moving uncontrollably in strange combinations, the eye and the hair and the woman again, knowing I would be drawn across the fields again and again, through the heat and the weeds, to the creek, to fish, to see her and to hear strange words that came unpronounced into my chest and stayed there like an extra heart, to touch her, to touch her hand again and to wait for something, to feel it in the ground or to know it floated by down the creek, escaping the hook like a fat white cloud laying on the water or like *the water...the water...* or something in it, moving beneath the surface of the Little Peoria.

THE WOMEN TALK ABOUT HOW THEY LIVE

by river malcolm

Note: This is an excerpt from the notes of a young woman who traveled through time, to a future society organized as a gynanarchy. The word gynanarchy began in the United States in the terrible dark years of the 1970s. Two visionary witches, Justine Kowincidence and Morgan Morganstar, quarreled about who thought the word first. Probably both thought it at once. It combines the word gynarchy, meaning rule by women, and the word anarchy, meaning no rule, so that it means something like no rule, by women. Perhaps this means that the rule of no rule is enforced by the women. The young time-traveler, although not trained as an anthropologist, tried to take notes on the culture, hoping the information would give women of our time hope and inspiration for our task of creating the future. She made the notes available to me, and I in turn make them available to you.

The women address each other as 'elder sister.' They explain that elder is their term of greatest respect, it designates recognition of experience beyond their own. They explain that a newborn baby is elder to even the oldest woman, because that small sister has lived nine months of her own time, nine months the old woman has never lived. They say we are not each a part of the universe. They say that we are each all of the universe. Each of our consciousnesses extends through the whole universe, we are each a unique way of knowing ourselves and every other being. Each of us is a new knowledge, a new truth, a new conception of the universe.

They say we do not occupy a part of time, that each of our lives is a consciousness which extends through the whole of time. Each of our consciousnesses is a way of knowing, a knowledge, a conception of the whole of time. Therefore there are many times, and not one. Therefore we are each elder to the other.

They say elder is the term of greatest respect, with which we remind ourselves that we are listening to a sovereign and separate truth which we can never reduce or contain within our way of knowing. They say elder is the term of greatest respect, with which they remind the other that they do not wish to gobble her into their way of knowing, but to contemplate the irreducible difference between their two truths.

They say that although elder is used regardless of age, there is also a unique respect given to those who have lived in their body a large number of years. They say although each person's life is all of time, still their consciousness unfolds to them within a small piece of time. And the longer they live in that small piece of time, the more their consciousness reaches through all of time. Therefore a special respect is given those who are elder in years.

Here is their manner of solving conflict. The women say that conflict is holy, like love. It is a configuration of energy, an energy interaction powerful and sacred between two unique irreducible bodies of energy. They say we move on our own paths but we are pulled and pushed by each other's energy. They say the pulling and pushing are love and war, they say they are holy. They say each being finds her own path by using the energies of love and war, like a sailboat using the wind. They say these energies move us through our destinies.

Love and war are dangerous, the women say. They are interactions between bodies of energy that require great respect and careful handling. But, they whisper, never be afraid of the energy. These are our life forces bubbling up, revealing our destinies. We choose each other, through the energies of love and opposition, as guides. They say the enemy is as sacred as the lover. They say both are our guides.

When lovers come together it is a sacrament. The elders watch them closely and offer comfort and support, and share stories out of their long memories. Love is a delicate tightrope they walk between fusion and separation. There is no way to learn balance without practice. There is no way to practice without falling. The old women hold nets under the young women and catch and comfort them when they lose their balance. The old women encourage young women not to be afraid, to get up and try again. The old women kiss the young women, comfort their hurts, tell them how precious and necessary love is, and how much there is still to learn. They urge them to get up and walk the tightrope again, after they've fallen. The longer you wait, the harder it is to risk, the old women tell them.

To know our own truth, our own knowledge, is the sole purpose of our birth, the women say. Love and conflict are the means by which we know ourselves. We know our own energies by interaction with other bodies of energy. There is no other way, the women say.

When enemies come together it is a sacrament. Enemies are as intimately a part of each other's destinies as lovers. As a girl grows she learns to feel energies, she learns to recognize enemies and lovers. When young enemies come together the old women watch them carefully. War is a tightrope young enemies walk between conquest and defeat. As with fusion and separation in love, so with conquest and defeat in war, when they lean either way the energy of the conflict is lost, the players lose balance, fall from the

tightrope, land on the nets of the old women who wait to console and caress them.

Balance in love and war is not easily learned, the old women say. It is not learned by one woman, nor in one lifetime. To learn balance a woman must learn to extend her consciousness into all of time and into all things. For this the wisdom of tradition is necessary, to guide her growing. Slowly, the women say, we create a culture which understands balance. This is a shared work. An individual cannot learn balance alone. It takes a whole people.

The women say it is unimportant the nature of the quarrel. The women do not sit and judge the accusations made by enemies. The women laugh at words of blame and justification. The women say that all that matters is the push of their energy. They ask the enemies to come together in full body and soul in conflict, as lovers bring their full body and soul into love. They ask the enemies to fight, not to win or lose, but to know the energy of conflict and to use that shared energy to know themselves better. The old women remind the young fighters that it is their own knowledge and truth they must strive to know better, whether they come together for the sacrament of war, or the sacrament of love. It is not the purpose to prove one side right and one side wrong. When such a judgement is made, all the energy is lost, all the opportunity for knowledge. No one grows, in conquest or defeat. The purpose of war, the women say, is to learn about energy.

Young enemies approach each other with great fear. They are afraid of killing or being killed. They do not trust their own beings, the movement of their energies. They do not trust each other's natures. They try to control their own moves and each other's. They do not abandon themselves to the flow, they lose their balance and tumble into conquest or defeat.

The women say that killing comes from the fear of killing, from the attempt to control energy. If we give ourselves to the flow of energy we do not kill or destroy, the women say, unless it is the destiny of a being to die, and then we will feel that and know that we are not destroying a life but completing a destiny. When you bring about a death in this way you do not kill or destroy a life, but complete it. We are all destined to die in one place and one time. This is nothing to be afraid of, the women say. It is part of our being, it is something to search out and give ourselves. There is great pleasure in dying, the women say.

When the lovers meet they are afraid, like enemies. They are afraid of missing their own or each other's pleasure. The old women say that when pleasure is missed it is out of the fear of missing. They say if the lovers will follow the flow they will find the pleasure which is their destiny, whatever weak or strong pleasure that may be, the pleasure that is true to the unfolding of their being in that time and place.

The old women say it is sweet to watch young enemies and lovers. The smell of young sweating bodies fills their old nostrils like flowers. They suck the fragrance in, their wrinkled eyelids close. They listen to the pleasurable cries of the lovers. They listen to the enemies' cries, trying to gather their courage. The elders shut their eyes and remember their long lives and the fragrance of their consciousness seeps into all of time.

The shapes and movements of energy are wonderful things, the old women say. We are only beginning to learn what energy is.

*i will be my own child
i will clasp my arms round
myself and hug myself to dreaming*

*i will enter a woods in which i might sing
to the moon and the moon sing back to me*

*i will be my own child
i will care for myself and
make myself good things to
eat and i will sing myself songs
that are born as i sing and hear them*

*i will be my own child
i will give myself the pleasure
of cats who adore me and want only
to be near me and i will tell myself stories
in the silver light that filters through
the trees at night when it is so cold
that owls sit huddled near fires and
chant to each other*

-susan raphael

THE TROLLOP MAIDEN

But my life is not portable now
said the trollop maiden
I need fixed light
to make my witless orchids
grow
into prizes
and the machine I use
to make my bread
is too bulky to move around
easily and besides
it needs
especially heavy current.

But the old maid who lives in your navel
is the trollop maiden's desire
and your orchids sing without smell
in the fixed light like sirens.

You can always run off
yourself
said the trollop maiden
but my life is not portable
yet she moved
into coquette with the rhythms
of a gypsy fiddle--
fired across my bow
with a mouthful of leaden pain
NOW
That's one piece I cannot leave behind
she whispered.

-Audre Lorde

SIGN LANGUAGE

—monica raymond

It has taken me awhile to send this poem out. I wrote it in New York in January and February of 1974. At that point I didn't consider myself a feminist, nor did I know any other women who fell in love with women. The woman I wrote it to was the only child of deaf parents. She was hearing; she learned sign language from them as a child, then studied it again, more thoroughly, after their death. Section 2 of "Sign Language," although edited and arranged by me, is taken entirely from her conversation. Someone crashing at my house that month left me Alan Watt's *The Way of Zen* which is the source of the epigraph. Later I found this in Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father*:

Durkheim wrote of the Warramunga tribe in Australia which imposed absolute silence upon women for long mourning periods (as long as two years). As a result, he claimed, the women developed communication through gestures. Some preferred to remain silent even for years after the imposed period of silence. One woman was said to have been silent for twenty-four years.
(p. 150, Beacon paperback)

-M.R.

SIGN LANGUAGE

Master I-Tuan once said to his assembled monks, "To talk is blaspheming, to remain silent is deception. Beyond silence and talking there is an upward passage, but my mouth is not wide enough to point it out to you." So saying, he left the hall.

1.

At the crossroads there was a woman
who took all my words

I said to her
what do you expect me
to do for money

and the words clanged down into her pail

I said then how can I go around the world
asking for what I need

and the words became blanks in my brain
before I even said them

I said aren't you going to leave me one
to say over and over again

she held up her pail
and the one tumbled in

I said can I still have clamor and cry
whimper and wheedle moan and hum

on a sign she had someone had written

ANYTHING IS ACCEPTABLE
BUT ARTICULATE HUMAN SPEECH

she turned me upside down
to shake them loose

and the words fell out of my mouth
rings of erasing
swallowing themselves

2.

houses like the usual houses only there's no phone and the doorbell works by a light deaf people are absolutely deaf not as if you can turn the sound louder the best lipreaders only get forty percent signing clearer some spelling some particular words but to spell what we are saying now impossible word for word

the hearing pretending the deaf could understand part of the denial continually part of their lives forbidden to teach it to speak it picking it up from each other a completely illiterate language

what they sign to each other is not the same as what they sign to the hearing I have been the only hearing person among deaf people I could not understand one word they sign so fast and one word has to stand for so much touch the third finger to the palm of the left hand that means touch touching but also did you get there and back did you touch the place you were going to and come back

range so narrow if I had to translate my thoughts into I would be reduced to as most deaf people are reduced to saying the same thing over and over to not being able to say anything it seemed to me my parents

literally said the same thing over and over there were signs that were the signs of my house my father had his signs stupid and dirty everything was stupid or dirty and my mother hers were not-stupid not-dirty if deaf people take to you take to you immediately and so warmly I once had to tell my husband

I don't know any of these people from before when you are speaking to deaf people the clearest articulation of the lips the tongue and teeth making everything visible do you see how you muffle it do you see how I'm doing it clearly but no sense in speaking louder no sense really in making any sound

3.

Catechize the difference
between hand and tongue

Tongue is aquatic
a small porpoise in a small pool

Hand soft shelled spider
is terrestrial

Tongue probes the places
where the lost teeth are
Hand's only backward glance
is acrobatic

Tongue clumped of the same bud
is democratic
while hand commands
sinew and cuticle

Hand will go far
Tongue cannot touch its tail

Tongue is beloved
by eaters of red meat
only suckers on knuckle
will eat hand

Tongue is coated or beefy shrill
with deficiencies

Hand is equivocal
its patterns defy interpretation

Hand wins hands down
in confrontation

Hand is tickle
tongue is taunting
hand is a fickle tease
tongue lies in its teeth
tongue may say no
but hand begins unlacing
tongue lashings lick
hand cuts you dead for real

Hand makes rabbit's ears on the wall
words are the tongues shadows

This catalogue cannot be done
in gesture

Remember last October
 how you rolled out all of New Hampshire
 and put red leaves on the trees
 to make an overture

how you diddled your carburetor
 till it broke on the road to give me
 a chance to hear your life story

how I slept with a man who rammed me
 with his penis like a piston
 and you slept with one so drowsy
 he couldn't swallow a muffin

what was I trying to tell you
 what were you trying to tell me

how one night you let the bridge down
 conjured mist up summoned neon
 and coaxed the weak tea sunrise
 drizzling up over Brooklyn

what were you trying to tell me
 what was I trying to tell you

it was sign language of a sort
 but the signs hadn't been agreed on
 and the scenes kept falling apart

the foliage won't stay pinned on
 the bridges are falling short
 men grow unwieldy and angry
 we run out of friends in common

I wonder that we gave up on
 words practical and eat
 flexible unobtrusive
 quick to accordian pleat
 back down the throat when done
 handy at exposition
 but unfit for communication
 by their zeal for definition
 their radical precision

how much closer to lean on

what was I trying to tell you
 what were you trying to tell me

Finally in the arctic silences
 eskimo guides dismissed huskies sent howling
 to fade into ice on the brown line of a sled
 finally we ride in

I tell you
 this is not my element

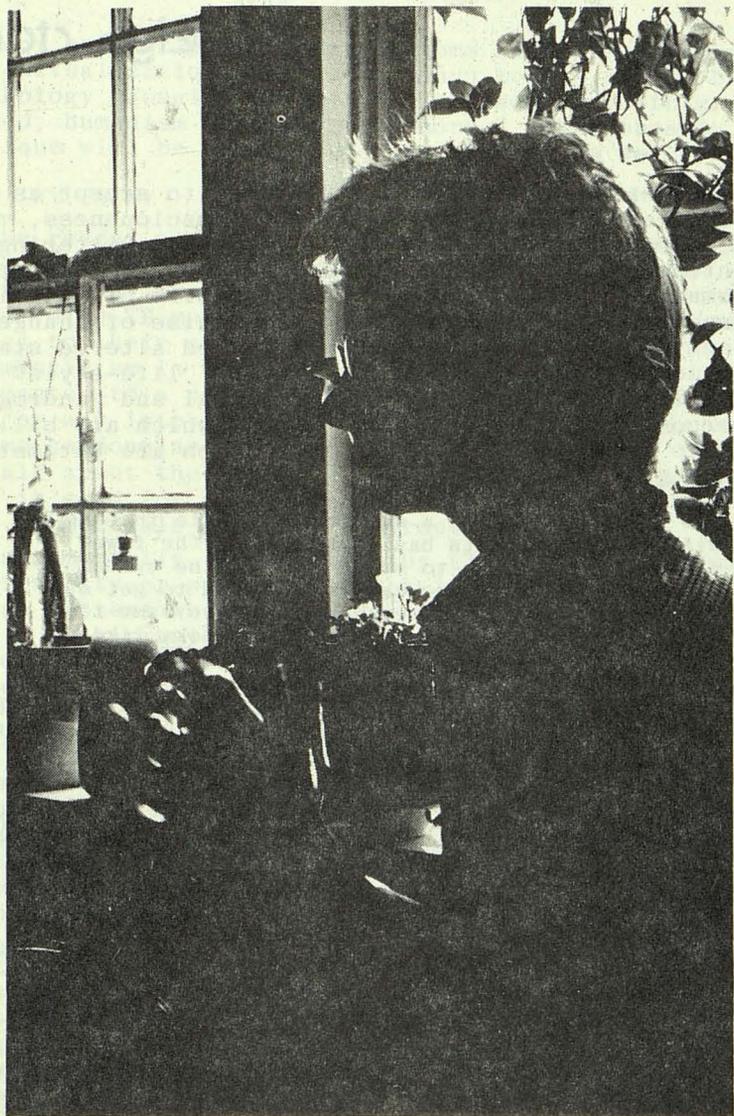
I go in it
 hunched and chill muffled in furs
 grammarian of silences
 to learn what the natives know

but you go back into it
 like one who having lived long free of witches
 in the city coasting pavement greets again
 leering the starry eyed beasts the sorcerers
 and this terrain answers you even if
 to all I ask you give me the gloved
 hand on the lip

oh you can't know

reindeer tracks thickly dusted
 crossfire of mists signs with no destinations
 idiot lumps of snow
 that neither attack nor caress
 having no mouth nor hands

-Monica Raymond



The Politics of Wholeness:

by Leigh Star

In recent years, patriarchy has expanded to accept as "normal" experiences of altered states of consciousness, meditation, dreams, yoga, biofeedback, perception-altering drugs, "enlightenment." That is, the basic structures of patriarchy have remained constant, while the repertoire of "permissible" experience has been expanded under the guise of change.

Closely allied with the above-mentioned altered states of consciousness are apparent changes in "life-style" like communal living, humanistic, transpersonal and "androgynous" interpersonal relations...again, things which are billed as leading to a better way of life, but which are ultimately imprisoning if unquestioned.

The more experiences a system expands to include without changing its basic structure, the fewer people will be able to stand outside the system and criticize it. The change required to get outside will be more far-reaching. At the same time, the system itself will provide what looks like change to most people through its own expansion.

FROM BROWN RICE TO LESBIAN SEPARATISM: ONE GIRL'S TRUE STORY

Several years ago I was heavily involved with meditation, yoga, and people who were committed to "natural" life styles. I became a teacher of TM, in fact, and taught it for a couple of years. I know that I initially began these practices in an effort to heal a split I felt within myself, for which I had no name. When Zen Buddhists or Tibetan Llamas pointed out that life is an empty shell, full of illusion, something in me resonated. I *did* want a way to unify things, to lose my separation and isolation.

The same feelings, a little later but overlapping in time, led me to come out and begin feminist consciousness-raising. Eventually, the contradictions between woman-identification--or female completeness, self-sufficiency, and spirituality--and the male systems deepened. Starting from when I was still inside of the systems, I began to develop an analysis and a gut-level intuition of their danger and insidiousness.

The critique I offer here grows out of my experience (or that of close friends) with Zen, TM, Buddhism, Hinduism, hatha yoga, macrobiotics, and several forms of guru-following. I lump them together and, (when I'm being polite), call them "new mysticism," "new spirituality," or "spiritual psychologies."

FEMINISM and the NEW SPIRITUALITY

Many currently prevalent systems have similar goals (of self-actualization, unity, harmony) to the above: humanistic psychology, Jungian psychology, "personal growth groups," indeed, humanism of almost any sort. Taken broadly, this critique will be useful for these things as well.

KNOW THY ENEMY

The recent plethora of language (books, jargon, labels) for "spirituality" conveys the fact that mysticism, however watered down, is now a locus of concern/control on a mass basis. The TM movement alone claims 600,000 American initiates to their system. Beyond that, the influence of the new mysticism in general extends beyond the numbers of participants--to a point where it is incorporating itself in a major way into the Western ethos. For example, it has become commonplace to refer to something as one's "karma," to talk about the yin or yang of something, to think brown rice is good for you, to talk about the "guru." (There are even commercials starring humorous gurus.)

Fundamentally, what I mean by the terms mysticism, new spirituality or spiritual psychologies are those developmental systems which purport to lead to a higher, more "unified," or harmonious state of consciousness (nirvana, alpha states, samadhi, enlightenment, etc.) in a (more or less) structured fashion. They may or may not have one central male figure who is the focus for disciples: Sri Chinmoy, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Ram Dass, Yogi BhaJan, Guru Maharaji, Hare Krishna people, who provides "guidance" or a "channel" for "reaching these states." (Maybe I should just put the whole article in quotation marks.)

Some systems, for example Zen and macrobiotics, do not really depend on devotion to a master, although there are male leaders. However, the lasting goal of all these systems is to eventually provide, through devotion, a technique of "purification," meditation, etc., a permanent state of "non-duality" or oneness with the world.

For me, there is a crucial difference between *duality* and *difference*, as they apply to males, females and the constructions/perceptions of patriarchal society. My assumption is that there is a male/female difference which is at least biological, and which has been construed as a duality by males. This has given rise to philosophies and systems of dualism. Since I believe it is not possible or desirable to transcend male/female difference, I refer to transcending dualities and dualism, that is, to getting beyond the control of women at all levels. Women are the primary objects/subjects of patriarchal control. It is natural and logical

that this getting beyond is inextricably linked with, and in fact, could define, feminism.

ANDROGYNY, OR HOW TO CREATE A DISEASE, PATENT A QUICK CURE, AND MARKET IT AS ENLIGHTENMENT

One aspect of the state of non-dualism is supposed to be the transcendence of sex-role stereotype; the enlightened person may thus incorporate into her/his personality any qualities, those typically masculine or those typically feminine. For example, Jesus has been called an androgynous symbol by Christian theologians such as John Cobb; in Transcendental Meditation, the movement's spiritual leader may be called either Guru Dev (masculine) or Guru Deva (feminine). Buddha was said to have been "androgynous."

Interestingly enough, this proliferation of androgynous gurus is coincidental with a new "androgynous" image being touted for Western women.

Themes of androgyny, "psychic wholeness," and transcending of sex and gender recur again and again in the new mysticism. The language used is "yin" and "yang" or feminine and masculine; the idea is that within each person are both masculine and feminine qualities, which can be "realized." (Although, most hasten to add, it just happens to be more *likely* that women will self-realize as mothers, supporters of men, nurturers of males; and men as active participants in the world they created.)

The last time I read about the concept of androgyny, my hands began trembling with anger and I threw the magazine across the room. The magazine was *Womanspirit*, the article a review of June Singer's book *Androgyny* written by Ruth Mountaingrove:

The path to androgyny/gynandry is open to everyone: celibate, lesbian, gay man, heterosexual. whenever the urge for wholeness pushes us into the risky, long, hard work of a lifetime. The outcome is unforeseeable, bound as we are by cultural gender definitions, but surely it is more than woman, more than man. A whole person will embody both, and until this is actualized, we cannot know. . . .¹

Goddess, give me the strength to say this clearly enough:

NOTHING ABOUT ME IS MALE.

I DO NOT NEED ANYTHING MASCULINE OR MALE IN ORDER TO BE WHOLE.

I DO NOT HAVE ANY MALE QUALITIES TO ACTUALIZE--I HAVE CERTAIN FEMALE POTENTIALS THAT WHILE LIVING UNDER A MALE SYSTEM HAVE NOT FLOURISHED.

I have scars and a deep anger about that in me which has been fought or raped by men, by their world. Removing the scars, the split, is my self-loving task as a Lesbian feminist.

The result will *not* be more than woman, more than man--but fully WOMAN for the first time. And that will come *completely* only with woman-identified revolution--psychic, psychological, social, material.

OVERCOMING THE YIN-YANG DUALITY, OR, WINNING THE WAR IN VIETNAM

Patriarchy creates and inculcates dualism. It is common for patriarchs to create needs and then manufacture a product to deal with them--like the medical patriarchs who manufacture a disease for which they must consequently find a "cure" (i.e. Thalidomide babies, vaginal cancer from DES). Since the late 1960's, what we are witnessing in American society is the selling of a "cure" for a disease which is endemic to male-centered society--the disease of dualism, of alienation from the "true self."

This disease has always existed, but has not always been widely perceived as the problem per se. Only a small, unusually sensitive and/or intense segment of the population ever dedicated themselves to understanding any dualism: the ahistorical phenomenon of mystics, saints, visionaries. I believe that these people always had hold of some kind of basic issue, and that that is why they were often ostracized, insulated from the mainstream of religion and society; why what they said was often misinterpreted or suppressed; why the image comes through of the mystic as a wild-eyed "crazy man" (sic). But it is important to see that the societal context within which they lived and interacted, if only the one they carried in their heads back to their cave, was male-dominated, male-supremacist, and anti-feminist. Not to ignore this would have been to generate a spiritual-political earthquake.

The union of female self-identification and mysticism is witchcraft. Politically, it has been/is ultimately threatening in its implications for the radical restructuring of man's world. It was once subjected to brutal control under patriarchy; now it is being subjected to extremely subtle control.

The kind of widespread "dealing with" issues of wholeness which we are now seeing is a kind of cooptation of the perceptions of male-identified mysticism on a very wide scale. It is being done in a manner which *ensures* that the connections between feminism (Lesbianism) and wholeness will *not* be made.

The new mystics are presenting a male-identified worldview to women who perceive the dualism in patriarchy, but who may not yet have formed their tactics for creating a non-dualistic life, a woman-centered "oneness." They have, unfortunately, done a superb job of masking the male identity beneath a guise of androgyny. (More about this below.)

On a social level, these forms and controls are quite new and not yet rigidly institutionalized, but they are certain to escalate within the next couple of decades if the present trend continues.

Amidst the escalation, it is vital for us to understand that the new mysticism has to do with the control of women; that it may be seen as a sexual as well as spiritual phenomenon; that it represents a subtler form of oppression, not a form of liberation.

Without being overly simplistic, I feel it is possible to talk in quite general terms about several beliefs which all of the "new mysticisms" share, and how these beliefs function to short-circuit woman-identification:

1. *Belief that by doing some technique, one can attain an ideal state.*

Proust observed with astonishment that a great doctor or professor often shows himself, outside of his specialty, to be lacking in sensitivity, intelligence, and humanity. The reason for this is that having abdicated his freedom, he has nothing else left but his techniques. In domains where his techniques are not applicable, he either adheres to the most ordinary of values or fulfills himself as a flight.

-Simone de Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity

There are two kinds of problems deriving from the belief that doing a technique will bring you to an (the) ideal state of being, as the above quotation suggests. The first problem is with using a technique for growth; the second, with the function of the goal of "ideal state."

The maxim "capture the kingdom of heaven and all else shall be added unto thee" is the underlying basis for those mystical systems which say something like: "Just do this practice (i.e. TM, yoga, or Zazen) and enlightenment will eventually be yours." Essentially, I have seen this idea function to absolve participants of all social responsibility for their own psychological growth "on the way to enlightenment." It fosters the belief that one can *buy* one's way out of the ambiguity of existence by putting in some "x" amount of time.

The logic of this concept, in simplified form, goes something like: a) we are all in an impure, unreasoning or somehow out-of-whack-with-the-universe state; b) all our actions are mediated by this disharmonious state; c) therefore, the only valid action is to meditate (or whatever the technique is) to achieve harmony and happiness. Also, as long as one is meditating, essentially one is on the right track and other things (like moral decisions and social action) will "be taken care of" in the process. It's a kind of existential cowardice, the deliberate avoidance of contradictions and decisions.

It manifests itself in such ridiculous situations as that of General Franklin Davis, who is a practitioner and ardent supporter of TM. He goes around lecturing about TM, and is often cited by other TM lecturers as an exemplar of the ability to integrate a secular career with a spiritual discipline. Obviously, Gen. Davis believes that he is developing spiritually through meditation; just as obviously, this "development" has not caused him to examine his participation in a sexist, rapist organization, the U.S. Army. I would suggest that in this case the General probably uses the fact of his involvement with TM to avoid facing his responsibility--perhaps he feels that the facet of his personality under

the heading "growth" is adequately covered by doing TM. And while the General may be an extreme example, the phenomenon varies only in degree whenever any formula is substituted for holistic change.

2. *Belief that certain individuals have achieved a permanent level of insight--the ideal state.*

The "masters," in mystical traditions, are, as the label implies, generally always male. They are credited by followers with almost supernatural powers, and often function in the same symbolic fashion as the reified male-god in other religions.

In a dualistic society, it is the nature of symbols for God to represent what is *good*, regardless of protests to the contrary on the part of their followers (or of the symbols). Women who relate to male gurus as masters, i.e. as the epitome of good, cannot but feel themselves to be "bad" or lacking in some degree if they are trying to imitate him.

But the "master" can exercise a more insidious form of psychic control than a god-substitution. Gurus can control the language we have about wholeness--and women control themselves at this level by responding to the idea of non-duality and freedom. Gurus set themselves up to "teach" (which should be "evoke") Selfhood and wholeness, non-dualism. They are therefore deeply desacralizing, psychically insidious for women. By blocking self-definition, they provide the ultimate substitution of male-defined reality for female self-perception.

The technique of reserving some mystical authority to a few choice men can be (and is) used to create a bureaucracy based in sexism, *dealing in* spiritual growth. Whatever the masters say can be used to justify any injustice or illogic on the grounds that it will help those involved get to that higher state, too. In some types of yoga, for example, the developmental schema depends on perfect love and obedience to a guru--one's own judgment and experience are necessarily abandoned in order to be a disciple and experience "perfect love." For women, this bears a suspicious resemblance to the self-surrender to males demanded by marriage, Christianity, etc. The masters, following what their masters taught, usually perpetuate sex-role stereotyping in the name of "it's inexplicable, but it must be *nature's way*." Women in the TM organization, for example, are informally (secretly) disallowed from teaching meditation in prisons or mental hospitals. The rationale is that Maharishi has said that women are "more delicate" than men and couldn't stand to be in such stressful environments.

The next premise concerns the nature of the so-called transcendence:

3. *Belief that the world is fundamentally dualistic (yin-yang); this dualism can be transcended by expanding insight and perception.*

The Eastern concept of *yin* and *yang* posits two basic and antithetical tensions present in all things. It is possible, goes the theory, by asceticism or meditation to transcend this duality and perceive an underlying unity. At the same time, one never really loses the aspect of being a part of the dualistic world altogether; the inner unity is incorporated into activity, the "kingdom of Heaven within" forming a solid base for "non-attached" activity on the "earthly plane."

From a feminist perspective, this philosophical twist, which prevents mysticism from becoming an absolutely simple rejection of the world for a kind of paradise, is unconvincing. The theory is that once one arrives at this ideal-state-which-is-always-here-anyway, certain dualities are transcended. However, this process usually takes many years, and in the meantime most mystics are going about perpetuating the most basic dualism, that of sexism. Misogyny and oppression of women (and given the facts of women's oppression, "neutrality" about feminism *is* misogyny) do not fall away like scales with a "mystical" experience. St. Augustine, for example, who was "enlightened" by certain standards, did his share to contribute to the upkeep of gynocidal dualism in the world.

To reiterate what was said in the introduction, it is impossible to talk about transcending duality while contributing to and failing to acknowledge the position of women as "Other" in the world. Patriarchal society inculcates duality, and in order to truly reach non-dualism it must be confronted.

The next belief seeks to avoid confrontation:

4. *Belief that the world is maya, an illusion, transitory and not-to-be-invested in or attached to.*

In an androcentric culture women are "sex"; we represent genital sexuality for heterosexual males. Sexuality is identified as one of the major worldly attachments and desires by mystical systems. Women, therefore, have historically represented the chief temptation of "the worldly"--that which is to be rejected, that which invites desire, which should ultimately inspire a total indifference in the mind of the true seeker. This belief is still widely held in modern systems where celibacy is recommended.

As Nancy Falk observed in an article on Buddhism,² women do come to symbolize in the literature on enlightenment, "the ultimate bonds of samsara" (the world of change and impermanence). The last temptation of Buddha before his enlightenment is resisting the sexual advances of three beautiful women. When he successfully resists, he reaches nirvana.

I have seen sexism flourish within the context of asceticism and celibacy just as well as it does with the presence of sexual intercourse--heterosexuality is larger as an institution³ than genital relating or the lack of it.

Another aspect of the belief that the world is transitory is that it is easy to rationalize about what is so brief in the face of eternity. The responsibility for sex-based oppression is much diminished in the minds of the oppressor if the suffering of women is seen as a mere moment of pain in the fleeting reality of the world. This is an extension of trading proximate for ultimate, and thereby committing both absurdities and atrocities without responsibility.

An outcome of this interpretation of time is found in the next belief:

5. *Belief in reincarnation: if you don't make it this time around, you get to come back until you do.*

The obvious result here can be one of not-doing--if you can always put off until tomorrow, literally, why do anything today? But a subtler consequence derives from a belief connected to reincarnation--the belief that you are reborn (or born at all) to finish out whatever *karma* you didn't do in the last life. This is (in simplified but accurate form) the basis of the whole Indian caste system: you are born and live where you deserve to be; it's all your "*karma*." If you are rich, you deserve to be, etc. The only way to escape the cycle of rebirth and *karma* is to transcend the world as it is, usually through meditation or some other path.

This kind of Calvinistic nonsense perpetuated by ideas of Karmic Justice serves of course quite well to perpetuate the caste system according to gender. Social change itself is invalidated in such a context, as is a radical new self-defining for women. Some systems even say you have to come back as a man to be enlightened.

The following belief can also suppress positive becoming:

6. *Belief that the ideal state is a universal, "natural" state.*

Most mystical systems have stereotypic descriptions of the enlightened state, "ways to tell" if you're having certain advanced "spiritual experiences"--quite statically defined states of consciousness or alterations of states of consciousness. The end goals are precise, described in a linear rather than processual fashion.

And subsequently, old stereotypes about masculinity and femininity are maintained and reified. For example, a recent issue of the *East-West Journal*, a magazine about the new spirituality, ran an article denouncing abortion on the grounds that there are all these souls out there waiting to come back, and we can't deny them the change; women, in the new spirituality, are to be passive, maternal, devoted to husbands and "naturally" heterosexual--in order to facilitate a return to the idyllic "natural" state.

CONCLUSIONS

The women say that they have been given as equivalents the earth the sea tears that which is humid that which is black that which does not burn that which is negative those who surrender without a struggle. They say this is a concept which is the product of mechanistic reasoning. It deploys a series of terms which are systematically related to opposite terms. . . They joke on this subject, they say it is to fall between Scylla and Charybdis, to avoid one religious ideology, only to adopt another, they say that both one and the other have this in common, that they are no longer valid.⁴

It is not possible to retain the old forms of these systems in a "non-sexist" way.

Men keep finding more and more subtle ways of assuring women that we can be whole, happy, fulfilled and true human beings without being political, and while continuing to give energy and primacy to men.

Most of all, they find more and more ways of assuring us that we need them, that in order to be permanently happy we need to find our "masculine complements," whether in our heads or in a male body.

The definition of "wholeness" offered through new mysticism is bounded by male presence. Self-realizing women are not mental hermaphrodites, Earth mothers, yin, androgynes, free animae relating to their animi, "in touch with their bisexual nature."

ANOTHER MODEL, OR LESBIANISM AS A NECESSARY IF NOT SUFFICIENT CONDITION FOR ENLIGHTENMENT

"How can I constrict this message so it will be understood uneasily?"

--Robin Morgan

For me the way a system of control becomes apparent is through the presence of alternative models, other worlds. The name that my other world has right now is witchcraft, which means:

I AFFIRM MY SACREDNESS/MY SEXUALITY AS THE SAME AND AS FEMALE;
I AFFIRM MY CONNECTION TO OTHER WOMEN;
I FIGHT TO SEE AND STOP ALL RAPE AND I AFFIRM MY RAGE;
I AFFIRM THE ABSENCE OF EASY ANSWERS.

FOOTNOTES

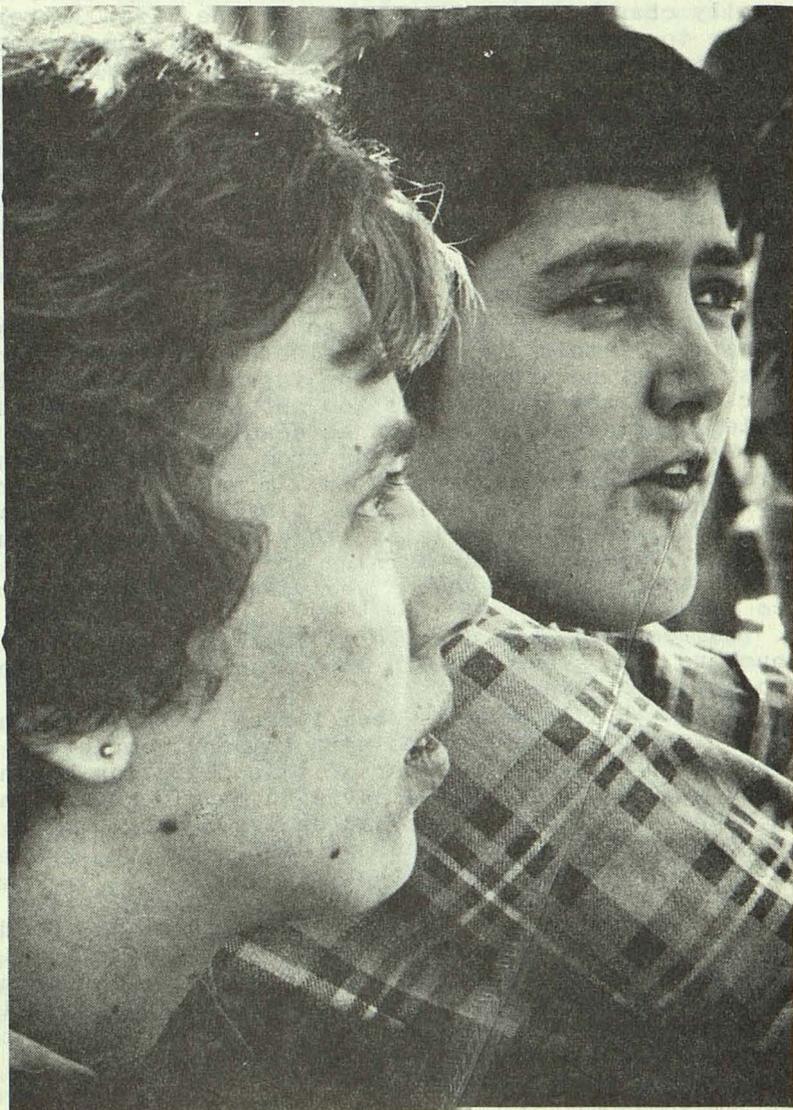
1. Review of Androgyny by June Singer, written by Ruth Mountaingrove, Womanspirit, Winter Solstice 1976, 3, No. 10, p. 58.

2. Nancy Falk, "An Image of Women in Old Buddhist Literature: The Daughters of Mara," in Women and Religion, ed. by Plaskow and Romero (Montana: Scholars' Press, 1974).

3. Artemis March, unpublished MS.

4. Monique Wittig, Les Guerrilleres (NY: Avon, 1973),

LETTERS TO FRIENDS



TO A BAMBOOZLED SISTER from Anita Cornwell

As much as it distresses me, I have finally concluded that I can no longer continue our correspondence which has, intermittently, been carried on since our departure from State College almost twelve turbulent years ago.

That we both have changed drastically during that time is fairly obvious, I believe. Yet, I wonder if you have really changed at all. I remember the first letter you wrote to me the summer we left State which concerned your relationship with the man you subsequently married, and by whom you've had--what seems to me--the astronomical number of seven children!

You complained in that letter of how insensitive you felt he was toward you. That he *always* expected you to accomodate your lifestyle to his. And, in case you have forgotten, I wrote you to "Ditch the damn bastard before he wrecks your life!"

Well, you did not ditch him, and by your own admission, he has indeed wrecked your life.

Now it's not my intention to unearth old sorrows while singing, "I told you so," in gleeful obbligato, for the past cannot be undone, and the future is seldom affected for the better when one is too obtuse to realize that one male chauvinist pig is just as deadly as another.

Yet, after finally fleeing from the chaos of your disastrous marriage, you settled in a mixed Commune where, according to you, your life was "finally beginning *at last!*"

And I, ever the optimist, told you I thought you had merely jumped from the burning ship into the churning waters which would consume you *if you were waiting for some MCP to rescue you.*

In response, you declared, "There's always safety in numbers, and sleeping with more than one man is the answer to any woman's dream!"

Right then I think is when I finally began to suspect that we would soon have to part company completely because the sheer absurdity of most of your logic was beginning to wear me down. Not that I envision myself as any incipient genius, but I have always had enough sense to come in out of the storm. Whereas you, my dear, seem to feast on one grand debacle after the other.

And now has come your latest, incredible letter saying that you are pregnant again. *PREGNANT AGAIN!* Goddamn! And by the man, or men, who used to live with you in the Commune. Then, as if that wasn't mind-blowing enough, you go on to declare that since your ex-husband is willing to take you back, you were hoping I would be willing to take your baby after its arrival, so your new life will not be endangered by past mistakes!

Now that last assertion is so absurd I won't even waste ink trying to pinpoint why. But what I feel I *absolutely* must deal with is your equally absurd statement that we single Sisters "must bail out you Mothers in your time of trial."

Why in the name of the Virgin Mary you feel that I, or any other woman should take on the responsibilities of some male chauvinist pig is completely beyond my comprehension. We did not give you any baby, so why do you assume it is our duty to take the responsibility for your fucking around with our *oppressors*?

The only time you ever think of *Sisterhood* is when you're in trouble and are in hope of dumping some of your shit on my head. Well, my dear, I have news for you. If you straight women are so intent on "relating to men," as you so mistakenly put it, and casting aspersions on Gay women whenever we try to point out the inherent folly of your actions, then I will be damned if I will even listen to any such nonsense as my duty to you.

You, like 99% of all straight women, are dedicated to men and *not* to the liberation of women. So now that you are in hot water again, I suggest you go to the people who are ever in the center of your emotional life--men, men, men!

That men do not want to be burdened with you when you are not able to flunkey for them twenty-four hours a day, I very well know. And, obviously, you know it also. For some mysterious reason, however, you simply refuse to act on your knowledge.

To be brutally frank, you are the main reason I have begun to despair that the Women's Liberation Movement will ever fully succeed. For I have finally had to admit that most women are like you, not me. Most straight women will sell their soul for a man when it has always been painfully obvious that most men care only for themselves.

And, yes, you are quite right, there is a great deal of racism within the Movement. But I fail to understand why you think the racism of some white women should make me want to endure the blatant sexism of most black men. Or any men for that matter. Which is not to say that racism is any less evil than sexism, but the fact is, I don't go around fornicating with racists as you have always done with sexists who have raped, maimed and mutilated women since the dawn of recorded herstory.

This you know, yet you steadfastly refuse to raise one small finger to protect yourself from your executioners. And since it is patently impossible to free people who not only don't want to be free, but who will emphatically tell you they are not oppressed, I am through trying. I have had my last argument with you straight Sisters as to whether men or "the system" is the oppressor. If you choose to think "the system" runs by remote control from the planet Pluto, then more power to you.

In the meanwhile though, you have seven and a half babies to deal with, and if you're really serious about going back

to that chauvinist who, literally, nearly beat you to death, one can reasonably assume that more children will be on the way since your head is so messed up you're still buying that man's crap about birth control being racial genocide for black people.

Well, I have discussed that nonsense with you before, all to no avail, of course, so I won't waste more time on it here. I would like to point out, however, that your chatter about being a friend to me, et cetera, is simply untrue since you have never been free of male domination. Men won't let women become friends because *true* friendships build Sisterhood. And Sisterhood *is* powerful. And it is only through true Sisterhood that male supremacy will ever be destroyed.

Men know this and will go to any lengths to prevent *their* women from becoming truly involved with other women. Yet, the sad truth is, men don't have to lift one finger. Most of you straight women are so eager to remain in bondage, you even try to destroy the few Sisters who are truly free. Which is the main reason you hate and fear Gay women.

We are live proof that women can not only survive without men, but we survive happily. And we live in relative peace and harmony with one another, for no matter what differences may exist between any group of Lesbians, we are never threatened when we have to deal with one another on a truly human level. *And we enjoy being together.*

While you man-centered women languish in your straight-jackets, smiling your false, brittle smiles while frantically trying to figure out what *he* is doing now. Thus you are really never engaged when you come together with other women. And, in fact, I have heard any number of so-called Feminists say they are "tired of being with all those women," or they are "ready to start working with men now."

I suppose it is useless to point out to you yet again that any woman who is *not* comfortable with other women is really not in harmony with herself. And I'm sure you know that so many straight women are so miserable that "going to the shrink" has become their major occupation, if they can afford it. Otherwise, dope and the bottle have to suffice. As they sufficed for you for so damn long, until you finally cracked completely.

Yes, I know, this letter may seem unduly cruel to you, but that is nothing comparable to the life you're going to endure if you go through with your misguided plan of resuming your horrendous marriage.

And as for that ridiculous idea of women who are ready to start working with men, where on earth do you ever see women working with men? *Women work for men.* And they work their cans off for peanuts or nothing at all, as per the good housewife who works 99 hours per week for zero per diem.

So do go ahead, work for men, for that is what you've always done anyway. Because we are not making a revolution when most women have to stop at 3:15 to pick up little Johnny from school then race home to start big Johnny's dinner.

And we are most certainly not making a revolution when so much of the energies of straight women is expended fighting the Right-to-Lifers when all you have to do is stop fornicating with the enemy and you won't need any damn abortion. And ditto with child-care centers. If you mothers would make the fathers take physical care of *their* children, this country would be flooded with good child-care centers practically overnight.

But no, you would rather hang onto your burdens, fighting useless battles because you are too frightened to fight the real war. You have been enslaved so long that the idea of freedom terrifies you. And I find that the greatest tragedy of all, for your plight is a true mirror for all male-identified women.

Now I realize that you don't really want a true revolution. All you want is a few patches here and there to make your misery less intolerable. But true change will never do. Because men don't want change when it means losing their unpaid serfs.

This means that if there's ever to be a true revolution for the liberation of women, Gay women will have to make it. The question is, will we succeed when most men *and* women are against us? Better yet, will it be worth the effort?

I wish I knew.

*i admit i have fallen out of love with you
your face has hollows
i suspect
you have been hiding in
i cannot trust
the sudden darkening of
your eyes*

*silence shrouds the words
between us
we speak vacantly
the floorboards creak
beneath our tread
measuring our separations*

*already we are our own ghosts
breezes in an empty house
opening and shutting
closet doors
one at a time
without purpose*

-Susan Robbins

TO FRANCES FROM BETH HODGES

Frances Doughty and I think what happened between us is important. (Once when she caught me talking about it, she said, "I don't mind if you tell it. It was a great day for feminism." And we hugged each other then, proud and happy that we are on our way to becoming friends.) Because I think it is important, I'm grateful to *Sinister Wisdom* for letting us share our exchange.

The last Saturday in September Frances and I met at the pier for a boat trip around the Manhattan harbor. She had submitted an article for the *Sinister Wisdom* issue I was editing; and I had asked her to abridge the article. For different reasons but connected with the same *Sinister Wisdom* issue, Frances and I were in a crisis about ourselves, as a writer in the one case and as an editor in the other. My image of Frances was Self-Sufficient Big-City Movement Leader; Frances' image of me was Grown-Up Editor. As much as we each needed reassurance and encouragement then, neither of us was strong enough to risk being weak before the other (who, of course, had never doubted herself). So that Saturday evening in September we took the same boat around the Manhattan harbor, but two months were to pass before we spoke honestly about the difficulties we were experiencing then.

In September I was overworked and overwrought: teaching seventeen hours, editing *Sinister Wisdom* out of a motel room in Hays, Kansas, speaking in Chicago one weekend and two days later flying to New York City for two twelve-hour days of meeting with the MLA Women's Commission. The Saturday I met Frances, the meetings had run over into a third day. In the morning: Women's Commission. In the afternoon: dinner with three friends in Chinatown. In the evening when I met Frances, I was physically and emotionally exhausted. Frances tried briefly to talk with me about her article. I couldn't talk.

Frances' letter came almost two months later. In it, she told me a) her family was indifferent or else hostile to her attempts to do things and that she was fighting their internalized voices in her own head when she tried to write; b) she wanted detailed directions as to length and structure rather than my generalized criticism; c) she wanted encouragement; d) she was terrified of rejection, inadequacy, etc. And as for our exchange at the pier, she said, "I kept feeling strange (trying to mask my own heavy reactions) but I also felt I was getting no solid responses from you...", with the result that she could not work on the piece for some time and missed the deadline. Would I talk about what happened that evening, tell her a) what was going on with me then, and b) what messages I heard from her? She ended, "I don't know exactly how to sign this - 'towards friendship' is how it feels."

November 19, 1976

Dear Frances,

Your letter came today. My first response was some sorrow--as with a loss--and a great deal of disappointment. Why did you not know what I had been through this fall? and why did you not tell me what you expected of me (since our expectations did not coincide)?

And then I realized--what you were asking of me was exactly what I was asking of you, that we each understand (intuit) what the other is needing and that we be responsive. Oh, Frances, I grieve for us all. The most hateful thing they have done to us is that we don't know each other, that each of us is alone. Though we've begun to "exorcise the pig in our heads," still we know precious little about ourselves and our resemblances. We each failed the other because we did not guess that Frances is not very different from Beth is not very different from Frances. I did not guess that you had doubts. You did not guess that the evening I was evasive, not responsive to your needs, was the beginning of a (what? less than a breakdown, more than a collapse of will).

I believe it is true--and our only hope, that we know it--we are so much more alike than we are different. And what I need, what feelings I have--of insecurity, vulnerability, inadequacy--you have also. And sometimes perhaps more so. That we don't know this is not a failure of imagination. We have been cut off so completely from our kind--woman--that we don't even know ourselves. How know self when nothing in our separate experience validates our experience?

Your family? We don't have families, Frances. And what chance, I wonder, have we of ever becoming a family of one (oneself). I am terrified that I may never have even this person I live with most intimately. Existential terror--the boys don't know a thing about it. When the philosopher, unarmed, goes to live in an alien and actively hostile culture, he can write home about--no, even then he has nothing to say to me, he still has a community, a "back home." That we aren't all totally insane...If we aren't.

The evening of the boat trip. Both of us standing off, both hiding behind cool exteriors. No, I was not responding to you that evening--I was having my own crisis.

You and I might find it easier if we had a partner in our work. But I know too that partners are not the whole answer. Harriet tells me how exposed they feel, now that the issue has gone to press. Jan Clausen writes of her need to have her work validated, says she does not know what validation she craves. Frances, are we not all alike in our uncertainty and our need for affirmation? Can we not find a way to meet and to be present to each other. I want this for all of us. My first act is to tell us that no one is unique in her aloneness.

Toward friendship of us all,

Beth 51



Marko Marj 1960

plantinting

NURSERY RHYME MY MOTHER NEVER TAUGHT ME

Mary, Mary quite contrary
to patriarchal culture
cultivates cockle shells
in her garden

Oh, the wonderful whorls
and convolutions, Mary!

Mary, Mary quite contrary
to oedipal expectations
grows silver bells
in her garden

Oh, the graceful curve,
the tiny clapper tipped
with a silver ball, the sweet
sound of tip touching silver wall!

Mary, Mary quite contrary
how does your garden grow?
With silver bells
and cockle shells
and pretty maids all in a row--

Pretty maids all in a row?
Oh, Mary!
Your Mother Goose knew
a thing or two
and now we do
too.

Jacqueline Lapidus

Kudos

Dear Harriet and Catherine,

Thanks for the exchange copy of SW. It was a great issue and so important. Everyone here was excited about it and discussing it, etc. The thing that came across from the women I talked to was that the subject of feminist publishing, being highly controversial, was presented in a manner which made it possible to discuss the issues rather than split women apart over the whole topic. That seems to me to be most desirable kind of journalism and the very hardest kind to accomplish. You have really done a good job, an important job. We all owe a great deal of thanks to you and the women who made this kind of presentation possible.

Nancy Stockwell
Berkeley, Calif.

and Kvetch

Dear SW,

Thanks for your first two issues. I respond only to kvetch, but that is typical of me, as people who know me could tell you. And I had better do it before the semi-annual zoo (the spring term) starts up here.

Most of the women queried in "The Politics of Publishing" /Jan Clausen, *Sinister Wisdom* 27 are admirably wary, I think, of trying to be politically pure in a society that doesn't allow anybody to be pure (except through self-destruction). June Arnold's intransigent statement is quoted--but look what happened a couple of weeks ago in the Sunday *Times* magazine section! Lois Gould wrote about Daughters, Inc. and nobody refused to "give favorable attention to the books or journals put out by the commercial press" by insisting that the article be withdrawn. Thank goodness. Nor do I think Daughters is ripping off the movement because the *Times* said something nice about it. *Mother Jones*, on the contrary, is clearly a rotten little radical-chic rag and deserves to be boycotted.

Harriet and Catherine's letter to Beth Hodges at the end of the magazine bothers me. I know that tone of militant desperation and while I feel I must criticize it, doing so makes me nervous. It's like idly watching someone trying to lift a 200-pound rock and after idly humming and leaning against a fence, saying "Hey, um, you're not doing that well, are you?" I'll leave it to your imagination what

happens to the idle critic in that situation.

Yet I must. There's a kind of desperation produced by someone else's (apparent) worldly success when you're penniless and living on the edge of things that isn't envy but rather a kind of horrible frustration, and it isn't surprising that in such situations people lose their heads. If only everybody were as self-sacrificing and poor and hard-working and selfless as I am, then everything would be all right. So the real enemy becomes Susan Brownmiller, who must be either stupid or selfish, and we know that nobody who reads her book even notices what she did to the ending (except us). Now it's true that our society defends itself by partial incorporation (David Riesman invented the phrase). So we can argue forever about whether the restriction is worth the incorporation and vice versa. And waste our energies and drive ourselves crazy, which is another form of partial incorporation by restriction. And who benefits? We all know who. It makes sense to boycott *Mother Jones* but it doesn't make sense to slam Brownmiller, who-- after all--wrote a necessary book and got it out to a lot of people, ending or no ending.

Behind such militant desperation is, I think, terror, which I can allay only by offering my spare bedroom if things really go bang economically and SW needs a few weeks' refuge and you haven't robbed a bank or killed someone. (Seriously.) And yes, I know Denver is pretty far from North Carolina. Behind it is also, I suspect, in all of us, a kind of guilt. I think it's time to stop blaming ourselves or others for compromises that the system we live in makes unavoidable. An insistence on self-sacrifice (aren't we always being asked to do this?) and purity not only doesn't work (I know all it does to me is to make me very angry); it focuses our attention *in the wrong place*.

We're all living in the same economy and it's a doomed attempt to try to climb out of it by main force--which is what I think we do if we become preoccupied with issues of sell-outs and ripping off the movement and so on. If *Mother Jones* ought to be boycotted for exploiting feminism, that's not because the magazine uses feminism to sell itself (so does *Sinister Wisdom!*) or because MJ makes money (would that SW did). What's wrong with MJ's use of feminism is that the magazine does not offer in exchange a reasonable opportunity for getting real feminist information out to the world--i.e. MJ is taking more than it's giving and much more (in this year, in this place, under these conditions) than it's worth to give up.

In a sense we all sell out and the only questions one can ask are How much? and For what? I think Brownmiller got much the better of the bargain in the opportunity to get information out to the world at large (not in money, by the way; half of that \$250,000 goes to the hard-cover publisher, 10% to an agent, and 80% of the remainder to the IRS. It comes out to about \$25,000, I would estimate, for five years' work. This doesn't, of course, include spin-

offs like articles, etc. Still, a modest return by middle-class standards. The hard-cover rights were probably \$20,000 or lower.) Dealing with MJ you get the worst of it.

Focusing one's attention in the wrong place leads to the kind of statement June Arnold made recently at the MLA, that the prices of feminist-press books don't matter because if a woman really wanted to buy something, she'd pay the five dollars. This is just not true. A woman living on less than \$5000 a year (as many graduate students do here-- and they've been doing it for years) may buy one book at that price but she won't buy five for her friends and she won't let anybody borrow the one, and she will be very angry and disappointed if she doesn't like the book. And of course women who live where there is no woman's bookstore and women who don't know about women's bookstores won't get a chance to buy even that one book.

Real problems are real. To insist that everything would work if only everyone was good and selfless (this is what focusing on sell-outs and rip-offs means) is a way of confessing that you can't see any other way out of the problem. It's a confession of despair. Morality always fills a gap of some kind. But to fill the gap with analysis and action is better.

The Lesbian and feminist presses both seem to be mesmerized by one model of publishing; the hard-cover-bookstore market. That's essentially what Daughters (for example) is doing. But there's an alternative, which I believe to be a better one, or at least potentially so.

It's this: there are at least two functions going on in publishing today: libraries last, paperbacks travel. Books ought to (and eventually will, in all publishing) come out in at least two editions, possibly simultaneously: the mass-market paperback, where the real problem is distribution, and one or two other forms: the quality paperback which can be bound by the owner or the very-good-quality hardcover book for libraries and collectors (of whatever kind). The paperback is a sleazy one dollar, the quality paperback about \$4 (the current price) and the library copy--which may sell a few hundred a year--a whopping \$12 or \$13. (There should be a real difference in paper; I think somebody tried this merely by altering the cover, but that didn't work and probably won't.)

Bertha Harris, Charlotte Bunch, and I have also concocted a rather loony plan for a sort of Sears Roebuck scheme for feminist books out of print--a certain number of which to be bought from the publisher and sold via catalogues only after the book goes out of print. This would probably leave out a press like Daughters, which keeps things in print.

I believe SW to have a long and honorable history ahead of it. That is, I don't think it's necessary to resort to morality yet about the Lesbian presses; they're too obviously necessary and loved to need self-sacrifice, at least from those who buy their publications. I'm not enclosing a check to SW because I want to support the Lesbian presses, which

is a vague and dim sort of motive, but because I need them, period.

Anyway, if I pick on the margins of SW, it's only to say that I think the rest is splendid. But I worry about adjuring people to follow the correct line or be good or putting pressure on them to do X or Y. First of all, it doesn't work. It has a very long history of not working (50,000 years). Also it assumes that we do know what good is or what's correct or that we know X and Y are right. And often we don't, at least not yet. And I can only say again as emphatically as I know how that political solutions that depend on self-sacrifice--as opposed to new ways to meet people's real needs--are 180 degrees from possibility and are doomed in advance.

Which, of course, none of us wants for anything that's important to her.

Joanna Russ
Boulder, Colorado

Dear Joanna,

Thank you for the \$4.50 but thank you even more for your concern.

We wanted to print your letter because it spoke so well to the necessity of avoiding a politics based on self-sacrificial purity, a politics based on some chic rewrite of Christian morality.

We wanted to print a reply because we think our "Letter to Beth" had nothing to do with "purity" or female self-sacrifice. Beth had spent an agonizing four months caught in the middle of a movement controversy over publishing, and even after she decided to place "Lesbian Writing and Publishing" with *Sinister Wisdom*, she wrote: "I did not see a principle..." We thought that a principle was involved and that her decision had been a good one, for more lesbians than just the two of us. We told her why we thought so and in the process developed an analysis and proposed action, neither of which relied on patriarchal morality. (Feminist political principles may in some sense be moral principles, too--we don't know--but we do know that no feminist principle, political, moral or hybrid, condones the sacrifice of women to an abstract goal. We weren't asking any woman to do the impossible; we were supporting something which Beth had, in fact, already done.)

Our reasoning was, briefly, this: a) the patriarchal press exists to promote patriarchal ideology; b) the Lesbian and feminist presses exist to "create a communications bond between women that works and that speaks in the voice of the resistance"; c) when we treat our presses as the "real press," we create a form of collective feminist power--"power of absence to the oppressor"/"power of presence to each other."

It's one thing to call the analysis faulty or the implied strategies impractical. It's something else to equate our saying what we think with "adjuring people to follow the correct line...or putting pressure on them to do X or Y." If logic is sound, it will compel; if vision is genuinely visionary, it will attract. If the "Letter to Beth" is neither sound nor visionary, it will exert no drawing force. We set out our position as clearly as we were able; any woman is free to dismiss part or all of it. What concerns us now is the demand so often *concealed*: the demand that we sacrifice our perceptions and our work to Movement mush.

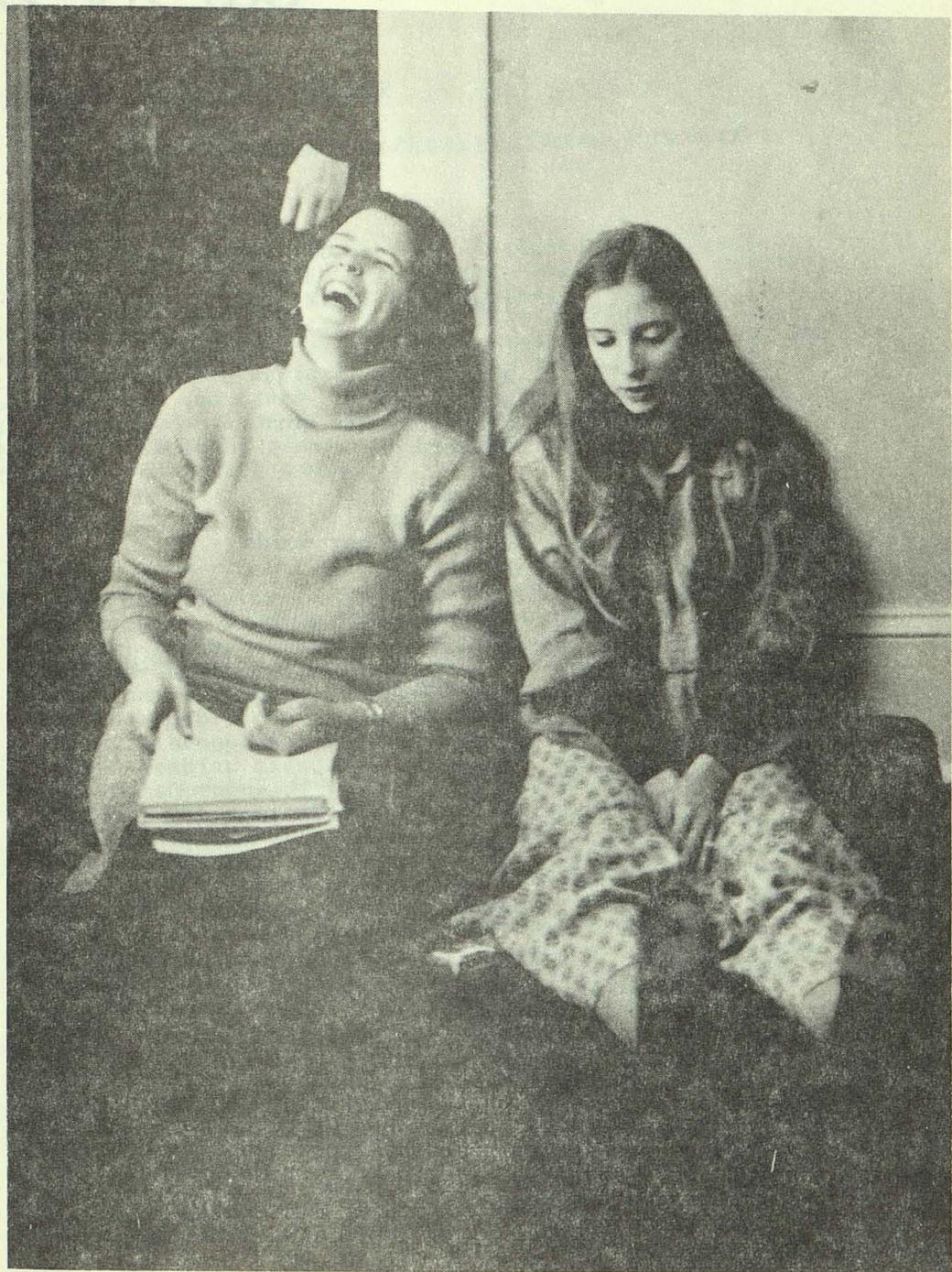
How is it that when any woman advocates a separatist stance, other women begin immediately to question her mental stability? Why is it that when we present separatist analysis and propose separatist action, we are matronized and told to mind our terrors and guilts? Do you seriously consider a passion for Lesbian publishing the first step on the road to bank robbery and murder? Were the nuns serious when they said that a girl who will chew gum is a girl who will smoke, and a girl who will smoke is a girl who will drink, and a girl who will drink is a girl who will..(!)..? Is the domino theory still so pervasive and persuasive? To pay only the most cursory attention to what we say, the better to dredge up psychological explanations for "the tone of militant desperation" in which we say it, is to argue *ad hominem*, and we've all heard that *ad nauseam*. (We remember in particular Rhoda Katerinsky's letter* explaining why she advised Ms. not to excerpt or review *The Female Man*. After a few cracks about the book's "general incoherence," she announces that "...the general tenor of violent hate leaves something out" and then launches into the stentorian refrain "Liberation is for people," thereafter completing her dissociation from rabid feminist Russ by asserting that she is "more for education and enlightenment than for separatism and disruption.")

Your criticism cuts closest and helps most on our use of *Against Our Will*. After reading your letter, we read ours again and could see how we mishandled that whole paragraph. If we had it to do over again, we would omit all personal references, so there would be no confusion: we're not in the business of making personal attacks or accusing anyone of "selling out the movement." The specific reference to Brownmiller's book was entirely unnecessary to the points we were making.

And...not to worry. We made it a rule never to drop 200 pound rocks on our culture heroines, of whom you are one.

Harriet and Catherine

*in *The Witch and the Chameleon*, issue 5+6, p. 25.



Ideograms

A man
who stands
stands by his word
Sincere

A woman
who waits
waits for her words
Dumb

Silence
What word
can be
defined now

Process
An ax
a tree
and a woodpile

Vision
An eye
with two legs
running

Action
My heart
one body
in two positions

-Judith McDaniel

REVIEWS

TALKING ABOUT THE LADDER

Adrienne, Catherine, Clara, Harriet

On a rainy spring afternoon four friends got together to talk about THE LADDER anthologies--THE LAVENDER HERRING, LESBIAN LIVES, THE LESBIANS HOME JOURNAL (from Diana Press) and LESBIANA (Naiad Press). We met at Adrienne and Clara's home in the foothills of North Carolina. Adrienne, 30, who calls herself "an aspiring writer and homesteader," was born in Ohio and lived several years in Chicago. Clara, 43, grew up in the South and then lived in Washington, DC. For the past three years, they have farmed this acreage together and raised goats.

CA: I've been trying to remember when I first heard about *The Ladder*. I think it was 1959 or 1960; I didn't see a copy, I just heard about it, and I can't recall now where or how I heard about it. But I do remember my reaction: I was a closet lesbian at the time and I thought how incredibly courageous it was for a group of women to call themselves the Daughters of Bilitis and to publish a lesbian magazine, but at the same time I was a bit contemptuous of the idea. From my male-identified academic perspective on literature it seemed silly--why on earth should lesbians want to publish their lives, their experiences. And I recall getting the impression that the quality of the material was poor. That impression was, of course, pure assumption on my part, after all I had not seen a copy of TL. And when I began to read the Diana Press anthologies my first reaction was amazement at the quality--how fine it was. When did you first hear about *The Ladder*, Clara?

CL: Well, I can appreciate your perspective on it. This is my first introduction to the writing. I began by reading Barbara Grier's introductions which talked about the background of TL, and that was the first I knew about it. I guess the first thing I had to face was that all the writing was from a European perspective, and being a Black person, I had to sort of bend my head into the point-of-view. Some of the stories are quite good, quality wise, some are not. But I enjoyed reading all of them.

AD: I first heard of TL from Del Martin's and Phyllis Lyon's book *Lesbian/Woman* which I read in '72 at a party, and I was impressed that they had had the courage to publish such a magazine in the fifties, considering the conservative political atmosphere. I was a child then, but I did know what was going on.

CA: Yes, that time was certainly suppressive of anything that wasn't apple-pie, heterosexual family--

AD: I was amazed that the Daughters of Bilitis had the courage to buck society that much. Even though they did use pseudonyms, they could have been discovered.

CA: Harriet, when did you first hear about TL?

HA: I can't remember exactly, it must have been '75. I came out of the women's movement, and I wasn't aware that there had been a lesbian movement prior to '68, '70. So when I saw these anthologies, I really felt cheated, because if you had only read *Amazon Quarterly*--which I thought was the first and only lesbian magazine that ever existed--you would never have known about TL. I just feel that if I had known about it sooner, if the women's movement had publicized it more, if they had respected it more, if they had not denied it, through silence or through ignorance or through something...

CA: FEAR

HA: Yes, the fact that there was this lesbian movement prior to the second wave of the feminist movement, then I think I would've moved along a lot faster.

CL: Who is the writer who talks about--was it Rita Mae Brown--who talks about trying to get into the women's movement? I guess it was the same thing, she tried and tried, she went to NOW and she mentioned "lesbian" and they all had a stroke and collapsed, and she went through a good number of changes trying to find some organization that included her.

HA: Another thing that makes me mad, I got this impression that TL was no good: that it was conservative, that it was drippy and totally unrelated to feminism, that it was a group of "old lesbians"--whatever that is--and that it had nothing to do with revolutionary theory, practice, or art or anything, that they were all upper-middleclass, closeted, white professionals--

CL: NOW rejects--

HA: Sure, yeah, right. So that's why I liked *The Lavender Herring* best, because it isn't like that at all.

CA: What did you like about the essays?

HA: I liked the rage in a lot of them, I like the lesbian chauvinism in them. I particularly liked what Anita Cornwell wrote and what Mary Phoebe Bailey did--she makes stories out of her experiences--

AD: I'd like to argue with you about that--I was lukewarm about Mary Phoebe Bailey, but Clara was downright hostile--

CL: Big Daddy's daughter!

AD: Yeah! Clara can talk more about this than I can, but I will say that I was impressed with her style, her sensitivity--especially in "Cousin Shirley's Complaint," I'll never forget that--the way she could see the pain that this woman was living inside regardless of the front she had to put up. But I thought that in "Getting Ripped Off" her point-of-view was almost ridiculous. She lost me there in the elevator--

HA: That's the rape story, she's raped by a Puerto Rican--

AD: It was like she forgot she was white, or it could be that she got so hung-up about being a social worker that she didn't take the precautions that woman would normally take when you're in that situation in a project--that the women in the project would take. You just don't get caught in a stairwell without a weapon like pollyanna--I don't mean that you just slink away and accept oppression from men, but--

CL: She should have been prepared not to slink away but to deal with him or anybody--it's going down to a neighborhood where you know that the women who live there take measures to protect themselves, and you come with a note pad, a pair of hornrimmed glasses, and an outfit which you describe as making you totally unacceptable or unsexy to a man--just blithely going along as though this were the world that you live in. And the way she described Black men, I didn't like that either.

AD: And the attitude that she had toward the women she was working with--she was so obviously condescending. First of all, she didn't see any of the women as individuals or if she did she didn't say so. And what she did see was these strong matriarchs, amazons or what-have-you who, when a man in fake alligator shoes and--how did she put it?

CL: iridescent green pants--

AD: --as soon as one of these men showed up, the women throw their legs open and go off to get screwed and then have babies, which is all they do in these projects in the ghetto--

CL: And that's the attitude she had and that's why she would be walking around in a raincoat and hornrimmed glasses with a little notebook. Although I appreciated the skill of her writing, I began to call her Big Daddy's daughter after I read the essays which I assume described her background--I thought of "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" and I began looking around for Big Daddy. After that I could understand where she was coming from and why her head

was so twisted in this area and yet so straight in others. I appreciated her talent, but she really made me mad. I wanted to say to her, don't call yourself a feminist, or talk about feminism, which is supposed to encompass us all, and then I see that you're looking at other women as though they don't exist--especially Third World women. So how can you expect me to identify with things you write when you write insulting stuff like that?

AD: I got the impression from these books that alot of the writers don't expect Third World women to identify and they don't care. And that's ok but we need to be honest about that. I remember that in the introduction to *The Lavender Herring* Barbara Grier laments the fact that only one Black woman had contributed essays--Anita Cornwell--why weren't there more of them. Whenever Black women are mentioned, it's why aren't there more of them, why don't you do something. But I get the impression that most white women don't really want us to do anything because if we did, it would probably be in conflict with what they are doing--

CL: The story about the social worker, the one we were just talking about, you never got the feeling that she felt that way about white men--men in general, yes--but not white men specifically--

CA: I disagree with you about Mary Phoebe Bailey; in "Notes from a Summer Diary" what she says about her brother is a strong indictment of white men--southern white men in particular--southern white male mentality--and since my background is white southern, I suppose I could identify with that story and that point-of-view. I could also identify strongly with the one about the art school: "Pratt: A Four-Syllable Word Meaning Nothing"--having taught in an arts program that was as silly as the one at Pratt!

AD: Comparing Bailey's perspective with Rita Mae Brown's, Clara and I agreed that Rita Mae can attack the male, the patriarchy, and the nastiness and horror of the males she encountered when she lived in a ghetto, where she walked the streets and was insulted, but I got the feeling in her writing that she understood that there was no difference between the ghetto men and other men--that poorer men of all races tend to hang out on street corners and insult women; that it was a matter of class, in other words, not of race. I'm sensitive, too, to the way white people ridicule the way Black people dress--the alligator shoes and the shiny green pants.

HA: I'm seeing what you mean about Bailey--she's classist and racist both, but almost every white middleclass anything in this country is classist and racist, and what I liked about Bailey was that she was so open about everything that those parts came out too, but the way they came out is easier to get a handle on.

CA: Which essay did you like the best in *Lavender Herring*?

AD: That's a hard question. I think the one I liked best was a humorous one, "Variations on the Double Life" by Jocelyn Hayward. The one where she discusses the problems one has leading a double life, you know, when you're still in the closet or only halfway out. I remember this lover of mine who wanted us to buy twin beds, and I said I don't like those little beds, I like double beds, and finally she confessed, "What if my mother comes to visit?" And I told her, "Why let your mother visit us?" But she talked me into buying twin beds and we ended up sleeping on this little bed and the other one was empty all the time. And I think the bed is the crux of the matter for the outside world.

CL: Like the people from your office coming to see you, and they start looking all around your place, you know? and you think they're looking for the bathroom. But they're not looking for the bathroom, they're looking for the bedroom--they want to see the BED!

AD: I liked the essay because Hayward said so much in so few words about our dilemma--how do we deal with the rest of society? And once you get over the bed question you've come a long way.

CA: What about Anita Cornwell's essays?

AD: I liked them, especially "From a Soul Sister's Notebook" where she's at a conference with predominantly white lesbians and she overhears two women talking about George Jackson's being killed in prison and starts thinking about her dilemma. Let me read from that one:

"I lay here, not unmindful of the fact that I was a fairly great distance from home, from any public transportation apparently as we were out on a farm, that I had come in a white woman's car, and was at that moment lying in another white woman's tent. And *their white Brothers had killed my black brother!*

Their Brothers were pigs, I thought then, and I think so now. But what of my Brother? A pig, too, in all probability, as most black men are no different than white men as far as sexism is concerned.

But they didn't shoot him because he was a pig. They got him because he was black. I am black, too, and as James Baldwin is reputed to have said to Angela Davis, 'If they get you in the morning, they will certainly come for me in the night.'"

The dilemma for Black women in this society is, of course, that racism is so deadly--the patriarchy is too--but which comes first for us and can we deal with them both at the same time? And if so, with whom can we work?

CL: You asked Adrienne which essay she enjoyed most, well, the one I liked the best was Rita Mae Brown's "Take a Lesbian to Lunch." I liked the way she kept pointing

out that every woman is a lesbian and that when women choose to be heterosexual they make themselves your enemy because they just don't like you, you know. In an office situation, or any situation where there are women who identify with men, *you* like them, *you* try to make them like you, but they don't, they can't because you're too much of a threat.

CA: What I liked most about the essays in *Lavender Herring* was the subjectivity and the readability. Have you noticed how we keep referring to the essays as stories? The writers keep us aware of themselves--and the truth of their statements is so striking because we can see how their political perceptions grew out of their often painful experience. Early in the Movement we saw more articles like these, but now they're deplorably rare. Now we have a lot of in-depth, scholarly analyses--and that's fine, but I still would like to see more personal-political essays like these from *TL*. ...Oh, I wanted to ask you, too, how you felt about the looks and feel of the anthologies...

AD: Very nice. I liked the design of *The Lesbians Home Journal*, the anthology of short stories, and *The Lavender Herring* better than I did *Lesbian Lives*, the collection of biographies.

CA: Why?

AD: Well, I believe that content dictates form, and the contents of the *Journal* and the *Herring* are better than the *Lives*. The strength of the *Lives* is in the pictures.

CA: Definitely, although I learned a lot from the *Lives*--that is, bits and pieces of information about an impressive number of important lesbians--I wanted more depth. But, of course, I'm asking for too much--

CL: It gives you enough to make you interested in reading more, other books, and they list the other books for you. I kept saying I want to read this book and learn more.

CA: True, but even so, I wanted the lives fleshed out more.

CL: Yes, we had just read that big introduction to *A Woman Appeared to Me*--Renee Vivien's novel--Gayle Rubin who did the introduction, it's beautiful, she had done extensive research--so when I came to *Lives*, I said--wait! this is thin.

CA: Yes, but it's wonderful to look through the book and marvel at the number of people who were included--

AD: Willa Cather was my favorite writer in school, and I thought there must be some reason. Most of the women we read were sort of namby-pamby, but Willa Cather, she was powerful. Now I know why!

CA: Well, which of the short stories did you like best?

AD: Jane Rule's "My Country Wrong"--

CL: That was mine too, beautiful story--

HA: I'm going through and looking for those I identified with--although I just loved it, it was real important for me to read these stories--

CA: Why?

HA: Because of all that giant chunk of lesbian experience written down, you just never see all that written down.

CA: What kind of experiences?

HA: Just ordinary, daily experiences, or love stories--I hardly ever read lesbian love stories. There wasn't a single story in there that was remotely my experience, but I just loved reading all of them. I think my favorite was "The Cat and the King," the one that was published in a 1919 *Ladies Home Journal*! What delighted me was a time that accepted young women's crushes on other women as a matter of course. The freshman who had a crush on the senior and fakes illness to get into the infirmary to be near her idol--and the woman doctor who understands and helps the freshman find herself--

CA: --and "The Fire" written in 1917, which identifies the teenage girl's affection and esteem for her spinster art teacher with her yearning to do something, to be somebody when she grows up.

AD: What did you think of "The Bath"? You know, the girl in the gym class who has polio. I felt the power of the tenderness that the teacher showed to her. And it put the gym teacher in a good light for a change.

CA: I think that's what most of the stories do: they take situations that are ordinarily treated in an unsympathetic way and characters who are ordinarily treated unsympathetically and because the authors are lesbians they show the situation from a woman-identified viewpoint and it becomes something new. That's why I can't easily pick out a story and say I liked this one but not that one--I liked all of them. One of the criticisms made of *TL* was that it was very sentimental, very romantic, very idealistic about lesbians. What do you think about that after having read this anthology?

AD: No, I would think not, just the opposite. Look at all the problems these characters had--

CL: They were problem-ridden--

AD: I was so impressed with the quality of these stories; I was talking to Harriet a while back about *Amazon Quarterly* and I don't want to attack it, but I will say that the quality of selections in the *TL* anthology is far superior. The style, the attention to writing, the feeling--

CL: You don't get the abstraction that you find in a number of the *AQ* stories.

AD: Let me say this: I don't know what the world is like for the white lesbian, but I get the feeling that a lot of white lesbians feel that they have no more restrictions--social restrictions--and that they can be open and free in society without retribution, without, that is, the type of retribution we expected in the '50's and '60's, the type that is reflected in these *Ladder* stories. It's a tension experienced by white lesbians of that period--and in the AQ stories there wasn't that tension.

HA: That's why I feel *The Ladder* stuff is more real. My experience now is full of tension.

CA: I wanted to talk about Naiad Press' *Lesbiana*, which none of you has yet had a chance to read since I've been hogging it. It's a collection of Barbara Grier's book reviews from TL, 1966-1972. It's an incredible book, a treasure. Barbara has spent her life tracking down our heritage, our literature--

AD: That woman must be a hundred years old!

CA: No, only 43--and she's still tracking. I found her reviews lively and informative, fun to read. Maida Tilchen characterized the book so well in a recent review [*The Body Politic*, Toronto, March, 1977]. She said that "reading Grier's column is like having a well-informed friend fill you in on what's really interesting in lesbian literature each month." --Well, we've run out of space. If you have any questions you'd like to ask Coletta Reid or Barbara Grier--

CL: When is the next one coming out?

--Coletta Reid & Barbara Grier, eds. *Lesbian Lives: Biographies of Women from THE LADDER; The Lesbians Home Journal: Stories from THE LADDER; The Lavender Herring: Lesbian Essays from THE LADDER*. \$5.75 each from Diana Press, 12 W. 25th St., Baltimore, Md. 21218, add 15% postage & handling.

--Barbara Grier *Lesbiana: Book Reviews from THE LADDER, 1966-1972*. \$5.00 from The Naiad Press, c/o The Ladder, Box 5025, Washington Station, Reno, Nev. 89513, add 25¢ per book.

A BOOK REVIEW (by Dusty Miller)

A WOMAN APPEARED TO ME. Renee Vivien
Translated from the French by Jeannette H. Foster
The Naiad Press, 1976

Renee Vivien was an Anglo-American poet who wrote in French and lived in Paris in the early twentieth-century. She was a member of a community of expatriate Lesbian writers living in Paris at that time. The central figure in this unusual community was an American named Natalie Barney. Natalie was the lover of many Lesbian artists, actresses, and writers, including Renee Vivien. A WOMAN APPEARED TO ME is one version of Natalie Barney and Renee Vivien's love story.

FEBRUARY 2, 1977

IN MEMORIAM: NATALIE CLIFFORD BARNEY
OCT. 31, 1876 - FEB. 2, 1972

"I dream of ancient women who
did not apologize
for their moon-stains or their way of living.
I pray their like may come on earth again."
-from "Invocation," a song by Lanayre Ligera

She was born one hundred years ago. She died five years ago today. Her grave is a flower bed.

"Natalie Clifford Barney, who was born in Dayton, Ohio, in 1876 and who died in Paris in 1972 at the age of 95, was a legendary figure in France but almost unknown in her native land... For almost sixty years her house in Paris provided the setting for an international salon frequented by many of the leading writers, artists, diplomats and intellectuals of the century... She herself was a writer, but her notoriety stems even more from her being unquestionably the leading lesbian of her time."

-from "A Natalie Barney Garland" ed. by G. Wickes
The Paris Review, Spring 1975

You fly through my brightest dreams. No need of nest for you, lovely bird of a paradise where distance and space weave magic bowers to shelter fairy love.

I miss you, Natalie, as if I had known you. Although today is the fifth anniversary of your death, I do not mourn you. (You, who never went to a funeral.) You told Renee Vivien, the poet who chose death when she was only 32, "Let the dead bury their dead - but not the Living." (from *Intr. to A Woman Appeared to Me*)

I almost missed knowing of you; fortunately now I am finding you.

"They had forbidden me your hair, your eyes
Because your hair is long and fragrant
And because your eyes hold strange ardors
And become muddy like rebellious waves."
("Words to my Friend" Renee Vivien)

Natalie would have been both pleased and pained by a book just now published. It's Renee Vivien's tragic, angry love story about her love affair with Natalie. In translation it's called *A Woman Appeared to Me* and it's the first version of the love story, unfortunately, rather than the second version Renee wrote when she was no longer so angry at Natalie and they had become friends.

Renee Vivien published twenty volumes of poetry and prose, and although her open celebration of Lesbianism has denied her establishment literary recognition, she had never been lost to homosexual and Lesbian readers. Natalie would be pleased that "poor little Renee," the poet of tragic but passionate Lesbian love, is being reclaimed by Lesbian readers of the 1970's. She would honor both the translator, Jeannette Foster, and the women of Naiad Press, for their long years of dedication to the illumination of Lesbian writing.

"illumination": "You offer to read and criticize one's poems - criticize, (in the sense which you have given to the world) meaning illumination, not the complete disheartenment which is the legacy of other critics."

-Vita Sackville-West in a letter to Virginia Woolf
(September, 1925)

Natalie, it is not easy to gather up the threads of your life and weave a whole tapestry. In this preface to Renee's novel, Gayle Rubin attempts to transmit the spirit of those times and to identify you and Renee as pioneers:

"In France, Renee Vivien and Natalie Barney were not political in the same sense as the German homosexual rights movement. But the achieved and articulated a distinctly lesbian self-awareness. Their writings show that they understood who they were and what they were up against...Before Radclyffe Hall argued for tolerance, they argued for pride." (p. x)

We are told how you and Renee came to Paris at the turn of the century, young women in your early twenties, and how you worked from that time on to live and write of your pride in your exclusive love for women, your community of Lesbians who created many forms of beauty from their Lesbian strength. We are told of how you reclaimed Sappho (Psappha, as you

called her: "The soft and sonorous Psappha, for which has been substituted the colorless label of Sappho..." p. 9). We are told of how you and Renee went to live on Lesbos, hoping to establish a group of women poets dedicated to "the greatest feminine spirit that has ever dazzled the universe" (Renee Vivien, p. 9). We are told of your pride in loving women.

"I understood that on this earth there can blossom
faerie kisses without regret or shame."

-Renee Vivien

But...in the very little we have been able to read about Natalie Barney, we are always told of Renee's broken-hearted love for Natalie and of her sad death at age 32 (starvation and alcoholism). Natalie is too often blamed for her failures rather than praised for the vital energy and love she must have given Renee and others in her community during her very long life. She said to Renee:

"And would you have put all of your courage and all
your poetry into your verses if there is so little
left for your life?"

Is it you who will write these audacious and beautiful words and will I alone dare to live that of which you sing?"

(Natalie, in a letter to Renee)

Although it is Renee's accusations of Natalie's cruelty that have perhaps condemned her the most, it is Renee's words also which give us a sense of Natalie's life-choosing energy and beauty:

"Vally [Natalie] accused me of exacting Christian fidelity, against which all her instincts of a young maenad rebelled. Her pagan joy found outlet in numerous love affairs. She chose as her symbols the variable weather of April, the changing fires of opals or rainbows, everything that glittered and changed with each new ray of light." (p. 4)

If they understood that Natalie and Renee were symbols of Lesbian pride and beauty, why did Naiad Press reprint such a sad and essentially negative story? This story reduces Natalie's strength to cruelty and her Lesbian vision to a shallow self-defense. It is the first taste of that remarkable community since Radclyffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness* (1928) and it is such a bitter capsule! There is another version of the same story written later by Renee and several versions written by Natalie in three of her books: *Souvenirs indiscrets*. *Adventures de l'esprit*. *Je me souviens*.

There is sometimes great beauty in Renee's writing. It is fortunately never that simple sweet narrative of the Lesbian love story which can be cloyingly dishonest in its imitation of dove love. And her writing is, at times, passionately feminist:

"Everything that is ugly, unjust, fierce, base, emanates from the Male Principle. Everything unbearably lovely and desirable emanates from the Female Principle. The two principles are equally powerful, and hate one another incurably. In the end one will exterminate the other, but which will be the final victor? That riddle is the perpetual anguish of all souls. We hope in silence for the decisive triumph of the Female Principle, the Good and the Beautiful, over the Male, that is, over Bestial Force and Cruelty." (p. 7)

Renee did not, perhaps, intend to write a story which would be so damning to the vision of Lesbian love she and Natalie shared:

"I have never felt resentment against any woman, no matter how great the harm she did me or tried to do. The injustices and rages of women are like those of the gods. One must accept them with resignation and endure them with love. And certainly no one can be blamed for not loving someone else. That is why Vally has never been at fault with regard to me." (p. 82)

But she has left a bitter, defeated picture of what should have been a story of love revolutionary in its daring and passionate freedom.

It is our responsibility in carrying on the tradition of the Paris ex-patriates' Lesbian vision, to discover, translate when necessary, and re-print the writings (perhaps especially the letters and journals) of those women like Natalie Barney who combined literature and lifestyle in living Art.

"For years I have been haunted by the idea that I should orchestrate those inner voices which sometimes speak to us in unison, and so compose a novel, not so much with the people about us, as with those within ourselves, for have we not several selves and cannot a story arise from their conflicts and harmonies?

Let us seize the significance of life where it is unique, not where it is repetitive. Our thoughts more than our actions represent us.

Let us report from our live-centres.

A new star makes a new heaven."

-Natalie Barney, *The One Who is Legion*, London, 1930.

ANDREA DWORKIN, SOOTHSAYER

by Jacqueline Lapidus

Woman Hating (Dutton, 1974), 217 pp., \$7.95 (also available in paperback).

Our Blood: Prophecies & Discourses on Sexual Politics (Harper & Row, 1976), 118 pp., \$6.95.

A soothsayer is one who speaks truth, describes reality, predicts the future. Andrea Dworkin is a soothsayer. The paradox of the (female) soothsayer in patriarchal society is that while she speaks the truth, nobody believes her; she is condemned to the fate of Cassandra. It is time to demolish this paradox and recognize Dworkin's voice as our own. Her books are rigorous and disturbing, in the best sense of both words. No woman who reads them can feel quite the same about herself and her world afterward. This is probably why her first book *Woman Hating* has been so hard to find in bookshops and got so few reviews of any kind anywhere: even its publishers got uptight about its contents, and avoided pushing it.

Once *woman Hating* had been published, virtually ignored, and tucked away on library shelves to gather dust, Andrea Dworkin wrote other articles which she was unable to get published anywhere. She therefore turned to lecturing as a way to bypass magazines and still earn a living. The result of these two years on the lecture circuit is *Our Blood: Prophecies and Discourses on Sexual Politics*.

These essays expose certain myths widespread both outside and within the women's movement, notably the notion that we are struggling to achieve sexual "equality" with men. Unless universal freedom and justice obtain, "equality" simply means being the same as the oppressor: rich instead of poor, rapist instead of raped, murderer instead of murdered. Reforms are simply "emergency measures, designed to save women's lives, as many as possible, now"--but they will not stop the various forms of contemporary gynocide which Dworkin describes in *Our Blood*. She maintains that rape is "our /patriarchy's/ primary model for heterosexual relating...our /patriarchy's/ primary emblem of romantic love", a definition of women's value and function, a crime against men's property and men's honor. Unless we redefine it as a crime against *us*, we will continue to be raped. The root cause of rape is a polar definition of "men" and "women", the very notion of phallic identity as normative in our culture. Pornography, which is the overt reflection of the entire society's real view of sexuality, is "a kind of propaganda designed to convince the male that he need not be afraid" of fucking, of that terrifying journey into the female void which is also his only sure way of affirming masculinity.

Women learn fear as a function of femininity; we experience it daily; it is isolating, confusing, debilitating to such a point that we forget our own tremendous capacity for physical courage, and our heroic commitment to the sustenance of human life including our own. Andrea Dworkin shows how so-called "objectivity" works in the culture that has formed our perceptions and actions: since the male condition is taken to be the human condition, no woman's perceptions, judgments and decisions can be considered accurate or trustworthy. When she says "femininity is roughly synonymous with stupidity", I immediately think of the French word *con* which literally means *cunt* but is colloquially used to mean *stupid*; this usage is so common that most people have forgotten or censored its original meaning and no word subsists in the French language for the female genitalia that is both accurate and acceptable.

In order to create a revolutionary culture in which all individuals can enjoy freedom, justice, equality, we will have to destroy not only the phallogocratic definition of womanhood but also that of manhood. The most exciting part of *Woman Hating* is the final section in which Dworkin reviews various mythical and historical descriptions of androgyny and pursues their implications in the areas of sexual identity and behavior. She gives substantial evidence for her contention that human beings are in fact a multisexed species, biologically as well as socially. Many readers may find this an "unreal" description of human "nature." Dworkin's reply to this sort of objection, at the end of *Our Blood*, is a model of philosophical clarity:

For humans, reality is social; reality is whatever people at a given time believe it to be...Reality is whatever premises social and cultural institutions are built on...Reality is enforced by those whom it serves so that it appears to be self-evident. Reality is self-perpetuating, in that the institutions built on its premises also embody and enforce those premises..

Truth, on the other hand, is not nearly so accessible as reality. In my view, truth is absolute in that it does exist and it can be found...it is the human project to find it so that reality can be based on it.

I have made this distinction between truth and reality in order to enable me to say something very simple: that while the system of gender polarity is real, it is not true. It is not true that there are two sexes which are discrete and opposite, which are polar, which unite naturally and self-evidently into a harmonious whole. It is not true that the male embodies both positive and neutral human qualities and potentialities in contrast to the female who is female..."by virtue of a certain lack of qualities"... We are living inside a pernicious delusion, a delusion on which all reality as we know it is predicated. In my view, those of us who are women inside this system of reality will never be free until the delu-

sion of sexual polarity is destroyed and until the system of reality based on it is eradicated entirely from human society and from human memory. This is the notion of cultural transformation at the heart of feminism. This is the revolutionary possibility inherent in the feminist struggle.

Modifying our concept of sexuality is crucial to the re-invention of human relationships and institutions. "As feminists", says Dworkin, "we inhabit the world in a new way. We see the world in a new way." She defines heterosexuality as "the ritualized behavior built on polar role definition," and argues convincingly that homosexuality, in itself, challenges neither phallic identity in men nor masochistic nonidentity in women. The very notions of hetero- and homo-sexuality belong to the sexist system and must be superseded.

Being a lesbian, for Dworkin, means deriving strength from the love of women, plus "the erotic passion and intimacy which comes of touch and taste," plus "the memory of the mother, remembered in my own body, sought for, desired, found, and truly honored." As lesbians we are claiming feelings and commitments that are rightfully ours, and which are denied us in a male-supremacist culture. But she also observes that in the transformation of sexist society into something else, "men will have to begin to make love as women do together", renouncing the privileges and powers conferred on them in consequence of their anatomy, renouncing the phallus as distinct from the penis. As lesbians today, we are exploring possibilities for everyone in the future. Dworkin is careful to point out that "any sexual coming together which is genuinely pansexual and role-free, even if between men and women as we generally think of them (i.e. the biological images we have of them), is authentic and androgynous."

Andrea Dworkin considers that a writer has a sacred trust: to tell the truth. I believe she fulfills that trust. She is saying that aggression against half the human population by the other half is the basic dynamic of the world we live in, and that we, women, are an endangered species; I am convinced that this is a reality against which we desperately need to defend ourselves. We need to lay the groundwork for a new and totally different human culture: our survival, everyone's survival, depends on it. *Our Blood* and *Woman Hating* sound like such incontrovertible truth to me that I have to remind myself they will be controversial for others, but that doesn't matter. The more these books are discussed, the better chance they have of being widely read, and of having the effect the author hopes for: making a difference in how, and even why, people live.

COMING HOME

I. UNBOUND

Fear hits up hard
closing a wooden door.
The Girl leaves to go where
to do what
is going to--will--happen to her
to us. Nothing.

Mamie, old and more than half dead,
her mouth like the black hole she was headed for,
cried in her craziness:
"I think I am my mother
I never thought it before."

They leave me. I leave me.
A door dissects us.
Daughter, mother,
unbound
we shatter.

II. WITHDRAWAL

Empty, interrupted, a thread scatters,
the warm hues of the drug gone and the dream aborted,
the charge leaving her feeble-vacant, cleft.
Let her hide.

Now what happens happens unmitigated.
Decomposing, the bright falls away
in the ritual thrust, vile-violent.
Fuelless, bound in both directions,
the empty force exists and the hole is nothing.

Spurts of light go off like spansules in her veins.
The reds and golds put her a puzzle together.
Not back together.
Back in a long left country
inside a round of grey and brown-gold
the out unable to bring its ice cubes in
to the circumference of darkening fire and feast.

Once at the beach she remembered being born:
"It was all burnt red and blue, dark, like I had become
the bone of a chicken's leg in an oven
or a wish-bone."
No one believed it.
And again in the winter when the girl was born.
Nesting. Entombed for a while.

III. MOTHERLAND

My unreal mother dead for too long,
replaced now by the site warming, holding, rocking
in a circle, an orb in an orb.
Creator created, the ground her body.
The dry soil, the sun, the sweater I wear
mother me.
At rest, I sink and forget.
She is the whole, big, old, and simple.
Be kind and beware.
To lose again is too much gone,
with one shot one kick too many.
Her breath and pockets like gin, tobacco-ry unclean
surfaces/depths.
The flame catches, the blast a terror in her absence.
If she is gone I am fear
and see her lover stalking through greenhouses,
a dirt giant his boots in the mud
amazed and doomed.
Then the blue motherless child is blessed
charged with the mystery, the murderous ray,
the bad weather one startled into a dance
by the hard neon color of everything enduring and mixed.
The sun is the hot cobalt mother.

The cotton and wool hard rock me.
The words on the page comfort me.
The air bringing us together out of infinite confusion,
the needles in the sky, the purple grasses, the full
silent place
filling the grave, comfort me.
In a globe a fine bubble surfaces.
The unknown known.

IV. HOLY MOTHERS

The audacity of it,
rising and falling in a sacred place
like mice in her cavernous belly.
In her presence saying, "Father."
Mother Margaret, wisdom-goddess-grandmother
embalmed in the Abbey,
sleeping in stone,
holding us scholars and widows
in your hands ancient and blackened to bones,
asleep in the body of a chapel that glows like new fruit,
mirroring in gold the souls of girls and crones,

one of our dead Mothers, realer than the live.
But some like Virginia, pale wrinkled Ariel,
not comforted by the Bloomsbury rector
but by the ice water
made real by the loss of it.
Or the one who loves age come to us late and still
unwelcome,
the God of old women like ourselves, a nun of sorts,
raised in the night laughing and promising a stone chapel,
privately entombing the three,
our mothers, our daughters, our selves.

-Judith Jones

TO THE DAUGHTER I BECAME WHO GAVE BIRTH TO THE MOTHER
I NEEDED

The woman
I needed to call my mother
was silenced before I was born.

Your two hands grasping your head
drawing it down against the blade of life
your nerves the nerves of a midwife
learning her trade.

Adrienne Rich

A mother who croons an epic lullabye,
I rock you in my arms, for all
The years I lived before I bore you.
Daughter, when you became part of this air
I had already learned to apologize,
To dread what I feared I couldn't do.

I have lived those failures
Before you were born.
Before I met you
I cried at five years old,
Terrified by the complex twisting of my name
The day in school I had to use the alphabet.

At ten
I waited a week
For the drug store to develop
Pictures from the miniature camera
Bought for a dollar on the street.

I was ready
For the miracle
Of that tiny machine, ready
To admire the souvenirs
That came from my own fingers
And my careful eye.

I never told anyone
That only a blurred roll of negatives
Recorded my accomplishments,
Already accepting
Failure as my inheritance

Believing
Intimacy with things gone wrong
Would be my grief.

In the spring
I was not surprised
That the tulip bulbs I had planted
Toward the center of the earth,
Lidded with mounds of dirt in our backyard hill,
Did not survive the winter.
Colorful flowers
On packets of seeds
Belonged to other people
With better fortunes.

I never owned another camera
Or grew a garden.
If I could not succeed
Then at least I would not fight my pain.
I would be gracious.
This self-defeat was praised
As old wisdom in a young girl.

Love, you did not witness
The misery of those years.
Today, my African violet pleases you
With its green leaves like a litter of healthy pups.
You admire the photographs on my walls.

Do not accept a repetition of this story.
Leave my history behind.
Forget the years between us.

Come into my arms
And believe we were both born
Always acknowledging our gifts.

-Beverly Tanenhaus

Adrienne Rich, of woman born, the Amazon explorer who has mapped the intricate mazes of her experience for our discovery, whose feel for the interior of English, its hollows, folds, creases, teases meaning from our minds, has written a book. Writing this book, *Of Woman Born*, was an act of courage, of love, of exploration, of necessity. As Adrienne observes of the patriarchal institution of motherhood: "...any institution which expresses itself so universally ends by profoundly affecting our experience, even the language we use to describe it" (p. 42). Each linguistic choice she must make in order to write about her subject is an act of risk, yet she has dared to "return to a ground which seemed...the most painful, incomprehensible, and ambiguous [she] had ever traveled, a ground hedged by taboos, mined with false-namings" (p. 15). That the language in which she writes is a dangerous trap is marked continuously by her use of quotation marks around words and phrases whose denotative value derives from the male control of women's lives she seeks to exorcise.

...the assumption that women are a subgroup, that 'man's world' is the 'real' world, that patriarchy is equivalent to culture and culture to patriarchy, that the 'great' or 'liberalizing' periods of history have been the same for women as for men, that generalizations about 'man,' 'humankind,' 'children,' 'blacks,' 'parents,' 'the working class' hold true for women, mothers, daughters,...

(p. 16)

Neither the 'pure' nor the 'lascivious' woman, neither the so-called mistress nor the slave-woman, neither the woman praised for reducing herself to a brood animal nor the woman scorned and penalized as an 'old maid' or a 'dyke,' has had any real autonomy or selfhood to gain from this subversion of the female body. (and hence of the female mind). (p. 35)

Any deviance from a quality valued by that culture can be dismissed as negative: where 'rationality' is posited as sanity, legitimate method, 'real thinking,' any alternative, intuitive, supersensory, or poetic knowledge is labeled 'irrational.' If we listen well to the connotations of 'irrational' they are highly charged: we hear overtones of 'hysteria' (that disease once supposed to arise in the womb), of 'madness' (the absence of a certain type of thinking to which all 'rational men' subscribe), and of randomness, chaotic absence of form. Thus no attempt need be made to discover a form or a language or a pattern foreign to those which technical reason has already recognized. (p. 62)

Throughout this book I have been thrown back on terms like 'unchilded,' 'childless,' or 'child-free'; we have no familiar, ready-made name for a woman who defines herself, by choice, neither in relation to children nor to men, who is self-identified, who has chosen herself. 'Unchilded,' 'childless,' simply define her in terms of a lack;... (p. 249) 81

The English language, perhaps the most powerful socializing influence in our lives, is alien territory; it is possessed by the enemy. "In the interstices of language lie powerful secrets of the culture" (p. 249).

Adrienne Rich is not the only woman to find herself writing in quotation marks. Barbara Starrett, in "I Dream in Female: The Metaphors of Evolution" (*Lesbian Reader*, p. 114), asks: "The thought occurs: as my consciousness level rises, will I finally put the entire world-as-it-is in quotes?" Andrea Dworkin has written at length in the Afterword to *Woman Hating*, "The Great Punctuation Typography Struggle," on the politics of punctuation, the relationship between "mere" conventions and the possibility of freedom.

standard forms are imposed in dress, behavior, sexual relation, punctuation. standard forms are imposed on consciousness and behavior--on knowing and expressing--so that we will not presume freedom, so that freedom will appear--in all its particulars--impossible and unworkable, so that we will not know what telling the truth is, so that we will spend our time and our holy human energy telling the necessary lies.

(p. 200)

The struggle for self-knowledge must go on even at levels of language that appear to some to be irrelevant to their lives.

My focus on Adrienne's struggles with English is not whimsical. *Of Woman Born* charts her attempts to move beyond the dichotomous conceptual structure of English into wholeness of self, a wholeness that the language denies, forbids. The reviewers of Adrienne's book, in their use of English, must deny the validity of her analysis by denying her language.¹ Because they live in the "Kingdom of the Fathers," they use English as a weapon to separate themselves from Adrienne's work. By doing so, their reviews reflect the social dichotomies required for the survival of the patriarchy. They present themselves as "rational"; Adrienne is "irrational." They worship "legitimate method"; Adrienne's method is "illegitimate." They are "sane"; Adrienne, and the rest of us, are "insane."

Women have been systematically excluded from the English language, split off from the sounds, words, and syntax that should be our most powerful means of expressing our feelings, thoughts, and desires. We have been dispossessed of our tongue as we have been separated from our experiences of motherhood, sisterhood, self-knowledge, and the other complex relationships that define our dwelling in the world. Our separation from language defines and maintains our separation from our experience. *Of Woman Born* seeks to analyze the sources of our separation and thereby to undertake the healing process that is the goal of the feminist revolution.

Rich has moved into the new time/space described by Mary Daly. As a consequence, she no longer speaks the language of her reviewers, if only in the sense that she must now question every word, each phrase, seeing the ways in which

patriarchal patterns determine which thoughts are possible. For her, their words are as meaningful as bicycles are to fish; she and they no longer inhabit the same culture, and their assumptions, expectations, and "understandings" do not belong to the world of meaning Adrienne has moved into. They live in different universes of discourse. The rage of Adrienne's reviewers, couched in carefully modulated "objective" prose, reverberates in their sentences, phrases, and words. In their efforts to not-listen, they have fallen back on what Jane Caputi has called "writing that erases itself."² As Mary Daly has described such writing, it is the style so often labeled as "academese"; after you've read a page or two of it, you realize that none of the words has caught hold in your mind. There is no substance to it, nothing in it that will take root and create those weavings and interweavings of association that we know as thought. Adrienne's reviewers don't want to think about what she has said, and their defense is the rhetoric of denial. In order to make their non-questions sound plausible to readers who haven't read *Of Woman Born*, they have performed amazing feats of nonreading; that is, they haven't read "between the lines" (reading between the lines is impossible in this book), her reviewers have had to read *outside* and *around* the lines.

Why are most of the reviews of *Of Woman Born* hostile and enraged? Because the reviewers are threatened by Adrienne's analysis, threatened in ways they will not acknowledge to themselves. At the core of their fear is Adrienne's love for other women, her Lesbianism. Their fear surfaces in the reviews in the form of questions such as, "Where are the fathers?" In her own way, each reviewer attacks Adrienne for not talking about "the fathers," yet much of the book is occupied with her analysis of the patriarchy, "deification of fatherhood." The reviewers have utilized delusion, distortion, and deception to separate themselves from Adrienne's political analysis. The rhetoric of denial enables them to create pigeon-holes for themselves in which they can hide. They have first lied to themselves, which makes their versions of the book *almost* credible. If one reads *Of Woman Born*, however, she becomes increasingly aware of the complete lack of mesh between the book that Adrienne wrote and the book that her reviewers said they read.

Adrienne has refused to engage in the "mystification of motherhood." In her loving analysis of the politics of Lesbianism, both within and without the patriarchal social structure, in her demonstration that institutionalized motherhood (and heterosexuality) is the foundation of women's oppression, she has laid bare the basis of woman's "otherness." She has stripped motherhood of its sanctity; it is no longer "the sacred calling." In order to avoid Adrienne's truthful narration, the reviewers must become "the other" to Adrienne. They remove themselves from her analysis, splitting themselves off from the implications of her book, and to do so they immerse themselves in the dichotomies of

language that Adrienne is fighting to destroy. "Otherness" is the basis of conceptual dichotomies (this/not-this, that/not-that), and in order to be "other" one must rely on the process of mystification. (Mystification makes possible fetishism, the practice of treasuring small tokens of the "other," hoarding them in closed drawers, fondling them in the darkness of the self.)

Of course, not one of her reviewers has *said* that s/he is mystified. Adrienne has been patronized, in every possible sense of that word. What is saddening is that almost all of the hostile reviews have come from women, the same women to whom Adrienne has tried to speak.³ The male media has outdone itself to discredit our first, extensive analysis of motherhood and its political use under patriarchy. Her reviewers tell us that they are "troubled," "disturbed," "vexed"; Adrienne's prose is "awkward," "cliche-ridden," "melodramatic." According to Helen Vendler, Adrienne's style combines the "rhetoric of violence" and the "rhetoric of sentimentality." Adrienne's political analysis is reduced to "the puritanical regrouping of women without men," "the new theology of male evil," "the prejudices of radical feminism," and "the rewriting of history." One woman complains that "the most significant omission from 'motherhood as experience' is any account of what it was like with and for her husband." *Of Woman Born* is merely an "idealization of the past." Over and over, her critics call for her to return to poetry, which is easier to mystify. One critic hopes that Adrienne's "excellence as a poet will in no way deteriorate," and "wishes this intelligent poet had trusted her intuition more and scholarship less." I infer that their thinking assumes that if Adrienne had "trusted her intuition" she'd stop being nasty to men. They want her to assent to men, to assent to their own unexamined lives. But Adrienne can no longer offer them such absolution.

. . .maternal altruism is the one quality universally approved and supported in women. . .Harding, like other Jungians, fails to give full weight to the pressure on all women--not only mothers--to remain in a 'giving,' assenting, maternalistic relationship to men. The cost of refusing to do so, even in casual relationships or conversations, is often to be labeled 'hostile,' a 'ball-breaker,' a 'castrating bitch.' A plain fact cleanly spoken by a woman's tongue is not infrequently perceived as a cutting blade directed at a man's genitals. (My italics.) (p. 213)

To tell the truth is equated in patriarchal society with being "unfair," "harsh," and "unnecessarily mean."

The rhetoric of denial seeks to abolish meaning, to destroy the connections between one idea and another, to disconnect the human mind from communication and understanding. It is the language of delusion, distortion, and deception. When one is threatened, she becomes afraid; when one is afraid, she attacks, strikes back. Violence enables us to avoid facing truths in ourselves. The ideo-

logical structures of these attacks can be represented as simple syllogisms of the form "this, this, therefore that." The overt assertions in the reviews consist of two such structures, which then create the third, as a corollary, which is only implicit, and never SPOKEN. The explicit line of attack condemns feminist politics and Adrienne's use of language.

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|---|--|
| (a) Adrienne is a feminist. | (a) Feminism is a political movement. |
| (b) Feminism is an adolescent/childish phase. | (b) Political rhetoric is empty and meaningless. |
| . . . Adrienne is adolescent/childish. | . . . Because Adrienne is a feminist, her language is empty and meaningless. |

↖ UNACKNOWLEDGED ↗

- (a) Lesbianism is adolescent/childish.
(b) Adrienne Rich is a Lesbian.

. . . Adrienne Rich is adolescent/childish.

The unacknowledged, underlying assumptions result in the value judgments that surface in the explicit attacks. At all costs, including their own integrity, Adrienne's reviewers must separate themselves from her universe of discourse. They must say "I am different," "I am UN-like her," "I am a woman," "Adrienne Rich is a Lesbian," "I am NOT a Lesbian," "Adrienne Rich is NOT a woman." They must justify themselves in their own minds in order to say that Adrienne's analysis does not apply to their lives. Their only choice lies in garbing their accusations in the language of second-hand power borrowed from their "fathers."

Mary O'Connell's review in an Evansport, Illinois newspaper illustrates the ways these "necessary" delusions surface as distortion and deception. She distorts when she says that the subtitle of the book, "Motherhood as Experience and Institution," is Adrienne's "central dichotomy." The dichotomy is not the creation of Adrienne. Rather, the expressed purpose of the book is the analysis of the patriarchal dichotomy between motherhood as experience and motherhood as institution. "Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to be purged once and for all of our mothers' bondage, to become individuated and free" (p. 236). For O'Connell to present Adrienne's analysis as *her* dichotomy suggests that Adrienne has made all of it up. Adrienne describes the splitting of women at one point: "If motherhood and sexuality were not wedged resolutely apart by male culture, if we could choose both the forms of our sexuality and the terms of our

motherhood or nonmotherhood freely, women might achieve genuine sexual autonomy (as opposed to 'sexual liberation')" (pp. 183-4). With respect to patriarchal dichotomies in general, she emphasizes the necessity to reject "the dualism, . . . the positive-negative polarities between which most of our intellectual training has taken place . . ." (p. 64).

O'Connell has created for herself (and for her readers) an interpretation that feeds her own delusion. She states that "Rich is at her best when she tackles the mother-son relationship, *which lies at the heart of the problem.*" (My italics.) I must have read a different book; I'd have sworn that at least one (and not the only) issue was Adrienne's analysis of the mother-daughter relationship, and the ways mothers and daughters are separated from each other within the patriarchal social structure. Adrienne's vision seeks a new connectedness between mothers/daughters: "To accept and integrate and strengthen both the mother and daughter in ourselves is no easy matter, because patriarchal attitudes have encouraged us to split, to polarize, these images, and to project all unwanted guilt, anger, shame, power, freedom, onto the 'other' woman. But any radical vision of sisterhood demands that we reintegrate them" (p. 253). Perhaps O'Connell somehow confused *Of Woman Born* with *The Glory of Hera* by Philip Slater, in which the focus is the mother-son relationship. Her illusory reading comes out of the male universe of discourse in which she apparently feels most comfortable; it does not reflect an understanding of Adrienne's work.

Finally, O'Connell deceives the readers of her review. Having decided that the mother-son relationship is "the heart of the problem," she proceeds to inform her readers that Adrienne is "inconsistent."

If independence is the only solution for mothers and sons, by contrast 'the loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy.' This loss must be restored, 'until a strong line of love, confirmation, and example stretches from mother to daughter, from woman to woman across the generations.' Men are to lose their mothers, women are to find them.

The inconsistency reflects Rich's personal reorientation toward women. Here, as throughout, we are dependent on the author's own experience--which introduces the major problem.

Adrienne's analysis, however, is not "inconsistent." It is O'Connell's interpretation that is skewed. The deception lies in O'Connell's statement that Adrienne's Lesbianism is the cause of her alleged "inconsistency." At this juncture, one may well wonder what the "major problem" is.

O'Connell maintains that Adrienne never suggests that there are any *rewards* in child rearing, i.e., "delight in watching an infant develop, heightened sense of participation in the future, involvement in a task vastly more important than many other human endeavors." Not only does

O'Connell trot out many of the cliches we've heard all our lives (we're back to the "sacred calling" syndrome again), but her assertion is demonstrably false. Adrienne speaks often of her positive feelings for her children. One example will suffice.

From the beginning the mother caring for her child is involved in a continually changing dialogue, crystallized in such moments as when, hearing her child's cry, she feels milk rush into her breasts; when, as the child first suckles, the uterus begins contracting and returning to its normal size, and when later, the child's mouth, caressing the nipple, creates waves of sensuality in the womb where it once lay; or when, smelling the breast even in sleep, the child starts to root and grope for the nipple. (p. 36)

Adrienne's point here, as throughout the book, is the ways in which the mother's immediate experience of motherhood is filtered and distorted by the patriarchal institution, and, as a consequence of this distortion, is fraught with tensions and ambivalences that erode the positive feelings described by her.

O'Connell has intentionally misrepresented the book to her readers. Once she convinces them that Adrienne's imputed "inconsistency" is the result of her Lesbianism, the remainder of her assertions can be passed off as accurate interpretation. Some might wonder if I am being too harsh myself (or giving O'Connell credit for too much intelligence) when I say that her deceit is intentional. Consider the following: The title of the review, "Rich's bleak portrait of motherhood," begins at the left-hand margin of the page and brings the reader's eye to a picture of Adrienne; below the picture is her name, followed by the caption "What of the fathers?" Since the book is entitled *Of Woman Born*, O'Connell's question can only come from the patriarchal universe of discourse. Its prominent placement above the review works visually to deny the validity of the questions posed by the book. What O'Connell herself may never understand is that her title and caption together perfectly capsulize Adrienne's political analysis of the institution of mothering as we know it.

O'Connell, however, is only the least ingenuous and most obvious of Adrienne's hostile reviewers. The reviews (also by women) that have appeared in two of the most "prestigious" male newspapers, *The New York Review of Books* (9/30/76) and the *New York Times Book Review* (10/10/76) are the longest and also the subtlest.

Helen Vendler, who reviewed *Of Woman Born* for NYRB, after "raising the problem of partisan writing," proceeds to borrow catch-phrases from Octavio Paz as her analysis of Adrienne's use of language. (Later she will claim that Keats and Shakespeare represent "an inclusive consciousness," and that Adrienne's "language has ignored the honorable history of this idea." She asks: "Why not tell women to

imitate Keats or Shakespeare? There are models for such 'thinking through the body'; that they are men does not vitiate their usefulness." Time and again Vendler goes to the boys in her attack on the book.) The following quotation represents the doublethink in which Vendler engages.

It is disheartening to see any of our ruling ideologies ('those lower forms of religious instinct,' as Octavio Paz calls them) able to seduce a poetic mind, able to make a poet choose (in Paz's terms) 'the rhetoric of violence.' In Rich, the rhetoric of violence is accompanied by a rhetoric of sentimentality, as though, in having chosen to ally herself with a female principle in opposition to a putative male one, she has adopted a language of uncritical deliquescence: . . . There is, of course, no such thing as a sentimental emotion; emotions are felt or not felt, and that is all. It is the language which is or is not sentimental. To find language better than that of greeting-card verse to express the sentiments of love is the poet's task: the rest of us are not equal to it. In lapsing so often into cliché in this volume, Rich has failed her own feelings. (p. 16)

Vendler is "disheartened"; feminism is now a "ruling ideology," i.e., *powerful* (Does Vendler know something I don't?); Adrienne "has chosen to ally herself with a female principle in opposition to a putative male one," but if the existence of a "male principle" is in doubt, what are her *choices*? And, Vendler's equation of Adrienne's description of women's love for other women with "greeting-card verse," the "rhetoric of sentimentality," is a transparent mask for Vendler's distaste for Adrienne's positive portrayal of Lesbianism. She has tried to avoid directly confronting her feelings by claiming that she wouldn't have objected to the "subject" if only Adrienne had had the good taste to express her emotions "better." Vendler has at least convinced herself that Adrienne has "failed her own feelings," and that she, Vendler, is justified in ignoring them.

Later in her review (p. 18), Vendler comments that "The selectivity of quotation throughout is a fault common to all ideologically motivated writing. It will be said that all writing is ideologically motivated. To that remark there is no response." In this passage the two universes of discourse clash. Vendler cannot respond because in order to do so she would have to make her own choice explicit, and she is trying very hard to demonstrate that she is BEYOND both universes of discourse, which is an impossibility. She is unwilling to admit to herself that her review is clearly motivated by patriarchal ideology, and she needs to believe that she is being "objective." Her attempt to reduce the content of the book to "mere ideology" fails because her review is equally "tainted" by her beliefs. Furthermore, she makes no effort to substantiate her description of Adrienne's language as the "rhetoric of violence" other than by citing Paz (Is one boy all it takes?), because her assertion is false.

The one notion that Vendler *must* retain is her belief that other perspectives are as valid as Adrienne's, especially her own. She implies this when she says that the value of the book "...lies in reminding us that different conceptions of motherhood are possible; that motherhood is not necessarily congenial in the same way to every woman..." (p. 18). Lesbianism, as REALITY, as one way for one woman to please herself, disappears in this statement! Vendler, evidently satisfied with herself, can fall back into her patriarchal mind-set, hardly moved by a few adjectives, content with her "knowledge" that, although "different conceptions of motherhood are possible," none of them is necessary or relevant to her consciousness. She remains "sane," "objective," "detached." She hasn't heard anything she didn't want to hear. The rhetoric of denial has served its purpose. (Dear Helen: It's not just that "different conceptions [pun intended?] are possible." Different conceptions of being a WOMAN are real; Lesbians DO exist. For some of us, motherhood in *any* "way" is uncongenial. Yours truly.)

The line of attack chosen by Francine du Plessix Gray in her review for the *New York Times* follows much the same directions as that of Vendler, although Gray strains less for the facade of detachment. She, too, uses Adrienne's language as a means of ignoring her analysis. The review is announced with a headline at the top of the page, "Amazonian prescriptions and proscriptions." (The book, we are given to understand, consists of nothing more than feminist dogma.) In Gray's first paragraph she informs us that "...feminists, like many blacks, have sometimes resorted to mythologizing their history...Feminists have glossed anthropology to exalt a prepatriarchal Eden...Whatever struggle one is waging, Utopianism comes before analysis,...idealization of the past seems to be an early stage of any struggle for decolonization. It is a form of adolescence that the colonized group must pass through before it can attain a new phase of pride and self-confidence." These sentences establish the position from which Gray will attack. First, she removes herself from the "colonized group." Her own "outsideness" is reflected in her choice of words: *resorted* instead of *reclaimed*; *glossed* instead of *reread*; *exalt* instead of *discover*; *attain* instead of, perhaps, *regain*. Second, she reduces Adrienne's analysis to a utopian "mythologizing of the past." Inherent in her assertion is the assumption that Adrienne's information about our past is at least questionable in its authenticity, if not downright false. Third, she performs one of those magnificent turns in logic familiar to us by now: Having asserted that feminists (like Adrienne) engage in mythologizing, she defines that activity as pre-analysis, which places it outside those methodologies Gray regards as "legitimate." Feminist analysis, thus, does not qualify as "real" political analysis. In contrast to masculinist analysis, i.e., Marxism, *Of Woman Born* is an "adolescent phase," and "when we grow up," become "mature," we'll "know better."

Only one paragraph later, Gray makes the most of her assertion that books like *Of Woman Born* represent an "early stage." She praises Adrienne's narrative of her experiences as a mother (the "personal" is valid), then condemns her political analysis as "muddled."

'Of Woman Born' is almost two books, one moving, one maddening. When Rich draws from her own life to write about daughterhood and 'motherhood as experience,' she reaches moments of great poignancy and eloquence. When she writes about 'motherhood as institution' (which, she asserts, 'must be destroyed'), one feels that her considerable intelligence has been momentarily suspended by the intensity of her rage against men. Here she tends to bombard us with unoriginal, muddled polemics against patriarchy, and gushing eulogies of a gynocentric Golden Age, all couched in awkward, vituperative prose that is not worthy of one of our finest poets. (p. 3)

Of Woman Born is "almost," but not quite "two books." Gray has managed to separate the personal from the political. (How, I wonder, can the psychological and physical crippling of women NOT be a political issue when the starvation of children is?) Adrienne has "moments" of "eloquence" when she restricts herself to her own experience, but her "intelligence" was "momentarily suspended" when she turned it into political analysis. Then Gray inadvertently makes a telling slip. Adrienne's "polemics" against the patriarchy are identified with "rage against men." Gray can separate the lives of women from political analysis, but an attack on the patriarchy is an attack on the lives of men. We discover in this that Gray's life, *her* personal experience, is more closely bound to men than to women. Any political analysis, therefore, that proceeds from the experience of women is suspect, "muddled polemics," "awkward, vituperative prose."

Gray returns to her dichotomy between personal/political analysis later in her review when she compares negatively Adrienne's "anthropological polemics" to books by de Beauvoir, Millett, and Mitchell. Adrienne's presentation of theories of a prepatriarchal period are "Utopian nostalgia," and her "rehashing of the matriarchal controversy seem[s] regressive and adolescent" (to Gray). Adrienne's chapters on the history of obstetrics are, on the one hand, "extremely interesting... But they are also pervaded by misanthropy, an almost maudlin cult of primitivism, and historical distortions." Gray fails to document these alleged "distortions," but she is not above characterizing one of Adrienne's comments as being made by "schoolgirl Rich."

Gray's comments on Adrienne's description of Lesbian love are especially revealing. She begins by saying that it is "one of the most eloquent Amazonist statements to come out of the American women's movement. And that may be its most unique contribution." Here we finally find out what those "Amazonist prescriptions and proscriptions" are

that opened her review, and why Gray has stubbornly endeavored to establish her separateness from Adrienne's analysis and its implications in her own life. Adrienne's discussion of the feelings of women for other women are a "unique contribution"; they have nothing whatever to do with motherhood as an oppressive institution. Gray reveals her fear only a few sentences later; it would be funny if it weren't a woman writing. She tells us that "Rich's moving descriptions of her deep love for her own mother and her eulogies to women's support of each other provide some of *the most clinically interesting and lyrical passages in her book*" (Italics mine). The extreme distance that Gray interposes between herself and the book opens up in the contrast between the sterility of "clinically interesting" and the wistfulness of "lyrical." Gray's need to extricate herself from the beauty of the passages requires the rhetoric of denial, the language of fear disguised as "objectivity," exposed in the oppressor's most disdainful terms.

That Gray is threatened by *Of Woman Born* because she is dependent on masculinist validation surfaces, finally, when she accuses Adrienne of "dogmatic exclusion of any class analysis from her feminist perspective," and then aligns this alleged dogmatism with Adrienne's "disdain for men." Both of Gray's assertions are lies. Not only does Adrienne *not* exclude class analysis from her book, but over and over she emphasizes that class analysis is *insufficient* as an explanation of the oppression of women, *especially* poor, Black, and Third World (*First* World) women. Gray, like other reviewers, does not want to be reminded that Adrienne is analyzing the patriarchal institution of motherhood, not "fatherhood," not "economics," not the so-called "human condition." Her book is called *Of Woman Born*. The title is specific, it is well-defined, and Adrienne does exactly what she says she will do, no more and no less, touching upon as many aspects of women's oppression *as* mothers as one might wish. As Adrienne explains this analysis:

. . . the patriarchal institution of motherhood is not the 'human condition' any more than rape, prostitution and slavery are. (Those who speak largely of the human condition are usually those most exempt from its oppression--whether of sex, race, or servitude.) (p. 34)

Time and again she returns to the problems of women as *women*, and to the effects of institutionalized motherhood on all of us. For example, on p. 53 Adrienne points out that "Even when she herself is trying to cope with an environment beyond her control--malnutrition, rats, lead-paint poisoning, the drug traffic, racism--in the eyes of society the mother *is* the child's environment. The worker can unionize, go out on strike; mothers are divided from each other in homes, tied to their children by compassionate bonds; our wildcat strikes have most often taken the form of physical or mental breakdown." Nor does Adrienne ignore

Marxism (discussed on pp. 54-5) or Engel's analysis, which she cites for its "masculinist bias" (pp. 110-1). However, her most telling analysis of the oppression of women as a class is her chapter, "Alienated Labor," in which she discusses the dual meaning of *labor*.

However, over and over she [Simone Weil] equates pure affliction with powerlessness, with waiting, disconnectedness, inertia, the 'fragmented time' of one who is at others' disposal. This insight illuminates much of the female condition, but in particular the experience of giving birth.

Weil's image of the prison camp is also an image of forced labor--labor as contrasted with work, which has a real goal and a meaning. The labor of childbirth has been a form of forced labor. For centuries, most women had no means of preventing conception, and they carried the scriptural penalty of Eve's curse with them into the birth chamber. (p. 158)

To deny Adrienne's analysis as class analysis is to deny women's experience as mothers for most of recorded history. What Gray and the other reviewers wish to ignore is the fact that men have power over women's lives, and that they continue to deny us the right to have power over our lives. Power is the central issue here, the right to live one's life as she pleases, and our powerlessness to define the terms under which we will live. Only the nonwoman reviewer explicitly raised the issue of power.

POWER: This last, which relies heavily on political rhetoric and a reductive view of the present condition of male humanity, is volatile stuff.

(Prescott, Newsweek, p. 106)

That's the only time he uses the word *power*; he reduces Adrienne's analysis of motherhood as a patriarchal institution to "a fantasy of a male conspiracy."

According to Gray, Adrienne's Lesbianism has clouded her vision. She cannot see how oppressed men are. A "class" analysis would, of necessity, take into account the ways in which nonwomen are oppressed; it would also enable Gray to forget that even "oppressed" males always have women beneath them.

. . .there is an underlying assumption throughout her work that men are supremely happy in their roles as oppressors. I join many other feminists in believing that men are almost as oppressed as women by class distinctions and economic factors which Rich never touches upon. For instance: a very complex network of economic and social causes--rather than men's ill will, as Rich would have it--has created the father's present alienation from his traditional role as educator, story-teller and companion, and his painful sense of obsolescence among a generation of offspring educated by the corporate-owned media. To believe that men actually benefit from their historic and

current role is to fall into the genetic determinism that the feminist movement has been trying to obliterate.

Here Gray manages, through abstraction, to obscure the facts that: the corporate media are controlled by men for men; that her "complex network of economic and social causes" are *all* the result of male control of economics *and* society; that if men are alienated, they have alienated themselves. Men are not in an OBJECT relation to their own control; it is *reflexive*. If they suffer, it is at their *own* hands. At no point does Adrienne assume "genetic determinism." Patriarchy is a social and cultural phenomenon; it is not "genetic." As Adrienne has pointed out, "the essential dichotomy [is] power/powerlessness." To argue that our lack of power in our lives is genetic would mean that we will *never* control our lives. If women are conscious of our powerlessness, then men are conscious of their power.

Power is both a primal word and a primal relationship under patriarchy. Through control of the mother, the man assures himself of possession of his children; through control of his children he insures the safe passage of his soul after death. It would seem therefore that from very ancient times the identity, the very personality, of the man depends on power, and on power in a certain, specific sense: that of power over others, beginning with a woman and her children. The ownership of human beings proliferates, from primitive or arranged marriage through contractual marriage-with-dowry through more recent marriage 'for love' but involving the economic dependency of the wife, through the feudal system, through slavery and serfdom. The powerful (mostly male) make decisions for the powerless: the well for the sick, the middle-aged for the aging, the 'sane' for the 'mad,' the educated for the illiterate, the influential for the marginal.

. . . To hold power over others means that the powerful is permitted a kind of short-cut through the complexity of human personality. He does not have to enter intuitively into the souls of the powerless, or to hear what they are saying in their many languages, including the language of silence. Colonialism exists by virtue of this short-cut--how else could so few live among so many and understand so little?

. . . The powerful person would seem to have a good deal at stake in suppressing or denying his awareness of the personal reality of others; power seems to engender a kind of willed ignorance, a moral stupidity, about the inwardness of others, hence of oneself. This quality has variously been described as 'detachment,' 'objectivity,' 'sanity'--as if the recognition of another's being would open up the floodgates to panic and hysteria. (pp. 64-5)

The reviewers of *Of Woman Born* cannot acknowledge the existence of the power differential between the lives of women and those of nonwomen. Through the rhetoric of denial, the

language that enables them to live within their delusion, distortion, and deception, they become parties to that "willed ignorance" and "moral stupidity." If one can deny having power, one can continue to use it.

By the end of her review, Gray is obviously desperate to maintain her "willed ignorance." That she is on the side of the patriarchy cannot be doubted; she informs us that it was her "male parent" who instructed her "on such adolescent female issues as menstruation and sexuality--*out of a parental decision that he would be better at it*" (My Italics). If there is no difference in power between women and nonwomen, then her mother must have freely consented; the oppressed never have the option of free consent. Immediately thereafter, Gray also gives us information on her husband's parenting behavior (and her own), which some may find clinically interesting, in view of the fact that Gray tells us that she finds Adrienne's feminism "puritanical," "exclusionary," and "perilous."

Perilous is perhaps the most honest word used by Gray in her review. Indeed, feminism *is* perilous, as those of us who believe in it know. The exclusion of men, however partial, however less than total, is, nevertheless, living dangerously. Gray knows, however subconsciously, where the power lies in our society; she is dependent upon it; without it, she cannot survive. The only real difference between us, perhaps, is the choice to struggle against that dependency. We have, as yet, no way to live beyond the patriarchy except in our minds.

There is no "middle road" between the universes of discourse; either we live in a peripheral time/space we are creating, or we live in the "Kingdom of the Fathers." There is the patriarchal universe of discourse, in which the categories and labels define the world as it is filtered through the bifocal consciousness of men, and there is the feminist universe of discourse, which has only begun to become self-conscious and aware of the potentials of women as separate, autonomous, and free: self-defined. Our universe of discourse has only begun to expand, evolving out of our struggles and exploration, and much of our language is still in quotation marks. One may stand within the world defined by male perceptions, or she may live outside it, in the new feminist time/space, wondering how anyone could choose to remain in the old world. At least that much is now *choice*, because many women like Adrienne Rich are no longer afraid of themselves. "Objectivity" is a delusion, carefully fostered by those who cherish their power; no one can live "outside" both universes of discourse. To attempt that would perhaps lead to "madness," derangement; any woman who tries to imagine that she has no connection with the institutionalized oppression of women is "out of" her senses. Anne Bernays, in *Harvard Magazine*, best illustrates how far apart these universes of discourse have become. When she speaks of the language of *Of Woman Born*, she says: "The pervasive tone of this book suggests

that the author has been greivously used, as if, like Rosemary in Ira Levin's novel, she had been drugged and then raped by the devil." Bernays does not want to believe that "Infanticide is a subject [appropriate] to the subject of motherhood."

The rhetoric of denial is merely a symptom of the desperation of such women, evidence of their addiction to male approval and their need for masculinist validation. Until we have exorcised that language, we will continue to be "the most powerful weapon in the hands of the patriarchy." What is most unfortunate about the denial of these women is that Adrienne hoped, by exposing the dichotomy between experience and institution, to facilitate the breaking down of dichotomies and to help us begin the process of healing. In her Afterword, she gives us her vision of the possibilities that such a reintegration would create:

The repossession by women of our bodies will bring far more essential change to human society than the seizing of the means of production by workers. The female body has been both territory and machine, virgin wilderness to be exploited and assembly-line turning out life. We need to imagine a world in which every woman is the presiding genius of her own body. In such a world women will truly create new life, bringing forth not only children (if and as we choose) but the visions, and the thinking, necessary to sustain, console, and alter human existence--a new relationship to the universe. Sexuality, politics, intelligence, power, motherhood, work, community, intimacy will develop new meanings; thinking itself will be transformed.

This is where we have to begin.

(pp. 285-6)

A frightening vision indeed, and a "perilous" journey. The worst of the obstacles we meet along the way will be the women marshalled under the banners of patriarchy in whom we will see reflections of our former selves.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I have used Adrienne Rich's first name throughout this article for two reasons. First, I noticed that the hostile reviewers used her last name, which is standard "academic" practice. However, they were engaged in their reviews in putting distance between themselves and her experience (and analysis), and their use of "Rich" seemed to me to emphasize further their refusal to identify themselves with her analysis. Second, and in contrast, I felt deeply involved in her analysis, committed to it as a woman and as a daughter; I used her first name to indicate my personal involvement in her book. Where other reviewers had denied, I wanted to assent clearly, without qualification, at every level of my being.

The issue of power is very much a factor when we decide whether or not to address someone by their first or last name, so much so that I knew I had to make a political choice

based on my best understanding. Use of the first name often signals feelings of friendship, intimacy, a "knowing well" of someone that goes beyond language, equality. We use first names for our immediate family members, our close friends, those we love. Use of the last name may also indicate equality, but it is of a more distant, removed, abstract relationship derived from our status in the power structure. Thus, we usually use last names in formal articles, reviews, or conversations structured by the prevailing social context. Because the use of first and last names is an indication of our social relationship to other people, such a decision specifies our relationships in terms of our power within the hierarchical social structure.

Men often refer to each other with last names if they are social equals, but use the first names of women and other men they perceive to be their "social inferiors." These distinctions are necessary to and inhere in the male universe of discourse. Naming of "others" is based on sex, race, and class. If a man calls me by my first name he indicates that he is condescending, and thereby implies a false "intimacy," signalling his superior "rights" over my inferiority, i.e., that I am a woman and therefore his legitimate prey in our society. He reminds me of my "place" in his world.

Because our naming has been based on social status, it is possible to read my use of Adrienne's first name as either condescension or assertion of a false intimacy, or pretense. I do intend intimacy in my usage, the intimacy of respect and love for a woman who has written poetry and prose that I admire for its honesty and courage. I know her work well, and she is present to me in her writing. My feelings of intimacy have grown out of knowing her presence in her work, and my use of her first name acknowledges my feelings of presence. As I reread my draft of this article, I felt that my initial use of her last name identified me explicitly with the likes of Vendler and du Plessix Gray and denied my feelings of identification with Adrienne's analysis. I had to make a political decision with respect to naming, and, like all of our new choices, it is made dangerous by the old meanings and dualisms that define and separate women from each other. I do not want to detach myself from the lives of women, and I hope that the context of my article succeeds in erasing the old meanings.

Endnotes

¹Throughout this article I have restricted my analysis to reviews that were negative responses to Of Woman Born, which may give some readers the impression that all of the reviews were negative. There have been a few positive reviews, some that praised Adrienne's book, and these women deserve acknowledgement, certainly more than I have given them here: Margaret Atwood, Margaret Blanchard, Mary Daly, Annie Gottlieb, and the Spokeswoman reviewer. They are included in my bibliography, and I refer you to them with pride.

²I am indebted to Mary Daly in many ways. To her I owe long discussions about this article and the hostile reviews of Of Woman Born, and the sharing of ideas about patriarchal language. She provided me with Jane Caputi's statement and her own description of "writing that erases itself."

³Some women will immediately say that it is Adrienne Rich's "fault" if these women didn't want to listen to what she had to say in Of Woman Born. The reasoning behind such statements is a trap, because it allows us to assume that if we want to "communicate" with a specific group of people, especially those in power, we must speak their language in order to "gain a hearing," as though we were not entitled to a "hearing." This belief reflects the assumptions of our linguistic socialization: Women, Blacks, children, the poor, slaves, the outcasts are to be "seen and not heard." When we do wish to speak, we have been taught that we must speak and write "properly," "correctly," if we wish those "above" us to listen to us, or if we desire to participate in the existing power structure. On the other hand, we know from experience that imitating the language of specific "sub-groups," e.g., Blacks, gays, prostitutes, etc., may work for or against us. If we are members of a "sub-group," i.e., powerless, speaking the language of that group signals that we, too, share in powerlessness. We acknowledge our belonging. The same holds true if we have been accepted into a "sub-group" as a "friendly enemy." However, if a white enters a Black group and immediately begins to speak Black English without first being accepted, she will be excluded as another "honky liberal."

The use of language as a gesture, whether in a powerless group or a powerful one, signals either belonging or a desire to "belong." This use of language creates many miscommunications among feminists, for we come to feminism speaking many different "languages." The problem I am discussing in this article derives from the language of power, "power over others." The hostile reviewers have used that language against Adrienne. She had a choice to make in writing her book: She could have spoken to these women in their language, or she could have written as she did. If she had written in the language of power, she couldn't have written Of Woman Born. The language of power over would make her book an impossibility, as evidenced in her constant use of quotation marks. The function of that language is to make impossible questions, statements, explorations, analyses that would threaten the patriarchal power structure. Many women believe that they can "communicate" with non- and anti-feminists if only they can find a language in which to speak that is non-threatening. But this possibility does not exist. Consequently, they become trapped in the male lie of the "gentle lie." In their efforts to communicate across the universes of discourse, they try to dilute, diffuse, and de-fuse the logic of feminism for women who are frightened by feminist concepts. The language of patriarchy excludes feminist meaning. An excellent example of this conflict between language and action occurs when patriarchal labels such as dyke, man-hater, or castrating bitch are attached to a group of women involved in issues like "equal pay for equal work." The knee-jerk response of such women thus labeled has been denial of the meaning of the labels, because those meanings are threatening to them. They hasten to assure boys that what they are doing is not "threatening," and they go to great lengths thereafter to show how "good" their intentions are, not realizing that any activity on behalf of women is threatening to male control. It is women of this persuasion, those who cannot conceive of their potential power, who are

the most threatened by Adrienne's book. To deny the challenge of feminism to the existing power-structure is to deny the validity of our lives. To play the boys' game, to become involved in "gentle lies" that deny the strengths of feminism, is to invalidate feminism as the power to change. We cannot tell the truth and also tell "gentle lies." Perhaps we cannot believe that there are women incapable of becoming feminists, whose desire for male approval is so engrained that they would extinguish themselves if they listened, so we keep castigating ourselves for not speaking their language, trying to find "another way" to talk to them.

Adrienne has written a book that is gentle, kind, compassionate, but unrelenting in its logic. It is so compassionate that I could not have written it. In her prose her reviewers found, alternatively, the "rhetoric of violence" and the "rhetoric of sentimentality." Neither of these phrases, catchy as they are, accurately describes her writing; but the application of these phrases leads me to wonder if there is a way to speak to women whose lives and identities are threatened by feminism.

I'm not saying we should stop trying to talk to them, or that all of these women are "lost causes." If I believed that I wouldn't have written this article. But I don't believe that we can use "gentle lies" to communicate with them. I need to believe that sooner or later, somehow, our meaning will come through to them. What stands between us is the patriarchal language of power, of dichotomies, of separations. As long as we remain aware of their investment in what they "know," and our living in the "unknown," we may eventually learn to talk to each other in a new language with new meanings.

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(continued p. 102)

NOTES FOR A MAGAZINE

by Harriet

We began exactly a year ago at point zero: isolation and ignorance. We decided to make a magazine because we wanted more Lesbian writing, we wanted more friends, and we wanted to express the power we felt building up inside ourselves, that was both us and not-us. (We didn't want much, just everything.) This is the story of how *almost* everything came true.

We planted a fantasy tree and with a great whoosh of wings an entire flock of Lesbian birds-of-paradise settled in its branches. The immigration began in February 1976 with a night phonecall from a woman in the mountains of western North Carolina. She told us about a Lesbian writer's workshop in Tennessee and the next weekend found the three of us driving to Knoxville. Catherine and I brazenly announced that we were starting a magazine. The women appeared to believe us, and we taped ideas for the first issue. We returned to Charlotte and worried at the temerity of it all. Finally, Catherine said: you have two hours to write a leaflet for *Sinister Wisdom*.

So, in two hours of an afternoon early in March, we wrote, typed and pasted-up a call to "lesbians & lunatics" to submit work to a new magazine. Then Catherine ran it to an insty-print and we folded, stamped and mailed a hundred to addresses mostly picked out of *The New Woman's Survival Sourcebook*. Finally, we got sick. (Only movement leaders start national magazines, right? They don't do it alone, and they do *not* do it in the South. They form a collective; they find backing, financial and prestigious; they carefully plan. We had \$2000, no plans, no skills, no movement credentials, no cohorts.) I stopped nausea in its tracks by firmly believing that no one would answer the leaflet and that would be the end of *that*. It wasn't.

Letters began appearing in the mailbox. Women even subscribed--on the strength of one insty-print leaflet. The initial response came from Beth Hodges. Within a remarkably short time she was on the doorstep, handing us her list of Lesbian writers. Later, she would give us issue 2. And later still, the loan of her IBM Selectric. In the fall of 1975 we had met Julia Stanley at the Gay Academic Union conference in NYC. She had attempted to read a piece during a workshop which was drowned out by the stomping of male homosexuals in the corridor mobbing Kate Millett, who was talking about erotic literature--Julia was talking about female separatism. Julia seemed an accessibly warm bear and, as everyone knows, bears are sacred to the Goddess, also to Jane Harrison, and we'd liked her story, so we asked her for it. It became the first piece in issue 1.

Women have given us money; they've given us writing; they've given us graphics and help with design; they've taught us everything from packing books and keeping records to using press-type; they've xeroxed leaflets and handed them out; they've collated and made PMT's; they've criticized content and criticized style and given us a kick in the pants when we needed it. And still it goes on. Whenever we're deciding finally to chuck it and flee the country, a letter arrives...with ideas, gossip, encouragement.

A network exists. We plugged into it, and sometimes we've expanded it--which is the biggest thrill. We've done the domestic labor on *Sinister Wisdom*, but in truth everyone else has made the magazine. Even though her staff line-up consists of Catherine: *this* and Harriet: *that*, *Sinister Wisdom* from the beginning has been--wouldn't you know it--a collective effort.

TOWARD A POOR MAGAZINE:

After we saw how women responded to issue 2 (which had blossomed into a book, though it wasn't planned that way), we went temporarily bananas. We'd do THREE book-sized issues a year! We'd have to raise prices, of course, but that would be OK because look what the buyers would get: typesetting on a real typesetter, perfect binding, honest-to-Goddess volumes of Lesbian lore. Print, we'd discovered, has its own built-in heirarchy. Offset talks louder than mimeograph; a typesetter talks louder than a typewriter; paperbacks definitely lord it over stapled 'zines. And we wanted *Sinister Wisdom* to have all the authority she could get.

Then we sobered up. Who was going to invest? who was going to do the extra work? who was going to be able to buy the finished product? We abruptly reverted to our original value judgment: *CHEAP IS GOOD*. Our only problem now is to convince you all. How about: we promise to stuff the most and finest Lesbian writing into the loveliest format we can manage. And we won't raise prices 'til the paper peddler puts a gun to our heads.

HOW TO GO INTERNATIONAL ON GRITS AND TURNIP GREENS:

Earlier this year it dawned on us that we were publishing a journal of Lesbian writing in the hometown of the "Praise the Lord" television network and that this was somewhat akin to raising pineapples on the North Pole. Our solution? Move to New York, move to Boston, move to L.A., move to San Francisco! Finally, we decided to just stay where we were. For one thing, it freaks out people in the Bay area. For another, most Lesbians live, love, work and politic outside the metropolitan centers. And the movementmonster could surely stand a corrective dose of Southern, Midwestern, "provincial" chauvinism. Then, too, we have our smug moments, like the evening one deeply closeted South Carolina Lesbian appeared, hopping from one foot to the other. sputtering. "I can't believe you all are *here!*"

BUILDING A SUBSCRIPTION LIST IS LIKE WATCHING MOLASSES
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Did we forget to tell you that *OF COURSE Sinister Wisdom* will be carrying on for another year...or three.

We wish to thank all the writers and artists who have contributed their work to *Sinister Wisdom* this year. And we wish to thank these people who, in our first year, have given labor, money or assistance:

Mia Albright, Pat Argue, June Arnold, Sandra Bailey, Jo Blum, Parke Bowman, Diane Broadstreet, Charlotte Bunch, Ann Carver, Kent Crawford, Casey Czarnik, Debbie, Claire Ellington, Paula Ellington, Ann Gray, Barbara Grier, Bertha Harris, Merrill Harris, Pat Harris, Cathy Helms, Beth Hodges, Marie Kuda, Marianne Lieberman, Val McDonald, Jan Millsapps, Coletta Reid, Adrienne Rich, Becky Sheehan, Julia Stanley, Leigh Star, Anne Taylor, Mandy Wallace, Robert Watkins, Penny Webb, Joy Willa.

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Sinister Wisdom is published three times a year. It contains essays, fiction, letters, poetry, drama, reviews and graphics. Its purpose is to develop a Lesbian imagination in politics and art.

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-Audre Lorde