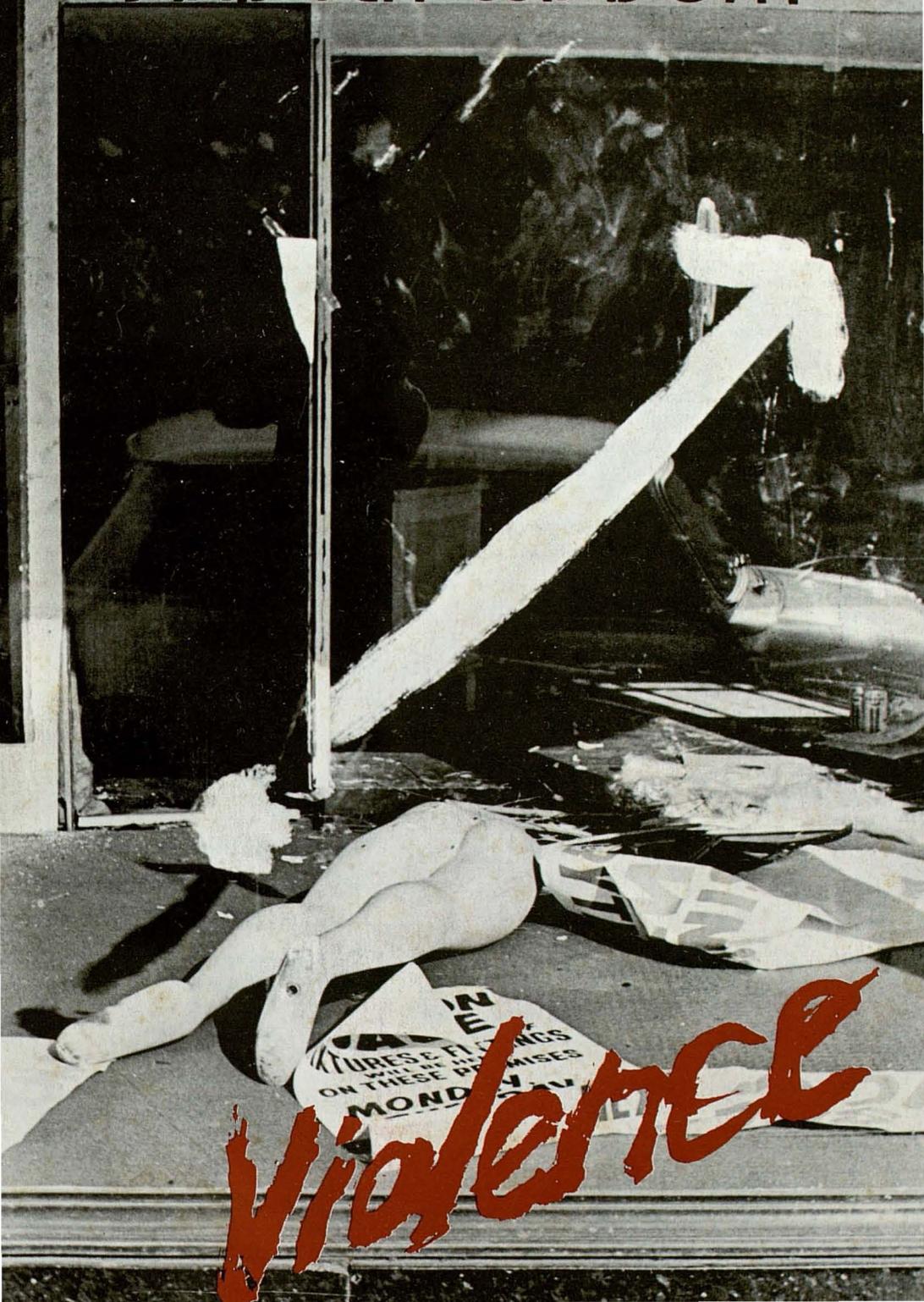


SINISTER WISDOM



Violence



SINISTER WISDOM 15

*A Journal of Words and Pictures for the Lesbian
Imagination in All Women* (Fall, 1980)

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SPECIAL

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THE PATRIARCHY: VIOLENCE AND PORNOGRAPHY

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*This special issue is dedicated to Frog,
who isn't afraid of her anger.*

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SEE INSIDE BACK COVER FOR IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

BACKROOM WITH THE FEMINIST HEROES:

Conference for Women Against Pornography

New York City, 1979 *

I went to this conference on Women Against Pornography. I was into it. There we were at Martin Luther King High School in New York City. I was ready. Ripe for revolution.

All the hot-shot bigwig feminists were there. Susan Brownmiller. Lois Gould. Barbara Seaman. E.M. Broner. Phyllis Chesler. Shere Hite. Bella Abzug spoke with such fire and power that I wondered if I was at the Democratic National Convention. Gloria Steinem recited the story of her humiliation at the hands of Al Goldstein, who published a centerfold in *Screw* with Gloria's face on the body of a nude woman. Along the side were penises of assorted sizes, and the page was captioned, "Pin the Cock on the Feminist." When Gloria wrote a protest letter, she received a small box of candy and a message which read, "Dear Gloria, Eat it! Regards, Al Goldstein." But Bella told Gloria not to worry; Goldstein had published Gloria's face, but he had published Bella's labia on that centerfold; they were all in this together. Then Gloria said she felt better.

Robin Morgan said she had to read a dirty story and strip for her parents and their friends in the theatre when she was six. She explained that her occasional brutal sexual fantasies were the result of "scar tissue," and I thought that was very moving. She said that her idea of erotica was Anne Bradstreet's poetry, and I thought she was skirting (as it were) the issue.

A lot of other brave women got up and said they had been raped by their fathers and brothers and that they were shown pornography to justify the rapist's act. Another woman said that she was confused about the suppression of pornography and its relation to censorship, but that when *Playboy* said it was a magazine publishing serious authors and interviewing important people, and she read the *Playboy* interview with President Carter and turned the page to find a photograph of a nude woman, shot labia first, lickety-split down her middle, she lost her confusion.

I watched a slide show with some pretty disgusting slides—from peep shows, from record jackets, from advertisements. It became obvious that women are the victims of pernicious propaganda. It was equally apparent that not only are women themselves injured by pornography, but pornography cripples male perception of women as well. The media seems to bombard the country with images of violence against women, and we all know what violence breeds.

A march on Times Square was announced for October 20th. That was pretty much that. Spirits were high. It had been years since all those feminists gathered together in one place to work on one important issue. But with all the pretty women, something was not quite right.

The next day, I attended the Lesbian Workshop, but they weren't discussing pornography. They were discussing the dilemma of trying to locate lesbians.

2 *For Susan Brownmiller's comments see page 111.

They were deploring the sad implications of lesbians dressing like straight women and straight women dressing like lesbians. But a rather serious, vocal lesbian said that you could still tell the straight women from the dykes because straight women wore their ties loose like Diane Keaton, but dykes wore theirs tight around the neck like she did. Then she pulled her wide yellow-and-blue striped tie even tighter around her neck. We were all very relieved to hear *that!*

The discussion then turned to the fact that the conference organizers had not done an adequate job of recognizing lesbian issues in its exploration of the effects of pornography or even of recognizing the lesbian contingency at the conference. We got all riled about this.

Then we went back to the auditorium for the final round. A panel discussion with feminist organizers from around the country was scheduled. The only "famous" feminist on stage was Susan Brownmiller—all the other "stars" had headed home. The panel members gave their speeches and a small discussion was held about whether to invite the morally indignant church-going Catholic mother of seven to join us, or to give her the feminist position on ERA and abortion and all the other scandalous matters (no one mentioned lesbianism, oh no, not yet) instead.

Then a woman got up and asked where the third-world women were. Everyone looked around but no one stood up. Another woman got up and commented that maybe the third-world women couldn't *afford* this gathering, because God knows *everyone* wasn't as rich as *some* people present who made their capitalist-pig money off their successful mass-market books!

Susan Brownmiller knew who they were talking about. Now Susan had a long, hard month, and here she was, all tired and drained and (worst of all) *unappreciated!* at the end of *her* conference. She got up and slapped her fist on the table and said, "This *always* happens at the end of feminist conferences!!!!" She was disgusted. So she apologized (yes, apologized!) to the rest of the audience for the unfortunate presence of these impolite, ungrateful women who had dared to mention that she and her friends might not have planned an absolutely perfect conference.

Now the lesbian in the tie was beside herself. She climbed to the podium with an aggressive stride and yelled that she is "*sick* and *tired* of this movement being run by *cocksucking* straight women. After all, how could anything be accomplished to fucking abolish violence against women since the cock was fucking ultimately responsible for all violence against women, and here were all these fucking straight women right before her very eyes and they were all going to go home to their men and *suck cock!!!*" And the lesbian made a few more remarks in that genre.

Brownmiller was furious. She started toward the dyke in the tie, shouting that by God, she was straight and she wasn't going to *take* this kind of abuse. The lesbian with the tie started to laugh and then bent down and called *Brownmiller* a cocksucker. Susan had to be restrained.

Then some lesbians said that they felt that the lesbian at the podium was not adequately conveying their position. Some straight women said that obviously, we all needed some consciousness-raising. A lesbian agreed—"Yes, that's the spirit. Let's talk about women rather than men and cocks." I almost thought it was about time to get peaceful. But Susan Brownmiller rose a final time, pointed at the woman in the tie, and said triumphantly, "See, she even *dresses* like a man."

Which remark set off another trauma in the audience. *All* the lesbians, myself included, started hissing and hollering, "*Apologize! Apologize!*" Susan Brownmiller did, but you could tell she wasn't a bit sorry. The woman in the tie wasn't sorry for her behavior either, although during the rest of the shouting, she remained uncertainly on stage, like leftover mashed potatoes on a plate. And we might all still be shouting if we hadn't had to vacate the building.

FOR THE WOMAN IN THE TIE

*—to the Lesbian who called Susan Brownmiller a cocksucker
at the Conference for Women Against Pornography*

1

having tasted blood
felt it seep as people talk
seen it cake and smell
foul up weddings and christenings

sister, I am frightened for you

2

on a day
blue-eyed as a daughter
we gather

I am there, yes, I am there for history
and fear

shoulder to shoulder
the women murmur
double-exposed sound
of black and white, of old and young
familiar incantation

3

the talk continues
in the room we come and go

veiled women
breathing antiseptic
waiting for signs of health

lesbian charity sister
you overcome the microphone
to research evil

I am frightened

4

it's not pride
it's not bravery

it's not harmless entertainment

you follow orders
by the men who hate us
you are pornographic and obscene

as I listen to your talk
as I hear your willful laugh
I try to reason with brother/father

you use language ten years dead

I watch
you stretch your legs
an ache apart
while Susan Brownmiller springs to tell us
you dress like a man

the tie you bought
in the men's department of a village store
binds you tight
sure as any woman
strapped in a Times Square display

you photograph well

5

blinking at mutilation
oh, we are complacent
women
wearing the ties of men

6

I want to take your tie
unbutton your shirt
to look

having tasted blood
found it salty and thick
more satisfying than tomato juice

I could lick your wounds
I could like your wounds

some call this perversion

even as I cherish you
I cannot tell if I suck to heal or kill
both are natural

sister, I am frightened for you

scene i

sky still bright
 we weed, companionable.
 she on her side of the low wall
 me on mine
 “they leave their shells in the ground”
 she says, “see those holes? I don’t know
 why, they have to be dug up and
 thrown away.” she holds up
 a transparent thing,
 tissue pattern for an insect dress.
 her petunias, my corn, beans, squash and I
 nod amiably.

in the hills last night
 two more animals
 dismembered:
 rectum, lip, nostril, vagina
 split.
 bodies left bloodless
 on the unmarked grass.
 something out there.
 something unknown.
 I straighten, groaning
 wipe sweat from my eyes.
 mystic impulse all around
 slicing holes in air
 digging bad dreams
 in daylight.
 sun like a corpse over me.
 sky blooming deep.
 a shroud.

scene ii

unmannered.
 soft as night.
 air keening
 sky building.
 what manners these?
 fear lightly easing itself over
 back wall, through trees.
 starshine
 beginning at the edge.
 her dress moves with ease, eyes
 glitter, hair
 so soft in evening wind, she
 recalls summer nights,
 arms like branches singing, body
 sinking graceful into dusk
 comfort of lounge chair
 holds buttocks, back, pliant neck.
 she dreams of Pentecost, tongues
 of flame above her shining hair,
 longs for beatitude, so suited
 to this place.
 a manner of speaking touches her lips
 lightly, careful for her carelessness,
 words slip cautiously toward formation,
 birds settle in for the night, crying.
 daylight evaporates as she swirls
 her drink, sips cold with perfect ease
 against her teeth, rests against cushions
 soft as dissolving clouds
 overhead.
 trees by the back wall
 begin to stir
 ominous.
 sky goes dark.

what else do you remember

it was so long since we'd been together away from the apartment where she and John and I lived the two of them in their bedrooms and me in the living room an afterthought, a person to help with the rent Denise and John lovers and me jealous at least they didn't sleep together after they made love in the room next to mine Denise liked to sleep in her own bed, with lots of space at least I could wake her every morning by bringing coffee, sitting carefully on her bed and touching her hair soft brown on the pillow she'd roll over and grunt irritably tonight she had said let's go for a walk and I felt honored stoned but clearing, we headed toward the park

on her favorite green I tried to fall in with her "dramatic improv" do anything, she had told me act what you feel she stood in the center tall then paced in long powerful steps a dance and deep wordless music, her voice she acted for the trees, the grass, the sky and I spun on the edge of her circle like silly lace mixing short dry laughs with whispers I stumbled down the hill trying to drift with the air she misunderstood, called after me and followed are you all right cynical, I asked, aren't you supposed to react to the other actors, even in experimental theatre well, yes—so what do you mean never mind

we walked to a spreading knobbly blossoming tree and she stretched, then flopped down and we sat looking up at blossoms and stars I remembered that night years ago summer before college drunk in a cemetery but not drunk enough to excuse it Denise lay resting her head on my bare feet and I sat looking at stars each distinct in a clear black sky she touched my feet kissed my ankle and I stroked her hair her neck her cheek lightly afraid later we walked toward the gates of the cemetery and suddenly I fell to my knees giggling buried my face in the grass sweet green laughing

in the park, under the tree I lay leaning back on my elbows, watching she sat three feet away not looking at me I sang to myself and to her like the teasing half-finished phrases we gave each other sometimes at the apartment when we were high or feeling brazen flirting stepping out of our fear as clumsily as drunks shedding clothes before stumbling to bed and deep sleep then forgetting like drunks the morning after a "phase," she called it pulling up blades of grass, I sang "don't let the past remind us of what we are not now" surprised when she sung to answer "something inside is telling me that I've got your secret fear is the lock and laughter the key to your heart and I love you" she still looked away

restless, I stood up let's walk veering off the golf course we found a wooded strip high thick grass then a road, a long uphill curve

and later I had to answer, I don't know where officer was it near the ninth hole, he asked I don't know (too dark to see those little flags, I was thinking we stole one uprooted it and speared it into a tree yelling war cries like Amazons there might have been a 9 on the flag her favorite number and my

favorite color, yellow) just down the hill from that big oak tree officer, I said later when we tramped through the park to find The Scene Of The Crime and Denise said like a child remembering an outing yes this way because we were sitting under that Japanese tree we looked away but I caught the two detectives frowning at each other at the police station they asked, what were you doing in the park that late at night

I was singing bouyant pieces of some song and had just burst out laughing my arm around her waist when she said walk faster and I said, what? she nodded toward the woods heavy thrashing through the brush an animal a man in dark clothes thickset crouched STOP OR I'LL SHOOT

what did he look like, they asked he was big not tall but stocky and strong about how tall I don't know I can't judge too well was he taller than me, taller than Sergeant White I don't know maybe a little taller than you about 5' 11" then okay what else do you remember

I grabbed Denise's arm she still trying to stride past until he jumped down into the road STOP OR I'LL SHOOT YOU BOTH he pointed the gun HANDS ON YOUR HEADS PULL YOUR COATS UP OVER YOUR HEADS a hoarse horrible voice I turned away even before he said TURN AROUND I had wrestled my sweatshirt jacket up around my head couldn't see tried to stop gasping so I could hear him then he searched us little pats on my side my ass my legs GIT DOWN ON TH' GROUND I knelt then fell on my face down like he'd shot me already no sound from Denise I think she was still standing I sobbed for air dirt in my mouth gritting on my teeth I spread my hands not only to touch the earth maybe the last thing I'd ever touch but to show I had no weapon I held out my arms the coat bunched under my armpits it was crazy he knew I had nothing my coat pockets were so small and he'd already searched us I smelled earth crushing my face straight into the ground tried turning my head aside but I remembered I paid fifty dollars for these glasses I'm not going to break them for this but I might not need them anymore

I SAID LIE DOWN a sound beside me Denise

MOVE CLOSER TOGETHER oh no will he make us does he know

he kept telling us to move we crawled forward back I remembered t.v. murderers arranging bodies painstakingly like flowers in a vase what's it feel like to be shot in the back a pinprick pain spreading like the blood coming from it will I die instantly newspaper pictures shredded unrecognizable bodies face down little rivulets connecting to dark wet pools Denise's white jacket standing out it was new I said it was nice she said she liked it but it looked butch I said oh come on, a simple white jacket her body like so much garbage off the side of a road clumps of grass trampled down policemen's feet heavy and crude sounds of brush breaking next to our ears wouldn't hear someone taking pictures and chalking outlines of our separate imprints

I'd be beside her but she wouldn't know

you can do anything to me anything you want but please don't hurt her my breathing so loud chest hurts hush, he'll hurt you because he'll know you're afraid don't let an animal know you're afraid of it

what time is it they'll ask us what time when did we leave the apartment clock's face on the bookshelf in my mind is blank

where's John when will he come home it'll be late the apartment will be

empty when will he start to worry tomorrow next day will he miss us

what else do you remember what did he look like I didn't see his face he had something wrapped around his head and face a grey or brown tattered scarf his clothes were dark his posture was crouched from the shoulders he was black they looked at each other and nodded

did he have an afro no his hair was short did he wear a hat no just the scarf hm so you couldn't see any scars no tattoos no jewelry no facial hair no was he young or old about early thirties did he have an industrial smell like a millworker no I don't know did he smell like liquor (I hadn't thought of that) no I didn't notice (I didn't get that close) did he have any personal odor any body odor not that I remember can you remember anything else at all yes I remember he had big heavy boots

heavy boots do you mean like work boots I don't know (good god stop) I twisted around and my coat slipped down to my chin when I heard Denise yell: *I'm not going to stand for this it's not a real gun* I saw her lunge up trying to kick his groin a black shape rearing against black sky Denise trying to kick the gun away and he threw her down easily I heard her hitting the ground YOU BITCH he said YOU BITCH EVERYTHIN GOIN ALL RIGHT TILL YOU MESS THINGS UP YOU GIT DOWN ON THE GROUND I heard the thumps his boots slamming into her ribs her back Denise yelling then whimpering she rolled away crying her arm raised blindly trying to shield herself *stop it I won't move again please stop it* thudding slamming into her back

Denise stop it do what he wants

a high sharp cry hanging in the air before I realized it was mine he stood over her breathing heavily through his scarf faceless even then made her lie, bare back against gravel how bad is she hurt is it broken Denise whimpering he prodded my side with that boot YOU SLIDE UP THERE I crawled a few feet ALL RIGHT STOP NOW YOU GODDAM FUCKING WHORE NOW I TAKE CARE OF YOU DIRTY BITCH

can you describe his voice yes it was harsh and low he used bad grammar Denise said tiredly, he had the accent of an uneducated lower-class black man like a street accent what did he say he called Denise a bitch is that right, a bitch he wrote it down how many times did he say it, miss a couple of times how many times about four what else did he say it might help to identify him since we have so little identification he frowned at his papers I asked, a voice is identification? if we apprehend the suspect we can put him in a lineup and make him repeat the words really? my voice like an interested kid's I didn't think that was legal it's a method of identification, yes now what else did he say

he said stop or I'll shoot

okay now he looked at his form are either of you injured in any way (any signs of struggle is what he meant) officer I have this she turned her back lifted her jacket and shirt bleeding cuts and blue-black welts

Denise do what he wants her body jerking up and down as he pushed in sne crying how bad are you hurt I pressed my leg to her arm maybe the last time I'd touch her how did he rape you both couldn't one of you get away she crying and bumping against me Denise I'm here I would shoot the fucker the animal cut his balls off and let him bleed to death I touched

Denise's arm felt her shaking, then my trembling pressed my hands to the gravel and forced myself to stop so she wouldn't be more afraid then realized she was shaking from the cold or from anger WHAT YOU DOIN OUT HERE like a stubborn kid she said, just takin a walk he said TURN AROUND PUT YOUR HANDS UP he searched us YOU GOT ANY MONEY? Denise answered again, a little impatient I told you before we don't have any money YOU SHUT UP GETTIN SMART WITH ME BITCH she said I wasn't getting smart with you her voice exasperated now GIT YOUR HANDS OUT AND SHUT UP he searched us again, then YOU TWO BULLDAGGERS? oh god I haven't heard that word since junior high will he make us do something to get him off a silence no she said then that's okay Denise he doesn't have to know she thought he said do you two pull daggers, she said later pronouncing it crisply with confusion on her face and he'd just searched us I thought he was afraid of us pulling a knife out of our coat pockets no I said that's slang for bullydyes

what exactly did he do he made me lie down he took off my pants he wrote it down on a form (I am going to be sick I can't speak) what else did he do I remembered he ran his hands down my hairy legs he looked and grunted with surprise made me hold my legs up so he could get in deeper I wouldn't wrap my legs around his I held them up in the air my shoes and little kid's white bobby socks sticking up in the air ludicrous Denise lying face down where he could see he stopped, pulled the jacket over my face pushed the gun against the coat a bulge in my mouth as I gasped

that's his gun don't move it might go off it can't kill me if he shoots through my mouth there's no brains behind my mouth I just won't be able to swallow or talk anymore a hole in my coat and the back of my head gone but I won't die he pushed in and I grimaced cool air on my lips the coat had slipped he stopped to cover my face did he see my braces did that hurt him

he stopped moved away PUT YOUR PANTS ON I stood, felt on the ground for my pants the coat still bunched up at my neck can't find my underpants never mind hurry put the pants on belt twisted can't buckle it hard to move in this coat my arms out so he can see how I'm moving

GIT BACK DOWN ON THE GROUND I lay beside Denise she had dressed too his boots scraped gravel as he walked to me, then a soft kick in my side YOU. YOU NUMBER ONE what? didn't he rape Denise first? he walked to her, kicked her ribs hard she writhed and cried out YOU NUMBER TWO is this a game will he give us directions by number and shoot us if we don't get it right I repeated to myself number one, number one stretched my index finger out like I used to in gym class when we counted off to pick teams and out goes y-o-u

NUMBER ONE STAND UP I stood with my coat still over my head
NUMBER TWO STAND TURN TO YOUR LEFT GIT WALKIN

Denise led me away I asked *is he gone* she answered flatly yeah I burrowed out of the coat, grasped her arm and sucked in air *are you all right* yeah aw fuck she said, disgusted then mock gaiety well life in the big city raped in the park you know I answered, I knew you'd say that my breath came in shaky sobs feet dragging through the grass Denise striding and shaking her head with pursed lips and a murderous frown sparkling ice-blue eyes

then laughing incredulously, aw *fuck* we were far enough away and I reached to hug her arms circling barely touching how bad are you hurt I'm okay aw fuck

we walked through the park to Forbes Ave saw the lighted sign of a pizza place Denise said, my mouth is dry let's stop in there for something to drink she reached for her back pocket and stopped mid-stride I lost my wallet he might have it did you have money in it, I asked no, my i.d., she said, irritated that I didn't understand if he has my name he can find me in the phone book he'll find our address and that apartment's simple to break into I turned cold as she looked at me her white jacket reflected the street-light aw, shit she walked ahead again shit well, all we can do is wait maybe he didn't find it if we tell the police maybe they can keep an eye on the apartment, I said Denise looked at me, frowning you want to go through all that red tape? no, we won't report it unless we have to, she said

wonder what time it is, I said as we walked to the pizza shop door feels like it went on for hours look at your coat, all dirty and grass-stained she frowned, looking down then started to push the door open wait, there's a leaf in your hair, I said, brushing it out smoothing back her hair, we went in, came out with two cokes did you see those guys? she said smiling they were looking at us like we'd been in the park at night together . . . my eyebrows raised, I answered, well we *were* the one night in ages I was hetero ya can't please em she shook her head, smiling, *jan*

walking back to the apartment we passed a police van the driver's eyes followed us we turned down a side street sat on a curb under a tree because our legs were suddenly shaking we giggled like two schoolgirls, deciding who to tell Denise said I know I'll tell John I tell him everything I don't think I'll tell anyone else

back at the apartment we found John still awake he teased, where were *you*? his forefinger wagging: naughty, naughty we came into his room he saw our faces in the light and his voice softened what happened? I was worried Denise told him about the rape, the beating, the gun her anger cooled to a weary, matter-of-fact tone she sat on the bed winced and carefully touched her back John said eagerly, I have something to tell you too this was such a weird night the moon was out a full moon and I had a premonition that something would happen I had a weird night myself I just got back from Cris' party but anyway the phone rings and it's this guy Denise and I look at each other did he have a real hoarse voice? she asked yeah John imitated the voice, grinning a hunchback his hands became claws on an imaginary telephone he growled IS DENISE WEBER THERE? what time was this? Denise asked about one o'clock nobody calls at one in the morning and asks for me by first and last name it must have been him

we decided to go to the police I realized I'd wanted to remembering the numbers of reported rapes estimated rapes never knowing just how many how that galled me I wanted to be two numbers closer to the truth but I wouldn't have gone if Denise hadn't wanted to

John walked with us to the police station Denise and I on either side of him each holding his hand like two children out for a walk we went ahead of him through the doorway into a large bare room and up to a high wooden desk Denise and I had to stretch our necks to put our chins level with the

counter-top I remembered being shorter than the counters when my mother took me to Murphy's I knew I had to be assertive, be adult three policemen sat behind the desk like judges I felt like a criminal

Denise and I were silent can we help you ladies? and finally she spoke officer, we've just been raped how long ago? about an hour and what are your names?

they asked John for his name and what is your relationship to these young ladies? Denise answered, he's our roommate hm. and where did you say this rape took place? I thought, well, it's all a formality from here on

the police made John wait on a wooden bench across the room while they questioned us Denise told them about the wallet she said, he knows where we live could you please have a patrol car somewhere nearby just for the next couple of nights he might try to break in he's already called at the apartment sure honey we have a car stationed on that beat, he said, looking at his forms, pencilling a number at the top but could they keep a special watch will they be around there often sure honey we'll take care of it

well, we'd better get these girls to the hospital check them out walking us toward the door, they shot John a look at the last minute do you want to come too? he stood up quickly, smiling excited as a puppy rode in the back seat with us to the hospital

in the emergency room the police gave us coffee they apologized laughing about the paper cups marked for urine samples eight ounces of urine coffee is a diuretic don't pay any attention to the cups honey now we hate to ask you this but uh well do you have any uh protection are you taking any contraceptives Denise said yes quietly like a schoolgirl with the right answer

and you miss? no oh well that complicates things well don't worry we'll ask the nurse for something he walked to the hospital desk swinging one leg out in a strut the holster banging on his hip he talked to the nurse almost whispered she turned back to a medicine cabinet the policeman kidded her you workin the late shift tonight Rose? you look pretty good for three in the morning uh-oh you know it's snowing down south she looked over her shoulder at the hem of her uniform the half-inch of slip beneath oh you be quiet where's Bob tonight? he's out on another case

later the nurse gave me a large bottle, saying now you take these five times a day for five days try to take them with meals so you don't get nauseated I turned the amber bottle filled with large white tablets now you call us dear if you have any problems

they called me to be examined before Denise she's hurt she needs help it's all right dear we'll take care of your friend on the table I spread my hands on the clean taut sheet the nurse had said take your pants and underwear off put this robe on you can leave your shoes on dear my feet sticking up in the stirrups absurd clunky shoes, bobby socks and hairy legs the nurse cleared her throat and looked away a man parted the curtains, came in and pulled them shut quickly hello my name is Dr. Harman he nodded to the nurse she said this will be a little cold dear she rested her hand lightly on my shoulder the papery white gown the doctor pushed the gown up pushed in the speculum what are you doing? my voice like a curious child's the nurse answered we're just taking samples of his semen dear acid churned up to my throat the doc-

tor silent took out the speculum his hand in a plastic glove shoved a finger in my vagina pressed my stomach with the other hand what are you doing now? we're checking your cervix dear I tried to relax so it would hurt less I couldn't stop the muscles from clenching could only make my mouth hang open, slack remembered the gun pressed my hands against the sheet the nurse smoothed my gown Denise how bad are you hurt

he took his hand out and turned away then came at me bending his scissors pointed at my crotch long, thin glittering steel *what are you doing?* I pushed myself up the nurse caught my shoulder and settled me back don't be afraid dear we're only taking samples I'm not afraid I just wanted to know what you're doing samples of what? of your hair dear in case we find him there might be traces on him for evidence (traces, such a nice word traces of me on that animal his scum in me in Denise) a metallic snip and he gave the scissors to the nurse turned away, stripped the loves off while she said now we'll take some from your head honey don't worry I'll try to take it where you won't notice that's all right I don't care you're a brave girl there now we'll put these in an envelope and send it to the lab you can get dressed now dear they left the room (Denise are you all right)

at the police station the officer's pencil had paused above the form did he ask you to do anything for him? Denise and I looked at each other

did he at any time ask you to uh touch him *no* did you touch him at any time

NO

well take my word girls you're lucky, he said looking up we've had some cases where these fellas have made them do all kinds of things with him, with each other and they didn't walk away from it he stared at us is there anything else at all that you can remember

no

well all right that about wraps it up now let's go over your story once again

AFTER NEWS OF A RAPE/MUTILATION

Twinges in my shoulder joints
all day. Awareness of arms

as of something added, something
that could be removed. Arms,

four of them, as I lie beside
my lover, our various arms

wedged between us, or entwined
cocooning us.

I dream of driving the back roads
of Modesto with a knife

wondering, when we find him,
where to start

FOR VENUS DEMILO

What is my sister's name?
who wandered armless through the city
raped and dismembered by a
gin-stained night?

What is her name?

Maria?

Ayesha?

Reiko?

What is the name of my sister?

We read her slavename on breast-heavy billboards:

Lupe's tits shoot Tequila Sauze.

Fly me to Hong Kong on Lu Chin's neck.

Put your hands on some black velvet, baby.

The whore bends over for her pimp.

What is her name?

Maria?

Ayesha?

Reiko?

Charlene can be bought on Capitol Hill,
screwed and paid for with her own tax dollar.

Cheaper by the dozen, wrapped in black leather,
centerfold for the military budget
in Viet Nam and South Africa.

What is my sister's name?

Maria?

Ayesha?

Reiko?

What's her name?

What's her name danced through the 10 o'clock news
to exhibit her strength—the Art of Living Armless,
Venus DeMilo
Victim of the gin-stained night!

What's her name?

Maria.

Ayesha.

Reiko.

Como se llama, hermana?

Josefina, my Columbian cutie

crucified for cinco dineros
on the backdrop of an imported

genuine

American

Snuff-porn film.

Mi hermana!

Como se llama?

Maria!

Ayesha!

Reiko!

We know your names, you sons of Mothers

Rippers

Rapers

Uterus-eaters

my armless sisters' butchers.

You shall know our names!

They ring through the streets

calling out to our sisters:

Tear down the billboards!

Rewrite our Herstory

Wage relentless war against

Chick porn

and

Snuff porn

and

Soft porn

for

Maria+

Ayesha+

Reiko+

Scream out your name, sister.

Helen.

Luisa.

Margaret.

Sue Yin.

Make this pledge for your name's sake:

Woman will walk tall!

Woman will fight back!

Woman will not fear

the

gin-

stained

night!

A Rainbow of Arms

strong and slender

Will embrace you—

Will protect you—

Will defend you—

And your name shall be

DIANA

Unconquered Queen of the Night.

OBJECTIVITY, SHE SAID

"Huey Newton is on trial for the murder of a 17-year-old black prostitute," said KCBS Radio News.

The phone woke me this morning. Charlene. "Did you hear about the rape by the Campanile?" she asked.

I did not need this before 9 o'clock in the morning.

"It was still daylight," Charlene said. "She was walking alone. He grabbed her can of Halt and sprayed it in her eyes. Then he shoved her in a van, one of those ugly modern ones with a thick carpet."

What the carpet had to do with the story, I did not know, but I was glad Charlene told me. I would watch out for carpeted vans more than I did already.

"He made her suck him off," Charlene said, "raped her repeatedly and then. . ."

Did he kill her? I needed to know. I did not want her to be dead.

"She made it back to campus by 9 P.M. to tell the police."

Just yesterday after class I almost went up the Campanile terrace to sit in the late sun. I was tired from teaching for three hours. And I was nostalgic. In another age, when I was a student, I used to neck with my fiancee by the Campanile. But yesterday I felt too tired for reliving memories. So I went home. Home to my apartment where I locked the doors securely.

"And the day before yesterday," Charlene was still talking.

"Oh, yes," I said, because it's not as though I could go back to sleep after hearing such a story.

"There was another rape," she said, "up by International House."

I wonder about the late 1930s in Europe, about whether the Jews phoned each other like this. Did they wake each other with clipped, dark warnings? Did they tell each other to get away?

"Huey Newton is on trial for the murder of an Oakland prostitute," said KRON evening news.

But how do we get away?

I was jogging at a park near my house. Ho Chi Minh Park, we named it in the '60s before we learned how long the revolution might take.

"Hot stuff," called the leering man who looked like a used teenager under his long, blond hair.

"Hot stuff," he murmured before taking another swig from the sherry bottle. Sherry at 8 A.M. Sherry in this neighborhood park next to the junior high school which had seemed like a safe place to jog.

"Hot stuff," he said, despite the fact that I was wearing baggy pants and a sweatshirt.

I tried to ignore him.

"Get her Rover," he said to his big dog. "Sic her."

His Boxer loped toward me. And I remembered another oversized Boxer

dog who masturbated himself against me when I was a fifth grader at Sacred Heart School. So I jogged on home and locked the doors securely.

“Oakland prostitute,” said KNBR. “Black prostitute,” said KGO. Usually they left out the 17-year-old part. The lawyers were having trouble finding a jury.

Tonight I visited my friend Jana who is a tough cookie. She lives in a “bad neighborhood” because she is poor.

“I don’t mind having bars on the windows,” she said, “don’t notice them anymore. But this door bothers me. You can’t get in or out without a key. The fire department would slap a fine on me in two minutes flat. But they can’t get in here either.”

“Huey Newton is on trial for the shooting of a prostitute...” a student read the newspaper article aloud.

“Objectivity,” I asked my class. “How is the notion of objectivity in today’s media related to the 19th-century concept of logical positivism?”

“It was still daylight,” Charlene said. “She was walking alone.”

I told my mother I went to a pornography conference.

My mother stiffened. She already disagrees with 85% of my life. She said coolly, “I don’t like pornography.”

“Neither do I,” I said, marvelling that for the first time in twenty years we agreed on something.

“I think pornography causes rape,” my mother said flatly.

I considered the fact that she works in an all-night coffee shop where she sees both porn and violence.

“I’m *sure* it causes rape,” I answered. But I didn’t bother to present the sociological research proving the correlation between pornography and assault. Some women do not need statistical evidence.

“Huey Newton faces his second trial for the shooting of an Oakland prostitute,” said the man on the tube. “The first trial ended in a hung jury.”

I watched the television series on Marie Curie. It was inspirational to watch her perseverance, to see her working in her laboratory until very, very late at night.

(This reminded me of the rush of dedication, fascination and hope I used to feel when I stayed at the library until 3 A.M. studying. Then one night a policeman caught me leaving the library.

“How are you getting home?” he demanded.

“Walking,” I said.

“You looking to get raped?” he asked.

“No,” I answered briskly, “just looking to pass my class.”

I was angry. He was admonishing me. Accusing me. But the powers of my patriarchal logic acknowledged that he was right. No more necking by the Campanile. No more walking home alone at night.

And now 13 years after as a teacher on the same campus, I know when to leave my office. I go home at dark. I smile at the policeman now. I am a good girl.)

If Madame Curie returned to the Sorbonne today, some conditions would be better for women. Some conditions would be much worse.

A woman was found dead in the trunk of her car. A 72-year-old woman. The first murder since the town was incorporated in 1971. Who? Where? I asked my class. The facts, I said, put all the facts in the lead.

My class was discussing the mass magazine market.

"Six out of ten of the best-selling newsstand monthlies are men's entertainment magazines," said one student. She showed a *Penthouse* cartoon where a rape victim is calling, "Encore."

Several men in the class giggled.

A woman got angry. "That cartoon implies that women *like* getting raped," she said.

"Well," said one man in all seriousness, "Don't *some* of them enjoy it?"

He felt the wrath of seventeen women, few of them self-declared feminists.

"But," he said. His voice was lower then and he was still serious, "don't *some* of them enjoy it *sometimes*?"

The Fremont rapist has raped forty women, but luckily, according to Jim Avila, East Bay Bureau Chief of KPIX, "no one has been injured."

I went to London to work during the summer. I was staying with friends in a house on Gloucester Drive.

"Gloucester Drive," said the taxi driver, raising his eyebrows and then driving on because cabbies, like priests, have heard a lot of stories.

Gloucester Drive, my friends had written to prepare me for the raised eyebrows, is a red light district. Not a proper red light district with madames and limosines, just a working class neighborhood in Hackney where women on the dole turn a few tricks to keep their kids fed.

Gloucester Drive, I learned, was a tricky street to cross. You had to *look out* for *cars*, but you could not *look at* the *drivers* or they would stop. Gloucester Drive was always crawling with businessmen on their lunch breaks.

It took me a week of practice before I got across the street safely, without having one of the prowlers stop.

Worse things might happen, of course. I learned this during my fifth week there. Walking home alone, I sensed a man following me. I moved out on the street and he hugged my heels. I turned around and shouted at him to go away. He just stood there. I walked faster. So did he. Then I ran, flinging open our gate, rushing up the steps and ringing the bell as I fumbled for the keys. He just hung on the gate, watching. Esther opened the door and as we walked into the hallway, I breathlessly told her my story.

"Happens all the time," she said, handing me a glass of burgundy.

We walked into the dining room where a group of women were sitting around a table, drinking and laughing. And I wondered if we were all fools.

"Huey Newton has been acquitted of the murder of the seventeen-year-old black Oakland prostitute."

Good thing too, Newton later told reporters. He was in his penthouse writing a religious tract during the stoning, rather shooting of the prostitute.

IN WICHITA, KANSAS, IN LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

Tonight, when I pull back the drapes,
there is a man crouched
beneath my bedroom window.

I see his white shirt glow
like a dwarfed reflection of the moon
or a hard patch of snow
that will not melt.

He is clever and does not move.

Only his breathing
gives him away.

This man has crouched
below windows for centuries,
and more times than not,
has entered through them,
unasked, uninvited into the lives
of women.

He is young, he is old, he is the man
at the newspaper stand, the former student,
the pastor of the corner church.

He brings only blood and death.

He goes through women

the way some people go through clothes,
the way others, bored with the latest pets,
cast them out.

He kills with the ease of a man
signing his name.

His voice is the strange clicking we hear
that wakes us from our dreams.

His dreams are our worst fears.

The man curses at me through the screen.

I move for the phone, call the police.

The man disappears into the cedars back of my house.

The police are three blocks away.

It takes them twenty minutes to arrive.

They ask my name, address, phone number, date of birth.

The man has crossed five streets

by now. Headed east,
his shoes leave wet stains
on the walk.

They ask where I am employed, need the number
of my business phone.

The man's white shirt moves
like a light along the boards
of a brown house.

Finally, I take them to the spot
where his body hunkered against the bricks.

The officer says there are always cranks around,
that I should lock my windows, go back to bed.

The fingers of the man's right hand
probe for the latch on the low screen.

This time his left hand unsheathes a knife.

—Anita Skeen

KILLERS

The freckle-faced boys,
all snips and snails and puppy dogs' tails. . .
the freckle-faced boys learn to whistle young.
They will be whistling all their lives.

They wait for me around every corner
conjuring dark mushroom clouds with their eyes.

Their wolf whistles are little darts
piercing apples over my head, warning me
they have good aim.

Their whistles ride up my thighs, ride up
the thighs of the world.

Boys will be boys.

They whistle while they work,
wrapping my dreams in barbed wire
and selling them back for a profit.
They whistle all the way to the bank.

In the silence before the bomb hits,
there comes a high, thin, descending whistle.

Boys throwing spit-balls
imitate that sound.

They are the killers of the world.
They learn to whistle young.

Listen. . .

—Pamela McAllister

THE SLAUGHTER HOUSE

This poem is part of a book which we will read. . .because we have to understand how we let them get this far before we said no before we woke up in the same instant as the blow meant to stun us fell. . .the stunning realization that if we do nothing else we can say **NO** that we must. . .at least do that.

The cow, the gentle stupid mother of many went to the slaughter house the long way more and more alarmed by the ramp, the boxcar, the jolting Then the yards. . .chaos and noise, stifling dust rushing at the last, as if toward freedom! It was the stunning blow and being strung up that made her say no. . . But the blow didn't quite stun her.

She said **NO** again, hanging by her hind ankles She struggled, knew what was happening Another man in rubber pants came over with his sledgehammer to help. . .another blow. . .and walked away and came back for another and still she said **NO** even tho it was too late and then she was almost quiet. A last great shudder of bone and hide and then she was still and didn't move again.

Watching, I didn't cry or cry out. . .I never averted my eyes Perhaps I knew I was getting a lesson which I must not refuse But I stowed it away in a secret store and turned the key.

I saw this and other things which horrified me at the time

I saw this and other things which horrified me more at the time at **SWIFT**, years ago. . .seen from behind glass and several feet below this huge cow was dollied in with the others. . .one of those marvels of the dairy industry. . .black and white. . .with a huge bag that gives the most milk on record day after day year upon year and among the slow herds of the region embellishes the scenery where she grazes.

So. . .she was beautiful even hanging upside down. . .and she said **NO** and she said No and then she couldn't say it anymore. Between them, the two guys must have given her 4 blows on the head. The others were finished with one.

In neighborhoods near the meat industry in Chicago
when the wind is right. . .people smell something
and hear something. It is animal. . .
hide dust poop blood all mixed together
to make a huge smell/thing. . .and they hear a chord so vast
not loud, really, from the cattle steers sheep pigs
waiting in the yards.

They even see something. . . a warm colored haze
lifting over a wide area then mixing with
and dissolving into the blue Chicago welkin.
Chicago has a sky not merely blue. . . it is all different hues:
cobalt ultramarine cerulean and has
a depth you can go into, almost inky.
All blues vie for the eye of the admirer. . . draw her into
its inky depth where it holes into the universe. . . (is why
I call it a welkin). Anyway
some of the best steak houses are right there in the middle
of things and men come and eat hearty for good money
with the best napery tucked over their big fronts.

I would not eat with them. (But I *did*. . . I'd forgotten it!
I *did* eat there, with that guy who'd already begun doing it to me
and making me think I liked it.
Thank goodness he found better
chops than me to fry, soon after.)

We have to lay it out like a map
the long way to the slaughter house. . . with X marking the places
to say NO

(The cows will lie down in the grass where it's comfy
and won't get up.)

Will they?

(Hoho, *this* metaphor requires a cow
who can burst an ancient barrier in the brain
so as to *think*.)

And all the cows will have to do this at the same time!

—Jane Gapen

A SPIRIT CRUSHED, A SPIRIT HEALED

It was a cold brisk late afternoon in February, 1978. Not one of those afternoons that would make one scurry home from work and hide under the electric blanket. No, there was a kind of energy about the day. It had motivated me to get going, to get things done. My reports were finished, my lesson plans were shaping up, and my desk even looked fairly presentable. Now, after a productive Wednesday, I still had enough energy to look forward to my second guitar class.

As I left the rehab center, I shrugged off the idea of taking a bus as I had the first time and decided to walk. The first half mile was an easy familiar route. I walked along briskly and let my mind wander where it would. But after leaving the familiar area, my mind began to ask a few small nagging questions. "These streets are numbered, but how do you know that one of the numbers hasn't been left out of the sequence? Suppose some little side streets have been thrown in between the numbered streets? How can you determine the number of blocks you still have to walk?" I decided to continue walking and to ask the next person who came along for a few directions.

As it turned out, the next person who came along asked me if I needed directions, so I immediately explained where I was having difficulty. "Gee," he said a little hesitantly, "now that you mention it, I'm not sure about the sequence of the streets around here either. But I can walk with you, and I'll find out the street signs along the way." I took his arm, and we walked together for about two blocks as he pointed out landmarks and tried to locate street signs. Suddenly, he made a sharp turn, and I felt walls closing in. "Hey," I said, feeling the panic rise inside me, "this is a garage." "It sure is!" he replied, releasing my hold and roughly drawing me toward him. I could only utter a monosyllable and that came out in a scream: "No!"

The next few minutes were a blurred succession of blows, screams, and threats such as, "Be quiet or I'll hurt you," "don't let me hurt you." Somehow, through all the commotion, a persistent message kept getting through to me. "You can't get him by force, so gross him out." I was menstruating at the time, so I let him get plenty of blood all over himself. The horror ended as quickly as it had begun, and in an instant he was gone.

Stunned, I stood in the middle of the garage thankful to be alive and not injured too badly. But what next? I wondered. Should I leave? I think I'm about a block away from my guitar class, but should I go? Maybe I should go home. To the police station. To the doctor. Is he hanging around out there? Where is my cane? Where is my guitar? Well, forget the guitar, but *where is my cane? I need it!*

I began carefully exploring the garage. The sound of a car heading purposefully in my direction caught my attention. It was going to be the end of me now. He had come back with his car.

The car pulled into the garage and a woman got out. "Are you all right?"

she asked. "No. I've been attacked." There was nothing more either of us could say. I moved toward her and we embraced. By that time I had located my cane, but I was sure my guitar had been taken. She discovered it, however, sitting neatly in a corner as it had been put there with the utmost care. "Maybe the jerk had one redeeming quality," she said as we got into the car, "maybe he liked music."

The time at the police station was spent answering and reanswering questions as accurately and succinctly as I possibly could. The policemen tried as best they could to show tact in the way they phrased the question. But what, they queried, had a "blind girl" like me been doing out alone? At six o'clock in the evening? Were they serious? What was I supposed to do, live in a vacuum all of my life?

I was asked to report to Hennepin County Medical Center for a thorough medical examination and a special test. My companion and I waited there forty-five minutes before I was finally ushered into an examining room. During the long wait, I found that she was a tough no-nonsense insurance agent who hailed from New York, loved classical music, and who treated me like the intelligent person I was. The only concern she showed was that which she would have offered any woman in the same situation.

Fortunately, most of the examinations and special tests were carried out by a nurse practitioner who was unhurried, sensitive, and who was absolutely furious with the rapist. I appreciated her empathy, but at the same time, I asked myself how she could work there every night facing the reality of women in such pain and raging against the men who had caused it.

After she was through with all of the tests which might have offered some clue to my assailant's identity, a doctor stepped in to confirm everything. Seemingly bored with the whole routine, he probed me with a few cold instruments, and promptly left the room.

Back in my apartment in the privacy of my own bedroom, the silence of my surroundings and the loudness of my thoughts became unbearable. I thought of going into the next room and awakening my apartment-mate. I checked myself in time. She would, I surmised, simply tell me that I was over-reacting and that I should promptly put the whole matter out of my mind. (When I told her about the whole thing later, that's exactly what happened.)

Instead, I dialed the number of a young couple, friends of long standing with whom I had spent countless hours talking, listening, going places, and doing any number of things that good friends do together. I asked them to get me out of the dreadful silence of my apartment and to let me spend the night with them. During the night, they could only give me what countless other friends and relatives must offer with the best intentions to loved ones who have been raped—a cup of tea, a hot bath, and advice to forget the whole thing.

It was difficult enough to conduct regular classes the next day constantly fighting the turmoil in my mind. But, to make matters worse, I was called out of class twice to confirm the police reports. And, once, to converse with a newspaper reporter who had talked with the police and who wanted a good story. It was unnerving to stand in the reception area, to talk into the telephone to these men, and to try to answer their questions, yet trying to keep my statements vague enough so that eavesdroppers could not grasp what had

happened.

The story which came out in the newspapers that evening was a pathetic account of a "blind girl" who had had the courage to venture out somewhere by herself, had gotten lost, and then had gotten raped by someone who pretended to help her. According to the story, she had told reporters that she would need "a whole lot of counselling" and that she would be afraid from now on to leave her home alone. Where had they gotten all of that? Certainly not from the telephone interview with me. I could see that letting reporters write my story had been a terrible mistake. What I hoped to convey by letting the story get printed was that women still get raped in this fair city of Minneapolis when they are just carrying out everyday functions, when they are just trying to live their own lives.

When I arrived at work on Friday morning, I began overhearing my colleagues' reactions to the newspaper article. Naturally they were curious about who had been the rape victim. "Well, whoever it was," a blind female colleague said rather complacently, "the dumb girl shouldn't have been out alone." For a long time that one remark became a representation of what most of the people at the Minneapolis Society for the Blind must be thinking, that somehow the whole incident was a result of a blind woman overstepping her bounds.

That evening, I took an acquaintance of mine out to dinner, a gesture that I hoped would bring a sense of normalcy back into my life. Then we whisked ourselves off to a friend's tupperware party, very normal indeed. During the party, the telephone rang. My friend returned a short time later howling with laughter. "Chris, get this," she said. "A friend of ours just called and said he's read the article in the paper. He was afraid the person might have been you. Now is that paranoid or what?" "Yeah, I guess that's paranoid," I replied, and quickly addressed an unrelated comment to another guest. After the guests had left, I felt a need to tell my friend and my acquaintance the whole story. Aling with that came a whole barrage of guilt feelings about my past, and conflicting feelings of dependence and independence. My acquaintance spoke up suddenly. "Chris, what can we do for you right now?" Before I could change my mind I said, "I wish someone could hold me." The things this woman did for me were simple: she held me, she listened quietly, she shared her own experience with rape, and she wandered with me step by step through a maze of feelings. Somehow, I felt that she had been able to reach inside me and deftly untangle this web before it had time to curl itself into a hard unrelenting little knot. To me, February, 1980 will signify the two-year anniversary of the assault. Since that time, I have participated with a group who have provided free counselling for me while I, in turn, filled out questionnaires, voluntarily supplying them with information about the healing process which was taking place over the months following the rape. I had been informed that I could drop the research program at any time and still receive free counselling. Even though the task of frequently filling out questionnaires was an arduous and painful task at times, I'm glad I stuck with it. I felt that it was essential that more research about women working through this crisis be made available to professional people as well as to the general public.

In August, 1979, I had an opportunity to release a great deal of anger in a constructive way. A group calling themselves "Women Against Violence Against Women" organized a march to protest rape, incest, battering, and other crimes

against women. Six blind women participated in this "Take Back the Night March," and half of us wore sashes which stated: "I survived a rape." Gradually, I have been sharing my story with more and more people. One by one, I talked to several colleagues at work, and they proved to be very supportive. Eventually, I got up enough nerve to tell my family. I expected parental protective remarks like: "Well dear you should have been more careful" but, for a change there were none. I admitted to my mother later that I had been surprised that she had not asked me to return home to Thief River Falls immediately. "Why should I do that," she asked rather incredulously, "when sitting at home would make you even more miserable?" Yea Mother!

At the AAWB convention in St. Paul, in October, 1979, I volunteered to be a facilitator for a workshop on sexual assault. I have also stumbled upon opportunities to help other women through their feelings about rape. I hope I have been able to help them as much as my new-found friend helped me on a long February night two years ago. As I think of the women I have met who have gone through the experience I have, I think of a song recently released by the women's jazz group Alive!. The song depicts women suffering because things happen to them which seem to be beyond their control. The song gives an admonition to me: "You are the spirit healer."

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lady-unique-inclination-of-the-night

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A STORY FOR FREUD

I

He is no match for you. It is 1951 and he is not even five years old. He is about to get a whipping. You do not like to watch. Your father is too big and clumsy when he whips. He looks angry. You hate it when he whips you. You hate him and the stupid movements involved. It hurts besides. Usually you are the one who gets the whipping. Today it was your brother's fault and he is going to get the whipping. Don't, you think of saying. Whip me instead. He's too little. It's awful. Whip me. Your father is unmoved. For once your brother is to blame. He is going to get the whipping.

It is outside. You usually get it indoors, in your own bedroom. You don't know why.

Pull down your pants, he says. Why? you say. Don't ask questions, just do it. It is with a belt. Your father's army belt. It is heavy woven cotton with a metal tip which is like gold. You are told it is brass. The buckle slides and rattles, it is gold too.

Outside the yard is long and green, rough in patches all along one side of the yard. In the middle it is broken by grape arbors. Big, dusty grapes, with round seeds and pale grey insides. Your father positions himself between the fence and the grape arbor behind the garage. The chinaberry tree is within running distance, just a few yards. Why outside? That's where it happened. His disobedience. You try to shield him with your eyes. It's no good. Your father is determined to punish your little brother. Billy's mouth is open. He cannot believe it. His father is going to punish him, outside, in the middle of the yard, almost under the chinaberry tree.

There is a slight rise in the ground here, like a stage in the grass. It is a platform. Your father is standing in the middle of it with your brother's hand in his. He slides his hand along until he is holding Billy by the arm. The sky is behind them and the chickenyard where there are three geese waddling and stopping to look. They hear something. It is your father speaking loudly to say what the whipping is about. Billy can't believe it. His father is going to whip him. You can't believe it either. It is never his fault. Your mother has come out to look. We don't like it. We don't want to see Billy whipped here in the middle of the yard. We stand on the edge of the platform. We move forward when my father speaks and back again when he turns and says why he is doing it. He is very angry. He likes being right. My brother has been wrong.

It is my fault. It is usually my fault, even though I say it isn't. My brother is only little. I tell my father it wasn't his fault. Usually that is what he thinks. He doesn't believe me. He doesn't believe me when it isn't my fault. But I'm used to the whippings, Billy isn't. Please, no, I say, hating to have to speak to my father this way, but it isn't for me. It's for my brother.

My mother is silent. She spoke once, to say my father's name. She calls to

him that way. He is not listening. He has started this thing and won't stop.

Your father loves you very much your mother says. Oh sure you say. Sometimes you think he does. Right now you are furious at him. You can do nothing. He has begun to whip your little brother.

You look at your mother. She is watching your little brother get a whipping. It is not too bad after all. Your father is ashamed of himself but he must finish what he has started. He hits harder just before he stops. Billy is crying the way little children do. His eyes are full of water which spills out all around the edges of his eyes which have gotten very big. He breathes in and out of his open mouth. His whole face is open and crying. It hurts me very much to see him this way. It is worse than when I get the whipping. My father looks at me as if I will understand. I will not look at him.

My mother is forbidden from comforting my brother, and so she touches his back once, puts a hand at the back of his head where his hair is all shaved off and goes back to the kitchen. My father is left alone in the middle of the grass. He looks at the ground where he and my brother had gone around in a circle, and scrapes it with his foot. It looks the same as it did before. We were going to have a picnic today. I don't want it anymore. I don't want to eat with my father out in this backyard. I walk around to the front and look at my mother through the kitchen window. She.

What happens with the whippings. Your father gets his belt out of the top drawer in his bedroom chest of drawers. Sometimes your mother says, your father has gone to get his belt. You cannot run away. You have to stand still because he is your father. You are only a child. You cannot disobey. That is what got you into trouble to start with. You are disobedient. A child mustn't talk back to its parents. You talk back. You do not honor your parents. You do give your seat to ladies on the bus. Sometimes you even have to stop and think, is she old enough for me to give her my seat. Only one of these ladies has ever refused to take the seat you offer. But you mustn't talk back to your parents. You are only a little girl. You must listen and not fly back in their faces. Your mother tries to spank you sometimes. You make her laugh. She only uses a hairbrush. She cannot do it. You dissolve in laughter together, you and your mother. If she is serious she says, I am going to tell your father when he gets home. Later she may say, he has gone to get his belt.

You stand and it is almost unbearable. Your legs want to run away, they, almost, won't stand still with you waiting for your father who has gone to get his belt. You cannot believe your mother does this, but she has before and she has just done it now.

You can't believe you wait because they have told you to, but you do. He comes. He has his belt. He takes you into the bedroom. On your own bed. He wants you to lean over with your pants down. I AM ALMOST ELEVEN YEARS OLD you want to say. Don't cry, he says, striking you. You cry.

He's crazy, you think. You don't know whether you are more angry than hurting. It does hurt. Of course you are going to cry. He wants you to know that little girls are not supposed to talk back to their parents. You are a little girl. Don't cry, he says.

You cry furiously.

Your father is upset. He is usually upset when he is whipping you. His face gets red and he looks angry. He looks sad, too, but he is determined. You feel

sorry for him because he doesn't understand what he is doing. Your father loves you very much, your mother says. He whips you very hard. You are only a little girl and he shouldn't use a belt like that. Your behind is sticking up in the air. You try to keep it down. It embarrasses you to have your father standing behind you with your behind naked. Your mother goes away and doesn't listen to what is going on. You tell her. I am almost eleven years old. I know, she says. I'm sorry, she says sometimes.

You are thirteen when you get your last whipping. You say, I am thirteen years old. Someone hears you because you don't get another whipping. You are glad but you are still angry about the ones before.

Your brother got one more whipping. You didn't mind so much the second time because he was older and he deserved it the second time. You don't know how many whippings you got altogether.

II

"A Child is Being Beaten," Freud titles one of his essays; as is so often the case, his titles are catchy. Subtitle: A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversions." This 'phantasy' [my italics]—a child is being beaten—was invariably charged with a high degree of pleasure . . . " he writes. "Phantasy!" I might write with some heat. "That was no phantasy, that was my life!"

A pallidly jocular psychology professor of my acquaintance assures me that there is, chuckle, little difference here, the line between reality and phantasy in a case like this is a fine one.

"Further information would have been welcome," Freud hastens to add in his introductory remarks to the essay. "Who," he asks, "was the child that was being beaten?"

The one who was himself [sic] producing the phantasy or another?

Was it always the same child or as often as not a different child?

Who was it that was beating the child?

A grown-up person?

And if so, who?

Or did the child imagine that he himself was beating another one?

"Nothing," he writes melancholically, "could be ascertained that threw any light upon all those questions—only the one timid reply: 'I know nothing more about it: a child is being beaten.'"

(This phantasy, by the way, is undertaken out of "an incestuous wish to be loved by the father." The "meaning" of the beating is that my father "loves me." That IS what my mother kept telling me! Did she know something I didn't?)

Freud's questions. The answers would complete his story. I shall answer him and thereby complete mine.

III

The scenario again: a child is being beaten.

—Who, Freud asks, was the child that was being beaten?

—My little brother. I've already said that.

—The one who was himself producing the phantasy or another?

—My brother was being beaten; I was producing the phantasy.

—Was it always the same child or as often as not a different one?

—It was my brother in this case. Usually it was me . . . I've already told you that.

—Who was it that was beating the child?

—My father. You already know that too.

—A grown-up person?

—Yes. A grown-up person. That's the trouble. He was a *crazy* grown-up person.

—And if so, who?

—My father, the grown-up person.

—Or (cagily) did the child imagine that he himself was beating another one?

I refuse to answer this one. I can only go so far for my little brother.

IV

The scenario. I am leaning over my bed. My father is whacking me with his belt. (Is this a metaphor? Am I using dirty language? What does “whacking” mean? Oh dear.) He has said the words: pull your pants down. whack. don't cry. I cry. whack. don't cry. I cry.

It continues in this vein.

V

My father comes home. I am going to get a whipping. On a Monday night, one week and a day exactly since my little brother was whipped. It is almost dark outside and my mother has turned on the lights in the house. It is dark in the room where I am waiting, except for some late afternoon/early evening light. I watch the light go away outside the window and listen to my father who has come into the house. I can hear the noise from the new television set which he has turned on while he is going back and forth between their bedroom and the kitchen where my mother is. It is the evening news program. My mother is saying something to my father in the kitchen. He answers her. He raises his voice and I can almost understand what he is saying, but a singing commercial comes on even louder than his voice. I can hear the sound of their voices but none of their words.

—Nancy!

He calls my name and I don't answer him.

—Nancy!

—In here, daddy, I'm in here.

—Come out here where I can talk to you.

I consider staying where I am but he calls my name again, louder this time. He is standing right outside my door.

What is this about you and your brother? he says. I hold on to the door to my room. What is this your mother was telling me about you and your brother?

I hate to look at him. I don't like to look at him when he is talking to me like this.

I don't know, I say.

Of course you know, he says.

This is what it was: I shoved my little brother. I shoved him deliberately. I put my hands against his back, against either side of his backbone, against his t-shirt, feeling his back through the t-shirt so I could get my balance, and I shoved him into the grass. It didn't hurt him. He was bothering me. I told him to stop. He wouldn't. I shoved him. He told my mother. My father has told her that if I keep on being ugly to my little brother and inconsiderate

of his feelings he wants to know about it so that he can straighten things out.

That is his word for it: straighten things out. That's what he says now.

I want to straighten this thing out, he says.

I humpf deep in my throat, the way I have been practicing it for weeks.

Humpf, I say.

My father catches me at it. I have done it on purpose. It makes him furious. I know that.

(Freud says this is the "love-impulse"; masochistically, I am seeking the "punishment for the forbidden genital relation." The humpf was my provocation to obtain the "regressive substitute" for this relation. I do not believe it for one minute: "Timidly," all I can say is that a child is about to be beaten—"whipped" in my family's vernacular.)

I clear my throat. Already I am having second thoughts. He hears a sound in my throat and thinks I have humped again. He grabs my arm. It hurts. It means he is getting angry. I remember his holding my brother's arm last week when he was whipping him on the grass. I can see my father holding my arm that way and feel his hand squeezing my arm right under my shoulder. His hand went all the way around my brother's arm. I pull on my father's hand and try to slide my arm away. He squeezes very hard.

That hurts, I say.

He looks at me as if I had humped again.

I don't like to have to do this, he says.

Oh, really? I say inside my head. Oh reely. I would like to say it out loud but that would be talking back.

Instead I say:

I'll bet.

Afterwards I go into the kitchen, where my mother is, and sit with my back to the door of the den, where my father is watching *I Love Lucy*. My eyes are dry and swollen, and I feel very tired. We eat supper in the kitchen with the bright, overhead lights on and I feel embarrassed.

Later, that night, my brother tries to talk to me when we are both in bed. He talks for no reason at all when he is falling asleep. I don't even have to answer him. He doesn't talk for very long because he falls asleep quickly. He doesn't even know who he is talking to.

I lie in bed and think about my mother's face at supper. She couldn't keep her eyes off us, the three of us. My brother, my father, and me. I ate my supper with my hand half over my eyes the whole time. I pretended to be reading a book. My father didn't stop me. He didn't want to look at me, only my mother did.

—Did the child imagine that he himself was beating another one?

—I said I wouldn't go that far. My father did it for us.

—Did the child imagine that he himself was beating another one?

—I cannot speak for my brother.

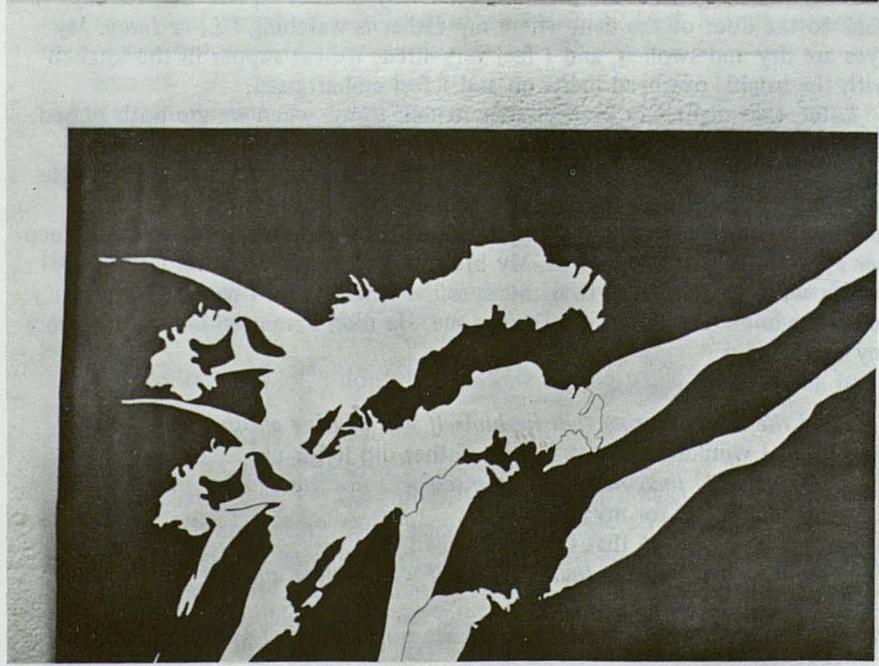
I said I wouldn't go that far, but I will.

—Did the child imagine that he himself was beating another one?

—Yes, she did.

This is a patent lie, of course, but I am nothing if not amiable.

of his feelings he wants to know about it so that he can straighten things out.
That is his word for it: straighten things out. That's what he says now.
I want to straighten this thing out, he says.
I know that
My father catches me as it. I have done it on purpose. It makes him furious.
I know that



—photograph by Emily Levine

FIVE AFTER INCEST

1. trusted, shared so many years
so much
betrayed
seduced in every way
hate disguised as love shows its hand
on a child, free woman child.
the friend, till the end
holding my hand
and screwing our daughter with the other.
when his cock couldn't shaft the mother
he pledged his undying friendship
and fucked a child
(he always liked tender meat)

2. i did not deny him
love, just my body
was my own and my mind
believing he understood and cared.
oh, he cared,
cared for his loss
the sheath for his ego.
and he could not accept
the rejection.

i can not accept his action
my mind refuses to see
while my guts feel
the truth

he is a man
man is a cock
and a cock will fuck
he is man is a cock
and a cock hates
he is a man and man hates me
and anything that is part of me—woman
free from his cock hates free woman
free woman child.
cock fills holes
in bodies and minds
knock 'em up or knock 'em down
fuck 'em up and fuck 'em over
every man, any woman
any age any size, any woman
just a place to stick it.
the face of hatred disguised
lies
lies
lies as love
as truth, as natural
as protection
as need, as sharing
and giving, the face of hatred

shoves its way through
the face of hatred is a cock
cock is man.

i look at my daughter
and know
that she has been touched
by that hatred
knows the meaning
of being born a woman
she knows
the beneficent father
is a cock.

i did not protect her
when my mind said "fear"
my heart said "trust"
and i taught her to trust.
my guts know fear
fear is man
my daughter's taught me
what i wouldn't learn
and i can not forget.

3. signed over by a quit claim deed
one moment his and the next
mine.

this is mine
me, i
own a house

these are mine
two children
me, i am a single parent.

me, i, mine
i am mine
alone

dissolution of a marriage
dissolves so much
more than the preacher's words.

my past remembered
dissolves
in a solution of incest

my future as conceived
dissolves
to crystallize, beyond my eyes

4. oh, typewriter, my friend
i have shared pain with you
and joy, every hope and disappointment
i have laid on your listening keys
and you have answered with understanding words

to ease my mind
you have stored for me
the many, too many to keep inside
you have held safe and carried my baggage
leaving me light.
but friend
though your keys are warm
under my fingers tonight
you will not take this from me
though i pound it in to you
it stays with me
and will not come out
with words or tears or time
but eats its way out
through my heart.

5. night creeps

loudly through the open windows
seeps painfully

through my skull and enters
my frantic mind crushing my search
for peace
of mind

night when

i can think, undisturbed
i am disturbed by my thoughts
spinning and swirling
sinking and rising
covered
with bile

work and read by night
till exhaustion claims me
and chains me to sleep through the day
because

night creeps

after sleep
and waking is remembering

unable to halt the flow
think, feel think feel
and it pours from under my eyelids
cold and damp under my arms

slippery on my fingertips
i am afraid

as the night creeps

—Ran Hall

THE SWIMMING LESSON

The tongue-depressor diving board was ready,
cornered, bound with our masking tape
and onto it three boys placed a small brown gerbil,
then another, as the first hit the water
of the schoolroom's aquarium.

The second was likewise pushed,
And we stood to watch them swim.

“Look, he’s swimming!

She can’t make it. . .”

Then they were held
each shaking inside a winter glove
close to the lamb’s wool lining,
one a swimmer,
one saved from going down a third time.

My boundaries. I didn’t know where they were. Caught by their cruelty, I wanted to see it played out on something else, instead of me. To feel the relief that it was not me this time.

I was small, helpless, minding my own business. You, my father, reached in with one hand, invading my bed, and brought me out. Set me on a make-shift diving board, pushed me off, with your lie still ringing in my ears about some “lesson.” Let’s give the gerbils a swimming lesson, which was, let’s see whether these gerbils can swim. Let’s see whether Susan can swim. Put her on the diving board. See whether the gerbils will die. See whether Susan will die. Tell her you are going to give her a lesson, push her off the board, and watch her thrashing in the water. My father. He taught me. He took me out of my cage, invaded my warm bed. I was small, helpless, minding my own business.

Now years later
I think of those gerbils,
I think of me.
Who will hold us
each in winter’s lining,
some swimming
some going down for the third time?

—Susan Marie Norris

“When you grow up an abused child . . .”

When you grow up an abused child your vocabulary is one of objects, of images. Words such as incest or violence no longer carry personal impact. Too often they've been used to rationalize feelings too painful and overwhelming to accept. But those feelings live, buried in objects as common as a wicker clothes hamper. The white wicker hamper in which I hid from my father, a small child covering herself with soiled bed linens. Those objects invade our peace like a strap wielded by a violent hand, leaving bright red welts on the prism of memory.

I don't suffer nightmares like some: it is the mundane encounter with a white wicker hamper that shakes me. Forcing me to relive a childhood that seems so unfair, so destructive. I'm thirty-one now, living far away from my family, but so often I am that same vulnerable little girl peering through the strands of woven wicker.

Our family lived in Pittsburgh. When my parents weren't separated my father drove truck out of state. Either way, he was a stranger to my life. My mother and I and her two maiden aunts formed an extended family. From them I received a strong sense of who I was. Those first five years of life were an idyll where my individuality was encouraged. My father moved back home about the time I was ready to start school and with him came a change of atmosphere. It was both a feeling, dark and oppressive, and a physical presence that I can only compare to a volcano. I sensed I could no longer argue the appropriateness of my bedtime or plead my case during meals. I went directly to bed at eight and no longer argued about eating certain foods. There were rules that I had to obey. I was glad, initially, to be like my friends and have a father at home. But there was a price to pay. The freedoms I had taken for granted ended with the return of my father and for the first time I knew authority. I did not question my father's rights over me. All of my friends' fathers behaved like that but until then it hadn't affected my life. Where once I was thought independent, my father now called me willful. I began to resent this new oppression and the man who returned to my life not as a suppliant but as an owner.

I clearly remember the evening my father first kissed me. My mother had gone to the store and I was playing with my doll house. The kiss was unexpected, full on the lips and warm, very warm. “I love you,” he said.

For a child needing parental love those words are important. I couldn't understand why they made me uneasy. That this authoritative, temperamental man loved me brought a promise of better times to come. I should have been happy but I was only confused.

Each time my mother left us alone I felt an expectation from my father that I should sit with him by the television and we would kiss. During and after those sessions he was always very kind. His heavyhanded manners relaxed and I saw glimpses of freedoms I thought I had lost. But I was still uneasy and more and more I hoped my mother would not let me alone with him. I

begged to go along or pretended I was ill. Looking back, I know it was his need I feared. His love was only a thinly disguised neediness that threatened to overwhelm me. My instincts knew what my child's mind couldn't know: I was right to be afraid. It was then I discovered the clothes hamper.

It stood outside my parents' bedroom close to the front door. After crouching among the laundry I'd close the cover and wait for my mother's footsteps on the stairs. A trip to the store took about thirty minutes. I would wait and mark time by the programs on the television set. I remember a time or two when he walked past the hamper into my bedroom and called my name. My fear was palpable inside those wicker walls. I expected myself to respond but I couldn't. What would he do if he found me? What explanation could I give that wouldn't betray my distaste for being alone with him? Sometimes I left the hamper early and would go and sit with him, knowing she'd be back before too long. Before he could start our "game."

The more I hid in the hamper the meaner he became. My withdrawal brought little punishments or the loss of already dwindling privileges. But the more I kissed him the more intolerable my inner world became. There are two pictures I keep locked away in my grandmother's cedar chest. This first is of me taken on the first day of kindergarten, proud and spirited. The second is my school picture at the end of first grade. The spark in my eyes had gone and a limpness had replaced it. Those pictures mean a lot because twenty-seven years later I am still rekindling the light in my eyes.

When I was ten we moved to my great-aunts' house. My parents had been having marital problems again, so I had been staying over there on weekends. Their home meant protection for me; my father and I would never be alone together. There wouldn't be time for our "game." I was growing older and knew the facts of life. My father's advances were odious and I knew consciously that his needs were inappropriate. I was angry and began to avoid him. My rejection turned his neediness into violence.

One morning I slept through my alarm. Afraid of being late for school, I quickly dressed and headed for the front door. There he stood waiting for me. In my haste I hadn't made my bed and this infuriated him. He grabbed my hair and started to hit me on the back and shoulders until I ran out the door. Any small infraction of the "rules" was enough to set him off. As I sat in class I could feel the bruises forming, turning purple beneath my clothing. A few years before I had tried to tell my mother and a school counselor what was happening. Both refused to hear me and I felt shamed for saying things that obviously should have been left secret. I never mentioned it again and I lived that way until I left for college in Minnesota when I was eighteen.

Perhaps I'm most bitter about how my father's and my relationship affected my own concept of myself as a parent. I became pregnant when I was twenty-three and after much deliberation I decided to abort. The reasons I gave for my decision were lack of money and a lot of confusion about my affectional preference. But my innermost fear was that I was emotionally incapable of being a good parent; the fear that I would imitate the man I've tried to disown in my soul. I had to come to terms with my own anger and know that it won't overwhelm me. It is very difficult to consciously denounce what I consider negative "masculine" behavior, to deny the patriarchy only to have to confront those very same feelings in myself. Perhaps that is not all bad. But it would be much easier to say those behaviors only exist "out there."

Allowing myself to have emotional needs has been another difficult task. My personal belief is that Lesbians, especially those of us raised without the benefits of community, have a difficult time with our needs, anyway. Not only because they are different from the norm but because they are so traumatic to accept let alone try to fulfill. Added to that was my inner belief that to have needs is a weakness. You will either suffocate others close to you or be suffocated in turn by their needs. I am still awkward, still learning to accept my own needs as normal. Still learning to meet those needs in ways that are healthy.

Naturally, the inevitable question arises. Did my father's behavior "make" me a lesbian? Back in the days when I thought myself abnormal I leant an ear to that tired chestnut. Now I have different thoughts. I prefer women because it is in their company that I blossom, just like when I thrived with my mother and her aunts before my father reentered our lives. By the age of five I had been permitted more of a sense of myself than most women acquire in middle life—if they're fortunate. I was a female child who had defined her own space: I knew when those perimeters were being violated.

My being a Lesbian means reclaiming my boundaries, reclaiming the light in my eyes. It seems more appropriate to say that my lesbianism, my childhood strength, made my father violent. I could have played our "game." I could have pleased and supplicated my father: perhaps sexual intercourse would not have been required—only a posture of feminine passivity. But I knew I had been violated and I fought. It cost me my childhood, it cost me my child and it scarred me in places where I'm the most vulnerable—but I preserved an integrity that heals.

you doin this daddy?
its ok then?
feels funny please dont
daddy?
goin to sleep now
am i still your little girl daddy?
nite nite

there was you Dad
and the Doctor.
were there others
or did you keep me for yourself,
the Doctor an oversight?
are you sure you knew where
my 6 years bigger brother played at night?
was I ever too young?
or too small?
"You were such a cute baby."
"You were such a cute little girl."
Mommy's girl by day.
yours by night.
ever mine?

FACE TO THE WALL

she bangs her head
in the same spot
until a dent appears
in the wall
spreading like blood
the thick lines
like her grandmother's hands
spreading slowly over the wall
opening it
the plaster falls
down her face
onto lips
over eyelashes
a white rain
everywhere is falling
the wall opens for her
she can see the worn wooden beams
and the small insects
which house themselves
on the insides of things
gnawing on the discomfort of the world
deforming their bodies to fit
into closed places
to become the private dark
she can see the night
clearer than any day sky
engraved permanently on each of her eyes

she is banging the wall with her head
her body loses everything
but the knowledge and meaning
of wall
after it is broken into
and what a head becomes
when it can move in only one direction
against something

she becomes her own drum
her music is that of the broken
the broken into
she deforms the shapes of mind
spirit body to fit
into closed spaces
crawling into plaster and splintered wood
surrounding herself with the dark
listen to the sounds she makes at night

listen to the sound of a woman
breaking into herself

a small, tenacious thief
with strong hands

—Martha Courtot

"WHAT DID HE HIT YOU WITH?" THE DOCTOR SAID

Shame. Silence.

Not he.

She.

I didn't correct him.

Curled into myself like a deformed foot

I looked at the floor

ceiling

evading

A fist.

Hand that has spread me open

fingers I've taken inside me

Screaming I love you bitch

You are the she

who rocked my head

side to side

barrier reef for your rage boat

It's safe to beat me

I've lain under your tongue

between your thighs

hungry

When I grabbed you to throw you off

you screamed "if you've scarred my face

bitch

I'll kill you" I'm sorry I wept I didn't mean to scratch you

Should have said you won't have a chance to kill me

I'm gonna kill you for thinking you can hit me like that

screaming that you love me

You said "I haven't hit a woman in 8 years"

8 years bad luck my head caught it

My arms in dishwasher scrubbing out my father's shoe

the dream tells me

you're familiar

that brutality I slide in without a horn

"You don't have to be beaten to be loved" she said

I held the cool shock of those words

against the purple bruise of still wanting you

You've hit me with that irresistible

deadly weapon:

hatred dressed in the shoes & socks

of the words

I love you

-Chrystos

THE IMAGES

Close to your body, in the
pain of the city
I turn. My hand half-sleeping reaches, finds
some part of you, touch knows you before language
names in the brain. Out in the dark
a howl, police sirens, emergency
our 3 a.m. familiar, ripping the sheath of sleep
registering pure force as if all transpired —
the swell of cruelty and helplessness —
in one block between West End
and Riverside. In my dreams the Hudson
rules the night like a right-hand margin
drawn against the updraft
of burning life, the tongueless cries
of the city. I turn again, slip my arm
under the pillow turned for relief,
your breathing traces my shoulder. Two women sleeping
together have more than their sleep to defend.

And what can reconcile me
that you, the woman whose hand
sensual and protective, brushes me in sleep,
go down each morning into such a city?
I will not, cannot withhold
your body or my own from its chosen danger
but when did we ever choose
to see our bodies strung
in bondage and crucifixion across the exhausted air
when did we choose
to be lynched on the queasy electric signs
of midtown when did we choose
to become the masturbator's fix
emblem of rape in Riverside Park the campground
at Big Sur the beach at Sydney?

We are trying to live
in a clearheaded tenderness —
I speak not merely of us, our lives
are "moral and ordinary"
as the lives of numberless women —
I pretend the Hudson is a righthand margin
drawn against violence and woman-loathing
(water as purification, river as boundary)
but I know my imagination lies:
in the name of freedom of speech
they are lynching us no law is on our side
there are no boundaries
no-man's-land does not exist.

I can never romanticize language again
 never deny its power for disguise for mystification
 but the same could be said for music
or any form created
 painted ceilings beaten gold worm-worn Pietàs
 reorganizing victimization frescoes translating
violence into patterns so powerful and pure
 we continually fail to ask are they true for us.

When I walked among time-battered stones
 thinking already of you
 when I sat near the sea
among parched yet flowering weeds
 when I drew in my notebook
 the thorned purple-tongued flower, each petal
protected by its thorn-leaf
 I was mute
 innocent of grammar as the waves
irhythmically washing, I felt washed clean
 of the guilt of words, there was no word to read
 in the book of that earth, no perjury,
the tower of Babel fallen once and for all
 light drank at my body
 thinking of you I felt free
in the cicadas' pulse, their encircling praise.

 When I saw her face, she of the several faces
 staring, indrawn, in judgment, laughing for joy
her serpents twisting, her arms raised
 her breasts gazing
 when I looked into her world
I wished to cry loose my soul
 into her, to become
 free of speech at last.

And so I came home, a woman starving
 for images
 to say my hunger is so deep
so ancient, that all the lost
 crumbled burnt smashed shattered defaced
 overpainted concealed and falsely named
faces of every past we have shared together
 in all the ages
 could rise reassemble re-collect re-member
themselves as I remembered myself in that presence
 as every night close to your body
 in the pain of the city, turning

I am re-membered by you, re-member you
even as we are dismembered
on the blue-movie screens, the white expensive walls
of collectors, the newsrags blowing the streets
— and it would not be enough.

This is the war of the images.

We are the thorn-leaf guarding the purple-tongued flower
each to each.

—Adrienne Rich

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SEXUAL POWER

transcript of tape, 2 women

no, i'm afraid to—

why?

*i don't know—i don't know—
it's like you said last night
i keep pulling away—ooh, could
you cover me anyway. even if i
pull away don't throw me out
in the cold*

*no you have to be cold & suffer—
& i'll pour cold water on you—& take
away your shoes . . .*

*(laughing) that's funny to you?
well it is a little funny, but
i wouldn't have thought of some-
thing so mean—*

*well you started the fantasy, you said, will
you cover me even if i pull away.*

oh.

why do you pull away?

*don't know. i think i pull
away so that you'll pull me back.*

*it seems like it requires a lot (laughing)
to pull you back.*

it does?

*well, because, you know, you're pulling so
hard.*

*really? harder than most
people do?*

yes.

*why? do you think? really?
isn't that strange? do you
think it's unusual?*

(both laughing)

well, i do.

*oh, a freak. you're in bed
with a sexual freak.*

*no, baby, not a freak—just somebody who
doesn't want to let me have my full sexual
power with her. . . .*

question: what is sexual power between women?

—what is power severed from patriarchal sanction?

—what is female sexuality unmediated by male demands or desires?

Feminists have described our mechanisms, our biology; but have offered little exploration of our sexuality.¹ lesbian artists and writers have given us images of intimacy and lots of flowers, but—tee corinne partly excepted—very little that is explicit about good old funky sex.²

We can hazard some guesses about why. we—especially lesbian feminists—labor under a burden of prettifying, to demonstrate to the (hostile het) world that *we do it better* (nicer: we're *still* trying to be nice!); that *we are free of power struggle in our sex*. also we hesitate to focus on our sexuality—except to announce its existence, sometimes bravely—lest they think that's all we ever do; and dismiss us as purely sexual beings.³ finally, the idea of men turning on to our eroticism makes us sick: we don't often have a sense of privacy.

but separable from their eyes is their vision—which we internalize (*she said, sooner or later we find patriarchy in bed with us*). at some point we need to own these taboos as *ours*. we partake exactly of our culture's prudery to the extent that we aren't actively challenging this prudery: sex still, god help us, embarrasses us. if there's any doubt about this, think how we've exposed attitudes toward menstruation and reclaimed menstrual blood as ours and healthful (sometimes to the point of romanticizing): where are the visual or verbal depictions of lesbian sexuality equivalent to tampax art?⁴

it seems we're afraid—of objectifying, of “innate masochism,” of “insatiability,” afraid of how we look with our face in a cunt, afraid of what we want—like our lover's sexual power coming on strong. it seems the fear of being unfeminist keeps us prudish, silent, or partly lying.⁵ how many sexual fantasies would clear a feminist check point?⁶ how do feminist check points in our heads affect our sexuality? why do we fear as well as desire the lover's sexual power? what's the relationship between sexuality, strength, and power?

Years ago, just after i left my husband, i fucked a man who told me i was “too passive.” (his ex-wife—who soon became the first woman i admitted wanting—told me, later, that “too passive” meant you expected him to do anything!) i took it to heart and one night, drunk, i fucked him, saying to myself, do what you'd do if you were a man, pretending i was a man. it was a huge success: he liked it; so did i. i also felt the opposite of loving: along with feeling strong and free, i felt hostile. (*she said, why did i need hostility to free me?*)

years later the collective house i lived in was splitting up, painfully; my lover and i were making love and i kept wanting her to be “more like a man” is how i thought of it, i kept pushing, pushing for her to be harder, stronger: in rage and frustration, i began to sob. she said, *i felt like you were wanting me to hurt you, so you could cry*. then i accepted her perception. now i wonder—was i wanting pain? or just intensity, release?

There is an edge to my desire for strong sex that scared and shamed me. we're supposed to be autonomous beings, responsible for our own desires; equals; considerate, gentle. i was not supposed to want the strength i found myself wanting. fear kept me back from my edges: fear of hurting, as men had hurt me; fear of pain, fear i would like hurting, like pain, fear that i wanted control or wanted to give it over, fear that sex—full strong out of control sex—would be, yes, violent.

*why are you afraid you'll hurt
me?*

*you're all sore—you say no, i don't hear
you—you say stop, i don't—why do you think
i'm afraid?*

*do you think that if i really
wanted you to stop i wouldn't
have stopped you?*

oh.

we have rarely seen or gotten to imagine sexual struggle between equals; we have rarely seen or gotten to imagine strong sex that did not imply power—abuse, violence.

If they did not rape us, push us around; if we did not make movies like *swept away* to project their fantasies into vast compelling images (*what she really needs is a good . . .*) meaning not only that women's assertions against male dominance are really a cry to be mastered sexually, but also—implied—a good fuck means a hard fuck, a brutal mean fuck—

if we had named our own parts, our own desires, our own comings & goings, if we did not need to define our sexuality always *against* their images of sex in general and female sexuality in particular, maybe we could acknowledge that, yes—
in addition to meaningful interesting and safe work, a decent wage, a secure adequate shelter, safety on the streets, concerned wholistic health care, real choices about mothering, a society that cherishes its children & its people, including its old people so that we are not terrified of aging, a society that does not pump carcinogens/mutagens into the earth/air/food, in addition to friends creative work/play, bodies that sing minds that dance a splash of sunlight a dip in the ocean, recognition of who we are and what we can do, in addition to these things—

we sometimes need a good fuck.

question: is *fuck* a sexist word? a heterosexist word? if so, what can we say we do?

Or consider the following phrase: *c'mon baby you know you want it*. uck. in movies, on tv, in the books of norman mailer (that mailer stabbed his wife should have surprised no one versed in his work) & other american greats, these words—or words like them—are said to women who gasp with pleasure; or else they repress-deny-and-wither-away. this was in contrast to my life, where men were always wrong about what i wanted and besides, the thought made me sick. it implied:

coercion (*c'mon*)

condescension (*come off it, i know what you want*)

power (*you want it & only i can give it to you*)

(not to mention) *baby*, which included all of the above

So what if, in the midst of making love . . .

(transcript of tape, 2 women)

*i'm afraid if you go down on me
that i'll be cold*

*yeah? i wish we had a heater (both laugh)
i could go down on you while i was upside
down, you know—*

you mean 69?

i don't know. but it scares me.
uh huh. (pause) why not?
cause i'd lose myself in you, you
how come?
know...are you gonna do it?
 (both laugh)
why do you want to?
is that ok? where are you? well, what?
well, i got it into my mind as a way to
keep you warm, you know, & i thought
i'd do it, and then when you said—any-
time you say you're scared of something
then i want you to do it
 (both laugh)
then you want me to do it if i say
i'm afraid of it? are you serious?
well, cause i want you to do it & not be
afraid.
ok, let me, can i close my eyes?
 (both laugh; pause; noise)
i don't care how much you hold me
& kiss me & reassure me, when it
comes right down to it—well, i'm
embarrassed.
why are you embarrassed?
i don't know, i never have been
before—
i guess it's me, huh—
 (both laugh)
no, it's like too much woman over
me—i like it, i'm just embarrassed—
do you want me not to?
no i want it, i want it, i just had
to tell you about why—
 (pause, mumble, nervous laughter)
STOP, stop . . . i'm sorry, oh no,
shit . . .
stop it, it's ok—
well, i know, but you know i should
be able to do anything
well, i'm curious about why—
oh, could you just go down on me—
oh sure, i will . . .
 (long pause, breathing, moaning)
oh no oh oh oh god . . . oh oh
oh god . . . oh no oh god . . .
aaaaaahhhhhh
uh huh . . . hu huh . . . uh huh . . . (mumble)
uh huh . . . mmmmmnn hmmmmmmmmmm

This tape has a happy ending; i don't offer it as an instance of failure. nevertheless: you, the second woman, as you confront your lover's fear with questions, exploration, answer her in her own terms—*i'm embarrassed/why are you embarrassed?*—you seem to be courteous, sensitive.

in fact, you're being a coward, taking no risks (*she said, feminists make love like a series of negotiated okays*⁷). your lover says *it's too much woman to have over me* and for the moment you see your own cunt as scary, possibly ugly, and you're afraid to act, afraid of your lover's displeasure or disgust; afraid you'll force her "against her will." you forget: that your lover can/will does stop you, if she wants; and, that she wants you. so really you are afraid of her fear and so can't pull her past fear.

fear: in your body, in your cunt, i will be lost. the mother. where i was born.

fear: that your body will mark mine, that my body will mourn yours.
fear of intensity.

beyond fear of absorption, fear of intensity—and are these connected? fear of loss, of the self, of the lover—beyond fear of loss is fear of who we are, who we might unleash if we lose controls, fear that we are not only gentle, not always running through meadows and brushing each other's hair: fear we are strong. fear we have power.⁸

you, the second woman, take refuge from fear in concern and verbal support. in words you'll go anywhere with a lover, defy her limits and demand everything—what are you feeling, why, where, what do you like (*she said, don't ask me what i like, we'll find out as we go what we like*). but sexually, you hold back, ask her to define her limits, instead of trying to pull her past her limits, instead of asking her to pull you past your own.

you could say, *i'm afraid too*. at least this would be honest & equalize the risk. you could—since you know this woman & love her—instead of asking & tugging & teasing with words, *why are you embarrassed, is it ok, what are you thinking*, she said *i want it, i want it*, you could reclaim the words, it was never the words' fault, you could say *c'mon baby you know you want it & climb on shove your cunt in her face and she can do what she likes with it*.

SEXUAL POWER

in latin, the word was *vis*, feminine gender, meaning

force, power, strength, energy; hostile strength, violence, attack, impetuosity, fury, compulsion; power, might, influence, potency; force, meaning, nature, essence, sense, import; quantity, abundance.

in english the word that derives from *vis* is *violence*. the loss described by this linguistic shrinkage begins to emerge as we discover our fear of our own power.

question: can we be strong without being *them*?

To define our sexuality in terms of our selves; to diminish sexual fear; to enjoy sexual power: we have to trust what we want; to acknowledge that while some of the things men do say and feel in sex as elsewhere are stupid vicious boring and/or abusive, some may be expressive of more freedom than we have had; and if we choose freely, who knows? do they own sexual freedom? are we doomed in the name of liberation to be awkward, formal, prissy, or clinical with our sex, to always make love, secrete, have orgasms, perform cunnilingus: can't we accept that women get down, fuck, come, (*she said, that's what lesbians do, we do come and we drip wet between our legs*) we go down on each

other & lick each other's cunts, we sweat/bleed into each other's faces, we shove bristle of hair against hair, breast against breast against bone, we rub suck tug & wrestle each other into coming

excerpts from journal

i force you open everywhere i can. i want in. i want your legs open wider, i open your legs with my legs, my fingers, restrained because of the surgery more than a month old now but still healing, go inside you not too far & you are wet & gooey. afterwards i'll paint you with the stuff (you said, i want you to do everything to me; i never said that before either)

NOTES

1. Masters & Johnson, Anne Koedt, the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, Mary Jane Sherfey, Shere Hite, and Betty Dodson have all done crucial work; but we are still at the excavation stage.

2. Our artists, myself included, for the most part treat the subject intermittently and way too prettily, self-consciously; for example, the school of "cunt art" created by women who think our cunts have petals instead of flesh. Is there something wrong with flesh?

3. The stereotype of lesbians who do it all the time may have some grounding in reality (admit it, isn't it fun?); and in heterosexual fantasies which transform a woman into a huge cunt/or dildo the minute she says she's a dyke. It's worth noting that the stereotype closely resembles the stereotype of Black sexuality, popularized after Emancipation, and the stereotype of Jewish sexuality, which flourished throughout recorded history and into this century (so that when i read a poem about my grandmother with the line *you wore a girdle and no underpants*, a woman raised in rural Oregon tells me that her image of Jewish women was exactly that they wore no underpants so as to be always ready to do it). In fact, excessive sexuality is attributed to the poor (under capitalism); the "natives" (under imperialism); and, until the 19th century, to women. The point is to dehumanize the underclass by "animalizing" them (sex=animal function). Lesbians are doubly animalized, as an underclass of deviants whose deviance is sexual; and as prototypical women. Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature* beautifully exposes the chain of non-life in patriarchal reasoning, linking women, nature, and beasts as that-which-is-to-be-mastered.

4. On the other hand, menopause remains even more in shadow than sexuality. June Arnold's *Sister Gin* deserves mention here as a novel that deals both with menopause and with explicit sexuality.

5. What I'm talking about here has wide-ranging implications for the current fight against pornography. A feminist fight against porn must include a fight to expand and protect sexual freedom and honesty; otherwise we, especially lesbians, threaten ourselves with censorship and repression (feminist strategy on abortion similarly has demanded that the struggle for abortion rights be paired with the fight against forced sterilization).

I might as well say, while I'm on the subject, that I wish we'd use the word *pornography* as a strictly descriptive non-evaluative category of explicitly sexual literature, movies, etc. By this definition some of what I'm writing is porn. I do not want explicit sexuality to define the cutting edge of our struggle. I find much "great" or popular art more horrible and violent than some porn (*Looking for Mr. Goodbar?*) And I want a new category that means HORRIBLE VIOLENT OFFENSIVE & INTOLERABLE. The distinction offered by some between porn and erotica leaves us in the hazy realm described by Ellen Willis (in a *Village Voice* from October 1979) as "if it turns me on it's erotica; if it turns you on it's porn."

6. Only quislings (traitors) like Nancy Friday have paid much attention to women's sexual fantasies (*My Secret Garden* and sequel). Friday claims to be gathering our fantasies in an attempt to free us from shame on one hand and failure of the imagination on the other. But her analysis seems creepily dishonest, so riddled with woman-hating and heterosexual blindness as to be useless to any feminist. In addition, the fantasies themselves seem suspiciously uniform in rhythm and voice.

7. Michaele, conversation, March 1979.

8. Cf. Adrienne Rich, timely as ever: "We shrink/from touching our power" in "Hunger," *The Dream of a Common Language* (NY, 1978).

notes on an artist in search of an erotic image

a lesbian artist/revolutionary seeking to enhance erotic images — for . . .
i have a knack for changing peoples minds. i have a knack for aggravating settlements, an image of bravery, one foot in the swamp of catholic inhibitions, both hands in the planet pie, and my nose up the ass of the universe. (and i am, you can see, entirely unconcerned with any meanings or any coherent images, not un-in-keeping with my sexual interests, for i have had, at critical moments, the unpleasant experience of having my come tangle up with my prose.)

. . . i, too, am caught by such key phrases as: their breath came faster and faster. or, she arched her back and tensed her thighs . . .

because eroticism depends so on images, i think of it as something of a warm plasticine sculpture. i tried at u.c.berkeley to take a course in sculpture sometime before liberation (1970). i was concerned about injustice. accordingly, i carved little hearts out of soap and rough crosses out of soap stone. i hoped, thereby to work up a voodoo against my race (white) which i perceived as one wellspring of global imperialism. my art teacher said i was trite. i was convinced, however, that getting on the bus covered with soap and stone dust was sculpture enough and at least voodoo enough. learn to present, g. said, you dont know how to present. get the picture?

a genius in search of external, showable media. a gimmick to forestall drowning in lesbian/hippie/commie madness. i looked at my friends, lesbian/hippie/commies for sure. one had drowned in her madness. her arms were covered with deep ugly purple gashes from a razor blade. some presentation! a gallery success. but i decide against this media on grounds of im not sure how much ugliness is worth as an ingredient in the beaker of fame, or more to the point, whether it will have other than prurient interest for imperialists. i decided to take pictures instead. i took pictures of arms slashed with razor blade to show to an exclusive audience of lesbian/hippie/commies. it was an outrageous display of cynicism caused by a childhood amputation of taste. the intent was innocent. i hoped only to become an artist, and perchance exercise my knack for changing a few minds. mutilation tweaked my conscience. i had hoped no less for my comrades. but my erstwhile culturally maddened comrades looked at my pictures of the details of insanity, became sad, and so averted their eyes. nothing changed. now, while i still hold tight to my usefully gruesome mind, i have subsequently been taught the sweet healing balm of lesbian erotic love; but i havent yet learned to depict it. so to continue my beloved intimations . . .

. . . she arched her back and tensed her thighs . . . and later, as she nuzzled her nose into my neck . . .

nuzzled her nose! what the fuck kind of erotic language is that? what are we? bunnies? again . . .

. . . after she arched her back and tensed her thighs, she

came, moaning into my neck.

. . . after she arched her back and tensed her thighs, her legs gave out, and her cunt gave in, and, in the exact moment i slid my tongue into her mouth, she came.

flat. flatflatflat. cant you write decent prose about a fuck? again . . .

hmmm. her legs gave out, and her cunt gave in . . . sounds like a sling-shot, sounds like a push-me-pull-me doll. but the rest, getting better, getting sexy. at this point i need to show it to someone. i find m. m. says of the above that i sound too detached. that she feels like an object in here. she implies fascist tendencies in the mind of the fucker/writer. (i do confess an arrogance to any strangers i fuck. with strangers i am a cold fuck indeed. but m. is not a stranger. i am in love.) a little background might help. m. is my lover. she is typing downstairs—we are working out working in the same house. but i am afraid of her. i have been in love five times before and this is the first time i tremble with fear whenever i have her image in my minds eye. something to do with credentials? she asks.

m. wonders what my fear will become. loathing, disgust, contempt? she asks. what will you do, leave me? she inquires. i ponder. i will do what i always do when i am afraid, i will try to fuck her in as great a variety of ways as i can think of. that will keep her happy. i will test out my prowess, and if i do it well, she will kiss me and take me behind the altar in her house. if i do it well, she will give me the keys to the sacristy. i will steal bread and drink wine and draw dirty pictures on her belly with my tongue. she will wrap her legs around me when we fuck. (i might mention that she is jewish and does not always catch on to this, that desecration is part

... while she arched her back and tensed her thighs, i whispered my sexual heart out into our come . . .

... and later, as she nuzzled her nose into my neck, i, with more tenderness than i have ever felt before, licked my soul into her ear . . .

... her legs gave out, and her cunt gave in . . . (hmmm. oh well.) and i moved my hands between her thighs seeking our extraordinary pleasure, (entire cities have fallen for less) and finding myself dying with love, at the exact moment i slid my tongue into her mouth, she . . . ah, that is, we . . . came.

thoughts on the matter:

i had written my consciousness is my throbbing clit. but a friend wrote on the paper, bullshit! be more complex and truer. well, im not so sure its bullshit, and im not so sure i can be so much truer, but heres some complexities. my understanding of the world and my life in it often comes filtered through a haze of nightmares and a contracting vagina. i can look at selected parcels about the nazi atrocities as declared (entirely out of context) in the writs of nuremburg, look at biblical overtones in news stories depicting the poisoning of our wells and fields (for generations on generations), visualize my own inquisition as it mirrors the inquisition of millions of women and homosexuals, our trials, our tortures and deaths, endure my cancer and my castration cure,

and parcel of catholic porn.) and if i do very well, she will cry when she comes. this is all in my greedy imagination. in reality, we fuck in a large number of ways that have nothing to do with power and less with desecration, (i should mention that while she does not participate in catholic porn, she nevertheless demands my presence, an image of my participation, within my writings about *our* sex.) so here goes again . . .

better, its getting better . . .

oh, baby, now you are definitely on. on, baby, yes . . .

stand by helpless in the slaughter houses, cause an icy death within the heart of my former lover and friend, and still, still, in the stillness of the night, have the hardest come of my life when we make love, make tender love, sweet guilt-ridden illicit love (tho she sensibly, communistically, denies a belief in guilt, and that keeps me going further into my sins, further into our relationship, deeper into life), and our love, our sex, is at the very least an antidote to my fear, a way to wash my face and tug at my heartstrings, a healant to my errant mitotic cells and my recent wounds. i often tell her i hate her. i want to tell her, in hard come, hard won erotic prose, that i will protect her from everything, that i will certainly think about giving my life for her.

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LESBIAN EPIC

However

This is the story of Trolls
and their lovers:

In the thread of life, some knitting,
some weaving, some tangling the spool.
And all caught on a spindle.

But look

How their scales glisten, transmute.
From the dark scum of their water they flash their tale.
Guileless and soft-spoken,
dragging crooked legs behind. I have seen them
in your eyes, where the blue foams grey

And nerves
broken and played

under the furrow and the wave.

And you wishing there were no nightmares?
No self-denials?

With your entourage of nymphs and gutter snipes
and your own private allegory
we masturbate full circle.

How's tricks?
How were you stricken?
Tell me,
how are you going
to do it?

Princess Charming Disarming
court and ritual. Frothing with riddles.
It must have been another time,
another place, another performance.

Sappho
Scorpio
Struts

leans over my chair, tongue tempting ear,
leers into my book

gurgles

honey
there are no chapters in that book.

She asks me to worship my cervix.
She tells me secrets ooze through the marrow,
seep out the phalanges.

I am the womb carver,

the warm caressing angel. I let me in.

My eyes unfold in petals, paper roses.

Her heart throbs against my back her hands

trace my hips

her vulva sears me from behind do you want

to dance?

I wipe my eyes.

She breathes of oranges and sex.

Legerdemain

Legerdemain

Vigilante, who assigned you to my case?

Feint once

Feint twice

Beguiler beguiled. Who'd have thought it?

Her teeth graze my flesh, She is teasing,

I turn her into this wild thing.

I make her grovel.

I make her growl.

I am mud. I am clay. I am granite. I am gibraltar.

I am air. I am fire. I am moonlight. I am water.

She pouts.

Tensely twitching haunches.

Groan,

nibbling clitoris. "Oh red exotic kernel!"

I pour myself out to her. She absorbs me.

I sharpen my claws with her. She adores it.

We do this dance with flaming feet. All senses.

She turns me into this wild thing.

She makes me grovel.

She makes me growl.

My teeth graze her flesh. I am no longer teasing.

My fingers spoon and cajole

cackle

cackle

there's no measuring my ardor.

You know I want it all:

sinews, tissues, corpuscles.

The grime lacing toe to toe.

I will have you for soup.

Nail clippings caught midair,

pubic hairs teased from the rug.

A poultice of entrails, a dab of honeyed bile.

This is no one's business but our own

Hold Still!

I think you should know something.

Heart and spleen are wet,
must be seen inside out for proper loving
To hug your gnarled beauty is not
enough. To hurl such little bones
higher is too much. Honey, roll over

I am going home.

My hat, my suit, my tie,
My smart grey suitcase drooling red linen—
I pack me up and go.

Do I have a closing quip?

My thighs worry and jitter.
Hands itch and collapse. I'll be back
for the luggage. Honest
stare straight into your squelching
I must be going. I have to go. I go.

Bloodless eye at the keyhole

Spirits

Lamias

Shadows

gawk and twitch.

One taps me on the shoulder.

I DON'T WANT TO RECOGNIZE THEM!

I want to be alone. I want to shuffle
out,
quietly
dangerous. I want you
to tell them to leave me alone.

I will go.

Plucking at entrails, old music,
like Mrs. Lot I think it over, turn back.

I DON'T WANT TO WORK OUT KARMA WITH YOU!

I want to fuck you.

But
in the boredom of my bedroom
listening,
the incantation smolders.
By nightfall glistening,
by candlelight I graft shadows.

In the dying night
I dream of you and you and you.

Receiving the gift of tongues
from your mouths from your mouths

—Victoria Ramstetter

REFLECTIONS ON EROTICISM

I want to write about the lesbian erotic. I want to do so because everything makes it impossible. I want to do so because I do not have the words. I want to do so because of the contradictions it leads me to. I want to do so because what I write is not true for every woman or even every lesbian in this culture, and yet the powerful intuition of my blood insists that my experience is the lesbian erotic, the female erotic.

The contradictions: I do not think of men when I lie between my lover's thighs. As I go through my days, I do not think of lesbian sexuality as a variant, an alternative. For me, lesbian sexuality *is* female sexuality, is primary. Heterosexuality seems at its best a poor and fumbling imitation. Yet I live on a street, in a world where Heterosexuality = Sexuality. And so to write about lesbian sexuality in this world, I must write about heterosexuality. I must write about the differences. I must write about men.

Another contradiction: Deborah, a friend, complains, "Now that I am known to be a lesbian, I am seen strictly as a sexual being." 'Straight' women are curious, not about her political work, her creativity, or her emotions, but what it means to do those strange things in bed. Yet in fact, our eroticism is, as Audre Lorde has affirmed, the wellspring of our emotions, our creativity, and our political work.

Approximations. The words we need are extinct. —Olga Broumas

The words we are stranded with, the false namings: Sexuality, sexual liberation.

Sexuality. Harvard scientists have discovered a species of lizard that is all female, reproduces parthenogenetically, and enjoys erotic behavior, tribadism [tribade = lesbian ("she who rubs")]. In their press release, the scientists contrast this species with its "sexual counterparts" which are both male and female. Assumption: without the male erotic activity or even reproduction cannot be "sexual."

Sexual liberation. As defined by men it is the freedom of women to be constantly available to men, according to male sexual values. What a powerful phrase if it were ours, if it meant liberation of our territory, our bodies, from colonial rule by men. Now a phrase pre-empted, turned upside down before we could even claim it.

The vocabulary of their sexuality: Not merely cunt, tit, boobs, pussy, ass, prick. "Foreplay"—eroticism trivialized. Defined by its culmination, rather than as powerful exploration and knowledge in itself. As if the climax of the symphony *were* the symphony, all the early movements only a titillating lead-up. "The chase"—sexual excitement as hunting, whose pleasurable climax is domination and killing. "Sexual liberation" does not alter the chase, it simply makes

woman "an easy lay," "an easy prey." "Passion"—derived from suffering. Eroticism as pain, to be extinguished by the release of orgasm, rather than that intense, joyful force that propels us to another to know and be known. "Seduction"—to lead away, rather than to draw together. "Erogenous zones"—the compartmentalization of our sensuality in order to control and manipulate it, rather than an interconnecting flow in which eye, nipple, voice, armpit, labia, mind blend and alternate erotic powers in an ever-changing variety of responses.

*If you don't like my ocean, don't fish in my sea
stay out of my valley, let my mountain be.* —Ma Rainey

I grew up not so much straight as straightened (as hair is straightened because only straight hair is beautiful or even acceptable). To grow up straightened was to grow up with my sexual feelings rerouted, forced along complex channels that were not of my making.

When I was still straightened, I saw women sexually through male eyes. Male images of naked or half-naked women, in those contorted postures that even "artistic" porno-graphics prefer, were faintly repulsive to me but they also excited and stirred me. I did not see those breasts or thighs through my own girl-woman eyes. I had to step out of myself and into a man's head in order to dream of a woman. It was as if the direct path from woman to woman or from girl to girl were blocked—as indeed it was by every armed "no" that society could muster. Instead I saw the women in male-designed photographs or paintings as they had been seen by the male photographer or painter. Those female bodies were intensely attractive to me but oddly foreign. They were more attractive for being suggestively half-draped, as if knowledge must be less exciting than illusion. They swept me on a dark and disturbing flood, where pleasure was a sudden moment to be grabbed, snatched, wrested—raped—not from a woman like myself, but from a provocative yet unwilling and rather dangerous stranger. I could fantasize myself as a man uncovering, handling other women's flesh, but I never envisioned another woman willingly or joyfully touching me. It seems to me now that if I had, just once, imagined a woman touching, kissing, stroking me sensually with love and trust, time would have speeded up, leaping over years of terror, confusion, ambivalence, husband, children, to lesbian knowledge. Then I could also have seen myself touching, kissing, stroking her with love and trust. But active sexuality was male—and I became a male in my fantasies with women. Passive sexuality was female—and I envisioned a male partner when I imagined being touched or kissed. He might taunt me or treat me with contempt or he might be the gentle lover. But even the gentle lover was not fondling me gently because he wanted more knowledge of me. For him it was foreplay. What he really wanted was something from me of his own that lay ahead.

I would maintain that in those days my fantasies were heterosexual, whether they involved women or men. When I knew myself to be a lesbian, a woman-lover, before I ever kissed a woman, my fantasies altered radically. "Fantasy" no longer seemed the right word; "imaginings," rather, since I imagined real possibilities with real women in which both of us kept our reality, instead of the incredibly elaborate structures of male-defined fantasies. The complicated games of teasing, ritualized undressing, provocation, retreat, defiance, submission. Men talk about "play"—"playmates," "foreplay"—but male erotic fantasy

involves not play, but games.

When I knew myself to be a lesbian, I ceased to need those shadow-games—I was moving into female sexuality, into the sunlight.

I always assumed that the reason why heterosexuality had a dark and restless element for me was the puritanism in the culture. The child, punished for her or his sexuality, must associate all sexuality with the secret and forbidden. But what in the culture is kept more secret and forbidden than lesbian sexuality? And yet, for many of us, to know our lesbianism is indeed an act of "moving into the sunlight." It is a way of seeing and feeling more clearly. Not excitement followed by peace—a thunderstorm building at night and exploding—but a profound peace that pervades the most intense excitement. Not the slow undress but the direct gaze at another body, so same and so different. Not a body to be held at bay until the doubts and ambivalences, the foreignness, can be mastered, but a body whose meanings are to be slowly absorbed with both wonder and fullness of knowledge. I am convinced that the direct and clear-eyed gaze of the lesbian—one of the ways that we recognize each other—is related to her sexuality, to the clear-eyed directness of her sensual being, the honesty of her eroticism.

Men and women need games and rituals to overcome their mutual distrust and fear. Women fear, with painful cause, men's superior physical size and force. The erect penis has been used as a weapon against us throughout history, and the deep knowledge of those real and symbolically enacted violations is imprinted on every woman's unconscious, if not her conscious, mind. Rape by husbands, "friends," strangers, five men forcing a 14-year old girl into a wooded area—rape and the threat of rape used to intimidate and confine us, to repress our power. "We tame our women with the banana," a the Mundurucu Indian men in Brazil of their gangrapes. Not surprising that the heterosexual "act of love" has a dark and uneasy underside. The woman must always stifle beneath the surface her personal and collective knowledge that the penis has more often been used as an instrument of terror (or an instrument for male release of sexual tension with indifference to the real woman and her desires, her rhythms, or her fears of dying in childbirth) than as an instrument of love. The woman must, consciously or not, always be insisting to herself, but this man is different.

Man's fear of woman is more deep and primitive since it is even further from consciousness. It is based on a fear of powers that are more mysterious than the power of brute force. Men fear our creative power, that makes our connection to nature more profound, more awesome, and more secure than their own. Woman has the power of life; hence, the power of death—she can bring forth a live child or a dead fetus. Parthenogenesis—the dispensibility of the male—is not only a future possibility for the human race and a present reality in some species, including, on occasion, our own. At one time—before women discovered the relationship between intercourse and pregnancy—parthenogenetic birth was an assumed fact of daily life. Even today, men's confidence about the role they play in creating life is shaky and uncertain. Many—if not most—men carry with them the knowledge that they may well have begotten children whose existence they will never learn of. Other men, looking at an infant whom they hope or fear they have fathered, wonder—is it truly mine? No woman can conceive a child and be unsure whether it was born or

whether she is indeed its mother. She usually knows, better than the man himself, who is its father. Men sense that they are transients in the life-generating processes of nature.

I have borne two children, my lover has borne none. She consciously and without hesitation chose another life than that of biological mother. But when she approaches my cervix she does so with the knowledge that she has lived her lifetime intimately aware of the potentiality of her own uterus. The mystery of my being is no more or less awesome than the mystery of her own.

Coming out—a woman's first experience of another woman's rich and deepest body-life—has been described as coming home. It takes us back to our mother's bodies, but where for a man that is a trip fraught with peril—since he must dissociate himself, define that place as "other"—for us it is a return to the ground of our being in the present, not only in the past. We meet at once the wonder of our lover's body into which we penetrate, the wonder of our mother's body in which we lived, and the wonder of our own in which we are living.

Sexuality that is more than mere release of tension is the exploration, deeper knowledge and celebration of our self and the other. Men can only experience ambivalence about knowing and celebrating a woman. For a man to *know* a woman would be for him to know men's crimes against the Goddess, to confront his own affronts against women, to know above all that there are things that he will never know and yet must worship. Scarcely surprising that men who have a little of that knowledge, who have some intimation of what women are, are so often impotent or gay. They know enough of women's power to fear more knowledge. No wonder that sexuality became loaded with men's guilt and shame. A man knows that to approach a woman's being is to glimpse his own guilt, his own shame. His sexual forays towards her are loaded with the terror that true intimacy with her—true knowledge of her—would change his life.

For me to know another woman is profoundly life-changing, but in changing me it deepens and enlarges my self-love and my knowledge of my own female power. I feel mystery and reverence in climbing the staircase of my lover's being, but the mystery and reverence is for a power that includes me, celebrates me, empowers me.

Not only psychologically and spiritually but physiologically too, men and women must strain to bridge the gap between male and female. I laugh when I read sex manuals. It sounds as if they are trying to get two different species together. From Van der Velde's *Ideal Marriage*—the best-selling manual of my parents' generation, that I used to crouch on the floor of an attic closet to read—to *The Joy of Sex*, men are reminded that they must go against their natural inclinations (or, if you prefer, their acculturation—but whose culture is it?) in order to please a woman. Such books spell out how profoundly different are the rhythms, the needs, the sources of pleasure for men and women.

Why bother? The penis was designed for procreation. Woman's deepest erotic pleasure and fulfillment are anatomically sheer accident in "natural" intercourse. Her multi-orgasmic desires, the imperatives of her clitoris, are rarely met without the addition of "unnatural" acts. And although I find the deep and forceful penetration and vibration of my vagina can create a profound surrender to excitement, as my lover reaches into and shakes my very being, her hand is a more responsive and sensitive instrument than any penis.

The awkwardness of heterosexuality! Masters and Johnson have confirmed

that same-sex loving (for reasons that they see as cultural) is more richly and finely tuned than heterosexual loving. That homoerotic lovers not only savor each other more, but—while already instinctively knowing more of what will please the other—communicate more freely. Is that lack of communication, of loving trust between men and women really cultural? Is it truly “natural” for males and females to spend time together as loving and trusting companions? Not in the rest of nature, at least, where males and females meet only once a year for a few days to attend to the purposes of procreation. The females and children spend all of the other days of the year in each other’s company, while the males travel alone or in small groups with other males.

In their sexual laboratory, Masters and Johnson clinically observe the convenience for the homosexual of taking turns in orgasm. They call it: “you—then me.” I do not “take turns” with my lover. While we may take turns at orgasm, we do not take turns in erotic joy. She and I know within our cells the nature of the excitement the other is experiencing. We do not remain observers of each other’s delight, straining to imagine how it might feel to have a penis stroked. At the moment at which my tongue lifts my lover’s clitoris, I am both outside, creating her joy, and inside, partaking in it. I am simultaneously lover and beloved. As multi-orgasmic, we can extend many times over the delight of bringing each other joy while our sensuality is still alive and mutual. Lesbian loving comes closer to an unbroken erotic flow—between lover and beloved, between active and passive, between kitchen and bedroom, between passion and politics.

The politics of passion. Revolution calls for the No of refusal. The no to one who is dominant and the no to one who is dominated. The no to games and rituals that mask terror. The no to faking orgasm to please another and the no to faking for myself a depth of confidence that cannot stand the full scrutiny of daily life. The no to the lover who enters my being but who is unwilling to face the consequences of the full power of that being. The no to the lover who will use my energy and love, not to transform the world for women, but to shore up the world for men.

Some women, consciously or unconsciously, remain celibate out of that refusal.

But lesbians know that the Nos and the Yeses are indivisible. A revolution with the vision to see its true direction calls for more than refusal. It calls for blood-knowledge of the possible. In her erotic life, the lesbian imprints the possible on the tissue of her being. The deep exploration and celebration of self and other. The reclaiming and the cultivation of the soil of her psychic and physical territory. The dissolving of man-made divisions between flesh and spirituality, giving and receiving, work and play, creation and recreation. The free sharing of wealth. That is what my lover and I do at the kitchen table, and that is what we do in bed.



— photograph by Morgan Gwenwald

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DIARY OF A WOMAN/WIFE/QUEER

Sitting in the dark drive-in, my husband's hand on my thigh, I watch the movie on the screen in front of me. Am I that woman, those women? Am I supposed to be? Obscene, I shudder. Fascinated, I watch. For a clue, for an answer. An eight-inch penis grows to eight feet or more on that screen, looming upward, linear, threatening, a warning. A weapon, like a sword, knife, gun. God's cock must be even longer, I think to myself, the only humorous thought that has occurred to me during the hour we have been here. This movie is serious. This place is serious. The man on the screen is proud, demanding respect, even worship, from the woman who kneels before him, a woman who is reduced, by male fantasy and a cameraman, to nothing but an open mouth, a receiver. My husband tugs my attention back to him; his penis is only seven inches long but he makes sure my hand is on it, a reminder. The fantasy on the screen is to be applied to the reality that sits beside me in this car. I turn the speaker off; I don't like the sounds. Once my husband hid a tape recorder under the bed when we made love and later, he played back for me the sounds of my orgasm. He never understood why I had been so angry and disgusted.

If I remove me, the woman, from that screen, from the slick pages of popular pornographic magazines, then I also remove almost every image of the women I have seen. All women I see there are me, within the minds of the men who make the movies, who take the pictures, who write the words. And yet, they are *not* me, not me as chunky, short-haired, wide-hipped, square, solid, muscular, unshaven, large-thighed. *Only* me as slim, long-legged, moist-lipped, paint-eyed, open-mouthed. *Not* me as strong, capable, free. *Only* me as weak, submissive, willing. Not me, all me. *All* women. A male fantasy that is not *all* fantasy since women act it out every day. I am confused.

I was raised to please a man, sexually. I try to be those women, those fantasies. In bed with him, I bring them to mind; I imitate as best I can, to please him, to define my sexual self. I feel self-conscious because I am large, not slim and svelte. I feel clumsy, ponderous. Afterwards, when the light is out, I roll over as far as I can to avoid touching him in my sleep. I feel angry; I feel sad. But mostly, I feel empty.

But, I am liberal. I am hip. I am a progressive woman. The movies, the books, the magazines, all have the right to be, to exist. Freedom of the press, of choice. Don't let the children have them. It's silly to think that the books and movies have any real influence over people's actions or thoughts. I am liberal; I buy penthouse and playboy at the local convenience store where the manager there knows me, knows my husband. He says my husband is a very lucky guy; he and some of the male customers say they wish their wives would loosen up, read the magazines, go to the movies. They talk about how good

it would be for their sex lives, put some pizzazz into their marriages. They think I'm *okay*. They thump me on the shoulder and tell me their latest dirty jokes.

My neighbor's husband seeks me out to show me a color nude spread in *hustler*: Shere Hite, a lay-out pose done during her college days, years before, reprinted by *hustler* to discredit. *The Hite Report* is valuable; I've read it, have it on my bookshelf. The neighbor man smiles. Proof on the slick pages of the magazine he holds in his hands. She's nothing but a slut, he says, a bitch. Acting like she knows everything. Probably puts out for every guy that comes along. *That's* why she knows so much. I am angry at him, confused and dismayed by what I have seen. I feel betrayed.

There are things bad girls do that good girls don't do. Mama taught me well. But my husband wants something Mama never mentioned. She talked a lot about a wife's duty to please her husband, to submit sexually, to satisfy him, to never tell him "no." She didn't give me any details as to how I should go about it. That was always very mysterious. But now he wants something else and I'm sure it wouldn't fit mama's ideas of what good girls do. He knows I am attracted to women. He approves. He's liberal; he's hip. He's a progressive man. At the drive-in, on the large screen, two women make love together. He knows I watch carefully; he knows I've never seen this before. He wants me to be with women, with *a* woman that I will bring home to him. He wants to watch us make love and then thinks to join in at some crucial point, hoping to replace our hands and mouths with the penis he is sure we will want. He says it would be fun, that no one would be hurt. He brings the idea up from time to time, never forgetting this favorite fantasy. He thinks that my attraction to women will make it possible for him to talk me into such a threesome some day.

I am beginning to have a fantasy of my own and it is relatively simple: all I really want to do is kiss another woman, touch her breasts, hold her, feel the softness. But he brings me books, glossy magazines from a local porno store, women together, women in black garters, wild looking, with whips in their hands, dildoes held like weapons. I can see the male imagination in what the models are doing together, the whip handles and artificial penises. I wonder why there are no books that tell in gentle ways how women are together when they make love with one another. He waits for me to read what he has brought. There are other pictures, too. Women with men in various poses. I realize that I am afraid, afraid that I must be some image if I am to be a woman.

All women are whores, he says to me one day, breaking the Sunday morning silence with his tearing statement. All whores, in one fashion or another. My hand shakes as I pick up my coffee cup. I know he means me, whether or not he will say it. At least hookers are honest, he goes on, obviously enjoying himself, you just give them money and they put out, no questions, no demands, no coaxing. Plain sex. Everyone knows exactly what they're supposed to do. He talks about other women/whores. In order for a guy to get laid, he says, you have to court a woman, buy her dinner, coax her, sweet talk her. And even then she sometimes still says no. "I don't know why women make such a big deal out of it all. Besides a guy spends a lot of time and money on a date and he should get something more substantial than a thank you and a

goodnight kiss." He looks meaningfully at me. I am reminded of how long I held out when he and I were dating. I finally gave in a month before our wedding, tired of the constant demands and somewhat curious, too. But now we are married, I think silently. Then suddenly I understand; he bought my services, my body, when he married me. He pays the rent, buys the food, buys my clothes, gives me a car, and even pays for the gas, to name only a few money matters. I am his own personal prostitute, he is saying, and he pays dearly, much more, perhaps, than he thinks I am worth. And I can be replaced.

I begin to read the magazines once more and I learn quickly now. He has finally frightened me; he has shown me my worth to him even if he did not mean to do so. I must be those women, those fantasies. That is what he wants. He pays me, pays for *it*. He would deny all of this if I were to confront him with it. He *loves* me; he would seem hurt by such an accusation. Now I frequently go to the movies alone, sitting inside my carefully locked car, absorbing what I see on the screen in order to surprise him, to find out what I am to him. I read more and go to the movies once a week. I watch them in total silence. I am cautious because I am alone; I often wear a hat so men passing by my car won't notice that I am a woman without a man by my side, fair game, perhaps wanting some company. I do not get out of the car during the movie. I remain there in order to protect myself. I take my own beer and food.

I begin to notice that the women in these movies are furnished only to offset the men, to be receptacles, necessary to the dim plots and the men's pleasures, whatever form those pleasures might take. The women are not allowed to argue in these films and if they do resist, they are properly subdued by the macho, dominant man, in such a manner that the women are portrayed as liking the roughness, the cruelty, the lack of interest in their desires or in their sexual satisfaction. The point of each and every movie seems to be that men are the aggressive masters and women are willing, panting slaves, even to the point of suffering humiliation or pain. Even the lesbian scenes do not portray women having orgasms, but merely looking futile, fumbling, and incompetent, until a man steps in and takes charge. And of course, there are no scenes of two men together.

The more I read, the more I watch, the less I feel. When in bed with him, I create a scene, I act. I can fake passion and orgasm with great artistry. Maybe he knows. I never ask and he never questions. He thinks there is a medical problem that keeps me from getting wet when we make love. I don't correct his thinking. There's safety for me in his ego-saving logic. More and more I conjure images of women when he and I make love, trying to free myself of the reality of being with him, of having him inside my body.

I am desperate to get away from him, from my marriage. He doesn't really want *me*—I've seen him stare longingly at the nude pictures in *Playboy* and then sigh when he looks at me. I am a poor substitute for those long, slender, "sexy" bodies. I feel cheap, obscene. My broad shoulders and square, chunky body are not feminine, not "sexy." I don't wear skirts or negligees or heels. I don't totter about or act helpless. I've even stopped wearing makeup. He doesn't think of me as a woman.

I am losing feeling for myself. Perhaps I am not a woman. Perhaps I am a

neuter. I have female genitals, breasts. But that is all that would mark me as a woman. I don't fit into any model of woman I can find. I want to be with women. I seek out N.O.W. groups and the Girl Scouts so I can avoid being with men. I find myself staring at women, consumed by feelings I can't name and frightened by my bursts of aggression and desire. I want to make love to a woman and never go home again to a man. Maybe, I should have been born male and it all would have been much easier.

Bad girls. The worst bad girls. Unmentionable bad girls. How will I manage this? She wanted me and told me so to my face. No games. She took me to her apartment and I spent the afternoon in bed with her, drinking wine and making love. I didn't feel aggressive; I felt shy, young. I don't know what it means except that I want to see her again.

I went to bed with a woman, I tell him, not realizing my foolishness. I expect him to understand. He has encouraged me, discussed it with me. My love-making with her has left me feeling gentle towards him, not expecting so much from him. I feel that he will know my joy and will be happy, too. After all, I am here with him. His face blanches for a moment. I knew you would someday, he says, how was it? I don't know how to answer his question. I know he is asking for specific details, a description of exactly what she and I did together when we made love. He wants to confirm his fantasy and the fantasies of the magazines and movies. And he wants my love-making with her to be okay but incomplete. That night, he wants to make love with me. He is especially careful, taking a long time to try to arouse me fully. Later he tells me that he is self-conscious now, that he thinks I am secretly comparing him with her. I tighten inside and tell him that there is no comparison. Reassured, he smiles and goes to sleep. He did not hear, did not understand, what I said to him. But then, it doesn't really matter to me whether he did or not.

I try to write in my journal; I try to describe what it is like to make love with a woman. But I cannot find satisfactory words. If I go into detail, it sounds like a porno story. I think there are no words for women together.

He wants me to bring her home, to fulfill his fantasy. I will have his blessing, his complete approval if I share her with him. He is furious when I refuse to even ask her. I will keep her separate from him, a part of my life that he cannot touch or even see. I try to reassure him in other ways. In anger, he turns on me and says all of our marital difficulties are my fault. He says that I do not know how to make love, that I only know how to fuck. He says I do not know how to be tender or gentle. I think about rocking her in my arms while she slept and then I see the playboy magazine on the sofa. My fault. I am not a real woman. We never make love, only screw. The anger I feel towards him is so intense it frightens me. I have had no identity except as his wife, his woman. I tried to be what he seemed to want me to be. Now I feel the obscenity and the betrayal. And I feel violence in me more vividly than I have ever felt it before.

I lay in bed beside her while she sleeps as she often does after orgasm. It is quiet and I have time to think. I do not want him anymore. I thought I could love both of them and that they would let me. Both want me without the other and I feel I have to choose between them. C. wants me to leave him and live with her in a life that I cannot fully understand. He wants me to leave her and give him back his woman, his self-worth, his proof of manhood. He wants

me to live with him in some undefined way that he can always challenge. I feel like a sacrifice.

I choose neither. I leave alone.

In another town, I unpack boxes, placing my few things in a new house/home. Some of the boxes he has packed, throwing things in; his haste to remove the last of me from his house is obvious in his packing. As I go through the contents of the boxes, I spot a magazine turned cover downward in the bottom of the carton. When I pick it up, there is a picture of three women. One has her arms thrown over her head in a pose of self-defense; another holds a multi-tongued whip; the third woman watches, her arms crossed over her chest. His parting shot. Queer. Dyke. Whore.

I throw away the magazine. All the words were frightening. All the words that are me, that are all women. Slut, queer, dyke, lesbian, hussy, woman. I use hard words and I am still afraid. I have to decide how to be a woman. Without the magazines, without the movies, without the books and the fantasies. I have to create my own fantasy. I write in my journal, word for word, of how my lover and I made love last night.



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VIOLENCE, VICTIMIZATION, VIOLATION

Feminists first focused on overt violence against wimmin in pornography and rape—the rapidly increasing imagery of dismemberment, slaughter, cannibalism in porn, the widespread male linguistic and conceptual merging of violence and sex, the predictable increase of assault and mutilation—in response to the heterosexist charge that if wimmin were liberated from our prudish backgrounds, we would appreciate explicit sexual material and would be bedded by an “appropriate” male. We distinguished between feminism and the male sexual revolution with the latter’s elemental premise of access to wimmin on demand and its consequent absolution of male responsibility and commitment. As we clarified the basic hatred and fear of wimmin which pornography and rape express, we accepted the traditional liberal male distinction between erotica and porn, explaining that material displaying wimmin sexually to arouse men was OK so long as it contained no hint of physical abuse and violence. Violence is the key, we said. And we determined to take back the night. Finally, in an effort to reach out to less aware, less honest, less afraid, less safe and/or less committed wimmin, many have simplified the issues and simply focused on violence.

I think the simplification as well as the focus erroneous. We must ask why violence against wimmin is such an integral part of society; why it is expected that men will maim, rape, batter, mutilate, torture and murder wimmin; why rape, wifebeating and “incest” are ignored while wimmin who fight back face the full brutality of the system. Pornography is violent; but its violence stems from male objectification and victimization of wimmin. We are displayed legs apart, cunts open, arms out of the way, breasts posed, ears accessible, and mouths ready for male “pleasure.” Objectified, we are objects whose function is to be acted upon by men—objects of male pleasure, pain, anger, joy, titillation, aggression, love,² and hatred . . . targets of male “attention.” Straight porn exists to portray the objectification of wimmin, and it is even more blatant in so-called lesbian porn.³ We are the targets at which they aim to get in some mood or other and then relieve themselves. Thus men do things to us and for us and at us and against us but never with us. As a result of objectification, female autonomy, integrity, independence, are invisible, conceptually non-existent. In their place men assert our victim status, and violence against wimmin follows *ipso facto*.

Objectification is violence, a violation of integrity, wholeness, and it leads to more violence; but it is important to acknowledge that objectification is not always *obviously* violent; it is not limited to physical assault, dismemberment, maiming and death. When we focus on explicitly and overtly violent material and on the physical violence of rape, we fail to acknowledge the full extent of the control men claim over us; we fail to admit that institutionalized heterosexuality is key in the maintenance of male supremacy. Over the centuries

men have clothed male domination and authority in the rhetoric of romance and protection. We see only the most blatant of their violations as violence against us.⁴

Protection objectifies just as does predation, and violates our space.⁵ Paternalism operates to legitimize domination and establish control "for our own good." To protect us men do things to us and at us, and if they act "for" us, it is to create the ideology of special protection for wimmin and affirm our victim status: To be protected we must first be in danger. Thus it is in the interest of protectors that there be predators;⁶ for men to maintain the conceptual framework in which they can see themselves as protectors, they must establish and maintain an atmosphere in which wimmin are in danger; they must create our victim status. To maintain the ideology of special protection of wimmin, men have portrayed wimmin as helpless, defenseless, innocent—victims, targets. And when we step out of the feminine role, becoming active and guilty, it is a mere matter of logic that men step up overt physical violence against us to reaffirm our victim status. When they cannot control us through protection, the safety valve they have to fall back on is overt violence, predation.⁷ But protection violates wimmin just as much as predation. Through institutional heterosexuality, men cast themselves as protectors.

If we focus on obvious violence against wimmin in pornography and rape rather than the fundamental objectification of wimmin essential to predation and protection, we will be increasingly tempted to turn to male protection, institutional and random: police protection, the use of men who see themselves as protectors, the fairytale father protector, increased laws on rape, violence and censorship for men to (selectively) enforce, neighborhood male vigilantes, the use of men in anti-porn and take-back-the-night campaigns. We will be more likely to Playboy money to fund battered wimmin's shelters, child advocates and rape crisis lines. And we will be tempted to believe men are essential to our well-being. If we focus on obvious violence against wimmin, it will become increasingly difficult to fight institutional cooptation of feminism and maintain conceptual autonomy from conservatives who are concerned with pornography and rape in their efforts to return to "sexual purity." If we focus on violence against wimmin, we will forget that our victimization forces us to turn to men, and then asking for *protection* becomes an acceptable alternative. The essential function of the propaganda of pornography is objectification. The essential function of the propaganda of protection is also objectification. They both are tools which render wimmin victims, violate our integrity, fix us in male vision. Porn/rape (predation) and protection emerge from the same ideology, and it is a matter of indifference to the successful maintenance of male supremacy which of the two we fall for.

If feminists focus on obvious violence against wimmin, rape and porn appear simply to be the results of some men's actions who have been "conditioned" by a sexist society to vent "abnormal" but tolerated male aggression against wimmin. If, on the other hand, we focus on the objectification and victimization of wimmin, it becomes clear that rape and porn (predation) together with protection are tools men use to enforce female heterosexuality. Taking back the night only from predators reinforces our victimization. Taking back the night from predators as well as protectors challenges the rule of the fathers and the forced alliance of wimmin with men.

NOTES

1. My thanks and love to Julia Penelope for helpful suggestions on an earlier draft of this piece.

2. The violence and death worship of Eros and of male erotic love is epitomized by Cupid's arrow. In Greek literature and in the Bible, Eros is a total taking and subsequent loss of identity in contrast with Agape, a total giving (allegedly motherly love). Neither include *Philia*, companionship and "brotherly" love. The complete removal of giving and of companionship from erotic love in male thought betrays the poverty of the male concept of sexuality as well as of the concept of erotic "love" altogether.

3. There is now a slick, glossy monthly porn magazine coming out of England concerned exclusively with so-called lesbians, *Lesgirls*.

4. To violate is to rape; *violate* and *violence* share the Indo-European root, **wei-*, which means 'vital force.' **Wei-* is possibly related to *wiros* which means 'man' according to the editor of *The American Heritage Dictionary*, and appeared in Old English and Frankish as *werewolf* while appearing in Latin (*vir*) as *virile*. Also the editor thinks the latter relates to *curia* or *court* if it is regarded as deriving from *co-vir* which means 'men together.' Apparently, the vital force of men together, particularly virility in their courts, is violence and violation (rape) following the practice of werewolves.

5. While children are often protected, the protection is allegedly provided so they can have space to grow up and learn to take care of themselves. No such expectations surround the conceptual basis of protected wimmin.

6. In fact, most often protectors are themselves predators: Husbands more often beat their wives than strange wimmin, and fathers are far more likely to rape their daughters than strange girls.

7. For example, prior to the Shah's overthrow, Iranian men attacked feminist wimmin broadcasting a wimmin's program in order to "defend femininity"—punishing feminists and driving other Iranian wimmin to men for protection. The Ayotollah's men continue the same policy, attacking wimmin who refuse the veil.



—photograph by Emily Levine

THE LESBIAN IN PORNOGRAPHY:

A Tribute to Male Power

The photograph shows two women in an elegant living room. Both women have cream-colored skin, taut and flawless. The room is cream-colored: carpeting, sofa, table, walls. The furniture is taut in design: very modern and simple. One woman, blond-haired, lies on the sofa, her ass raised on the arm of the sofa, her legs bent back toward her stomach, the spread of her legs shown by the distance between her feet poised in the air. She is wearing a garter belt, nylon stockings that end a few inches above her knees, and spiked heels the same color as her hair. Her eyes are closed, her eye shadow is dark gray. Her mouth is slightly open, her lips are distinctly pinkish. One of her hands disappears between her legs; the other, emerging from a hidden arm, seems to be fondling her own breast, which is not visible because one sees the profile of the breast closest to the camera. The most prominent part of her body is her buttock, raised, highlighted by the intensity of the light on it. The rest of her ass, even in profile, is obscured by the head of the second woman. The second woman is on her knees beside the sofa arm, her features indistinguishable, her mouth apparently kissing the first woman's exposed buttock but in fact her face is merely profiled against the woman's raised buttock. The second woman is perpendicular to the reclining woman, so that her ass, fully exposed, directly faces the camera. She is wearing a cream-colored robe which is draped across her back and falls to one side to highlight her naked ass. Her legs are spread. Pubic hair shows underneath. She is wearing spiked heels the same color as her hair, dark brown. The light is concentrated on the ass of the woman on her knees.

In the photograph, all visual significance is given to the ass of the woman on her knees which is in the foreground, exaggerated by the light markedly on it, and to its echo, the raised buttock of the woman reclining. The camera is the penile presence, the viewer the male who participates in the sexual action which is not within the photograph but in the perception of it. The photograph does not document lesbian lovemaking; in fact, it barely resembles it. The symbolic reality of the photograph—which is vivid—is not in the relationship between the two women, which not only does not provoke but actually prohibits any recognition of lesbian eroticism as authentic or even existent. The symbolic reality instead is expressed in the posture of women exposed purposefully to excite a male viewer. The ass is exposed and vulnerable; the camera has taken it; the

viewer can claim it. The spiked heels suggest cruelty, associated with the lesbian, the quintessential castrator. At the same time, the spiked heels suggest a slavish conformity to male-dictated fashion, a crippling of the female, binding of the feet, underlined in the accompanying text, which is long and languid, by the declaration that neither woman has ever before made love with a woman (so this is just for you, dear boy) and the assurance that men are magnificent. The exposed ass is an emblem for the values in the photograph as a whole. The contact between the women does not exclude the male; it explicitly invites him. The woman on her knees, legs spread open, conjures up the propitiating, submissive gesture of the animal who takes the same stance (ethologists take note: without the spiked heels) to appease an aggressive male. The photograph is the ultimate tribute to male power: the male is not in the room, yet the women are there for his pleasure. His wealth produces the photograph; his wealth consumes the photograph; he produces and consumes the women. The male defines and controls the idea of the lesbian in the composition of the photograph. In viewing it, he possesses her. The lesbian is colonized, reduced to a variant of woman-as-sex-object, used to demonstrate and prove that male power pervades and invades even the private sanctuary of women with each other. The power of the male is affirmed as omnipresent and controlling even when the male himself is absent and invisible. This is divine power, the power of divine right to divine pleasure, that pleasure accurately described as the sexual debasing of others inferior by birth. In private, the women are posed for display. In private, the women still sexually service the male, for whose pleasure they are called into existence. The pleasure of the male requires the annihilation of women's sexual integrity. There is no privacy, no closed door, no self-determined meaning, for women with each other in the world of pornography.

DECLARATION OF

I am afraid
of men with whips
of men who like pictures
of men with whips
and women tied down
and women tied open

I am afraid
I remember
men who said
all I needed was
and there's no such thing
and relax and enjoy

I am afraid
of men who say
this pretend threat
this is fantasy
this is freedom
for women tied down
for women tied open

I am afraid
you said
you assume consent
and you oppose censorship
and you would not deny sexuality
for men who like whips
and men who like pictures
of men with whips

I am afraid
when the woman on the screen
was slit
from throat to cunt
when they pulled out her guts
the men in the theater stood yelling
give me a knife
give me a knife
and then went
home

I am afraid
we are at war

—Catherine Risingflame Moirai

MYSTERY AND MONSTER:

The Lesbian in Heterosexual Fantasies

For some reason I have yet to fathom, the year 1975¹ saw the publication of an extraordinary number of stories and pictorials about the subject of Lesbianism in two sectors of the popular media that we prefer to ignore: confession magazines and "men's" magazines. While sanity and self-esteem might argue that the less said about the prurient fascination with Lesbianism that heterosexuals seem to have the better, I believe there is information to be gained from exposing the mythological structure of their fantasies that will prove tactically useful to Lesbians in particular and feminists in general, especially if we intend to continue to fight masculinist pornography and the violence against wimmin it purveys as a necessary ingredient of heterosexuality.² Whether we wish to acknowledge it or not, male pornography, (and I include here both the magazines aimed at a female audience, such as *True Confessions* and *Secrets*, and the slick porno productions written for a male audience, such as *Playboy* and *Oui*), exerts an insidious, long-lasting, and destructive influence on our ability to conceive ourselves as Lesbians, and provides the conceptual framework within which heterosexual wimmin and men perceive us. We are not "people" to heterosexuals because we have been unwilling, two-dimensional toys manipulated to serve the whims of heterosexual fantasies in a tradition that goes back at least to the greek patriarchal "classics."

It would be simple (and stupid) to pretend to ourselves that we have somehow escaped whole from the influence of male imagination in coming to understand ourselves as Lesbians. How many of us, desperate for *any* information about other Lesbians, had only the confession and porno magazines to read when we were growing up? (Where did you hide yours?) How many of us accepted those male images and descriptions completely, unwittingly, innocently, believing that we were learning *what it means to live as a Lesbian?* (I did.) To what extent is our individual understanding of our sexuality *as Lesbians* still structured according to those male fantasies we soaked up as young wimmin? I have no handy numbers to toss around here, but when I look at the inside of my own imagination, I am frightened. What is worse, perhaps, the concepts created by those early images and words are so integral to us that we don't even want to talk about them, and with good reason. It is humiliating, depressing, and scary to admit to ourselves that we believed, and *still* believe, in neural structures we can't begin to reach, those images we accepted when we didn't know any better. I am talking here about emotional violence so pervasive, buried in our minds,

that most of us will die with some portion of the self-hatred still intact within us. I learned to despise myself as a Lesbian from those magazines and books, and now my belief in feminism makes it easy to despise myself for believing what I was told and for not being able to completely disengage my sexual feelings from those lurid fantasies. I already have enough reasons for despising myself; if I maintain my silence about the ways in which men determined my perceptions about my Lesbianism, I would despise myself more. That silence, and the conflicts about it, are tearing me apart.

It would be so comforting, and dishonest, to say that no one, especially Lesbians, believes that "nonsense" churned out in such huge quantities by the men who conceive, write, print, publish, and distribute it. We must never forget that *men* control the economically feasible media in this world, including pornography; that what we see in the popular media is of men, by men, *for* men, even when a particular book, article, movie, or TV program is advertised (by men) as being aimed (by men) *at* a female audience. We must keep asking *why* such-and-such exists, *why* specific images keep recurring, *why this* gets published and *that* doesn't. We must continue to ask *whose* interests the various media serve. We must ask *why* pornography exists; why the images we see are available but *not* others. We must ask *why* the idea of Lesbianism is so popular in male pornography! Whoever controls and, thereby, has unchallenged access to the media in this century controls our minds and our lives. It may be fashionable to pretend otherwise, but it's also foolish.

Being virtually unaware of the ways in which male pornography had influenced me, I didn't realize that anyone believed the distortions and misinformation contained therein to be "factual." After all, the "purpose" of pornography is to provide the content of sexual fantasies. I discovered that other people accept the "stuff of fantasy" as factual information, including myself, when I happened to overhear a conversation in a restaurant in New York City.

You know how men can occupy space just by talking? On this particular morning, I was having breakfast out with the woman I then lived with, when I heard a male in a back booth explaining, at the top of his lungs, *how Lesbians do it*. I looked back, and saw two males and a woman sitting in a booth, and the male I had heard was "explaining" to her about "lesbians." When she shook her head in disbelief, he assured her that he had gotten his information from reliable authority. His authority? *A STUDY OF LESBIAN PRACTICES!!!* And that was how I learned about the existence of that magazine, from a male who believed that he had *THE WORD* on "lesbian practices." How many wimmin have participated in similar incidents and, not knowing any better, accepted such misinformation as the basis for their opinions about themselves and other wimmin? He went on with his "explanation" for at least half an hour, describing for her bewildered amusement the scenes of sado-masochism, whippings, nipple-pinching, the use of whip handles as dildoes, and, finally, wound up by saying that all any Lesbian needed was "a good fuck by the right man." Mind you, I was sitting in a booth in the front of the restaurant, and they were sitting way in the back, yet I heard every word of that conversation. How many other people heard it, too? How many believed it? (Do we want to know?)

As we left the restaurant I stopped at the newsstand on the corner, just on a hunch, to see if *A Study of Lesbian Practices* was there. And it was. I bought it, dear reader, and thus began the process of collecting as many of these periodicals as I could find (and afford). (They are now on file at the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York City. A "gift" of dubious value, but perhaps some day they'll have "merely" historical interest.) What I found remarkable was the *quantity* of male descriptions of Lesbian activities (not real ones, needless to say) available on the newsstands during a two-month period, October-November of 1975. (There are nine such articles in six magazines.) Between March and October of the same year, 11 articles purporting to be about "Lesbians" appeared in confession magazines, which I assume to be the female equivalent of male pornographic materials. (If you've read one, you know why.) Both types of magazine exploit ignorance about Lesbians as a means of titillating their audiences: Confession magazines portray most of their Lesbian characters as monsters, while male magazines portray us as mysterious and somehow "unreal." These contradictory views of Lesbianism serve two important cultural needs: Portrayal of the Lesbian as disgusting and sordid keeps wimmin bound to men; depicting the Lesbian as mysterious and surreal enables males to think that Lesbians aren't a threat to them. By perpetuating images of the Lesbian as "dangerous" to wimmin and "exciting" to males, these pulp magazines make it easy for their respective audiences to continue to think of Lesbianism in culturally safe ways. Thus, however much we might wish to ignore it, the popular media exercise considerable influence, both reflecting and perpetrating conventional, masculinist attitudes among heterosexuals, and the image of the Lesbian promoted in these media deserves our attention if we plan to combat their effects in our own lives, never mind anyone else's.

This periodic interest in Lesbianism, in a culture that actively suppresses discussion of the subject in more "respectable" publications, indicates that some awareness that Lesbians exist abounds, at least in those media directed to a mass reading audience. That this increased interest in a taboo subject is essentially prurient carries cultural messages of its own. Why does Lesbianism have such pornographic appeal for those who purchase magazines such as *True Story*, *My Romance*, *True Confessions*, on the one hand, and *Cavalcade*, *Climax*, and *Playboy*, on the other? Some of the appeal must derive from the combined effects of Lesbianism as a tabooed, and therefore "deviant," topic, and the ignorance about us that results from our invisibility. Although the handling of Lesbianism as content in the two types of mass magazine is significantly different, and apparently aimed at the culturally-approved "taste" of the sex for whom the magazine is published, the portrayal of "lesbianism" as a potential source of sexual fantasy for both sexes tells us a lot about the dullness of heterosexist culture in America, and nothing about Lesbians. Because, of course, what one reads in *True Story* or *Playboy* has no relation to the reality of Lesbianism. In both confession and male magazines the images of Lesbians and our "activities" are clearly intended to feed the fantasies of those who read them. That is, in magazines published for a heterosexual audience in need of escape from the drabness of their own lives, the Lesbian becomes a dangerous (therefore exciting) subject cast in a safe medium. An examination of the differences

in the treatment of Lesbianism in these magazines reveals the uses to which our lives are subject in a heterosexist culture.

The readers of confession magazines are primarily young wimmin between the ages of 12 and 25, (my own introduction to the genre came through female peers in junior high school), but this does not imply that some readers of these publications aren't older or male. The style, format, and range of topics in the "confessions" are cast stereotypically for a young female audience. The articles are simplistically conceived and written, and the subjects treated have to do with rape, abortion, familial relations, incest, love, extramarital sexual relationships, orgies, and other tabooed areas of interpersonal and social problems. Unfortunately, because most of these subjects are the sort that most young wimmin have been taught they shouldn't discuss with *anyone*, "confession" magazines provide them with the only information they are likely to find. Since Lesbianism is defined by our culture as a "social problem," it fits very neatly within the range of topics covered by the "confessions." The titles on the covers of two confession magazines illustrate the tone and approach to the problems as they are presented for young wimmin: From *Real Confessions* (April, 1975): "My Father Watched Me Make Love!", "Kept as a Sex Slave for a Teen Rape-Gang--only faith in god saved my sanity!", "He Made Me Pregnant--without even touching me!", "Forced to Marry--though I can't love *men*!"; from *Revealing Romances* (April, 1975): "The Sex Operation I Swore I'd Never Have--I Believed in Leaving Mother Nature Alone", "Scared to Try What This Girl Offered Me--If I Let Her, Would I Ever Want a Man Again?", "Manhandled Too Often--I Went from Great in Bed to Dead in Bed", "He Promised, 'It Will Be Better Next Time'--Eager For Sex Until I Got It".

In general, the subject of Lesbianism is advertised in the same sensational, excited tone; one can almost hear the fearful tremor in the voice, complete with exclamation marks: "How Did I Ever Get Mixed up with a Roommate like Angie?--The story of a singles weekend that turned into a nightmare!", (*True Confessions*, April, 1975); "Maybe I'm a Lesbian!--In my husband's arms I have every reason to believe it!", (*True Story*, March, 1975); "Rape Was Double Horror for Me--Because I'm a *Lesbian*!", (*Real Confessions*, June 1975); "I Lured My Best Friend into My Bed--I Wanted to touch her, love her, but my kind of love always ends with pain", (*My Romance*, July, 1975); "The Family Secret That Became Heartbreak--My Mother is a Lesbian", (*True Love*, May, 1975); "My Stepsister Can't Love a Man--*She Wants Me!*", (*True Experience*, October, 1975). With two notable exceptions, the articles about Lesbianism present us as depraved, disgusting monsters, which is the "appropriate" response for any "normal" woman. As these titles indicate, the subject of Lesbianism is merely a lewd enticement, and the so-called confessions carry with them the "moral" that Lesbianism is "dirty," "immoral," "sinful," and "evil," an activity in which no "decent" woman would engage. Of course, the readers get to enjoy these Lesbian stories from a safe distance, vicariously, at the same time drawing about them the safe cloak of conventional morality.

All of the negative stories carry in them warnings about the dangers of Lesbians, the inherent corruption of Lesbians, and emphasize the social stigma attached to Lesbianism. In "Scared to Try What This Girl Offered Me", for example, we first meet Peggy as she arrives at a reform school, and the third

sentence of the story sets the tone: "I could picture some butch matron beating me to death and then saying I'd fallen and hit my head." Another story, one which ends happily for the Lesbian, begins by describing a teenager's first Lesbian love affair, with her ninth-grade teacher. The two wimmin are caught making love, and the teacher, of course, is immediately fired (and replaced by a male teacher!) Perhaps the most clearly stereotyped portrayal of the Lesbian occurs when Peggy (of "Scared to Try") encounters her first "dyke" in the reform school.

The other girl who was let into the bathroom at the same time I was whispered, 'Don't worry about Julie. She's a lousy fink, but I'll take care of you, baby.' We'd moved out of sight of the door by then, and this other girl put her hands on my breasts.

I jumped as if I'd been scalded. 'Hey, what's the idea?' I demanded. I tried to sound tough, but I was scared. I realized this girl was a lesbian—a real dyke with squatty build and coarse features. Her hair was a drab brown and chopped off just below her ears. Her eyes were pale and evil looking, though she tried to smile in a winning way.

'I'm Lena,' she said. 'And you know what the idea is, baby. I run this joint, you know. If you want to do easy time here, you'd better be friends with me.'

'I don't go for your kind of friendship,' I whispered fiercely. 'I've got a man in my life—a real man who has something to give me. You dig?'

(Revealing Romances, p. 37)

Clearly, Peggy's involvement with "a real man" is supposed to make her immune to lesbian advances, and her initial reaction to Lena typifies the ways wimmin are taught to imagine lesbian contacts.

Carol, the major figure in "Forced to Marry," is constantly badgered by her parents to marry. The final argument that pushes her into marriage is expressed by her mother.

'We're your family. We know you're a normal, decent girl. But your attitude about marriage is unnatural—and we want to protect you from scandal. Nobody's talking yet—but they will.'

And Carol thinks to herself:

There was nothing between Buddy and me. We were just two women who had no marriage plans. I never asked her what her reasons were, nor told her the truth about mine. But now that my family's suspicions were out in the open, I had to face them—and I was frightened.

I wasn't a homosexual, but the thought of people whispering about me behind my back—made me sick.

She decides to marry Mark because of the pressure from her family, although she believes "There's something wrong with me. I can't love men." After a rocky beginning and a brief separation, she suppresses her lack of enthusiasm for sex with her husband, and resigns herself to heterosexuality: "But in the end, it's all turning out for the best." (Sigh.) In spite of her fears about the possibility that she might be a lesbian, the demands of a heterosexual audience are satisfied as Carol settles for heterosexuality and the "safety" of marriage.

This fear of Lesbianism is the major theme of "Maybe I'm a Lesbian!," in which Connie struggles constantly against the possibility. After a school friend has commented that "it's a gay world," with emphasis on the word *gay*, Connie's introspection reveals her "problem":

Forgot, too, the doubt that had been keeping me awake nights—the doubt that said that maybe I *wasn't* normal. That I might be like Martha Barnes, the girl on my dorm floor who was unmistakably a lesbian. Or Miss Phigbee, my high school P.E. teacher, who was the only person of either sex I'd ever had a crush on. Miss Phigbee, who lived with a squarely-built, masculine woman named Jo.

Later, Martha Barnes asks Connie to study with her, and Connie wonders if Martha is friendly to her because she knows that Connie is “like her.” Again, sex-role stereotyping plays an important part in the development of the story. Connie wants to join the Waves, but is told by her husband-to-be that “they’re all lesbians.” (He goes on to say, gratuitously: “I never dated one myself. Women like that aren’t my type.”) After two wimmin have dropped in and “caught” her working on her sewing machine, Connie feels humiliated and says to herself: “Okay, so I’m a failure when it comes to being a woman. Well, then, I’ll just be what I am . . .,” and she puts on a pair of old jeans and a polo shirt. Finally, she decides to “be herself,” and her marriage also begins to improve. The article ends with a lengthy moral concerning the role of wimmin in American society.

Women today are very lucky. We have a lot of opportunities now that women never had before. Women are piloting planes, removing brain tumors, and fixing telephone lines, besides being nurses, and teachers and secretaries. Some of us have children, others choose not to. Some marry, some never do. But we’re all ‘normal’ women. An interest in mechanics or sports doesn’t make you a lesbian. And neither does an understanding tolerance of those women who are.

I’ll never want to be like Martha Barnes or Phyll . . . or poor Miss Phigbee, my high school P.E. teacher. The world isn’t ready for their sexual preferences, and I think they miss a lot by not knowing normal male-female love. But I’ll never again think that just because I, or anyone else, prefers motors to cook-books, jeans to ruffled skirts, or being a Wave to being a chorus girl, that they’re in the misfit category.

When Darrell got home . . . I explained all that to him, and then we had a rousing good time in bed. The kind that made him know he was a man—and me know I was definitely all woman.

(*True Story*, p. 96)

In spite of the plug for “understanding tolerance,” the conclusion is clearly intended to reassure readers of their own “normality.” And, although it is fine to encourage wimmin to pursue their own interests in spite of the sex-role dichotomy, I find the insistence on defining Lesbians as “misfits” a grating bit of condescension. But the medium sells this kind of treatment, since its purpose is to tantalize its female readers with possibilities, at the same time reinforcing their heterosexual security. Whatever the specific instance, they can sympathize with the major female character who either doesn’t enjoy sex with her husband or prefers tinkering with machines to cooking, and, when the character accepts life with a male, these readers can re-establish their heterosexual identities through the process. Is it any wonder that so many wimmin buy confession magazines?

Conventional horror at the thought of Lesbianism is expressed graphically in “My Mother is a Lesbian”, a story in which a young woman runs away to join her mother after her father has remarried. She has never been told why

her mother left because her father wanted to “protect” her. After traveling all night to the city where her mother lives, she coaxes the landlady to let her wait inside the apartment for her mother. Shirley, the young woman, is half asleep when her mother returns from a party, with her lover, and she watches them embrace and kiss after they’ve turned on the lights.

I heard my mother’s excited giggle. And then I heard a wounded cry. They broke apart and looked at me. And that was when I knew the anguished sound had come from me.

‘Shirley!’ my mother screamed. She rushed over to me, reaching out, crooning, ‘My baby. Where—’

‘Don’t touch me!’ I was up on my wobbly legs, backing away from her, the horror swirling around me like a red fog. ‘You’re—’ My voice choked in spasm of revulsion.

‘You’ve got to understand,’ my mother cried.

But I did. And I staggered away from her toward the door, needing to get outside before I got physically sick . . .

I began crying. It was so *awful*, worse than any nightmare I’d ever had.

(*True Love*, p. 50)

Shirley is rescued by her father, finally, and he takes her back home. While they’re on the plane, Shirley assures him: “And I’m not—like that, Daddy.” He replies: “Thank God.” The final sentence brings us the reassurance that all’s right with the world: “So, while I can’t say what’s right and what’s wrong, I can say I’m glad I am the way I am—a girl who likes boys.” In spite of this qualification, the expected revulsion and horror is explicit in this article, and the mother *never* is given a chance by her daughter either to explain her life or to try and console her. The Lesbian mother’s pain, her point of view, is never heard throughout the story.

Peggy, in “Scared to Try What This Girl Offered Me”, although she expresses the appropriate hostility when approached by Lena, the “coarse dyke,” later becomes attracted to a young woman who doesn’t “look like one.” The progression of her thoughts provides an interesting example of the way in which heterosexuality and male approval are insinuated into story lines.

My head buzzed; my cheeks burned. Grace was a lesbian. This beautiful, talented girl wanted to be my lover. I thought of Ron, and I could hardly remember what it felt like to be with him . . .

Oh, no, I cried deep inside me. Don’t let it happen! But still I was excited. Don’t knock it till you’ve tried it—I’d heard that plenty of times, even on the outside. What would it be like, I wondered. Would it really be good? Would it be anything like a man’s love? If it were, wouldn’t that be a kick! . . . Would I be doing it because I wanted to or because I wanted to ruin myself? . . . Her other hand went to the back of my neck, and she pulled my face toward hers. Our lips met.

It was awful—no, it wasn’t. It was just the idea of it that was awful. If we’d been in the dark and I’d thought she was a boy, I would have been thrilled, . . . I longed to melt in Grace’s arms, but something held me back. If I started down this street, would I ever be able to turn back? Would I turn against heterosexual love? I couldn’t bear to think that I’d never want a man’s body in the coupling that is a part of creation.

(*Revealing Romances*, pp. 39-40)

Through the character of Peggy, the reader is allowed to venture into the idea of Lesbianism without feeling seriously threatened by the events. At each step of the way, as Peggy's thoughts move her toward Grace, readers are reminded of heterosexuality as Peggy weighs things in her mind. At no point does Peggy let go of males as her standard of comparison, and the female reader is thus permitted a minor transgression in fantasy, knowing that Peggy won't take her far beyond socially proscribed boundaries.

"My Stepsister Can't Love a Man—She Wants Me" presents the Lesbian, Figgy, as a rapist. The reaction of the "straight" daughter to the advances of her Lesbian half-sister completely satisfies conventional expectations. From the beginning, Angela, the "normal" young woman, is "mildly uneasy about Figgy," the Lesbian stepsister, because she is "forever looking at me, watching me." Figgy, of course, is described in a frightful way. As Angela sees her: "Her hair was terrible. It was a blunt-cut and not cute in a pixie way, but just chopped off. She didn't wear one speck of makeup, not even to emphasize her eyes, which were unusually big and blue. Of course she wore jeans and a shirt, but there wasn't any style in the way she dressed." Well, of course, all the "signals" are there! Any woman whose hair isn't "cute," who doesn't "emphasize" her eyes, and whose dress lacks "style" can't be completely "normal." If Figgy looks so terrible, it is difficult for the conventional reader to be surprised when she "attacks" Angela one night. Angela has safely fallen asleep and becomes "dimly aware of feeling caresses beneath [her] sheer baby-dolls." Angela's description of the ensuing scene establishes her own authenticity as a "normal" woman.

My pleasure at the sensations quickly turned to horror when I realized their source. Twisting away, I yelled, 'Get away! Are you crazy?'

Swiftly, Figgy caught me in a grip I couldn't break. I strained against her, but she only pressed her body tighter to mine. Her breath rasped in my ear.

The taste of vomit was in my throat. 'Let me go,' I croaked. . . .

Figgy was a lesbian!

It can't be true, I battled in anguish, but I knew it was true; all the pieces fit. Even without Figgy in my bed, all the pieces fit. . . .

'Let me show you,' she purred, her hands shifting across my flesh.

Swallowing against the sickness in my mouth, I protested, 'That's like rape.'

'It's love,' she argued.

'Not love! Not between two girls! How dirty can you get?'

Angela threatens to tell Figgy's father, and gives her an ultimatum. Poor Angela, of course, lives "in dread of what might happen." Figgy, driven to extremes in her "drive" for satisfaction, is caught by a neighbor attacking his daughter. He drags her back home, and while Figgy lies "crumbled to a heap on the floor," he says "in a tone of horror": "She had her face between my baby's legs." (Hmmm.) Later, Angela provides us with her analysis of the situation.

Long after the house was quiet, I lay awake, reflecting about Figgy, wondering what I could have done differently. I did see that with her friend, Trish, out of town and with me repelling her at every turn, Figgy was all wound up and ready to pounce. It was just awful that she'd caught Christy Sellers alone.

At the end of the story, Figgy is being treated at the Pastoral Council Foundation, and the family is trying to survive the crisis. The psychiatrist has informed them "that a true lesbian can't be changed," and they are trying to learn to

accept Figgy as she is. Because Angela has established her "credentials" as a heterosexual, she can add at the end: "In time, maybe I can really be a friend and a sister to Figgy. And maybe she'll be the same to me."

In each of these articles written from the perspective of a heterosexually-programmed woman the emphasis is on the horror she feels when she is touched by a Lesbian or when a male calls her a Lesbian. Once the narrator has carefully proven to the reader that she is "alright," it is permissible to express sympathy, or even tolerance, for the "unfortunate" Lesbian, who will never know "real love." The readers of such stories are thus encouraged and reinforced in their own heterosexuality by vicariously experiencing something alleged to be Lesbianism at a safe distance. In only *one* story is the narrator allowed to *consciously* experience pleasure when another woman touches her, but she is turned off when she thinks that she might never want a man again. The logic of this "reasoning" is never explained, although I assume that it suffices as a "turning-point" for heterosexual wimmin.

Up to this point, the articles I've been discussing appear to fulfill one's expectations about the kind of treatment one would find in a confession magazine. There are, however, four exceptions to this general statement. Two of them are "confessions" told from the Lesbian's point of view, and the other two are purported "interviews" with "real" Lesbians. Once again, however, the method of treatment and presentation is simple-minded, and it is clear that the writers assume that most readers of confession magazines are heterosexual wimmin (which is probably true).

One of these stories, "I Lured My Best Friend into My Bed," carried a subtitle that contradicts the actual outcome of the article—"I wanted to touch her, but my kind of love always ends with pain." The major character, Val Owens, describes herself and her experiences in a stereotypical fashion. She thinks she's always been a Lesbian, she has kept a copy of *Playboy* hidden in her drawer under her panties, and she had her first Lesbian experience with an older woman, a teacher (of course!). After her parents find her and the teacher naked in bed, the teacher is fired, and Val becomes a member of a group of Lesbians her own age. She is attracted to Meg, and plots ways of seducing her. The major event in the story, from which it takes its title, is the night that Val tries to make love to Meg. She waits until Meg is asleep, and then begins to gently caress Meg. (MORAL: Never go to sleep around a Lesbian!) Meg responds, in her sleep, (of course), thinking that she's in bed with her boyfriend. When Meg realizes that she's kissing Val, she pulls away and tries to cover her body. When Val tries to tell Meg that she loves her, Meg screeches, "Get away from me you—you pervert!" In this story, the "true" heterosexual woman is appropriately disgusted and repelled by the approach of the Lesbian, but the Lesbian winds up with her own apartment in New York, where she is protected by the anonymity of a large city. She has a "wonderful roommate," and they "have a great thing going." The "pervert" is living happily in New York City with "her own kind," she has "seen the error of her ways," and, most likely, we are given to understand that she'll never bother another "normal woman" again.

My last example of the Lesbian image in confession magazines is unique: Not only is it told from the Lesbian's point of view, but it also deals with a situation common to adolescent wimmin after they discover their Lesbianism.

In this instance, the young woman has been forced by her parents to go out on a date with a young male, a "friend" of the family. However, Madelyn, the young Lesbian, has already made plans with Barbie, her lover. Madelyn's description of her relationship with Barbie is superficial, and reflects heterosexual ideas about Lesbian relationships:

Barbie, as you might've guessed, was really the butch in our relationship. She dug taking over, and she was so good at directing me and guiding me in whatever we did, especially in the sensual pleasures we shared. She always beat me at chess. She made me go out with her, wearing no underpants and bra. It was all fun, and it turned me on.

Although Madelyn protests her mother's interference in her life, an ultimatum from her father forces her to accept a date with the young man her mother had picked for her. After her initial refusal to date a male, Madelyn's mother begins to sob violently: "What's going to happen to her? . . . She's not normal. There's something wrong with her! Oh God, what is it?" In an unusual turn of events, however, it is the young male who is "sick," for he repeatedly rapes Madelyn after she refuses to have anything to do with him sexually, and he ends up being treated by a psychiatrist. Madelyn spends a month in a sanatorium being treated for the emotional trauma of rape, her mother realizes that she shouldn't have pushed her daughter into doing something she didn't want to do, and the story ends happily, the only one of its kind in the magazines I've surveyed.

The contrast between the image of the Lesbian projected to wimmin by confession magazines and that portrayed in male magazines is startling, and revealing. While wimmin's pulp magazines continue, by and large, to perpetrate negative cultural attitudes toward Lesbianism, "men's" magazines tend to use the idea of Lesbianism in order to titillate or excite their primarily male audiences. There are two significant differences between these two types of magazine that strike me with renewed force each time I consider them: First, while the confession magazines rely on the verbal medium, using *words* to describe *reactions* to Lesbianism, male magazines use photographs to depict supposed "lesbian" *activities*, and captions to direct the fantasies. Men are stimulated (I guess) by visual imagery; at least, that's what's provided for them in their slick magazines. The photographs are posed by professional models, not Lesbians, so I suspect that it is the "claim" regarding Lesbianism that makes it a popular subject. One might wish to argue that photographs of wimmin pretending to engage in lesbian activities is only an "excuse" for showing *more* nude or partially-clad females to the prurient male eye, but such magazines have shown female nudes for years and they don't need "excuses" for exploiting our bodies. If male pulps continue to provide visual portrayals of "lesbians" for male heterosexuals, it must be because such men are fascinated by the sexual "potential" of the subject. When *Playboy* published their first selection of photographs from j. frederick smith's *Sappho: The Art of Loving Women*, it promised its readers that this was only the first such selection. "And you'll be happy to note that there will be a sequel in our February issue. How's that for a special valentine?" While confession magazines are pushing the negative reactions of "normal" wimmin to Lesbian advances, male magazines are offering the same subject as something pleasant, even desirable, to their readers.

Second, the confession magazines stress heterosexuality as a moral imperative for wimmin, asserting time after time that any woman who permits her-

self to become involved in a Lesbian relationship will never again "enjoy" a relationship with a man. Why this assertion should be so frightening to wimmin, I have no idea. Certainly the stories that fill these magazines offer no substantial reasons why wimmin should *want* to relate to men, and one would think that Lesbianism would be an alternative. But, of course, there are two very clear messages embedded in the stories: In the heterosexual stories, which feature rape, incest, and battering, the powerlessness of wimmin and their dependence on men for "protection" (from the same men?) provides the covert "moral," whereas, in the stories that focus on the subject of Lesbianism, the emphasis is on the supposed "depravity" of a Lesbian lifestyle. Why don't the readers of confession magazines see the depravity of heterosexual relationships? How do they manage to *not* understand the contradictions to be found between the covers of a single issue? In contrast, the portrayal of Lesbians in male magazines is thoroughly consistent with their depiction of wimmin in general as the *objects* of male sexuality, with, perhaps, the additional titillation created by *inaccessibility*. The major theme found over and over again in slick porno magazines is *male conquest of wimmin*. How much more reassuring, then, to a male must be the "conquest" of a Lesbian??? If Lesbians don't like men, then the male who succeeds in convincing a Lesbian to have sex with him must be very "special." And we're back to the cliched male ego again. In the male porno magazines, then, Lesbianism is used as a vehicle for reassuring the male of his desirability, not his heterosexuality *per se*, as it is used in confession magazines.

By setting the portrayals of Lesbianism in magazines aimed at sex-segregated audiences in contrast to each other, it becomes possible to discern some of the mechanisms by which heterosexuality and male dominance are maintained in our culture. The confession magazines provide a "legitimate" vehicle for wimmin to externalize their hostility toward men; at the same time, Lesbianism, their alternative to men, is presented in ways that refocus men as the "desirable" sex. Wimmin are told again and again that they aren't "real" wimmin if they aren't heterosexual and dependent on men, socially, economically, and sexually. Male porno, on the other hand, doesn't reinforce male heterosexuality, it reinforces conquest as a *prerogative* of male sexuality, and the definiendum of a "real" man. Heterosexual fantasies about Lesbianism are, thus, the link that secures the circle of institutionalized heterosexuality. Lesbianism is used to bind wimmin to heterosexuality and male domination, to insure that they remain vulnerable to male conquest. What are the mechanisms that secure these interconnections?

Part of the answer lies in the *kinds* of material found in the magazines themselves, in the very conjunctions created by the possible story lines. First, consider the fact that confession magazines carry stories that purport to handle, in a "realistic" fashion, the very real problems that wimmin confront in our lives: rape, wife battering, lack of pleasure from heterosexual sex, too much pleasure from heterosexual sex, abortion, unwanted children, adoption, and—Lesbianism, strong feelings for other wimmin. Having aligned Lesbianism with every other major issue in a woman's life, (and it is worth pointing out that all the other problems stem from heterosexual relationships), it's a simple matter for the writers (and publishers) of these stories to tell wimmin that *the solution* to all of these problems is a *good man*. Once all of the "problems"

have been reduced to the level of fantasy, it makes a certain kind of sense to offer, in the place of the unpleasant "fantasies," yet another fantasy that promises hope, however false: the discovery of that mythical beast, the "good" man. At this point, who can tell the difference?

If we want to know why Lesbianism has come to be thought of by wimmin as belonging to the same genre as rape, mutilation, and abortion, we may find some thought-provoking evidence elsewhere. The magazine *Secrets*, for example, carries a monthly feature called, "SEX—ask our male expert." (Does it set your teeth on edge?) Their "male expert" is "Alex," who is willing to tell their female readers "how the mysterious male mind works." (The only credentials offered for Alex's expertise are: he has "experienced the world" and "he's the type who appreciates a good woman.") In the May, 1975 issue, a woman wrote in, wanting to know if she should tell her husband-to-be about an affair she once had with another woman. Alex's reply, with all of its contradictions, is interesting.

I definitely think we men are threatened by a woman's affair with another woman. Even when a man is pretty sure he's satisfying his woman, he's never sure what making love is like for her. Men fear that women, since they understand better what sex means to a woman, can be better lovers to each other. We wonder, too, if these women really hate men and so turn to other women for sex. Then again, some men feel that sex between women is a perversion. You seem to be honest, and you want to tell him about your affair, and he might understand more about you if you did. But when you do, be sure to reassure him that you think he's terrific in bed, that you prefer men as lovers, and having sex with this woman was your way of showing her how much you cared. If he still feels troubled, try to get him to discuss his feelings with you. He'll probably discover his fears and prejudices are silly and unimportant.

Once the two of you are able to talk freely, he'll feel more sure of you and less threatened by the idea that at one time you loved a woman. Try it; I'm sure you'll get positive results!

While the specific logic of this response escapes me, the contradiction does not: Although men are threatened by Lesbianism, (Alex makes this assertion twice), this woman is supposed to "reassure" her husband-to-be, thus proving to him that his "fears and prejudices are silly and unimportant." I think that Alex is right; men are threatened by the thought of wimmin loving each other. If we look carefully at the juxtaposition of four of the assertions here concerning "what goes on in the male mind," an interesting sequence emerges. First, Alex says that men don't know what making love is like for a woman. (Can't they guess?) Second, third, and fourth, *after* his admission of the conceptual ineptness of heterosexual males, Alex goes on to list three popular stereotypes about Lesbians: (1) We're better lovers than men; (2) We're man-haters; (3) We're perverted. (The first two may be true; the last one is a matter of definition.) But *what*, if anything, is the conceptual connections between the masculine inability to imagine whether or not a woman enjoys sex with them and the conventional statement about Lesbians? Simple: We get from no. 1 to no. 3 via no. 2, and the connection is FEAR. See, IF men aren't decent lovers, IF wimmin are better lovers, THEN, we're "man-haters" and "perverted." Is that clear? (To *anyone*?)

For the other side of exactly the same coin, an article in the July, 1980

issue of *Forum* provides an example of a woman executing very complicated mental gymnastics. (And the article bills her as a data processor from Lincoln, Nebraska, of all places!) As a lead-in to her "Lesbian" experience, "Suzanne" describes her heterosexual affairs in the following way:

My affairs always started off with an explosive bang [sic!], but eventually turned out to be more like a firecracker, just a flare of brilliant light, burned out in a flash, leaving behind nothing but smoke and ashes. And so I went, from bed to bed, body to body, never totally sure if I was satisfied or if sex was even worth the effort. (p. 55)

Is it merely coincidence that "Suzanne" talks about her sexual experiences with men in exactly the same metaphorical way that they promote themselves? Why was she never sure whether or not she was satisfied? As you might've guessed, a "good" man provided her with an opportunity to make love with another woman, (he even left the room after he'd "gotten" them off!), which she describes as follows:

I found in Maria a tenderness I had never experienced with any man. For the first time ever, I felt I was offering my body freely and lovingly. Sex used to mean giving something away or feeling used. For some reason, making love with Maria felt more natural and more equal. . . .

Having had a taste of the other life, I returned to my merry-go-round of affairs anyway. They all left me asking myself, 'Is this really all there is to sex?' (p. 55)

Our "heroine" is then introduced to a vibrator, by a man, of course, and, of course, less than a year later, meets "the lover of her dreams," Eric, who can give her an orgasm as good as her vibrator. Eventually, we learn, they begin to experiment with sado-masochistic sex, and she learns the "relief of pain" (p. 57).

What do these two narrations have in common, one written from the male point of view, the other from a woman's point of view? The Lesbian "experience" is the link. For the male, Lesbianism is a threat, something in "his woman" to be conquered, and it is the conquest that provides the relish. For the woman, Lesbianism becomes a gate through which she passes to find "her man" and submits to her "true state" of heterosexuality. If you think I'm conjuring this interpretation, I know a woman (married to a faggot) who goes around telling Lesbians that she "knows how wonderful it is to love another woman because it enabled her to love a man." Doesn't it begin to sound as though heterosexuality couldn't exist without the threat of Lesbianism??? In both female and male fantasies, FEAR of Lesbianism is the common feature, and it is the *conquest* of this fear that excites them.

If fear is a basic element in heterosexuality, then men's magazines satisfy their audiences by providing threatening images to the male imagination. The visual representations of "lesbians" in male magazines fall into one of two categories, depending upon their audience. The first type, the glossy, expensive male magazine, generally carries pictures of "Lesbians" that are illusory, vague, and romanticized, and the wimmin in the photographs have "perfect" bodies, without hair and without blemish. Such magazines portray *all* wimmin in their pages as hairless, although pubic hair occasionally appears. The image of wimmin in these photographs shows us as mysterious but warm, unattainable but provocative, and the depiction of "lesbianism" follows these concep-

tions. The second type of male magazine has selected the opposed view of wimmin, and their photographs portray wimmin as coarse, vulgar, unattractive, and lewd (in male terms). Accordingly, the wimmin who pose for "lesbian stances" have hair on their bodies (all over!), pimples, moles, and warts around their genitals. In addition, many of the photographs of "lesbian practices" play to male fetishism, especially sado-masochistic poses, although garter belts and see-through bras are always in sight, as are *net* stockings. The image of the "lesbian" portrayed in each type of magazine depends on the stereotype of wimmin that the editors think will most appeal to their male audience. In the expensive magazines, the "slicks," we have "perfect" bodies and the poses convey warmth and "femininity"; in the "pulp," no special filters have been used; our bodies are flawed and we are depicted as brutal and sado-masochistic. Neither mode of portrayal is connected with the reality of lesbianism; in its own way, each method extends the stereotype of wimmin chosen to Lesbianism, and caters to the sexual fantasies and aberrations of its male audience.

On the less romantic side of male pornography, one finds whole magazines devoted to the subject of Lesbianism, complete with unfiltered, un-pretified women, and a *long* discourse that is supposedly direct quotation from the wimmin depicted in the photographic sequence. There is no doubt in my mind, however, but that the actual writers are male. Two elements contribute to my observation: 1) The terms used throughout the texts are the kinds of expressions that few, if any, wimmin ever use, particularly when discussing another woman sexually; 2) too frequent reference is made to the "almighty prick" to make the conversations believable. The following quotations illustrate the ways in which wimmin are supposed to discuss sexual relationships with each other. (All of the following examples are taken from *Illustrated Case Histories: A Study of Lesbian Practices*.)

"When I first saw Sheri sitting on the bench outside the Student Union I knew that she'd just love to suck my boobs. You know how it is, you can just tell that about some girls." "The whip handle has this big knob at the end of it. It's like a prick head, I suppose." "Right away she developed this little trick that really made me throb. She started licking right under my boob, letting her rough tongue rub back and forth along my milky skin." "But even when his rod is jamming away inside me, and I feel the walls of my pussy spread apart with his throbbing prong, even then there's nothing happening inside me." "So, you can see why I think about Ellen while Bob's pumping his load into me. . . . And you know what? I don't ever think for a minute that I'm cheating on Bob. After all, it's not like going out and getting screwed by another man, is it?" "Well, her nipples were sticking out about a mile! I mean it! They looked like rifle bullets, that's how long and firm they were. Just like little pricks." "Like, as soon as I see the chain coiled up there in the corner, or the thick, prick-like handle of the whip, well, the fires start in my boiler . . ."

As should be obvious from these quotations, the purpose of such prose is not elucidation, but ejaculation. Because the cheaper male porno magazines shun the vague romanticism of the more expensive "soft" porn, they make explicit the use of Lesbianism as a vehicle for male fantasies of conquest in the construction of heterosexuality. Wimmin may prefer each other, but we can't *live* without men, no matter how repulsive they are. So say the male pornographers!

In both the so-called "hard" and "soft" pornography published for males,

we find that Lesbianism is the fantasy that satisfies both elements that are essential to masculinity: the arousal of fear by direct threat to male predation and its conquest by conquest. It is the "fantasy" of Lesbianism sold through the male media that is important, while whatever reality we may have for them is trivialized through mystification or brutalization. In either case, the polarized stereotypes of wimmin provide the mythological structure for both the photographs and texts. These fictions of supposed Lesbians "in the act" cast our "behaviors" as being at the extreme ends of masculinist definitions of wimmin: the aloof, unattainable virgin and the sadistic bitch.³

Clearly, Lesbianism, although a tabooed topic in "respectable" media, is a powerful, perhaps even necessary, element in the heterosexual scripts of wimmin and men. In fact, I suspect that it is the taboo status of Lesbianism that makes us prime candidates for heterosexual fantasies. As long as the sanctioned male media keep our reality invisible, the pornographers will find us invaluable for maintaining the fantasy worlds in which heterosexuals seem to live. Between the two levels of media, Lesbianism is the axis that sustains the myth of heterosexuality. Fear of admitting their Lesbianism keeps other wimmin "in line," and fear that they may be dispensable keeps men buying pornography. In their minds, we are the essential link that binds heterosexuals together in the scenario of female submission to male conquest.

ENDNOTES

1. In spite of periodic browsing through the magazine racks in grocery stores, I have not yet found another year in which the subject of Lesbianism was as popular in confession magazines, although I clearly remember similar spates during the mid-fifties, when I was a teen-ager.

2. The issue here is not whether, in fact, violence is a necessary ingredient of heterosexuality, but the extent to which the male media present violence as an inherent element in heterosexual fantasy. Does it make a difference?

3. After reading this article, Deidre McCalla suggested yet another, more gruesome aspect of male fantasies of Lesbian "activities" and their pornographic utility as titillation to the male ego. She observed that, in addition to my analysis, which hints at female compliance in the male's conquest fantasy, (insofar as the depicted woman's will must be "broken" first), when pornographic portrayals of Lesbians cast us as sick, perverted, and, therefore, as non-human, as objects that are the very "scum of the earth," men can cast themselves as beating us, mutilating us, raping us, torturing us, fucking us to death, without having to feel guilty about it. If we represent to them the lowest kind of animal, then we deserve whatever brutality the male can imagine himself acting out, and he can also maintain the illusion of his "superiority." Whatever *his* sickness may be, however foul his fantasies, *ours* is worse in his eyes. Thus, the pornography itself justifies male violence directed at Lesbians.

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CIRCLING

Now. After all this time . . . all this writing. This one is for you. About you. Us. What has happened to my life lived now in your love. And fear. And then more love. This is about the temperature changes in my body on my skin in my moist and damp and dark places of birth and of sex and of love and of our joinings. This is about how I grow sticky with wanting . . . how my body grows round and I move in circles and slide and your eyes widen in surprise in fear in love. And we move together our bodies in circles circling. We open. Our mouths wet. Our mouths wet. No need for words here. No words live here. Just the circles our bodies make. Our mouths circling. Our tongues. Our fingers hovering over flesh. Slowly lowered onto breast arm thigh all the same. All you. All us. Circling. Moving up and into your body. Hearing your intake of breath as you are entered and filled with my hand. Hearing your deep sounds dark sounds as I move in circles. Circling. Lower my head to my hands . . . my mouth and my hands move together. Opening. Filling. Your wetness and your sounds are both thick and full. Your hand reaches down to join mine. Our hands move together inside you . . . my mouth moves on us moving in you. Your sounds grow sharper your hands move fiercely your face tenses I watch you. I watch your eyes open and look at me pleadingly. Sandy. Oh my god Sandy. And your voice trails off into short thinner cries. Talking to yourself now. This is yours. Your body folds itself around my hands, tenses and opens and opens and spills over. Your body eases as my mouth moves softly to your liquids and fills my mouth with us. Your hands reach to my head stroking it with tenderness and I move slowly up your body to rest my head on your narrow chest. A chest held so tightly. A chest that holds so many secrets and angers. A chest that rests now cradling me. We are silent.

The phone rings. As you move away from the bed to answer it I watch your curved hips, remember their precise shape and feel under my hands, their smell and taste under my mouth. You begin to speak and turn to face and watch me. I move my hands down my body and begin to move them lightly, sliding along my wetness. I keep my eyes on your face and watch your eyes darken, your mouth part hear your voice grow husky and hurry to finish the call. I hold your eyes and move on myself open my mouth run my tongue along my lips imagining it to be your tongue your mouth. My hands move more quickly more moving into my body only my thumb visible moving in smaller circles. You return nearly running to the bed and kneel between my widely spread legs nuzzling your face into my hand, into my body, into my wetness. We move more quickly now and you say "Put your hand in my mouth . . . I want your taste in my mouth." Slowly I take my hand out of my own warmth and place it into your open lips and your hands replace mine and your

head again lowers to join them and I move and strain up to be deep inside your mouth and my body opens wider and my throat is hot and full and still there is more.

You make sounds now . . . murmuring yes love yes all of it everything I love you yes. Your sounds stir a growl deep inside my belly. A growl that travels up into my throat . . . pushing aside the thickness and I call your name as I come. Barbara . . . Barbara . . . Barbara . . . the sound growing smaller as my body stills. I am growing smaller. Allowing myself now finally finally to be held. To sleep.



—*photograph by Emily Levine*

REVIEWS

HOW LESBIANS READ LITERATURE: A Constructive Criticism

A review of *Motherlines* by Suzy McKee Charnas, Berkley Publishing Corporation, 1978, New York, N. Y.

As Lesbians re-discover and create our own culture, we sometimes find disturbing levels of violence and sexual exploitation in the books and music, both popular and woman-centered, widely consumed in wimmin's communities. Some of this offensive culture creeps in through association with gay boys with their pornography, sado-masochism, man-boy "love," etc. And as long as we live in the cities and towns of the patriarchal world, it continues to seep into our consciousness as it permeates our visual and audio environment.

Most Lesbian artists/eroticists, like photographers Tee Corinne and J.E.B., who both address this issue in their slide presentations, are conscious and careful that their works neither exploit nor objectify wimmin. But as a community, as a people, Lesbians are so starved for readily available movies, art, music, and fiction that is not blatantly heterosexual, that we sometimes lower our standards of acceptable quality — not just in craftswomanship, but in the quality of content and the treatment of exploitive sex and violence.

In *Sinister Wisdom* No. 12, Joanna Russ wrote an upbraiding review of Donna J. Young's *Retreat: As It Was!*¹ According to Russ, Young's book and Sally Gearhart's *Wanderground*² lack the mettle of good science fiction. As an alternative to "Gearhart's sturdy eveready flashlight and Young's druggy candle," Russ offers *Motherlines*³ by Suzy McKee Charnas, as a "giant who is using the fire . . . to hammer out tools for the future."⁴

Russ wonders why *Motherlines* was not a hit in hardback (most Lesbians I know can't afford hardback books), but it does indeed seem to be a hit in paperback. By popular fiction standards, the book is excellent—fast pace, plenty of action, interesting characters, intrigue. For Lesbians there is an added bonus: there are no boys.

In her review, Russ says as much about *Motherlines* as she does *Retreat*. But among the things she doesn't tell us about *Motherlines* is that the "parthenogenetic Riding Women" stimulate ova division by fucking with their stallions, and that the book includes a detailed description of one of these "matings."

Any good adventure story has a moral, and much of what is distasteful in *Motherlines* is integral to the plot, setting up conflicts which not only stimulate the reader's consciousness but set events moving. The protagonist Alldera has escaped from the Holdfast, a survival city of a post-nuclear wasting, where wimmin, called Fems,⁵ are the literal slaves and loathed beasts of burden to an extraordinarily violent, male-controlled society. She has escaped the moun-

tains bordering the Holdfast, onto the wide grasslands feared to be occupied by monsters. Rescued by the amazon Riding Women, Alldera finds that she feels out of place with them and with the Free Fems—wimmin like herself who have escaped the Holdfast and live by trading herbs, dyes, and trinkets with the Riding Women.

The Riding Women do much that Alldera or the reader disapproves of, most notably the horse fucking. There is also the child pack: the wild, unkempt, unsupervised pack in which the young daughters learn survival of the fittest, and from which young wimmin are violently expelled at the onset of their first bloods. There is the slaughter of beloved horses for meat, alongside a wasteful system of grain storage. There is the constant raiding and pillaging among the camps of the Riding Women.

The Free Fems are no better with their incessant quarreling and intrigues, their stupid prejudices, arbitrary and hierarchical leadership, and grotesque internalization of misogyny. Alldera tells them, "I can't believe this. It's as if I'd never left the Holdfast at all—fems spending their lives laboring for someone else's profit, squabbling among themselves over trifles—" (p. 115). The Free Fems continue very much as they did in the Holdfast, even to the extent of carrying their trade wagon across the plains on their own backs.

On the other hand, there is much the reader can admire about both groups of wimmin in the novel. All are amazons of physical strength and moral courage. The Free Fems have their dream of some day raiding the Holdfast and freeing their sisters there. The Riding Women are especially attractive, with their close bonds to their horses, unswerving loyalties to one another, freedom of laughter and touch, melodic speech, and commitment to honesty.

But it is the very attractiveness of the Riding Women that makes the obscenity in the book so insidious. Here it is important to assert that Charnas has no obligation to give us perfect characters or a perfect society—her novel is science fiction, not utopia. As a feminist writer,⁶ however, she is obliged not to offend our sensibilities with purposeless, graphic images of wimmin being fucked by gigantic penises.

With the exception of one sensitive but non-descriptive moment between Alldera and the Riding Woman Nenisi, most of the sex in *Motherlines* is at best disappointing to the characters. For example, Alldera and the former "pet fem" Daya attempt to be lovers after a long-standing quarrel and reconciliation:

Their lovemaking was not a great success for Daya. She needed to feel overwhelmed by a force of nature, swept to a place of infinite security and delight where she could let herself safely melt. (p. 148)

But for Daya, that place of security and delight includes penetration and submission:

Early on in the Holdfast she had seen that a pet's life included a lot more fucking than the life of an ordinary labor fem; she had made herself enjoy, and had later come to crave, the sensations of penetration. (p. 125)

And earlier, "She enjoyed seeing her companion's eyes glinting greedily in the flash of the lightning" (p. 122).

Daya's sexual liaisons are numerous, and when the reader first meets Daya,

her current lover beats her regularly. One of the Free Fems, perhaps a jealous lover, tries to poison Daya. The instrument of the poison is a vaginal syringe, supposedly carrying an herbal mixture to stimulate parthenogenesis (an unfulfilled dream of the Free Fems). During the ritual herbal douching in which the wimmin pair off, Charnas describes how Daya "rode the flooding instrument to her climax" (p. 125). This is followed by a description of Daya's burning, excruciating pain and near death. Here we have sex combined with pain and violence, the victim an insatiable woman who is satisfied only by the penis-like penetration she had learned to "enjoy" throughout years of rape.⁷

The emphasis on "penetration" suggests a lack of familiarity with Lesbian sexuality. Is Charnas confusing the pleasures of vaginal stimulation with a desire for penis-like penetration? Many Lesbians spent years in heterosexual relationships, but we certainly don't carry into our relationships with wimmin a craving for penetration. Charnas includes detailed descriptions of sexual encounters only in those instances which mirror men fucking wimmin. This heterosexual "erotic" appeal is by nature voyeuristic, exploitive, and violent, and certainly not the work of a Lesbian.

The section in which Charnas describes the mating between the Riding Women and their stallions is insidious because the reader likes the Women so much better than the Fems, and because the Riding Women so poetically justify the mating by speaking of the bond with their horses. The reader would like to willingly suspend the offensiveness of it and just let it be all right, but it's not.

Although the mating itself happens relatively non-violently (if you can pretend that a horse's prick thrust into a woman is non-violent), the language and suspense leading up to the act is charged with expectant death and violence.

The mating and its attendant ritual is narrated from the point of view of Sheel, the most violent and aggressive of the Riding Women. The mating is preceded by an "erotic" description of a group of young wimmin "dancing the horses," running naked among and on the backs of their studs. During the preparation for the matings, the wimmin sing their self-songs and remember the dead. "The faces of the other women showed Sheel that they too were thinking of the dead; dead horses, dead children, dead women who had bled to death after bad matings" (p. 155). Fortunately, the young woman in the mating chute ("Some called it 'the saddle' because this was the horse's turn to ride," p. 153) is not hurt. But later in the book, at another gathering, two wimmin are hurt in the matings.

It is not so much the *presence* of this offensive material in *Motherlines* that I find disturbing, but the *use* of it. It is clear that a major theme of the book is the conflict in values between the two groups of wimmin. But Charnas never finds quite the right voice or the right perspective to make the reader feel that she has not been offended. Although the characters do seem to sense a conflict between the lives of the two groups, there is never any recognition and articulation of the value conflict operating in their fear and mistrust of one another. Alldera is repulsed by the horse fucking and slaughter of horses for meat, but the reaction seems to serve no other purpose than to provide her a reason to go live with the Free Fems. There is virtually no attempt to resolve these conflicts. The novel lacks a unity of purpose and vision that a third volume of the Alldera series would, hopefully, complete.

Those wimmin who can overlook Charnas's insensitivity in offering us what I think is pornographic material, and read the book anyway, will be delighted by much and engrossed by most of it. A word of warning, though: don't run out and buy the first in the Alldera series, *Walk to the End of the World*. It was first published in 1974, and I did not discuss it here because Lesbians I know aren't reading it and making it part of our culture, as with *Motherlines*. *Walk to the End of the World* takes place in the Holdfast and primarily follows the action and character development of a male death figure in search of his father. Our heroine Alldera figures as a main character in the last quarter of the book. It is an inexcusably violent story, the pages filled with rape, blood and gore, cannibalism, and witch burnings. Like *Motherlines*, it is hard to put down once you pick it up, especially if you're a sci fi fan, but you will hate yourself for reading it.

All this raises the very old questions of the relationship between art and morality (politics) and the role of the critic. Lesbians are discovering and creating our own culture, making or not making new rules as we gradually recover a real morality and aesthetics, free from patriarchal values.

One reason why so many Lesbians are reading *Motherlines* is that it is so well written. I agree with Joanna Russ that we deserve good writing, careful craft, and high quality in wimmin's culture. We should not have to choose between art that is "politically correct"⁸ and art that is technically well crafted. Our art should provide us with a spectrum of expression of our be-ing, without offending our sensibilities with unexamined intrusions of heterosexual, patriarchal images.

Setting standards which include a moral commitment spreads the responsibility for good art among the artist, publishers, reviewers, and, not least, the readers, making critics of us all. We can support all our established and emerging artists by taking their work seriously, constructively criticizing both their craft and their politics.

The manner in which we engage in critical dialogue and the value judgments we make on art can facilitate or paralyze the artistic process in all of us. While encouraging excellence in the exercise of our crafts, we need to guard against the kind of elitism found in Russ's review of Donna Young's novel: "*Retreat: As It Was!*... is a heartbreaking non-book... written out of starvation;..." "I want to convey as forcefully as possible the absolute, limp, thinness of the book..."⁹ Such a nasty review would be hard enough to handle coming from some mouthpiece of the male publishing establishment. But how crushing to a new novelist to read such devastating criticism from a Lesbian, published in one of the most respected and widely read journals of wimmin's culture.

One last comment about *Motherlines* and its pornographic appeal. Russ calls the paperback cover of *Motherlines* "unjustly dull." The cover depicts three wimmin, two on horseback, one on foot, all with Hollywood faces and figures. The woman on foot is carrying a baby, she is barefoot, and the scenery is a wasteland with discarded machine guns poking up out of the sand. The woman on foot has rope around her neck, and one of the riding wimmin is holding the other end of the rope. This cover is not "dull," it's an outrage! Do "explicit and committed feminists"¹⁰ really have no control over the covers their publishers choose?

- 1 Donna J. Young, *Retreat: As It Was!* (Weatherby Lake, Missouri: Naiad Press, 1979).
 2 Sally Gearhart, *The Wanderground, Stories of the Hill Women* (Watertown, Massachusetts: Persephone Press, 1979).
 3 Suzy McKee Charnas *Motherlines* (New York: Berkley Publishing Corporation, 1978).
 4 Joanna Russ, "Listen, There's a Story for You . . .," *Sinister Wisdom* No. 12, p. 91.
 5 Charnas always refers to the riding wimmin as the "women" and the escaped Holdfast wimmin as the "fems" or "free fems". The free fems refer to the riding wimmin as "mares." None of the characters ever reflect on the misogynist implications of the language they use, and there is no indication that Charnas uses the words for any reason other than the convenience of distinguishing the two groups. When the distinction is not clear by the context, I will use Charnas's language in discussing the characters, since they are her creations.

6 Just inside the cover of *Motherlines* is a joint statement by Charnas and Russ: *For too long science fiction has been dominated by masculine/sexist writing, but in recent years a group of women writers has been bringing new life and maturity into the field. These women are explicit and committed feminists. We're proud to be among them.*

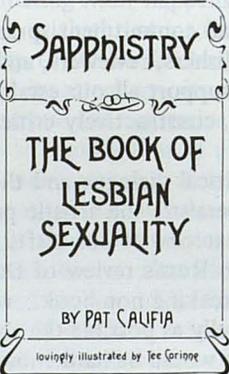
7 For an excellent analysis of sado-masochistic pornography, see Andrea Dworkin, *Woman Hating* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1974).

8 In *Sinister Wisdom* No. 11, p. 54, Joanna Russ writes, "Most artistic and literary criticism in the women's press is very bad. It reacts to having its P.C. buttons pushed." The term Politically Correct has become a derisive phrase used to belittle and oppress radical and separatist Lesbians who are seeking honest examination of the patriarchy within us. The phrase is a destructive tactic to avoid discussing issues of moral integrity.

9 Russ, "Listen, There's A Story. . ." p. 90.

10 See note 7, above.

—*Pamela C. Johnston*



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“AND NOW FOR THE HARD QUESTIONS . . .”

A review of *A Woman's Touch* edited by Cedar and Nelly, published by Womanshare Books (1979) and distributed by Amazon Reality, POB 95, Eugene, Oregon 97440, \$4.75. 158 pp., 27 pp. of photographs and drawings.

Driving back one below-zero-cold winter night from Hallam, Nebraska, a carload of dykes snuggles cozily along the highway into Lincoln. We are warm and satisfied. Sitting three to a seat, we are all touching, our parkas rubbing noisily together. Outside the car, it is cold, and snow lies piled on either side of the highway; inside, we are bundled together, touching and laughing. Our bellies are full of the best homemade tortillas and Mexican food we've ever eaten, and it's cheap! For now, we are satisfied, at this time, and in this space. We are planning to play bridge and get stoned, just to top off the deliciousness of this night, this deep winter time together. Two of the wimmin are moving back to North Carolina and we are going to miss them.

I am in the front seat, happy and full of myself and tortillas. From the back seat someone asks, "Has anyone read that new book of Lesbian erotica, *A Woman's Touch*?" "I'm reading it now," I yell back into the darkness. The driver asks, "What do you think of it?" "I think it's boring," I declare, ready for an argument. "So do I," says another voice from the depths of the car. "Why?" an anonymous voice asks. Hmmmm, I think to myself. Good question. *Why* is a book of "Lesbian erotica" boring??? Of course, I hadn't then finished the book, but there's a wonderful excitement in debating ideas, issues, half-considered reactions, airing internal debates with other dykes, and we still have 20 minutes in the car. The temptation is too much for me.

"Well, I don't know," I begin hesitantly, thinking fast, my brain scanning hasty impressions, selecting, rejecting; I can feel my synapses fighting off the food-induced torpor, gearing up for action. "I found some of the stories, uh, well, sort of 'made-up,' 'artificial,'... they just weren't 'real' enough to me to be exciting." "Like what?" the woman sitting next to me fires back. (No slouches here. You ain't gonna git away with haphazard generalizations with this group, Julia P.!) Feebly, I make a stab at specifics. "There's this story about a woman having an affair with a chicken named ellen, and the woman's father kills the chicken at the end" ("Going Down on the Farm or Duck, Duck, Goose," by Robin Chaparral, 93-8). "Oh, *heavy* symbolism," quips our psychologist driver. "Sounds *too* Freudian for me!" "Well, it's a good title," I offer, "but, really, the idea of *chicken* feathers in my mouth just wasn't exciting to me!" "Maybe *furry* animals," a woman's voice suggests from the back seat, "a *kitty*, for instance." "Yeah, *I* like cats!" another voice chimes in.

I persevere with my "specifics," not to be derailed from my musing out loud. "Then there's another story about a woman making love with a woman from outer space... ." "*I'm always* from outer space," says one of the dopeheads. But I continue, over the laughter, "... and the woman from outer space has this interesting appendage just above her clitoris, 'a tube, a wet spaghetti coiling and uncoiling,' and it's called a *carnapalu*. In addition to being extremely handy during sex, these other beings can use it to reproduce themselves, either parthenogenetically or with another woman" ("Foreheads Forever," by Star, 36-61).

"You know what turns *me* on?" interrupts the driver. "Really *plain* stuff, like, 'She unbuttoned her shirt'." "Yeah, or, 'She unzipped her zipper'." By now, everyone is excited, interrupting each other, offering their own examples. The material of our parkas rubs together deliciously, scrunching and crunching. Something happening here, I think to myself; *this* is important. A voice from the back seat carries unerringly to those of us in the front seat. "Ya know, one time I had a lover who only took off her glasses when she was going to make love to me. All she had to do was take her glasses off, and I got all wet and shivery with anticipation. For months after we stopped seeing each other, whenever another woman took off *her* glasses, I'd get palpitations in my clitoris." "Kinky!" declares our psychologist driver.

"Interesting," says Julia, who's already begun her book review in her head, starting opening sentences, revising them before they're even complete. "It sounds to me like we're 'turned on' by the mundane, the commonplace, the 'real', whatever that is to each of us. We're excited by descriptions of exactly what goes on when we make love to other wimmin. Maybe we don't need or want the 'fantastic', the 'erotic', the fictional, or the absurd." But what does all this mean?

Cedar and Nelly, describing the creation of the book, tell us that they "first envisioned [it] as a lovemaking partner, a new turn-on while masturbating" (Introduction, 9). But, this book, like so many others we are creating, raised more questions for them than they had anticipated.

However, frequently the stories which we found most sexually exciting made us feel uncomfortable from either a political or literary viewpoint. This brought up lots of questions about what we, Cedar and Nelly, find erotic and why. (The process of editing and writing the book has continually forced us to analyze and work on our personal sexuality.)

(Introduction, 9)

Indeed, *A Woman's Touch* is not an amiable masturbatory companion, nor would it be realistic to expect it to be just that. For any Lesbian, but especially for the Lesbian/Feminist, engaged in the difficult process of dismantling the masculinist descriptions of sexuality that structure our perceptions of our own sensual pleasures, even the most casual reading of the book will raise profound questions of the most disturbing kind. "Disturbing" because simple answers for them do not exist and are unlikely to appear for a long time, but they will keep coming back to us over and over again; "profound" because they expose unresolved contradictions in our own struggles to define our sexuality, which, because it is the first cause of our independence, is also the source of the patriarchy's fear of us. Nelly and Cedar tell us they hope the appearance of *A Woman's Touch* will "inspire dialogue and affirmation of our sexuality" (12). Their anthology has already accomplished that for many of us, and the clarification of issues and redefinitions that such conversations will lead to will help all of us toward affirmation of our sexuality.

There are many questions about the sexual aspects of Lesbianism that these stories put before us, among them: What is the role (if any) of fantasy in Lesbian sexuality? If it is true that some (if not many) Lesbians are "turned on" by the most mundane descriptions of their sexuality, do we even want to in-

corporate a specifically "sexual"* literature as part of our cultural growth? Is it possible, much less "desirable," to integrate the S-M ethic into Lesbian/Feminist culture?

As I've indicated previously in this review, other Lesbians have said that they are "turned on" by descriptions of real actions that are all a part of Lesbian sexual intimacy, and they have also confirmed my own reaction to stories like the one about the chicken and the being from another galaxy as too "unreal" and "made-up" to be sexually exciting. Are these assertions idiosyncratic and common only to dykes here in Lincoln, Nebraska? Are we, because of geography, too insular to appreciate sexual materials too subtle for us? I think the answer to both of these questions is "no." I've talked to many of my friends who live on both the East and West Coasts, and they agree with these observations. Are all of my friends just as dull and unimaginative as I am, the old "birds of a feather flocking together"? Maybe. We all agree that we prefer what Pat Califia has described as "vanilla sex." Well, so be it! At the risk of being labeled a "puritan" by those who believe that all ideas have equal value (if they did, I wouldn't call myself a "feminist"), and thereby condemned for my obtuseness, I will assert that the unrealistic, the far-fetched, the artificial have no sexual value for the Lesbian culture some of us believe we are in the process of creating. This is not to deny that some of us don't participate or share such fantasies, only that we do not include them in our visions of the Lesbian future.

After I had been mulling over these issues about fantasy and reality in Lesbian sexuality, I began to read Kathleen Barry's *Female Sexual Slavery* (Prentice-Hall, 1979). Her discussion of fantasy as an integral component of the pornographic experience which, in turn, is one of the media institutions that contributes to the maintenance of cultural sadism (see especially pp. 178-82) provided an analysis that helped me to make sense of my own observations. While Barry is willing to regard fantasy as neither positive nor negative, in and of itself, she stresses the relationship between fantasy and social reality, about which we know so little.

Fantasies are very private experiences and sexual fantasies are most private of all. Sharing a fantasy with another may rob it of its excitement and therefore its mystery. Fantasy is essentially an interaction with oneself through images present in the mind. The images may be free-floating, separate entities, may be singular fleeting images, or may form into a story content—a scenario, script, or short vignette. They exist only for their elasticity, their ability to instantly incorporate any new character, image, or idea—or as in dreams, to which they bear so close a relationship—to *contain conflicting ideas simultaneously. They expand, heighten, distort or exaggerate reality.* (Friday, 1974; pp. 34, as cited in Barry, p. 179.) (My italics.)

Thus, although Cedar and Nelly collected these stories in an effort "to transform the pain by creating images of our sexuality that move beyond our conditioning, to create change by changing our expectations" (p. 10), such an enterprise is inherently dangerous to our consciousness, and, given that Lesbians (of any political persuasion) must exist in a patriarchal culture that, by its own definition, is hostile to our existence, we cannot afford

to accept uncritically even the most innocent efforts put forth as “additions to our culture.” Can we accept without question the assertion that Lesbians *need* a pornographic literature? I don’t think so.

The fact is that it is impossible to think of any symbol, image, or concept in fantasy if we have no prior knowledge of its existence. Yet it is popularly assumed that fantasy reveals some basic, innate truths about ourselves. But it is in our interaction in the social world that concepts or images are formed or developed. We learn them. We must know about something from our social experience for it to enter our fantasy life. *We do not have to know it as a social reality in the same manner, form, or context in which we meet it as a fantasy image, but it must have had in some form a prior social reality to us before it enters our private self-interactive fantasy.* (My italics.) . . .

Fantasy is often the link between one’s self and one’s sexual life. In the privacy of one’s mind one can dream of, fantasize about, or plan out sexual experiences. In the freedom of one’s mind those fantasies may be as exotic or erotic as one’s creativity will allow. *However the images form and are presented in fantasy, they have their source in social reality. The less individual creativity brought into private fantasy, the more closely the fantasy will approximate social reality, the experienced world.* (My italics.) (Barry, pp. 180-1)

Surely there are none of us so utterly naive as to believe that we have individually purged our minds of *all* the male-constructed, negative symbols and images of ourselves *as wimmin*. Yet, this is the leap we must make if we are to believe that: (1) Lesbian culture needs pornography; (2) We are capable of creating sexual images that are *free* of negative, patriarchal myths about wimmin in general; (3) Sado-masochism is a “natural,” *welcome* addition to Lesbian sexuality. I realize that I am treading on dangerous ground here, but then, nothing is *safe* for any of us (safety is another delusion), and I have gotten ahead of myself.

Let me back up just a bit here. I believe that Kathleen Barry is correct when she says that fantasy objectifies.

. . . however fantasy enters a sexual interaction, when sexual experience with another is determined by fantasy, the social-sexual reality of the other person is replaced by the fantasy. The extent to which fantasy dominates sexual interaction with another is the extent to which the other is *an object of sexual pleasure*. (My italics.) One of the effects of widespread pornography has been to introduce movies, books, or pictures as the erotic stimulant between two people, thereby reducing the need for people to relate to *each other*. (Author’s italics.)

(Barry, p. 181)

That is, the more we rely on internal fantasies during our interactions with other wimmin, the less we are relating to each other as wimmin! When these fantasies can only be drawn from our common, externally-defined social reality, we have admitted into our intimacy with each other elements of patriarchal culture in which we were raised, and in which we must live, nor are any of us individuals absolutely free of the symbols and their meanings that we are trying to destroy. Furthermore, I think that Barry’s description applies equally well to our masturbatory fantasies: To the extent that we rely on fantasies for our masturbation, we have objectified our own sexual feelings.

I think that we are still operating within patriarchal definitions of sexuality when we accept their definition of Lesbianism as "a sexual preference." We incorporate their emphasis on "the sex act" as a *product* or *single* event, and we perpetuate their concepts about sexuality when we attempt to incorporate "pornography/erotica" (call it what you will) into our culture. I think the "need" some of us are expressing these days for external sexual images is something we have picked up from phallogocentric ideology, and I think it is destructive of the radical consciousness we are trying to evolve within ourselves. I am not denying that this "need" is real; I have no doubt that it is. I *am* suspicious of its source(s) and of where it might lead us.

There are some stories in *A Woman's Touch* that do describe some of the real things that happen between/among lesbians, such as "Bosom Buddies" by Mint (pp. 18-20), "Excerpts from the Open Road" by River Malcolm (pp. 21-8), "A Journal Entry" by Shady Gove (pp. 29-30), "Sex and the Working Class Jewish Woman" by Cypress (pp. 73-83), "The Rite" by Ouida Crozier (pp. 84-92), "For Nights Like This One" by Becky Birtha (pp. 99-106), and "The Perfect Touch" by Nelly (pp. 146-8). Yet, neither I nor any of the other Lesbians with whom I've discussed the book were particularly "turned on" by even the realistic stories. Again, I had to ask myself, "why"? I think, perhaps, that the problem lies in the print medium itself. Maybe the use of written language, which is also a way of objectifying experience, interferes, *comes between* our minds and the sensual experiences themselves. It is worth noting that most of the realistic stories are also the shortest ones, often only one or two pages, which suggests to me that they are the most difficult to write and sustain over several pages. (While I think the print medium may be inherently inimical to the creation of sensual images, I leave it to others to assess the degree to which the objectification of visual media interferes in the experience of it.)

I do not mean to suggest, with my questioning and negative reactions to the stories in *A Woman's Touch*, that the attempt to "create more lesbian power" by creating beautiful images of Lesbian sexuality is a worthless endeavor. We do need positive images of ourselves that reach into and convey back to us *every* aspect of the new lives we are trying to construct. We do need positive images of our bodies, all our bodies, every facet of them, every pose we assume as we change and grow. I am suggesting that we do not need anything that labels itself as purely sexual, because that is to dismiss many areas of our lives that are stimulating, exciting, and sensual, and to cordon off one area as distinct from the others. Whatever the temptations may be to do this, I think we need to hold suspect any attempt to pigeon-hole our experience as "just this" or "just that." If we really do believe that being a Lesbian comprises every aspect of our beings, then it cannot be true that any single facet of our lives is more central than another. I am suggesting that fantasy, as an aspect of sexuality, may be a phallogocentric "need" from which we are not yet free, that fictional fantasy, in particular, may be derivative of masculinist concepts, that the current belief of some Lesbians that sado-masochism is compatible with a feminist consciousness is a hangover from patriarchal social reality and inimical to our attempts to construct a sexual identity distinct from masculinist conceptualizations of sexuality.

I hope that my discussion of *A Woman's Touch* accurately conveys my appreciation of what Nelly and Cedar have contributed to all of us. I, too, hope that their book will stir dialogue among us. They have given me a great deal, as I believe my questions and "outloud" thinking indicate. Without their book, I would not have been pushed to any of my questions. From beginning to end, their book is a challenge to our consciousness, and we need it to grow. Buy it, read it, *talk about it!* Especially, talk about it. Two of the wimmin in the car got so turned on by the discussion that they decided not to play bridge and went home to enjoy each other.

—Julia Penelope

LESBIANS DISCUSS THE VIOLENCE IN OUR LIVES: We are a group of eight womyn who met for eight weeks to discuss violence—violence between lesbians, incest, sexual abuse, batterings of all kinds. Our common interest was that we felt battered by these situations, and wanted a supportive atmosphere in which to discuss issues surrounding the abuse. Since the group was an experiment, we allowed flexibility in the format and learned as we went along. Mainly we discussed agreed-upon topics such as: fear, anger, powerlessness, manipulation. One week we each described a situation where we felt powerless and how that felt emotionally, physically and mentally, and then how we could have changed the situation. We also discussed situations where we felt powerful and compared the feelings.

It's important for womyn who are battering each other to seek support and to take responsibility. You are not alone. We all have deep-seated patterns which we can change together. We need to learn how to express our anger. Understanding how we move from anger to violence is the first step toward creating solutions. As womyn who were sexually abused as children, we share many of the same feelings, but what is accented by childhood sexual abuse are feelings of guilt, a sense of responsibility, alienation from our bodies and our sexuality, and denial of our own perceptions. Because the experience is not talked about and is invalidated, we lose touch with what really happened—that it really did happen. We found that as we discussed this topic in the group, we became aware of how the effects of incest had manifested themselves in other areas of our lives. In becoming aware of our feelings and realizing the patterns and effects of abuse in our lives, we gain a sense of power and control. (For lesbians who are interested in talking about the group, please call and leave a message with Sarah or Marynella at Operation Concern, (415) 563-0202.)

RESPONSE

ON "RACISM AND WRITING"

A response to Elly Bulkin's article in *Sinister Wisdom* 13 (Spring, 1980)

Elly Bulkin's article, "Racism and Writing: Some Implications for White Lesbian Critics," would have been more accurately entitled, "The Racist Patterns in *Gyn/Ecology*." Reading the article was like being a spectator at a cannibalistic picnic with ritualistic grace before and after meals to normalize the event. Initially, I was shocked at the subterranean hostility in the article towards Mary Daly, her work, and the impact that her work has had on women. Secondly, I think that Bulkin's overt criticisms of *Gyn/Ecology* are based on an uncertain grasp of Daly's philosophy of feminism and also on a false reading of her work. She has, perhaps, read her words, but she has not *heard* them.

In the introduction, Bulkin associates homophobia and racism, enjoining feminists to edit written work for evidence of or reference to both. Being a mathematician, I sensed the emergence of an arithmetic of oppression: Homophobia + Racism = Oppression, an equation whose correctness is measured by its containing the proper factors of addition. There are at least two problems with this groundwork for a critique of *Gyn/Ecology*. The first is the word *homophobia*. Like the word *human*, *homophobia* lumps women in with men. Like the word *human*, *homophobia* does not say woman; it is not female-centered. Both words may, in fact, by the false inclusion of women with men and by the false transcendence of gynocentric language, really mean *male* existence and *male* oppression. Daly does not write about homophobia; it is not even in the index of her book. She writes of the male hatred of women and, mythically and historically, of the dismemberment of the goddess spirit in women. It should be further noted that Daly does not use the word *lesbian* as it is commonly used by many within the "women's community," i.e., primarily to designate "sexual preference" and as a word which stands by itself. Rather she always uses it with a capital "L," spelled *Lesbian*, and in the company of other Self- and woman-identified words. Her old words with new meanings such as *Hag*, *Fury*, *Crone* expose male terror of wild women. Unlike the word, *non-heterosexualist*, they act as metaphysical forces of gravity which draw the female reader closer to Be-ing. While a Hag may be seventy, Eskimo, and sexually active—or forty-five, white, and celibate—she is unmistakably female, "wild-eyed, and not man-wooed." This is not a false transcendence of real differences between women, as Bulkin suggests, but rather a *real* memory of an original wholeness, in the sense that we were once a clan, a tribe, and a sisterhood, whose tribal consciousness has been fractured by patriarchally imposed differences, and whose love has been crippled by enforced heterosexuality. This is not a false transcendence of differences but a *hope* and a life *commitment* to reconciling those differences that have not been of our own making. In contrast

to *heterosexism* and *homophobia*, Daly's new phrases, *gynocide*, *Totaled Woman*, *feminitude*, name unmistakably the female experience of oppression and enforced passivity.

This brings me to a second problem with Bulkin's article. Equations, mathematical or political, have never been adequate for encompassing the more subtle, complex, or spirited dimensions of existence. $H + R = O$ is both technically incorrect and substantively imprecise. It does not include the oppressions of ageism, classism, and the handicapped. Nor can it. There are, by this method of addition, an infinite variety of specific oppressions. Equations are limited to a finite number of factors. Neither does the equation describe the specific oppression of women; it could be used just as well to define the plight of the young, gay, Chinese male in *Word Is Out*. The criticism of *Gyn/Ecology* in "Racism and Writing" would lead one to think that Daly's book is missing some analytic parts, parts which would be indexed under *racism* and *classism*, as if the fracture of the female spirit could be made whole by adding fragments together. As Janice Raymond has pointed out, using this method a new *androgyny* model has been incorporated into the women's movement but this time, men are much more subtly included. This method will always leave joints, seams, and fissures subject to new rupture and new additions. Daly's method, which is integral to her philosophy of female oppression and female Be-ing, in contrast to the addition of parts, is like that of one labyrinthine ear whose hearing is deepened, not by the addition of a second ear for homophobia and a third ear for racism, but by journeying more deeply inward through that labyrinthine passage to original female wholeness, as our consciousness of the forms of female oppression expands and deepens.

While I sense that the heart of Elly Bulkin's article is her unstated philosophical differences from Mary Daly on the methods of patriarchy and the vision of female Be-ing-in-the-world, I think that it is important to address her particular accusations of racism in the Second Passage of *Gyn/Ecology*. While I am at it, I will identify her own theoretical contradictions and anti-female innuendoes therein.

Bulkin writes: "As a vocal critic of heterosexism, I have been able to raise my voice confident in the knowledge that my own actions, my own words do not reflect that very bias." I challenge her confidence in her own non-misogyny. I and many women were shocked at the odor of sarcasm and woman-hatred in her article. To insinuate, by the word *gynuflect*, that the thousands of women *moved* and *empowered* by *Gyn/Ecology* were reflexive robots is a devaluation and a betrayal of those women. It is a belittling of radical feminist thought and action. If a man wrote this particular word, we would accuse him of misogyny. To suggest, as Bulkin does, that Daly and women who proudly use "big words" are most likely "token women able/allowed" to overcome barriers of sex and class is deceptive and unjust. First of all, *able* and *allowed* are two entirely different realities. Women who *en-able* themselves classically do so in spite of not being *allowed* (i.e., tolerated, encouraged). Second, her interpretation of Daly's section, "This book contains Big Words, even Bigger than *Beyond God the Father*, for it is written for big, strong women, out of respect for strength," missed the point which was to ward off some anti-intellectualism creeping into feminist circles. To insinuate, as Bulkin does, by quoting one working class lesbian, that the majority of working class women cannot read big words (which in the intended metaphysical sense of Daly means *power-*

ful words) is insulting and patronizing to those women. It is also, to my mind, covertly yet outrageously classist.

Bulkin criticizes Daly for using white western males such as Joseph Campbell to illustrate the patriarchal mind because of their racism and Daly's failure to cite this. Bulkin's own examples of typical racist images and descriptions in the media of Japanese, Chinese, and North Vietnamese are those of *men* in war. Furthermore, the reasoning behind her criticism is not woman-centered. The female-centered purpose of searching out and encouraging feminist writers and thinkers to use primary Indian sources on suttee and primary African sources on genital mutilation is to illuminate more clearly the underpinnings of woman-hatred in the Indian and African male culture. It is not to protect Indian men, who enforce suttee, and African males, who encourage genital mutilation, from the racism of white males; it is to search out the most transparent account of the plight of women in Indian and African patriarchal culture.

I have not read *Mother India*, and I presume that the majority of women who read *Gyn/Ecology* and "Racism and Writing" have not either. Therefore, my judgment of Bulkin's criticism of Daly's use and praise of Katherine Mayo's analysis of the widespread material poverty and malaise throughout the Indian subcontinent is limited to the text quoted. Mayo states that the basis of "the whole pyramid of the Hindu's woes" is the horrifying system of child brides. Bulkin charges Mayo (and Daly by collusion) with racism for assuming that the condition of women could not be the *basis* of the oppressed condition of a society. Cannot the oppression of the female by the males of her culture be sufficiently sapping to a culture to affect every member? Why could not sexual politics, i.e., misogyny, be the "rockbottomphysical base...of the whole pyramid of the Hindu's woes"? I am reminded of the classical myths of India, related by Merlin Stone, in which an original woman-centered, goddess society was defeated and subjugated by a patriarchal order. Yes, I can believe that millennia of patriarchy and phallocentrism would drain the potency and will of a whole society, female and male, adult and child. Because we do not see the same visible effects of misogyny on the white male or in American culture, can we conclude that woman-hating in India did not sap the entire society of its vitality? (Because it doesn't look that way in America, it couldn't be that way in India?) Bulkin's judgment seems culture-bound and betrays a reverse racism. In this context, I was appalled at the bloated accusation: "[I]...found Mary Daly doing to Third World people exactly what she (accurately) charges men of doing to women." The charges of what men do to women are such heinous crimes as foot-binding, Indian suttee, genital mutilation, mind-binding, and fracturing of women's spirits. Men have cultural approbation to ruin women. No radical feminist has or wants that kind of necrophilic power. I think this kind of juxtaposition and accusation demeans feminism. It disguises the power and horror of patriarchy, it confuses who is doing what to whom, and it undermines the credibility of a critical article on racism.

The final charge of racism is, in brief, that Chapter Seven of *Gyn/Ecology*, "American Gynecology: Gynocide by the Holy Ghosts of Medicine and Therapy," is short on concrete examples and detail of the victimization of women of color and poor women by American gynecology. Chapter Seven is, in fact, the longest chapter of the *Second Passage* and has more than twice the number of footnotes and additional references for the reader than all of the other chapters.

Its speed and pace are due to the enormous spectrum of information which, in fact, points to the thorough medicalization of life and the triumph of the therapeutic to which the author constantly alludes. Of all the atrocities written about by the author, gynocide by American medicine and therapy is that atrocity which has been exposed and documented extensively by feminists, as the notes to Chapter Seven make clear. Bulkin accuses Daly of indifference to the unequal access that poor women and women of color have to the American health system. This accusation, however, is based on her own assumption, not Daly's, that more and more care from this same system is unequivocally desirable for women. Chapter Seven, to the contrary, challenges that assumption. I think that the unique value of this chapter for women, no matter what our access to medical care and therapy, is to associate American gynecology and therapy with footbinding, suttee, and genital mutilation so as to unmask the death-loving and death-inducing face of modern medicine.

Conclusion: I feel keenly aware of the insufficiency of debating selected points from the Second Passage of *Gyn/Ecology* to show that one-third of the book (and, presumably, the author) is not racist. It is an exercise which feels static, uninspiring, and strangely unlike the book itself. The word *passage* suggests movement. The three passages of *Gyn/Ecology* are not separate trips or journeys, nor self-contained stories or themes. They creatively fuse the classical fragments of time: past, present, and future. They voyage into and between one another. It is a bizarre discontinuity and a fatal omission, in a critical piece on *Gyn/Ecology*, to fail to speak to the First Passage, the groundwork of Daly's analysis, and the Third Passage, her visionary hearing of a new gynocentric time/space. It is as if the two passages were written for all women and one passage was not.

One challenge that I see for feminist thinkers is to make sense out of what is being called racism in the white feminist movement. First of all, it is not clear who or what is the white feminist movement. In Bulkin's article, a woman known for her radical thought is lumped together with women (e.g., Ellen Moers) and work about women (e.g., anthologies whose *object* matter is women) which is not radically feminist.

A second challenge is to develop criteria, not in a static or rigid sense, along with critical perception with which to judge the ultimate value of a woman's work for women. I think that a woman's writing and thinking can be measured by what it challenges and inspires, as well as by what it says. Words such as *Crone*, *Fury*, *Spinster*, and *Amazon* do call forth a hearing and seeing movement of women who will resist being torn asunder by the various guises of woman-hatred: sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, to name four. The imperative for radical feminism, as I see it, is to find language and theory which describe in precise detail every manner of suspicion and separation that has dulled the passion for a community of women. Finding words to express the intuition that woman-hatred is the model, the symbol, and the basis of all oppression is central to the philosophy of radical feminism. Daly's works, *The Church and the Second Sex*, *Beyond God the Father*, and *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* are not intended to be a final word on oppression nor a final resting place for feminist thought. Like the galaxies, her work has a moving center. Other women and she, in future books, will continue to search out new sources and new words to illuminate that same thesis, i.e., that all manners of oppression ultimately quench the fire of female friendship.

I would, finally, like to suggest some questions which may further a deeper listening to the divisions among women which racism engenders. Certain of the ideas are spin-offs from concepts in *Gyn/Ecology*:

What are the mechanisms of racism which lock women into men (white women with white men; women of color with men of color) and keep women from one another?

If, at its root, racism divides women from women, what is the reversal that calls white women's loss of sisterhood with women of color, white privilege?

How are white women used as "token torturers" of women of color in order to "mask the male-centeredness" of racism and turn women against one another?

If we cannot remember, how do we reinvent the tribe of women?

—H. Patricia Hynes

EDITORS' NOTE: We have received to date four other responses to "Racism and Writing," which the guest editors chose not to include in their special issue. In *SW16*(March, 1981) we will publish these responses by Andrée Collard, Marguerite Fentin, Sally Gearhart, and Louise Mullaley, as well as a reply by Elly Bulkin.

—Catherine, Harriet, and C.Colette

IMPORTANT! PLEASE NOTE:

In the last issue (*SW 14*), we ran an ad on page 67 for a new Lesbian newspaper, *The Lesbian Insider/Insighter/Inciter*. The ad did not print well, so we wanted to run the information again. Subscriptions are \$9.00 for 13 issues. Lesbian Art and Writing wanted. Write to:

The Lesbian Insider/Insighter/Inciter
2104 Stevens Ave. South
Minneapolis, MN 55404

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

Paula Gunn Allen is a poet and writer and a member of the Laguna tribe. She lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where she does readings and is an independent scholar. **Sandra Butler** is a Bay Area feminist and writer. She is the author of *Conspiracy of Silence: The Trauma of Incest* (New Glide, 1978) and is currently researching the causes and effects of misogyny in American life. **Chrystos**: "Until recently I've been more interested in doing readings, which I feel are closer to the root of poetry, than in publishing. My drawings have appeared in *Womanspirit* and in several books; the two for which I was sole artist are *For Those Who Cannot Sleep* and *Visions Incognito*." **Susan Chute** is a lesbian poet living in NYC. She has been an associate editor on *13th Moon*. She is now learning lighting design in NYC theatres and searching diligently for the perfect radical feminist theatre group to collaborate with. **Martha Courtot**: "I am a lesbian, I am a mother, I am a fat woman insisting I am beautiful—author of *Tribe and Journey*. My third book, *Night River*, is looking for a publisher." **Chris Cuppett**: "Although I was born in Warren, Ohio, I spent most of my growing-up years in Thief River Falls, Minnesota. Presently, I am a Braille and abacus instructor, specializing in work with the deaf/blind; and I am hoping to move toward another career. Two of my dreams are to compose music, and to do music and news commentaries on educational media." **Andrea Dworkin** is the author of *Woman Hating* (1974), *Our Blood* (1976), and *the new womans broken heart* (1980). Her next book, *Pornography: Men's Graphic Depiction of Whores*, will be published by Perigee in May, 1981. **Jane Gapen**: "I am a divorced ex-mama of a boy & a girl, now grown up, and I live near Key West with Barbara Deming, also a lesbian feminist writer, and a volunteer with our domestic abuse shelter. A book of mine, *Something Not Yet Ended* (Pagoda Publishers), will be available in women's bookstores by 1981." **Christina Glendenning** lives in St. Paul, Minnesota. **Sami Gray** was born in December 1952, lives in San Francisco, and has only recently started to emerge from her "closet" as a writer. She is also a masseuse and psych/counseling student. **Morgan Grenwald** is a Lesbian-Feminist photographer currently trapped in Brooklyn but dreaming of relocating on the earth. She is compiling a Lesbian photography directory to be published Summer Solstice, 1981. **ran hall**: "Lesbian writing and publishing is the most important part of my life." **Jan Hardy**: "I write mostly poetry and am active in the Pittsburgh Feminist Writers' Guild. I'm a man-hating separatist, obsessed with political perfection, and doomed to fall short of the mark because of my happily monogynous relationship and my lack of faith in Tarot readings." **Nancy Harrison** lives in Austin, Texas, with her "wimlife" ("the-woman-I-live-with"). She is working on her Ph.D. and writing A Novel. **Pat Hynes** is an environmental engineer. She was a founder of Bread and Roses, a women's restaurant and cultural center in Cambridge, Massachusetts. **Pamela Johnston** lives in Lawrence, Kansas, and works as part of a collective that operates Spinsters Books and writes and helps edit *The Monthly Cycle*, a Lesbian newsletter. **Melanie Kaye** is co-writing a book on women and violence and co-hatching *Harpies' Bizarre* (see **Michaele**). She teaches part-time at Goddard College and at the University of New Mexico. Her book of poems, *We Speak in Code* (1980), is available from Motherroot Publications, 214 Dewey St., Pittsburgh, PA 15218, \$4.75 + .50 pst./hdlg. **Emily Levine**: "I'm still keeping grounds at UN-L, trying to change my concepts of photography. I've been trying to incorporate an artistic, visually interesting technique with a basic documentation of Lesbian Lives." **Pam McAllister** has written numerous articles for feminist publications and is a playwright, poet and musician. She is currently completing a book on self-defense strategies for women and is editing two anthologies—one on the feminist dialogue on violence and nonviolence, the other on feminist consciousness in the contemporary theatre. **Michaele** and **Melanie** spoon together in cereal monogamy in Santa Fe. They are working on a book about women and violence. **Michaele** presides over hatching the weird, gossipy, obscene eggs that become *Harpies' Bizarre*, an outrageous women's newspaper. Invite her out for spaghetti. **Valerie Miner** is co-author of *Tales I Tell My Mother* (1980) and *Her Own Woman* (1975). Her stories and articles have appeared in *The Feminist Review*, *Ms.*, *Spare Rib*, and *Saturday Review*. She teaches at U.C. Berkeley. **Catherine Risingflame Moirai** lives on a farm near Knoxville, Tennessee. **Susan Marie Norris**: "After spending 13 yrs. as a teacher of English and as a social worker, I found myself out of a job in 1971. Since then I have named myself as a lesbian, as chemically dependent, as an incest victim, as a musician, and as a poet. For the next 2 yrs. I intend to study feminist healing, and then join with a few women in a new healing center in Minneapolis." **Victoria Ramstetter** has self-published two volumes of poetry, *Root Chakra* (1978) and *Antares* (1979), and has co-edited an anthology,

Dinah Might Voices of Strong Wimmin, as a fund-raiser for *Dinah*. A novel, *The Marquise and the Novice*, will be published by Naiad Press in 1981. **Adrienne Rich** is living in western Massachusetts and working on a new book of poems. **Cynthia Rich** is a writer living in Cambridge, Mass., where she is currently collecting unemployment and wisdom. Her most recent writing has appeared in *Sojourner*, *Equal Times*, and *The Feminist Review*. **Anita Skeen**, a native West Virginian now transplanted in Wichita, Kansas, teaches Women's Studies and creative writing at Wichita State. She is currently on sabbatical, traveling the country with her two beagles in a big blue van (listen for a call from Van Dyke at 2:00 a.m. on your CB radio), and working on a book of poems about relationships among women. **Cris South** lives in the country with her two cats and her dog and is still trying to write the great lesbian novel. **Luisah Teish** lives in Oakland, California. **Deirdre Vanderlinde**: "I'm growing, thinking, writing, loving, struggling, teaching, and living with two cats in NYC." **Sarah Lucia Hoagland** declares herself a Chicago Dyke. Chicago Dykes are Dykes who survive in Chicago. We are a fine breed. **Julia Penelope** still lives (yes!) in Lincoln, Nebraska. She is the co-editor, with Susan J. Wolfe, of *The Coming Out Stories* (Persephone Press, 1980), and they are now collecting stories for a sequel anthology about "why wimmin marry men," deadline: Dec. 1, 1980.

Susan Chute sent a copy of her poem "For the Woman in the Tie" (see page 4) to Susan Brownmiller and received the following reply: (Used by permission)

Dear Susan:

It was a beautiful poem. It really worked as poetry, and that's the most important thing. I also liked the politics of it.

We intend to make many copies of it for our members, straight and gay, many of whom were traumatized by my encounter with the "woman in the tie," who we've learned calls herself Frog and belongs to a loose association of Dyke Separatists who see their role as trashing feminist conferences.

Fashion is very political, I think, but I don't think everyone understood I was trying to make a very serious political comment.

We have never had a gay/straight split in Women Against Pornography and we never will. Some of the lesbian women in the group are angry with me for what I said—but some of the heterosexual women in the group have said that if I didn't say what I said they would have walked out and never come back.

I try to be sensitive to the feelings of lesbian women, but I want lesbian women to be sensitive to the feelings of heterosexual women, most of whom feel it is close to impossible to work in the feminist movement today—because of the slurs against our sexuality that never stop.

Lesbian women have good cause to feel that they are on the defensive in the real world. Heterosexual women have good cause to feel that they are on the defensive in the women's movement. The problem is a serious one but we will work it through.

In Sisterhood,

Susan Brownmiller 111

NEW ADDRESS FOR POSTER

In the spring of 1977, a Tee Corinne solarized photograph of two women making love appeared on the cover of *Sinister Wisdom* 3, followed by a deluge of requests for a poster. The poster was printed in the summer of 1977: a duplicate of that cover, black on gray, 17" x 22." Beginning in January 1981, the Lincoln Legion of Lesbians will take over the sale and distribution of the Tee Corinne poster.

Send all poster orders to: **LLL**
P.O.Box 30137
Lincoln, Nebraska 68503

Posters are \$3.00 each plus .50 postage.

Bulk rates for 5 or more posters= \$2.00 each plus postage.

Also available in feminist bookstores.

NEW SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

Sinister Wisdom's expenses have been increasing and we are long overdue for a subscription rate increase. For quite awhile we've been aware that the old rates were not sufficient to cover the mounting costs of paper, supplies, postage, and printing. Therefore, we are announcing the new rates in this issue, effective immediately. They are:

Individuals: one year (4 issues) = \$10.00
two years (8 issues)= \$18.00

Out-of-the-U.S. subs: one year = \$12.00
two years= \$21.00
(U.S. dollars only)

Institutions: one year(4 issues) = \$15.00

Supporting Subscriptions: \$25.00 and up

SINISTER WISDOM

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Amherst, MA 01004

I would like to subscribe to *Sinister Wisdom*, beginning with issue 16.

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Enclosed is _____. Please send SW to my friend.

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We are very happy to announce that next year the new editors and publishers of *Sinister Wisdom* will be Michelle Cliff and Adrienne Rich. Michelle and Adrienne will be receiving manuscripts after January 1, 1981, at **SINISTER WISDOM, P.O. Box 660, Amherst, MA 01004**. Please enclose an SASE for return of manuscript. If you would like an acknowledgment, please also enclose a stamped postcard. Please send xeroxes or photographs, not originals, of art work.

Sinister Wisdom 16 will be the final issue selected by the current editors. It will be typeset and pasted-up by the Lincoln staff, but it will be distributed by the new publishers and editors in Massachusetts. *All* correspondence, including orders as well as submissions, should be sent to **Sinister Wisdom, P.O. Box 660, Amherst, MA 01004**.

SW BACK ISSUES, WHILE THEY LAST

Issue 4 (Fall 1977): stories of mothers and daughters and witches and lovers; Joanna Russ's tale for the girlchild in all of us; Lesbian separatism from the inside; photo-essay; interview; reviews, letters and poetry. 96 pp., \$2.25.

Issue 5 (Winter 1978): Susan Leigh Star, "Lesbian Feminism as an Altered State of Consciousness"; Judith Schwarz, "Researching Lesbian History"; Michelle Cliff on speechlessness; Lesbian Day speech by Barbara Grier; fiction; poetry; photo-essay; reviews; interview. 104 pp., \$2.25.

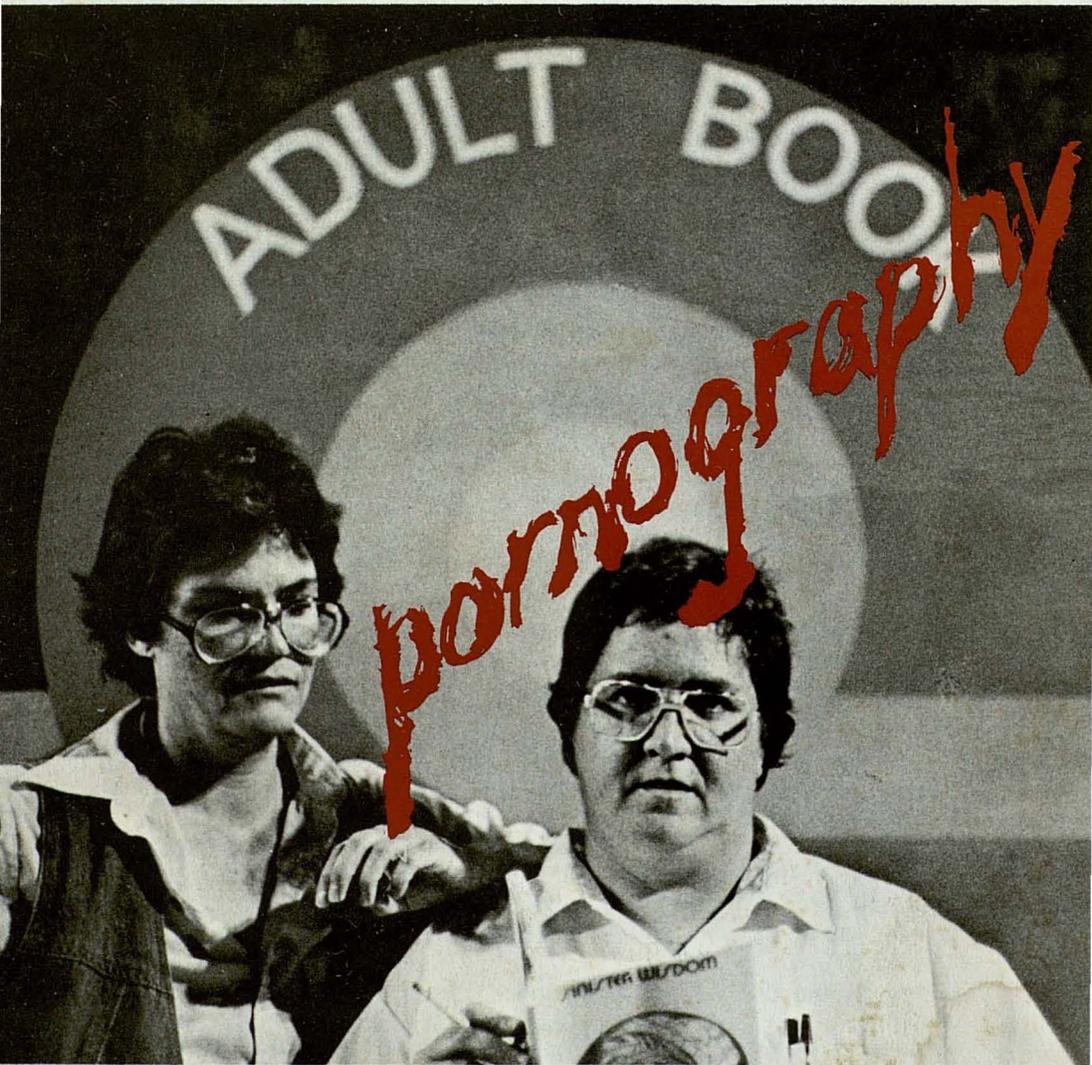
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