

SINISTER WISDOM 25



BIRDS OF A FEATHER...

WINTER 1984



SINISTER WISDOM 25

Editors and publishers: Michaele Uccella and Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz

Typesetting and layout: Edith Morang and Helga Manning

Volunteer Workers: Cindy Lanane, Sherrill Brittain, Mitzi Lichtman
Crane Willemse, reader for cassette edition distributed by
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preferably for black & white reproduction; winner receives royalties
from sale of poster (& t-shirts) deadline: **June 1, 1984**

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Notes for a Magazine

We bring to *SW* a triple passion: for women, creativity, and liberation. And we had thought to write here about weighty subjects, the future of lesbian publishing, the state of the movement, our projections for this magazine passed along to us like a temporary but demanding child. But, as happens to many mothers, we discover the sheer labor is so much and so unexpected, that we are left racing to prepare this final bit of copy for Edie Morang, our already overly generous typesetter, and Helga Manning, our patient layout artist. And besides we have this morning realized that we have accepted—and announced we were printing in *SW* 25—about 50 pages more copy than will fit into the 128 pages of our absolute limit. Given this lack of both time and space, theory withers away and a few mundane words need to be said.

We thank our readers, especially those who subscribe, for welcoming us as the new editors. We thank Catherine and Harriet, Michelle and Adrienne for, in their separate grapplings with *SW*, shaping this creature we now inherit to love, tend, feed and be fed to, until it's time to pass her along. Catherine and Harriet, for the lesbian imagination that was certainly in them to see *SW* into existence and through five years of production; Michelle and Adrienne, for working to expand the base of writers and artists who send *SW* work to include many women of color, so that the work which comes to us, which we have been privileged to read — some of which we are honored to print here — is so richly diversified and compelling. We thank Beth Brant for, first of all, working to produce *SW* 22/23—*A Gathering of Spirit*—and for continuing that work by sending to us—as to IKON, where she is officially a contributing editor—such fine writing by Native American women, like the poetry of Gretchen Cotrell and Elaine Hall which we are proud to present in this, our first issue. And we thank the artists who sent us work, for the substance of the work, for the reminder of how much needs to be said, and of how deeply art can move, instruct, and inspire.

And how *little* of it we are able to print. 112 pages (our original plan) sounded infinite at first, but, even when expanded to 128, hold far less than we imagined. We ask your forbearance and look forward to printing in *SW* 26 the following work which we had planned to include in this issue: Pegasis Touch's extraordinary essay on incest — "Stories My Body Tells" —, Annette Kennedy's play about the court martial of Navy dykes, poetry by Melanie Perish and Lisa Simon, art

work by Katie Seiden, Sandra DeSando and Sharron Demarest,

Though this issue contains no book reviews, we will be publishing these in future issues. In addition to traditional reviews, we will be experimenting with a new format of a fiction review column and a poetry review column, each of which will cover several new titles; the column format should allow discussion of more of the many new books hungering for attention and should also make for interesting reading. For the next two issues (or so), the fiction reviewer will be the versatile SDiane Bogus, whose poetry appears in the pages that follow; the poetry reviewer will be Irena Klepfisz, one of the founding editors of *Conditions* magazine.

Finally, we want to acknowledge another kind of debt: to the other lesbian and feminist publications which inform our geographically scattered communities; connect our spirits; give our artists something so essential we, in this last decade, almost take it for granted, a vehicle with which to reach an audience. These publications, often with an explicit commitment to publish new voices, have expanded the circle of creating women. We feel this debt with particular emphasis at the end of this difficult year 1983, as several publications fold or have announced that they may be folding: *Feminary* (Durham, NC), *Lesbian Inciter* (Minneapolis), *Dinah* (Cincinnati), *What She Wants* (Cleveland), *Maenad* (Gloucester, MA), and *Womanspirit*, one of the oldest and widest reaching of our publications. We recognize the loss this news portends, to the various women's communities, and to the artists and thinkers already faced with too limited opportunities for seeing print. At this time it seems especially important that those publications which remain be sturdy enough to survive; and responsive to the communities we serve. We will try, during our time with *SW*, to make her—like a good dyke—both tough and sensitive.

Michaele Uccella
Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz





Sudie Rakusin

CREEK

I am an Indian.
I never saw an Indian
 until I was twenty-two years old
except the Indians on T.V.
except the Indians in my family.

I never saw an Indian
 until two years ago, one year ago
when I looked in the mirror
and an Indian face looked back at me.

We are shadow-people.
In 1836
in Alabama and Georgia
we melted into the swamps.
My family melted into the Oakmulgee Swamp in Alabama
and stayed until the days of terror were over
stayed until the death march to Oklahoma was over
stayed and married Black and white
 until
it was reasonably safe to be Red
 again.

Then, my family emerged as “poor white”
sharecroppers
passing whites.

We had a secret. And the secret was
 who we were
 and why we looked different
 and acted different
 and thought different
 and felt different.
We were strange. To ourselves and to others.

There are people in my family who
genuinely don't know why
we are different.

There are people in my family now
who really aren't that different anymore.

There are people in my family who
know who we are.

And I am one of them.

Somewhere, my mother's family
and my father's family
are related.

How was never explained to me.

My father doesn't even have a birth certificate.

Papers
on that side of the family
have a way of disappearing.

Wherever I've asked questions
I've been met with shrugs
off-handedness.

The Indian has been admitted to (rarely)
and then quickly discounted —

“It happened a long time ago.”

“Sure we got Indian blood, but that don't matter now.”

There are people in my family
who have the odd habit
of marrying other shadow-Indians
of preferring them to more “conventional”
white folks.

But it doesn't matter
the point is, legally we're white
and in the South that means a lot
though we are only partially
white.

We are also Red.

We are also Black.

Sometimes, my blood wars.
I can hear voices screaming in my veins—
Red voices, Black voices, white voices—
why can't they marry and sing together?
The point was
we weren't Black.
In Alabama, that meant we were safe.
Hell, it was fashionable to claim
 Indian blood.
All the white folks I knew in school did
always at least an eighth
always Cherokee.
But none of them looked like me.
None of them was called names
 snickered at.
 knowing looks hidden behind notebooks
 paper sneers.
None of them were shunned like I was shunned
and some of them were as poor as we were
and their daddies made moonshine
and their mamas slept around
but my family was held up for ridicule.

Was it because we were dark
 and quiet?
Was it because our eyes and skin and hair
 glowed with secret fire?
I was taught never to ask these questions.
I was punished for being loud
made to stay out of the sun
 so my skin wouldn't get too dark
had to torture my unruly hair into submission.

And the message was clear.
“Don’t be like your daddy’s folks. So poor and mean
and hard-drinking and cynical.
Outlaws. Savages. Be like mama’s people instead.”
Good and clean and virtuous and thrifty
and honest and God-fearing.
And white.
The Indian beaten out of them.
So, I pacified my rebellious blood
got religion
made good grades
but I couldn’t change how I looked
or how I thought or felt
and finally, I couldn’t act anymore.

So I moved away.
I left Oakmulgee, left Alabama
and moved to California.

Three years ago I went back home to visit
and my mother gave me, as a gift of parting,
a photo album.

Photographs.
A record of us shadow-Indians.
The ones that disappeared.
My lover, who is a Black woman, had pointed
out to me
that several people in my family
didn’t look white at all.
“Shit,” she said, “I grew up with
plenty of people
who looked as white as you and your folks.”

That was the beginning. I asked
questions and was met
with endless evasion.
But then, what did I expect from people who
are passing?
passing for over a hundred years
from the time when to be Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee,
or Seminole
meant confiscation, rape, imprisonment,
exile, starvation,
death.
And I was born in a time
when to be Black
still meant those same things.
So what did I expect? An honest answer?
But I questioned. And the answers
were most informative
the fear that lay under the reticence
and pretended ignorance.

I talked to my first cousin about it.
She married a rich doctor and sends her kids
to a private school.
Her sister became a Mormon and had to do a
family genealogy.
My cousin claimed she didn't know what
her sister found out.
But she knew.
I asked and I read and I manged to piece out
a skeleton of an identity
the way my Grandma pieced a quilt
from scraps of cloth.

My family is French and English and Dutch
my family is Afro-American
my family is Native American
Creek.
Creeks, rivers, lakes, and swamps
are in my veins.
Spanish moss
threads its way through my brain..

In Alabama history class I read about
the Creeks I read about Menewa and the Battle
of Horseshoe Bend
I thought they were talking about somebody else's people.
Some Creeks hid in the swamps, and fought
and starved and lived so far away from "civilization"
that no one noticed them after a while.
They became known as Alabama and Georgia
"Cajuns."
They were Native American. They were Creek.

They lost their language, their customs, their religion
they lost everything but a fierce loyalty
to each other and the land.
For over two hundred years the Creeks survived
every attempt the Spanish, French, and English
and "Americans" made to steal their rich lands
until the Indian Removal Act of 1832
beaten in battle and intrigue
whites playing one against the other
set upon by gangs of opportunist
white patrols
the forerunners of the Ku Klux Klan
driven from their towns
their crops destroyed
the women raped, the old men
beaten, their children stolen and
sold for slaves, the young men
murdered.
The whites setting Creek against
Cherokee. Chickasaw against
Choctaw
until. . . .
begging bread in the streets of
frontier settlements that had once been their towns
they were driven through icy rivers, through
cholera epidemics, through hunger and fear and madness .
whole families in chains. . . to Oklahoma.

Except for the ones that got away
the ones that don't officially exist
in any census report.

Yes, I am Creek.
The terror and hate
the bitterness and rage
crawl under my skin
like the snakes I dreamed each summer.
Those rivers and streams snake through my blood
and I also live in exile now
but in my dreams

I live in Alabama, in Oakmulgee,
in a little place
situated between the Alabama River and the Cahaba River.

Remembering things I never knew
prophecies and doom-sayings as real
as the riddle the crows used to challenge
me with in my grandfather's cornfield
as real as the buzzard circling in a blazing
Alabama sky.

I did not die.



Restricted Wing: 1968

Though my real name is Katerina Alexandrovna Ryabakobila, and I call myself Katie Greymare, my friends have always called me Mush. Now don't you think that amounts to a fair number of names to choose among?

Take my word for it, it doesn't suffice.

There always has been and always will be some kind of a sonofabitch waiting to lurch out at you from behind the wings and call you an altogether *different* sort of name; the sort that'll pull the blood down out of your head — as though your blood were a big red rubber band — pull it taut, and snap it flying down into your heels, and leave your heart sucking on a vacuum.

The first thing you want *back* after an event like that, Jack, is your blood.

And where are you going to get it?

Why, out of the sonofabitch's neck, that's where.

People who claim they just don't *understand* about violence make me want to laugh. Where have they been? On Mars? Or living in some big white house set back behind a mile of green, green trees? Maybe so. But that leaves an awfully wide world in between, which is where most people live, including me. Yet when they're not busy framing lies about their virgin mothers, you will find a good number of people speechifying against violence, as if it truly were some test God had devised to separate the angels from the apes instead of what it is: the helpless shudder of the blood at mortal insult. I'm seventeen. I understand about violence fine. Why doesn't anyone ever ask me to explain?

"Speaking of names," Minna says, "what do you suppose you are saying about *women* when you call men sonsofbitches?" (As though that were remotely near the point.)

"Women are sonsofbitches too," I reply. "They just can't hit as hard as most men."

A look — as though a baby squirrel were being skinned alive in front of her eyes — crosses her face, and I feel a rush of pleasure, as though, in that instant, I were both the baby squirrel and the one doing the skinning, and were the possessor of an inhuman power — a faculty of cruelty so astonishing, I must reserve it only for myself.

Surely she must feel the power such cruelty gives me? I look at her again, to see whether she recognizes it and see, instead, as if a mirror in her eyes had tilted two or three degrees, pity — pity at the holy terror that I am, a look which pulls me, suddenly, out to the edge of myself, out to the brink of where the space yawns between us, and makes me feel as if I were about to get up out of my chair — get up and do something very important; as if, in another moment, I were going to clamber over the wall of some old longing. And then the moment passes. It hangs for a moment in the air while my heart thuds into my side, and then I slide my eyes away and light a cigarette. It's enough. It has to be enough, because, if you're like me, you've long since learned that what you want and what you aren't going to get are twins, joined together at the hip at birth and meant to travel to the grave as one. You've learned that hope, the instant you awaken him, wakes up his ugly brother Ralph, who, grabbing up a length of pipe, hightails it to the pass, always in time to cut you off.

What it is Minna believes *I* believe, I don't exactly know. Maybe she thinks I never got the painted horse for Christmas, or enough ribbon candy to eat; maybe she knows I sometimes feel as if I'm a standing column of air, not even footprints to mark where I'm standing; but she coaxes me, coaxes me — saying, *everyone*, some time, has felt the bite of doubt; a little or a lot; with great consequence, or small; from just below the chin, or from the level of the gut; or even, dizzily, up from the invisible footprints of the feet, swaying like a column, air leaning into air But what *she* calls doubt, *I* know to be a certainty. Not knowing how to tell her this, I make a joke. "If doubt bore fruit," I say, "this could be the Garden of Eden all over again." And smile.

Sometimes I am awakened in the middle of the night and shaken by the remembrance of how close I came to walking away. A shudder seizes me, as if I were trying to throw my own flesh off my bones, shake off the sense of self-betrayal as if it were some stranger's coat. But my flesh stays put, and encloses me in a terrific heat. I would give anything, right then, to run away, but the ward is sealed. So I place the palm of my hand, like another seal, over my heart. I line up the fingers of my hand along the bones of my ribcage and seal the outline of my palm over my heart, as if I were trying to reach into a cage and touch the head of a frightened animal. And I lie still.

It was not my mama who called the police. As far as I know, she's never dialed a phone by herself in her life, anymore than she's ever gone to a store alone, or buried her own dead. While he was still alive, my papa would dial the telephone for her, and only then would she ap-

proach the thing, distrustfully, Hah?Hah?-ing maddeningly into the steep electronic well of the mouthpiece, as though she'd just been handed an instrument from hell and *had* to scream into it out of pure self-defense. Neither would she have gone next door, to Ru's house. So she must have had to hustle a good ways up the block looking for a likely candidate, and it was probably Tante Deutsch, in the end, who lived seven or eight houses up the street and baked and gave away fruit cakes at Christmas, who called the cops. Tante called the cops and they called an ambulance, and when the attendants came swarming into the narrow bathroom of our steep-staired house, they found me jack-knifed over the commode doing some pretty serious Hah-Hahing of my own, two bloody fingers down my throat in unconscious imitation of my mother's phone technique. I had had a change of heart about the pills I had taken and was doing my best, in my own way, to remedy the situation. But what the cops and the attendants simply failed to *grasp*, was that my mama had summoned them to *her* rescue; and even as she wailed and gesticulated wildly in their faces, they strapped me into a stretcher and hauled me down to Our Lady Of The Sacred Blood Of The Lamb, to have my stomach pumped. I hoisted myself up onto one elbow as the ambulance began to pull away and saw her through the rear window, following in our wake, toiling angrily back up the block toward Tante Deutsch's house, and my laughter, for I *had* been laughing, I couldn't help it, died in my throat. Neighbors who had drifted or been yanked out of their houses by the commotion stood in little cross-armed groups on their porches or lawns, looking wan in the failing light, watching my mother toil up the street in her slippers and housecoat, and as we pulled away I felt that they were all receding into something more than distance, more than time: that they were prisoners of a particular quality of light, and I would never have to see that light again.

And I might not've. If I had put my luck to use, I might never've had to see it again. I might've been gone — pelting away into the high brush, pulling all traces of myself in after me, like the rabbit disappearing back into the magician's hat.

But I didn't keep my head. And the bandages they put on my hands were my undoing. At Sheep's Blood — for we called it that — they swabbed and bandaged my hands. They threaded a skinny little rubber tube up into my nose and down into my belly and put the other end of it into a pan on the floor. Then they pulled a white curtain on an overhead rod across the room, to shut me in, and rubber-soled it down the hall, to the next emergency. I started pulling the tube out right away. I would have done so anyway, but my attending physician,

Doctor Kildare, gave me additional inspiration. There were people in the hospital (he'd said, jamming the tube into my nose) who actually *wanted* to live! Tears sprang into my eyes. My sinuses hummed like a struck tuning fork. He had better things to *do* (he said) than cater to my self-pity. The lip of the tube probed the soft part of my palate, hitting it once, twice, three times before sliding over the hump and down into my throat. He was like a little steamed-up bull, dark-haired, showing red at the nose. While he fussed over a tray of instruments, and I lay back picturing him as a caterer, a nurse swabbed and bandaged my hands. They were shallow cuts, needing no stitches. How did they decide who got to do what? I wondered, and pictured them outside the door, flipping a coin: "OK, you do the hose this time, I'll get the hands." The nurse threw me little mollifying looks behind Doctor Kildare's back, as if she really cared about the kind of impression they were making up there at old Sacred Sheep's Blood. Before she finished, he left, without another word, and she must have felt pretty bad about the way he'd acted, because she gave a dramatic sigh and told me, shaking her head, that he'd lost an old man with a bad heart that night and, not forty-five minutes later, a four-year-old girl whose hand had disappeared into the blades of her daddy's combine. She'd died from shock, the nurse explained, not loss of blood, although she'd lost more than half the blood in her body by the time they'd gotten her into the hospital. I tried to let that make me feel better about the little bull doctor, but all it did was make me feel like hell about the little girl.

Every minute or so, my stomach gave an involuntary heave, and more stuff would patter into the pan set on the floor. She made two last passes with the scissors, and left me with a wide X over each palm and a neat cuff at each wrist. The minute the white curtain closed behind her, I started pulling the tubing out. It didn't feel good. It felt as though I were pulling one of my own veins out through my nose. When that sharp little lip jabbed me in the tonsils again, I almost gave up; but if *I* didn't do it myself, the Savior of Mankind would be back to do it *to* me, so what was the difference? I yanked it and it came out with a pop, like a soda bottle being uncapped. Then — like an *idiot* — I began to undo the bandages. All I had to do was put my hands in my pockets and stroll out of there, but I began to undo the bandages, giving up on one hand and going to the other til I had made a bloody mess, and suddenly thinking, *Jeezus! somebody's going to be in here any minute!*, I grabbed for the white curtain and nearly pulled it off the rod. Suddenly, I was having one hell of a time standing up. I held onto the curtain and followed it to the end of its rod. That took me to

the door. I staggered out into the corridor, trailing bloody gauze behind me like Tut the Mummy. Halfway to the back door I barrelled into a gurney, setting the IV bottles swinging and jangling, and fell on top of the little old man who was lying there on his back, tubes running out of him crazily, out of every hole God had put in his body. I looked him closely in the eye. His sap was all gummed up. His look told me so. I was sorry. I was sorry I'd fallen on him, too. Why, he looks more tired than me, I thought, and then I began to think about how really tired I was. I felt so tired. I felt myself beginning to fold like a column of dough and topple sideways, away from the gurney. A hand seized me by the collar and lowered me to the floor. It seemed miraculous to me, as though I were in the grasp of a crane from outer space, but it was only the nurse who had bandaged my hands. She gave me a look half sorrowful and half dirty. Before long, we were all reunited behind the white curtain again (no longer very white, since I'd swung on it), Doctor Kildare, Nurse and I; hose, scissors, swabs — just like old times. He'd gone beyond whatever anger he had felt against me and worked with silent, dogged efficiency, never hurting me once. The nurse, on the other hand, put extra english on the needle she inserted into my hip. I nearly cried out, but her eyes were veiled and she held her mouth like a small fist, clenched against any protest I might make, so I remained silent. During the night, I don't know when, they strapped me into another stretcher, swung me into another ambulance, and brought me here. They hadn't known it, but they'd been going to bring me here all along. Mama had pulled the rabbit out of the hat.

The next time I opened my eyes, Minna was standing over my bed like some kind of a goddamned vision. After I had taken her in, I took the deepest breath I had taken in months. I must have been full of drugs, because she looked wreathed in that kind of unearthly light they use to photograph Doris Day or Jesus in the movies. Just looking at her, though, I knew she would never say anything stupid. She was wearing an open lab coat over her clothes. Her eyes were blue. They rested against you easily. Their look was steady. Not the kind of steadiness that rides you — trying to get you from one place to another — but like a steady light that you can read by when it's dark. It was not a look you'd ever feel you had to shake off, or slide out from under. She was tall, or seemed to be from where I lay. She had brown curly hair and her face was full of high color, as though she had just come in from a long walk among the fallen leaves. I'm not hiding how good the sight of her felt to me. If it makes me a fool, I guess I can bear it this one time. I didn't want to fight against what felt like peace.

And even so, I've asked myself: "What if Minna is crazy because she treats me like I'm not?" I can't bring myself to believe she is, though; I suppose she's only kind. It's frightening to be the recipient of her kindness.

Some people — when they're afraid they might be going nuts — are afraid of hearing voices. Not me. I happen to know that somebody out there is *listening*. I've always been afraid of being overheard. But Minna says, "Keep talking, Mush. If we keep talking, there's a good chance we might both be out of here by May." May is when Minna's service rotates and she has to leave for the Vet's Hospital downstate. About the same time, my case comes up for review before the hospital board. But that is still light years away. Outside, the snow is hip deep. Everything alive is locked and frozen down.

* * *

Mama does not visit me. Ru does. Ru says mama doesn't come because the hospital frightens her, in which case it's just as well she stays away. I do hear from her, but her letters don't exactly qualify as news: "My dearest Katya, I have one foot in the grave and you are pushing me with both hands." Chatty stuff like that.

Ru's real name is Ruth Silverberg. For years, we have lived next door to her and her husband Dave and their pathetic little retarded kid, Aaron. In fact, Ru got her name because Aaron could not say "Ruth." He calls her Mu or Ru, Mu for momma. What with Ru coming to visit me and all, I've been doing a lot of thinking about Aaron. It makes me feel like hell, but I just can't find any soft spot in me for him. If they put him away somewhere, would I go visit him as Ru does me? *No*. He puts my teeth on edge. He always has, the way he goes sneaking around and bursting into tears over nothing. But it makes me feel like hell — that I could no more *like* Aaron than I could fly backwards through a ring of flame. And, right away, it brings my own mama to mind. What if that's all it is, between me and her? That I hit her the wrong way — the way Aaron hits me? Wouldn't that be something?

The "library" here is very big on Reader's Digests and National Geographics; also the complete works of Sir Walter Scott. The food's really not much worse than what it was in the high school cafeteria: the powdered mashed potatoes taste like tin; the green beans come out of giant, gleaming cans and squeak like something alive when you bite into them. If you stand your fork up in the gravy, it'll stand at attention until you take it out again. Nothing terrible. But because she does not feel about me the way I do about Aaron, Ru takes a bus down from Malone every second or third Sunday, and comes trundling into

the dayroom with an overstuffed box in her arms. The box contains food and books. Smiling, half-frozen, she unhitches herself from the box with a grunt. The lenses of her steamed-up glasses look like two cold winter moons hovering around her bony face. Once they've unfogged, you can see the sorry combination of mournful and glad she wears when she first comes in. Her homely, high-domed face hitches up into a smile that starts falling before it even reaches her eyes. It's never occurred to me before to wonder how old Ru is. I wonder it now.

Today, in a greasy paper bag perched on top of her box, she has brought me a barely warm, oniony cheeseburger and an icy chocolate malted. While I rustle around half-heartedly inside the bag, Ru pulls off her over-size mittens — red, with purple reindeer running after each other along the knuckles. One of the mittens has a hole near the tip, which is fraying badly. The whole thing will come undone if she doesn't do something about it soon. She's wearing a pair of green ear muffs over her head scarf, a shade of green you'll never see outside the discount basements of department stores. The fur isn't real. It sticks up in sorry little peaks, like the pelt of a stuffed animal left out in the rain. I've never seen Ru without her head scarf. She wears it always — on account of her religion, and her head, supposedly, is bald. Sometimes I've imagined what that must look like: her smooth high forehead going up, and up, and up. . .all the way around to the bones in back of her ears.

Ru sinks her mittenless hand deep into a pocket of her plaid mackinaw and pulls out a white envelope with a blank face. Holding the envelope out to me, waiting for me to take it, she says primly, "Your mama said to say you're in her prayers." I take it from her and put it in the pocket of my jeans. Later, I will bring it out, turn it over in my hands, and tell myself: "Throw it away." But I will open it anyway. My eyes will slip and slide down the same old terrain, looking for any outcrop, something that's never been there before. And then I will either crumple it up and heave it away, or I'll just let it slide, from between my fingers, to the floor. That's when it feels the best: when I just let it slide, as if from its own weight, to the floor — meaning no more to me than a hole turning itself inside out.

The box Ru has brought is full of books. It kills me. She never reads herself, only looks through old almanacs, atlases and encyclopedias; but she rummages around in the used book stores along Joseph Avenue and brings books for me. Half the books in the box are battered old Zane Greys, well-mauled paperbacks with broken spines and chewed corners. These are good; someone in them will

always be throwing himself up on horseback and riding hell for leather. The smell in the box wafts up and hits me in a place just below the center of my chest. It's not really like smelling food, but something about it is like that. Next, there's *The Black Stallion* and *Crime and Punishment*, both in hardcovers; then, another paperback, *Hot Rod*, by Lowell Jamieson. This one features a cover with a blond, crew-cut boy scowling behind the wheel of a turquoise convertible. Underneath that, yet another paperback, by someone called Rod Hammer, called *Marooned*. Under the blood-red letters of the title, four men and a half-naked woman huddle around a crumple-nosed plane on a vast desert floor. This one will be good for the sex. I pass over it quickly. The last three books in the box are *By Love Possessed*, *Jude the Obscure*, and *The Red Book of Fairy Tales*. Ru catches my smile as I heft this last one out of the box and allow it to fall open at a color plate in my lap. She tucks in her chin and aims an answering smile at the wall behind my right shoulder, leaving me to catch the edges of her satisfied look, glimmering like moonlight from along the outer corners of her eyes.

Then I take another bite out of my thawing burger and dredge around in the bottom of the malted with my straw, making the kinds of noises which would get you thrown out of just about anyplace else. Not here. The duty nurse just throws me a sluggish dirty look. No wonder. It's unbelievably hot in the day room. The radiators clank and hiss like senile dragons and people stagger from one side of the room to the other, like flies bumping from pane to pane in a hothouse. My jaws ache from yawning.

Ru has settled herself down on one of those blond wooden chairs that weigh about a half a ton, and pulled her mackinaw down around her shoulders, like a stole. She believes this will prevent her from catching pneumonia. There's a ragged lake of water around her feet, where the snow she carried in has melted and run.

"I saw a pretty funny thing today," she says, looking down into her cupped hands where they lie tamely in her lap. Ru fingers her wedding band. Her hands are long. Her fingers look dully polished; they gleam like candle wax. She moves the loose ring easily along the joint between two knuckles.

"Oh?"

"Yes," she says. "It was a pretty funny sight, all right. I let Sarge out for his run, this morning, like I always do. It was barely light, cold. Air felt good, though. The porch was clear of snow, so I stepped out for a breath."

She laces the fingers of her hands and presses her palms down on

the little pot of her belly, letting the silence stretch.

“Well,” she says, “instead of taking off, like he usually does, he stopped in his tracks in front of your house, and started in to digging at a drift.”

Well, what is the wonder of that, I think, and glance at her face. But the wonder of it is there, on her face, and her eyes, behind the blurry lenses, look alarmed.

“So?”

Ru unclasps her hands. They reach out for the chair arms, which aren't there because the chair doesn't have any, and she gives a little stagger of surprise, recovers and folds her arms under her breasts.

“So it wasn't your everyday snow drift,” she says, and lets the silence stretch a little bit again, as if to give me a chance to come clean, to let on that I've known all along what she's been talking about. But I don't so much as stir.

“That snow drift was full of silverware,” she blurts. She strains forward in her seat. “All the silverware in your mama's house,” she adds, “unless I'm crazy and your mama's rich.”

It's not fair. I almost laugh out loud at Ru, because puzzlement and alarm are trying to pry one another off her face, and neither one of them has a ghost of a chance of winning. It's just not fair.

* * *

Minna says she thinks I'm afraid to talk.

I *am* afraid, but that's not the only thing.

It's that you can't count on words. There aren't two words left that I can put together about myself anymore with any kind of hope they're going to stick. They have a way of sliding apart and leaving a mess. I'm not stupid, I know words are what I'm writing here; but it doesn't matter. It's like looking at the inkblot they showed me the first week I was here. Or reading mama's letters: “I love you, Katya. I hate you.” They slide apart. The inkblot looked harmless, at first. Just two heads, facing one another. “Well, why do they want to show me this?” you wonder. Then, all of a sudden, as if your eye went out from under you, you find you're looking at a vase instead; one big vase, filling up all the space that used to be between the faces. It's enough to make you dizzy. You *know* the faces are still there, but it's also as if they never existed — they've disappeared so cleanly, in the blink of an eye. All you can see is the vase. If you stare hard enough, the faces will come back. And after a while, after you've gotten the hang, you can start going back and forth, between them: faces first, vase next, faces, vase, faces, vase, faces, vase But it's not what you *want*. What you *want* is to see them together, all at once, two

faces and one vase. Together. Well, you can just forget it. You can sit back, relax and forget all about it, Jack, because you never will. You will go back and forth, seeing one after the other, faster and faster, until they become a blur, until you're sick and dizzy and want to die — but you will never see it whole. And that is how I feel when Minna presses me to talk. I've *said* so! It's not as if I've held it back!

“Like what?” she asks.

“As if — no matter what *I* say, the other half, the half that *counts*, is what *you* know, and will *not* say. Not to me.”

“About you?”

I nod.

“What do you think I know about you, Mush, that I won't say?” she asks in a hushed voice.

And just like that, I start to back away, but I feel heavy, like an incredibly clumsy beast who has been tripped by the sound of her words, and panic catches at my heart because I'm falling now — falling deep into the space between the faces and the vase, deep into that nothing place that can't be known . . .

“Mush,” she repeats, “what do you think I know about you that I won't say?” Something feels like it's torn loose inside my chest, under the ribs. It's crawling around in there faster and faster, climbing up and down my ribs like a monkey in a burning zoo. And yet, I feel like a stone, sitting in front of Minna with my elbows rooted into my knees. The need to say something rises in me like water behind a dam. I've *got* to say something soon. I'll be sorry if I don't say something soon. But if I *do* say something, I'll probably still be sorry. So I just sit there like a fool, holding down the floor with my feet and wishing the air would swallow me. Water, stone, air.

“Hey,” she says and leans toward me and lays a hand on my knee.

For a crazy moment, I think: “What if I didn't *have* to be sorry?” But her touching me has made me want to cry. And if *that's* not feeling sorry, what is? Inside of me, it feels as though a burning ladder were falling over onto the floor.

She gives my knee a little shake.

“Breathe,” she says.

Shame at my own stupidity runs through me like a flame. I have forgotten to breathe. When I pull the air into my lungs, it feels as though I were inhaling a bunch of rusty tin can lids. My tongue tastes metallic. I grope through my pockets and light a cigarette. I am so grateful there is still something I can do. I can smoke. I sit back. I blow a plume of smoke through my nose. I gaze past Minna, through

the wire mesh on the window, to the window's ledge — where old snow rests like a sleeping cat on the sill. When half the cigarette is gone, I finally reply, "What you really think — is what you'll never say."

"Look at me, Mush," she says.

But I can't really meet those eyes right now, not for more than a second. They just stay there. Even when I'm not looking, I can feel them not going away.

"I don't think that you're bad," she says.

That crawling feeling starts up again immediately, as though something were treading with its feet at the very center of my chest. I flick my eyes at her, just for a second, and suck in another lungful of smoke. There's sweat on my upper lip and an inch-long column of live ash in my hand.

Maybe she *doesn't* think I'm bad. *It doesn't matter*. I don't think so either — not all the time. But *something* thinks it; something a lot bigger than Minna with her wide blue eyes, or me, or both of us together; and something doesn't *like* what we are doing here. Minna doesn't know what she's asking for. She doesn't have any idea.

Outside, hip-deep in snow, trees are swaying from side to side in a monotonous wind. My mind goes out to them, to the pure geometry of the snow. *Sycamore*, I think. *Yew*. *Laurel*. *Oak*. *Tetrahedron*. *Water*, *air*, *fire*, *stone*. I take it back — words *are* good for something.

When Minna speaks again she sounds a little tired.

"Why don't we try this, Mush," she says. "Why don't we each write down our half?"

Half right, you're down, I think immediately. *Right down your half. Half your down, right?*

"Mush?"

I know what she is getting at. She's saying she will be the faces, and I can be the vase. Or the other way around. I guess it doesn't matter which is which. But I don't have to kid myself. I will not pretend. Whatever she decides to show me, it'll only be what she *wants* me to see.

"Do you want me to write about what happened with the knife?" I ask.

"I don't want you to write about anything you don't want to write about."

When I expect her to try to trick me, and she doesn't do it, it's like finding out there's an extra step in the stairs.

"What *do* you want me to write about," I ask sullenly.

"Why don't you make me a list," Minna says. "Make me a list of the things I know about you, but won't say."

Cinturón

for Victor Fragoso

As an amusement park about to close
for the season, New Brunswick holds a festival,
celebrates its new tomorrow, say the posters.
A new street opened on the old Main Street
which has been made to destroy itself
in this urban renewal.

There is no good way of telling the painful
not with the grace of the Spanish you spoke.

Today, it was borrowed to

give me more to understand;

our incomplete poetry translations,

all the first drafts of poems

you never returned to,

times you could not be found,

all the silence that surrounded you

for all that space,

as if you were studying

how friends might act

with you not there,

the chiseled paleness of your face

as you spoke an explosive avowal

incapable

of touching that paleness, that blackness

in your eyes.

Finally, clearer than hindsight,
your predecessor's wanderings,
Julia's footsteps on years too hard for imprints.
She too despised your history
written against you
by *conquistadores* through centuries,
the new nation of Puerto Rico,
Estado Asociado Libre.

You had come here to die
as Julia De Burgos did. She, an unknown
in Bellevue where her poems of clenched fists
and desperate love were more reasons
for electric shock. She
raved on in Spanish
with more music, not less,
escaped, died in the endlessness
of the streets of New York
where another Hispanic woman can die more alone.
At thirty-seven you died alone because
you kept your fatal secret.

In this brilliant day,
when the extravagant sounds of the festival,
of the jazz and latino bands are shadowed
by the colors of the trees,
by leaves floating upon the waters of the Raritan,
your frail image
of the gray day I last saw you
comes unopposed.
Of course it was raining.
You wore a black raincoat
 buttoned all the way to your chin,
a black umbrella over you
 framed your almost white hair.
The uncompromised black of your eyes and
your faint smile
 appeared to fatigue you.

What mad journey brought you to die
in the heart of the place you most despised,
to write poems in Spanish
to New York, to spill your fluid words onto
the time of all parched things

Lorca took a share at that time's
metallic suffering
but left.

You came here to stare into the eyes of your enemy
and just as you began,
from the first word you wrote,
as you sang it,
as you acted it out in plays,
as you played it,
the knowing that made your telling true,
had started to wear the minutes
from the profundity of your eyes.

The knowing continues to gather the ashes
of those who most long,
who fight with most intimate weapons,
who calculate each day,
bathing themselves, their songs
in all the need left
by invading powers.



Cinturón means “sword-belt” and “series of things that surround another”. **Victor Frago** was a poet and a tireless worker for Puerto Rican independence. **Julia De Burgos** (1914-1953), one of the greatest and most loved Puerto Rican poets, lived in pre-revolutionary Cuba for several years, and was associated with the Cuban struggle for liberation as well as with the movement for Puerto Rican independence. After leaving Cuba, she came to New York where she was hospitalized in Bellevue, escaped, died on the streets, and, a month later, was rescued from anonymous burial in Potter’s Field and returned to the town where she was born, *Carolina*. Victor and I had started to translate her book *Canción de la verdad sencilla* before his illness struck. *the time of all parched things* is a line from the great Spanish poet García Lorca.



Kaddish

and when I told the woman—a survivor, a fighter in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising—about the Holocaust conference in Maine, and how many of the people there had known *nothing*, she said, *They still know nothing.*

*

*Yisgadal v'yiskadash sh'me rabbo,
b'olmo deevro chiruseh v'yamlick
malchuseh*

if I said kaddish for each one

if I were to mourn properly
I would not be done

If I were to mourn
each artist seamstress *schnorrer* midwife baker
each fiddler talker tailor shopkeeper
each *yente* each Communist each Zionist
each doctor pedlar beggar Bundist rabbi
each prostitute each file clerk each lesbian
each fighter the old woman in the photograph from
Hungary holding the hand of the child whose
socks droop each Jew

*b'chayechon uvyo-mechon, uv'chayey
d'chol beys yisroel*

I would not be done yet
it was more than death was more the people's
heart a language I have
to study to practice speaking with
old people songs to collect transcribing
from records or from the few
who know a culture which might have died
in this country which eats culture a death
we call normal a culture *astonishing*
in its variety a taste a smell a twist of song
that was *Vilna*
Odessa
Cracow
Covner-Gberna
Warsaw
these were once Jewish sounds

*

baagolo uvizman koreev, v'imru omen.

Tuesday my father died Wednesday
the rabbi who never met my father met with us
my mother my father's sisters the daughters
5 minutes before the funeral was to begin
to prepare the eulogy He asked
if my father had belonged to any organizations if
people from his place of business had come
and he said since there were no sons
he would say kaddish for my father

and I did not tell the rabbi my father was broken
before he died I did not describe his twisted body asbestos
in his lungs I did not explain my father worked
6 days plus 2 nights a week paid
for my eyeglasses cavities penicillin shots
I did not say he joined no temple

I did not say he loved the sound of Yiddish but
would not speak it
I did not mention he beat us the children
but not his wife I did not reveal his high point in life
a trip with his buddies to the Chicago World's Fair
in a '32 Ford I did not say he changed his name he was
Kantrowitz he became Kaye I did not say he built
a business retail and taught me
never cross a picket line

*Y'he sh'meh rabbo m'vorach l'olam
ulolmey olmayo*

I did not tell the rabbi my father listened carefully
to all things Jewish

nor did I tell him
save your prayers

I said, *I will speak at this funeral*
and I did to mourn him properly

*

*v'yespo-ar v'yisromam v'yisnaseh
v'yishador v'yishal-lol*

he taught me all men are equal before I knew
to suspect the words before I learned
to fight with him to say *people all
people daddy and please don't say
girl*

sh'med d'kud-sho b'reech-hu

About Hitler I always knew
Chanukah we lit candles said
no prayers but got presents red sweaters ball bearings sang
no songs but *Hatikvah* played on the menorah like
it was our song I knew I belonged to Jews
I knew I was part of Israel

*l'elo min col birchoso v'shiroso
tushb'choso v'nechemoso daamiron*

and so I do
and so I am

and so when I heard about children women
families shot stabbed at the table in Shatilla
Sabra I couldn't breathe
and I was almost too afraid to mourn

let me be plain
Jews sent up flares
for christians to kill by

let me absorb
yes they are men soldiers also, my people my father loved
all things Jewish and should I disown?
I who will be blamed with the others again

let me mourn if anything
is holy flesh
so readily torn from the skeleton

let me rock my body like a scared child—
of what skin what tongue which people?
whose child is this?
the answer says if the child shall
live die suffer kill

let me be strong as history
let me join those who refuse
let there be time
let it be possible

*b'olmo v'imru omen. Y'he sh'lomo rabbo
min sh'mayo*

let no faction keep me
from those who suffer

let no faction keep me from those who needed a home
and found one

let no faction keep me from those
who need a home now

*

*v'chayim olenu v'al col yisroel.
v'imru omen.*

and in Rome where Jesus the dead Jew is raised
against us
as in Kansas or California

a synagogue blown up for being a Jew place
a baby blown up for being a Jew baby
in *shul* for the high holy days

Oseh sholom bimrorev, hu'ya-aseh

if there's a Jew alive if a sin is always Jewish sin this baby
paid again nothing is expiated there is
blood in the camps the bulldozers come to push
bodies into hiding this is what men do
Gemayel is received at the UN with applause
this is the Jewish problem

my father loved all things Jewish

a culture *astounding in its variety* was

if I were to mourn properly
I would not be done

*sholom olenu v'al col isroel. v'imru
omen.*

1983



kaddish, Jewish prayer for the dead, language: Aramaic. *schmorrer*, a moocher
yente, a gossip, someone who has to put her two cents in all the time
Bundist, member of the Jewish socialist organization *Hatikvah*, lit., "hope"; the
Israeli national anthem *Gemayel*, President of Lebanon, head of the Christian
Phalange Party

Note: All poems have sources, but with some, these sources are so immediate
that it seems only right to name them. *Kaddish* came to me first through the work
of the Argentinian Jew Mauricio Lansky, an artist whose series of prints depicts
simply and with extraordinary beauty face after face; each print has a number like
a concentration camp tattoo. Also crucial was Irena Klepfisz's long prose poem
Bashert (published in *SW 21* and in her book *Keeper of Accounts*). Jacobo Timer-
man's *The Longest War: Israel In Lebanon* taught me to be more afraid of silence
than of how speech will be used against Jews. The many-faceted Israeli peace
movement gives me necessary inspiration and courage.

White Point

Is this what it is where the green hills walk
& the white water surrounds us like mermaids

Does it start with a slow ship passing
Where two islands meet like a woman her legs parted

Head thrown back in the white water
Breaking like angels on fishermen

Is it this mad shimmer
That pulls you irrevocably beyond

How can you believe it after so much gone
For mermaids & the grammar of water

Lillies of fog Breath of the Mother
Firm & thick in the rough coat of the headland

After all the weeping & refusal to weep
This ship passes passes passes

In the beginning it is an island
With three palms sailing backward

You do not know it is your ship
Now it is before you

Moving & returning
In the isthmus at the center of vision

Permafrost

And I come home still
to an empty house. Don't kiss me. Don't speak.
There are too many sounds. The preverbal forest calls
in the cosmopolitan streets. You find yourself
sitting at a bazaar giving away your furniture.
A woman approaches with a stethoscope
at the end of a small shovel
listening for the tapdance of radiation
on the path to the testing ground
for the hard breath of a woman
stumbling barefoot up Second Avenue in the snow
for the frenzy of women who wait for language to include them
who reach for one another knowing woman
is an island strong with birds & totem poles
standing back from shore in the ancient pines.

I've sat & watched you sweep your porch now for weeks
drifting with the wild horses of the aurora
the kildees & crows of dark winterlight.
This is the eerie tundra that man leaves to the wolves.

Alcoholic

the years gone
in earthquakes of booze
bad food & silent men

she comes smiling
through tooth stumps
shrugging her ragged coat

like a mild winter & the stars
go grieving round the poles

Dustdevils & Preverbal Choirs

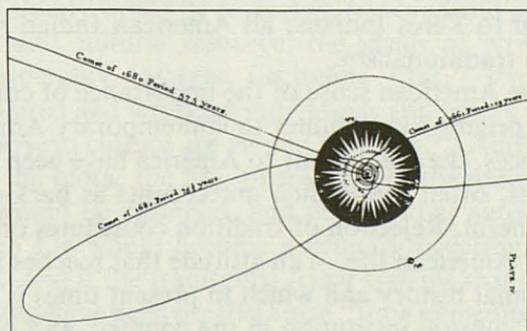
Winters in the Flathead we used to study the night
for satellites We could hear the beep the red light
A mile away the dissonant coyotes paced the marble cold
Good fortune to see the insistent gold thread
sewing itself to the blue dark

Time stretches over Los Angeles like a sheepskin coat
too short shrunken at the sleeves Hope
these third-floor nights that you will not wake up
until February drifts like paper on the windy rocks

You place your words in my hands
like a sack of oranges into the cooler
a dream of your parents sculpted by beryllium

The Eskimo have no word for radiation
They call it poison in the wind

All Power to the People of Yellowknife





Who Is Your Mother? Red Roots of White Feminism

At Laguna Pueblo in New Mexico, “Who is your mother?” is an important question. At Laguna, one of several of the ancient Keres gynarchical societies of the region, your mother’s identity is the key to your own identity. Among the Keres, every individual has a place within the universe — which includes human and non-human — and that place is defined by clan membership. In turn, clan membership is dependent on matrilineal descent. Of course, your mother is not only the woman whose womb formed and released you — the term refers in every individual case to an entire generation of women whose psychic and consequently physical “shape” made the psychic existence of the following generation possible. But naming your own mother (or her equivalent) enables people to place you precisely within the universal web of your life, in each of its dimensions: cultural, spiritual, personal and historical.

Among the Keres, who are my mother’s and grandmothers’ people, ‘context’ and ‘matrix’ are equivalent terms, and both refer to approximately the same thing as knowing your derivation and place. Failure to know your mother, that is, your place and its attendant traditions, history and place in the scheme of things is failure to remember your significance, your reality, your placement on earth and in society. It is the same as being lost — isolate, abandoned, self-stranged, and alienated from your own life. And this notion of the importance of tradition in the life of every member of the community is not confined to Keres Indians; all American Indian nations place great value on traditionalism.

The Native American sense of the importance of continuity with one’s cultural origins runs counter to contemporary American ideas: in many instances, the immigrants to America have been eager to cast off cultural ties, often seeing their antecedents as backward, restrictive, even shameful. Rejection of tradition constitutes one of the major features of American life — an attitude that reaches far back into American colonial history and which in present times is validated by virtually every cultural institution in the country, and feminist practice, at least as it shows up in the cultural artifacts the community values greatly, follows this cultural trend.

The American idea that the best and the brightest should willingly

reject and repudiate their origins leads to an allied idea — that history, like everything in the past, is of little value and should be forgotten as quickly as possible. This all too often causes us to reinvent the wheel continually. We find ourselves discovering our collective pasts over and over, having to re-take ground already covered by women in the preceding decades and centuries. The Native American view, which highly values maintenance of traditional customs, values and perspectives, might result in slower societal change and in quite a bit less social upheaval, but it has the advantage of providing a sturdy sense of identity and lowered levels of intrapsychic and interactive conflict.

Contemporary Indian communities value individual members who are deeply connected to the traditional ways of their people, even after centuries of concerted and brutal effort on the part of the American government and its allied institutions — the churches and the corporate business system — to break the connections between individuals and their tribal world. In fact, in the view of the traditionals, rejection of one's culture — one's traditions, language, people—is the result of colonial oppression, and is hardly to be applauded. They believe that the roots of oppression are to be found in the loss of tradition and memory, because that loss is always accompanied by a loss of a positive sense of self. In short, Indians think it is important to remember, while Americans believe it is important to forget.

There is much to be said for the traditional Indians' view, if it is widened to mean that the sources of social, political and philosophical thought in the Americas should not only be recognized and honored by Native Americans, but should be implemented in American society. If judicious modeling of the traditions of the various native nations was practiced in the Americas, the place of women in society would become central, the distribution of goods and power would be egalitarian, the elderly would be respected, honored and protected as a primary social and cultural resource, the ideals of physical beauty would be considerably enlarged (including "fat," strong-featured women, grey-haired and wrinkled individuals and others who, in contemporary American culture are viewed as "ugly.") Additionally, the destruction of the biota, the life-sphere, and of the natural resources of the planet would be curtailed, and the spiritual nature of human and non-human life would become a primary ordering principle of human society. And if the traditional tribal systems that are emulated include those who have been pacifist since "time immemorial," war as a major ordering principle of human society would cease.

Re/membering Connections and Histories.

The belief that rejection of tradition (as well as of history) is a useful response to life is reflected in America's amazing loss of memory concerning its origins in the matrix and context of Native America. America does not seem to remember that it derived its wealth, its values, its food, much of its medicine and a large part of its "dream" from Native America. It is ignorant of the genesis of its culture in this Native American land, and that ignorance helps to perpetuate the long standing European and Middle Eastern monotheistic, hierarchical, patriarchal cultures' oppression of women, gays and lesbians, people of color, working class and unemployed people. Hardly anyone in America speculates that the constitutional system of government implaced here might be as much a product of American Indian ideas and practices as it is of colonial American and/or Anglo-European revolutionary fervor.

However Indians are officially and informally ignored as intellectual movers and shapers in the United States, Britain and Europe, they are peoples with ancient tenure on this soil. During the ages when the tribal societies existed in the Americas largely untouched by patriarchal oppression, they developed elaborate systems of thought that included sciences, philosophy and governmental systems based on a belief in the central importance of female energies, systems that highly valued autonomy of individuals, cooperation, human dignity, human freedom, and egalitarian distribution of status, goods and services. Respect for others, reverence for life, and as a by-product of this value, pacifism as a way of life, importance of kinship ties and customary ordering of social transactions, a sense of the sacredness and mystery of existence, balance and harmony in relationships both sacred and secular were all features of life among the tribal confederacies and nations. And in those that lived by the largest number of these principles, gynarchy was the norm rather than the exception. Those systems are as yet unmatched in any contemporary industrial, agrarian, or post-industrial society on earth.

Grandmother, The Old Woman Who Thinks Creation

The name by which the tribes and nations refer to the greatest kind of woman-power is "Grandmother" or "elder woman power." As the Keres remember (celebrate) our origins, "In the beginning, Thought Woman thought all that is into being." By this, they don't mean there is a beginning in the sense that first there's nothing and then there's something, but that at the source of our particular life-system a creation/power/being who is female in the kind of energies she possesses and expresses gave life to all that we know by the expe-

dient of thinking it/us. They mean that she did and does that, and that without her thought nothing would exist then or now.

The Iroquois trace their origins to the descent of Sky Woman, who gave birth to a spirit daughter. When that daughter died giving birth to her twin sons, Sky Woman flung her body into the sky where it became the moon and hung her body on a tree near her lodge where it became the sun. For so powerful was the spirit woman's being that even in "death" she continued to live. (And of course this myth expresses the Iroquoian idea that death is a change of state rather than an end, as well as their view of women as primary to life on earth.)

In ancient Meso-America, the Grandmother power was Gucumatz, the Feathered One, who thought and meditated and spoke with her cohorts. She was later to be called "Quetzal" — another word that designates the same bird and, by extension, the same ritual force. This being later became known as Quetzacoatl, the feathered or winged serpent among the Aztecs who were by all accounts a latter-day people descended of more ancient peoples. One of their major deities, Quetzacoatl, reflected the masculine shift that was beginning to take place in the western hemisphere about the time the Aztecs descended into the valley of Mexico and began building their masculine-oriented system.¹ It appears that Quetzacoatl combines in his person the earliest female deities, Gucumatz and Cihuacoatl, or "Bird Woman" and "Serpent Woman" (who might both be better understood if called "Eldest Female Spirit Who Circles Above" and "Eldest Female Spirit Who Meanders Within"). In essence, the title of this best known Aztec deity, Quetzacoatl, reflects a female nature, for the highest Aztec deity, whose original identity (all but lost in the patriarchal ages since her coming) was Grandmother.

Changing Woman, as the Grandmother power is known among the Navajo, does just that, she changes. Ancient crone, seductive maiden, mature woman, mother, creator, grandmother, mistress of the sun, she wields the powers of Creative Thinking to the ends that best meet the needs of the universe of people, spirits and other creatures. According to an account recorded by Gladys A. Reichard, Changing Woman and her sister, Sand Altar Woman, were the sole inhabitants of this fourth or fifth world and made it safe for the human beings who eventually came here from the previous world.²

Like Changing Woman, Hard Beings Woman has the ability to change from young woman to old crone. And, in the words of Hamilton A. Tyler, ". . . as every Hopi knows, the world was created by Huruing Wuhti, Hard Beings Woman."³ This creation-goddess is referred to as Spider Woman among the Hopi, and as creator she

possesses many of the attributes of the Keres Thinking Woman, who is also informally known as Spider Woman. She is most often seen as the agent of human welfare and the benefactor of those who have good hearts and think no evil in their hearts. Often she is the champion of those who are weak, helpless, oppressed or suffering.

Speaking of goddesses with creative potency, the Zuni tell of Shi'wano'kia who "expectorated into the palm of her left hand and slapped the saliva with the fingers of her right, and the spittle foamed like yucca suds, running over her hand and flowing everywhere; and thus she created A'wilelin Si'ta (Earth Mother)."⁴

On the Plains walks White Buffalo Woman. The director of wind powers, the significator of the quadrants, directions, seasons and solstices, she gave the sacred medicine pipe to the Lakota, and with it the rules for how they should be a people, and how they should live within their traditional tribal mind. She is the heart of the people, the psychically-charged center that gives their being as a people its structure, meaning and vitality. In that way she, like the Keresan Iyatiko (Corn Woman, the Mother of the katsina, the people and the animals and plants) or the Navajo Changing Woman, is the center of the people, the true source of their power to live and to prosper.

These are only a bare hint of the sorts of female gods that were recognized and honored by the tribes and nations, but even such a brief account indicates that femaleness was not devalued among them. Rather it was highly valued, both respected and feared, and social institutions of every sort reflected this attitude. Even modern sayings, such as the Cheyenne statement that a people is not conquered until the hearts of the women are on the ground, reflect their understanding that without the power of woman the people will not live, but with it, they will endure, and they will prosper.

Nor did they confine this belief in the central importance of female energy to matters of worship. Among many of the tribes (perhaps as many as 70% of them in North America alone), this belief was reflected in all of their social institutions. The Iroquois Constitution or White Roots of Peace, also called the Great Law of the Iroquois, codified the Matrons' decision-making and economic power. For example, Articles 19, 44 and 45 provide:

The lineal descent of the people of the Five Fires [the Iroquois Nations] shall run in the female line. Women shall be considered the progenitors of the Nation. They shall own the land and the soil. Men and women shall follow the status of their mothers. (Article 44)

The women heirs of the chieftanship titles of the League shall be called Oiner or Otinner [Noble] for all time to come. (Article 45)

If a disobedient chief persists in his disobedience after three warnings

[by his female relatives, by his male relatives and by one of his fellow council members, in that order], the matter shall go to the council of War Chiefs. The Chiefs shall then take away the title of the erring chief *by order of the women in whom the title is vested*. [My emphasis] When the chief is deposed, the women shall notify the chiefs of the League. . .and the chiefs of the League shall sanction the act. The women will then select another of their sons as a candidate and the chiefs shall elect him. (Article 19)

Beliefs, attitudes and laws such as these resulted in systems that featured all that is best in the vision of American feminists and in human liberation movements around the world. Yet feminists too often believe that no one has ever experienced the kind of society that empowered women and made that empowerment the basis of its rules of civilization. The price the feminist community must pay because it is not aware of the recent if not contemporary presence of gynarchical societies on this continent is unnecessary confusion, division, and much lost time. Wouldn't it be good for feminists to know that there have been recent social models from which its dream descends and to which its adherents can look for models?

The Root of Oppression is Loss of Memory

An odd thing occurs in the minds of Americans when Indian civilization is mentioned: little or nothing. As I write this, I am keenly aware of how far removed my version of the roots of American feminism must seem to those of you steeped in either mainstream or radical versions of feminism's history. I am keenly aware of the lack of image or information Americans have about our continent's recent past. I am keenly (keening) aware of popular notions of Indian women as beasts of burden, squaws, traitors or, at best, vanished denizens of a long lost wilderness. How odd then must my contention seem: that the gynocratic tribes of the American continent provided the basis for all the dreams of liberation that characterize the modern world.

We as feminists must be aware of our history on this continent. We need to recognize that the same forces that devastated the gynarchies of Britain and the Continent also devastated the ancient African civilizations and we must know that those same materialistic, anti-spiritual forces are presently engaged in wiping out the same gynarchal values, along with the peoples who adhere to them, in Latin America. I am convinced that those wars have always been about the imposition of uncontested patriarchal civilization over the wholistic, pacifistic and spirit-based gynarchies they supplant, and that to this end the wars of imperial conquest have not been solely or even mostly waged over the land and its resources, but more, they have been fought within the bodies, minds and hearts of the people of the earth. This is, I think,

the reason traditionalists say we must remember our origins, our cultures, our histories and our mothers and grandmothers, for without that memory, which implies continuance rather than nostalgia, we are doomed to extinction.

The vision that impels feminists to action was the vision of the grandmothers' society, that society that was captured in the words of the 16th Century explorer Peter Martyr nearly four hundred years ago. It is the same vision repeated over and over by radical thinkers of Europe and America, from François Villon to John Locke, from William Shakespeare to Thomas Jefferson, and from them to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, from Benito Juarez to Martin Luther King and from Abigail Adams to Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Judy Grahn, from Harriet Tubman to Audre Lorde, from Emma Goldman to Bella Abzug, from Malinalli to Cherríe Moraga, and from Iyatiku to me. That vision as Martyr told it is of a country where there are "no soldiers, no gendarmes or police, no nobles, kings, regents, prefects, or judges, no prisons, no lawsuits . . . All are equal and free," or so Friedrich Engels recounts Martyr's words.

Columbus wrote:

Nor have I been able to learn whether they [the inhabitants of the islands he visited on his first journey in the New World] held personal property, for it seemed to me that whatever one had, they all took share of. . . They are so ingenuous and free with all they have, that no one would believe it who has not seen it; of anything that they possess, if it be asked of them, they never say no; on the contrary, they invite you to share it and show as much love as if their hearts went with it.⁶

At least, that's how the Native Caribbean people acted when the whites first came among them; and American Indians are often the despair of social workers, bosses and missionaries even now because of their deeply ingrained tendency to spend all they have, mostly on others. In any case, as the historian William Brandon notes,

. . . the Indian *seemed* free, to European eyes, gloriously free, to the European soul shaped by centuries of toil and tyranny, and this impression operated profoundly on the process of history and the development of America. Something in the peculiar character of the Indian world gave an impression of classlessness, of propertylessness, and that in turn led to an impression, as H.H. Bancroft put it, of "humanity. . . unrestrained. . . in the exercise of liberty absolute."⁷

A Feminist Heroine

Early in the Women's Suffrage Movement, Eva Emery Dye, an Oregon suffragist, went looking for a heroine to embody her vision of feminism. She wanted an historical figure whose life would symbolize the strengthened power of women. She found Sacagawea ("Saca-

jawea") buried in the journals of Lewis and Clark. The Shoshoni teenager had travelled with the expedition, carrying her infant son, and on a small number of occasions she acted as translator for the expedition.⁸

Dye declared that Sacagawea, whose name is thought to mean Bird Woman, had been the guide to the historic expedition, and through her work Sacagawea became enshrined in American memory as a moving force and friend of the whites, leading them in the settlement of western North America.⁹

But Native American roots of white feminism reach back beyond Sacagawea. The earliest white women on this continent were well acquainted with tribal women. They were neighbors to a number of tribes, and often shared food, information, child-care and health care. Of course little is made of these encounters in official histories of colonial America, the period from the Revolution to the Civil war, or on the ever-moving frontier. Nor, to my knowledge, has the significance of intermarriage between Indian and white, or between Indian and black been documented and the implications of these unions explored. By and large, the exploration of Indian-white relations has been focussed on governmental and treaty relations, warfare, missionization and education. It has been almost entirely documented in terms of formal white Christian patriarchal impacts and assaults upon Native Americans, though they are not often characterized as assaults but as "civilizing the savages." Or, particularly in organs of popular culture and miseducation, the focus has been on the imaginary degradation of Indian women ("squaws"), their equally imaginary love of white government and white conquest ("Princesses"), and the horrifyingly misleading, fanciful tales of bloodthirsty, backward primitives assaulting the innocent and virtuous efforts of white Christian settlers to find life, liberty and happiness in their chosen land.

But, regardless of official versions of relations between Indians and whites or other segments of American population groups, the fact remains that great numbers of apparently "white" or "black" Americans carry notable degrees of Indian blood. With that blood has come the culture of the Indian, informing the lifestyles, attitudes and values of their descendents. Somewhere along the line — and often quite recently — an Indian was raising the children of a family designated as "white" or "black." In view of this, it should be evident that one of the major enterprises of Indian women in America has been the transfer of Indian values and culture to as large and influential a segment of American immigrant populations as possible. Their success in this endeavor is amply demonstrated in the Indianized lifestyles that characterize American life.¹⁰

An Indian Focused Version of American History

American colonial ideas of self-government came as much from the colonists' observations of tribal governments as from their Protestant or Greco-Roman heritage. Neither Greece nor Rome had a pluralistic democracy as that concept has been understood in the United States since the Jackson administration, but the tribes, particularly the gynarchal tribal confederacies, did.

It is true that the oligarchal form of government that colonial Americans established was originally based on Greco-Roman systems in a number of important ways, such as its propertied-white-male-only-need-apply-for-citizenship structure, but it was never a form that Americans as a whole were comfortable with. Politics and government in the United States during the Federalist period were also reflective of the English common law system. However, they reflected it as it had evolved under patriarchal feudalism and monarchy — hence the United States' retention of slavery and restriction of citizenship to propertied white males.

The Federalists did make one notable change in the feudal system it derived from. They rejected blooded aristocracy and monarchy. This idea came from the Protestant revolt to be sure, but it was at least reinforced by colonial America's proximity to American Indian confederacies and their concourse with those confederacies over the two-hundred years of the colonial era. It was this proximity and concourse that enabled the revolutionary theorists to "dream up" a system in which all local polities would contribute to and be protected by a central governing body responsible for implementing policies that bore on the common interest of all. It should also be noted that the Reformation followed Columbus' contact with the Americas, and that his and Martyr's reports concerning Native Americans' free and easy egalitarianism were in circulation by the time it took hold.

The Iroquois federal system, like that of several in the vicinity of the American colonies, is remarkably similar to the organization of the federal system of the United States. It was composed of local, "state," and federal bodies composed of executive, legislative and judicial branches. The Council of Matrons was the executive, that is, it instituted and determined general policy. The village, tribal (several villages) and Confederate councils determined and implemented policies when they did not conflict with the broader Council's decisions or with theological precepts that ultimately determined policy at all levels. The judicial was composed on the men's councils and the matrons' council, who sat together to make determinations. Because the matrons were the ceremonial center of the system it can readily be seen how it was that they were the prime policy-makers.

Obviously, there are major differences between the contemporary governmental structure of the United States and that of the Iroquois. Two of those differences were and are crucial to the process of just government. The Iroquois system was spiritually based while that of the United States is secular, and the Iroquois had the female as executive. The female executive function was directly tied to the ritual nature of the Iroquois politic, for the executive was lodged in the hands of the Matrons of particular clans that functioned across village, tribe and national lines. That office was hereditary, and only sons of eligible clans could serve, at the behest of the matrons of his clan, on the councils at each of the three levels. No one could impeach or disempower a Matron, though her violation of certain laws could result in her ineligibility for the Matrons' Council. For example, a woman who married and took her husband's name could not hold the title Matron.

American ideas of social justice came into sharp focus through the commentaries of Iroquois observers who traveled in France in the colonial period. These observers expressed horror at the great gap between the lifestyles of the wealthy and the poor, remarking to the French philosopher Montaigne, who would so heavily influence the radical communities of Europe, England and America, that "they had noticed that in Europe there seemed to be two moities, consisting of the rich 'full gorged' with wealth, and the poor, starving 'and bare with need and povertie.' The Indian tourists not only marveled at the division, but marveled that the poor endured 'such an injustice, and that they took not the others by the throte, or set fire on their house. . .'"¹¹ It must be noted that the urban poor did just that in the French Revolution. It was the writings of Montaigne and of those he influenced that provided the theoretical framework and the vision that propelled their struggle for liberty, justice and equality on the Continent, and later throughout the British empire.

The feminist idea of power as it ideally accrues to women stems from the same source. The central importance of the clan matrons in the formulation and determination of domestic and foreign policy, as well as in their primary role in the ritual and ceremonial life of their respective nations, was the single most important attribute of the Iroquois, as of the Cherokee and Muskogee who traditionally inhabited the southern Atlantic region.

The latter peoples were removed to what is now Oklahoma during the Jackson administration, but prior to the American Revolution they had regular and frequent communication with and impact on both British, and later, American people, including the African

peoples brought here as slaves. Again this most important aspect of American Indian political systems does not often find its way into official discussions of their history and culture though it has been recorded by white historians and ethnographers on occasion.

One such, Lewis Henry Morgan, wrote an account, published in 1877.¹² This book was to heavily influence Marx and the development of world Communism, particularly the feminist-or women as powerful-aspects of the socialist revolution. Indeed, the very idea of socialism, that is, of the egalitarian distribution of goods and power, the peaceful ordering of society, and the right of every member of society to participate in the work and benefits of that society are ideas that pervade American Indian political thought and action. And it is through various channels, the informal but deeply effective acculturation performed by Indian women who married into other cultures, the social and political theory of the confederacies fueling and then intertwining with European dreams of liberty and justice, and most recently the work of Morgan and the writings of Marx and Engels, that the age-old gynarchal systems of egalitarian government found their way into contemporary feminist theory.

When Eva Emery Dye discovered Sacagawea and honored her as the guiding spirit of American womanhood, she may have been wrong in bare historical fact, but she was quite accurate in terms of the deeper truth her discovery pointed to. The statues that have been erected depicting Sacagawea as a Matron in her prime signify an understanding in the American mind, however unconscious it might be, that the source of just government, of right ordering of social relationships, the dream of "liberty and justice for all" can only be gained by following the Indian matrons' guidance. For, as Dr. Anna Howard Shaw said of Sacagawea at the National American Woman's Suffrage Association in 1905:

Forerunner of civilization, great leader of men, patient and motherly woman, we bow our hearts to do you honor! . . . May we the daughters of an alien race. . . learn the lessons of calm endurance, of patient persistence and unflinching courage exemplified in your life, in our efforts to lead men through the Pass of justice, which goes over the mountains of prejudice and conservatism to the broad land of the perfect freedom of a true republic; one in which men and women together shall in perfect equality solve the problems of a nation that knows no caste, no race, no sex in opportunity, in responsibility or in justice! May "the eternal womanly" ever lead us on! . . .¹³

NOTES

¹At least, this seems to have been the case, though the apparent shift might be a result of Spanish Catholic destruction of all records and informal sources of information about a gynocratic system, for such would have given serious cause for alarm among European potentates, namely the officers of the Inquisition and the Pope himself. The Spaniards who were destroying documents all over Latin America during that period were largely interested in a peaceful conquest, and were unlikely to be willing to acknowledge gynocracy there if they were to find it. But it is interesting (and perhaps not a meaningless coincidence), that the Aztec ritual or ceremonial calendar was based on a year of 20 13-day months, and that that same 13 is, in Europe, the number of the wiccan covens and all allied cultures.

² Gladys A. Reichard, *Spider Woman, A Story of Navajo Weavers and Chanters* (Glorieta, New Mexico: The Rio Grande Press, Inc., 1971), 169-79; cf. 236.

³ Hamilton A. Tyler, *Pueblo Gods and Myths* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, The Civilization of the American Indian Series, 1964), 37.

⁴ Tyler, p 94, citing Stevenson "The Zuni Indians," *BAE Twenty-Third Annual Report*, 1901-02, Washington, 1904, 23-24.

⁵ The White Roots of Peace. Cited from version in *The Third Woman: Minority Women Writers of the United States*, Dexter Fisher, ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980) 577. Cf. Thomas Sanders and William Peek, eds., *Literature of the American Indian* (New York: Glencoe Press, 1973), 208-239. Sanders and Peek refer to the document as "The Law of the Great Peace."

⁶ William Brandon, *The Last Americans: The Indian in American Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974), 6.

⁷ Brandon, 7-8. The entire chapter "American Indians and American History" is pertinent to the discussion (1-23).

⁸ Ella E. Clark and Margot Evans, *SACAGAWEA of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: UC Press, 1979), 93-98. Clark details the fascinating, infuriating and very funny scholarly escapade of how our suffragist foremothers created a feminist hero from the scant references to the teenaged Shoshoni wife of the expedition's official translator, Pierre Charbonneau.

⁹ The implications of this maneuver did not go unnoticed by either whites or Indians, for the statues of the idealized Shoshoni woman, the Native American matron, suggest that American tenure on American land, indeed, the white right to be on this land is given them by her. While that implication is not overt, it certainly is suggested in the image of her the sculptor chose: tall, heavy woman, standing erect, nobly pointing the way westward with upraised hand. The impression is furthered by the habit of media and scholar alike of referring to her as "the guide." Largely because of the "hype" surrounding the circumstances of Sacagawea's participation in the famed Lewis and Clark expedition, Indian people have viewed her as a traitor to her people, likening her to Malinalli (La Malinche, who acted as interpreter for Cortez and bore him a son) and

Pocahontas, that unhappy girl who married John Rolfe (not John Smith) and died in England after bearing him a son. Actually none of these women engaged in traitorous behavior. Sacagawea led a long life, was called Porivo (Chief Woman) by the Comanches among whom she lived for over twenty years, and in her old age engaged all her considerable skill at speaking and manipulating white bureaucracy to help in assuring her Shoshoni people decent reservation holdings.

¹⁰ A full discussion is impossible here, but an examination of American child rearing practices, societal attitudes toward women and exhibited by women (when compared to the same in old world cultures) as well as the foodstuffs, medicinal materials, counter cultural and alternative cultural systems and the deeply Indian values these reflect should demonstrate the truth about informal acculturation and cross cultural connections in the Americas.

¹¹ Brandon, 6.

¹² Lewis Henry Morgan, *Ancient Society or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery Through Barbarism to Civilization* (New York, 1877).

¹³ In Clark, 96.

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From Battered Wife to Community Volunteer:
Testimony of a Welfare Mother

In 1976 my husband began beating me with a frequency and intensity that caused me to fear for my life and that of my nine month old baby, Mary Ann. We lived in a small cottage on the Florida coast and I supported all three of us with my veteran's benefits that enabled me to go to college for the first time.

In June of that year Brion admitted some startling things — that he'd made sure he slept with me every day until I got pregnant and that he'd manipulated me during the entire relationship through an elaborate system of lies and deceptions. He laughed and said it was easy, that I had a moral code that I lived by and he could always anticipate how I'd react to any situation. He also said he wasn't letting me go alive. I threatened to leave and he threatened to kill all of us, including the baby and the dog.

The night he dragged me around the house closing windows with one hand, to muffle the noise, and covered my mouth with the other, I knew he was serious. I held the baby with one arm and with the other I tried to loosen his grip on my mouth so I could breathe. I broke free long enough to scream bloody murder and the police arrived within minutes, checked me for external injuries and tried to get me to make a statement but the inside of my mouth was cut and I couldn't talk. They assured me that my neighbors were looking out for me and urged me to yell if I needed help. They said someone in the neighborhood would hear me and call them.

They left and Brion apologized. Actually, he wanted to have sex. I refused and he waited until the next day to rape me. Things went from bad to worse and I made plans to leave town. I was all packed and waiting for a ride to the bus station when he came home drunk and carrying a loaded gun. He held me hostage for four hours and slapped me and knocked me down so many times that I can't remember them all. He wanted to kill me but I think he was afraid to live without me. He raped me until he couldn't get an erection anymore. Mary Ann cried at first but I closed the door so she couldn't watch and she sat down in her crib to play her red piano.

Brion decided I should cook one more dinner before he killed me and I ran away from him on the way to the grocery store, despite his promise to shoot me in the back if I made any false moves. He disap-

peared when I started screaming and I got to a phone and called the police. Since I looked like a victim from a horror movie by then and I'd called many times before, they had no trouble believing my story but they did think I might change my mind later and refuse to press charges. I explained that the only way for me to get out of town alive was for them to keep him in jail overnight. The bus to Los Angeles left once a day and I had already missed it.

I dropped out of school when Brion sabotaged the car. The campus was several miles away and public transportation inadequate so that was the end of my steady income. (I'm a Vietnam-era Navy veteran and I was going to school under my GI Bill.) Brion had quit his job so he could watch me every minute and I didn't trust him to stay home with the baby while I went out to work. I tried to get welfare but I wasn't eligible while Brion lived with me and he refused to leave. I had to get out of town to save my life and I had to get to a major city with emergency social services. I chose Los Angeles because it was far away and on the west coast. I knew how to survive on my own in a big city but I didn't want to go back to New York.

I arrived in L.A. after three days on the bus and I didn't know a soul there. I got on welfare quickly and again, no one had trouble believing my story. My bruises were starting to get large and purple and yellow and my face was sore and swollen, too. There I was, a young woman walking around a strange city with a baby, a suitcase, and signs of a recent beating. I guess it was pretty obvious.

"I know, I've been there," women on buses and streetcorners seemed to say to me with their eyes. Wherever I went people seemed to know I was on the run.

I spent nine months staying home, taking care of the baby, healing, forgetting, remembering and letting go. Some days I was too upset to leave the house. When I did, I often returned to my roach-infested apartment near MacArthur Park to face a dreaded image of my husband standing in the shadows, red-faced with beer and violence, holding a gun and sneering, "Hello, honey . . . get undressed."

"That it could come to this," I thought as I calmed down and assured myself that it was just my old fear welling up inside me and making it seem so real. Surely he could never find us. After all, the police had arrested him. After the better part of a year I was ready to face the world again. I went to a welfare conference and plunged headlong into welfare rights work. I gave and gave and gave, trying to change a system that basically never budged, though minor concessions were made, and I, personally, could have become a token minority at a low-paying social service agency job.

I stayed on welfare and learned how to cope with people's assumptions about me, mostly that I'm not working and that I am more dependent on "the system" than they are. People seemed to expect me to feel ashamed of being on welfare and they thought I would want to keep it as secret as possible. Like when I was a battered wife, I wanted *everybody* to know and I wanted them to know how I got there. I made a conscious choice to stay on welfare, especially as I became more employable. Aside from people's attitudes about my supposed inferiority, shame and dependence, the life is not that bad. I had my time to myself, and I had already learned the "ins and outs" of the welfare department, so I knew I was eligible and how to stay that way. The money wasn't much but I'd been buying all our clothes and household supplies at Thrift Shops for years anyway, so it didn't really involve a major change in shopping or lifestyle. Also, I was already pretty much a vegetarian and by eliminating expensive meat and dairy products from our diet and cooking from scratch a lot, I could feed both of us on my food stamp allotment.

I basically like living alone and don't miss having a mate. I never wanted to marry again, although I did despair at the beginning of ever resuming "normal relations" with men. Then I decided I didn't know what that was and didn't care. I was not afraid to face the world alone and never thought I needed another person to co-parent my child, although a lot of my plans were postponed for years while she was little.

When welfare rights became a never-ending cycle of infighting and meetings that went nowhere, I went on to other things — women's land, school again, feminism, writing, lesbianism, and to tie it all together, I began writing regularly for lesbian/feminist publications. I still have to contend with people's judgement and hostility, their resentment that I'm getting "easy money" or that I'm getting paid to "sit home and be creative" because I had a baby, while they have to go out and work for a living. I make a clear choice to forego the social status and higher income of regular employment in favor of the income maintenance and freedom of movement that I now enjoy.

Most people who hate me for being on welfare would not want to live the way I do. Until recently, at my daughter's insistence, I had never bought furniture, appliances, or any kind of entertainment equipment such as TV, radio, tape recorders, etc. It was fine with me to live without these things but at 7 years old and in public school my daughter feels a tremendous pressure to be "normal". In fact, I've done such a good job of living within my income that she doesn't seem to know that we're poor people and she regularly tells people that we

“have a lot of money.”

I have to watch that because most of the people who get prosecuted for welfare fraud get turned in by a friend or neighbor. People continually ask me how I manage to stay on welfare and if I really lie about my income. They always seem disappointed when I assure them that I am completely legal and I report everything. My book business is well-documented in my AFDC case and it doesn't generate enough income to affect the amount of my monthly check. I am careful about not telling people in the community “my business” because even though my continued eligibility remains unchanged, any investigation into my case could keep me busy for a long time and basically make my life miserable while I clear myself of all accusations.

The hostility and put-downs are constant and subtle and all of a sudden I'm not so sure of what I want anymore. I think all my early volunteerism was a way of proving myself to be a capable and worthwhile person and to give something back to the taxpayers who support me.

In addition to the women's movement, where I write for free, I have also been a volunteer at a mental health association, community radio and TV stations, a food co-operative, and I put in hours at a Feminist Women's Health Center until they decided volunteerism was oppressive to women and sent me a check for my work. I'm not sure how much appeasing my own sense of guilt and inadequacy for not being a wage-earner has actually helped, either myself or the world around me, since pandering to people's hostility about welfare never changes their minds. If anything, the resentment increases, both inside and outside the feminist movement, as I become more successful and happy and learn to use my welfare income to promote my career as a writer and media personality.

I have accomplished enough now that I do not have to keep proving myself again and again and I want to be more clear and focused in my goals and activities instead of just keeping busy for the sake of being active. I still want to work to make the world a better place but now I want my own goals to be a priority and I think it's okay if there's something in it for me, too, when I give my time and energy.

One of the biggest obstacles to achieving my full potential is people's continued presumption that I am not working and my time is available, or that I should work for them for free or just generally let them waste my time. I should make it clear that these responses and presumptions are just as strong and hateful within the New Age “counter culture” and the women's movement as in what can be called mainstream America.

I have enough plans and ambitions to last a lifetime if I don't let other people's attitudes undermine my enthusiasm and my will to achieve, but it's a constant struggle. Usually, it's easier not to discuss welfare with anyone, especially white people who hate me for so many things anyway. It's alarming sometimes to think about how many minority groups I belong to and what that means, that it takes enormous energy and inner strength to overcome both the external obstacles and my own fears. I spend a lot of time just working on myself, coming down from the last episode and preparing for the next idea or goal, and I think I have come farther in order to be where I am than people who don't carry the following labels: I'm a woman, I'm single, Puerto Rican, I have no college degrees, I'm a veteran, a single parent, a lesbian, on welfare, a vegetarian and kind of a counter-culture progressive type. I've eaten organic food for years and I make and wear my own flowing matriarchal costumes. Also, I'm more downwardly mobile in terms of lifestyle and upwardly mobile in terms of accomplishments and work.

Some days it's just too much and I don't want to face the outside world. That's why it's important for me to live alone, with just Mary Ann, so I don't have to. When I can't take it anymore I just go home and lock the door. With no phone I'm pretty inaccessible and I discourage visits from all but the best of friends, those people who don't put undue pressure on me.

As far as the broad assumption that I am more dependent on the system than someone with a job I can only contend that I feel freer now than I did when I was being controlled by a boss, a husband, a university and even the feminist movement. Keeping the welfare trip together gives me a lot of leverage in dealing with the rest of the world. If my books don't sell I don't have to worry about how to pay the rent and if the people I work with on a volunteer basis don't like my performance they can't withhold a paycheck. I would never want to be financially dependent on a husband or lover again.

In a way, being on welfare has given me the freedom to be a totally independent artist and also to stay celibate as long as I want. I acknowledge the fact that white lovers, male or female, usually represent an opportunity to increase my access to money or privilege and in that way I always depend on the relationship to make my life easier, whether that capability is realized or not. I've opted out of the whole lover game by concentrating on myself and my own process and progress.

I no longer ask for those things that are mine by right — respect, freedom of choice, privacy, tolerance, and understanding. I'm not

sure I believe in mass re-education anymore. I think misjudgement and ignorance are deliberate excuses that people use to get what they want at other people's expense. The people who value my work and myself seem capable of doing that without long involved explanations, so I have stopped qualifying my life as well as my statements and I am less likely to let myself get put on the defensive by someone else's accusations or desire to monopolize my time.

Although more opportunities exist for me in the feminist movement than anywhere else, I'm not sure it has all the answers either, since mistrust and malevolence continue to divide women and keep us from realizing the full extent of our power together. As people take their freedom, in all walks of life, I believe the answer for all of us lies in the ability to increase our own and each other's choices. I don't think the energy expended hating people like me with my \$116. per month welfare check is helping anybody and that kind of jealous/anger/resentment is something that women continue to undermine each other with. It is time we started applauding each other's freedom, choices and movement in many — different — directions.¹

1. This entire subject arose in correspondence with lesbian/feminist author and healer Billie Potts, who responded to a statement of mine in relation to PAZ PRESS that "I just want to break even, getting the word out is the most important thing". I responded so defensively to her urgings to examine the premise behind my statements that an entire article emerged.



Now Edited By:

DOROTHY ALLISON
ELLY BULKIN
CHERYL CLARKE
CARROLL OLIVER
MIRTHA N. QUINTANALES
AIDA SANTIAGO

conditions

a feminist magazine

BOX 56A VAN BRUNT STATION BROOKLYN, NY 11215

We are concerned that women's/lesbian publications have often failed to reflect the experiences and viewpoints of Third World, working-class, and older women. We want *CONDITIONS* to include work in a variety of styles by both published and unpublished writers from all women who feel a commitment to women is an integral part of their lives.

SUBSCRIPTIONS (three issues)

\$15. individual; \$25. institution; \$9. special "hardship" rate; \$20. or more - supporting subscription; Single Issues: \$6. individual; \$9. institution. Overseas distribution: add \$2. for subscription and \$.50 for single issue.

BACK ISSUES (five and subsequent issues still available): \$4.50 each.

Like Old Rags

Quotes are from an article, "Haitian Women: From Repression to Jail" published in the *Guardian* in April 1982. The *Guardian* included within the article part of a statement written by Haitian women imprisoned in Puerto Rico. I have combined descriptions of Puerto Rican and U.S. jail experiences since the article detailed conditions which were similar in both countries.

There is less and less
mail only relatives
listed with the Immigration and Naturalization Service
are permitted to write allowed outside once
a week for chapel Sixty-two refugee
women *like old rags forgotten in some*
corner outside the brick building a fifteen
foot chain link fence *food and drink like*
they say one woman mixed broken glass
with her food how they dared to cross having
no drinking supply only urine
and yet you treat us like animals
by day the interpreter stresses
repression is not a good enough
reason for leaving Haiti
you know this as well as we do the I.N.S.
forms are pages of English these women
speak only Creole
not allowed calls to the Haitian Legal
Hotline any longer *we did not flee our*
country in search of flashlights shock
from bed to bed at night roll call five
times a day inside Cottage 26 Alderson Federal Prison
pipes flooded again roused after midnight guiding
mop handles Haitian women push water across
floors after 65
days on the ocean after 65 days on the ocean

Marie's Poem

her arms are scarred with years of lying in the hard water
below the highway
she smells of grease
eyes like old mussels
she slams the plate down
bites down on doublemint
"yah order"
years of standing on this goddamn linoleum
no goddamn windows
hard water

sweeping dust out the side door
she swallows hair
remembering jacey saying:
"y're gonna shake this town off y heels dessa.
mama's gonna be so proud."
in '59 when she just started those men would call her over
"ohdezah sheeyit thats a fancy name.
howd y like to take a trip to tulsa honey.
y & those
fine breasts."
'detonate'
she thought
wasnt that when a thing said what it truly was.
& wept like a fucking river

she looks like dog shit in that dress
looks like some kind of power rocks beneath the skin
pushes at the skin
as she turns around spilling coffee
her broken nails
more trucks coming in

monday morning 7 am
hands full of hot egg & sausage
she thinks about dolphins drowning
tethered up in fishernets
bodies burned with the many lines
& she twists & throws the dishes
all over the clean forks
through the orange juice
her arms red with liquid
it must have hurt like hell

Violations

this is 'dedicated' to my brother—daniel jay vie.

y find y own way out.
give my hand back
it belongs to me;
yre a magic man

“give my hand back.”
y follow me around the house:
i know magic
the acid i drink is the sweat off y skin

y follow me around the house
trailing y long thin laugh
the acid i drink is the sweat off y skin
y hands are the last to burn

trailing y long thin laugh. . .
the wounds are subterranean.
y hands are the last to burn
shadows across my throat and mouth

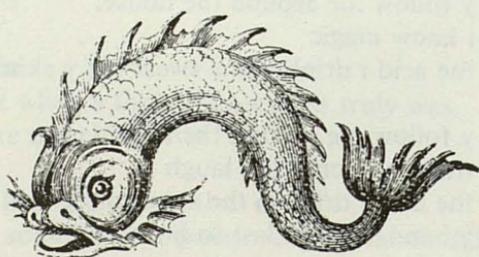
the wounds are subterranean
i am not here in my body. the
shadows across my throat and mouth
are highways and i am running

i am not here in my body. the
doors are locked against me. there
are no highways and i am running
barefoot in my flowered dress

doors are locked against me there
grief is a live thing walking
barefoot in my flowered dress.
i get the knife

grief is a live thing walking.
i drag it behind me.
i get the knife
put y in a forest of a terror

i drag it behind me—
it belongs to me.
put y in a forest of terror;
find y own way out



Her Name Is Helen

Her name is Helen.

She came from Washington State twenty years ago through twisted
routes

of Hollywood, California,

Gallup, New Mexico,

Las Vegas, Nevada,

ended up in Detroit, Michigan where she lives in apartment #413 in the
gut of the city.

She worked in a factory for ten years, six months, making carburetors
for Cadillacs.

She loved factory work. She made good money, took vacations to
New Orleans,

“A real party town.”

Went home to see her mom.

Went to Chicago once, but didn't like it there.

Couldn't find any Indians.

She wears a cowboy hat with pretty feathers. Can't wear cowboy
boots,

because her feet are crippled with arthritis.

She wears beige vinyl wedgies and in the winter pulls on heavy socks
to protect her bent over toes from the slush and rain.

Helen takes pictures of herself.

Everytime she passes those Polaroid booths, one picture for a dollar,
she closes the curtain, and the camera flashes.

When she was laid off from the factory, she got a job in a bar,
serving up shots and beers.

Instead of tips, she gets presents from her customers.

Little wooden statues of Indians in headdress.

Naked pictures of squaws with braided hair.

Feather roach clips in fuschia and chartreuse.

Everybody loves Helen.

She's such a good guy. A real jokester.

Helen doesn't kiss.

She allows her body to be held when she's had enough vodkas and Lite beer.

She's had lots of girlfriends.

White women who wanted to take care of her.

Who liked Indians.

Who think she's a tragedy.

Helen takes pictures of herself.

She has a picture on a keychain, along with a baby's shoe and a feathered roach clip.

She wears her keys on a beaded belt.

Helen sounds like a chime, moving behind the bar.

Her girlfriends took care of her.

Told her what to wear, what to say, how to act more like an Indian.

"You should be proud of your Indian heritage. Wear more jewelry.

Go to the Indian Center."

Helen doesn't talk much.

Except when she's had enough vodkas and Lite beer.

Then she talks about home. About her mom. About wanting to go back before she dies.

Helen says she's going to die when she's fifty.

She's forty-two now.

Eight years to go.

Helen doesn't kiss.

Doesn't talk much.

Takes pictures of herself.

She touches women who are white, and her body is touched by their hands.

Helen can't imagine that she is beautiful.

That her skin is warm.

That her cunt smells like fire and redwood.

That her short black hair is thick and moves like a current when she bends her head to pick up a beer.

That her large body speaks in languages she never learned.

That her mouth is wide and full and when she smiles, people catch their breath.

She's a gay Indian girl.
A dumb Indian.
An ugly, fat squaw.
This is what Helen says.

She wears a t-shirt with the legend "Detroit" splashed in glitter
across her large breasts.
Her breasts that white women have sucked and molded to fit their
mouths.
Her incredible breasts that she has harnessed in a brassiere
that strains and pulls with her movement.

Helen can't imagine that there are women who see her.
That there are women who want her mouth to open underneath their
own.
To taste her breath and salt.
Who want a speech to be created on their tongues.
Who want her strong flesh to dance in tremors from their
fingers and lips.
Who want to go deep inside her and touch places that are dark,
wet, held together with muscle and spirit.
Who want to swell and expand two bodies into a word of our own
making.

Helen can't imagine that she is beautiful.

She doesn't kiss.
Doesn't talk much.
Takes pictures of herself to look at so she will know she is there.
Takes pictures of herself to prove she is alive.

She takes pictures of herself.

She takes pictures of herself.



I've Paid My Heavy Dues

Whatcha mean I ain't never had no dues? Listen to me.
Don't everybody know dreary dues? In my teens,
I was a chorus high-stepper, full of ginger and
all kinds of groovy moves. I was paid in fast shuffles.
Later on, I was short-changed good by my chasin' man
while my rebel-kids traded in scams and scattered.

I was thirty-five then, a tall leggy, buxxy babe.
I splashed big riffin' with a scat quartet.
What a blast of jazzy one-night grand|stands!
I pizzazzed on and I was pleased off the band stand.
One night I botched my stack, boom from a powerhouse joint.
I was hooked, strung-wide, inside-out; couldn't cope
with the glitter. I sagged to the dregs at forty only
to be told I wasn't gonna make it. Me and the other
honey-pots dotted all over the landscaped rest home, the
mean asylum scene where they stashed us to coast as they
toasted our tootsies. We were the unluckies who blew it.

How was I to know my bubble would go pouff into flickers
as rainbow sprinkles twisted and aged my wide-eye looks
long before and beyond my time. Now I know it wasn't
worth the bedeviled game. There were so many days I tried
to hide from mirrors while I wore lop-sided blinkers.
I forgot high-style gussies. I couldn't remember
how to reach out and smile; not for a long while.
Five shaky years later I showed 'em I could make it,
do it. I was togethered, a restored, rehabilitated broad.

First, I applied for General Relief with G.R. work at the
County Hospital next day. My high and mighty social worker
said, "They don't give you somethin' for nothin'."
Their somethin' is a big nothin'. Tomorrow it's four needlin'
from an A-S-S-T, Assd. Superintendent of infirmary linens.

I gotta fold and stack you name it just so as
I can take home pea-nuts from a State without a heart.
That government with everlastin' stakes stucked into
my frail-tail that's plum full of gizzard-miseries.
Will I make it 'til I get S.S.I.? Not \$ \$ like dollar signs.
What I mean is S.I.S., somethin' like State Integrity Shit.

What'll I throw on my back tomorrow? I gotta sashay to eastside
on three slow jitneys. How about my puccoon flounced blouse that
lost its flutter? I can't holler if my slax and puce jacket don't
match. Last year it was a superoozee Goodwill good buy for two
dollars; a snatch for my shivered shade of lean crumblin' green.
It's right on. I totsy around unspiffied in rag-me-downs laced
with tears and last years tears of other bods' indigo blues.

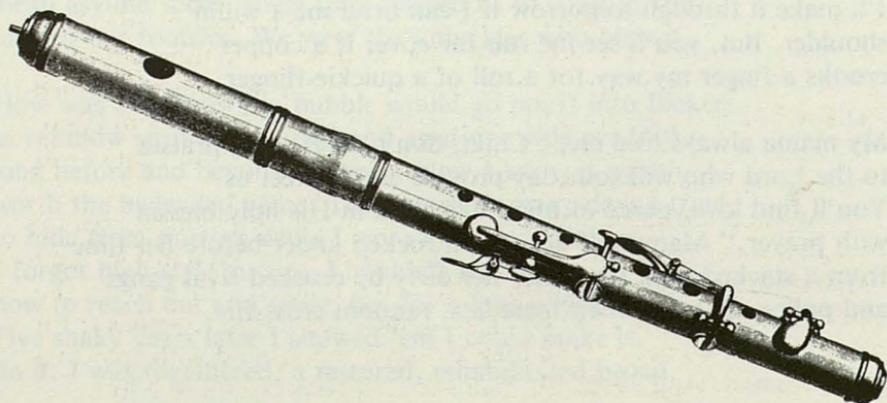
If you dig, that ain't all I got. So what if mine ain't the
most purty butt in this bigtime city of beat crazy ruts.
Once in a while, I'll wheeze a bop chorus at the piano.
Maybe strut-tut silly after I cage a short lick at next-door
bar. It'll see me through today's spoilers of woomon-ity.
I'll make it through tomorrow if I can bend me a willin'
shoulder. But, you'll see me run for cover if a copper
crooks a finger my way for a roll of a quickie-flinger.

My mama always told me, "Child, don't covet. Sing praises
to the Lord who will someday provide and protect us.
You'll find love, peace of mind like I did in His holy blessin'
with prayer." Mama has her peace; rocked under before her time
from a stacked deck that dealt her dirty by crooked rival gangs
and police, all totin' their merciless, random cross-fire.

I am pained, revolted by what I see and what I hear
'til I can't feel any healin' with so many heels
diggin' into me, especially from county supervisors.
They programmed their shaft to screw my CETA plans.
They ended my hope of makin' it again, on my own.
I don't understand why there's no change for the better.
I can't give up lookin' for a perfect light. There must be
a supreme light to lead me out of this mucked-up gutter.

Tell me, what've I got? All I see are pieces; a bunch
of no-class crass bits and unwanted brass hand-me-frowns.
I picked 'em up takin' turns at life's learnin' game where
every tenth bod looks for to tame another higher tiger.
I thought I was tough-stuff. I tell you, it was ever rough.
What a helluva bluff to pile on, to lay on our kind!

Someday, they'll scatter my tatters; where I don't know.
It don't matter very much. When they do, there'll be time;
so much more time to enjoy all those down-home smiles
without clouts from my piled on heavy; oh yeah,
I'm talkin' about all my UN-deserved heavy dues.



Homewrecker

This woman is just too much! said Sally Anders Johnssen to herself. I've never. . .! Embarrassment flooded her, bringing on her scarlet flush, spreading over the face to the bright yellow roots of her hair.

That did it! Nina Martarano said to herself. Now she'll come in with me. . .no one's home. . .we'll have at least an hour to be by ourselves! She dropped Andy's arm.

"I'll try to forget you did that, Nina," Andy said out loud. But she could still feel the hard nipples on her arm, the surprise of having her arm grabbed gently at the wrist, drawn across Nina's lush breasts — directly across!

Nina tried to give her a look that would melt steel — the blue metal steel that matched her Norwegian eyes and soul. Dammit, I can't help it, I want her! But it looked like she'd have to go in alone after all.

Shall I go in with her? thought Andy, knowing she wanted to more than she should. My dad always said they're all whores and pimps, Italians, and here's the proof! What if Louise should get off early? This is *wrong*. This *isn't* what I should be doing right now, I should be putting my hand on the ignition key instead of this door handle—start the car and be gone, and instead I'm getting out—

Nina tried to be serious and not exult in her heart as she turned the key in the bungalow door and switched on the livingroom lamp. Andy had given in! She looked about. All was untouched, Louise was still at work; thank God it was a ten-o'clock night. . .

Andy sat down on the edge of an armchair, beginning to sweat, though it was November. The blush had lasted—she felt it inside, deep in the stomach and in the place she tried not to live. . . Like a *guy*, she chided herself angrily, like any goddamned guy trying to knock off a piece. . . I'm no better than they are—playing around with someone else's woman. And especially Louise's. . . I respect Louise a lot!

Nina sat down on the couch and rejoiced as Andy came over to her. This is it! I knew I could do it! her heart flip-flopped, as her eyes drowned in the purple-blue pupils that were Andy's best feature. Her size, her heaviness, the thick body, the small breasts—none of it mattered: it was something she *was*. Nina tried not to think 'butch'

but the word kept coming to her mind as they clasped hard, still staring in each others' eyes.

Christ, what was that noise! Andy jumped, startled and spoiled their kiss. She's brazen, she's going to kiss *me*, this one. . .reverse things. . . Then the feelings took over and the two bodies wheeled in awkward ecstasy on the cushions. . .

These damn cushions always fall down on the floor, thought Nina inappropriately. It's actually happening! What I've wanted for so long I can't believe it! My heart'll stop! Should we? The bed in the little inner room beckoned. Oh my God, what if Louise came home early this one night! Thinking but not thinking as she felt the delicious press of their bodies together—

"This isn't right, you know it, Nina," Andy finally forced out. She carefully untangled herself from their knot, brushing her pants and running her big hand through her short straight hair.

"You're feeling guilty." Nina did not move away on the couch, but sat there looking at her, mystified the other could break such a feeling, interrupt such a moment with stupid Puritanical ideas! "It's right if we *feel* it's right. Be honest, what do you feel when I do *this*. . ." Nina embraced her, hard, both arms around her shoulders. The blush came back to the wonderful face.

"I—you know what I feel," stammered Andy helplessly, "but I also know that Louise loves you, and—and—I shouldn't be here. I'm going to go now." Andy rose and looked for her keys. Then over at Nina who was staring down at the carpet.

Nina felt heaven and hell blend together in one single half-hour, watching Andy put on her jacket and go to the door. "Wait! I'm coming with you. . .just to your car," she finished quickly, as Andy protested something. So close. . .she was so close! Wait till I tell Carol tomorrow at work! I love her! I don't care what anyone else says or does! I'm going out there with her to say goodnight!

I couldn't help but let her get into the car again—it was just too strong, right now, but I know I'll have to forget it. I won't listen to what she's saying, Andy thought, and abruptly they kissed, in the yellow headlights of an oncoming car, which caused such a storm in Andy's head she practically threw Nina off her and leaned over, thrusting open the passenger door: "Out! Now! Or I'll never leave, don't you *understand*? I'm not a very strong person!" The brown eyes pleaded at Andy but she set her face hard and barely responded to Nina's wave as she drove off, not looking in the rear view at the figure standing at the curb, across the street from the little green bungalow that was theirs: Nina and Louise's—theirs together. Homewrecker,

that's what I am—one of those to stay away from! I've never been any different. . . just no good! Got to take myself in hand. . . stay away from her. . .

Nina saw the profile of Andy against the streetlight across the street. She didn't look over at me, but she wanted to! Again came the hidden exultation, the fear and forbidden pride, and the assurance of having Andy for her lover eventually—it covered her whole body with cold needles. Regretfully, she went back into the house, glowing when she glanced over at the couch, not even bothering to straighten anything, living again in the moments of their hard grasping clutch of each other, that impossible kiss from another world—the hair of gold, eyes of—God! it's almost ten, Louise would be home soon! I have to rearrange myself a little or she'll guess, Nina thought, wondering how Louise could possibly *not* know! I can't keep anything off my guilty face, just like my family, Louise always says. . . Nina and her organ-grinder emotions. . . a bunch of Italian organ-grinders! Everything is always an opera!

* * *

What are they talking about! agonized Nina, peering out the front window discreetly at them. But the bushes around the bungalow kept her from really seeing. They'd been sitting out there for a half-hour now—and nothing, she still didn't know anything—She stalked over to the kitchen, then back to the livingroom window to look out again. What's going on? Why on earth did she come?

"You oughta keep her more in line," Andy said stiffly, not looking over at Louise's slim length on the chaise lounge, feeling the slow painful red coming and going on her face. "She's just got too much freedom. Not that I'm trying to excuse myself. I—I sort of got sucked in, and couldn't get away, I guess—no, that's not really fair, Louise. A admit I really *wanted to*—I know she's not mine, and I'll—we'll—it won't be repeated, I can promise you that, if it means anything to you." Andy was feeling foolish, like she wasn't making it—wasn't coming across the way she wanted to when she planned this: to tell Louise that they'd gotten involved. . . Louise's face looked lofty and calm and almost unconcerned. She didn't even look mad! But Andy cringed in spite of herself when Louise spoke, at her demeaning words, so softly delivered and not even icy—well, maybe just a *little* bit icy, but I deserve it! It was a relief at last to be able to get up and leave—not even wanting to look to see if Nina was observable—to see if she was around. I know she must be, Louise had said she was

home. . .but this is the best way. . .

“And then she said I should keep a closer watch on you: make sure you don’t play around again—that’s what she told me, man-to-man.” Louise was smiling at Nina’s twisted expression as she repeated Andy’s words to her. Nina wanted to cry, scream, be beside herself, but she kept thinking: *no*, don’t do it! don’t make another opera! that’s what she expects—control your feelings! I can’t hurt, openly, in front of her—but tomorrow, when she’s gone to visit her folks I’ll let myself cry—tomorrow—right now I just have to not think of any of this—Andy, why did you *do* it?! How could you say it! That it was all my fault, in front of Big Daddy Louise, with her rigid punishing mouth! Andy, how *could* you, after the miracle-feeling when we finally touched!



To the Editors, regarding the short story’s use of negative concepts of women’s behavior:

I want to say that the parts of this story reflecting looksism or sizism, cultural chauvinism, role-playing, or other negatives are intended to be merely descriptive of the manner in which women often related to each other in the past I experienced as an Italian-American woman growing up in racist southern-California in the 50’s, and do not in any way represent an attempt to condone, apologize for, excuse or otherwise promote and foster these attitudes. I believe we can gain from looking frankly at these behaviors, with their horrific effects on our relationships, both then and now. I feel I have both the obligation and the right to portray people as they are in their struggles with self-hatred and WASP attitudes we have all absorbed. Many times ‘Anglos’ even now don’t realize how they limit the range of non-WASPs to express themselves in ways not considered (by them) acceptably ‘nice.’ We are shut up if we are too intense, angry, ‘over-emotional,’ loud, hysterical, etc., especially if we have a dark face. If you find you can use this piece but want to edit out any language in it (as opposed to organizational and/or punctuation changes) please send it back. I’d prefer to see it uncut in ways that would delete my experience. I hope you understand. (I have recently been told by an editor about another story that the two lovers related to each other in ways ‘too heterosexual’—yet this is how reality is and has been. To censor this and present something unreal as our experience is not going to aid anyone to confront her heterosexism. I write this hoping you agree — if not, kindly send back ms. Thanks.)

Arline Pozzi Zimmerman

Katharyn Machan Aal *interviews* Judy Grahn

on

Women's Poetry Readings: History and Performance (Part I)

August 6, 1982, at The Women's Writing Workshops, Ithaca College
(transcribed by K.M.A., edited by J.G. and *Sinister Wisdom*)



K.M.A.: What I would like to know from you are two things in particular. One is your role as historian, telling me about the evolution of poetry readings on the West Coast. And also what I want to get at is what it's like to give a poetry reading. If you can describe for me what it feels like and why you do it. What is a poetry reading, for you?

J.G.: As I remember, the first adult reading that I did was probably in '66. And it was in Albuquerque, and about eighty people came, and I did a reading. I was—I felt very shy at that time. I was twenty-six and just getting started, feeling as though as an adult I could be a poet. I had gone through a child-type career with my school and schoolmates and so on, and then there was a time when I was just getting into the work force and learning how to be a grown-up that I didn't write poetry for years. And then I went back to it. So that was the first reading that I did, and then when I moved out about eight months later I moved to the West Coast. And one of the first things I did was to go to an open reading and wait until the very end and then get up and read a long poem called "Why Do Americans," which is in *Edward the Dyke*. It's a long, philosophical poem that I had written after listening to a tape of Ezra Pound, and I thought if *he* could use really slow, measured rhythms like that and take his *own* time in saying the words, well, so could I. So I tried doing something that was very measured and deliberate and full of control of my own space as the poet and as the reader. So I went to a reading that was an open reading and it was in a dark environment, in a church, and wine was served, as is the custom of poetry readings. But this was in the middle of the flower children renaissance of San Francisco and it seemed to me that everyone was drunk to begin with and by the end of the evening the man who preceded me was almost

unable to stand up. [laughter] He went on and on and on and on, and finally I got up with what was left of the audience and by that time I was almost too drunk to stand up, too, because there was nothing to do but drink gallons of wine while you waited. And I didn't find that satisfactory at all. My initial entry into the world of reading poetry in public was one of being an outsider who was dissatisfied with what was already happening. It made me angry that established poets' work was being sold for high prices—because I was resentful that I couldn't even get published and yet I knew that I was good. Their autographs would be sold, for instance, for \$25 or something, just for a name on a piece of paper. This made no sense to me as a resentful twenty-six year-old.

K.M.A.: Who were some of these poets?

J.G.: Lawrence Ferlinghetti, for instance. At that time there were very few women, but they were extremely important, who were writing. Diane di Prima was one model. Diane Wakoski was another. Denise Levertov. The fact that they existed at all was of tremendous importance. But they were very separated from each other. And most of the women poets that I saw were, first off, outnumbered by twenty to one at a reading, and they were so reticent, they were so shy, they were so hidden behind the barricade of the podium and they said in such small voices such insignificant things, that I was really disgusted with them.

K.M.A.: Did Levertov and di Prima and Wakoski read like that?

J.G.: No. No, *they* didn't, but I didn't see them read that often to know what was different about how they read, and it wasn't *as* different from that as I would have liked in that day. So I didn't use their reading methods as a model. I never have. I decided as I began dropping away from that world—I dropped away from *any* kind of male-dominated world—and I began forming, along with some other people, a world of women and women's audiences that were separated from the mainstream, separated from the usual poetry audience also. And we used poetry for different purposes. We used poetry to help energize women and speak to women's needs and women's energy. We derived our sources from that and we put it back to that same audience, and we literally built up not only a women's poetic literature but also a women's audience who understood it and wanted it. And we did it by

organizing at the ground level and holding readings that were very broad-ranging in the kinds of women who would come and read. They were from all different places and all different stages of writing. But they were welcome to come and read. And we would hold them in places where women were. That sometimes meant lesbian bars, that sometimes meant churches where there would be child care, or women's country groups out in the country where we would be so welcome. I remember reading till two in the morning to a group of farm women up in the country. All the babies had gone to sleep by that time and the women wanted me to go on and on because they really wanted to hear what I had to say.

K.M.A.: And this was in California?

J.G.: Um-hmm. Yeah.

K.M.A.: Can you describe for me what one of those readings was like? A typical reading.

J.G.: The early readings that were all-women's readings—I remember one in particular that I helped organize, and it was probably ten or twelve poets, probably three hundred or four hundred people in the audience. There was still too much alcohol, because we did not know not to—I didn't know that you could even *do* a reading without alcohol. I had known many real outright drunks who were poets who wouldn't read without just being *completely* tanked.

K.M.A.: The Dylan Thomas influence.

J.G.: Yeah, and the beatniks. I think they followed that line, too. So it wasn't until later that I got control of that aspect and so did other women and there's—alcohol is no longer a part of women's readings. But at that time it was, and a sort of party atmosphere. A very political atmosphere was part of it. And at *that* reading there were just about ten or twelve poets. I was very militant at the time on a number of issues. Another poet was Pat Parker, and she's a Black lesbian poet with Movement experience and sensibility. She had come through already two or three Movements by the time lesbian-feminism was beginning to develop, and she helped develop it, as I did, as a philosophy and as a way of getting groups of people together who would form an audience. So one of the major audiences for us has been lesbian-feminists. That's only been one of them, but it was very formative. She and I would team up and we *often* read together as a pair.

K.M.A.: Was this still the late sixties?

J.G.: Yeah. '69, '70, '71, '72, '73. This is the time period. Another person was Willyce Kim, who was the first Asian lesbian to really speak up. In her poetry she had a very aggressive stance, with provocative and funny poems. We would operate as *teams* very often, reading together, being asked to read together, going to colleges and schools and high schools and churches and benefits and rallies and that sort of thing.

K.M.A.: Did you get paid?

J.G.: Gradually. In the beginning the pay was sometimes just gas, and then gradually it began to be honorariums, and finally it became a fixed fee that built up over a period of time. Primarily what the readings did besides pull people together for a social evening that was also highly energizing and that they loved, was promoting the books that we were putting out, so people knew about them. Because there was no distribution network for our books at that time and they were passed by word of mouth. It was a tremendously exciting time. No one stopped to analyze what was happening. Everything was *happening* and going on. So it was very exciting. From reading *The Common Woman* poems I became involved then with a group of musicians who were performing. We performed at the Ash Grove, in fact, in Los Angeles, and I alternately sang and played with them or was an individual poet on the stage. That was quite a raucous weekend also, organized by one of the waitresses, who was promoting women's material. It was a whole women's festival. So *The Common Woman* poems were read on stages in nightclubs as well as in bars as well as in churches and libraries as well as on the radio.

K.M.A.: And this was when again?

J.G.: Around '72, '73. The most interesting thing I did with it—I developed a technique for the purpose of strengthening my voice as a woman's voice. It was very, very clear that the women poets, with a few very important but token exceptions, who I've named, but for the rest, their message was weak and they were inconsequential. So I deliberately developed along with content of the poems that would turn a corner, take women *through* being oppressed or victimized or pressured or underpaid—all those "isms"—all the way through to the other side of what was *strong* about being a

woman, what was energizing and joyful and the source of ideas and historically exciting, brilliant, had something to do with science or spirituality or any of those elements. In addition to the *content* saying that and the form of my words, the form of my delivery had to say that, too. So I developed—I sat and thought it through, thought about what was needed, and I did away with the podium as often as I could. In my first performances I would not use a podium at all. I would not stand behind a large wooden slab that was going to block me off from my audience and make me feel small, 'cause most of them are designed for very tall people to start with. And secondly I—for a number of years I would not stay confined to the mike. I wanted a moving mike or to do away with the mike altogether, just so that I could move around the stage the way the rock singers did. Because I could see what their techniques were doing and how *alive* their performances were. So I would perform *A Woman Is Talking to Death* very often walking up and down the stage, walking it, using it like a stage more than using it as a podium, while at the same time not doing a *dramatic* reading in the old sense of a dramatic reading, but sort of a this-is-the-way-Americans-talk poetry reading.

K.M.A.: What do you mean by “the old sense of a dramatic reading”?

J.G.: I did not use any dramatic gestures, and my voice didn't rise and fall in dramatic ways. I've become a *little more* like that in these later times, but at *that* time I would read it almost deadpan in a certain way, very directly, in other words, just very direct: “Here it is.” But at the same time I would move around and I would not be a static figure on the stage. And this—It seemed to me this *electrified*. The other thing that I did was always make eye contact with people, whenever possible. If I could have memorized the poems I would have done that, but my memory wasn't good enough. So I did the next best thing, which was to try to meet everybody-in-the-audience's eye if possible, even if it was four hundred people or something. Another thing that I did, really early on, to break the spell of poetry being fragile, especially women's poetry if it's being fragile and hearts-and-flowers, was to turn the microphones up too high, the amplifiers, and get very close to the mike and pop and hiss right into it [laughter] so that people were forced to listen to the impact of my voice as well as the words. That was a little piece of

drama. It was abrasive, but it also broke through to the other side of poetry so that the poetry stopped being so contained and so controlled as it had been. And it broke free of the whole Creeley school that was very tightly contained poetry. It just burst out and was something else altogether. I did that for all of us, for the woman's voice. That was Stage One.

K.M.A.: How did people react to that?

J.G.: They loved it. It grated on them and it electrified them and it made them want more and it made them weep and cry.

K.M.A.: Was this primarily women's audiences?

J.G.: Men would—If the audience was all women, men would sometimes dress up like women and sneak in to hear. [laughter] Isn't that funny?

K.M.A.: It's like *The World According to Garp*, that movie that's coming out.

J.G.: I haven't seen that.

K.M.A.: He does that in order to be at his mother's funeral.

J.G.: Yup. That would happen. So they weren't all all-women's readings. Some of them were, oh, the regular poetry crowd of San Francisco, the young poetry crowd. Some of them were more Leftie-type rallies that would be going on, or issue-oriented things that would be happening, where I would read. And then sometimes I'd read for college classes, for college-type audiences. So there were a number of audiences listening, even that early.

K.M.A.: How did the college audiences react to your style? I'm just asking—I'm curious if it was any different because they'd be used to the more straitlaced academic approach.

J.G.: Oh, I think they had mixed reactions. I think that it was new and I think probably for some of them they didn't know what to make of it and it didn't have a context and so they just sort of heard it and went on and it was a curiosity that happened. Other people had heard Ginsberg and had heard some of the more declarative sixties poets, and so it wasn't all that really different. Just a different subject matter. And what would bother them would be the content. Some people just picked right up on it. As always, the content of women's lives had not been very directly spoken before, so—for instance, I think I was one of the first people, perhaps *the* first, to read anything overtly on the subject of rape and—We had published a poem by a woman—it was called *The Rape Journal*—and it just described a rape and its after-

math and the effect it had on her, wanting to stay home all the time. And then she noticed that her parents had locked themselves into their house out of fear and she didn't want to live in jail. That her parents were afraid of being broken into, so they never went out, for instance. She just *noticed* the effects that fear has. I would read that out in classes and two or three women would get up and have to leave because they were crying because something like that had happened to them and they'd never told anybody, and the poem would go right to the heart of it. So the readings were—they were so much more than *poetry*, always, in the sense of "art for art's sake." There's so much about life or about what had been unspoken or about uncovering something or about pulling people together toward some end or some purpose, to speak more clearly about themselves or to understand a history that they hadn't known before. The sheer *use* of it was almost overwhelming, and the demand for it was almost overwhelming. Lesbians had never heard the word *dyke* used in a performance, in any kind of legitimate way. They'd only heard it used as an underground or as a cuss word used to make them feel bad. So to hear it said out loud by someone who was standing up in front with a microphone was just *thrilling* to them. They memorized my work. Women would memorize it in those days when the distribution systems hadn't gotten going and there were no bookstores or only two bookstores handling our work. We were selling like hotcakes, but it was through a network that was word of mouth. They would memorize the poems and go and recite them to someone they knew in cities hundreds of miles away. That's how sometimes my work would end up on posters or calendars or something paraphrased, because someone had *remembered* it. It had gone into an *oral* method of communication.

K.M.A.: When you say *we*, do you mean Diana Press?

J.G.: Well, the Women's Press Collective was the first group of women publishing in our era. That was the organization that I founded and worked on. And then later we merged with Diana Press. By that time there were a number of presses that had gotten going, bringing out women's work, exclusively women's work. Alta's Shameless Hussy was the first to do women's political feminist poetry.

K.M.A.: You talked about "Stage One" in your presentation, your performance. What's after that?

J.G.: Of breaking through. Stage Two, after I'd listened to some beginning women musicians, I wrote the *She Who* poems. And they were very musical, very rhythmic. And I would read them without talking about poetry at all. I would read them as though the only thing that mattered was the performance and not the fact that it was poetry. So the self-consciousness that is so present in many poets was gone from my performance. I also wouldn't talk about myself. I wouldn't make any attempt to make a communication or contact between myself as a performer and the audience. I would make no warm contacts whatsoever. I would just get up and very starkly read these electrifying poems one after another after another. So that something would build that was beyond the usual form of communication. Something—I was aiming for some bubble of energy to come out of that kind of performance that would just electrify people. And often it would. It would bring them to their feet screaming. Or I would aim for them to all say "ooh" or "ohh" or all say "ahh" or something like that, because something in it had really struck them, and helped them feel closer to each other. I thought that what should happen next was that it should move beyond *my* single voice and the poems should be delivered by a *group* of voices, like a chorale. So I began working with a group of women who had never done any performing and were not in any way literary or poetic or anything, but were simply interested in what was happening with women's ideas, and were interested in working with the poems because they had been around while I was writing them, or they had taken a writing class from me, or something. So about a dozen of them worked with those poems for probably a year. They never reached the stage where they could take control of the stage. They didn't know how to do that and they didn't *want* to do that. And they would not use microphones, so there was no way to amplify what they were doing. So it remained an art that was very good for an audience of about forty or fifty people, but not more than that. And that was disappointing to me. But what they did with the work was really wonderful. We used a tape recorder to get feedback and that was how we knew how we were doing. We would all listen to a tape. And we would divide up the voices, high voices and low voices, slow voices and fast voices, and do poetry in rounds or do it in cadences or do it as call and response or a

chorale and a single voice or a duet. And some very beautiful things came out of it that made me understand the possibility of it. But I couldn't ever either take charge of the group or find a way to work with it collectively, so I had to leave. And I didn't take the performance any further in that direction because I thought that was as far as I could take it and there was nowhere further I could go without stopping everything else I was doing. I was also a publisher and an editor and a printer, an organizer as well as a poet.

K.M.A.: This was what year?

J.G.: Well, I wrote those poems in '72. We put them on at the Ash Grove in that November, so this was in 1973. And also during 1973 I wrote *A Woman Is Talking to Death* and almost always performed that as an individual, although often Pat Parker or Willyce Kim would read parts of it with me in a kind of duet. It was a good stage thing to do, to have two people reading the work.

K.M.A.: Why?

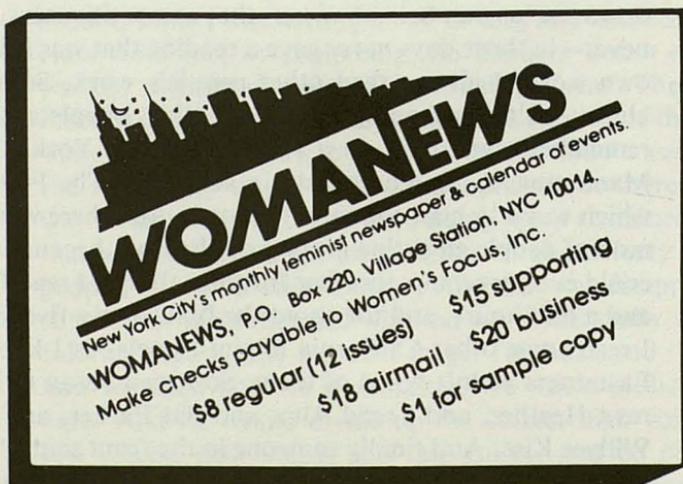
J.G.: Poetry that I saw in the sixties—The poets were competitive. I seem to remember a reading in which there were six or seven men and Denise Levertov, and they got into a *physical* battle over the microphone. I remember her yanking on someone to pull him away from the mike, and then having a scrap on the stage. [laughter] And maybe my memory is wrong and maybe it was someone else and not Denise, but I do remember being influenced by that event as never wanting that to happen to me. And one of the things we women concentrated on as a group of poets was breaking down in a number of ways the competitiveness. So I never—in those days *never* gave a reading that was solely my own work. I always read other people's work. Sometimes almost half my reading would be other people's work. I remember coming to do a reading in New York City, in Manhattan, a big reading at a place called The Firehouse, which was a lesbian community center. And there was just a mob of people all sitting around on the floor because no one could even get chairs together for these things. I read for two and a half hours, and for about the first twenty-five minutes I read some other California feminist poets, as I knew that Easterners hadn't heard of them. So I read Susan Griffin, I read Heather, and I read Alta, and Pat Parker, and I read Willyce Kim. And finally someone in the front said, "What-sa matter? You afraid to read your own work?" [laughter]

So I explained to them what it was that we were doing, and people started crying because they said they had forgotten about that particular value. Because of course that was also a New York value, but it gets lost easily. Of being able to bring someone else's work along *with* you. Audre Lorde, I think, read a poem of mine in Copenhagen. And I've read her work all over the West Coast, so that people would read her more. And I've read Adrienne's. When Adrienne Rich and I did a joint reading about two years ago at the Manhattan Theatre Club, it was a matter of course by that time that she would read one of my poems as a part of her reading and I would read one of her poems as a part of my reading. Even though we're three thousand miles separated and couldn't work together any more closely than that, that was the least we could do. And it was a given that that would happen. And that was because of years of everybody reading other people's work in order to acknowledge that we're not individual and not alone in what we're doing in developing this new voice. And it is a new voice. It's a new woman's literature. And it's happening. It happened in poetry in those years. But there's also going to be a new fiction and a new nonfiction. A new way of thinking will come out of it. It's definitely a going renaissance.

K.M.A.: Ongoing.

J.G.: Ongoing. Yes.

(Part II will appear in SW 26)



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Darquita and Denyeta in Park

©JEB, 1981

How Does You Love Me, Sweet Baby?

For Dori

(A Black woman asks)

“How does you love me, Sweet Baby?”

I love you like this, HoneyMama:

I love the pores in your skin,
the freckles on your face,
and the hairs in your nose.

I love you more than every toe nail you ever clipped off yo’ feet,
more than every cornflake you ever poured in a bowl,
more than every seed you ever spat from a watermelon rind.

I love you more than Maybelline loves eyes,
more than Avon loves doorbells,
and more than Madame Bergamont loves grease.
That’s how I love you, HoneyMama.

Then, she asks:

“And how does you want me, Sweet Baby?”

I answer: I want you like I want my coffee, HoneyMama,
hot and black,

I want you like I eat my greens—with my fingers and no fork.
like children want suckers,
and like babies want tiddie.

Then she asks,

“And how you gon’ keep me, Sweet Baby?”

I’m going to keep you close like a secret
precious like your Mama’s picture
and watered like a potted plant.

I’m going to keep you in—like heat in the wintertime
on the bed like your grandmama’s quilt
and free like a naked sleeper.

“But how long will it last, SweetHoney?”

It’ll last as long as we call home a family
as long as music is played there
and as long as joy is in our hearts, eyes and touches.
It’ll last, and this is the truth, MamaBaby,
Every moment that it does.

Lady Godiva

As hope I bid you dream of her
Astride her ivory stallion
Arriving bare, with breasts for you,
Upon some wide, green galleon.
Leaning down she will offer you
Chocolate and a fantasy ride—
Look lusty, lustful, hot for you
Her voice a piper's, pied.
You climb behind her butt, her back
A back that's brazen to behold,
Touching her, your pubic hair
Sparks that that's wanton in your soul.
She laughs aloud, gives sex full reign
To her brilliant, strapping horse.
It rears, her smell wafts all about
Fragrant, moist, then off—
“Lady Godiva, Lady Godiva,
I fear, I want, I need!”
She laughs again, rides on as fine
With all of passion's speed.
Both new and young to bareback rides,
As new as much to Self,
You clutch at first her waist, her breasts
Then grip her thighs' deep cleft.
Seasons of smell, years of taste
Spread out beyond, headlong
She rides, you ride, she rides
You ride, you ride, she rides you on.
Lady go dive a lady go
Dive, the horse's hooves lay rhyme.
Up and down and up and down
She rides you out of your Mind.
To places untouched, reds unfelt,
To blues, the hues of come.
She knows the way to Orgasma Hill
The knoll where she was born.

Lady Godiva, Lady Godiva,
Enchanted Princess Charm
Lesbian of dreams undreamed
I offer her now as one.
Should you go there, should you go
Where I spin the way for you
Go again when alone in bed;
Go, whenever you do.
Lady, go dive a lady. . .Go
Dive a lady, go dive
A lady. . .go dive a lady



Exmatriate

I. NIGHTMÈRES

waking to drizzle and the inevitable
egg dream fragments drying
on the rims of my eyes
why am I always taking trains
across the ocean rushing for planes
on a forged ticket caught
with a bomb in my bag?
in dreams I am never ready,
never on time frantically I tie
a blue kimono round my nakedness
while mother unperturbed
says *don't worry, I'll drive you*

it's like that every night:
I'm back, I pack, I try
to leave the mother-country

oh mama, missed my
connection

II. MÈRE MÉDITERRANÉE

three years on an island, lotus-
eater, languishing, in love
with sunlight, writing
to mother of motherly women,
mother-in-law, grandmothers
drying like raisins on their doorsills

when she arrives
armed with guidebook and bathing suit
I am already a stranger,
speaking an ancient language with my hands
she confers grandma's diamond
on my finger,
finds my house bare my womb
has just been scraped dry
sullen, we stumble through the beehive tomb
clutching our husbands

secrets

lies

III. NOTRE DAME DE PARIS

spider in the interstice between
two lives, I have survived
a coup d'état
domestic servitude
postal strikes
partouzes
I have cracked the Napoleonic Code
I emerge, blinking, from organ pipes
to find I've missed the 60s
and the war
I am spinning a web of my own
attracting visitors like flies

* *beehive tomb*: Agamemnon's tomb at Mykenae, in the Peloponnesus

some day it might be turned into a novel:
the first ten years were the hardest
now my accent is nondescript
as a passport, this fabled city
just another one-horse town
where I am teaching again
the alchemy of words
home
is where my books are
I leave the hustle for cheap flights
free phones to those
who just got off the boat
my papers are in order
my number listed
my line: busy

IV. SOME PEOPLE CONSIDER THIS A SAFE POSITION

wondering how long waiting
for a sign the fifth gold inlay
the first grey hair
a gap in family snapshots where
the piano used to be
a death

V. MOTHER RIGHT

high above the Seine, bewildered
in this roomful of happy women
she cannot tell the mothers
from the daughters
something
about the way they kiss
upon parting, *what's*
going on here?

a swarm of bees
a school of fish
a flight of swans
a flock of ewes
a gaggle of geese
a herd of cows
a pride of lionesses

explaining in letters: here
my past is past, I melt
into crowds unrecognized,
vault over barriers I do not even see
here where the rooted fail
to bother me, I find room
to listen to voices in my head
and strength for the women in my arms

my pleasure
grows in correspondence
dear mother,
this ocean wide and salt enough
nourishes us both
and it was you who taught me
how to swim

I've gone back
the way you came,
singing my mother-tongue
eating dry bread in steerage
for a glimpse of the new world



from Tales Of A Lost Boyhood

I. The Bicycle Parade

walking outside into the 90 degree heat on the morning of July the 4th dressed only in shorts and sneakers taking long strides on my summer-brown legs I puffed out my thin and naked chest feeling my shoulders high in the sun clenching my fists and biceps I was strong and I was proud only my hair pulled tightly back from my forehead into a long heavy braid slapped against my back and reminded me of my sex

I had just turned 7 years old and outside every summer on July the 4th the whole block gave a party

I had gone out to admire the work on my bicycle decorated for the afternoon parade with red and blue and yellow crepe paper carefully woven through each spoke of each wheel and twisted around every available piece of frame and handlebar my bike gleamed as I tied my favorite mascot a long thick beaver tail dangling Davy Crockett from the back fender

I then strode down our almost treeless street houses so close I could see inside our neighbors' kitchens hearing the voices of screaming children I often wondered if they could hear the same from our house but today I paid little attention as I walked up a concrete driveway all glittery in the morning light to a group of girls putting the final preening touches to their pink bicycles the girls were my sister's friends but I greeted them as if they were my own feeling separate and strong in my naked and sun-drenched powers throwing out my chest as I admired their handiwork all the time thinking how much better my bike looked in comparison

I asked the girls to come with me to see the preparations for the later events and they followed to where the adults purposeful in their white shorts and fat legs and brightly colored shirts and beach hats were setting up picnic tables and grills for barbecues tossing burlap bags into large heaps which smelled more of farms and potatoes than of lawns and white houses and laying out cartons of eggs that someone said would be used for a



Baltimore Dykes ©JEB, 1981

contest where people threw eggs at each other and tried to catch them

we watched for awhile then bored and being the self-proclaimed leader of the morning I led the girls running over the newly mowed lawns lying carpet-like before every house through sprinklers swinging back and forth throwing great arcs of water and rainbows onto me and the girls and the parched ground as we soaked ourselves in the searing heat

the temperature was reaching 100 degrees before noon when my sister and I rushed into the house for lunch and tried to eat the tuna fish sandwiches my mother had made for us I felt nauseous with the heat and excitement but managed to nibble tiny bites into my soggy bread my mother then decided to give us salt tablets before letting us back out and I felt close to vomiting as I tried to swallow the full salt and milk but I ran anyway for the outdoors when my mother caught me with a hard voice Linda. she said Put on your shirt. lassoing my hand on the latch of the screen door I wondered if I should run pretending not to have heard Linda! she demanded again what I replied sinking deep into the quicksand of her voice Put on your shirt. I turned to her with more sickness rising in my gut Why I whined It's too hot to put on a shirt. we looked at each other

Little girls she firmly said Do not go outside without their clothes on.

What do girls have to do with it? I asked trying to stand as a wave of dizziness came over me

Go put on a SHIRT! her blue eyes glaring at me through her face

No. I refused sicker with the memories of our past everytime I had to put on a dress to match my sister who never seemed to have any problems with her attire as I tried to put on my jeans hiding the holes so my mother wouldn't throw them out knowing it would be forever before I could convince her to get me a new pair

and then I remembered my strength my naked powers of the morning

I couldn't I refused again shouting this time

Then you're not going out at all young lady saying it calm and clear emphasizing her last words as if to inform me just exactly what I was

my fury rose higher and higher as I slammed my fist down on the table at the power she thought she had over me and did my blow knocked over a glass of milk which rolled off the table shattering on the floor she whirled around and came after me chasing me through the kitchen both of us trying to avoid the broken glass and the pool of milk

picking up a hairbrush off the desk she managed to grab hold of my arm backing me into a corner as I tried to pass through the solid wall like a ghost on t.v. her arms and the hairbrush coming at me blinded in my cries onto my naked shoulders and back and legs over and over with a fierceness I didn't understand until I found myself sobbing and retching on the floor - hands covering my face my back up against the cool white wall she was stooping with her back to me cleaning up the spilt milk and the pieces of glass the memory of my beautiful bicycle sitting outside without me surfaced in my bleary mind and I stopped crying longing drawing me out I knew I had to ride in the parade

O.K. I made my voice strong I'll put on the shirt. said as I watched the tiny specks in the linoleum floor hearing silence in her turned back Mom! I said even louder looking up I'll put on my shirt! she turned around to face me I looked back down feeling the shame of my acquiescence

I want an apology she demanded I'm sorry I mumbled trying to control my voice thinking not of giving in but only of my bicycle and the parade and getting out What?! I can't hear you I'm SORRY! blurting out the words which had lost every meaning in having first said them

pointing to the floor in front of her her face not responding she said Come over here and clean up your mess I lifted myself off the floor with my arms feeling weak on my legs wondering what she meant if she was going to let me go bending down as she watched me swab up the remains of the milk There's more over *there* she directed at me and I went over there keeping down the knot of fury which threatened to explode again can I go now? I asked weakly o.k. she said her face unchanging But only if this *never* happens again.

I nodded vaguely and left the kitchen to find a shirt just wanting to get out of the house as fast as I could

I caught up with the others joining my sister and her friends who had been my morning followers and felt their eyes

on my swollen face I stared out at them making my face
hard and tried to sound removed and mean as I
said Hi avoiding the look of fear and concern on my sister's
face
as we rode on I suddenly caught sight of my scrawny arms
dangling out of the sleeveless blouse that covered my chest
I had become a part of them I thought the girls I wasn't any
different I heard their laughter and saw their dainty arms and
tiny hands lightly holding onto their handlebars
I filled with disgust the rage in the kitchen sweeping back over
me as I gripped my bicycle harder wanting to pedal past all of
them to pedal past my thin arms and the laughter and the
crowds and the blouse sticking to my back in the heat the rage
grew in my belly until I couldn't pump hard enough hard past
bursting I stopped
letting everyone go by my sister looking back I glared at her
with a look that said she better not say anything or she would
pay I waited until the last paraders went by then ripped off
my shirt and threw it on the grass
remounting my bike I rode on at the back of the line

for a moment I felt free and strong again I held my head
up and felt the air cooling my chest as I rode steadily
through the course
but slowly the heat began to work on me sending its
waves around and through my body weakening every circle my
feet tried to accomplish on the pedals
I saw the parents lining the street who I had imagined in the
moment of my sudden defiance to be cheering me on as if I were
a hero who had been rescued and saved only seconds before be-
ing unjustly hung
I heard them now jeering and yelling at me I closed my
eyes trying to convince myself that they were not all staring at
my thin now strangely cold and clammy chest I opened my
eyes seeing faces all around changing back and forth laughing
and pointing at me
were they really laughing at me? at the garish nightmare of my
brightly colored bicycle? why had I made it so bright?
I caught sight of a woman smiling at me through her open
teeth the cleft between her large breasts and the white edge of
her brassiere showing brightly under her low v-neck blouse
I grabbed the center of my handlebars with my fists clenching my

arms tightly over the sides of my chest to hide my small pink nipples horror rising to my racing heart then to my neck and cheeks my hair rough and scratching my back
the bicycle started to shake I tried to hold on blinded by the sweat trickling into my eyes
I had to stop or fall

and I did stop and turned my bicycle around walking it now my ears hot but not hearing my eyes open but not seeing my legs walking on their own back to where I had dropped my shirt which I found and put on
hidden now and safe in my covering
shame descended from my ears and travelled inward and down to lodge somewhere between my heart and belly
it secretly and silently asked as I walked home through the crowds
Did you see me? and answered back for itself and all the faces lining the street No. I didn't see.
No one saw.

II.

coming home in the afternoon after a quiet and watchful day in my first year of school sitting still and silent over a cookie and a glass of milk
my mother sat down with me and began to talk
she told me that the next day we would visit a doctor who was going to test me and ask me some questions
as she watched me I could smell the milk as if it had suddenly turned sour
I didn't ask but she went on to say that we weren't going because I was sick that I was perfectly healthy that his kind of doctor was called a psy-chi-a-trist and that we were going to find out if he could help me learn things better in school and to help me make friends
I felt my lips tighten not knowing what to say so I nodded and looked down seeing the half-eaten cookie
my mother got up and walked to the counter I pretended I was invisible
then quietly got up myself leaving the milk and cookie on the table
and went up to my room

I knew why I was being taken to the doctor it wasn't what my mother said

it was because I was a boy believed I was a boy wanted to be a boy more than anything else in the world and I knew my mother knew because of the ways she always got angry at my playing ball and wanting to wear pants and the way I fought every time I had to get dressed up I felt her always watching me and I hid from her gaze as if I were walking a razor thin high wire always about to fall and slice myself in half the knobby bedspread was rough on my bare legs as I sat on the bed so I got up and took off my skirt going to the dresser for my jeans

I felt protected as I put them on but a knot of something thick the taste of sour milk remained in my belly as I tried to look at a book and hoped the next day would never come

waiting with my mother in a room filled with couches and Weekly Readers

I tried to look at one and watched the only other person in the room a woman when she wasn't watching me who was she waiting for? I felt like I was going to get a shot remembering the last time when the doctor told me I was going to get a little pin-prick a vac-cine he called it laughing his little laugh like it was nothing to be worried about I started to cry when he pulled down my pants and told me to lie down on his lap which I obeyed then started to struggle against his arm feeling the needle get closer to my naked bottom he said Relax It will be over in one second but I managed to break free and kick the thing out of his hand before it got to me my mother and the nurse having to hold me down for a second try as he stuck the needle in my rear

I was thinking that I would act older this time when a little boy dressed in a white shirt and a frightened face came out of a closed door at the other end of the room and walked over to the woman who I knew now must be his mother he was followed by a nurse in a white dress who called out my name

I went into the doctor's office alone and found a room filled with toys

the furniture all child-size my size and sat myself down at the small table the nurse had told me to sit at the doctor came in dressed in a white coat his hands full of

papers

he sat across from me in another tiny chair he was tall and had no hair except around his ears and towered over me and everything else in the room

he smiled at me and said hello I said hello back trying to make my voice sound loud Your name is Linda? I nodded knowing he knew exactly what my name was My name is Doctor Boz he must have seen my hunching shoulders because he reached over and patted them and said Don't worry Nothing is going to happen I thought of the other doctor's little laugh

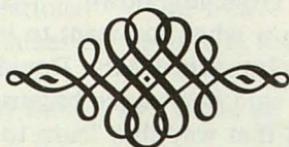
and he did ask me questions: Did I have friends in school? I tried to think of the names of the girls in my class there's Laurie and Billie and I couldn't think of any more so I made up Sally I said loudly

What's your teacher's name? Mrs. Donahue Do you like her? I didn't know but said yes in a quiet voice I thought of the mice she had shown us at the science fair What games do you like to play? my heart tightened I should have made up an answer before I came um tag and baseball and hide and go seek my shoulders went up believing I had given something away the mice were in a flat box with little walls and pathways through it and had wire on top so you could see them What do you like to watch on T.V.? all I could think of was Zorro and Leave it to Beaver but suddenly I remembered Sunday nights and Walt Disney so I said Walt Disney I've seen movies too I surprised myself offering the information without being asked then I thought it might make me seem smart What movies? Bambi I answered and and my mind went blank then came back and Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty the mice ran through the box to get their food at the other end Do you remember the story of Sleeping Beauty? I saw the doctor's face looking serious and calm reminding me of my father who asked me questions like this every night at dinner when he came home from work I nodded Tell me the story he said and I felt my face itching and my throat too my heart beating fast sorry I had mentioned anything about movies in the first place but I went on there was a baby born and a witch put a spell on her Do you remember the witch's name? Millifigent I knew I passed Then what happened? I couldn't remember trying to see the picture book we

had at home which told the whole story and followed a record - but all I could see was the picture of Millificent dressed in a dark cloak and looking very mean and angry her arms raised up like some huge bat as she screamed at a room full of people who were all smaller than her but fat and eating not remembering I skipped and blurted out Sleeping Beauty fell into a long sleep and a prince came riding on a horse and found her castle covered in weeds and he kissed her and she woke up the doctor looked at me and nodded his head then looked down at his papers everytime the mice ran the wrong way they would suddenly stop and freeze crouching down I could see their muscles shaking Do you know what you want to be when you grow up? someone in the class asked Mrs. Donahue why the mice were shaking and she said they shake because they get a little shock of electricity and that way they learn to find their food faster uh I tried to look like I was thinking in my head I heard an explorer a sailor and saw Bambi running through the woods I I I don't know yet I said out loud maybe a doctor the doctor across from me smiled and reached over patting my head That's a good thing to think about he said and then felt down below the table lifting up a tray on the tray was a box with holes cut in it and a pile of colored shapes he asked me to put the shapes into the holes which matched them which I did easily happy there were no more questions all the time wondering how much I had given away if the doctor knew my secret life and what he would do to me if he did

when I finished the puzzle the doctor looked back down at his papers with his blank face no smile now and asked me to choose a toy in the room and go play with it I thought it was another test sure he was watching every move I made getting up slowly from the chair I looked around the room and saw the teasetts and the baby dolls but couldn't go to them not knowing what I would do with them once I got there I felt the trucks and the baseball equipment drawing me with some power of their own and tried not to look in their direction knowing exactly where they were in the room using every bit of will I had to avert my eyes no I wouldn't reveal anything about myself having got that far my breath came faster not knowing where to go frantically searching for a safe choice when my eyes finally rested on a wooden doll house standing on the floor near the far wall

I walked over to it and looked down through the roofless ceiling and saw that it was filled with carved wooden dolls their shapes thick and round there was a vaguely male doll a vaguely female doll and very vague children dolls just smaller and perfectly non-committal I sat down pretending to play lifting each wooden form out and above the square wooden rooms trying to ignore my shaking arms the doctor's eyes searing my back and let the relief of another survival wash over me when he said he was finished and I could go out of the room.



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Visitation Of The Icon

What writhing flowing Majesty
Oozed from the vision of Her Darkness.
She settled upon me like a mist.
A plague of sense and spirit this
Enchantress seized my brain
Bound my reason
And sweetened my captivity
With a song.

She sang my lust
With hidden dreams stolen from
Valleys of my yearning
With airy lips upon my cheeks
She sang me promises no one could keep.

I waited for Her to speak
But She was silent
In a whisper almost in my mind I said
"I've seen you before
You are She
Of my primeval cravings."
Yet dialogue She would have no more
But wordlessly took me into Her rapture
Made me look into Her Brown Her Dark
Her ebony flesh to capture
The phantom of Her touch in me.

A touch mystic yet profane
Conjuring wellsprings of forgotten memories
From sunsets long ago I became
A child walking streets-turned-playgrounds
Among other bodies colored
Black red yellow brown
And saw it was She who'd watched
From a morning seat on porches
Her children safe in play
While picking beans swapping news
And keeping other rituals of the day.

When She came closer She smiled
And Her mouth was big wide roundness
Like the hips of my brother's wife
Holding me rapt and soundless
On Her slopes and curves.

I looked into the black of Her eyes
And traveled the lands of my youth
Where She brought me to
A reckless drumming
Drumming and drumming for truth.

A moving refrain played to and sang
In rhythms swift and tameless
She taught me to harness
Her mystery in earnest
By giving name to the nameless.

Fondly she stroked my face
With creamy chocolate fingers
That had the touch of fantasies—
Private inviolate
Ones that lingered
And guided my pubescent hands
In dreamy baths
On afternoons past.

I laughed a little.
She laughed a lot.
Then somewhere inside the steamy hot
Of my soundless self
Her smell rattled my nostrils.
I took Her breast in a kiss
Entering a sapphic eucharist
That anointed and
Expunged from me the blight
Of a mistold tale of wrong and right.

Her voice was
A pool hall
Jukebox's colored liturgy—
A guts and soul epiphany
Of things found out lost or won
By an Etta James or Dinah Washington
She wore pedal-pushers and ballerina slippers
Or was it tight skirts with left-side zippers?
Hugging the better part of an easy stroll
Down some city's street
As She feasted my soul.

A womonchild I was
Wide-eyed fresh and inhaling
Sorcerous BlackWomon She was
Making creating unfailing
Whatever good there was
Whatever magic to be had it was She
By degrees reaching deeper in me.

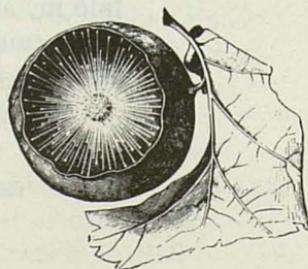
And the mythic play played on.

Calling her girlfriend
Calling her soulfriend
Her company was all I could to keep
When I moved on yonder
To marry or flounder
In that tired old pageant
Where genders meet
On dubious voyages
In stagnated menships
Her wholeness calmly breezed
Into my amazed dis-ease
To be caught on another trip
Up-creek of those much-traveled seas.

She seemed for days and days to wait
And watch the life that was mine and not
And all that was prepared
And all that issued forth
From seedlings planted in the plot
Of things designed to make a show
For Someone who clearly wanted to know
What's a soul like you
Going to do with a thing like this?

Before bluejays could awake
I woke myself
Speaking a name I did not know
Shadows only
All still and unknowing
Hovered 'round my bedroom door
For She now was gone
Back into the etherous heaven
Or hell from which She'd come.

And that is what She looked like
In an autumnal night's dreaming.
Had She stayed past morning
Or at least til the dawning
When icons are tried for their seeming
I'd have come to know Her better though
She still must be unreal
She need not fill all the crannies of my dreams
To walk from the dream into my life.
With certain imperfection
But contented predilection
I'd just want to be with her
As wife
Friend daughter mother
Sister teacher disciple lover.



A Letter of Apology to Ms. Alice

A Short Story

Dear Ms. Alice,

I jest found out somebody been writing you letters in my name. Honest, Ms. Alice, I never said none o' that stuff. I don't goes round messing wit womens like you. I has my own place and I knows that nobody like me is gonna even dream. . . Well, Ms. Alice, I hope you do understand what I trying to say here. When yo Cousin Dede told me you was talking bout some stuff in some kind o' letter you thought was from me, her best friend, why, you shoulda seen my broke face cause I know—and this the God truth—I ain't writ you no letter or nothing. I always respectful to other womens and try and treat everybody nice and everything, but Lordy, I wouldn't never say none o' that stuff to nobody. Least o' all nobody like you, a educated writer woman. I mean what you want to hear a whole lotta trashmouth talk bout womens loving other womens for? And what I know bout som'in like that? Nothin, that's what. I don't know nothing bout no womens loving on womens period.

'Cept that one time when we was at that fish fry over in Fairfield and Delton Ivers come sliding up to me and tells me to come round to the shed wit him in the back. Now everybody knowed Delton was kinda That Way? So I musta looked at him like he was Crazy's mama cause he just turn up his little pouty mouth and say he wanted to *show* me something. So I went on wit him and s'ire nough, there was som'in to see. It was Enolia Glass and that manwoman Jessie Agnes.

Jessie Agnes was on top o' Enolia jest like a man. Had her skirt heitched up round her neck and she was jest a pumping like it the most natu'al thing in the world. Won't no way they was go know me and Delton standing there watching cause they was back up in the coner on a stack o' old scratchy blankets thowed cross John Glass'—that's Enolia's daddy—work bench. So we watched the whole thing. Jessie Agnes, she always wo britches, had tooken off her pants and didn't have a stitch on under that. She had Enolia's bloomers off, too. Lord, I never seen nothing like it.

They was making noises too. Not being quiet as they coulda been, probly like they shoulda been cause that's what put noseys Delton on to 'em. Jessie Agnes starts asking Enolia did she like it. And Enolia says I likes it, Baby, I always likes it. It always good to me. Then she starts

to whimper like a little sick puppy. Jessie Agnes had one hand under Enolia's romp, the other one squeezing her tiddy and she was pushing herself up into Enolia, in and out hard. Moon bright enough to see everthing.

Enolia reaches over Jessie Agnes' back and starts scratching like a cat and she moving and wiggling under Jessie Agnes like ain't no tomorrow. We hear her say aw fuck me bulldagger, fuck me bulldagger, and Bulldagger fucks her. Enolia throws her head back and let it hang over the table. She just about outa her mind now. Jessie Agnes musta done som'in wit that hand under her booty, cause Enolia started sounding like she gon cry and jumping mo like a fish laying up on that table than a girl.

Then they put theyselves better to each other. Enolia puts her hands on her own pussy and holds it open for Jessie Agnes. Now I knows what a woman got and what she ain't got. I'm a woman; my mama one; and I got three sisters, all womens. So I knows ain't no woman got no thing down there. But I guess Jessie Agnes ain't no woman, no natu'al one anyway. Cause she got *some'in* down there. I didn't see *it* but I saw her fix herself to put it in Enolia's pussy. And when she do that, Enolia starts cooing real low and gravley. All the time Jessie Agnes jest stroking away. (Well, that all you can call it, even if it is womens). She keeps her little tight ass in a tight little swirl pushing and mashing that thing she got into Enolia's pussy.

Enolia still groaning. It getting real good to her now. She starts flicking her tongue everywhere, biting and licking on Jessie Agnes. Jessie Agnes grabs Enolia's thighs and pushes'em way back over her head, puts her hands down there again and they go it some more. Then I hear Enolia start to come. She crying and hollering, Jessie crying too. Well damn, I says to Delton, they both coming together. Enolia's hips start rising to the ceiling like som'in pulling her and Jessie up off the table. Jessie gets faster and harder, then she gets real slow and push back off her hands and catches her arms round Enolia's thigh joints.

Then they come. The more Enolia comes the crazier Jessie Agnes gets and comes and hollers. And they both jest shaking like they in a earthquake. Then when you figure they all don for, Enolia reaches down and sticks her finger up Jessie Agnes' asshole and draws it back up her crack real slow. Jessie Angnes hollers like the last lifeblood leaving her. Then they both be still.

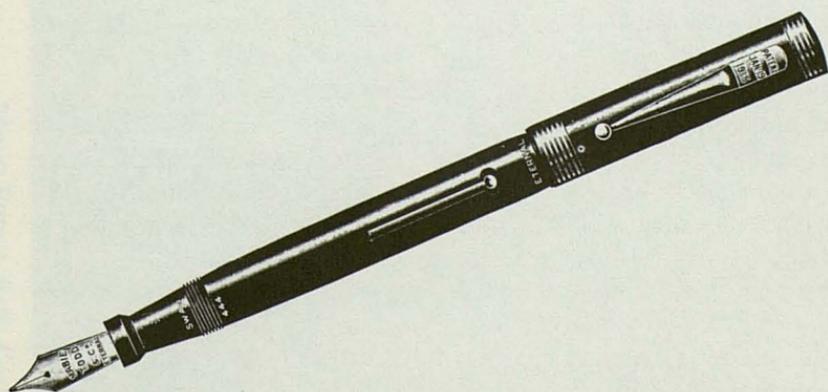
I jest looks at Delton and he looks at me. When we back in the house, he pleased wit hisself cause he made me see som'in and now I can't go round messing wit him bout his being the only one funny anymore. Delton made me promise I wouldn't tell it to nobody. And I didn't. Not even Dede. And I just told you but you not in Fairfield, so

that's alright. Anyway, the only reason I brung it up was to say that's the onliest thing I ever did wit womens was to watch Enolia and Jessie Agnes that time. I wouldn't know to do nothing myself and I ain't thought that much about in the first place. So I know I ain't go write no love letter to no writer lady and say a whole bunch o' old trashy stuff. You know, I bet Delton did that. It jest like him cause I told him how when Dede bought your book, we slept in one big bed one night—you, me and Dede while she read it to me. And he start asking me after that bout doing it wit womens and when I told him he think cause *he* funny everbody is but you a nice woman and a writer and me and Dede sho ain't never don it he say I ain't been seen wit no mens lately and me and Dede sure thick enough so maybe us like womens, too.

Well, even if it was Delton who wrote you, I know he don't mean harm and just fooling wit me so don't take it bad. Blieve me, Ms. Alice, me and Dede ain't doing nothing like that. I jest don't have time for boys anymor that's all. I'm trying to finish night school and tending that cafe in the daytime plus help raise two lil sisters at the same time, so when I got time for anything else, mens, womens, children, dogs, nothing? Dede my best friend so she the one I talk to bout things. But she knows I ain't sent you no love letter though. So I hope you straight now.

Well, I has to go. I didn't mean to take up so much yo time. I know you must be very busy. If you feel it though, you can write me. I hope you doing good. We sho' look forward to reading yo next book. Take care yourself, hear. Bye for now.

Yours truly,
Anna



Regret: A Night Poem

In Connecticut a thin moon
illuminates the sky.
It pulls the tide toward me,
coaxing voices from the sea
that whisper reprimand.
Five days ago we met, we spoke,
I touched your skin, its golden warmth
a secret current in that crowded room.
Miles away now I sit as night
darkens the cooling air.
Alone, on fire, I understand
I should have asked you in clear speech
if you desired me.
Woman to woman we might have met,
body to body, name to name,
white heat of stars, breathless discovery
of *yes* from dusk to dawn.

Moon Forest *Beth Karbe*



Love Poem

for M.

Lloro mi raza vencida

—“*Canción del derrumbe indio*,” F. Iramsim

This paper
 your face
this morning
 a morning paper
these accidents:
In the street someone touches my breast, by accident; she apologizes
too loud
 you are still home, sleeping
but I touched your breast, fuller than when I first knew you
 just as sensitive
I get to work
 not where you are

Last night you touched my breasts
fuller, this time of the month
almost painful; it could have hurt
 and I needed to hurt someone back about something
but it was an accident, what I said
 cruel as I could

Mourning
 the fine dark hairs around your nipples

Shame
 I lash out at you; can't trust myself, can't explain
“They try to justify the unjustifiable,” says Amparo; she has seen
 what I can't imagine
“Like sea urchins,” I said, the first time I touched your breasts
 your face that morning

This month, next month
grateful for a job
tearing us from our work
 Taxes absorbing our hours
“We shall dry up the ocean until we are rid of the fish”
said a general on the morning news, meaning, the people are the ocean
The shame
 my hours
beating the air in the blades of helicopters over the Río Lempa,
Río Sumpul
fishermen haul in the small split bodies, pray their children are still
 at home

Pepe draws his finger across his forehead, like a machete
“This is how the army tears off the faces of those they kill”
He escaped last year, at fifteen; he brings me
 another cup of coffee
I take Rosa’s blood pressure as she tells
of changing buses on her way to work in San Salvador
“Plastic bags full in the street. Or just the bodies, pieces of
 bodies. You never know who you’ll see”

Arms are
 not weapons
not the body
 not your face
not that way
 in my hands
but that first time over and over
the hours
 in your bed
I take your face
 in my hands, take
this knowledge over and over

 Not where you are, but
you touch my face
 this paper
my work, the best I can do

THOUGHTS DURING RAPE: Beirut and New York City

Mama, later my daughters told me, mama
you should have killed him, should
should have crawled back to the room
should have taken a knife, a gun
should have taken his life
for taking you.

My dear, later a lover told me, you
should have screamed, should
should have fought. What on earth
was in your mind, my dear, you
should never have been there —
not at all.

Killing, I was thinking then,
becomes useless. Now today
there is the child buried in the ruins.
The small girl thrown
beside her own mother — the mother's hands
turned upwards through the broken stones
old bloody, and the child's eyes
deadeyes flycovered watching
me.

Walk with me, woman
through the ruins of my city, find
the children. See — the heaps of
young girls who
with our permission were converted
by force to death. See — look
the crosses carved upon their faces.
Put your arms around
someone's mother, someone's child, someone's lover. Share
my friends, blessed be the ties —
Put your arms around
me.

Bad things happen, mama,
in foreign far-off lands.
You should never have been there,
my dear. You should have killed him,
mama.

But I was thinking then that I should — no,
should not bleed so much
on a Beirut hallway floor.
Victims now are
travesties with our permission,
rapists' numbers for the Red Cross.
The child buried, the mother crushed,
young girls, stacked and still bleeding
so long after. I know all their names.
Reaching down the blood is sticking
on my hands —
their blood, my blood, ours.
Blessed be the ties.

Walk with me, woman —
I can show you where our money goes.
Blood dries on walls and sand
on our hands in the camps of the world.

What has possessed you, a lover asked
with scorn. We have no camps. You should
should have known, should
should have stayed home, should
remember the ties that bind.

Enough, woman. Hush, children — see
I'm home — for now. No
scars on my face, no
crosses gash my eyes, the man I
should have killed left
no marks on me: blood
stays turning on my hands.
I know my binding ties.
Listen, children. Rape is a common place —
Bad things happen here
in this our alien land.



Jill Drew



A. Bigelow

Sabra Hagar

Ah'len. Welcome.
Ashnabiya. Stranger.
I knew you would return.
Night is coming and
you and I have nowhere
to go. Malesh — never mind.
Come with me now. We will
go to find my family — my daughters,
my sons, my father.
There is much blood
on this road. Ashnabiya,
be careful where you step.

Remember this low wall
we were building
by the garden. They tied
my daughters here — see,
like your Christ
but women Christs —
my Leila, my Jamila,
your friends. After they had
finished with them, they
used knives and slashed
their pretty necks.
Their rape, stranger, and
your crucifixion.

And our little street
where my boy was always playing.
You know — you would come sometimes
and throw the ball with him.
Yes, yes — my child
with the laughing eyes, my
youngest boy Abdallah,
the servant of God. You loved him, too,
I know. Do not cry, you are welcome
here still. Abdallah has gone
with his grandfather. Tell me, ashnabiya,
how will you serve your God now?

Here — here we are. The house.
There is no garden any longer
and the room we shared so often
in the evening — have you forgotten
not a week ago when we sat here
together? Abdallah slept, even
before we fed him and then
we lit the lanterns and talked
softly together about our dreams.
Did you listen then? You must listen
now. Abdallah sleeps forever
beneath these stones. He lies beside
his grandfather. Stranger, how will you
carry their dreams for them?

And Ismail? My son Ismail. Oh,
listen to the song we used to sing
to the night shadows. Do not be
afraid, stranger. . .do you wish
to harm my child? I will not
let you harm him. Do you wish
to kiss my child? I will not
let you kiss him. Do you wish
to take him away? I will not
let you take him. . .And this
is the guardian song we used to sing.
I cannot sing to Ismail. Ashnabiya,
how will you sing that song?
Ismail has been disappeared.
Ah'len, you are welcome here.

Ariel's Song

I saw a photograph of skulls piled up in a schoolyard, a couple of charts, and some blind eyes blown-up larger than life (cataracts caused by the flash). One image I didn't recognize until I read the caption. It looked like a piece of plywood someone had been hacking at with the wrong end of a hammer, but turned out to be a boy's back, standing up in tufts, and cracked.

The pictures were black and white.

I never could have looked so long if I had noticed right away that it was a picture of a human. It was late morning, hot. Women were wrapping themselves in black and picking out pictures to wear to the Seneca Army Depot, where we believe nuclear weapons are stored. I had just eaten an orange and a slice of sourdough bread. Elaine was sick. She had the shakes all night, her night in jail. Barb was on the phone with her mom, trying to explain the point of civil disobedience. I was quiet.

The photographs had been taken soon after the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Photographers choose subjects and angles, but I don't believe that these pictures could have been taken dishonestly. The lie here was that I could look away, could reach out and touch Elaine, although I didn't, could reach out and touch the dirt and listen to the soft talk of the women planning their vigil at the gate. I could turn the pictures on their backs and see only cardboard, or rip them up and see trash. Some people from the town did that. They hated to see things litter "their" fence, the depot fence.

A guy in a pick-up truck full of kids pulled over at the main gate of the depot as a group of women kept vigil there. He demanded "a *spokesman*" (emphasis his). A woman responded, listening to him for about twenty minutes. Every now and then one of the kids in the back yelled, "Go home!" He objected to the presence of lesbians at the camp, but his main complaint was against all of the messy banners flying near the road. He didn't like the origami peace cranes hanging on the fence, either. He said, "You don't need that stuff any more. People driving by know who you are and what you want. The whole country knows. Clean up the yard and take that stuff down."

The women at the Seneca Encampment for a Future of Peace and

Justice faced the fence that surrounds the depot, noted its powers of concealment and division, and then tried to transform it. They climbed over the fence, slid under it, sang through it, talked through it, and made it into a backdrop for yarn webs and photographs of suffering. The army responded with a symbol of its own: a yellow line was painted in front of the gate, and women were told that they must not cross it. Women danced across it, or crawled, and reenacted deaths on the other side. They were detained, or arrested, or simply watched. The process scared me, because the army symbolized its intentions with uniforms, clubs, and razor wire, against the scarves and face paints of the women.

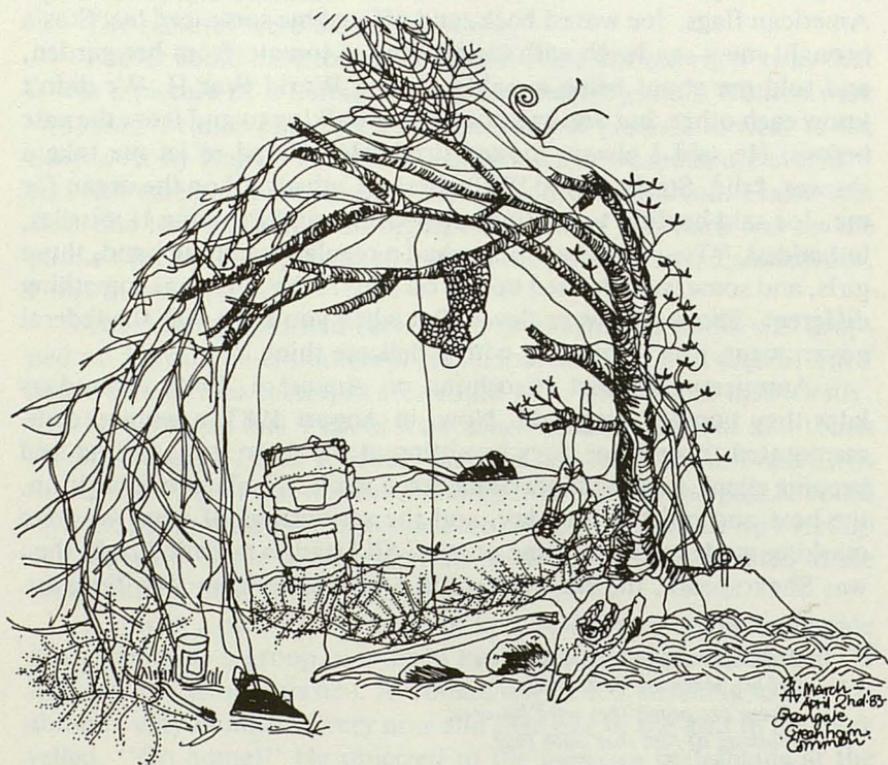
Walking back to camp from the gate one day, I waved to two people sitting on lawn chairs in their garage. Their grass was lined with American flags. Joe waved back, and offered me some iced tea. Stasia brought me a sandwich with thick slices of tomato from her garden, and told me about being a welder during World War II. We didn't know each other, but Joe had noticed me walking to and from the gate before. He said I always looked tired. He offered to let me take a shower. I did. Stasia played "Winchester Cathedral" on the organ for me. Joe said he didn't care to discuss Cruise and Pershing II missiles, but added, "Two weeks ago, they had a regular marching band, those girls, and some were dressed up, up on stilts. Now, that was something different. Those girls were clever. But when you mess with the federal government, you're messing with a delicate thing."

Americans bombed Hiroshima on August 6, 1945; three days later they bombed Nagasaki. Now, in August 1983, a woman commemorated those three days by sitting at the main gate, fasting and keeping silent. I sat with her alone for a while. The beat of her drum, the heat and quiet of the day, and the seriousness of what we were marking made me want some poetry. All I had in my mind right then was Shakespeare, the enslaved spirit Ariel's song from *The Tempest*.

*Full fathoms five thy father lies,
Of his bones are coral made:
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
Sea nymphs hourly ring his knell:
Hark now I hear them—ding-dong bell.*

I said it aloud, but I don't know if the silent woman or the silent MP could hear in my voice what I heard in those lines: the dead of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, the tortured

and murdered of El Salvador and South Africa, the Native Americans dying near uranium mines, the workers dying at Rocky Flats, the battered women, the raped women, and all of the leeches poor honored and mourned. I repeated the poem, saying "thy mother," and "her eyes." The skulls in the schoolyard were not coral, blinded eyes are not pearls, but a sea change, as wide and deep as the sea, that will take the results of our own brutality and force us into new ways "rich and strange" is the only way to honor those dead, the only way to do justice to those living.



Greenham Common
Beverly A'Court

PICTURES FROM SENECA: A Jew Riding The Edge

prologue: it's the pictures that get me. the ones of jews with their hands in the air, bundles of belongings hanging. it's the look on the faces of the soldiers. somehow i can look at the soldiers' faces and examine them.

i look for signs of depravity. that would reassure me. it was madness.

i seek a questioning look, for a crack in the steely facade. don't those with power ask questions?

i can't look at the jews' faces for very long. i hardly see their faces. i see my own agony of identification. are these pictures from the warsaw ghetto? my father and mother were both there till just before the uprising. my father's mother was taken away—disappeared—one afternoon. i don't know what she looked like. is that her, in the picture?

i see myself, singled out, separated from the human race. i write slowly. i don't want to betray myself.

end of july 1983. a group of seven women from the coast of maine, me included, go to seneca falls, n.y. blue hill women for peace and justice. we caravan to the women's peace encampment. we go to protest the deployment of cruise and pershing missiles in europe, to protest the war mentality.

as a group we agree on several things: we think nuclear weapons are insane and lead to nuclear war. we fear for the future of the earth. we are moved to act. we know if we want to survive, to write, to make music, to create, we must act.

as a group, we face external pressures. we face the tension of putting ourselves up against the soldiers who guard the army depot, the tension of confronting the angry fearful people who live in towns surrounding the depot. the tension of acting as free women when we're told again and again by those towns people "go home, take care of your children, clean up your own house."

we are a group made of strong individuals—few are as fiercely individual as feminists. we voice our needs to each other as we understand them. they sometimes conflict. i try hard to keep a lid on my insecurities, tone down my annoyances, but far from home, facing

hostility and possible physical danger, they do pop up. i want to give the reader a sense of our differences but i don't want to get anyone riled up. why?

as a jew, i feel acutely one phenomenon of my people: we have been kicked out of country after country. in one way, my country is my lesbian community. i don't want to create the reason for getting kicked out of it. if i upset someone by writing down my views, how secure is my place? will i be harassed, ostracized?

the radio news is on as i write. public radio. liberal. tolerable. today a jewish state legislator from west hartford connecticut has her house torched. it is the 4th connecticut torching in two months. two synagogues, a rabbi, before her. today is yom kippur.

two of us in the group are jews. we acknowledge that to each other from time to time. it is a help to me that there is another jew in the group. that is a understatement.

having her there, is like having someone from my family there, like a cousin. i know she is awake and sensitive to her jewishness. perhaps with two of us jews there i can lower my defensive hackles, can relax my sense of measuring jewish safety — like a thermometer — “is it hot for a jew here?”

i notice that often i feel i am the only jew in the group. one day we all paraded thru the streets of waterloo on a march from seneca falls to the army depot. we were blocked on our way by a mob, fists holding small american flags and growling. they growled, “commie, queer and jew.”

for me, commie was a choice, and queer was a choice, and jew was what i was born to. i felt my jew self burningly obvious, from the dark curls on my head to the bunions on my feet and i felt alone, obvious and alone, as the jew self i could not, would not deny. i didn't speak about what i noticed and felt about being a jew in that situation.

there's this 50 acre farm that the women's peace encampment organizers bought. it butts up against the army depot. it fronts along state route 96. the land is flat and open, fields, with spotty hedgerows.

cars drive by, windows open, faces peer out, sometimes shouting.

the army depot is surrounded by chain link fence with a barbed wire topping. soldiers sit at sentry towers. they are trained to use their guns to kill.

i feel righteous about my presence at the women's peace encamp-

ment. i think the soldiers feel righteous, too. i've always had questions about righteous meets righteous. who decides?

one night i overheard a conversation between a soldier and one woman in charge of security at the peace encampment. the soldier had come by to talk. there seemed to be a crack in his allegiance to the military. he wanted to warn us about the moods of the m.p.'s that night, how it would be their first night off duty in a week, how they were drinking, how they wanted to "bust ass."

they were threatened by us. hearing that, i felt a shadowed pride. something in our presence was affecting them. it might have been that we seemed wild and unpredictable. i think some were dumbfounded by our actions. one group of women had climbed the fence into the depot, climbed a 100 foot plus water tower and painted over the army slogan, and left undetected. to the soldiers, what was the point of groups of women climbing the fence to meditate inside and let themselves be arrested?

i climbed that fence myself, careful not to get caught in the barbed wire, to land lightly on my feet, to give the m.p. my hands behind my back for the cuffs. i looked into his face, straightforward looks, questioning looks. i hoped to crack his mask. i felt such a thick mixture of pride in acting on my beliefs, shame at being bound and herded like a reviled creature, unity with the other women there — both those arrested and those who sent their hearts over the fence with us; moments of feeling like a child allowed to act out her rebellion and a child-like innocence — a rope-strong kind of innocence that saw the world as it could be.

once inside i knew they wouldn't brutalize us. i had been afraid of that. the woman m.p. who guarded us as we waited to be processed told us they were ordered to act "professional," cool. . .and for the most part they did. i did sense the hair on their necks rising as our loud singing became clapping and stamping too.

and they let us go. processed and warned, they drove us in buses to the gates. we were picked up by women and brought back to the peace encampment.

i always write the full name. women's peace encampment. i have noticed how i feel when i say the word "camp." i have a genetic memory of the word. there i was with hundreds of other women voluntarily putting myself next to killing-trained soldiers. there is barbed wire; the soldiers, and the wire, and the mentality of righteousness and power flash back 40 years.

my mother warns me, "don't draw attention to yourself." forty

years ago, for her, and for my father, not drawing attention to themselves was a survival tactic. they survived the war by hiding in a cellar for a year and a half.

i can't help drawing attention to myself. i always find myself in the minority—as a jew, as a lesbian, as a city transplant in the country—and i'm not going to let any of those parts of me wither. i've been thinking lately about "fitting in." i don't want to wear my differences like battle cries, but i'm not quiet about who i am. it's kind of like genetics, like being the wild grass at the edge of a turf farm calling, "remember when we created our own destinies, when we grew spikey and tough and in clumps?"

my mother's warning entices me sometimes. don't draw attention, hide, be quiet, and it will be over. in low moments i long to draw my blankets over my head. i could be so still. no one would know i was there.

in world war II the nazis aimed to eradicate some of us — jews, homosexuals, radicals, gypsies. today, that same mentality pulls out the stops. we're all earmarked in nuclear holocaust, even our pets and our houseplants. the scope is so great as to be numbing at times. my mother tells me that as a jew in poland she felt no one in the outside world cared. i've heard, though, that some jews survived the holocaust by their need to tell the world what they witnessed. they felt that there were people who cared, who knew right from wrong.

i felt like a witness at seneca, like my eye was the eye of justice and could pierce the steely masks of those m.p.'s who were just following orders.

there's moral strength in the witnessing role and an optimism about people really knowing in their hearts what's right and wrong and caring about that, too.

i have pictures of my group from the peace encampment. we look bound to one another. physically we sit very close. our expressions are serious, sometimes agonized. pervading them is a sense of being on the edge of action—reviewing, regrouping, renewing. we have made a choice this time, to come to this place. my family in the ghetto didn't have that option. sometimes i sit inside the pictures of the war years and stare straight through time to now. i ache now with family loss, burn with my righteous power. a jew riding the edge, saying never again, not to me, not to any of my people, not to my home. over my live body.



from The Dinosaurs Could Come Back

The 10 minute/two day warning caught me taking the clothes out of the dryer jogging on the edge of my seat as karen was about to escape from her evil captor on *one life to live* taking the hamburger out of the freezer typing up those memos for the boss changing the baby watching my kids' little league game, sleeping, coming home from work on my way to work breaking up a fight between the kids picking up a quick bite at denny's getting my d&c in the hospital, in a long line to see the latest epic disaster movie mowing the yard, at the p.t.a. meeting the health spa the bar the church basement in my living room in my office in the carport at the check-out register charging what i can't afford paying the phone bill watching the memorial day parade.

O shit! they really did it i thought, and the kids are at school, harvey's at work and i am all alone.

What am i supposed to do now? Buzz out of town dig a shelter and cover it with a tarp? Oh, yes and the canned food and bottled water? Well i left them in the garage or are they in melvin's car? I guess i'll meet him in that farmer's field where we said we would dig our hole if we had to. The earth looked soft there.

I hope george can make it, and the kids will be safe wherever they are evacuating them to. They sure don't give you much time. There are only five minutes/ two days left. Maybe i should just go for one of those signs, wasn't there one in city hall in the basement?

O no! the traffic's getting really bad already, o shit! it looks like i am stuck.

This is really something isn't it, dying in a trafficjam on the way home from work on the way to the bank taking the clothes out of the dryer.

I hope irving and the kids are all right.

The 10 minute/ two day warning caught me taking the clothes off the line doing my yoga writing a poem rinsing the sprouts typing up those self-criticisms for the collective changing the baby watching the kids play barbie dolls in total amazement sleeping, coming home from work on the way to work on my way to the garden breaking up a fight between the kids picking up a quick carrot juice at the vegie restaurant

getting my d&c at the women's health services in a short line to see the benefit planting herbs in the backyard, at the coalition meeting the hot tubs the bar in the basement of the church that lets us have our el salvador meetings there, in the meditation retreat in jail under the car changing the gasket scoring an ounce, at the check-out register of the co-op, spending too much money at the thriftstore paying the phone bill calling my sister my ex-lover talking to my mom watching the gay-day parade.

O shit! they really did it said i and the kids are at the free school rolling stone is at the co-op faith healer is in flushing visiting her folks and una mae is off with her other girlfriend. . . .and she's got the truck.

So i guess i'm stuck here at home waiting for all the cityfolks to buzz up and dig holes in my yard there's nothing for me to do but go into the garden and wait five minutes/ two days to die out there by the compost pile.

I always did want to become compost, but i guess i'll be too contaminated to be of much use to the chard and spinach. Thinking of my little chard and spinach just makes me want to cry. Oh well, at least i get to go with the vegetables and kiss my calendulas good-by.

I hope the kids are all right.

There was no warning.

I was washing our clothes in the river praying making tortillas picking bananas cleaning up the baby picking coffee with the *niños* sleeping in my hammock coming home from picking bananas on the way to work at the sugar plantation taking a few bites of an old tortilla getting a hysterectomy at the mission hospital going to the fiesta planting some beans, at the school the church the bus station, buying a coca-cola, *en mi casa*, at the *mercado* selling my embroidery to *turistas*, buying something for the kids that i can't really afford, thinking about my sister, talking to my *abuela* watching the *semana santa* parade.

We are all here together and there comes such a flash and noise from the *yanqui* air base. My son is there working in the kitchen. I hope he is all right.

After the second flash and noise, i remember nothing.

Let it be clear all you generals and politicians and corporate upper crust that you are not going to be saved. You may think your doomsday jets and leadlined hideaways are going to protect you while the rest of us common humanity fries and dry roasts and dies slowly of the fallout thirsting and starving to death and you are going to be left afterwards so you can do things exactly the way you want with us pesky scum out of your way.

But you are the real scumbags, obvious fact, having made up these evil schemes and machines, and i want you to know you crazy bastards are not going to get away with it, no matter how much you think you are.

The earth will swallow you the winds will blow your jets down those concrete mountains will crack and the deadly smoke get on you too, you will not be any different, you will die with us, feeling even more guilty and like fools for having thought you were such hot shit when you will commonly die like us all, and in pain and miserably alone.

No one will love you when you die no one will wish you well and a good journey. The rest of us may not have jets or bunkers or lead mountains but we will have some loving arms and comfort in our going. Even though we will be regretting that we didn't stop you in time, we will share some caring as we pass.

But you will die loveless and you will die alone and without heirs and in the next world no one will give your wicked ways a second glance.

You are finished, played out, your empires are crumbling and the days are not many that you will be able to project your lies and deceit and have us believe that things are as you say.

The earth that you have battered used and abused and manipulated for your own sleazy ends is taking back the night and taking back the day and there is NO WAY that you can stop her. Judgment day is upon you, men of evil designs, and no one is going to believe you when you say (white, european) CIVILIZATION is so superior and wonderful and all about the wonders of modern science and technology and all the stupid crap you sell with that line.

All the former buyers will be cursing your names and your technology and no one will love it anymore, or you.

No one will think it's all right for you to steal the largest share for yourselves, and hand out payoffs to those who will co-operate in your theft, corporate vampires. No one will cook for you and clean up your messes and fly you around wherever you want to go. The riviera will be in cinders, gone, the mansions and the island vacations and the

rollsoyces and the private jets and the buildings and banks that you own, all of them gone.

Your fancy shelters that you think you can buy survival with will collapse in the quaking of the mother's righteous wrath. The security guards won't follow your orders, or the cops, anymore, or the fbi or secret service, no one will serve you, and your henchmen the politicians and military will not be saved to serve you either.

Everyone will be dead or hating you and cursing your name.

You will not survive to make another empire, to be a king or an emperor or general or *presidente* or chairman, it's all over for you, just like it's all over for us.

And it is ever so possible that all of us common humanity with our common sense and ordinary spirits will get it together to unhorse you from your seats of power, take down the weapons, stop the war before it is too late.

Yes that is possible too, that your schemes to kill us all and survive yourselves will not even get to first base, we the people will strike you out, that first strike will be ours.

We will bring you low where you belong scum of the patriarchy we will say no to war in a way that you will hear us, we will MAKE you hear us WE WILL STOP THE NUCLEAR WAR.

But if we do not, if we cannot stop it in time do not believe that you will win anything, for there is no place to run there is no place to hide the mountains will be crumbling like your empires the moon will be bleeding like your veins the rock will be weeping like your eyes there is nowhere you can run nowhere to go, all on that judgment day.

There is a button it says DON'T DIE WONDERING and i say people don't die regretting don't die passively don't die from the hands of men don't die massively.

I say don't die uselessly don't die afraid don't whimper about how you never did anyone any harm and always tried so hard. Don't say o shit! they really did it, don't die disbelievingly and don't say i should have known better, too late.



WHAT A WIND HAS COME TODAY, LIKE TO BLOW ALL MY PAPERS AWAY, WHAT A WIND IS BLOWING ON THIS DESERT TODAY.

AND THERE'S A BIGWIND GONNA COME THEY SAY A MIGHTY WIND COMING ALL ON THAT DAY AND TREES AND CARS WILL GET BLOWN AROUND LIKE MY PAPERS, YOU GOING TO HAVE TO HIDE FROM THAT WIND UNDERGROUND AND THAT WIND CAN BLOW THE FIRE HOT AND FAST CRASH IN YOUR WINDOWS THROW EVERYTHING AROUND LIKE THEY WERE BEERCANS AND BUBBLEGUM WRAPPERS WITH A ROARING BLAST.

WHEN I GO TO SLEEP THE NIGHTWIND CARESSES MY BODY WITH THE SWEET COOL OF THE EVENING SOMETIMES THE WIND BRINGS RAIN TO GREEN THE EARTH SOMETIMES THE WIND CARRIES MY LOVE THOUGHTS TO DISTANT DEAR ONES. SUCH A FRIEND WIND HAS BEEN TO ME, A TEACHER OF SONG TO US ALL.

BUT THAT DOES NOT MEAN THE BIGWIND THAT IS COMING WILL PASS ME BY, WILL SPARE ME AND MINE ALL ON THAT DAY, ALL ON THAT DAY I MAY BE PURSUED I MAY BE BLESSED I DO NOT KNOW. ONLY THE WIND KNOWS.

BUT I CAN ALMOST HEAR THE WIND SAYING NOW AS THE PAPERS FLY *YOU COULD HAVE MADE IT DIFFERENT, KEPT THEM FROM POISONING THE EARTH SO BADLY, YOU WOULD NOT BE CAUGHT IN THE WRETCHING IF THERE WERE NO POISON POISON, WHY DID YOU NOT HELP THE PEOPLE OF THIS RED RED EARTH, YOU CRIED FOR THEM, BUT THE SONG SAYS WHAT DID YOU DO FOR THESE ONES? AND I SAY WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR THESE ONES, WHAT GOOD ARE YOUR TEARS TO THEM?*

I built a corral for an old woman, i went to a conference and gave them a little bit of money for the paperplates, that's all, not much i know i could have done more.

DID YOU THINK YOU WOULD NOT FACE THE JUDGEMENT? DID YOU THINK THAT BECAUSE THERE ARE OTHER MORE EVIL ONES ON THE EARTH THAT YOU WILL BE SPARED? ALL WILL FACE IT, NONE CAN TURN AWAY. YOU KNEW ABOUT THE URANIUM THAT CAME FROM INDIAN LANDS, ABOUT THE BIRTH DEFECTS AND CANCER

AT PINE RIDGE AND RED ROCK, AND WHAT DID YOU DO?

I have no innocence. I was born into this world probably not for the first and only time, i have participated again and again in different ways in the deadly series of serious mistakes called history, there are no innocents here i am a responsible part of this world.

FLESH OF THIS WORLD BONES OF THIS WORLD MY DAUGHTER MY SISTER YOU WILL ALL FACE WHAT YOU HAVE DONE AND DID NOT DO YOU CANNOT AVOID RESPONSIBILITY YOU MUST FACE THE WORLD YOU HAVE MADE WITH THE OTHERS, IT IS YOURS. AND YES THE WORLD IS AT ITS MOST EVIL TIME AND YOU ARE THE MOST DEFEATED AND BURDENED WITH THE CONSEQUENCES OF YOUR DEADLY ERRORS, IT IS HARDER NOW IT SEEMS TO SET IT RIGHT THAN WHEN IT WAS LESS WRONG, EVIL IS SO STRONG, THE POISONING SO WIDESPREAD FROM YOUR CONTINUOUS FAILURES TO HALT IT. BUT WHAT CAN YOU DO, DAUGHTER? WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO BUT TRY TO PURIFY THE FLESH ANY WAY YOU CAN, HEAL THE BONES?

I can weep and hide and sigh for my powerlessness.

THE WIND WILL COME ANYWAY.

I can pretend there is no poison, drink deeply and say this world has no sickness.

THE WIND WILL COME.

I can huddle in a hole with my beloveds and cling to them waiting.

THE WIND WILL FIND YOU.

To heal this suffering there is so much, how to begin there are so many questions. . . .

THERE ARE ALWAYS QUESTIONS, THEY SLIDE INTO ETERNITY LIKE OUR LAST MOMENTS ON EARTH ARE SLIP SLIDING AWAY LIKE EACH PRECIOUS MOMENT FLIES WHEN FLESH CRIES FOR HEALING AND SWEET GRATITUDE AWAITS THE TOUCH OF REAL HANDS WORKING. . . .



Contributors' Notes



Katharyn Machan Aal is the Director of the Women's Writing Workshops, which in 1984 will be held at Wells College from July 15-28. Her interview with Judy Grahn is part of *The Writer as Performer*, a study of contemporary poetry and fiction readings. For more details about the Women's Writing Workshops, write to her at 714 N. Tioga St., Ithaca, NY 14850. Her most recent published collection is *Women: A Pocket Book* (Grass Roots Press, 1983).

Beverly A'Court: I've always done little drawings but dismissed them as "doodles". I live in Scotland, by the sea, with 4 other lesbians, making wallhangings in wool, cloth, wood, wire, etc., on themes to do with the countryside here, and the tiny lichens and life that grow. I'm 30. White. English.

Paula Gunn Allen, Ph.D.; MFA; BA (Laguna Pueblo/Sioux/Lebanese-American) b. 1939, Albuquerque, raised Cubero, New Mexico, a Spanish-Mexican Land Grant village. Her poetry, essays and fiction have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies. Poetry chapbooks: *The Blind Lion* (1975); *Coyote's Daylight Trip* (1978); *Star Child* (1981); *A Cannon Between My Knees* (1981). Books: *Shadow Country* (1982) poetry; *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* (San Francisco: Spinsters Ink, 1983) novel; and *Studies in American Indian Literature* (editor, Modern Language Association, 1983). Received an NEA Fellowship for Writing in 1978, a Post-doctoral fellowship in American Indian Studies, UCLA in 1981. Presently a visiting lecturer in Native American Studies at University of California, Berkeley.

Tata Andres is an artist and poet who lives in Negril, Jamaica

Anita Bigelow is a graphic artist who lives in Portland, Oregon.

SDiane Bogus (pronounced es-di-ann) is a Black lesbian feminist writer formerly from Chicago, now known more widely in California and in the Midwest. She is in the third year of study at Miami University, Oxford, OH, for her Ph.D. in twentieth-century literature, and is looking forward to returning to touring and full-time writing by June of 1985. She is the author of four books, the most recent, *Sapphire's Sampler* (1982).

Beth Brant: A Detroit, a Bay of Quinte Mohawk, a mother, a lesbian. Editor of *A Gathering of Spirit*, *Sinister Wisdom's* issue by North American Indian women. Currently doing work with women in prison, and putting together a manuscript of songs/stories about the people of her families: blood, gay, and working-class.

Maria Iannacome Coles: I was born in the province of Abruzzi in Italy after the war and immigrated to the U.S. with my family when I was fifteen. Settled in the large Italian community in Rochester, NY, I came to know immigrant life, its toil, its wholeness within and marginality to American culture. After high school and two years of college I transferred to SUNY at Buffalo where my early European socialism was revived through an understanding of the U.S. from its internal conditions of immigrants, women, to its world politics. I will have work in a forthcoming anthology of Italian-American women writers.

Gretchen Cotrell: Cree Métis descendant of the Little Shell Band of the Chippewa-Cree; I grew up in the Flathead, in Western Montana, and have been a social worker in L.A. for a long time; published in Applezaba's *Anthology of Long Beach Poetry*, *Stone Cloud 7*, *Alcatraz 2*, and *American Indian Culture and Research Journal: Special Metis Issue*.

Jill Drew: I was working for disarmament and trying to get my Art History degree at Fordham, having just pushed two-thirds of my children out of the home due to advancing age (mine) and diminishing tolerance (also mine). When everyone was young and being free out west, I had gotten a degree in Nursing. Well anyhow there was Beirut and since I knew how to be a trauma nurse, I felt I had no choice but to go. . . . I think I had been a hypocrite all my life. About so many things—not just war. The only thing I ever did that wasn't hypocritical was to keep my children safe out west as long as I could and to write. . . .

Judy Grahn's history of gay culture, *Another Mother Tongue*, will be out in September, 1984, from Beacon Press. *The Queen of Wands* is her most recent poetry book (Crossing Press). She teaches classes in writing and in gay culture at Mama Bears Coffee House in Oakland, CA.

Elaine Hall: I am thirty-two years old, I'm a mixed-blood Creek lesbian from Alabama. I now live in Los Angeles with my lover of ten years, Ardera Sharkan. I am living with a chronic illness (lupus), I write poems and stories, and am currently at work on my second novel.

JEB just edited *Seeing Women*, a 1984 calendar of women photographers. She has a new slide/talk show based on this summer's Women's Peace Encampment at the Seneca Army Depot. Help support a lesbian photographer and bring her to your town.

Beth Karbe: I am a dyke photographer primarily interested in lesbian portraiture and the creation and preservation of images that reflect lesbian strength, struggle, and wisdom.

Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz recently took back the name behind Kaye. She is an activist, writer, editor, and teacher. Her book of poetry, *We Speak in Code*, is available through *Sinister Wisdom*, and her work is included in *Fight Back! Feminist Resistance to Male Violence* (Cleis Press), *Nice Jewish Girls* (Crossing Press), & elsewhere. She teaches part-time in the Adult Degree Program at Vermont College, Montpelier, VT.

Jacqueline Lapidus is a magazine editor in Paris, where she has been living since 1967. Her latest publication (with Tee Corinne) is *Yantras of Womanlove* (Naiad), and her third collection of poems, *Ultimate Conspiracy*, is looking for a publisher. She has been passionately involved with Brazil and Brazilian lesbian feminists for the past ten years.

Helena Lipstadt: i've lived for the past 5 years on the coast of maine, marinating, as it were, and feel the stirrings of many family stories. i am laboring to give birth to these stories. i am the daughter of holocaust survivors.

Dorothy D. Love is a resident of Los Angeles, California, originally from Atlanta, Georgia. She has studied many areas of the arts on both coasts, but assiduously avoided obtaining a degree since she considers them less meaningful than identifying and performing one's own work. She is a Lesbian Feminist Afro-American and a 10-year practitioner of Raja Yoga. She started writing in her early teens when an eighth-grade teacher imposed diary-keeping on her and classmates, and she quickly discovered that she liked it, could do it, and knew more about doing it than anyone had ever taught her to know. Although previously unpublished, Ms. Love's first volume of poetry is scheduled to be published in 1984 by WIM Publications.

Juana Maria Paz is a New York-born Puerto Rican lesbian whose daughter Mary Ann is 8 years old. In the 7 years they have received AFDC they have lived in several states & Juana has worked as a writer, publisher & radio & TV producer. She presently coordinates a prison reading project that makes reading materials available to incarcerated Third World women. She is the author of *The La Luz Journal*, true story of lesbian of color land. She & the Prison Reading Project can be contacted c/o Paz Press, P.O. Box 3146, Fayetteville, AS 72702. "Testimony of a Welfare Mother" won 3rd prize in the 1983 Second Annual Latino/a Essay Contest, sponsored by Gay & Lesbian Latinos Unidos & The Garcia Lorca Educational Fund.

Phoenix: i write for anyone else who believes survival is an unnatural act. i don't write for men, ever. i'm learning to integrate laughter & poetry, & i never sound this educated in person. magyar/russian 3rd generation american jew. i am not a feminist.

Amanda Powell: I work as a poet and free-lance translator (Spanish to English), journalist, editor; have done plenty of office work, waitressing, and have worked in feminist women's health centers in Spain and Cambridge. I'm a white, gentile, middle-class medium-sized double Aquarius, & wild about women & all we can do.

Gretchen Pullen lives in San Francisco. She is completing a Master's program in the teaching of English as a foreign language and hopes to teach in an adult education setting.

Sudie Rakusin is a painter and graphic artist. She has recently published *Goddesses & Amazons*, a notebook with 48 original drawings and many blank pages for your use, available, P.O. Box 88, Brooke, VA 22430.

Estrella Root is a writer and an anti-nuclear pro-children activist in northern New Mexico. *The Dinosaurs Could Come Back*, selections from which are printed here, is looking for a publisher.

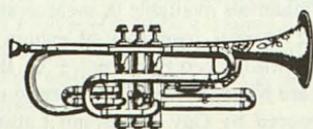
Linda Smukler, a lesbian writer, was born in Cleveland, Ohio, and raised in the suburbs. She now lives in New York City. She belongs to a writing group called *Overload*, which came together in workshops given by Gloria Anzaldúa. The *Tales* are part of a longer work-in-progress.

Maria Stecenko: My parents were Ukrainian refugees, fleeing Stalin's regime. I was born in a displaced person's camp in Mittenwald, Germany, in 1947, and grew up in America. Currently I'm working as a typesetter in the Bay Area. "Restricted Wing 1968" is the first chapter of my first novel.

Susan Stinson: I am a twenty-three-year-old writer who is trying to learn to live an honest, responsible life. I just moved from Colorado, where I was raised and educated, to the Boston area, where I have an idiotic job in a drugstore.

Ruchele ZeOeh has a degree in Radio Broadcasting, wrote, edited and recorded the weekly *Woman's World* in Escondido, California, and has published ninety inches of journalism copy with bylines. Her poetry is published in *Poetry/LA*, and she read in the last Poetry Festival at CSU Dominguez Hills where she is a student returnee.

Arline Zimmerman: Born in 1932. Grew up an Italian protestant during the Depression, in Cleveland. Came out in early fifties in California when it seemed there were only 10 of us. In mid-sixties married a straight Jewish male while remaining "gay." Such living on the "margins" produces a world of material for a novel, titled *Name the Dragon*; also a second novel, titled *My Burden is not Easy*. Currently involved in strong coffee, astrology and Brazilian music.



Announcements

Alliance of Woman Artisans is forming. For information contact Lee Higdon, PO Box 1052, Gatlinburg, TN 37738.

THIS BRIDGE CALLED MY BACK: Writings by Radical Women of Color needs money for reprinting by Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press. Make checks payable to Kitchen Table or Working Women's Institute for tax-deductible donations. Low-interest loans gratefully accepted. Write to: Kitchen Table Press, Box 2753, Rockefeller Center Station, NY, NY 10185.

Lesbians: Interested in living together in the country? You don't need any money to join us. Write Land Group, PO Box 8122, Minneapolis, MN 55408.

CONFERENCE ON LESBIAN PSYCHOLOGIES organized by The Boston Chapter of the Association for Women in Psychology to be held March 9-11, 1984 at the Park Plaza Hotel in Boston. For pre-registration materials, write Registration Committee, B.A.W.P., PO Box 1267, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130. Pre-registration deadline: **February 10.**

LESBIAN ETHICS, a new journal invites your support, articles, subscriptions, and comments. Write: PO Box 943, Venice, CA 01204.

Submissions wanted. **THE THINGS THAT DIVIDES US:** Stories by Women on Racism, Classism and Anti-Semitism. A collection of fiction to be published by the Seal Press, 312 S. Washington, Seattle, WA 98104. SASE. Max length 5,000 words. Stories may have appeared before in periodicals. Deadline May 1, 1984.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LESBIAN/GAY HEALTH to be held in New York City, June 16-19, 1984. Send inquiries and proposals to Fern Schwaber, Suite 1305, 80 Eighth Avenue, New York, NY 10011.

Aunt Lute Book Company is seeking manuscripts for publication in 1984, primarily interested in nonfiction work—skills manuals, political writings, collections and anthologies. Send with SASE to Aunt Lute Book Co., PO Box 2723, Iowa City, IA 52244.

ARTISTS CALL - a series of national and international art events in protest against U.S. intervention in Central America. Will happen in January 1984 (or thereafter). For more info contact ARTISTS CALL 339 Lafayette St., New York, NY 10012.

CALL FOR PAPERS. **Women's Struggles: Nonviolent Militancy and Direct Action**, a special issue of *Women's Studies International Forum*. For more information contact, ASAP, B. Carroll & J. Mohraz, Women's Studies, 411 Gregory, U. of Illinois, 810 S. Wright St., Urbana, IL 61801.

WE'MOON ALMANAC 1984: Astrological Moon Calendar for ♀♀ for Living in Harmony on the Earth. Hand-crafted, exquisitely designed, pocket or pack size. Order from WomanSpirit, 2000 King Mt. Trail, Wolf Creek, OR 97497. \$6-- plus \$1--postage.

MOON CYCLE CALENDAR for 1984 from The Native American Women's Self Help Project. Send \$5.00 plus \$1.00/postage (\$3.50 for ten or more) to Women's Dance Health Project, PO Box 8958, Lake St. Station, Minneapolis, MN 55408. This calendar features drawings and poetry of Native Women.

Feminist women over 45 years old. Wanted: articles, fiction, cartoons, drawings, photos, interviews, personal experience, feminist theory for an anthology on the issue of agism from a feminist perspective. Deadline: March 15, 1984. Send with SASE to FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON AGISM, c/o Polly Taylor, 904 Irving St., #258, San Francisco, CA 94122.

LESBIAN CONNECTION's annual Winter Catalog for Lesbians is now available. **FREE.** Mailed discreetly. Send name, address and zip code to Ambitious Amazons Catalog, PO Box 811, East Lansing, MI 48823.

The Feminist Arab-American Network, an organization of feminists of Arab heritage residing in the United States is interested in collecting: bibliographies on Arab women; personal and family histories; writings on topics of concern to Arab-American feminists; information about local projects and activities in which you are involved. Contact F.A.N., PO Box 725, E. Lansing, MI 48823-0625.

NURSES: At last there is CASSANDRA, a nationwide radical feminist nurses' network. For information, write CASSANDRA, PO Box 341, Williamsville, NY 14221.

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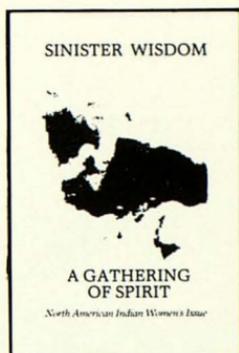
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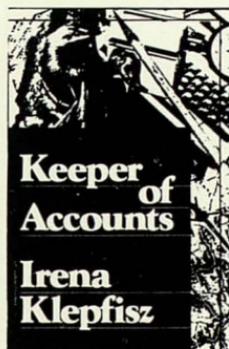
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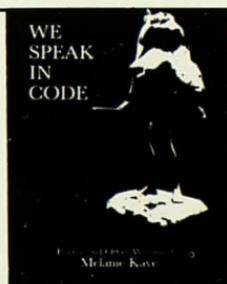
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