



Sinister Wisdom

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FALL 1977

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

SINISTER WISDOM



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Catherine Nicholson, editors

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and the Charlotte Collating Crew

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About This Issue--

Aunt Flo's tiny kitchen was: breads in the oven; coffee on the range; burned-out Luckies precariously balanced along the counter edges; a screen door that banged open and shut all day and half the night as neighbor woman after neighbor woman--arms full of green tomatoes, peppers, handmade potholders, dirty laundry because the washer'd broke down, and the stories of their lives--came for Flo and her talk. And did Flo ever talk... hour after hour, laughing until she choked. A small girl perched on the kitchen stool beside Aunt Flo's stove thought she'd died and gone to heaven.

This issue is for Flo because it's a lot like her. Lots of knowledge wrapped up in stories and poems, lots of laughter keeping off the pain, lots of warmth--all of it growing out of shared fortune and shared lives. There are stories of mothers and daughters and witches and lovers; a tale just for the girlchild in all of us; personal responses to "What is a Lesbian"; letters; a moving account by a word-magician of how she works; reviews; and page after page of fine poetry.

For you in your own life, we hope this issue conjures up a glimpse of "Aunt Flo"--and a taste of the brew she brews so well.

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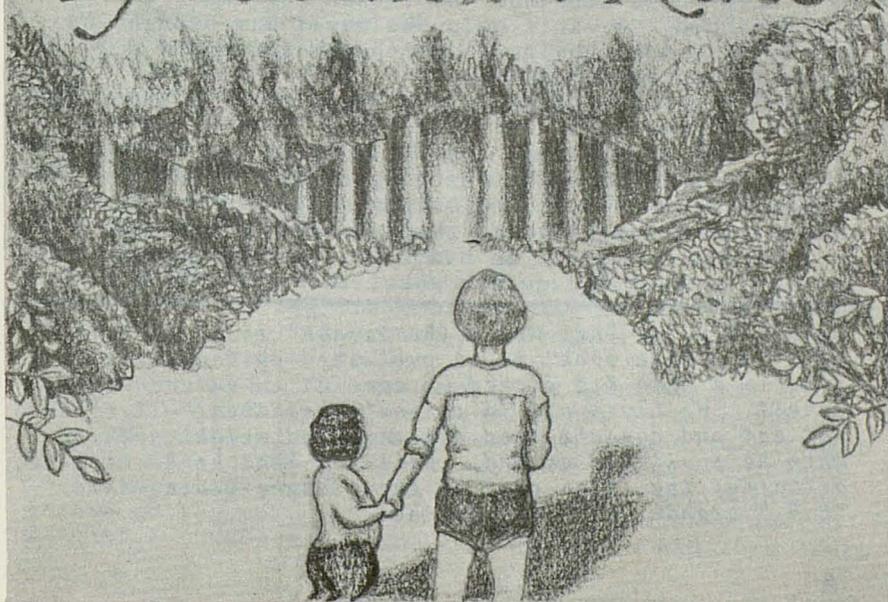
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KIT
MEETS
THE
DRAGON

by Joanna Russ



It seemed to Kit that she had been walking for hours through the fresh-scented forest glades. It was late spring and the wildflowers were blooming everywhere; even some of the trees were still in bloom, with dangling golden catkins or clusters of little greenish flowers that were barely visible. With B.B. on her back Kit wasn't hungry but the walking and the warm sunlight that filtered down through the trees were making her thirsty. She also wondered where you could go to the bathroom in the woods, and when B.B. woke up she asked him, but he thought that was the funniest thing he had ever heard and yelled, "Go to the bathroom! Go to the bathroom! Go to the bathroom!" over and over again until she had to reach round and thump him good and hard to make him shut up. The Valley people build privies behind their houses and use chamber pots at night or in bad weather, but they don't like talking about things like that. Kit had heard many fairytales about people having adventures in magic woods and none of them told anything about urinating or moving your bowels. Kit felt embarrassed and was even more embarrassed at being embarrassed. She tried to explain all this to B.B., who only shouted gleefully, "Move your bowels! Move your bowels! Move your bowels!" until Kit got mad enough to undo her shawl, dump B.B. on the ground, and threaten to leave him there forever.

Immediately he began to roar like a two-year-old. She started to walk away from him, just to show him, and the noise stopped; then came the sound of B.B. sobbing. He would sob and then stop to see if it was having any effect on her, and then he would start again.

Kit said fiercely, "I don't see what's so funny!"

B.B. stopped sobbing. He looked serious.

She added, "I can't help the way I was brought up and I can't help having to do things you don't do!"

He looked remorseful.

Kit then said, "Besides, I'm thirsty. Is that funny?"

B.B. shook his head. He rolled over and sat up. It occurred to Kit that he was bigger than he had been the day before--he now looked much more like a two-year-old child than an infant--and that somehow he was pinker.

Then she realized: he had lost all the hair off his legs. It was lying on her shawl in a fine cloud. He

AUTHOR'S NOTE: "Kit Meets the Dragon" is chapter three of a "juvenile book" to be published by Daughters, Inc. B.B. is a faun Kit picked up earlier in an enchanted forest. He lives off "a person's heartbeat" (i.e. does not eat and doesn't need diapers) and weighs nothing when he's off the ground. He's not what he looks like, actually; the later part of the story explains this. "B.B." stands for "Baby Brother."

had human legs now, straight ones, just like a real child. B.B. said in a small voice, "Kit?" and held out his arms to her, his face woeful. He looked as if he were going to cry. But she hardened her heart.

"No more yelling?" she said.

He nodded quickly.

"No more making fun of me?"

He nodded, a bit more reluctantly.

"Okay," she said. "I'll take you. But brush off the shawl. See, you're losing your hair." And sadly B.B. did so. She picked him up and tied him on her back again, feeling bad because he had looked so miserable, and so to cheer him up she said, "B.B., what about your hair? Aren't you happy about it?" She felt a sort of nod against her back. "Well, aren't you? It means you're becoming human."

"Ye-es," said his voice at her neck, but doubtfully as if he weren't sure. Then he began to shake up and down. B.B. was crying. He said:

"Oh, Kit! We're--we're *growing up!*"

And Kit didn't notice until afterwards that he had said "we" and not "I."

As the afternoon wore on, she got thirstier. The goat-hair left in the shawl kept working its way under her clothes, making her itch. When she heard the sound of running water off to her left she was pleased and relieved, but however far she walked towards it, the stream seemed just as far away. She kept hearing it, though, and B.B. quietly insisted (he had stopped crying, but remained subdued) that this was the right way to go for water. The woods had been getting darker--either the sky was clouding up or the sun was setting, Kit couldn't tell which--and the trees got bigger and older until walking between their trunks was like walking through enormous columns covered with green moss. It got hotter, darker, and more sultry until she could barely see. When occasional beams of sunlight straggled down through the broad leaves they showed clumps of toadstools under the trees, and here and there little stagnant ponds covered with scum, and once or twice Kit both saw and heard mosquitoes. She thought that was hardly fair, since the stories she had heard about magic and magic adventures never said you had to put up with mosquitoes. B.B. insisted he could drive them away by saying "Zzzzzzip!" and "Shoo!" and "Scat!" and making magic signs with his fingers at them, but none of that seemed to help.

Then he said, "The weather isn't changing; it's the forest. Go that way," and there right in front of her were two piles of heaped-up boulders crowned with tufts of grass and nodding plants, between which she walked as if they had been the gates of an enormous building. It had gotten very dark by now, the greenish-blackish dark of a thunderstorm about to happen. And then, sure

enough, there came an enormous dazzle of light and a *crash!* to one side, and then a cracking, ripping sound and a long-drawn-out thud as if something very large had fallen onto the forest floor, perhaps a tree struck by lightning. The next moment came the tumbling, grumbling, bounding, deafening roar of the thunder, as if the whole sky had opened up, and a moment after that thousands of tiny needles of cold water soaking Kit to the skin. Then there was a tapping that became a pattering that deepened to a thrumming sound that turned into a loud drumming. It was raining. Every leaf in the forest danced.

"No change in the weather, huh?" Kit shouted (so B.B. could hear her above the rain). "What do we do now, smarty-pants?"

She heard B.B. yelling back that he couldn't be a smarty-pants because he didn't have any pants on, but then he prodded her hard in the left side and shouted, "That way! That way!" So she splashed along between the trees, stopping every once in a while to drink from puddles (B.B. was saying, "Well, at least I got you some water anyway"), trying to avoid the boulders which seemed to jump up in front of her no matter which way she turned, and finally--confronted with the biggest boulder of all--she said, "B.B., I *can't* go this way!" and he poked her again, saying, "No, into it, into it!" and Kit saw that she was staring at the entrance to a cave.

It was a small entrance, barely big enough for her. It would have been too small for a grown-up. It looked like two big rocks leaning against each other with nothing much beyond. But when she ducked through, she saw that the cave was bigger inside than it looked from outside and that the floor was covered with fine, dry dirt. B.B. poked her again, saying, "This way," and when Kit said "Why?" he answered, "Because you're cold." Which was true; the rain had wet her so thoroughly that her teeth were chattering. "You have to get warm," B.B. said, kicking her. So Kit crept through an even smaller crack in the back wall and found herself in another cave, and went through this at the prodding of B.B. into yet another cave, and then into a tunnel, and then into a cave, and so on. The caves wound about like rooms. It was getting dryer and warmer all the time, with gusts of hot air blowing past her like the heat from a radiator. (Kit didn't think of a radiator, never having seen one; she thought of a fire.) There were no stalagmites or stalactites in the cave, no rock curtains, and no crystals growing in bursts from the floor.* This might mean only that the caves were young; still, it was odd. Odder still, she could see quite well. Caves, since they're underground and away from the light of the sun, are darker than the darkest night; if you stand in a cave and wave your hand in front of your face, you can't see anything; the darkness is like

black velvet over your eyes. But there was light here, although Kit had brought none in with her. She began to worry, but B.B. was very excited, drumming his heels on her back and whispering fiercely, "Go on! Go on!" so finally she did, down a rock passageway a little wider than her front wall at home, and the light got brighter and the air got hotter until finally she saw--way up ahead--a door or archway filled with very bright light. For some time she had been hearing a strange sound. We would compare it to the sound made by a flood of steam from either a factory chimney or an old-fashioned railway train, but Kit didn't know what to make of it. She was curious now, as well as scared, and B.B.'s excitement was getting her excited, too. He kept jumping up and down on her back, saying, "This is it! This is it!" So she went quietly forward, and the light got bigger and brighter and the air hotter until Kit saw that there was indeed a kind of rough archway at the end of the passage. From there she seemed to be looking into space. When she got there (watching her footing very carefully) she found that she was in a kind of hole high in the wall of a vast cavern and that she could see clear across the cavern to its shadowy, farther wall. At her feet the path dropped precipitously (that means very fast), so that Kit had to hold on to the side of the arch in order to lean out past the cavern wall. Doing that, she could just get a look at what was below.

It was a sea of gold.

From wall to wall, like a carpet, lay a great heap of treasure, a pile of shifting, glinting lights. It was like looking at the stars on a very clear night. It was as if the beautiful minerals she ought to have found in the caves and passages had all been turned to human wealth and stored on the floor of this vast, interior cavern: gold and jewels beyond counting and beyond price, things that glowed and things that glittered, encrusted things and smooth things, all thrown together willy-nilly in heaps and heaps, the smallest of them

* When water drips in a cave for many centuries it leaves deposits of minerals behind it, just like snow dripping from the eaves of a house and re-freezing into icicles. Stalactites are the rock-icicles that hang down from the ceiling of an old cave and stalagmites are the blunter ones that poke up from the floor. If the two finally meet they form a column or pillar. When a sheet of water drips down for a very long time, it forms a curtain of rock which is sometimes so thin that it's translucent--that means you can see light through it, but not enough to make anything out clearly.

bigger than all the houses in the Valley put together. Kit was so astonished that she sat down on the edge of the path (with her feet over the edge) as if the breath had been knocked out of her. The only gold she had ever seen in her life was a tiny pair of hoop earrings Mother Miller kept as an heirloom for her eldest daughter. And she had never seen jewels at all. She wanted desperately to go down and examine all those strange and beautiful things. B.B. seemed to want it, too; he was so excited now that he was dancing, bounding about in her shawl like a ball in a net, exclaiming, "Go! Go! Go!"

She yanked at the shawl and pinched one of his legs to quiet him down. Then she took a careful look around the cavern, straining her eyes for the dragon.

But there did not seem to be anybody there.

B.B. said, "The dragon's out visiting! Go!" Kit figured the same thing, so she slid over the edge and half scrambled, half fell down the path to the cavern floor. She wondered if she'd ever be able to get up the path again. She was thirty feet from the outlying pieces of the treasure and could see it clearly now, or thought she could: huge plates and embossed chests, swords, bowls full of jewels, little things that might be necklaces or rings, and far out in the middle of the floor a heap of something--no, a mountain of something--that glowed and dimmed like a fire-mountain. (Kit meant a volcano.) She knew that the dragon might come back at any moment, screaming like a jet plane (although she didn't, of course, think of a jet plane) and that would be very dangerous for her. She knew from the stories that you were supposed to kill the dragon, kill it or take something, or be very clever and steal something and then run away. She also knew stories in which the dragon gold burned your hands, made you ill, and finally killed you. There were stories in which a man had to rescue a woman from a dragon, stories in which dragons ate young women, stories of houses set on fire by dragons. Remembering the stories made her feel unhappy. Then she felt even worse and then, for some awful reason, she just wanted to sit down and cry. She felt that life was bad and pointless, that everyone suffered, that everything hurt, that little animals killed each other, that nobody was friends with anybody, that it was all dying and making things dead, and if life was as cruel as that, it wasn't worth living. The truth was that Kit had come under the spell of the Hoard and that she wanted it more than anything, more than food, more than sleep, more than money. She wanted it so much that her bones hurt. But not to be rich or to keep it: she wanted something else. She just couldn't bear to go away from that golden light and back to the rest of the world, which now seemed awful to her. What she wanted to do was rush down into the Hoard and stay

there forever, but she knew from the stories that if she did, she'd turn into a dragon herself. She believed the Hoard was evil, and felt she ought to get out of there very fast. B.B., it was clear, did not agree, because when Kit started back up the path (saying "Hold on tight" because it was so steep) he began to fuss desperately, pulling her hair and shrieking like an enraged snowflake. His grabbing at her hair and yelling bothered her seriously. More than that, the farther up the path she crept the steeper it became until it flattened above her like a wall, going straight up. Kit didn't remember it being so steep. She clung to it with hands and knees while B.B. screamed, "You're going the wrong way!"

Then the path began to shake.

It turned upside-down, making Kit dizzy. But still she held on.

Then she heard a voice, more in her head than in the air. A vast, deep voice like the thunder speaking, and yet a woman's voice, so sweet that it made her shiver:

Turn, thou.

So she did. The path was quiet again. For a moment nothing happened. Then before her eyes the Hoard shifted and changed, the way things do when you look at them through the heated air that rises from a fire. The gold melted and flowed together. It changed shape. What Kit had seen as swords were really the barbs along an enormous back and a still more enormous tail; what she had thought were chests were now the dragon's feet; what she had taken for a heap of gold coins was now a body covered with glittering scales. The voice said:

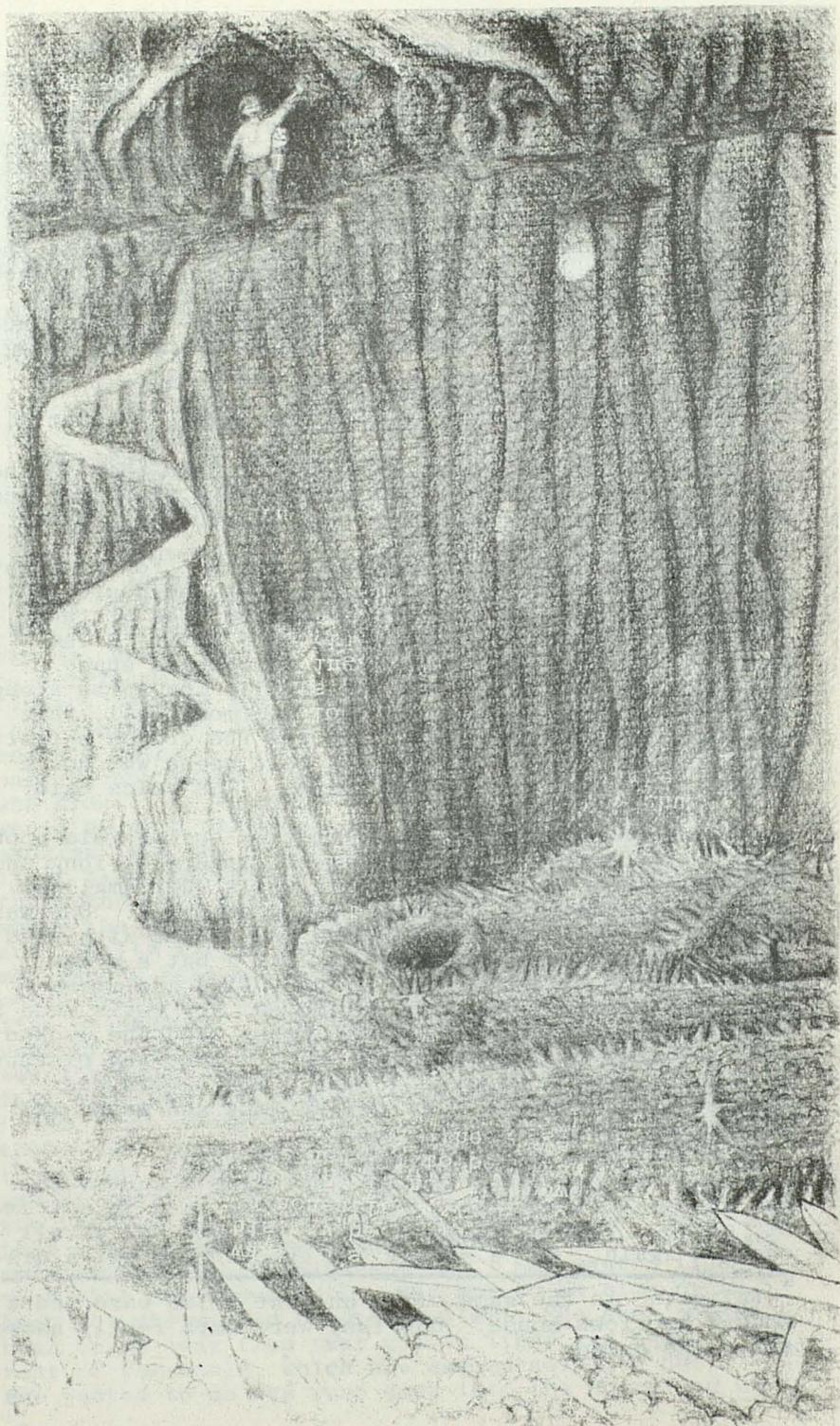
I myself am the Hoard.

It was the dragon Taliesin* who lay coiled fold upon fold in the cavern, a vast, Chinese fire-drake, long and thin, Her body touching the outer walls, Her smallest claw three times the length of Kit's own body. She was gold all over, armored and barbed and ridged with gold, and Her great wings, membraneous like a bat's wings, were folded back against Her spine. Fire and steam came from Her nostrils. As She moved, Her coils made a rustling sound like wind through grass, and She looked like a bucket of golden snakes in oil, like the pistons of a giant engine in an oily nest. The cavern was filled with Her smell; She smelled rank and musky and bitter and snaky and marvelous.

Kit had never seen anything so beautiful.

Clumsily, her knees shaking, she made a curtsy to the Worm (it wasn't easy, in pants) and said in a trembly voice, "Your Majesty--" but as she did so, it all changed again. For a moment the cavern held not a dra-

*"Taliesin" is the name of an ancient Welsh bard and a modern American house. But they were both really named after the dragon.



gon but a woman, a giant woman (she could have filled a football stadium) lying propped on her elbows on the sand of the cavern floor, and looking at Kit with the intent, thoughtful look Rose Bottom had once bestowed on a kitten saved from drowning. Only it was not one woman but many: a black-skinned woman with a flat nose and a long, thin skull, a brown woman with a face that kept changing, a pale, bleached woman covered with almost invisible pale down, a square-faced, golden-skinned woman. Rose was sentimental about animals but not about that one; Rose had only said, "I want her. She'll make a good hunter." And the kitten had.

Then Taliesin was a dragon again. Kit walked forward and drew her hands shakily over the scales of the first coil that lay before her like a small hill. She had expected to find it cold and metallic but it wasn't; it was like the slick, shiny, nylon cloth we use in raincoats and down jackets. (Kit had no name for it; she just liked it.) Then the great coils shifted, waking echoes in the cavern walls. The voice said:

How many summers hast thou?

Kit said, "Eleven, Madam." Into her mind came a picture of gnats dancing in the air above a stream as she herself had seen them many summers past, but she didn't know what it meant. Then the voice said:

Art fully human yet, adventurous child?

--but Kit didn't know what that meant, either. She thought perhaps the dragon was asking if she were grown up. She said, "Well, my mother--" and was answered by laughter almost too sweet, like getting honey in your teeth, which makes them hurt. The laughter fell down in pitch and then farther down, and then even farther down than you would have believed possible until Taliesin's amusement was a frightening rumble in the cave floor, until it was almost an avalanche. Kit got down on her knees, closed her eyes, and stuck her fingers in her ears. She could feel B.B. trembling on her back. Then there was a bump and something live and muscular wrapped itself around her and lifted her off her feet, something soft as velvet one way and raspy as a nest of daggers the other. It smelled of hay and daisies.

She opened her eyes. There was foot upon foot upon foot upon foot of it. It was Taliesin's long, green tongue. Nearby Kit could see a huge, black well with brown lines radiating from it as thick as a human fist.

That was the pupil of Taliesin's eye.

Stay there, cub, said the voice, and Kit was dropped into a golden valley between coils, as if she'd been lying on a nest of nylon raincoats. Far away across the cavern floor she could see the dragon's eyes, a shining emerald-green or leaf-green, like the light, pure color of the early leaves in Spring. The voice said:

Lies: that I am only a great beast, like a lion or tiger, with one appetite for gold and jewels and another to crunch little living things between My teeth. Know, thou: all greed is greed for love. Know: My body is more golden than the mines of Asia, My eyes more precious and jewelled than the sum of Peru. I am the Hoard which men hunt. My food is the heat which bubbles and burns at the center of the planet, My natural home that white-hot, molten core. Once all mountains moved in fire; once all beasts were of My kind, even thou and that pale Idea on thy back. All was fire, joy, and transformation. All was the many-shaped Goddess.

So will it be again!

Taliesin's great eyes closed: lighthouses shutting down. One vast wing came over them, causing B.B. to mutter, "Hey, watch it! I'm down here too, you know." Kit had thought the wing would be slick and tough like the dragon's armor, but it was covered with fine fur only a few inches long. It felt delicious. She pushed her face against it, like a baby in a crib or a cat on a lap. She thought that it made sense for a creature so big to sip red-hot metal from the center of the earth like a dragonfly snacking from a flower; dragons would never get enough to eat if they ate only people. She thought it nice that she had been a dragon once. Even B.B. had been a dragon. She thought she could hear him sigh from time to time the way geese do on a summer day when they're happy; the gander and the geese sit in the shade of a tree, close their eyes, and open their bills, from time to time making a tiny sigh of ecstasy. Taliesin's smell was under her and around her, making her dizzy; she yawned and turned over, burrowing into the body beneath her. A ripple went through her bed: Taliesin moving. Kit wondered if a dragonfly were only a very tiny dragon and if Taliesin's children had all dwindled away until they became dragonflies. Perhaps she and B.B. were Taliesin's children. She wished B.B. would take his hands out of her hair.

Kit began to dream. She thought she was back home in bed and wanted something, although she didn't know what. She thought she was little and wanted her doll. She knew there was someone in bed with her (that was B.B.) but didn't want him there because there wasn't room. So she called out, hoping that someone would come, "Mother...."

Kit dreamed of a statue. A woman sat quietly with a sword laid across her knees, but both the woman and the sword were made of stone, like a monument. Kit dreamed that the woman didn't know how to use the sword and couldn't touch it or pick it up; she could only sit there with closed eyes and hands resting in her lap. Then Kit dreamed of another woman, or maybe it was the same one, but this one was real. She too was seated,

but as Kit watched, she sprang to her feet. Then she shouted, clapped one hand to her forehead, and like a magician she drew right out of her own head a long, shining ray of light, which she dashed backwards and forwards through the air. It was a sword. It was a thought made real. Kit said to herself, "I'm only dreaming this because B.B. is grabbing my hair," and turned to pull Taliesin's wing closer to her, like a blanket.

But there was no wing there.

Kit woke up to broad daylight. She was lying in a sea of long, dry grass with her face pressed into it. It smelled like hay and daisies. There was no cave, no forest, and no dragon. B.B. was snoring next to her ear.

But in front of her on the grass lay a golden sword and buckler, as dazzling as ones from a fairy-tale, and along the sheath were curly, twisty, fiery letters which spelled out:

TALIESIN.

-by joanna russ

drawings by mandy wallace

DAHOMY

"in spite of the fire's heat
the tongs can fetch it."

It was in Abomey that I felt
the full blood of my fathers' wars
and where I found my mother
Seboulisa
standing with outstretched palms hip high
one breast eaten away by worms of sorrow
magic stones resting upon her fingers'
dry as a cough.

In the dooryard of the brass workers
four women joined together dying their cloth
mock Eshu's iron quiver
standing erect and flamingly familiar
in their dooryard
mute as a porcupine in a forest of lead
In the courtyard of the cloth workers
other brothers and nephews
are stitching bright tapestries
into tales of blood.

Thunder is a woman with braided hair
spelling the fas of Shango
asleep between sacred pythons
that cannot read
nor eat the ritual offerings
of the Asein.
My throat in the panther's lair
is unresisting.

Bearing two drums on my head I speak
whatever language is needed
to sharpen the knives of my tongue
the snake is aware although sleeping
under my blood
since I am a woman whether or not
you are against me
I will braid my hair
even
in the seasons of rain.

-Audre Lorde

"SO WHO'S GIVING GUARANTEES?"

An Interview with Audre Lorde

by anita cornwell

I am Black, Woman, and Poet--all three are facts outside the realm of choice. My eyes have a part in my seeing; my breath in my breathing; and all that I am in who I am. All who I love are of my people; it is not simple.

I was not born on a farm or in a forest but in the centre of the largest city in the world--a member of the human race hemmed in by stone and away from earth and sunlight. But what is in my blood and skin of richness, of brown earth and noon sun and the strength to love them, comes the roundabout way from Africa through sun islands to a stony coast; and these are the gifts through which I sing, through which I see.

How do I work? I work with great difficulty. As a matter of fact, it's hard sometimes for me to tap into the source of that feeling, that strength, out of which I've got to write no matter what the experiences I'm dealing with. No matter what the world of the poem I'm trying to write. It's also hard because I do so much. And so I try to discipline myself, the kind of discipline that doesn't always work.

There are always a hundred other things, legitimate, necessary, pressing things into which I can escape away from my work. So I have to be careful because my poetry is the thing that completes me. What I'm trying to do, what I'm trying to say, what I know deep inside me: That is my work.

I try to work every day, but what that means sometimes is merely small journal entries or simply holding myself to that kind of self-consciousness that I want to feel, that I want to record. What kind of self-consciousness? A consciousness of self, an awareness of feeling, of being, of sharing. I certainly try to do some formal writing every week. Also, I try to do that

*Excerpted from the poetic statement written by Audre Lorde for the Heritage Anthology, *Sixes and Sevens*, 1962.

shaping out of the poem--the cutting out of stone--at least once a week. But there again, it's sometime more, and sometimes less.

Then, too, I always carry a journal with me in which to write thoughts, snatches, impressions, et cetera. When I work these things out, I use lots of different colored paper. I love colors. Blue is for the very first draft, usually typed because that removes the emotion. I can see the emotion in my handwriting. I can see what *moved* me as I wrote it.

So I type it out, as type is bland and neutral. Then I can start working from that. Sometimes I retype a poem six or seven times at a sitting, which is part of a process I like. It's an editing process. It's also a process by which I hold myself to--to the experience and to memory and to touching again what I was feeling. And that sometimes is very painful. Yes, writing is hard, but it's like breathing. It's something I have to do in order to stay alive.

What would happen if there was nothing in my journal that I wanted to work with at any given time? Well, there are always piles and piles of things, I'm so far behind. Why I've got a year of journals! There're even two or three journals that I really haven't gone through.

Sometimes I pass over things that don't move me. Then when the time is right, I go back to them and something clicks. Also, there is always a lot of material to rework, and a lot of rewriting that I have to do. Sometimes when I cannot bear to get into the central core of me, I start revising stuff. It's sort of like sliding into myself by the back door. You know that feeling?

Yes, sometimes I find my material is painful. Yet truth is never without pain, because if you are seeking it, it means you do not yet know it. And if you do not yet know it, you are functioning in its lack. And if you are functioning in the lack of truth, there is an adjustment when you begin to know. So there must always be one kind of pain or another, if only that which we call work. *Hard work.*

Then perhaps we will begin to distinguish between what is hard work and what is pain. I use the word *pain* to cover those things that one would avoid as well as those things that are such hard work that they try you past your utmost. We call both of those things *pain*, but there is a difference. One gives results. Right? One is a learning experience, and the other is a waste.

How? Useless pain is the biggest waste. Which pain is useless? The pain that is a distortion. The pain that comes from a *lack* of truth, that comes from things out of kilter. The pain which comes from a disorder.

That kind of pain as opposed to the pain which comes from being tried beyond your utmost. Eventually, that pain mutates into knowledge. The other pain may end or mutate into something else, but one frequently doesn't know. So I call it waste although that may be short-sighted of me.

Of course, I am speaking of it in larger terms than just of us as writers. As writers we share a double knowledge that is both tortured and triumphant. Right? A knowledge that is both hard to bear and yet is our salvation. In a sense, our writing is only a vehicle or a tool. Is that not so? *Art is purpose.* One's art and purpose in living being the same...

Do I ever have problems with people trying to relate to me because of my work and not because of myself? Well, there does come a point, you know, when you can no longer separate the self from the poetry. I just can't say "They're only interested in me because I'm a poet, not because of who I am." Because poet and self become synonymous eventually. We all come to that point. When I say "I'm Black, Woman, and Poet," I really mean it. It's not something I can separate.

It's a question of where you center your identity. Most young people are still trying to define themselves, so they move toward those whom they feel have a kind of definition. Of course, I'm just discussing how I feel, how I move. A lot of things I just take on faith. Like, how many years did it take me to learn to trust the way the roots of my hair feel? Right? So when I feel that suspicious warm dampness behind my knees, I know it's telling me something.

I mean, I don't have to wait for a headache, an ulcer attack or stomach gripe or pimples to come out on my face. I can *feel* that left eyelash quiver, and I say, "Hey, that's right!" Those are the things that you use to tell. Besides, who's giving *guarantees*?

You move, and you move more and more fluidly. You move more and more freely until there's nothing more to be afraid of, you know? Of course, I can certainly be wrong any time! But what of it? The worst it can mean is death. Or pain. But pain either changes or stops. Once I learned that, not just up here in my head, but began to know it so I didn't even have to understand it. Once I began to *really* know what I'm saying now. Began to *feel* it. Baby, it was like becoming *Wonder Woman*! Not in terms of having extra power, but in terms of having my own power.

When did that come about? Well, it's been a long journey, baby. There are pieces of it all along the way. The latest came very recently, about a year ago. Like ole Sister Gertie said, "Messages are received all the time!"

So what was this latest piece that occurred about a year ago. Well, to make the connection between that

which is physical and that which is *other*--what is called *other*--the rest of the time, is difficult. But I did it! And now you're going to ask, "How did you do it, Audre?"

Well, we have to go back to the physical process. I *almost died*. Right after my first book came out, during Christmas of 1967. I got the flu, but I got it *very* bad. *And my life really altered!* A weird trip, honey, let me tell you!

Although, at the time, I didn't even know how dramatic an occurrence that was. But while I was recuperating, someone from the National Endowment to the Arts called about the business of the grant to Tougaloo College where I went as Poet-in-Residence in the spring of '68. A number of things happened there. First of all, I met Frances. She was Visiting Professor from Brown University.

And, of course, what I found at Tougaloo with the young people at the poetry workshop was an intense and a very critical experience. I felt myself working to capacity, and it was exhilarating. When I speak of working to capacity, I'm speaking of that sense of *being filled with what one does* so that there is no room left for hesitation or caviling. It's a terribly seductive feeling, and it's one that I value.

II

Audre Lorde once told an audience that she wrote what she lived, and that she speaks out of all the selves that she seeks to define. To date, she has had six volumes of poetry published, and has a seventh book, *THE BLACK WOMAN*, ready for her publisher. Her third book, *FROM A LAND WHERE OTHER PEOPLE LIVE*, was nominated for a National Book Award in 1973.

She drove down to my house in Philadelphia's Powelton Village from her home on Staten Island one simmering, summer-like afternoon in late May 1975 to give a poetry reading that night and so that I might interview her for my book of interviews with nine contemporary women. When I asked her to tell me something of her early years, a wry smile touched her mouth, then she said in a mocking tone:

I went to Hunter High School. It was the school for exception children, honey! And how this *little black spot* ever got in it, is more than we need to deal with. But the nicest thing I remember about my father is his going down and fighting the nuns at my elementary school to get them to allow me to take the test for Hunter High.

We had just moved to the neighborhood and were the first Black people on the block in this dinky little apartment. And soon after we moved in I learned that our landlord had *hanged* himself in *our* basement because things had gone so bad for him he had to rent to Black people. And *everybody* over there at St. Catherine's was talking about it.

Really, I think I would be insane today if I hadn't gone to Hunter High School. I've had a lucky life because I've been tried a lot. But I've found the right people at the right time, and that's really helped because, otherwise, I would not be here. Hunter High was like that for me. It saved me. It helped me to hold on to my sanity at the time when I was *just* on the edge. I was a very disturbed child--

Why was I disturbed? I was disturbed because I bore the weight of a tortured sensitivity for which there was no escape because I was *Black* and *Woman*. And I guess I was born knowing that there are certain ways that one could live, so when you were living in a way that didn't fill that, what one did was *scream!*

You didn't bear it; you didn't turn the other goddamn cheek. *You yelled!* And, honey, I yelled long and loud. But my parents were West Indian, *and they didn't dig yelling*. So why was I tortured? Because I could not express myself. Because I was not being given the tools by which to deal with the world that I lived in. And I had no way to deal with the hate and the fury that that made in me. And because I felt unloved and was supposed to be sweet and quiet, which I wasn't.

Why do children suffer? Why do they die? Why do they go insane? Because we live in an abnormal, sick, insane society, and our parents try to raise us as if this were not so.

No, I don't really think I was unloved. I think that my parents spoke a language that for some reason I couldn't hear. Or didn't want to hear. I was a difficult child. I was wild. *I was like a ravening wind!* I was silent when I should have spoken, and loud when I should have kept my mouth shut. And I expected a hell of a lot! I expected things my parents weren't about to give me. I have two older sisters, but in many respects, I grew up as if I were an only child.

So what happened to me when I got to Hunter High? Yes, I met teachers. I met girls. It was an all-girls school, you know? And they were all very very bright and very together. *It really turned my head around.* There was a kind of loneliness there, too, but I wasn't enough in tune with it. And also I didn't really recognize in those years the kind of lack that it was. I mean, there were so few of us Black women there.

But one very pivotal occurrence happened in my second term at Hunter. One day, Pearl Primas came! She

was a Hunter High School graduate. She had just come back from Africa, from her first fellowship there. Pearl Primas--beautiful, fat, Black, gorgeous! She talked about Africa, and she talked about the African women. She talked to us about *Blackness*, and she talked to us about *beauty*. Up there with 700 Hunter High School girls, *I sat there and I ate it up!* I couldn't believe what that woman was saying to me!

What else happened to me there? Yes, it was the atmosphere. It was being free to think, having some place where I wasn't repressed, where my head wasn't constantly turned off. Where, when I wrote a poem or something, my mother didn't say, "You'd better be careful, Child. Among you children, you don't *realize* what the world is like. People will think you're queer!"

Then there was Genevieve whom I met... I loved Genevieve very much. Practically all of the Memorial poems in most of my books are to Genevieve. She killed herself. We were sixteen....

Was she talented? Yes, fantastically so. She wrote and she danced. She was like a shooting star. The first time I met Genevieve I thought I didn't like her because she was so open and on the surface. She was just the opposite of me. I was so closed and withdrawn. But as I got to know her, I came to see that the flip side of her was really only one piece. It was a cover, and I'd never known anyone who covered so well and so charmingly before. So I came to love her, and she loved and needed me in the way that children do.

She killed herself because she was unhappy, because she did not believe that any piece of her world could make it better. When some people believe in something, they will stay on when it rains because they have faith that the sun will rise tomorrow. Genevieve never believed it would. And when pain came, no one had ever given her anything to believe, or to want to hold on to until the storm passed. She was full of anger, as we all were. But she turned hers inward. At the last crucial moment, *Genevieve turned hers inward!*

I think about Ginny a lot, sometimes. I felt terribly sad, and I vowed that no one would ever be important to me again. But what is most important is that I never forgot. Genevieve helped me always to remember. I'll never forget what it is to see young waste and how painful it is. And I never got over wanting to help so that it wouldn't happen again.

Yes, I see Ginny often! She had no one to turn to except me, and I had my own pain. There was no one else she'd speak to. We had no role models. We had no one to go to in those days, you know. We were lost. Wandering. We were children of ourselves.

We used to playact a lot. We used to cuddle up in bed, and playact at loving so we wouldn't have to deal with the real thing. Or rather, we *thought* we were

playacting, but we really weren't, you know? We never verbalized our feelings. I knew how I felt, and I guess she knew how she felt.

I never really believed that I was as important to her as she was to me. It wasn't until after she died that her mother talked about my being her best friend, and all that. I knew that she was going to do it. She had left Hunter and had gone to another school because she wanted to major in dance. She came to me that day--I was having exams--and I got out early. I cut the rest of school that afternoon and went with her to Central Park.

Ginny had bought these capsules, and she told me she was going to commit suicide. No. She didn't tell me. She'd tried to commit suicide the year before. She had cut her wrists, and her grandma had found her. That's when her mother had let her go to live with her father whom she'd just met. She had never known her father before, but she went to live with him and his woman. And some *awful* things used to happen in that house. Sometimes he used to beat her....

Once she came to my house at nine o'clock at night which was unspeakable to my parents. I wanted her to stay, but we never had people sleeping over, you know. So they told her it was time to go home. And she left. Then we had an argument, and we didn't speak for about three weeks. It seemed interminable. It was in February--about a month before she died--and then we came together. It was just so good to see her again--

Well, anyway, Ginny felt that she couldn't go back to her mother, and there was *no other* place to go. There was nothing she could do. Yes, I knew she was going to commit suicide. Or I guess part of me knew it. I don't know. What do you do when you're sixteen? I hoped that she wouldn't, and I felt powerless to stop her, except to pray. And you know how much good *that* does!

Then I went home. Her father called me that night asking if I'd seen Ginny. *And I lied.* I said *no.* He said she hadn't come home. *And I knew* then that she was going to do it. But I said nothing. What was there to say?

Next morning, her father called saying she was in Harlem Hospital. She had ridden the subway all night long, and then she'd stuffed arsenic into capsules and eaten it.

DAUGHTERS

holly lu conant

disunited nations

who are these foreigners who have landed on my body
planted flags between my breasts
charted trade routes and highways across my belly
all of my wildernesses have been homesteaded
by aliens and given discordant names

TOPOGRAPHICAL MAP ON FOLLOWING PAGE

this nation is not contained by surface geography
i have stratas of caverns and strange molten ores
which only a native could track

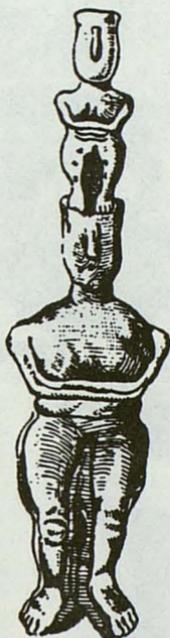
THE BORDERS ARE CLOSED

ALL COLONISTS WILL BE REPATRIATED

this is the motherland
i will not be settled

-holly lu conant

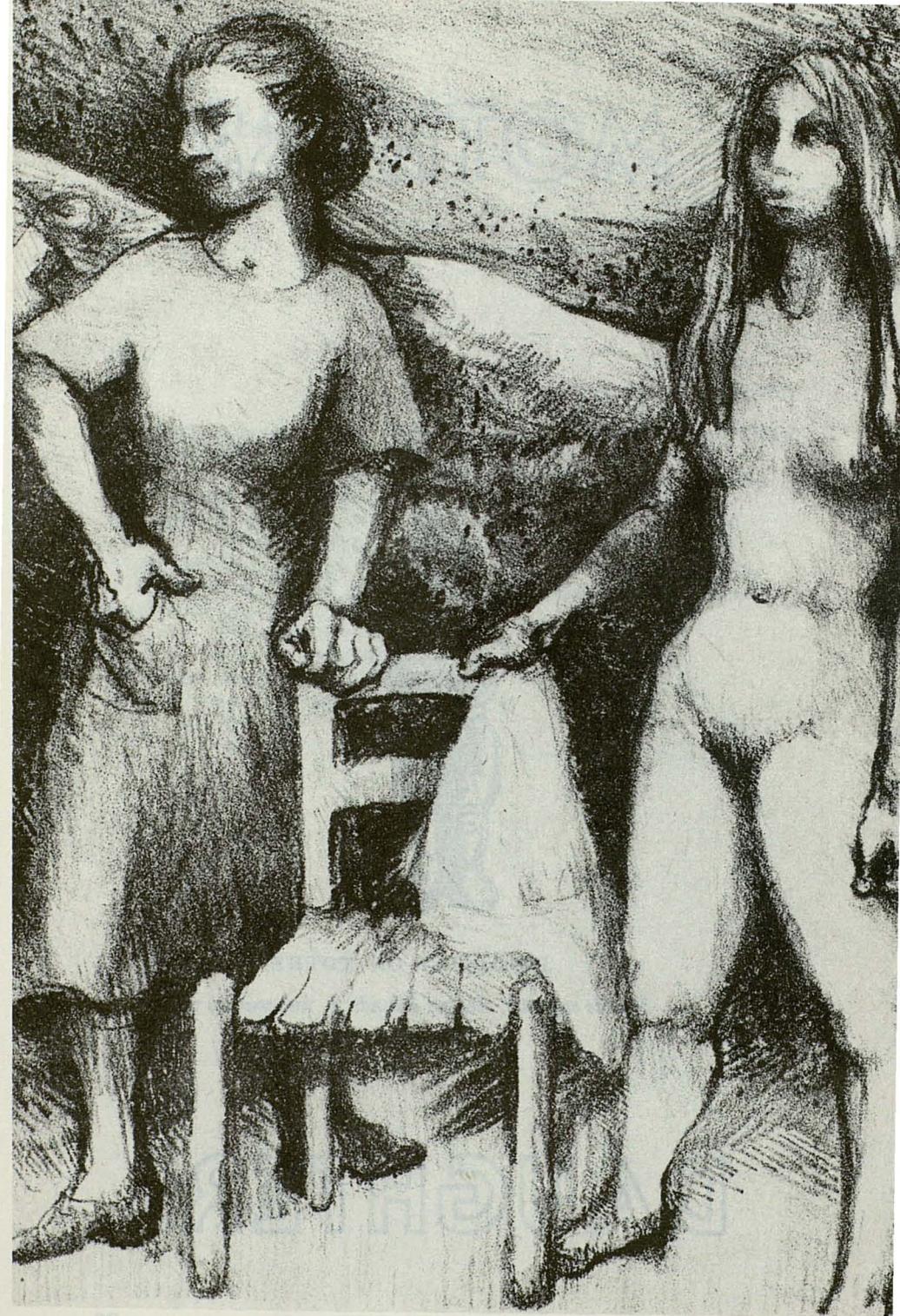
MOTHERS



DAUGHTER ON MOTHER'S HEAD

Marble statuette, Aegean Islands, c. XVI century B.C.

DAUGHTERS



Demeter & Persephone A/D

Maxime Liebenow

MIRIAM - DAUGHTER - MODEL

(How did you feel about posing nude?) I found it exciting and fun. I felt very much at ease. I remember telling mother that she was the only one who could take my picture; usually I'm intimidated by cameras...There was also a real, satisfying sense of sharing an experience with her.

(How did you feel when you first saw the photos?) I think I just stood there and giggled--that in-between modest and proud giggle--

(Did you see the image of your mother at first?) Yes. It stunned me for a moment--all of a sudden I see this dominating figure and realize it's my mother!

("Dominating mother" is conventionally a bad image...) But it's not here! When you think of a shadow, of what it means--and she is a shadow--she's not in the foreground, there is no face--but there is an obvious power, obvious effect on me...

(Did you feel that your mother's using you as a model was possessive of her?) No. Earlier I mentioned "sharing" and that's what it was. I remember as a child--from when she sculpted my head to when she painted me--I always enjoyed the fact that I was taking part in her creating something. I didn't feel at all that it was a possessive act of hers.

(Do you think your mother is unusual?) Yes. She's honest--painfully honest. Now I realize that she put a lot of herself into protecting my brother and me when we were children but in a way that let us be ourselves and make our own mistakes. A lot of my friends' mothers didn't, couldn't do that for fear of what *might* happen... And she took up for me a lot...

(What is your earliest recollection of her protection and support?) When I was about four, I guess, I used to masturbate on this stuffed animal. (My parents never stopped me, but they did suggest that I might like to go into my room, or watch TV or something.) One time when my grandmother was visiting, I dragged out my little stuffed dog, and boy, she hit the ceiling. I remember her screaming at me, telling me how awful I was and that what I was doing was awful, and my mother came in and sent her away. I remember this scene of their screaming at each other and me crying and not understanding what I had done wrong. But I remember, too, that my mother took up for me.

-miriam lieberman



MARIANNE - MOTHER - ARTIST

(Why did you choose to put yourself in the photograph?)
I didn't put myself in the picture; I put my shadow in the picture--as a protection--as a shell--to allow her to experience her body and her nudity as a positive and natural thing. How else am I going to express my joy in my relationship with my daughter unless I do something that is private and personal and that shows that relationship as contrary to society's stereotype of a mother-daughter relationship?

(How did it all come about?) It came about because I was studying women in myth and history and became interested in the Demeter-Persephone myth. First, I did my mother and me in a drawing and in a lithograph--a



media more suited to express my relationship with my own mother. Photography was a new medium to me; I was learning it and I felt it better suited to my relationship with my daughter because it would allow me a new insight, a new perception. It would be a challenge. Since it was a new skill for me, I'd be forced into new ways of seeing and there would be no chance of my falling into old patterns I'd developed with drawing and lithography. The difference in the two relationships demanded a new technique.

(Technically, how were the photos done?) I was standing outside the window and focusing into our house. Miriam was inside. The landscape and exterior of the house are reflected in the window glass. The reason for Miriam's existence in the photograph is the shadow I'm throwing into the room: I was blocking out a part of that reflection with my body and exposing her inside my shadow. In printing, I had to first expose the interior of my shadow, and then dodge that area to print in the reflection.

(Did you have a good time while taking these photos?) That's an understatement. It was like a flash--I suddenly realized the whole composition and what I would do and how to position myself, and the whole procedure took only 30 minutes; suddenly things clicked and there it was and it was simple. I didn't realize how complicated they would look until photographers began asking, how did you do this? or saying, it's obviously a montage, and I said no, it's not a montage, it's one negative, one exposure. It was almost like giving birth to Miriam a second time. In fact, her actual birth was a wonderful experience for me.

And I recall a comment of a student artist who was my daughter's age: "It's amazing--she's standing there as if she were wearing her confirmation dress--her coming-out dress--as if she weren't conscious of being nude!"

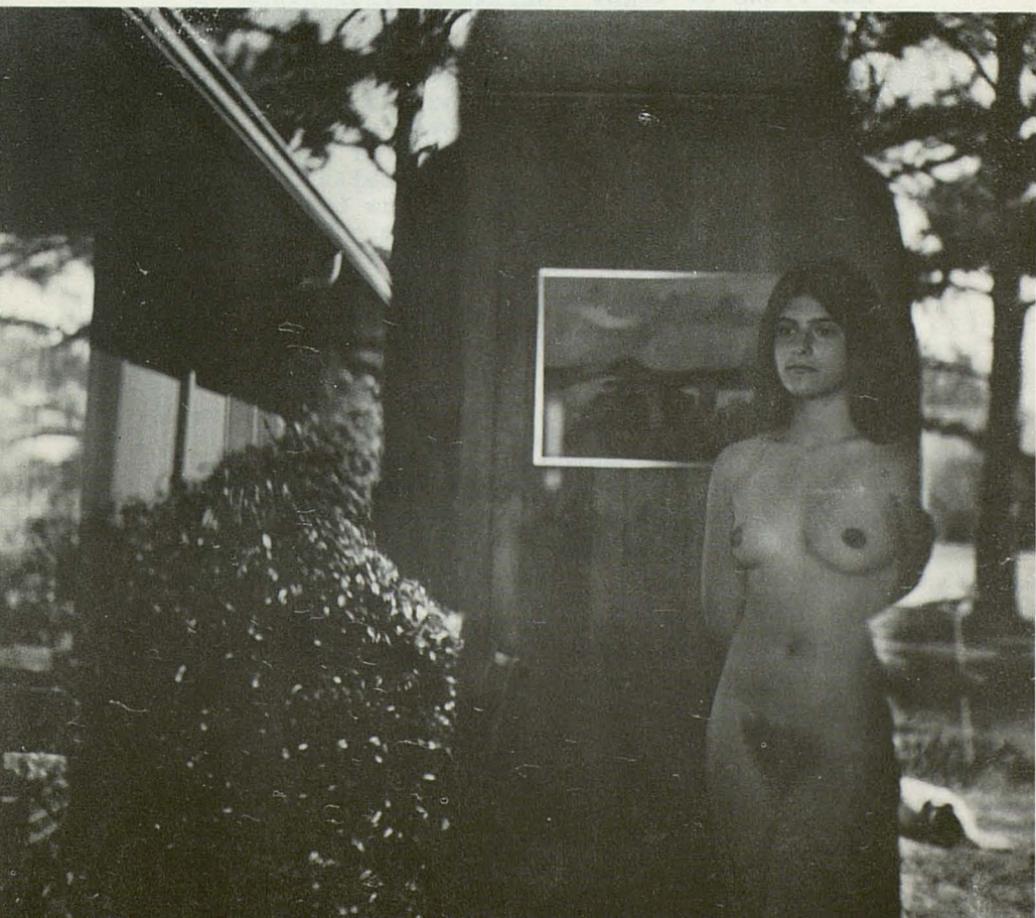
(...as though she were ritually costumed. So these are ritual photographs?) You might say that. The painting in the background--it was done ten years earlier than the photos--is an exploration in green that turned out to be a cave painting. There's something like a little primitive shrine in front of the cave. I moved the painting so that it could be in the picture. I wasn't conscious at the time of why I wanted it there, but I must have related it to something in the Demeter and Persephone myth.

(What was your relationship with your daughter at the time you took these photos?) I knew that it was a very difficult time in her life--a very exciting time--and I wanted to be able to reaffirm that, in spite of the difficulties a teenaged woman has, all the treacheries and pitfalls of teenage life, in spite of all that, I wanted her to have some memory of its also being positive and joyous. I wasn't given that, and if I had been I feel that it might have changed my life to a great degree.

I wanted to give her time--an excerpt--a quiet moment where she will remember that I allowed her to experience her body beautifully and to free her spirit so that she could go on from there---

marianne lieberman

PHOTOS BY MARIANNE LIEBERMAN



TWO WOMEN AT THE LUXEMBOURG

caught once again
ignoring shamelessly the celebrated
sailboats, churches, water
lilies, painted light

they hang here through December,
two months yet!

 across the crowd
a tiny woman, one arm drawn
around her daughter's waist,
is diagramming with her left hand
colors, the relationships of shapes
and flows of light
her hand rises and falls
as with authority
inflections in her voice exactly
playing over, amplify
the lined smile in her words,
the corners of her mouth,
her grey green eyes

her daughter's eyes are larger
and brown green; her images
float on their placid surface,
slowly are absorbed, and sink
uncertainly a nascent smile
rises rippling, gathering
direction, waits

 she holds herself still
seems to stand beside behind
this woman, watching on the terrace
walking through a field of poppies
wave cresting on wave

monica raymond

sappho on seventy-second street

do anything you want but don't
tell me about it says my mother
this on the subject
of cutting up some mushrooms
to fry in butter
while the rest of the family
has hamburger my sister Lucille
is playing *la dame aux camellias*
with a headcold my youngest sister
is flirting with me giving me
pokes in the ribs while the middle one
has just come back from her first day at work
at *Moneysworth* magazine
the entire house smells of paint
they are throwing out
old biographies of George Washington
I probe in the boxes
for valuable juvenilia
but there is only
a book called *Manmade Satellites*
I rejected when I was eight
this is the mother and sisters
you all have been raving about you lovers
of matriarchy no wonder my friends
take off for different cities or centuries
to find some woman to worship
envy sappho
on her island the present day
equivalent probably Vassar
where everything was lotus and palpitation
freed from old ties and family except for
that daughter who wore fresh flowers in her hair
whose words moreover like the antique columns
stripped of their gilt and paint
are burnished clean
of the stringy strands
the gristle of daily connections
by the twin mercies of time and mistranslation

in search of a lost woman--

by wendy stevens

They say the woman who lives down the street is a witch. she lives all alone in the brick front house at the end of the block, closest to the water. she rarely has any visitors, she doesn't seem to have any relatives--no children. the only ones who are ever seen coming and going from the house are older women like herself. neighbors say they do magic when they are together. they confer on new spells and gather energy like other women gather spare balls of yarn. sometimes it is said that howls and giggles shake the panes of her windows. but the blinds are always drawn, so, more difficult to imagine than clattering windows is the face of the woman, who is said to sporadically look out the top floor window, which faces the ocean. there is no inlet here and so the waves come right up to the shore. before she moved into the house there had been many storms, one storm had blown the roof off her very house. it used to be that once every two years or so the waves would push through the beach wall and roam the streets, leaving books and fish and salt and cars mingled.

the slices of apples sit at the bottom of a plastic bowl. i peel grapefruit as if it were a revealing gift, a premonition. the luxury of summer is so easily forgotten - it is impossible to sweat its memory, but the taste of the salads of summer, the berries, peaches, grapes, plums and melon remain, making winter salads of apples, bananas and citrus, waxy imitations.

i'm going to be all the way to manie's before dad gets home, watching the pinball machine twitch and jangle like how i imagine people look as they are electrocuted. lately dad comes home from working the swing shift and hollers:

-hell, why does this place always look like its gonna cave in the next stiff wind that blows. no matter what i do, he whines, there is always a leak or a pipe busting or a floor board coming up. there is no keeping up with this place, it's like dressing a spoiled woman in furs.

and i'll say:

-but dad this is our home and it's been our home almost all my life.

-it's nothing but a damn summer bungalow for rich people that we live in all year round like regular people.

the other half of the argument goes like this--

i scream:

-why the hell do i have to be stuck out here in almost the middle of no where. there is hardly anyone for me to talk to....

and my father says:

-but kisper, this is your home and if your mother hadn't deserted you when you was six she'd be the one to stay and take care of me. but i can't be here alone, now can i?

-oh you and this damn bungalow, it's like being in a paper mache cage.

i have only one clear memory of my mother, from right before she left. we had been sent home from school early cause they thought there was going to be a nuclear attack. it was raining very hard and the thunder and the lightning slashed the beach air like a siren. mother took me into the bathroom and pulled down a brown bottle from the medicine cabinet. this is poison, she said, when the bomb is dropped it is going to be terrible. millions of people will die, millions more will suffer and then die. it will bring this ugly world to a very ugly end. but you and i should not have to go through this. she held the bottle out for my inspection. -when the bomb drops, we will run into the bathroom and you'll drink this. she placed a small bottle on top of the sink, within my reach. -and i'll take this one, she pointed to her bottle still in the medicine cabinet. -there is no point going through this, let the men who make the wars suffer. i will not suffer for them.

all afternoon i sat sunken in a chair next to my mother, who read aloud to me as if we were awaiting a dental appointment. each time the thunder slashed i looked up for a signal to self-destruct. what do bombs sound like, how will we know when it is THE BOMB? will we have time to run into the bathroom and say good-bye and then drink our clear liquids and slowly ooze onto the linoleum floor? will mom make sure i finish mine before she drinks hers or will we hold hands as we slink out from under the bomb like jumping off rocks into chilly waters with a friend. the next morning when no bomb had come, i woke and went to the bathroom to wash my face. so this was where we were to sacrifice ourselves to the thunder. but the bottle was gone. i told my father the 'thunder and liquid death instead of bomb suffering' story and he swore and said that crazy witch of a no good woman, trying to kill herself and you -- no wonder she left.

-left? no, i said, maybe the bomb fell and killed her when she wasn't near enough to the bathroom?

whenever there was a rainstorm i would hold my pee until my body pumped against me. years later when i

would argue with my father i would threaten to go join my mother and he would answer something like: i didn't see her leave you no directions as to where to find her when you needed her, now did she?

i would run into the bathroom and latch the door, sitting there scrunched between the shower and the wall. this was the last place i remembered seeing her.

i put a note on the salad and slide it next to a plate filled with sliced roast. i stretch plastic wrap tightly over the meat but it snaps in the middle like a guitar string.

a concrete but distant memory remains. younger, i felt that i was not from this world. i believed that just before my mother was to give birth, i was substituted into her womb by beings from other spaces. no one but i knew, and i just suspected. i was aware, as a child, of an energy cycle which would culminate in a drained sensation about every two months. after being put to sleep a high-pitched tone would charge my ears and the next morning i was vitalized again, ready to begin another two months. i imagined i had power, power no one knew of. i could zap people with my eyes and my long stares could transfer energy and create subtle misfortunes for those who deserved it. perhaps, it was an illusion; but only because i could never realize or validate it on my own. by naming it 'illusion' i discredited myself and did their work for them.

not very long ago and not very far away from here there lived a woman whose name you carry -- kisper. kisper's great, great grandmother, celine, had lived in france not far from the small villages the ancient culture of faeries had created. celine was a seamstress and she sewed the secrets the faeries had shared with her onto the insides of skirts and blouses, carrying their mystical knowledge with her wherever she went.

each afternoon, celine, bundled in a shawl with a basket of threads and cloth, would stroll to the fields and wait by the huge shading tree for ralina. ralina was much older than celine, she walked very slowly to their shared space. the tiny figure crossing the last pasture would always excite celine, who was drawn to the intensity with which ralina walked on the ground. celine said ralina walked as if she were a tree spreading its roots rapidly, meshing with the ground, paying homage to the animals as she passed.

sometimes celine and ralina would sit till past dark, voyaging into the deep knowledge that ralina carried. they talked of healing, they talked of living with the plants and animals which nurtured and sustained them. celine's hands were constantly moving thread through cloth, thread through cloth, as her mind held tightly

to ralina's words... white cedar tea for woman pains, thistle and stoneseed for contraception... and for my daughter who suffers such severe headaches? celine asked ralina.

there was great patience between the women, patience which is carved on walls of respect. as it began to get dark celine would gather her material which lay across her and each woman would turn in her own direction; ralina to the rising moon, celine toward the setting sun.

one late afternoon celine arrived at the shading tree to find ralina already there, forcefully pressing her hands to the ground, her eyes impatiently awaiting celine's attention.

-what is the matter, celine asked.

-i have come upon some knowledge which i must share with you. i have kept it as long as one dares, preparing you for this moment which can no longer be ignored. the people with whom i grow have been dwindling. the world around us shrivels in violence and dissonance, we cannot survive. what use is there for healing and harmony in a world which counters that very notion? we are disruptive to their ideals, we are sorcerers of evil -- they have justified our extinction.

celine's arms fell around the small woman. there was little she could say.

-take what you have learned from me, celine, and pass it on, for people will continue to dream and seek ways to stay healthy and to understand their sleeping and waking -- that knowledge cannot be denied. take the respect my culture has for women and instill it in your girl-child and hers' after that. i will no longer be able to venture past my dwelling. weave with strong thread for all must learn the difference between strength and power.

that was the last time celine saw ralina; she waited for the small woman to disappear into the moon's horizon before she lifted herself from the ground and walked to the ravaging sunset before her.

the knowledge celine carried was dangerous. women with whom celine shared these insights were considered be-deviled and more powerful than any woman should be. they were beaten and burned for their knowing; girl-children destroyed for their potential. the threads of knowledge survived and were carried to this country, as were small pieces of people's history, hidden in hollowed books and gutted brains awaiting better times. kisper's grandmother brought her heritage to this land telling celine's tale directly to kisper for kisper's mother refused to listen to the knowledge that would endanger her life.

kisper took to celine's task: she proclaimed her knowledge with the vigor of a saint. celine's strength seemed to carry kisper's blood. she knew that the isolation of ralina's people had fostered their des-

truction, allowing them to be erased with hardly crumbs left behind as a trail. she was burned, as were nine million other women, as a witch. and so i name you kisper.

i calculate carefully, cause it is hard sitting around manie's too long. mostly the men who go there sit and complain about having four children to clothe and feed and if only their wives wouldn't spend so much money. they joke about the last time they took their wives to bed or about the way a woman's body stretches to bear six children -- it's like fucking a sail that's luffing.

-you take hazel and i'll take vernel. i'll trade you, at least vernel has tits.

-why'd you marry hazel if she didn't have tits?

-well, half a woman's better than no woman at all, right boy?

and i know these women, i see vernel and hazel and martha every week in the grocery and at the laundermat, juggling babies and packages, maintaining soft voices when i would be screaming, then losing their tempers and slapping their children with 'i don't know who else to slap for this mess' looks on their faces. this one woman hazel has it real bad. she got an infection in her womb and they went and took it all out and sent her home to her six kids to rest, with this medicine to put up her. the medicine didn't agree with her; it actually blistered and crusted her insides like someone had put a firecracker up her for a prank. she had to go back to the hospital again and you can imagine how angry sammy was then. he would come to manie's, consume twice as much beer and then he would yell to hazel at the wall:

-why'd you go and do this. you're doing a good job of making me miserable, hazel. you've been trying to do it for years and now you've succeeded, leaving me with six children to care for while you lay in bed with your legs up in the air like you was waiting for one of those handsome interns to come in and snuggle on down inbetween them -- 'cept there's nothing left for you to offer him. that'll teach you.

-but it's not hazel's fault, sammy. i finally interrupted one night. the men around me looked up. the only other thing people had said to him was -- it could happen to any of us, sammy.

-can't you imagine how awful hazel feels knowing that she has had to leave you with the kids, how awful she must feel knowing that you had to bring your mother into your house and she sweeps twice in places hazel doesn't even have time to look. she'd much rather be with you and the kids, i'm sure.

i wasn't real sure where hazel would rather be. i'm sure if she could have made a list, i don't think sammy's house would have been on the top, but never mind.

before the silence let up in the bar that night i walked out and home. but first i walked toward the beach, only as far as the wall. i pulled myself on top of it and instead of watching the ocean i faced the so-called witch's house and stared at the closed curtains, hoping if i stared hard enough i would catch a glimpse through the woven shades. i imagined the room filled with women chanting and moving to their voices. i imagined the large spaces of the house full of pulsating dark, lit by candles. i imagined the force of a room filled with such women, women who were not afraid. women who carried their strength throughout themselves, carrying it with tenderness and brilliance, the way young women carry potential. the way breakfast appears silently, from women's hands while everyone sleeps; the quick silent motions no one ever notices.

i am helaina. i was born a woman in the state of massachusetts -- not an old witch at that. the house i grew in was within the walls of a prison. my father was the director of a federal penitentiary and so i grew with bars on my windows -- iron. i could look out and see the huge building in the distance, there too, there were bars on every window. in fantasy, the prison was a castle of a cruel nobleman who kept me captive in my small room. the bars on his windows, all those windows, were to protect his riches from bandits and thieves. but that fooling child's play could not counter the demising sense which hung like a low tent stretched from guard tower to guard tower, from east to west wall. my father would take me into the prison building with him sometimes; a child's sense of justice does not allow for prisons. there is little within a child that allows for cages.

if witches are those who see through the opaque rules and powers, then all children are witches. witches are the women who would not ignore their strength, who did not submit to the assumed power. all women became viewed as bearers of forbidden powers, all women traitors to their men -- harbors for secrets, greedy sewers for male juices.

there are paths between the smaller houses which make the walk to manie's much quicker and block the chill coming off the water. the houses are still and glow an invisible solitude. i feel eerie as if an unsettling wind has begun to blow at me. i want to take things between my fingers and break them into small bits, crumpling them to morsels; i want to test my strength against walls. i realize i have never swung at anything full force; i begin to cry. i will get myself a good strong drink when i get to manie's, i deserve it. manie's is a low slung bar. it is a dark wet place with drier spots where the bodies of men huddle and the light reflects through the clusters of orange bottles.

there is the caked smell of salt one becomes immune to after living by the ocean for many years, the smell of salt rotting wood and metal which makes children think of salt as a hungry beast.

i am helaina -- an old witch perhaps -- hidden and anonymous as i must remain because i have struck out against the powers who make bomb deaths. long ago, i would have sacrificed myself and my child to them, knowing that i wanted no part, unaware of the force of my survival. they hunt me now, afraid of our combined knowledge which calculates their disappearance.

heads turn as i walk into manie's. why we bother to turn around is beyond me, but heads whip about like bobbing dolls in the back windows of cars, as the men leave their drinks for a minute and nod my name, kisper, kisper, kisper.

where did you get a strange name like that lady, like kiss and whisper, heh?

-what's the occasion, sam shouts at me. you aren't usually here on wednesday nights.

-i needed to get out.

-can i buy you a drink?

-no, no it's okay, i got my own money. i can get my own, but thanks. manie, make me a bourbon and ginger ale.

there is confusion here tonight, it feels like young boys waiting for a parade or young men waiting to get into the back room with robin glober -- 'they can't wait another minute cause it isn't going to be there if it doesn't happen right now' feeling.

last summer, some boys came in from the city to stay the weekend. while on the beach, they stopped to get soft ice cream from robin, who was working behind her parents' concession. the boys noticed that robin had her hands full watching her brother thomas and serving customers, so they offered to let thomas spend the day with them, playing football, swimming and horsing around, like young men do so well. thomas begged and begged and sulked until robin just sent him off with the city boys. the day went easily without thomas to look after and wrestle with. the boys stopped back somewhat later and asked robin if it wouldn't be okay to head down the beach with thomas and have her pick him up at their cabin. robin asked if this wasn't an awful burden, for she knew what spending a day with thomas could be. they laughed and said they were having a swell time, no problems. after work, robin rode her bike over to the fancy cabins on the channel side. surprisingly, thomas was asleep. the boys were sitting down to dinner and invited robin to join them. they were having steak and baked potatoes, there was cole slaw and potato salad and loads of beer. robin said at

first, she felt like a princess, sitting with the seven handsome boys.

she hardly knew when it all began. she had gone to look around the cabin when one of the boys cornered her and told her he thought she was very fine looking. he asked if he could kiss her. she had never had a boy ask like that before. he pressed himself against her like an axe presses itself into wood and rubbed his smooth skin on her neck. before long they were barely clothed on the double bed in the back room and she began to feel nauseous, a belly full of food and a salty flavor coming from all parts of him. there is no saying when but the door slipped open and one of the other boys walked through the bedroom to the toilet, coming out naked and pushing the other boy aside. he shoved his tongue and penis in and out of her. she looked to the first tender boy who was transfixed on the other boy's penis as it appeared and disappeared, and was swallowed and spit up and forced down again. then more boys came in.

she didn't scream. she didn't want thomas to wake up and run in to find her smothered in come and sweat. she arched her back against the flat-bodied boys, tossing from side to side until they took to holding her, cutting their jolly panting through her skin. they were gathered around the bed mocking her silence with their noise, dangling their soupy cocks. she remained awake, squeezing the muscles inside her vagina, closing herself off. how could god have done this to women, she thought, given them just an open channel with no door, no way to say no, and given men needs like cats in constant heat. when the boys ran dry, still huffing with energy, they took the leftover salad and began to rub it into her.

the city boys didn't pack up and leave the next day the way i would have expected them to, but everyday they would pass by the concession and not say a word. thomas would say hi to them and plead with robin to let him go play with them.

-they're my pals, robin. how come i can't go?

-no, cause i said no. we wouldn't want to bother them anymore than we already have.

she swallowed the smells of the cole slaw, the way women ingest modern medicine, sacrificing whole breasts to greedy physicians; their insides tied in secret knots, the combinations buried with all the other brown and red women.

sam is sitting at the bar, he has taken what looks like his old high school jacket and draped it over the chair of the nearest table to the bar. sam is talking to charley about the retired couples who come down here to the coast and spend their days fishing, thinking they know what they are doing with their expensive poles and lines. charley agrees, but sam sits there, still try-

ing to convince him what fools those retired people are and charley once again agrees.

i pull a chair out, to share the table with sam's jacket. the chubby men and women who stand in the cold water with their waders hanging like riding britches over their thick thighs are always smiling at one another, sitting there with their lounge chairs in six inches of sea water, the waves running through the aluminum legs, they might as well be reading the sunday paper or quilting together, the way they sit so patiently in one spot with lunch and afternoon snack on the trunk of their chevrolets. they always wave, as i walk past, down along the beach. i have no patience for fishing -- to me it is like waiting an hour for a pinball machine to warm up. hoping i was not born to die here, i order another bourbon. sometimes when i think about what i would rather be doing i get more confused, there seems a whole world out there and so i sip my bourbon. i wish my mother were sitting on the seat sam's coat is taking up, sipping her bourbon, telling me what she felt like when she was my age. when i go to the city, rich women on buses, wearing fur-colored coats smile at me and i hope they are not my mother. my mother is somewhere though, watching over me, making sure i am okay from a distance, unable to reveal herself. she is the witch down the street, casting spells on my father through me, like the asbestos contamination of families brought home on miners' clothes. the insides of my body feel coated with the syrupy bourbon color. i hear sam ask me what i am thinking about.

-what am i thinking about? about someday being away from here and you had the option sam and you didn't take it.

-had the option. who do you think is dealing this game, it's not me or anyone remotely related to me.

-sorry sam, i know, a wife and kids, inheriting a fishing business. those of us who were born with sweat for saliva understand.

-when i was younger, a few years back, i left this bungalow island and traveled to the west as far as kansas. i met people there who had never seen the ocean. they didn't know what waves looked like beating against the sides of a boat like a crazy man playing drums. i didn't know what i wanted to do with myself, i thought i might have wanted to be a farmer. i met an old man one night, looniest man i ever met, crazier than luke and my wife combined. he walked into the bar i was sitting in, drinking tomato juice and beer, i was missing the ocean worse than i had ever missed a woman. he just walked up and said: you can starve a man's stomach but not his spirit -- feed that first. that was all he said and though i thought him crazy, i headed east the next morning, thumbing my way back in three days.

i got up suddenly and put on my coat.

-good night, sam, i pushed in my chair and didn't look around the room once more.

i headed toward the beach instead of walking home along the road. there was hardly a wind blowing now, but the smell still rested everywhere. i walked on the sand, watching the lighthouse illuminations bob on the water. the beam skimmed the ocean like skipping rocks and there was no one but myself and the tumbling ocean. there is no human sound which can match the ocean; no other voice which asks and answers so many questions. i watched the beach wall, checking the corner houses so i could tell how close i was getting to her house. most of the houses along the wall were not bungalows, many of them were made of brick, built to withstand the force of the water as it came through the wall. many of them had large glass windows facing the water and porches with canvas awnings in summer.

the two-story house with the attic window, which looked on over the water appeared at the next corner, set back a few feet from the road, resting against the beach wall. i walked faster, hoisted myself up onto the wall, and watched her house, waiting like coral to be picked up and carried.

there on top of the beach wall, some feather ferns had sprouted; not many, just a few had made their way through and i leaned to touch them in the night. there has been a time, i am told, when ferns were much more prevalent -- but they are so delicate and now is not a time for delicate things -- there will be time again for them later. i stroked the fragile growths.

i stared at the house, bracing one hand against the wall. and there by the side window a curtain parted and a woman revealed her face to me. she smiled knowingly and drew the curtain closed again.

i rushed from the wall and down the street toward my house, inebriated with her face. i rummaged through the closet in our hallway and pulled down a shoebox. leafing through the photographs, i searched for that young woman posed beside a small girl-child. i stared, creating wrinkles and lines and pushing the hair back off her face. i looked at my own face in the mirror, by the bathroom sink and conjured up the smiling face next to the curtain, through the beach window.

i didn't knock at that woman's door. helaina is my journey, it is my door i opened. when i am sad, i am hunted like a runaway slave by the men who think i can lure their power from them by just looking their way, and helaina seems just an isolated and ignored older woman, cast off like ashes at sea. at better moments, helaina and i burn nine million of them, one for every woman sacrificed to the bomb gods.

debbie allison

AN ELEGY: A VINDICATION

mother

I'll write of you
one more time
but not this time
of your anguish

we both know enough of it

mama

I have repaid your labor pains
completing my birth
as a woman
years after my head said it was time

the child
hurts too being born
I know
wondering discovering
is mine again
now not a child

mother
if you had not died
if it had not killed you
I would be mother now
to you
and tell you
you were not wrong
to look for yourself
find yourself
in the love
in the arms
of another woman.

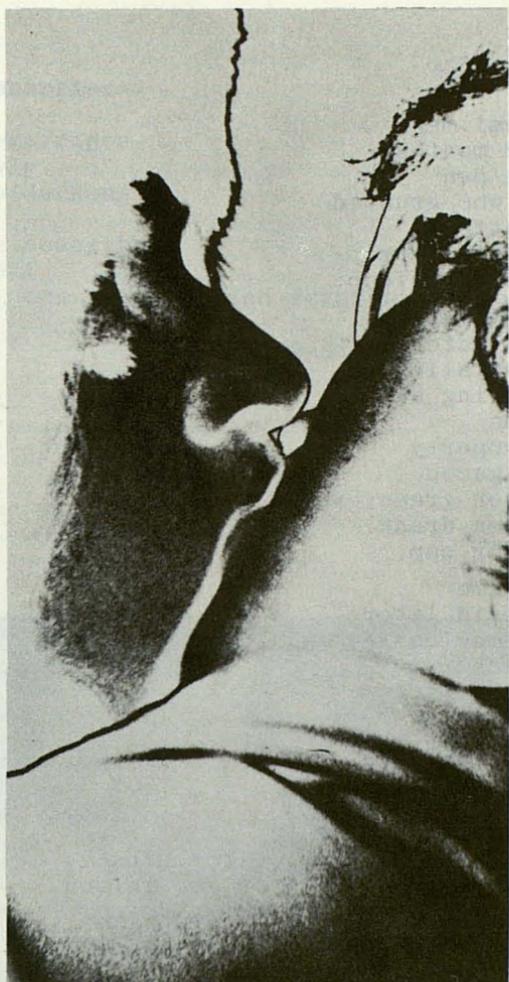


photo by tee corinne

LOVERS

judith mcdaniel

Circe's Cup

Ulysses' men
got 12 months
in the pen
swine who grunted
and rutted
for just one sip
from Circe's cup.

Himself sank
into a haze
of bestiality
forgetting wife
and son
and property
as he gazed
into her green eyes
and then drank
from her cup.

Her crime
they said later
to themselves
a breach
of hospitality
Civilization
can not survive.

He flees
toward home
his men drop
one by one
into the sea
arrives alone
waits
for the fog
to lift.

Circe sits
on her island
not alone
I linger gladly
her scent
water-heavy
and I drink
to intoxication
lick salt from her
neck and nipples
and sip
from her soft
cup
when I move
into her lap
the sea breaks
over my head
and I dive
into a new memory.

Raspberries

Others ripen
slowly
into darkness;
You
hide beneath
a leaf
and come in swift and fragrant redness.

-Judith McDaniel



photo by tee corinne

DIAMONDS FOR DANDY'S LADY

-by hadden luce

(for the wildest card ever drawn)

Dandelion got the nickname Dandy because she was something of a wild thing, something of a sport, and something of a modified Don Juan-Quixote in quest of a woman poet with whom to make literary and cosmic whoopy. She told me this the first day she stopped by to look at the diamonds. At first, these words hit somewhere in between our Irish blue eyes.

Dandy also wore expensive clothes, a timeless crowd-pleaser, and she got on well with strangers. The Baptist preacher in the small town where she grew up wanted her to use the best of her bright social smile for the glory of God. He offered to pray for her, that her wildness might be transfigured into sweetness and light. Dandy said, "thank you anyway, but I'm a tomboy, a cultural anarchist. I'd rather play tennis, ride horses, and write poems about graceful jump shots that win my gym teacher's favor."

Permit me, here, to ask a question: What's a middle-aged store-clerking mother of four daughters to do when she learns that lesbians are actually walking the streets in broad daylight? I mean it's either fall apart or try patiently to understand. I was so shocked I went to the branch library in my neighborhood and checked out every book listed in the card catalog on human sexuality. Dandy was so cute and so carried away with her beloved. I thought, how can this be bad? No valentine of mine ever gave me diamonds.

One November night when she was feeling good about herself and strong about growing from girlhood into brave maturity, Dandy wandered into the local lesbian bar, where she spotted a long-time acquaintance who repeatedly felt compelled to remark about the firm roundness of her sweater-girl breasts.

"We've got a table," said the friend. "Come meet Sophia Gordian. I've wanted you to meet this lady for years."

Yes, yes, thought Dandy, that woman I saw at the writer's conference last spring! She dropped a smile over her shoulder that felled me in my tracks. As Adrienne Rich spoke about connectedness among women, my life became inexplicably connected to the back of her head, and ultimately intertwined in her long, graying

hair. Crossing my legs, I prayed I wouldn't fall off my chair.

Dandelion was obviously gutsy, but in the matter of Sophia Gordian, she went out on a limb stretching across the universe and back. Her heart took off like a frenzied mare, with frivolous thoughts leaping toward exquisite illuminations on the meaning of life and art. Sophia Gordian wrecked Dandy's ability to concentrate on the bar-room games that buzzed like mosquitos around the edges of her life.

"You're a bright child...and you know it?" Sophia asked, blessing the loud and frantic bar with a smile more calming than brandy on a winter night.

"Yes," Dandy replied arrogantly, her sweaty hands clutching the chair for a handle on this handsome woman's power. "I'm looking for people to feed it."

"Come see me."

"When?"

"Soon."

Sooner than Sophia could grade her impending set of papers, Dandy appeared on campus to carry her books home from school. In her leather folder, she had a partially worked poem, outlining their wonderfully bright and productive future together.

"I'm surprised," Sophia said, with hints of coy shyness. "I didn't really think you'd come."

"I had to keep you guessing."

"I see," Sophia smirk-smiled. "The mystery behind manners."

"An act of Faith," Dandy said irascibly. "The string that holds together the sack of chicken feed."

"Metaphor at its best."

"As metaphors for living go."

"Art copies life. Angles, revisions, editions. You know?"

Dandy told me the story of their second meeting the second time she stopped to check on the diamonds. I have to say I didn't understand that angle-revision stuff, but it didn't matter. Dandy's excitement made my day. When a woman works six days a week in a department store, she gets pretty fed up with frantic men stalking around like ding-bats to buy some thing to keep some sucker in her place. When she sees joy on somebody's face, she starts to wonder what it's all about. You know? There's got to be more to life than getting through it with a stiff upper lip.

"Do you think she'll like these?" Dandy asked me.

"Why, I couldn't say. I don't know her."

"She's got a mind like a diamond."

"Then I'm sure..."

"Do you think the gold part looks like a peacock's tail?"

"I've never seen a real peacock, but I'd say it'll pass."

"I better purchase these with much dispatch before somebody else does. Should I?"

"Diamond earrings are awfully precious to give someone you've only known two months."

"But I've been looking for her all my life! Weird, symbolic stuff keeps happening to me, like I met her on my grandmother's birthday, and yesterday when I somehow knew she was thinking about me, a baby owl landed on the hood of my car. It just sat there, peered at me, then flew off. Besides, she has gorgeous ears!"

"Dandy, you've got a big heart. What if she breaks it?"

The next morning at 10 a.m., Dandy was waiting for the doors to open. After a terrible morning trying to get the kids to school, the dog to the vet, and the husband out of my hair about the light bill, I felt at low ebb. What in the name of Colonel Sanders am I supposed to do? Fry chicken in the pitch black? Lay golden eggs? Dandy looked like she might sink into the linoleum.

"Well," I punched her, "You made up your mind?"

"Yep. I'm going to lay my money on the table. I betrayed her. It was not only my parents' anniversary, but an ashtray in my apartment somehow mysteriously broke into two pieces that look like two broken hearts."

"Dandy! You mean you went off with another woman? Why? Why would you buy diamonds for one woman and then go off with another one?"

"I guess I lost my mind. I spend a lot of time trying to figure out if she really loves me. She's so refined, and I'm so rowdy. I feel like I have to prove myself to her over and over again. She scares me."

"You shouldn't ask why somebody loves you. You should be glad."

"I am glad, but she hurt my feelings. When I needed her, she left me. I apologized for needing her."

"Oh Dandy, you shouldn't ever do that. We all need each other."

"But I did. And all week long, that phrase kept going around in my head. She told me once that I was going to have to learn how to receive as well as give, and I apologized for needing her. I felt worthless."

Taking out her wallet, Dandy counted out her money.

"Maybe I'll just give them to my grandmother," she smiled wryly, "but that smacks of incest. N'est-ce pas?"

Diamonds for Dandy's Lady, I thought, I guess it's the age-old story of falling in love, whether a woman with a woman, or a kitten with a little girl who serves up its breakfast. We try to please, we want to do right, and sometimes we don't understand ourselves why we give people the power to hurt us. When we give that power, we want to take it away. We want to blame the other person for making us love. Why is it that way?

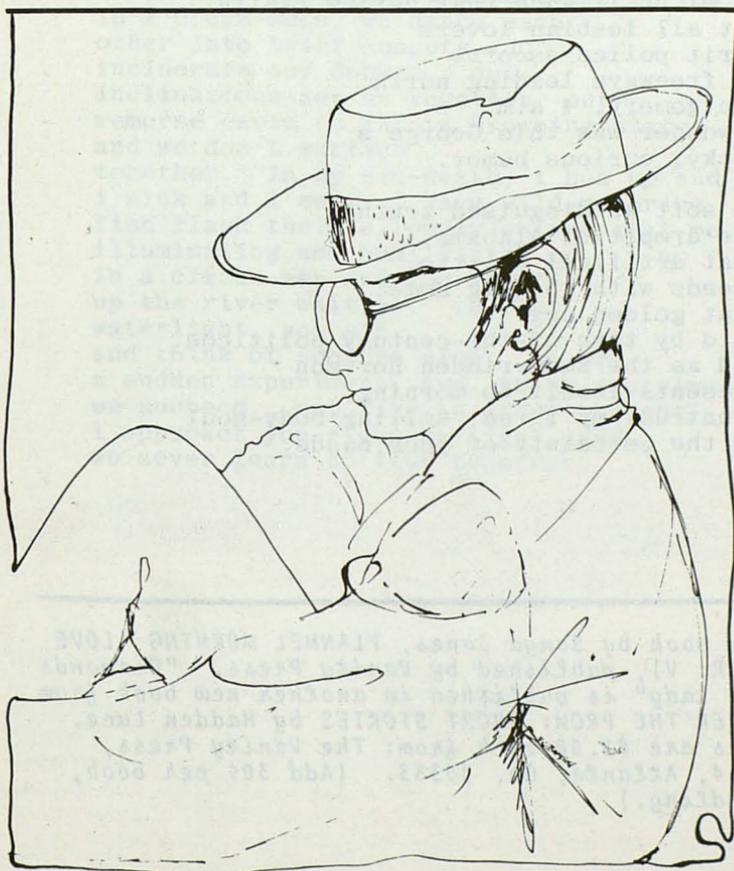
I guess it's got something to do with that string that holds the chicken feed inside the sack. And even if it's a supermarket edition, or a summer re-run that's played a hundred times, it still hurts. Love makes a woman want to give away her soul, and that's pretty blasted scary. Surely there's a blend somewhere between giving and receiving, between the woman and the little girl.

"I need a beer," Dandy growled, her full lips narrowing into a pout. "Can I borrow a dollar?"

"I'll buy you one," I said firmly. "I'm sick of selling diamonds six days a week to lovers and other suckers."

"You ever been to a lesbian bar?"

"Nope. But open the door, Dandelion, let's step out in the sunshine and find us some real peacocks. Then, if you have to camp outside that woman's heart for the rest of the week, I want you to follow your heart on down the line. The story's not over till you draw the last straw - and who knows? - souls and diamonds are a lot alike. Even if you try to hide them in a henhouse, they don't rust."



Luce at St. Simon's Island, June 1951
--from the cover of AFTER THE PROM

sonya jones

FLANNEL MORNING

Alloy my fears, dear V,
I am oddly diffident
as I hasten toward
the frantic city;
my skin remembers more clearly
the skin beneath your flannel gown
than the work I must round out
this winter day.

Think of unintended irony;
steel brilliance that defies finity:
Not all lesbian lovers
merit police escorts
to freeways leading north;
Montgomery, 4 a.m.,
I wonder was this George's
cocky, curious humor.

As soft as disguised truth,
the armpit of Alabama,
that artificial mulatto,
breeds with the big dome,
that golden egg
laid by turn-of-the-century politicians.
And as the smog-ridden horizon
presents itself to morning,
I entrust my tired, smiling body-soul
to the certainty of your hands.

-from a new book by Sonya Jones, *FLANNEL MORNING (LOVE SONGS FOR DR. V)*, published by Vanity Press. "Diamonds for Dandy's Lady" is published in another new book from Vanity, *AFTER THE PROM: SHORT STORIES* by Hadden Luce. Both volumes are \$3.00 each from: The Vanity Press, PO Box 15064, Atlanta, Ga. 30333. (Add 30¢ per book, postage/handling.)

devi kathryn hunt

jean/our disappointments

in some after-dream, all my
memories of you are shattered
and you return.
in that other-life, we approach
each other night by night
but don't learn how to live together. in
that awful under-laugh, we betray each other,
we kiss each other goodbye.
there are possibilities, but we
don't reach them together.
in an idiot-thought, i come close to you.
in a dream-mess, we dance each
other into brief sunsets and
incinerate our doubts. our
inclinations sew us together, our
remorse casts us into a drowning state
and we don't surface
together. in my sea-death, i bob up and down,
i sink and i swim, i have wild-memories.
fish flash their slippery whispers at me,
illuminating and humiliating me. i am
in a circus-web and you aren't
up the river waiting. in that
waterlight, you sit
and think of someone else. we are
a sudden experiment, and, as an experiment,
we succeed. but like an after-thought,
i approach you night by night, and
we never learn to live together.

ELEMENTS

*I say I have been trying to write
of danger: a woman
falling, starlike, into
another woman's life
making a hole in the roof*

-Jan Clausen, "A Sense of Reality"

but we Virgos
being an earth sign, anticipate
and make provision:
I was living on the top floor
with a skylight open to the stars
when she rained on me, moistening
every hollow in my body
till green plants pushed through
my skin, turning a hundred faces
toward the light

the danger, then
was not the hole but the roof

ANITA BRYANT: A LESBIAN VIEW



-photo courtesy of The Free Press

ATLANTA "GAY" PRIDE MARCH
JUNE 25, 1977

In response to the June 7th repeal of "gay" rights in Dade County, thousands of Lesbians led or participated in demonstrations of Lesbian and "gay" pride. Many brought a strong feminist presence and analysis to the marches. On the following pages are excerpts from speeches given by two of these women. Adrienne Rich spoke to a Lesbian rally while Elizabeth Knowlton spoke to a mixed audience, but--in these two very different contexts--both said strikingly similar things about the "Save Our Children" forces and their spokeswoman...

ATLANTA

...Before I end, I want to say something about Anita Bryant, unpopular as this may be. Anita Bryant is a woman and, as such, is a nonentity in our society. She is a very ugly person, but she is not the powerful witch that some homosexuals make her out to be. When we were all small, our mothers seemed to be the largest beings in the universe, the kindest or the meanest, but the biggest forces in our lives. As we grew up we found out that no woman is really powerful in our society no matter what the little boy or girl in us feels. And so it is with Anita Bryant. She has money, yes. (And only as entertainers have women ever commanded large sums of money.) But she is a figurehead. Behind her loom the powerful institutions of marriage, the church, and the advertising industry, all of them patriarchal and heterosexist. Without their decisions of how Anita Bryant will represent them, she goes nowhere. Within the institution of marriage, or on any public street, Anita Bryant has no more control over her body than I or any other woman here. Within the institution of the church, she has no more freedom of expression than what the male Christian hierarchy allows. And within the entertainment industry she may lose or hold her job on the decision of male presidents, boards of directors, and advertisers. I am not trying to white-wash Ms. Bryant. Obviously she is a real sickie. But she is also not a Hitler with the power to make real decisions. She is a field nigger who has made it into the big house. Let us not forget those less colorful figures in their discreet business suits who run her world--and the thousands of voters who turned out to defeat the Miami referendum.

Let us instead unite in fighting all forces which seek to divide us from the outside, whether the tales be of faggot child molesters, lazy welfare blacks, or castrating mothers. If we decide to divide ourselves within our movement, let the divisions be of our own making, based on what makes us strong. We are coming from many different places. Let the "Gay" Rights Movement remember and *respect* them all.

-elizabeth knowlton

-Excerpted from speech given at rally following Gay Pride March, June 25, 1977, Atlanta, Georgia. Full text published in *Atlanta*, monthly newsletter of the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance, Vol. 5, No. 7 (July, 1977). \$3.50/year from Box 5502, Atlanta, Ga. 30307.

NEW YORK

...A concerted attack is now being waged against homosexuality, by the church, by the media, by all the forces in this country that need a scapegoat to divert attention from racism, poverty, unemployment, and utter, obscene corruption in public life. It is not a bit surprising that this attack has created a new popular and infamous image of feminine evil: Anita Bryant. It should be obvious to us all that no woman in male-dominated society can wield the public influence ascribed to Anita Bryant, unless men say she shall do so, and unless male power networks give her, as they have given Phyllis Schlafly, of the anti-ERA campaign, access to the media, free publicity, and financial support.

Last weekend in Los Angeles, these forces joined to attempt a take-over of the International Women's Year Conference in the state of California. Only a mass turn-out of feminists prevented the passing of resolutions for the essential overturn of every gain made by the feminist movement over the past eight years. It should be clear that Anita Bryant and Phyllis Schlafly are the masks behind which the system of male dominance is attacking, not just lesbians, or "gay" men, but women, and the feminist movement even in its most moderate form; that the attack is being fuelled and fostered by the only people in America with the resources to do so: men. ...

-adrienne rich

-Excerpted from a speech, "The Meaning of Our Love for Women is What We Have Constantly to Expand," to Lesbian Pride Rally, New York City, June 26, 1977. Full text issued in pamphlet form by Out and Out Books, 44 Seventh Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217. \$1.00 plus 30¢ postage.

NEW YORK

WHAT IS A LESBIAN?



WHAT IS A LESBIAN?

Peggy Kornegger

*"There are things about women
That draw me to women.
There are things about women
That draw me to myself."*

-Fran Winant

I am a lesbian because I love women - and because I love myself as a woman. When I became a feminist, I was already moving toward recognition of myself as a lesbian (the "self-chosen woman" -Adrienne Rich). The woman who chooses herself, who chooses other women, is denying the necessity to choose opposites, is, in fact, denying the necessity of opposites. We live in a hetero, mono-istic society which gives us narrow, either/or options. By refusing polarities and one-at-the-expense-of-another dynamics (self-abnegation, subject/object relationships) - in short, by choosing to love oneself and other women (subject-to-subject) - we transform the present in revolutionary ways.

When I became a lesbian, all the many parts of myself came together; I made a "leap of consciousness" (Mary Daly) that opened me up to womanvision - a vision of the future that is expansive, connective, and ever-changing. The choice of lesbianism (and the opening to womanvision) is a wholistic, integrated choice: the blending of a politics, poetics, sexuality, spirituality, philosophy, psychology, etc. that transcends opposites, heals schisms, and affirms a multi-dimensional reality. To move in the direction of this multi-dimensionality is to choose revolution in the deepest, most transforming sense of the word - (for me) lesbian-feminist-anarchist revolution.

Judy Antonelli

A lesbian is a woman whose primary physical, sexual, emotional, political and social interests are directed towards other women (whether she has ever acted upon that by sleeping with a woman or not). In short, she is a woman-identified woman. Lesbianism is not just a personal choice of who to sleep with; it is a political stand. The lesbian is a woman in total revolt against patriarchy; she does not give primary energy to men on any level. Lesbianism is a primary strategy in restoring female bonding as the basic social unit of a matriarchal society (as opposed to the patriarchal unit of

the heterosexual couple). I don't identify with the term "homosexual" at all; to me that implies male. A separatist is a lesbian who gives as little energy to men as is realistically possible. Separatist politics come from placing a high value on our energy and power, realizing that without our nurturance men cannot survive. Separatism does NOT (as Adrienne Rich says) "proceed first out of hatred and rejection of others" [*Sinister Wisdom*, Issue 3, Spring '77]. Our motive is love of women. Nor does separatism imply hatred of straight women; it is withdrawal from MEN. Emotional withdrawal from men does not deny the necessity of political confrontation of men, either. While our *primary* motive is not hatred of men, I do feel it is healthy to feel hostility towards those who are daily killing and mutilating us. There is a lesbian (strong, woman-identified woman) in *every* woman, which has been suppressed by the patriarchy.

Feminism is NOT humanism. I cannot emphasize this point enough! Humanism is a "love everybody" liberal philosophy which does not identify an enemy; i.e., everyone is oppressed by "society." Feminism says that women are oppressed by men (who built the structures of society to reinforce their dominance); it therefore identifies an enemy. Humanism is responsible for the "men are oppressed by sexism, too" garbage.

Lesbians are an "emerging species" in the sense that we are Amazons and witches; women with a new strength and sense of power. We are building a new society, reclaiming what is rightfully ours. It is Lesbians who will save Life on this planet, not just for ourselves, but for animals and vegetation also. As I see Lesbians growing stronger, becoming more psychic, taking more power -- women who are on TV, models, Playboy bunnies, etc., look more and more like plastic dolls, man-made caricatures. We look and act *so* differently that it amazes me at times. Lesbians have gotten rid of the "drag" by which patriarchy defines women. We are discovering the true meaning and potential of womanhood.

"Go Tell Aunt Rhody" [*Sinister Wisdom*, Issue 1, July '76] is a superb analysis. Thank the Goddess that you have the insight to see socialism as another form of patriarchy!! (I am sick of socialist analysis being passed off as "feminist." It's a major co-optation of feminism, as bad as liberalism/humanism.) The only thing I would add is this: Patriarchy is based on man's fear of the female -- as nature, woman, emotions, feelings, instincts, intuition, non-rational modes of consciousness. Patriarchy suppresses the female principle (Eros), and gives the male principle primacy, which is contrary to Nature. The female principle must predominate (just like Nature ensures that women are 52% of the population!). The predominance of the male principle is Thanatos, i.e., death and destruction. Male

culture is based on physical coercion and force. The male imperative towards dominance and power over women stems from his insecurity as an incomplete female, his need to compensate (what Karen Horney so perceptively labeled "womb envy"). Classism, racism, and imperialism are all extensions of phallic mentality -- conquest, competition, heirarchy; the boys fighting each other to be on top and "prove" themselves. Racism also has psychological roots in patriarchy's fear of blackness/darkness.

Marianne Rubenstein

A Lesbian is utmost an individual - especially under patriarchy. I define a Lesbian as a woman motivated by our love for other women. We are not reactionary beings. This love extends throughout all levels - be they known or unknown. I use the word "motivated" intentionally. Lesbians know, for survival in all senses, we must move. To fall into stagnation, the deathbed of the patriarchy, is to fall into oblivion. To name ourselves Lesbian is to assert our most primary desire: to live. We are explorers, creators, indeed spacemakers. For to wield the name Lesbian is to pull out of time a space. Womanspace.

We are very special. Artists, all of us, so capable of perceiving our own beauty, we seek communion with it. The spirit of the wild burns through our soul like an uncontrollable brush fire. Yes. We are in revolt. Like Phoenixes we rise from our mothers' ashes. And with the integration of ancient and newly discovered wisdom we will spread what has been misconstrued as the most deadly disease: Compassion.



The Question She Put to Herself

by maureen brady

The question she put to herself every morning those days was -- Are you or are you not a dyke? She'd gotten to the point where the question didn't titillate her any more, it badgered her. There wasn't any place she could go, any thing she could do without it coming up, demanding immediate resolution and yet just hanging there. She felt as if her whole life were suspended on a question mark. Lena, the shrink, told her this was not so, it was just one aspect of self-definition and even though Ginger found Lena a relief to talk to, she knew she was wrong. She knew Lena was denying the truth of her every waking moment and she minded but not much, partly because Lena was such a relief to talk to and partly because she knew by then that most shrinks work that way, whether they know it or not. They supply you with a denial of your existence but a more straight forward one than you'll find most places. Thus you can see more clearly what you have to fight against. Lena was good that way.

Most Saturdays and Sundays Ginger didn't lift her head from the pillow before noon. She knew it meant climbing out of bed and up onto the tightrope again and another day of gradual inching along. She was at that mid-point of maximum sag so that either way she went had to be uphill. Sometimes when she left herself suspended on the mattress those mornings, she had the dream fragments to fondle. In the dream she lay full length beside the other woman who didn't know any more about this business than she. They both had warm skin, smooth, no perspiration. They gave each other long, light caresses, touched hair, cupped faces, sighed, knew precisely the location and sensation of the other's clitoris, didn't know -- should we, will we touch there, softly moaned. It would have made a good commercial if this was the sort of thing Madison Avenue had wanted to sell. With any perspective at all, Ginger would've attributed the imagery to Violette Leduc, but then, she had none. She could only fondle the fragments and try to hold off her coming for awhile because that would mean bladder urgency and time to rise and face real life -- smack -- in the mirror. Are You or Are You Not A Dyke?

It certainly wasn't the newness of the question that made it so difficult; it was the proximity. All her life it had been there but usually across the road, over there on the other side of a barbed wire fence where you didn't go because if you did the bull would

charge you, Santa Claus wouldn't come, mine fields were planted to blow you up, the boogie man was up a tree and the shadow lurked and knew. It was by learning the primary lessons of feminism that she had come to understand that her life was already heavily engaged with all those spooks. She had been charged and rammed by plenty of bulls and who gave a damn if Santa Claus never came again -- that was his problem.

She had a kind of rollcall list that flipped up before her mind's eye every time she tried to solve this problem by going back to her beginnings. LESBIANS I HAVE KNOWN.

First there were Bernie and Marilyn, who as far as she knew had always been lesbians and had always been part of her town. Bernie and Marilyn, that's how the town folks referred to them, just like they called her parents Dan and Mildred, never Mildred and Dan. Bernie wore the pants. Actually Marilyn wore pants too, men's pants with pleats and knee creases and owned the town store and was very strict about not letting kids charge candy on the family tab. It was Bernie who had short, straight hair and combed it back behind her ears. Ginger figured that was the factor that made them put her name first. She was sure it wasn't the inclination to alphabetize.

She had done a good deal of historical research -- not the library kind but in her mind, some of it with Lena, the shrink. For instance when Lena had asked her about these women, she had said, "Oh, they were just wonderful."

"Did you know them well?" Lena asked.

Ginger had a picture in her mind of Bernie pushing the lawn mower, graceful and intense. She could remember Marilyn holding the door open for her when she had groceries to carry home, then staying in the doorway until she was sure you had a good hold on the bag.

"They lived in my town," she said to Lena. She decided not to bother to explain what that meant to a city shrink. It seemed ludicrous in that office where if you spoke too softly you couldn't be heard above the traffic noise outside.

When she was twelve Ginger's family had moved to Florida, built a house, moved in, and guess who was there, across the street. Elly, the writer, who Ginger's Dad said collected rejection slips and Harriet, the nurse, who didn't work except in emergencies. That is, if there was a hurricane in Louisiana or a flood in Mississippi, she went on special duty for the Red Cross. Elly was an insult to the concept of neighboring; she rarely came out of the house. Ginger's Dad attributed her failure as a writer to this. Ginger's Mom was hurt by the fact that she could never get her to come in for coffee so she could get a better look at her. Harriet did come in for coffee and talked about where she had been in the Army or sometimes a recent disaster. Gin-

ger's Dad had once said to her, "Harriet, why don't you get yourself a man?" Of course he thought he was complimenting her. He thought he was telling her she could be likable to a man.

"Dan," she had said, "there's not a thing in this world that I want or need from a man." Harriet with the steady eyes, unequivocal. Years later he was still impressed. "She looked me straight in the eye..." he would say.

This was probably the only instance Ginger knew of when her Dad's big mouth had been left hanging flaccid with no words, no grunts, no hisses, nothing coming out of it. "Harriet was fantastic," Ginger told Lena.

"I can understand why you'd feel that way," Lena said.

It was one thing to be a dyke-watcher child when the watched ones were old enough to know what they were doing. It was another thing to be in college with the two Linda's three rooms down the hall of the dorm and Joey and Daniella up at the other end, Sparks upstairs and a friend sitting on your bed asking you to scratch her back. Ginger traveled with her best friend and in the motel room just before they went to sleep, their feet touched. She read in her psychology book, ten to fifteen per cent. That meant one in every corner. Scary. She often listened to the bedsprings squeaking in the Linda's room. She had to pass it to get to the bathroom.

Ginger could see from her historical research that it was at this point in time that she had commanded her feet to leap into the trench of heterosexuality, though she had remained a virgin for several years to come. She hooked herself up to a gay man and dragged the relationship out for as long as possible. He, having just barely escaped a Trappist monastery via a blessed nervous breakdown, was still wandering around in a fog of purity. She, relieved to find orgasm possible fully clothed, the main stimulus being his leg, dreamed of living happily ever after though they both flinched in biology class at such words as *homo sapiens*. Eventually, they got around to taking off their clothes and then of course the penis became more conspicuously an extra member that got in the way and they knew what they were supposed to do with it (and his shrink said it would mean progress) so finally they did, quietly and without much hoopla and for short periods of time, keeping in mind pregnancy and the possibility of defective rubbers. Neither of them ever managed to tell the other that even though that was the part that had to be done in the most private, that was the part they were doing for the public. In the end he was the one who had recognized the contours of a closet while she had denied it and thrown herself into the ring with the bulls and collected a series of miserable experiences.

Her LESBIANS I HAVE KNOWN list showed the gap which extended until consciousness raising and the word spoken, purred, sometimes shouted -- lesbian, lover...especially lover made her dizzy. It was a word from books, not from her experience. She lived with a man she could hardly stand. Her defenses were flabby from disuse and she fell in love with every other woman in the group. She condoned bisexuality, the bridge, but no one tried to seduce her. Lena, the shrink, would have loved her at this time. She would've said, "Why is it necessary to choose a camp? Why does it have to be such an issue?"

Lena would have said, "It doesn't. Don't make it be. Just do what you want and keep yourself open."

The reason Ginger knew that's what Lena would've said was because she was saying it now, four years after Ginger's consciousness raising group had disbanded, mission supposedly accomplished. But let's not get down on Lena because she was really okay for Ginger. She was just dealing from an abstract seat. Her words were less important than her eyes which had held fearless to Ginger's that first day when Ginger had announced just after her name and occupation, her sexual identity crisis.

Ginger told Lena about the softball game. She'd found it advertised in MAJORITY REPORT. After she'd finally dragged herself out of bed that Sunday morning and stared at herself in the mirror for awhile, the question punctuating her expression, she'd trudged to the local newspaper store and tried quietly to sneak a MAJORITY REPORT out of the big clip they were hanging in but the whole batch had slipped out and there they were swimming all over the fucking floor. Ginger, red faced, had felt the store lady's eyes on her back while she stooped, gathering them up, the word LESBIAN glaring from the front page headline.

Such incidents must either build courage or contribute to the demise of the external world view (if you're out to your newspaper lady, that's one less to worry about) because Ginger went to the softball game and she never would have done that the Sunday before.

"They were all a bunch of dykes," she told Lena.

"How could you tell?"

"Most of them were real tough and when they were waiting to bat they sat around on each other's laps kissing and hugging."

"I see," Lena said, convinced.

"And I was freaked out and trying to fake having a good time the whole afternoon," Ginger said. "I thought I was going to have a cardiac arrest every time I had to run the bases. I was so hyped up with adrenalin I hit a home run."

Lena looked impressed and Ginger couldn't tell whether it was her proximity to so many dykes or the home run that was turning her on.

"So what freaked you out the most?" Lena asked.

"They were so tough."

"Playing tough," Lena contended. It was an idea that had not occurred to Ginger.

Between the fifth and sixth innings a woman from the other team had stopped Ginger as she was going out to the field and asked her what she was doing after the game. Ginger had felt about ten years old and said she wasn't doing anything because that was the truth and at ten she'd been an honest Catholic who thought that telling a lie would bring on some dread disease like homosexuality. So the woman had asked her to come to Chinatown for dinner with her and it wasn't until she was out in right field that she realized fully she'd just made a date with a dyke. "The rest of the game was agony," she told Lena. She'd kept her eye on the woman and after each inning thought she'd sneak away but the woman was keeping an eye on her too. Definitely, she decided, the woman wasn't her type.

"So what happened?" Lena said.

"Oh, nothing much. As soon as we got to the restaurant I told her about my confusion. She turned out to be pretty fuzzy about herself."

"Altogether a courageous adventure," Lena said as Ginger got up to leave at the end of her time. Walking home Ginger wondered about the possibility that she was leading some part of Lena's life for her.

Her tight rope grew more and more taut. She found some lesbians to hang out with but she told them she thought she was straight. She told some of her straight friends from the past that she thought she was a lesbian. Then she hated everyone for being in a club -- she hated labels, she commiserated with Lena and her clubless ideals. She stayed in bed even later on week-ends mulling over her LESBIANS I HAVE KNOWN list, adding the new ones. The list was becoming staggering. It produced butterflies in her stomach and a tingling sensation in her thighs. In between lying down with each woman on the list, she sat with someone she had cared for in the past and said, "I'm a lesbian. What do you think of that?" Then she imagined answers for every possible question. Finally, her own answers woven round and round her, she felt snugly wrapped, an embryonic creature.

The next day, if you leave off measuring days by dawn and dusk, she was camping with three dykes. She was in love with her tent-mate. She'd slept three nights beside this small, soft breathing woman who whispered sweet good-nights. Her body floated light on the leaf bed beneath the sleeping bag. She touched her own cheek. She touched the cheek of the woman lying next to her. No questions came. She was a lesbian.

IMAGE

you are the vision i climb into
you are my self projected ahead.
i model you with all my whispers.
in the endless procession
always i am stepping into the next.
i am creator and disciple of my image;
i follow with devotion
drawn on by new desires.
this is the discipline without whip,
this is the self-loving called change.

before my birthday, glancing back,
30 years of selves i watch at once.
each self-vision overlaps.
i am a tribal procession,
not evenly spaced, or symmetric in stance,
but brilliant in the fashion of a psychic dance.
this birthday, as my goddessmother gifts,
i pledge transparency and motion:
not to stop or lock or crystallize.
i remember how each version of myself
has dared deserve more joy.
this is discipline by desire,
this the self-loving called change.

VISION

joy justice

I remember the last time I had a vision. It was the spring of 1974. I was living at the Charlotte Women's Center, and on the last leg of being straight. Harriet would come over from the house where she lived with her husband and three step-sons, and we would sit in the upstairs kitchen and talk about our vision of women's culture. I don't remember what we said, but I know what we meant.

We meant that we wanted to be lovers and lesbians. Our vision was of our emerging lesbian selves. It was the need to realize ourselves in this way with each other that gave emotional oomph to our words. Our "women's culture" was seduction talk. It sort of worked. We did become lovers and lesbians. But in a way it did not work.

It did not work because the things that made me and Harriet able to change, to become lovers and lesbians, things like common politics, commitment to the women's movement, and strong feelings for phrases like "leap of consciousness," "living on the boundary," "being on the road," and "vision," were not specifically Harriet and me. They were paradoxically ourselves and "other" both. Vision is by definition "away," up ahead somewhere. At the same time it is within the visionary. It did not work because we were not able to know what we gave each other beyond the sharing of the vision. Our relationship was not one-to-one; it was more "two-to-unknown masses."

(Confusion around personal relationships was part of my entire life as a "political person." In a way I did not have friends. I went to meetings with people. Partly I went to meetings because I did not know any other way to make friends. Partly I was friends with those who went to the same meetings because my "political identity" was the only part of me important enough to base friendship on.)

The sense of vision that Harriet and I shared was the beginning of the end for me of living by vision. It was my last vision. There were many before.

Looking back, I think I began my life as a revolutionary expecting to become the political equivalent of a saint. For example, I carried out the first overt political action that I can remember in the early sixties when I was about ten. My family was driving through southern Georgia when my father got caught in a speed trap. The sheriff escorted us to the Court house on the square of a classically southern town to pay the

fine. While my father was arguing that he had not been going any faster than anyone else on the road, I noticed two water fountains side by side, one marked "white" and the other "colored." I asked my mother why, and she told me. Filled with anger and righteousness I marched to the "colored" fountain, and took a liberal sip. Mother pulled me away in horror (lest we all be summarily lynched, I suppose), and I felt GOOD.

By the time I was sixteen I felt that I was part of the Civil Rights Movement. The vision was of a world without racial oppression and bigotry. For me the visions I have lived by have been connected with the movements I have been part of. A movement is a group of people moving towards a common vision. So I moved in the anti-war movement with the vision of peace; in the New Left with the vision of a world where no one had power over others, and each had power over themselves; to finally the women's movement and the vision that grew and grew of women free from male domination.

Over that period of about seven years I made two major decisions. Decisions that have been the basis for everything else in my life.

The first decision was that what was wrong in America was not caused by mistakes or a few bad people, but by the interests of those with power, and that total change was called for. I remember the exact moment when I was aware of my new perspective, and of my commitment to be part of changing things. It was while singing "I'm gonna lay down my sword and shield, down by the riverside" at a Quaker conference on South-East Asia. I was seventeen.

About four years later I made my second major political decision. I was a New Left radical feminist, living at the Charlotte Women's Center, and part of a collective doing a radical bookstore. I decided that I was going to base my choices about whether or not to do something on whether or not I felt like I wanted to do it. I was not going to do anything because of guilt, or because of the protestant work ethic idea that you've got to *do* something, or because Marx said to. (Obviously, by this time I had given up any pretensions to sainthood.) It was really a decision of the times, having its immediate roots in the exemplary action of the Black Panther Party, the "revolution for the hell of it" of the yippies, and the "personal is political" of the women's movement.

I figured that doing what I wanted to do would raise my consciousness which would in turn enable me to better know what I wanted to do. And that that dynamic would carry me. It did carry me. To Harriet, and the upstairs kitchen at the Women's Center, and lesbianism, and the next step which was the end of vision. Lesbian separatism.

To me lesbian separatism has always meant radical feminism without the "buts." I see two basic perspectives on the roots of sexism. There is the perspective that men oppress women. And there is the perspective that people are people, and we are all hurt by rigid sex roles.

The most uncompromisingly thorough development of the first perspective is separatism. Separatism elaborates the idea that men oppress women and adds that:

The institutions of society are created and defined by men so that relating to them is the same as relating to men.

--The institutions of society are created and defined by men so that relating to them is the same as relating to men.

--Heterosexual women identify with men, and therefore act as their representatives when relating to other women.

--Lesbian-identified-lesbians are more free of male society than anyone else.

--The values of society (aptly named in CLIT Statement Two, "pricks in the head"), such as competitiveness, "objectivity," self-sacrifice and hierarchy, have affected us all, and we need to understand and try to change these values in ourselves.

--Male-created divisions along class and race lines are present in relationships between lesbians, and we need to work on ending the oppressive relationships among ourselves as well as in society.

The second perspective is harder to be specific about because its main characteristic is mushiness. I think it could be called humanism. Its proponents rely heavily on the word "love" and a sort of amorphous-warm-glow attitude towards life in general. They do not want anyone to be angry about anything. They say things like, "men are people too." This perspective is the generator of the "buts." "Men oppress women, but I know this one good man."

After Harriet and I failed to find any security in what we gave each other besides the sharing of the vision, we became lovers with Catherine and Claire respectively. The four of us along with three other lesbians, Penny, Anne, and Mandy, started meeting to talk about CLIT Statement Two, which we had all read and liked. In the process of talking we became separatists. Our name grew to be Drastic Dykes.

We did not become separatists because we wanted to separate ourselves from the world. In fact for the first five or six months that Drastic Dykes met, we met at the Women's Center, and were individually still very much involved with the straight women at the Center. We became separatists because we needed to express what we thought and how we felt strongly. We needed to free ourselves of toning down everything we said so as not to threaten anybody. We needed to clear the mush from

our minds, to get the "buts" out of our lives, and to stop shrouding our words in cotton. We gave each other permission to do this, and support to take the consequences. The consequences were immense.

Two words seem to come up most often when non-separatists are talking about separatism: "anger" and "isolation." "You can't be so angry. You will only isolate yourselves." Well, it is not true that you can't be so angry. You most definitely can. But it is true that if you are so angry you will be isolated.

(The fear that oppressed people have of their own anger is phenomenal; it puts me in mind of early Christians under the rule of Rome. You won't catch the president of the Board of Directors of General Motors sitting around worrying about being angry. He doesn't have to be angry. He has power. Now I admit that getting stuck in anger can be demoralizing. But it is possible to get *through* it to the other side, and the world looks much clearer, and makes much more sense from there. Besides, if you are angry, then you are angry, and you're much better off facing it.)

As I said, we did not become separatists with the goal of separating. But isolation was the ultimate result. The process went something like this at the Women's Center. We began to express what we thought and felt. Part of what we expressed was anger. When straight women and other lesbians were frightened and angry with us because of what we thought and how we expressed what we thought, we became *more* angry, until finally there were no straight women coming to the center. We were left with the choice of continuing to run a women's center for women who would not come to meetings because we were there, or leaving. We left. At the time Drastic Dykes left the Women's Center I still did not expect to become isolated. I hoped in my heart of hearts that the other women would come running after us, yelling, "Wait! Come back! You were right!" That did not happen. There were other losses too. Catherine quit her university teaching job. Anne and Penny dropped out of school. Claire and Mandy changed relations with friends and lovers. We made our choices, and paid our prices. It was o.k. because the choices we made were truly what we needed to do.

For me, being a separatist felt like leaping *beyond* "the boundary," and living outside of patriarchal society. I know that technically it is not possible to do that. I mean, yes, I did still work for male bosses and stuff like that. But emotionally it is possible to live outside of patriarchal society now. Possible, but very hard. The physical sensation I associate with that period of isolation is that of being in a void and a pressure cooker at the same time.

Once I felt that I was living beyond the boundary, the vision began to fade. It began to fade because as

much as I could envision I was living in my daily life; the vision was no longer "away." And it began to fade because I had no movement anymore. The women I knew who had composed it were telling me very emphatically that they did not want any part of my movement. They told me to my face at the Women's Center and at conferences, and they told me in print in women's and lesbian papers. Following the vision as best I could led to the end of the vision.

I think it is very important that non-separatists writing about separatism make an effort to do so with much more thoughtfulness and respect than they have in the past couple of years. For the most part non-separatist comments on separatism have amounted to nothing more than name-calling. Because separatism has been so important to me I need to hear more than, "separatists are so angry, mean, and isolated." I need to know what lesbians think about the theory and analysis of separatism, which still seem to me accurate as a way to understand the world.

I suspect that behind most of the anger towards separatists are specific situations in which the angry writer did not want to do something that specific separatists wanted her to do. If that is the case, I want to hear about the specific situation as well as the conclusions the writer has made from the situation.

To get the ball rolling I will tell you this. I stopped being a separatist over a nightmarish period of months last fall and winter because to continue meant I would have to do things that I did not want to do. (Remember, I am still operating on the unsaintly premise of doing what I want to do.)

I would have had to stop being friends with a man who had been my friend for over seven years.

I would have had to feel guilty about being close to my sister, who was straight at the time.

I would have had to relate to everyone in the world on the basis of which box they belonged in - straight; straight lesbian; says some good things so she may be a potential separatist; etc.

I would have had to be vulnerable to a lesbian who hated me because I am middle-class and she is working class.

I would have had to be willing to sit around and seriously discuss whether or not I would kill my father if it were necessary for the overthrow of the patriarchy.

I was not willing to do any of these things, and other separatists wanted me to. (You may wonder how I managed to be a separatist for two years with such un-separatist elements in my life. But I thought I was, so as far as I'm concerned, I was.) By telling what happened I want to leave each reader free to draw her own conclusions.

I am living now as an "individual." I go to meetings of the Lesbian Center Group because I need to be around lesbians. I still need to always remember the things I learned from separatism about society, because otherwise the world would be an incomprehensible ball of goo. And I need to talk with other lesbians who help me remember. I also need to keep trying to understand the effects of classism, racism, ageism, and of course sexism on me and my life because I need to keep changing. But I have no movement and absolutely no vision.

I hope that other lesbians will try to think more seriously and respectfully about separatism. The theory it represents is too important, and the women who are trying to live it are too much a part of what we are all doing, for any lesbian or feminist or lesbian-feminist to be willing to disown separatism completely, or to scape-goat it out of fear and insecurity. I have no movement now, but I do still feel that there is a "we," and I hope that we are moving.

"Dear, dear! How queer everything is today! And yesterday things went just as usual. I wonder if I've been changed in the night?"



responses

"CONFESSIONAL" WRITING:

Julia Stanley's article [*"Fear of Flying?" Sinister Wisdom*, Issue 2] has finally pushed me into saying it. I have no use for confessional writing. It bores me. There is a difference between life and literature, and I don't want to give up either, but I also don't want to confuse them. I know that I get up in the morning and work, sometimes quite unwillingly and ineptly; that I play games and make love; that I have allergies and days when everything goes wrong, or right; that I fall into bed too exhausted to care; that somewhere in the middle of it all I eat. And I expect all this to go on happening - in my life, in my friends' lives, in total strangers' lives. I am perfectly convinced that this is daily life and don't read for confirmation of it. I read to find out what other people think these daily processes mean in the context of something larger than the day - the direction of my life, the worth of it in some historical sense, the current social and political implications, other people's lives.

Life is a jumble of experiences of widely varying magnitudes happening all at once so that it is difficult to perceive the trends, the chains of events. Literature is the presentation of some aspect of life in such a way that the connections, consequences and meanings become clear. Life is the data; all of us get enough of that first hand. Literature is the interpretation, and since I'm not yet willing to say I've found the truth, I want to read other interpretations. I don't feel kindly towards a book that doesn't satisfy that desire. I feel that the writer has not done her job.

If it is the function of literature to present some meaning, how does the writer go about doing this? Obviously first she must discover some meaning in, make sense out of, some aspect of her life. In this she's no different from anyone else; we all do this by talking with friends, teaching our children, building a career, etc. But the writer is trying to communicate this meaning to others who have not had a part in her experience, or, through a shared reference perceived exactly this meaning in it. If she simply reproduces the entire experience, then the reader is left to dig the meaning out for herself just as she must do in her own life, but if she reproduces it all and then tells what it means there will probably be much that is superfluous. What she must do is identify the significant details of the experience, the ones that actually de-

velop the meaning she has perceived, and present only them. They will present the meaning.

What are these significant details? That is really the crucial question in a discussion of confessional writing, and I can't give a one true answer. It depends on the experience and the meaning. It is of course tempting to think that everything one has ever done is significant; that the most seemingly minor details are crucial to the whole; that it could not possibly be understood if one were missing. Occasionally this may be true; mostly I suspect it's not. Even when being struck by a brilliant thought, one does have to be somewhere, doing something, with someone or other. But unless the meaning is that the brilliant and the mundane exist side by side and have some effect on each other, the mundane is just going to obliterate the issue.

Of course, what seems irrelevant clutter to me may seem quite necessary and clear to someone else, or vice versa. I naturally think that I have superlative opinions and excellent taste in literature. But they are exactly that - opinions and taste - which surely rank right after love in subjectivity. When I read a book I expect to encounter characters, situations and resolutions that seem real. I have thought a good deal about human experiences and feelings, and a book (whatever combination of autobiography and imagination) will not seem real to me unless the author has done at least as much such thinking as I have. It is the fact that characters think and feel that makes them real to me. Without that there is no quantity of detail that could convince me that a character could possibly have discovered a meaning in life. Once characters become real I will assume that they do all the physical things associated with being human, and will require the presentation only of those that are necessary to make the meaning of these characters' experience clear. But it just does not work the other way around. The description of dozens of toothbrushings will convince me only that the character has teeth.

In this attempt to present meaning, a writer may fictionalize her life. I see great potential in this. It is a way of asking and answering the questions: If this had happened like that, how would my life be different? How different could my life be before I would become different? Therefore it is a way of discovering which are the essential experiences of one unique life, and which pertain to our common life. Obviously if a writer fictionalizes, a reader will not know exactly what has happened in her life; the reader will know, however, exactly what she has felt and thought about. And for me, knowing this will make her much more real than would knowing everything she had done in the course of a month. It works the same way with the author as it does with her characters.

After reading Julia Stanley's article I did read parts of *Flying*. I couldn't read it all; it was boring, and I couldn't get involved in it. I could see that Kate Millett was involved, and she kept telling me how she felt. But I couldn't feel it. *Flying* was not accessible to me precisely because she had not thought enough about her experience. She had not picked out the details that would develop the meaning and feeling of it for someone who had not lived it. That's how I define confessional writing, and I've already stated my bias about it. It's not subject matter per se that puts a work into this classification; it's what the writer does with it. Jane Austen should be all the proof anyone needs of that.

Claudia Scott
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

LEAVING THE UNIVERSITY:

Dear Catherine,

I read your proposal that women must leave the academy / "How Rage Mothered My Third Birth..." *Sinister Wisdom*, Issue 1, July '76/ and reproached myself for murmuring "hysteria" and fell asleep hoping that when I reread the article I would be able to respond. (I did not think for a moment that my response would be as concrete as a letter, I hoped only for my clouded understanding to grasp your "thesis.") It is clear that your experience touches deeply upon my own predicament, for though I believed I had been too tired to read the piece thoroughly, my response was direct and unmistakable. I awoke in the night crying: "Get out, get out, get out..."

This was the dream:

I have discovered that the plumbing in my house leaks - the water supply has been contaminated by gases which fizz and hiss where the pipes join. I must take wrenches to the joints to tighten them. Before I have managed to stop the leaks, the head of my department (a patron) and my mother (who has been dead now twenty years) come in the front door. They make their way through the clutter of boxes of books which fill the space of my living room - they have to move and rearrange things to clear a path. Then I find I must go outside to attend to the outdoor spigot and I push my way through the boxes and go outside. My father is saying something which distracts me, but finally I move my attention to the water faucet and adjust the joints

to tighten the seal. I complete my job just in time to discover that the pent up power of the gases is already beyond containment. As I back away from the pipes the hissing joints explode sending fountains of water into the air. As the power lines are drenched a flash of electricity runs up to the roof and fire breaks out. The house is rapidly consumed in flames and I stand in the garden shouting to those on the second floor of the house, "Get out, get out, get out..." The words choke me, I am awake.

In the morning I did reread your words, and because perhaps I now know how I feel about your proposal I am able to see that hysteria is a proud metaphor for this woman-rage. I have long been aware of the elemental confusion in the university, but not until now have I envisioned its transmutation by thunderbolt.

Rereading what I thought I had only skimmed I found the dream images - Mary Daly's poisonous gases - really were a direct response to your piece.

The rest is a kind of orientation.

Why, I wonder, do you want to redeem Athena's reputation? I will meditate again on this. It is quite frankly a revelation to me that there are others, like you who can envision woman's scholarship. The truth is I have left the university before, but I have had to come back because I cannot do without certain resources which are collected only in universities. Not that I'm not ambivalent. For years I have seemed to myself a peculiar kind of double-agent. Without any ambition for an academic career I am nonetheless dedicated to learning: this is tolerated in the university but I have not found the woman's community supportive of such enterprise. For the past four years I have been at the University of California because here I could learn a number of things, like languages, which I simply could not learn anywhere else. I have been quite reluctant to having degrees grafted on, but someone must apprentice herself in certain fields if those skills are ever to become available to woman's scholarship. I do not intend to leave a single woman behind when I leave. Most of those I've found have already moved to my compost heap where they turn all the garbage into lovely fertile soil. It's been a long time since they've had a real garden to live in. As for me, I'm ecstatic at the discovery that there may be other gardeners.

Once I studied classics for six years in the university before I was given texts of Psappha. The teacher rambled endlessly on Pindar and at the last class meeting doled out shreds of verse in Lesbian dialect, an entirely new kind of Greek to me. As I strained my mind to convert the classical paradigms to the forms in these few xeroxed pages, he made some remarks on the obvious relative merits of homage to a universal emblem such as Zeus contrasted with trivial invocation of the

goddess, Aphrodite. He noted that Psappa's poems were shorter than Pindar's and not so complete. With the supreme effort to keep my voice from shaking I raised a tentative question whether the appearance of brevity and incompleteness might not be the result of the fragmentary state of their preservation. It was the only time I spoke up in that class and whether from astonishment at hearing my voice or perhaps he really did assume Psappa had been an aphasic maenad incapable of completing two consecutive verses, he shook his head uncertainly and without answering. On the final exam I took the liberty of suggesting no possible comparison could be made of Pindar and Psappa since her work did not survive, and when the exam was over I withdrew from the Classics Dept. It meant relinquishing my key to the departmental library where at that time the only copies on campus of some of Jane Harrison's books could be found, but it was high time I discovered the nature of Southwest European Ethnic Studies which I had been taught to call "the Humanities."

My rages like yours have been multiple, but not all rebirths entail rage. I thank you for a glimpse of the possibility of a community of woman-centered scholarship. I hope we shall be reborn into such a circle someday. Maybe it is happening already.

I need not say how much I appreciate your existence insofar as you are incarnate in *Sinister Wisdom*. I want to subscribe to the second volume although I will be in the Far East for a year and won't be able to read the issues until I return. Still the first issue, which was already a year old before I found it, has aged very well.

Blessings, love, and even more sinister insight!

Sue Ann Glover
Berkeley, California

AN INVITATION:

We welcome your responses to anything/everything printed in *SINISTER WISDOM*. When you write, please indicate whether or not we may publish your letter.

sue silvermarie

Now I will find the words,
now I will own my magik.
I decipher and bring to light
the sound and color vibrations
that spring like a fountain in the place I call Beloved.
I go to that home for grounding,
I go to claim my beauty.
I go to drink in awe.
More than I have ever taken in,
further than it has ever traveled in me.

I see light
golden orange as it enters me,
as it streams.
And if everything I do is perfect
it is simply
that now I see it.
And the first of the perfect is loving.
So I lie down to myself,
and I chant my mantra name.
Inner and outer attention merge.
Vision blurs to wider focus.
And the first of the perfect is taking and giving,
concurrent.

I look behind my eyes
and watch with such desire
as I open as I enter as I find as I take it.
And I ask,
Do I want
enough to be able to take it?
As I learn,
Have to want it enough to be able to take it.
And she says, and I say,
Hold yourself open to take it.
And I say, and she says,
Hold open the door to float into space.
And it feels
like chanting my mantra name,
like sinking into trance,
like blowing, barrierless.
And it feels
like owning my magik, my magik, my magik.

Notes for a magazine

by harriet and catherine

MESSAGES RECEIVED

May, 1976. Gina Covina & Laurel Galana, quoted in *Plexus*, on the much-mourned demise of *Amazon Quarterly*:

"...everything that needed to be said about lesbians had already been said..."

"...there's a lot of good writing from women; it just wasn't being sent to a lesbian-feminist magazine..."

"Labels have a way of staying static..."

Spring, 1977. "Save our Children" press kit contains "Why Certain Sexual Deviations are Punishable by Death." Bumperstickers appear in Miami: *KILL A QUEER FOR CHRIST*.

June 7, 1977. Miami voters repeal the Dade County "gay" rights ordinance by two to one.

1973. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*:

"It requires a kick in the imagination, a wrenching of tired words, to realize that feminism is the final and therefore the first cause, and that *this* movement *is* movement."

1976-77. United States Supreme Court rulings:

December: private employers need not include pregnancy in their disability benefit programs.

May: Title VII relaxed to permit race and sex discrimination in employer seniority systems.

June 20: states no longer need spend Medicaid money on elective abortions; public hospitals no longer required to permit elective abortions.

1950's. Margaret Sanger to a reporter:

"Birth control is the first step. When woman has gained control over her own body, she will not stop with patching up a world, she will remake it."

Spring, 1977. With the defeat of the ERA in North Carolina and Florida, newspapers announce that the amendment is doomed.

1972. Robin Morgan, *Monster*:

"I want a women's revolution like a lover,
I lust for it, I want so much this freedom,
this end to struggle and fear and lies
we all exhale, that I could die just
with the passionate uttering of that desire."

August 8, 1977. *Charlotte Observer* quotes John F. McManus (spokesman for John Birch Society in Belmont, Mass.):

"Opponents of libbers, lesbians, loonies and leftwingers are doing well."

June 14, 1977. Letter from Eileen Pagan:

"SW issues 2 & 3 arrived in my rural delivery box a few weeks back

and I do not need a doctor

I am reeling, reeling

reeling

dizzy

and I do not need a doctor

one line reaction: oh goddess, I have a home!"

June, 1977. Midnight phonecall from closet Lesbian friend of Catherine:

"Everybody knows that Lesbians and abortionists are killing the movement. Why don't you and your magazine just *shut up* or go underground until we get the ERA passed. Then you can do whatever it is you seem to want."

June 21, 1977. Letter from SW subscriber:

"I certainly find it hard to keep coming up with new and novel ways of telling you how WONDERFUL, FANTASTIC, GYNEFEROUS I think *Sinister Wisdom* is!"

August, 1977. An estimated 1/4 of elected state delegates to International Women's Year convention in Houston are "white-collar Klan." Phyllis Schlafley quoted in papers:

"Houston will be the death of the women's movement."

August, 1977. Note from SW subscriber:

"DON'T STOP. If for no other reason than that it helps to keep me (relatively) sane in the belly of the patriarchal beast."

June 26, 1977. Adrienne Rich to NYC Lesbian Pride Rally:

"We are now for the first time at the point of fusing lesbianism and feminism. And this is precisely the thing that patriarchy has most to dread, and will do all in its power to keep us from grasping."

July 7, 1977. Letter from SW subscriber:

"Be as wise as serpents and as sinister as dykes."

Reeking and reeling from MOUNTING ATTACKS OF THE WHITE-COLLAR KLAN and the SLOW SQUEEZE OF THE MULTINATIONAL-CORPORATE-GOVERNMENT-MEDIA "LIBERALS" (familarly known as "those who walk softly and carry a big prick"), Connie Sirius Dogstar and Daisy Eyebright Bellatrice fled one hot summer afternoon to the bargain matinee of "Star Wars." The critics said it was "pure escape." "It's THEM!" cried Connie Sirius, dropping her popcorn.

"Who do you mean--*them*," muttered Daisy Eyebright from under the seats where she was scrabbling after vagrant kernels.

"THEM THEM! The space opera! The good guys against the bad guys! A little witchcraft--the *Force*--thrown in, and a princess who can shoot, but still THEM!"

Daisy groaned, raised her chin to Connie's knee, picked one salted, buttered popcorn out of her left ear, and deliberately misquoted Carlos Castenada:

"There is no way to escape the *doing* of our world, so what the warrior does is to turn her world into her hunting ground."

VOICES (CRYPTIC, IN RIDDLES, AT NIGHT)

(wail): Why are we failing, falling, falling asleep?

(whisper): *The Fathertongue is a lullabye, lulling...*

(wail): Where has all the passion gone?

(whisper): *The passion's gone to press...*

(pompously, in a lecturing tone): The historical necessity of independent publishing of Lesbian literature is a PROVEN...

(whisper): *Your literature alone...a myth dangling helpless, severed from her ritual.*

(militant determination): We MUST slowly, steadily, carefully...

(whisper): *She who does not disrupt her routines becomes...the hunted.*

(uninterrupted, in full swing): ...BUILD strong womyn's institutions which will survive this wave...

(whisper): *The crest of a wave falls with the wave.*

(infuriated): But what is a Lesbian magazine supposed to BE?

(whisper): *...a guerrilla field manual--updated by the full moon.*

(disgusted): You talk as though Lesbians were an army. Army, hah! An army at each other's throats.

(whisper): *Divisions give strength; only keep moving.*

(in a mocking, exasperated, superior tone): Keep on moving! Keep on moving! Nobody's moving, and just why, Ms. Two-Bit, Plaster-Paris, Backyard Sibyl, you think YOU know...

(fierce whisper): *HUSH! Cowards, cynics...you stop moving when you try to hold on to what you already know. You stop moving when you think you know it all.*

(helplessly): But how do we SURVIVE?

(whisper): *...see with double vision...*

(in a very small voice): ...a key?

(fading whisper): *...desire...desire...desire...*

THE WAVES

in a dark night, moments
as their darker night dreams rising
memories strung on my name,
with their persistent questions,
like the window, loose and rattling,
passing, masquerade

where do they turn, becoming visible
a life, whole, ice clear and coherent, real?
where do I and this life stand face
to face? how will I know it
- as some poem unobtrusively
collecting images, times, energies
comes, as a wave breaks,
suddenly, to be this poem - mine?

along a rock beach
hard waves shatter in a spray of glass
odd phrases scattered
in our evenings, midnights,
early mornings along several beaches
over half a year
come back collaged
a conversation in ellipses
saying all there is to say

a groping after wholeness
for the hollow in the saying of the word.
what has this woman of three summers past
an image in a memory
to do with me?

flatness of distant water
how a wave swells lucid thin green
slides the surface, rushes onto shore
a long wave breaks like dominoes
surf running along sand
small waves fold, toss and fold between
green water, white water
a wave over and over

at odd intervals for years
a blueness at the
lengthening ends of days
a thin tune whistled in the wind,

the air light as if snow
were falling, glass wool
and the whitest blue white light;
a keen excruciating blueness
sharp silk
at the ends of some days
softly draws out one slow breath
one moment almost, in this
strange light, clearing

and the moment of my life
that is my life keeps passing
passing as the waves pass
on the sand a grain of sand
back and forth
back and forth

-Claudia Scott

REVIEWS

QUEST: a feminist quarterly. \$9.00/year from *Quest*, P.O. Box 8843, Washington, D.C. 20003.

It takes a certain amount of nerve to "review" what someone else has written, especially an entire issue of a magazine. Nerve or not, this is what this article is, a review, not from a regular critic or a journal expert, but from a reader pressed into service, from a woman unattached to any recognized political wing of the feminist struggle.

The current issue of *Quest* (Vol. III, No. 4), a journal of feminist political analysis, is a collection of essays on race, class and culture. The articles on class I found thoughtful and enlightening, but the ones on race are generally timid and apologetic -- a rehash of every cliché I have ever heard as to why there "aren't more black women in the women's movement."

That very same question was asked by the "peace movement" in the '60's. A black hippie I met on the steps of the Pentagon parking lot in October 1967 lit up a joint, looked out over the crowd of bleeding heads, and asked me, "where are all the Knee Growers." Why don't black people trust white people in general? Why don't those black women who are pro-feminist rush out and join ranks with white feminists to bring down the patriarchy? These are serious questions for which there are many answers. For one thing, black people generally stay away from white-led political and cultural movements because of what has happened to us in the past when we have joined. Remember what happened to black women in the 1920's when white women won the right to vote? Did this right extend to black women? No. Remember what happened to black women in the labor unions when white women won their "gains" in the factories. Did the rank and file strike down segregation? No. They became its rabid supporters. And what happened in the civil rights movement of 10 years ago when idealistic black women in SNCC and CORE looked up and saw so-called radical white women slavishly stroking the egos and the bodies of the "oppressed black MAN" at the expense of the "domineering black woman"? This is recent experience which would be hard to forget. These are just some of the historical reasons black women aren't running pell mell into the barricades of another white-run political movement.

Perhaps the question *Quest* ought to ask is this one: does the women's movement really want full participation and leadership from black women, poor women, native Americans, Chicanas, from the outcasts of society? One obvious reason for the lack of this participation is racism and elitism, the removal of which seems to be beyond the women now in the vanguard of feminism, regardless of their positions on abortion, sterilization, equal pay, or lesbian separatism, etc. etc. Part of the evidence for this statement comes from *Quest* itself, from the unserious way it treated this question of race in the first beginning.

The main effort on the race question came from three pieces, all of which left me feeling that the editors really believe that black women don't have time for political struggle or that the mythical black matriarch is indeed alive and living every day to support her man in the name of black power, the Afro twist, and keeping an obviously divided black community "together" no matter what price its women are asked to pay. There are so many statements made by the black women represented here about how hard it is for us to take any time out from "survival" that I almost forgot about all the black women I know who spend morning and afternoon watching soap operas and playing pitty pat. I almost forgot about the National Welfare Rights Organization that was at the grass roots led and run by poor women--the poorest of the poor--by black women who came out in numbers and in force to take action against the blasphemy of our social system. They disrupted offices, they sat in and they fought the police. They found time because the issue meant something to them. It was important and the struggle was their own.

And why do most lesbians recoil from "coming out." There are few women, especially black women, with independent sources of income. The hesitancy of more to "come out" is understandable. Where can we work once we "come out" to the public? Who is going to support us when we are attacked by angry men and women who see us as a threat to their fragile social institutions? These are the kinds of questions *Quest* should have been exploring, it seems to me. There are plenty of other magazines only too happy to print statements from women about how they wish they could stay home and be taken care of by their husbands and how they don't want to be "treated like a man" or how they don't want to be identified as man-haters and "weirdos."

The essay on "Class Attitudes and Professionalism" by Mary McKenny was done with much more thought. It challenged the notion that most people in America are middle class. It also exposed the problems of women from working, underemployed backgrounds who have gone to college and acquired semi-professional jobs and are in the dilemma of being asked to uphold the bourgeois values of "professionalism" while being denied its full

material and social rewards. McKenny also challenges the ideas of "downward mobility" and the joys of poverty. This essay ought to help women in positions of privilege understand how elitism is the enemy of equality among women and how it drives away the most oppressed from a "movement" which is supposed to be an assault on oppression.

Judith Withrow's "Native American Mother" and Ahshe's "Class Vignettes" both stand as living statements, speaking for themselves. Withrow takes apart the whole value system of motherhood--the mother of the year as described by newspapers, magazines, the church. The self-sacrificing pillar of the community. Withrow also forcefully asserts the values held by her culture as opposed to the values of modern "scientific" materialism. "Class Vignettes" talks about working hard and saving your money--the epitome of middle America and the most absurd thing you could say to a woman sweating it out from midnight to eight in the morning for \$3.00 an hour in a textile mill or a soap factory or for less yet and worse yet on the American owned plantations around the world.

To me, the most powerful essay was "An Open Letter to the Academy" by Michele Russell. Russell says she's teaching outside the walls of academia, outside the colleges and universities where very little true learning is going on anyway. Hers is a challenge to those women still functioning in these institutions to break out of the bind of textbooks and the same old tired curriculum and teach from the actual experience of today's people. This was the most serious look at class, culture and race in the entire issue and should have been at the beginning and not at the end.

I must admit that this is the only issue of *Quest* that I have read from cover to cover. I found other issues interesting but too tedious to read. Political analysis does not have to be tedious. Nothing has to be tedious. Perhaps it would help all of us aspiring to serve ourselves and others through feminist publications to ask the question Michele Russell asks in her "Open Letter to the Academy."

"Beyond the search for heroines and transcendent moments of victory, what will you do with everyday life? And, once you decide all these things, will you put your findings in a form to be of use to a woman with five children who works the night shift in a bakery."

This is a question we have all failed to answer; no specific offense meant to *Quest*.

adrienne manns

A WORSHIP OF WRITERS

spiderwomon's lesbian fairy tales by marion. calligraphy by mary lee lemke. New Moon Communications, Box 3488 Ridgeway Station, Stamford CT 06905. \$2.50 + 50¢ postage.

the immaculate conception of the blessed virgin dyke by Ellen Marie Bissert. 13th Moon, PO Box 3, Inwood Station, NY NY 10034. \$3.00.

Journey by Martha Courtot. \$2.00.

Tribe by Martha Courtot. \$2.50. Both from Tribe, 1828 E. 7th St., Tucson, Arizona 85719.

The Fourteenth Witch by Shelley Blue (poet) and Deborah Snow (photographer). Persephone Press, PO Box 7222, Watertown, Mass. 02172. \$5.50.

Because I feel uncomfortable in the role of solitary critic, I want to get my biases out in the open before I start talking about these books. I have a long-standing love affair with the English language, partly the result of a childhood filled with the sonorous cadences of the King James Bible, the luminous prose of Cranmer's prayerbook, and what Willie Morris calls "the verbal jam-session" of Southern conversation. I want language to be beautiful (as in beauty=truth, not as in beauty=prettiness) and I think that poetry should be the ultimate refinement of language.

spiderwomon's lesbian fairy tales is not a book of "poems" but it is wonderful language. Marion begins,

one time i asked for my mind to be opened to female plants and animals

needing in the feminist evolving of my lesbian consciousness a symbolic presence that would be a spirit guide.

spider grandmother, one of the creator deities of the hopi indians, came to live in me.

...

these stories are telling the evolving from a spider womon lesbian creation myth

They are stories of cinderella, of anima alice, of aladdin and her lamp, all rescued from the morass of masculinist tradition. This book has lots of humor and lots of heras. The richness of the language is a delight. Here is the ending of my favorite, "big red riding hood." (Red has just awakened from a dream, having found grandmother's house):

water elusive-water, wetness flowing, streams of knowing flowing to a place that is a state of mind

the water was wide now, she came to a path of rocks that could take her to the other side. decide. the river gets more and more wide, is grandmother's house on the other side? decide. she tested a rock to see if she would slide, and (flower of a girl) a bee tumbled into her ear and set up a wave that carried her over to the other side.

...
the river was now so wide that it had a tide, and water spirit rushing open mouthed ocean, ocean, begin to have a notion of grandmother's house where being began motion.

One last thing--these words are not set in type; they are in lovely Italic calligraphy by Mary Lee Lemke. As the contents page says, "there are no typos in this book."

I had a hard time with the poems in *the immaculate conception of the blessed virgin dyke* and am probably not the best person to be reviewing them. Most of them are built around either pain or depression, which I find either tedious or irksome. I don't think pain is the center of existence, and I have no patience with the "wounded artist" theory of aesthetics.

The most frustrating thing about your book, Ellen Marie Bissert, is the sense I have that you could do such powerful writing if you would just stop looking at the ground all the time. I think some of your pain is that of a potentially large vision confined to a cramped crabbed little space.

Anyone who can write about "the oblique sun shining boldly in its small deep sky" or that

there is a window
opening
to a secret window
wind
from rain blows thru
tender
& clear a pear
sits
on the innermost ledge
ripens

has no business settling for the bathos of "romance is a fraud/i stole from a bakery to make me normal, sick & fat/it has nothing to do with puritanism/but valentine's a shitty night when after all my poems/you'll be sleeping with someone new."

The last poem in the book ends

...i don't give a shit if sperm freezes over
i'll die alone and dig it
loving a woman in a black leather jacket

& walking into The Duchess with my polka-dot tie &
lace shirt

this is my life & i now ask everyone to dance.

which I hope is an indication of future direction. What most of these poems have is too much angst and not enough dance.

Journey and *Tribe* are more modest productions than either of the preceding books, but they are marvelous.

Journey is a set of poems about travels, internal and external. Martha writes, "Sometimes I begin to compose letters to my mother in my head. Casual notes, but to let her know what directions my life has taken." These are some of those notes.

I want to say, Martha Courtot, I love your writing. Poem #2, for instance--

traveling the Night Road
the long journey
i bring you moon-cakes
my friends
and messages from the dead:
this is what they say to me
open-mouthed:

Sing now!

Dance!

do what needs to be done
feel the sun on your skin
when you swim, swim deep
when you are still,
feel the bloodbeats rise up the spine
see with your eyes
see with more than your eyes
the dead say this:
what the dead have is good
and cannot be denied
but for the living
life is best. live.

"Bloodbeats"! What a perfect word! The next poem begins "sunset/on the underbelly/of a gull/passing overhead/is enough extravagance/of ecstasy/for nine life times." "Enough extravagance of ecstasy," indeed. Not many people can string together such a luxury of vowels.

Then there is *Tribe*, which is about the desert and about making love, about "women i love" who "have burnt faces/as if a fire/was burning/fiercely/at the base of their skulls" and about tribes of women moving past each other.

There is the story of stone, who "sits in a compassion of sunlight and water." Who "waits a long time; stone will wait a long time; many mornings of sunlight; many nights full of sky fires; seasons change. Nothing can stop this. Slowly stone will fizzle; open. The stories she knows whispered through hidden veins will

leak out, run down their own rivers making their own seas. Nothing can stop this. She will become the water which flows over her; someday it will flow through... the grasses whisper. What is a woman? What woman? Hush. Stone knows."

And of Martha's mother, dead of emphysema at 63:

...when i see a woman smoking
i think of my mother
holding her cigarettes around her hand
like a life raft
hanging on
to any piece of life she could find
even wrapped in tobacco and darkening her lungs

...
she walked through the world as if she owned it
even when it pounded itself into her lungs
year after year
robbing her of everything
but the fire in her eyes

And of the "women of the dream":

...some of us
will not make it
each Spring then
we will return
to this cliff-edge
tossing their bones fresh flowers
and our daughters and daughters
will return
wailing our ancient grief
each Spring then
we will let them know
the dream was worth it
as their bones whiten
the purest allelulias of hope

There is nothing else to say about these poems; they speak for themselves.

Tea Corinne did cover and book design for both volumes, and both are truly elegant.

The Fourteenth Witch is the most elaborate and expensive of all these books. It is a beautiful volume, with poetry by Shelley Blue and photographs by Deborah Snow. One thing about it drives me crazy, though: THERE IS NO TABLE OF CONTENTS. Upon careful inspection I discovered that it contains 7 sections--Trinity (in five parts), The Next Screaming Woman..., Freudian Slips, Four Women, Virgo Leaving, Virgo Loving, and Daughters of the Amazon Return. These (as the Preface says) capture "the evolution of women in revolution."

I like the ambitiousness of this book, both words and pictures. The sheer variety is amazing, and the juxtaposition of poetry and photographs often powerful.

The erotic poetry (Virgo Loving) is really wonderful. "Plum Song," for instance, which faces a close-up of someone's lovely nipple--

*red of blood of me to you of plum overripe dripping
juicy cold my tongue makes it hot fire of shooting star
round roll roll around and round tongue on skin salt
sweet red i trace your form with my tongue not tight
tied tired tried tried to touch to touch to touch me in
you I fall through you into me my body takes form again
is real and as I write there is no right or rites and
happiness is inevitable*

Shelley Blue, some of the things you try, especially with structure, are overly mannered and ineffective. But it is so nice to see someone exploring the power of structure in this way that I am not inclined to complain too much.

One thing, however, I will gripe about: the currently fashionable device of running all the words together like this, which is supposed to sweep the reader along in a heady rush of meaning, like running downhill. It doesn't work. What happens is this: first the eye hits a blob of print; then "wordlets" jump out at one, syllables which may have nothing to do with the poem; then one has to sit down and pick apart the words one at a time. Since poets sometimes submerge important changes in this swamp, one has to go through every last syllable, even though a pattern seems clear at the beginning. Finally bits and pieces are strewn about like shards of pottery and the poetry has vanished. In "Justine," for instance (one of the Four Women) the words are first laid out comprehensibly: "*yellow of hair of translucent skin turning into brown of eyebrows...*" then compressed into "*yellow of hair of translucent skin turning into brown of eyebrows...*"

When my eye strikes that, I get: "*yellow of hair translucent skin turn in gin to brown...*" That was certainly true of my kin, but I doubt that it is what the poem was meant to say.

All gripes aside, this is a beautiful, beautiful book. In the blurb on the back cover Shelley says, "Poetry is not a privilege. It is a necessity." This is a necessary volume.

Having read through all these poetries, however, I have one small plaint:

I long
for feminist poets
who would sometimes write
in something besides
free verse.

janis kelly

[NOTE: Two reviewers didn't say the one thing I wanted said about Bissert's *the immaculate conception of the blessed virgin dyke*, so I'll say it myself in a footnote. This poetry is an enraged, dirty, ragged fight through despair to an ironic triumph. It is not nice, but not-nice is validation and remembrance for those of us who came out of very dirty, very ragged, very heterosexual pasts. It is also a complex, tightly controlled poetry--for instance, the thirteen "lesbian sonnets" (each with thirteen or twenty-six lines) of "Outgoings."

My favorite lines remain these from the title poem:

my qualifications are suspect
i am neither blessed nor virgin
i've slept with men
given that up
i've slept with women
not quite ditto
i am becoming an antique virgin
a virgin as in antiquity
like Artemis
like Sappho retired
i am in control
of myself
myself
i am in revolution
spinning like a propeller through the clouds of paralysis
i am in revolution
I AM AT WORK

-Harriet_]

announcements

LESBIAN PRESS NEWSFLASH! NAIAD MOVES TO MISSOURI AND ADDS TWO NEW HISTORICALLY IMPORTANT TITLES:

Valerie Taylor's *LOVE IMAGE*. For everyone who missed or misses the few gems in that flurry of Lesbian paperback novels of the '50's & early '60's--a new novel by the author of *Whisper Their Love*, *Stranger on Lesbos*, and *The Girls in 3-B*. \$4.50.

AND Renee Vivien's *THE MUSE OF THE VIOLETS*. Her lyric Lesbian poetry available for the first time in English. \$4.00.

To order, send the total plus 10% postage/handling to The Naiad Press, Inc., 20 Rue Jacob Acres, Bates City, Missouri 64011.

IF YOU'RE CONTEMPLATING WITCHCRAFT...

WOMANSPRIT enters her fourth year. Issued quarterly at equinoxes and solstices. An eclectic collage of articles, poems, reviews, letters, personal testimony--ranging from the repetitive to the revelatory. *Womanspirit* has probably gone farther than any other journal in breaking down the elitism of print. Each issue Ruth & Jean Mountaingrove work with a different collective, often in different cities; the magazine-producing process becomes as fascinating as the product. Grows primarily out of Lesbian feminist experience. \$6/yr. Box 263, Wolf Creek, Oregon, 97497.

LADY-UNIQUE-INCLINATION-OF-THE-NIGHT. A new feminist spirituality journal. Emphasizes theory. Cycle I has material on the Mayan Moon Goddess and reflections on Jung, Ovid, *The Bacchae*, Emily Dickinson--and Martha Courtot's memories of her Catholic girlhood. Cycle I (88 pp., perfect-bound) \$2.25; Cycle II, \$2.75 from PO Box 803, New Brunswick, N.J. 08903

FOR THOSE WHO WRITE...

An anthology of writings by and about black lesbians is now being compiled. Articles, poems, fiction, art work and photograph submissions should be forwarded to A.A. Shockley, 1809 Morena St., #G-4, Nashville, TN 37208. Enclose S.A.S.E.

directory of women writing, ed. andrea chesman & polly joan. perfect-bound directory of women writers. includes addresses & self-descriptions ranging from sober to ecstatic. graphics & poetry interspersed. an aid to forming your own support-&-stimulation network. \$3.80 ppd. from Women Writing Press, RD 3, Newfield, NY 14867.

Write on, Woman! pamphlet guide to feminist & Lesbian magazines that welcome unsolicited ms. \$3.50 ppd. from Lynne D. Shapiro, 92 Horatio St. 4S, NYC 10014.

The Lesbian Herstory Archives needs copies of your unpublished writings, personal journals, group documents, photographs, tapes, etc. LHA, Box 1258, NYC 10001.

AN INVITATION TO JOIN THE FEMINIST WRITERS' GUILD:

"As one of our first political actions as a Guild, we will take out an ad in a major review publication. This ad, signed by members of the Guild, will point out the review bias against feminism. We will also publicly protest the small number of grants and prizes given to women each year. We will pressure publications with national distribution to review books by feminist presses, and we will work against the suppression of writing by lesbians. In addition, we will use whatever leverage we gain as a national organization to open up more places for feminist writing to be published. We will also encourage the creation of grants for the special needs of women (such as childcare), and we hope to be able to found a retreat for women writers.

As a service organization the Guild will assemble a list of minimal rights and percentages, draw up standard contracts, and put together a handbook on how to read contracts. A file on feminist editors and agents will be compiled, and a newsletter will be sent four times a year to provide information about publishing, grants, and Guild activities. Eventually we hope to provide medical insurance and even a retirement plan for members. Finally, the Guild, working through its local chapters, will encourage the growth of community among feminist writers."

--from an open letter signed by Alta, Jean Dickinson, Mary Mackey, Susan Griffin, Hallie Inglehart, Anica Vesel Mander, Valerie Miner, Anne Kent Rush & Charlene Spretnak.

--Membership fee: \$10/yr (\$5 for unemployed). Checks made out to Feminist Writers' Guild. Send to FWG, c/o Carol Murray, Redland and Murray, 1182 Market Street, Suite 408, San Francisco, CA 94102.

LITERARY JOURNALS:

Thirteenth Moon. "...publishing women whoever we choose to be." The quietly lovely journal of poetry, fiction, reviews & graphics grows lovelier with each issue. 3 issues/\$4.50 from Box 3, Inwood Sta., NYC 10034.

Conditions. A new journal "with an emphasis on writing by lesbians..." Fiction, poetry, interviews, and excellent reviewing. 3 issues/\$6.50 from PO Box 56, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, NY 11215.

QUEST will begin its fourth year by expanding to a 96 page format and adding an "Organizer's Dialogue" section. Projected issues include "Kaleidoscope II," "International," "The Body Politic," and "Women in Their Communities." See review, page 83, for ordering information.

FEMINIST NEWSPAPERS--THREE OLDIES:

Off Our Backs. The grandmama of feminist news journals, now in her seventh year. Letters, good to excellent reviews, personal coverage of conferences and cultural events, analysis, interviews and comprehensive international/national news coverage. From a stable, predominantly Lesbian-feminist collective. (But which one is CHICKEN LADY??) 11 issues a year/\$6 from 1724-20th St. NW, Washington, DC 20009.

Big Mama Rag. Since 1973. News, "hot briefs," letters, reviews, interviews. Back issues have focused on several movement tempests: Jane Alpert, Sagaris, FEN, etc. All issues from 1973-77 available for \$10 from 1724 Gaylord St., Denver, CO 80206. (Current sub: 12 issues/\$6.)

Amazon: a midwest journal for women. Since 1971. Midwest news combined with letters and personal articles in newspaper format. Back issue themes include mothers, money, and fantasy. Warm and practical tone pervades the feminist analysis. 6 issues/\$3 from 2211 East Kenwood, Milwaukee, WI 53211.

ART JOURNALS FROM NEW YORK:

The Feminist Art Journal: A Quarterly Magazine Devoted to Women in the Arts Past and Present. "Painters, musicians, sculptors, film-makers, crafts people, authors & every other creative field." Emphasizes interviews; biographical articles; reproductions; exhibition, film, and book reviews. Back issues include features on Janet Fish, Audrey Flack, Natalia Goncharova, Erica Jong, etc. 1 yr. subscription \$7.00 from 41 Montgomery Place, Brooklyn, NY 11215. Published since 1971.

Heresies: a feminist publication on art and politics. A new idea-oriented journal including research, theory, analysis, fiction, poetry, visual art. Each issue 130 pp., perfect bound, 8½"x11". Back issues ("Feminism, Art and Politics," "Patterns of Communication and Space Among Women"; "LESBIAN ART AND ARTISTS") \$3.00 each. Forthcoming issues: "Women's Traditional Art & Art Making"; "The Great Goddess and Women's Spirituality"; "Women and Violence." One year (4 issues)/\$10 from Box 766, Canal Street Station, NYC 10013.

DAUGHTERS, INC. MOVES TO NEW YORK CITY:

Before the November publication of their five new books, catch up with last year's harvest of Lesbian novels: *In Her Day* by Rita Mae Brown; *Levet* by Bertha Harris; and Monique Wittig's *The Opepenax*--her first novel translated from the French by Helen Weaver; a description in wonderful Wittig language of "the girl underworld" inhabited by Catherine Legrand, a Catholic schoolgirl who refuses to give up violence and who chooses for her symbol the shadow which means "rebellion." \$4.50 each from 22 Charles Street, NYC 10014. Add 35¢/book handling.

CONTRIBUTORS

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DEVI KATHRYN HUNT, Eugene, Oregon. "(My sister) Trina told me i was her favorite poet after rod mckuen, though that was two years ago & i think i've aced him out by now."

SONYA JONES does The Vanity Press in Atlanta, works on a newspaper and dances with wimmin--inbetween writing.

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SUE SILVERMARIE. "I'm a writer, masseuse, lesbian mother. etc.. proud to be a Wisconsin woman."

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MANDY WALLACE was born in Tuscaloosa, Alabama in 1951.

SINISTER WISDOM POSTER



by Tee Corinne

In the spring of 1977, this Tee Corinne photograph appeared on the cover of *Sinister Wisdom* 3, followed by a deluge of requests for a poster. And now the poster is ready: a duplicate of that cover, black on gray, 17" x 22". You can have your own for a contribution of \$3.00 toward the survival of *Sinister Wisdom*, plus 50¢ to cover mailing costs. (They make nice gifts for friends, too; so write for bulk rates.)

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SUBMISSIONS

Sinister Wisdom welcomes unsolicited manuscripts. We need: fiction, drama, essays, biographical material on Lesbians, research, interviews, reviews, line drawings and other graphics, photographs, letters, poetry, journal entries and responses to anything in previous issues. Allow 6 weeks for reply.

Please type all written work. Length limit for articles: approximately 5000 words. Enclose self-addressed stamped envelope and a 2-3 line bio. At this time, we can pay only with a year's subscription or 3 copies of the issue in which your work appears. Please indicate which "payment" you prefer. If you submit the same work to other publications or have submitted and are waiting to hear from them, please inform us of this fact.

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Submission deadlines: #5 -- December 15, 1977
#6 -- April 15, 1977

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SINISTER WISDOM

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