

Lesbian Poetry—When? And Now!

Featuring Poems by:

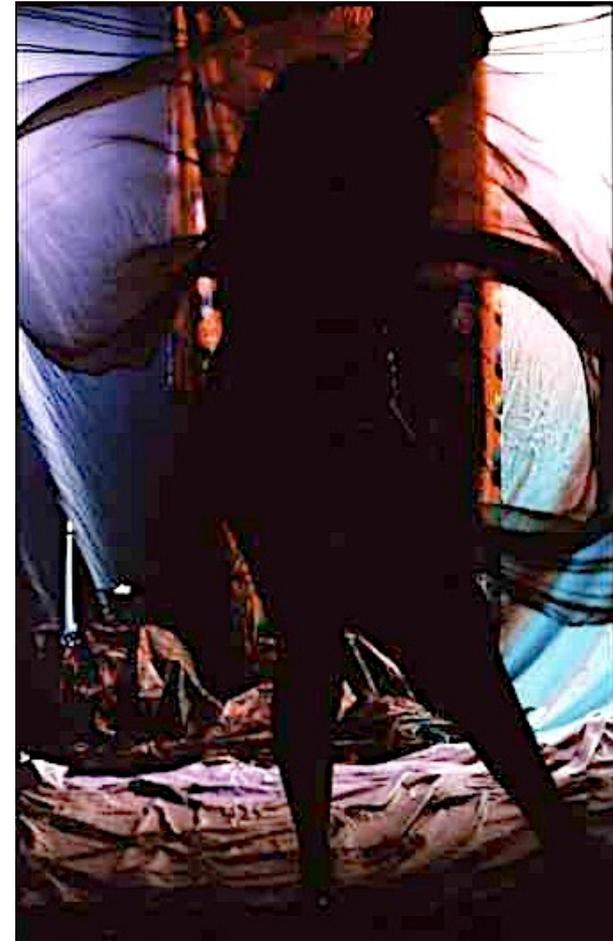
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- Elizabeth Colen
- Sharon Deevey
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- Jewelle Gomez
- Elsa Gidlow
- Carol Guess
- Alexis Pauline Gumbs
- Marilyn Hacker
- Susan Hawthorne
- Eloise Klein Healy
- Joan Larkin
- Audre Lorde
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- Adrienne Rich
- Muriel Rukeyser
- Sappho
- Ruth L. Schwartz
- Maureen Seaton
- SJ Sindu
- Edna St. Vincent Millay
- Chocolate Waters

Dedicated to Fran Day, her memory is a blessing.

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Lesbian Poetry— When? And Now!

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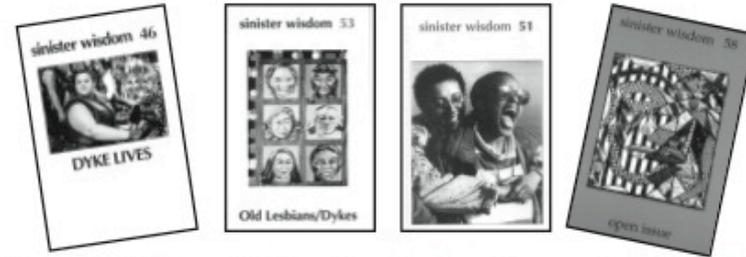
Sinister Wisdom is a multicultural, multi-class, female-born lesbian space. We seek to open, consider and advance the exploration of community issues. We recognize the power of language to reflect our diverse experiences and to enhance our ability to develop critical judgment, as lesbians evaluating our community and our world. Statements made and opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher, board members, or editor(s) of *Sinister Wisdom*.

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NOTES FOR A MAGAZINE

While I was working on this issue of *Sinister Wisdom*, **Lesbian Poetry – When? And Now?**, I was also beginning my research for my dissertation. August 2010 found me at the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture at Duke University looking at the papers of Catherine Nicholson. Nicholson, as you may recognize from the pages of *Sinister Wisdom*, was one of the founders of *Sinister Wisdom* with her partner, Harriet Ellenberger (aka Desmoines). Sifting through boxes, folders, and papers from Nicholson, I was filled with awe about the history of *Sinister Wisdom* and inspired by the commitment and excitement that wimmin have brought to this magazine as editors, contributors, and volunteers. I hope you will feel something similar while reading this issue.

Lesbian Poetry – When? And Now? reflects my belief that lesbian poets have been in dialogue with one another, directly and indirectly for decades. This issue brings together a variety of contemporary lesbian poets, most of whom have paired their work with a “lesbian poet of yore.” Many people inquired about what I meant by “lesbian poet of yore;” I confess I was cagey in my responses to them, not wanting to proscribe what I meant, but more interested in what creative responses womyn had to the call for poems. As always, I was gratified by lesbian creativity.

Lesbian Poetry – When? And Now? begins with a translation by Susan Hawthorne of a fragment by Sappho. Sappho's “Fragment 16” is followed by three contemporary poets responding to Sappho: Susan Hawthorne, Eloise Klein Healy, and Catherine McNeil. After this invocation to our Sapphic foremother, the poets and the poets to whom they respond vary widely. You'll find poems from Jewelle Gomez, Elsa Gidlow, Sharon Bridgforth, Gertrude Stein, Tamiko Beyer, Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Joan Larkin, and dozens of others in these pages. I thank all of the women who submitted to this issue and who graciously allowed their work to be included in the issue. I find the poems in this issue to be an exciting dialogue among lesbians in poetry. I hope that you will as well.

While assembling this issue of *Sinister Wisdom*, Fran Day asked me if I would take over as editor of *Sinister Wisdom*. This was a hard decision because I have been so impressed by the time, care, and attention that Fran gave to stewarding the journal over the last six years. Her dedication and commitment to *Sinister Wisdom*, and by extension to the entire lesbian community, has been extraordinary. Her sudden death in September 2010 shocked and

saddened me; I hope each of you reading this will find a way to honor Fran's life and work in a meaningful way. Honestly, when Fran asked me about becoming editor, I didn't know if I could walk in her shoes—or the shoes of any of the other editors who have been responsible for these pages and this institution. I only agreed to do it after my good friend, Merry Gangemi, agreed to work with me as a co-editor of *Sinister Wisdom*. We are both excited to be a part of *Sinister Wisdom* for the future. We are certain that there will be some rocky moments during this transition and along the way, but we hope that we will find the journey, the conversations, and the cultural visions sustain us and *Sinister Wisdom*. Thank you for reading *Sinister Wisdom* and being part of this community—and please stay around for the conversation and find a way to contribute to the community and to this institution.

In sisterhood and struggle,

Julie R. Enszer

Sappho, Translation by Susan Hawthorne

Fragment 16

some say an army of horses some say an army of feet
some say an army of ships is the most beautiful thing
on this black earth but I say it's whom-
ever you love

easy to make this thought catch
for she who was more beautiful
than all of humanity
left her sublime husband behind

to sail to Troy
neither children nor loved parents
could she perceive
but deceived – she went

for
lightly
recall to me now Anaktoria
no longer here

Translator Note: This is one of Sappho's best-known poems. I first read it as graffiti on a toilet wall in an inner urban suburb of Melbourne in the mid-1970s. Underground poetry always survives. Between then and 1979 when I began studying Ancient Greek a whole new world opened for me. But it's really only now that I appreciate the craft of Sappho's poems.

Susan Hawthorne

what Anaktoria says to her

when the herds are running the ground thrumming
sunlight scaling every beam of dust like a horde
on the move your finest poems are for me
that's what I love best

when the sun strikes your coat roan with heat
we all stand dazzled by your beauty
and none of us will ever abandon you
you the brightest of us all

when the summer grass grows pale
and the longing strikes up again
I think of you standing always knowing
which way to go

your doubts are few your face dewy
in the morning light and your eyes
brown soft but your glance as sharp
as thorns

so Sappho let me follow you on this track
into that thicket by the river
let us stand flank by flank our love
our armour

Eloise Klein Healy

Artemis To Aphrodite

The Parthenon—East Frieze panel #856
Apollo, Poseidon, Artemis, Aphrodite

OK, I know about the sparrows
in the dust, the storm of their arrival,
or love like a storm of arrival
and a flight of birds.

I'm the one supposed to be the hard lover,
but even with your sweet smile
and winning ways,
even with your promises
and devotion,

look here--
my arm stretching to touch
your shoulder,

you've made it stone
where a moment ago the folds of your garment
were running grass and
you were turning to greet me.

Sharon Deevey

In Celebration of Lesbian Desire

I myself might be considered a lesbian poet of yore, now reemerging after forty years in the hinterlands of Ohio, the workplace, illness, and survival. When I came out at age 26, every lesbian I knew wrote poetry. First, make love to a woman, next, write a poem – they were two parts of the same experience. I published my few poems of yore in *The Furies*, and in *Dykes for an Amerikan Revolution*, the small newspapers and pamphlets with which we hoped to change the world.

Forty years later, I am writing poetry again, and compiling scattered verses from my lifetime of journals for a project at the local, quite heterosexual senior center. In the Ohio State University Library, I find generations of lesbian poetry in the open stacks. I borrow the slim gem, Gerry Pearlberg's *Zenith of Desire: Contemporary [in 1996] Lesbian Poems About Sex* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1996.) I choose a poem I love, "January Vineyards" by Ruth L. Schwartz, and find her website.

Can I ask Ruth, twenty years my junior, to be my "lesbian poet of yore"? What is old, or young, of yore, or now? Lesbian age has always confused me, as I learned as a member of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change. At 65, I am younger than many other OLOC members, who are mostly 70-90. Because I came out at a younger age, however, I feel older *as a lesbian* than the chronologically older OLOC lesbians who came out in midlife or later.

Careers and creativity also vary in relative age. Ruth has a significant poetry publishing history, while I, starting anew after an early dabble, am a beginner in poetic craft.

I pair Ruth's 1996 poem with my 2010 poem, "come dance with me" -- to celebrate the surprising persistence of

desire through aging, illness, and near death, anytime right up to the very end.

In my life, the persistence of break-ups has been companion to the persistence of desire. I have aspired not to gay marriage, but rather to truth and courage, respecting the painful ending of desire. In Debra Riggin Waugh's wonderfully titled book, *Ex-Lover Weird Shit* (Takoma Park, MD: Two Out of Three Sisters Press, 1994), I find "A Parting" by Jewelle Gomez, and pair it with my recent "ex'es in public." I heard Jewelle speak at Ohio State, probably twenty years ago, the first woman I heard introduced as a lesbian poet. She said the most radical way to change the world is to return to your high school reunion as an open lesbian, which I did.

In academic reviews of lesbian poetry, I see discussion about the ambiguous subjects of erotic poems written by women of unknown sexual orientation. I realize that the lesbian poems I've written all these years to my beloved "you's" could, astonishingly, if standing alone, be perceived as written to men. My years of militant lesbian self-disclosure, my marching in the streets will disappear, if only my poems and my name survive. I wrote to "you" without thinking to label my words by gender, because lesbian life has become so normal, so open, more like breathing or going to the grocery store than like politics and confrontation. Maybe I need to insert new words into the space where others have a middle name. If I aspire to be a contemporary lesbian poet, I will need to become Sharon Womenlovingwoman Deevey, for all posterity to see.

Ruth L. Schwartz

January Vineyards

How our bodies fail to confine our longings,
even in death's season, withholding nothing

How the hills furrow like a cherished body,
leaning into the opened hand of the lake

How the brittle grapevines braid the fields

How the vagina clenches, prayerfully
around the fingers which have entered it

How the canopy of leaves will bless the fruit,
each grape soft and ready for the mouth

Sex was going to be the landscape
which would make our bodies perfect,
and it has

How savagely I want you, even here,
on the white stretcher, in the pallid hospital

Sharon Deevey

come dance with me

suddenly, you burst
into my daydreams
after years of casual contact

your smile
a pool of sunlight
in deep winter

you stand six inches away
and I shake

currents crackle
in the air between us

I watch
the flick of your kick
as you turn the corner
of the Bosa Nova

you invite me

and I begin
to rearrange
my calendar

Jewelle Gomez**A Parting**

We sit across a table.
She demands I say
the things I always
have trouble saying:
How I feel about loving her
about not loving her.
On my tongue
is only the knowledge that I can't
open my mouth
except to eat the sandwich
I've safely ordered.

I watch her hands move on the cup,
her slim fingers press the tea bag.
They are still the ones I want to feel on my skin
Her eyes filling with tears
are still the pale light
that pulled me inside and held me warm.
The plaintive song of her voice
is the same: pulling me
pushing me.

I want to make promises
I won't keep.
Instead I am silent.
Eating
as she demands
I say how I feel.

Sharon Deevey

ex'es in public

after writing group, you stop me
lean toward me and say
“now that wasn't painful, was it!”

ouch, ouch, ouch, I flinch
and stammer like a wimp
“I guess it was OK”

I hear your statement not as a question
but instead as firm pronouncement
implying you were right (of course)
insisting there's no reason for concern
about our public meetings

I still wish you'd ask me
 how did you feel?
 what was hard?
 what helped?

your words remind me, if I protest
much less show you full-blown
anger, sadness, grief

you will once again so quickly label me:
“oversensitive!” “overreacting!”

maybe true, dear one, but I have seen you
let suppressed emotion leak
later, always later
unexpectedly, sideways, zapping us both

I feel off-balance, always off-balance
with you

why have I not yet given up
the hope of friendship?

Meg Torwl

Blue (1998)

on the pavement
the evening we met ended
drawing imaginary maps
of the world
so I could know
where you live

then
it was you
you I chased
around the botanical gardens
hanging on your every word

you older
so full of energy
I younger
dragging my feet
between sticks

I can't take my eyes
off you
behind yours
I see
a million oscillating dots
each one
a thought or idea
sparking me
like we could speak
for years
and still
have just begun
synchronicity:
i take home
in my pocket
a lemon verbena leaf

you casually rubbed
between your fingers
for me to smell
my favourite tea

we are the
last ones left
lying on the grass
green clad
letting our blue sky minds
drift by
you give me
a lift home
we drink lemon bliss tea
speak passionately
of mountains and spirituality
maybe they are
the same?

next time last time
i see you
swopping photos
some hugs and kisses
lemon imagine dessert
dried persimmons
and sage tea

please tell me
this isn't all
there will ever be...?

Elsa Gidlow

The Artist (1922)

Let us leave off Loving, My Lady
You have kissed me Grey
And still I have no peace.
We thought we could make the night
A tapestry of passion.
Dear Love, what a vain caprice.

Where's the immortal design
We thought we had splashed on the indigo cloth?
And where is the cloth?
Dawn is forever the cynic.
She shows us love is the flame,
Our flesh the eternal moth.

My Lady, loose me and rise.
We are brief as apple blossom
And I am heart-chilled with thought of the end.
Creation is all.
The hours are thieves, Time a beggar,
And we have little to spend.

I ache for the brush in my hand.
The thrall of the compliant pigment
Governs my blood.
I will paint you, My Lady,
The afterlove glow in your face.
I would deify you, if I could
With enchantments of color,
Bind you with fetters of terrible beauty,
Fast to my canvas forever.
Give you the eternity God has denied you,
Bind you to life with art's sacred chains
That death can not sever.

Love has betrayed us enough with its treacherous wonder.
Let us go now, while we ache with the magic,
Or what is the gain?
Art is our one immortality.
All we win from the gods
In exchange for our labor and pain.

Adrienne Bradley

The Poet (1998)

poetry seduces
loose ends of imagination
hooks in to memory threads
giving them a place to be

I'm picking up hints of a tapestry
It has blue in it
you are shining a light
on it for me

metamorphosis feels
strangely good
my heart is a chrysalis
just now

Tuesday is very soon
breathing is hardly
any sound at all
stars will hold
everything together in light

Elsa Gidlow

Love's Acolyte (1919)

Many have loved you with lips and fingers
And lain with you until the moon went out;
Many have bought you lover's gifts!
And some have left their dreams on your doorstep.

But I who am youth among your lovers
Come like an acolyte to worship,
My thirsting blood restrained by reverence,
My heart a worthless prayer.

The candles of desire are lighted,
I bow my head, afraid before you,
A mendicant who craves your bounty
Ashamed of what small gifts she brings.

Meg Torwl

Je t'adore (1999)

I have seen
your lips on my breast
like a worshipper
at a temple
I have felt
your tongues libations
I have known
your head fall down
with overwhelming passion
as my body rises
to meet you.

Elsa Gidlow

To the Unknown Goddess (1918)

Come to me at the top of the World,
 Oh Mine, before the years spill
 Our rare love in to Time's cup
 And give our will to Time's will.

My wide basin is full of starlight,
 My moon is lighted with new fire,
 I have lit every sun in the firmament
 With the hurting flame of my desire.

The worms there in the valley
 Die – to forget death.
 But here at the top of the world
 I laugh under my breath.

There is pain here, and tears,
 Bitter, terrible tears;
 But the joys have warm mouths, and madness
 Dances downwards with the years.

Come to me at the top of the world,
 O Mine. The valley is deep.
 The valley is overfull of the dying
 And with those who sleep.

But here wonderful winds blow
 And the pines sing *one song*.
 Come to me at the top of the world,
 Come soon. I have waited too long.

Meg Torwl

Mountain (1998)

was it
the chilling wind
whipping in my eyes
which made me weep
or was it
the beauty of
being so high up
with mountains
in all directions
or was it being there
with you to share
over came me
with emotion
was it that I could not walk
now any
of the last steep trail
to the very top
that made the tears
course down
my face
but watched you go gladly
as my body yearned
to toil
up the narrow trail
where the wind swept
mountain dust in waves off
the top of the ridge
was it some freedom
I felt carefree on a rock
at high altitude
as the wind
played a mortal
mournful whistle
in the hollows
of my walking sticks
keening
ken
kin.

Sharon Bridgforth

and/Freedom is my name

i am from swamp and thicket.
flowering in sludge
i bask in laughter and tears.

7 cycles of rain/and stars
return my memories to the sun
where Angels sing my name.

wrapped in Prayers of them before
a thousand threads of moonlight kisses
blanket my spirit/dance.

i am born again.
this time
i am free.

and suddenly i can fly.

Ching-In Chen

Love with the Chinese Lion Dancer

Then your head emerged
from the cavern of the lionhead,
all ponytail and shit talk.
Sweat and swagger.

You knew your body
and its capacity for velocity.

Every week,
I came to the corner of the den,
out of your eyesight,
among the thin black shoes.

I tried to get my hands
to dance in the air
under the heavy lid of wire,
the bones of a discarded animal
scraped to metal.

The brooding eyes of the teacher
who shook her head,
kept me indoors.

We had to be better than the boys.
Their easy place granted
in the parade route,
their heavy legs marking time in the cold,
arms burly from the drums.

So I flicked and flicked,
praying for strong wrists.

Watched you through the metal gate
leap from tile to tile,
over the waiting arched back of your partner,
practicing flight.

Sharon Bridgforth

Excerpt from *lovve/rituals & rage*

i grew up n da woods
 fak/our houz waz so fa bak
 dem parts didn hab no nam
 so we calln it
 way-bak/dats where i grew up/yeah
 in way-bak, lousyanna.

my ma'ma's people waz full-blood Koromanteen
 from Kromantine on da Gold Coast,
 bought
 ova slaves/da
 Koromanteens
 escap'd
 inta da hilly-woods made a way
 nexta da Arawak/who
 waz-first-on-dat-land.
 white folk didn neva see da Koromantine
 no mo
 dat scar'd em/yeah/white folk
 said da Koromantine turn'd theyselves inta
 bush n tree/say dats why na n den
 a bush o tree wou raise up
 n kill sheself a white folk.
 ma'ma always laugf bout dat say,
gurl, dat go ta sh'w ya dem backra dun't nu
nuthn
kep em scar'd/kep we safe!

na/my paw'paw's people
 waz all-bloods-mix'd/made he be geecheee.
 he mak a livn readn shells
 by da port till he met my ma'ma
 who stepn off da boat from da hilly-woods/lookn
 fa hope.

paw'paw say ma'ma tooka hold of him eyes n next
thang he know'd he donn jump'd da broom n waz
livn in way-bak

na/paw'paw mak lik ma'ma spell'd him/i don't
know/but i know
paw'paw be smiln
all da time

till one day paw'paw wenta town
neva come back.
he stopn a white man from tryn ta take a cul'lad
gurl-child's-wo'mnhood by force paw'paw beat
dat white man/who tole da deputy/n da sheriff
n a-whole-crowd-of-white peoples/took my
po black/red/high-brown paw n burn'd him
alive n da town square/spitn at him n calln him
out his nam.

my ma'ma saw it all in her dreams/said
paw'paw he com'n ta her be moan'n
said she had ta go be wid him/said
not ta worry
she'd
be
right
bak/i
thank ma'ma went in dem
woods n gavn sheself
ta death.

na/but she did come bak i
waz rais'd by Spirits/yeah!
right dere in way-bak lousyanna
dey rais'd me/ma'ma
paw'paw and dey peoples.
only thang bout it, i neva figur what me
nam be dey
all been calln me somethang deffrent in
deffrent langauages/cept
ma'ma who calln me baby

*baby/she whoz sangn calls da Spirits down
baby/she who is Wind
baby/the trees lovve her
baby daughta*

n paw'paw who not calln me nuthn cause all he do
is moan
ma'ma say he still mad at da white
folk/say anga donn tied him tongue.
na/mus be a great numba wid dem tongue tied
cause i donn hearn a whole-lota moan'n in my dey/yeah.

na/well anyway
i nam'n myself baby may-fine
cause one day ma'ma's
baby may-fine
lovve.
i sho be lookn i even goes ta da port/watch dey come off da
boats/i be lookn/i say
fo somebody ta LOVVE me wid all dey
heart/somebody i wouldn mind die'n fo
and spendn all-time wid.

*baby/she whoz sangn calls da Spirits down
baby/she who is Wind
baby/the trees lovve her
baby daughta*

Ching-In Chen

Bag of Plaster

All we have to open the past are five senses ... and memory. - Louise Bourgeois

your mother like a pecking
bird & push your hands into
wet plaster & strung doilies
along the path & your hands
wait & your body thwarted
from the airtight box destined
for the ground & she plucked
your hands from your body &
i'm a scapegoat that she closed
her lips to & said

Black Is Beautiful in her light rain
accent & your hands under shellack
& her hands on your hands &
caressing your blackstone hands
& her hands light like wood or grain

*the people like prayers. before they come, she tells her assistant, the
student who wants to learn sculpting, at least they will live forever now & they nod & nod. they all
touch like She. i do not.*

*Memory: you lover argue with me. i
do not. sit silently at the dinner
table the last night out. you lover
paste my words against me. i do
not. you lover back & forth. i look
at your hands clean, prepared,
needy. i look at my own, stubby.*

*She saying the Mother why can't
you tell me in her own words what
she was telling you before she go &
i do not. i sit silently while she cuts
off your hands and offers them to*

~ after Lily Hoang

Anne MacKay

Edna St. Vincent Millay Goes to a Gay Bar

Entering, she walked between large
boulders, unsteady on pebbles,
seaweed, green and brown.

“Is that . . .?” “Yes. Don’t talk.
She’ll see me here - look down.”

Overhead, seagulls wheel, cry:
“where? -- where? – forget! – forget!”

“She runs to me but chooses him.
She drinks to drown regret.”

Strong smell of salt and sea --
alcohol, perfume fill the room.

“There -- she sees me with you.
She’ll drink too much, then leave.”

Clouds mist in from the sea,
weave around rocks and shore.
Distant foghorns mourn.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Evening on Lesbos

Twice having seen your shingled heads adorable
Side by side, the onyx and the gold,
I know that I have had what I could not hold.

Twice have I entered the room, not knowing she was here.
Two agate eyes, two eyes of malachite,
Twice have been turned upon me, hard and bright.

Whereby I know my loss.

Oh, not restorable
Sweet incense, mounting in the windless night!

Anne MacKay**Gertrude and Alice Seated in Their Atelier, 1923**

Gertrude and Alice sit across from each other,
 Edwardian floral patterns on their clothes, chairs –
 unexpected designs in their modernist world.
 Well-made wooden furniture, objets d’art everywhere,
 small statues, vases with flowers, candles, porcelains,
 perfectly arranged on tables and fireplace mantel.
 A high room, the walls filled with framed drawings
 and paintings. It’s all very neat and carefully posed.

Gertrude, solid, rests in her large comfortable chair,
 socks and sandals emerging under a long black skirt.
 Alice, who suffers fools gladly for Gertrude’s sake,
 sits in a straighter chair, small feet together, relaxed
 yet poised, ready to entertain guests – or photographer.
 They are looking towards the camera. You can tell
 Gertrude’s mind is on something else -- lunch?
 the open box of chocolates by her side?

They like being photographed. There is a sense of ease,
 the importance of place and time, and time to come.
 Alice, strong presence as partner and guardian,
 Gertrude, as fierce and fearless as those male adventurers
 who tame the wilderness. Gertrude, promoter, discoverer
 of the newest art, dazzling explorer of words and new
 forms of language. Gertrude, who writes – “I can be
 anything and everything and it is always always alright.”

Gertrude Stein

Dear Mrs.

I take my pen in hand to congratulate you dear Mrs. on the extremely promising husband you have. He promises everything and he means it too. He did not not mean it. He means it. The darling. This ejaculation refers to Mrs. not to Mr. as might be erroneously supposed. Mrs. is the fountain of all good all beauty and all sweetness. Mrs is a graceful fountain and she plays over Mr. who is certain that Mrs. is a grateful fountain which means that it is grateful to Mr. to have Mrs. play over him. Mr. is so grateful. Dear Mrs. Lovingly yours

Mr.

[2921-3]

Tamiko Beyer

The Love Poem

*Two women sleeping
together have more than their sleep to defend.*
- Adrienne Rich, New York City, 1978

This strand, your body.
Your face round as the moon and like the moon
dipped with scars, adolescent
boyhood memories:
ambling down crowded sidewalks chest curved
to a thin crescent, walking syncopated blue jean rhythm
to unremember the guilty refrain
of your feet in your mother's pumps.
Now, when we kiss

your lipstick smears against mine.
On the wide, white bed I trace
your shoulder's broad curve,
flick delicate bra hooks, cup your breasts—
small apples that make my own ache in memories
of twelve-year-old growing pains—
how my chest dimpled into unknown body.

A tree against a white sky.
Hair falls across your face as
I bow to the temple of your smooth
skin, as I lick the salt
from nipple, belly. Touch
my tongue to the ruffle
of green silk and elastic where you spill

heavy against tender thighs.
This treacherous landscape, this
choose-your-own-adventure.
I wash upon its shores, gather
scars in my mouth. Across our
histories we tumble—this discovery,
lovely friction. We call, we call into

each other's bones, into each other's singing,
shimmering bones. We sing

into each other's singing bones.

We weep, we eat
our tears, we shimmer into dawn.

Thirty years ago in this same
screeching city Adrienne watched
over her lover's sleep, counted the dangers woven
in each strand of her hair. Wrote:

in the pain of the city, turning

I am remembered by you, remember you

Meaning: woman body loving woman
body finding home, refuge, comfort.

Below us the streets shimmer awake
—this city still crackling with pain,
this city turning its face to us in the new
morning light. And still
so much to defend.

Adrienne might never have imagined
us but we remember again, deliver words
bruised and shining—your body wholly
yours and I loving wholly. Home.

Refuge. Comfort.

Watch the poems crack
open, watch us step through.

Adrienne Rich

The Images

Close to your body, in the
 pain of the city
 I turn. My hand half-sleeping reaches, finds
 some part of you, touch knows you before language
 names in the brain. Out in the dark
 a howl, police sirens, emergency
 our 2 a. m. familiar, ripping the sheath of sleep
 registering pure force as if all transpired—
 the swell of cruelty and helplessness—
 in one block between West End
 and Riverside. In my dreams the Hudson
 rules the night like a right-hand margin
 drawn against the updraft
 of burning life, the tongueless cries
 of the city. I turn again, slip my arm
 under the pillow turned for relief,
 your breathing traces my shoulder. Two women sleeping
 together have more than their sleep to defend.

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

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

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

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

When I saw hér face, she of the several faces
staring indrawn in judgment laughing for joy

her serpents twisting her arms raised
 her breasts gazing
 when I looked into her world
 I wished to cry loose my soul
 into her, to become
 free of speech at last.

And so I came home a woman starving
 for images
 to say my hunger is so old
 so fundamental, that all the lost
 crumbled burnt smashed shattered defaced
 overpainted concealed and falsely named
 faces of every past we have searched together
 in all the ages
 could rise reassemble re-collect re-member
 themselves as I recollected myself in that presence
 as every night close to your body
 in the pain of the city, turning
 I am remembered by you, remember you
 even as we are dismembered
 on the cinema screens, the white expensive walls
 of collectors, the newsrags blowing the streets
 —and it would not be enough.
 This is the war of the images
 We are the thorn-leaf guarding the purple-tongued flower
 each to each.

1976-1978

Tamiko Beyer

from *bough breaks*

and if by invisibility they mean they do not see us
our bows and gnashing teeth
our prom dress feather boa heels
hair glittered gray the fisting and holler
fishnets fishnets breasts breasts breasts
our voices pitched forward into reclamation
the blood in our mouths sweet slick
like our ready-to-take-you between our legs –
we signify no shelter signify
the precipice from where we've returned
all our baskets full of fruit and shark teeth
in the end no vision villain-split
our diy manicures all silvery and chipped
our shouts so lovely so lovely all that licking

Audre Lorde

Love Poem

Speak earth and bless me with what is richest
make sky flow honey out of my hips
rigid as mountains
spread over a valley
carved out by the mouth of rain.

And I knew when I entered her I was
high wind in her forest's hollow
fingers whispering sound
honey flowed
from the split cup
impaled on a lance of tongues
on the tips of her breasts on her navel
and my breath
howling into her entrances
through lungs of pain.

Greedy as herring-gulls
or a child
I swing out over the earth
over and over
again.

Audre Lorde

Power

The difference between poetry and rhetoric
is being
ready to kill
yourself
instead of your children.

I am trapped on a desert of raw gunshot wounds
and a dead child dragging his shattered black
face off the edge of my sleep
blood from his punctured cheeks and shoulders
churns at the imagined taste while
my mouth splits into dry lips
without loyalty or reason
thirsting for the wetness of his blood
as it sinks into the whiteness
of the desert where I am lost
without imagery or magic
trying to make power out of hatred and destruction
trying to heal my dying son with kisses
only the sun will bleach his bones quicker.

The policeman who shot down a 10-year-old in Queens
stood over the boy with his cop shoes in childish blood
and a voice said “Die you little motherfucker” and
there are tapes to prove that. At his trial
this policeman and in his own defense
“I didn’t notice the size or nothing else
only the color.” and
there are tapes to prove that, too.

Today that 37-year-old white man with 13 years of police
 forcing
 has been set free
 by 11 white men who said they were satisfied
 justice had been done
 and one black woman who said
 "They convinced me" meaning
 they had dragged her 4'10" black woman's frame
 over the hot coals of four centuries of white male approval
 until she let go the first real power she ever had
 and lined her own womb with cement
 to make a graveyard for our children.

I have not been able to touch the destruction within me.
 But unless I learn to use
 the difference between poetry and rhetoric
 my power too will run corrupt as poisonous mold
 or lie limp and useless as an unconnected wire
 and one day I will take my teenaged plug
 and connect it to the nearest socket
 raping an 85-year-old white woman
 who is somebody's mother
 and as I beat her senseless and set a torch to her bed
 a greek chorus will be singing in-time
 "Poor thing. She never hurt a soul. What beasts they are."

Alexis Pauline Gumbs

motherourselves

after “Power” by Audre Lorde

to insist
you are not
your mother
is mere rhetoric

a poem:

she backs a bright red tractor trailer
slams flat sideways into the stucco wall of the neighbor’s house
in the center of my dream
my heart a concrete slap beats punctual in the upstairs window
wide across the cul-de-sac
rage rush I stand over the truck bed
her neck limp lips split looking at me
i demand to know
why why why are you crazy
how can you how can you how can you do this
my mother my mother my mother
my mother is in there

the fire that teaches my mother to
crave love and blame it for everything
sold by Johnson & Johnson through *Essence* magazine
a flammable hair product
licks her ears burning whispers
of how she should have more money
and that it is better to be lonely than alone

today that 53-year-old black woman
with 18 years of single mothering
lives there
in a color-coded middle-class brick prison
pretends to be satisfied

confides

“I look forward to those days when he has to work 24 hours.”
some days she threatens to kill them both
and he the firefighter
calls the police

I try to singe my fingerprints off
touching the destruction within me
but unless I learn
to use
the opposite of rhetoric

I will become too tangled in my own hair
an acid rain steaming through the shower
trying to bleach my skin of respectability
claiming to know a better way
and the cigarette ads will sing me to oblivion
“you’ve come a long way baby.”

Toni P. Brown

from *the Clementine Poems*

O my darling
I wanted to write about
your taste
then I remembered the
Amaryllis
open on your windowsill
you said it was like a mouth
I disagree.

Janet Mason

from a woman alone poems

she colors her own fields
wide open with purple
and yellow bowing
to a prism of green
swept away
in a stampede
of poppies
a woman alone is
wild and red.

SJ Sindu

Cocoon

I am the stepping stone
the transition point
the rope that saves the drowning transman
the female-to-male transsexual
the butch too butch to be a butch no more
Testosterone throbs in your blood
rides on your cells
as they soar and dip
through your body
through your brain
anger and sex
like any other man
I can give you hormone shots
I can stand by your bed
before surgery
and tell you I love you
with or without breasts
I can use strange phrases like
double bi-lateral mastectomy
metoidioplasty
urethra lengthening
phrases that morph in the mouth
and taste like metallic saline
taste buds dissecting themselves
I can make you feel like a man
until you no longer need a trophy
I am the fucking Camaro
I know to call it a penis
call them balls
cringe when you refer to your uterus
pretend you don't have one
I can let you fall fast
fall hard
head over heels
because I'm there

at the point when you are neither
that cusp of change
before the world turns inside out
and shows its seams
the string unraveling
tying in on itself
like a surgeon's stitches
I can be the voice that whispers sugar cane
even when I am trapped in the saccharine
drowning
invisible
caught between the carbon bonds
poisoned by phenylalanine
during tea time
spiraling, draining
like blood in a bathtub
I can tell you I see stubble on your chin
when all I see are shadows
satisfy a sky-rocketing sex drive
Of course your hairline's not receding
And yes, your penis is bigger than it was two hours ago
I can tell you I love your scars
but I can't show you mine
remnants of internal bleeding
cut by your manhood
a sea of salty tears
rocking and pulsing
interpretive dance of destruction
This is your story
but I am the pages you mark
with the ink of transition
branded
never going back
the discarded cocoon

Pat Parker

Exodus (To my husbands, lovers)

Trust me no more –
Our bed is unsafe.
Hidden within folds of cloth
a cancerous rage –

i will serve you no more
in the name of wifely love
I'll not masturbate your pride
in the name of wifely loyalty

Trust me no more
Our bed is unsafe
Hidden within folds of cloth
a desperate love

You date to dismiss my anger
call it woman's logic
You date to claim my body
call it wifely duty

Trust me no more
Your bed is unsafe
Rising from folds of cloth –

Carol Guess

Hesperidium

Cafés stack chairs into long-legged spiders. Night walk in the shadow of anonymous jumpers, each bridge a postscript to the happy ending I've meant to write for myself. We faced off over a couch scattered with pillows sewn from scraps, bare arms crossed because you already owned me. That was all it took, really—the precise arc of suspension a bridge wields over a city as it swivels and the waterline tilts, lowering its hips, horizon glowing for the bridge and its beacon.

How night howls into violet stars. How stars leap, too, and cars block the path to the park where the dog used to walk me. How water dries in the tap and food runs out.

Even now I see you in the hour of orange light. Your skirt trails on the stair--I'm never sure--cool dusk breaking tin houses to pieces. Here's where foghorns slice the drawbridge, here's where locks lift *The Alaskan*, here's where trucks rumble past, recycling green glass, grinding it to sand. Here's where sand slips through my fingers in darkness. Still a multicolored sharpness—

Elizabeth Colen

DES OEUFS

A naked woman as motif is too easy. Breasts are universal. Life, birth, blood, and all of that. I see you standing against the wall of a French patisserie thinking, I will never see you standing against the wall in a French patisserie again. The plane will go down and all the croissants inside us, chocolate and buttered and otherwise, will go down too. I want to explain the laws of motion to you, but when you're standing against a wall it seems silly to imagine you rocking your fingers inside me. It seems silly to imagine the pleasure you will try to give me later in the hotel room. La chambre d'hotel. We will wake up way too late to really see anything at the Louvre but the crowded Mona Lisa and maybe Venus de Milo from the stairs. We will put on clothes. We will have eggs for breakfast, but they will call them something else.

Muriel Rukeyser

What Do I Give You?

What do I give you? This memory.
I cannot give you : it rings my nerves among.
None of these songs
Are made in their images.
Seeds of all memory
Given me I give you
My own self. Voice of my days.
Blessing; the seed and pain.
Green of the praise of growth.
The sacred body of thirst.

Muriel Rukeyser

The Transgress

The summer midnight under her aurora
northern and still we passed the barrier.

Two make a curse, one giving, one accepting.
It takes two to break a curse

transformed at last in each other's eyes.

I sat on the naked bed of space,
all things becoming other than what they seem

in the night-waking, in the revelation
thundering on tabu after the broken

imperative, while the grotesque ancestors fade
with you breathing beside me through our dream:

bed of forbidden things finally known--
art from the symbol struck, living and made.

Branch lifted green from the dead shock of stone.

Beatrix Gates

from Dos

II. The Knife

The cut.
 She used it as a verb,
 "when we cut...."

As a girl, she told me how she survived the knife
 when her abuelita challenged her, Take it!
 handing her the knife,
 the morning she announced she wanted to end her life,
 Take it!
 as the girl turned away in shame,
 shame for her life and shame for admitting the pain of it
 to her grandmother, her father's own
 supreme protector, mother.

*

Years before, a boy allowed to slice my neck.
 A young girl—my answer, Yes.
 Luck the cut that left a need for song,
 I heard the white throated sparrow's
 six notes and my own Yes, no no no... .

Tasting sound, alive in my mouth,
 I turned to arrive into a different language, hers.
 I wanted to pull the cut closed with a song,
 scar knots.

The girl in Mexico watched the machete come down
 on the necks of the chickens slaughtered in the kitchen,
 taken squawking from the henhouse
 next to the house on the roof where she and her mother and
 sister stayed,
 feathers drifting on steamy air
 and landing on stones in the street below,

roosters crowing from the chimney and gutters
of her grandmother's boarding house.

The girl tasted the burst of sweet saliva in the mouth of
 disdain,
acid silence in the hall where she ran the length of stairs
passing her father's second floor rooms
shared with another woman. She, the person
listed as his wife in the artist's books, a mention
of two children, none of her own mother
whose hand she held, sometimes,
when the three—mother and two daughters—
walked upstairs abreast.

*

Second language, she heard Spanish first, but learned to speak
 English,
and before her native tongue cleared, strange numbers
appeared on the blackboard, continuing a mystery to the girl
between languages, erased at the end of each school day
by close mother English and kitchen Spanish—
grandmother supervising the count.

The girl danced, spoke in a rush of skipping words
and counted steps, cobbled stones
the letters of her mother's name, Rose,
and letters in her father's name, Luis,
the same count and same broken syllables in Spanish.

To her, the running girl, it seemed that only birds in flight
could sing the same way in all syllables
as they trilled shapes dancing on air.

IV. Inside the Wind

The taste of her dries, evaporates sweet
inside the wind and stays like salt.

Sun how you carry waves on the air

Wind the dusky voiced companion
 clouds
 covering and uncovering her eyes:
 I hold her by letting her run through my hands.

I learn to sing
 death lives here:
 the deeper the love
 the deeper the pain, her words.

Fire-torn husk I fell to red earth.
 Fire burns everything except the bones.
 Twisted sticks tap on shelves of rock
 picked up by the wind
 ochre slabs cut with blue scrawling words
 until veins can be seen again.

Carved grief voice of blackened sands.
 Bare rock before and after,
 she sought a teller
 for her storied self
 hoping someone else could tell
 what the wind said before tearing it from her mouth.

She grew herself on the air
 and burnished talons for landing.

Gryphon bisexual: she could not fail the test
 of pride
 and power would be hers
 in flight.

Brow turned upward
 taking in the sun:
 her cinnamon skin glows at dusk,
 her grandmother's
 Tabascena knives and blood
 under hoof prints at the edge of the desert.

Skeletal ash for miles,

the blood volcano's glistening sash.
Air, the only name for life.

V.

I didn't really want to talk about it or tell,
taking my life up again, my good feet
walking backwards
 across hot deaf stones, then running until I reached a cave,
 the artist's room. The whole of it, weighing too much,
until that moment when all her unanswering (silence) lay deep
in my slowly turned back, weeping done.

There. I burned all the papers, I spoke to the wall alone. I said
 it.
I threw it away to survive. Don't make me do it again.

My friend said: some have given up.
 You gave what you had you loved.

She is the I I loved.

She the stranger I could almost become
and when I floated alone as a stranger,
I found others
who in kindness asked me,
across the ground of powdery ash and shapes of dying selves
who are you?

I learned to love by being stranded
where the current and the tide, and loneliness itself,
neither hers nor mother brine was my salt answering sea.

*

Wide-lit morning
red shout of evening
she who expels the colors of day
in a breath and yawning, obliterates
difference with a dry salt breeze

Pearl pain
curled hand
she always, she never
colorless words
twisting to resolve

*

I did not know the light
I had inside

I did not know I could stop
to let it rise

Sun above, fire below, Popocatepetl—
our beginning called back in flashes—
rock hardened by the hunger of the wind
black clay smoothing distance
and closeness to the same contours.

Now, easy within the city's rush of color—
black silver white stream light at the windows
encouraging.

The night sky of the country tells a different story—
the far visible and therefore the smallness
of our planet and patch of earth
also visible It is humbling to stand outside
and see the night sky with the naked eye.

She lived in a different country
with infamous winds:
blew the doors shut and carved streets bare

Direction came from outside
common as north south disappearance and waiting

I did not know I had the breath of firelight.

I needed light to capture the dark:

to stand quiet, full shadow cast behind,
unafraid of another's light or dark
and feel the full-throated sun, lemon yellow red,
ride the sky all day and fall through the night
into further circles of cool immensity
slowly carefully
without knowing where the spreading touch of darkness
would fold to light again.

Fearsome secret, shy turning
to the sky as years return
and pass
outside earth span.

Was it the bird of death I rode
my body, ribbed kite,
flying inside the far moment?

My senses came back to me one by one
even as sightlessness pored from my eyes
and became a cry seeking lament.

Reblazing breath opened a cavern.

And blood the one that kept track
all blood
the beat of loss.

Joan Larkin

The Fire

What I loved about you
finally I have forgotten

It was something to do
with your hair
and the late afternoon
light the floor
the molten stripe in the table

Nothing had weight or number
coins apricots windows
everything burning

and not forgotten
so much as fallen
like a husk shining paper
from the burnt grain

Beatrix Gates

Conditions

1. If I am empty and emptier
and no longer know

how to weed out hollow fury
how to walk away—cracked shell,
rounded shoulder

then the shape of a bowl is what I'm seeking
space more than water
air lighter than drifting sound.

2. If I cannot be hurt, then the wound was never forgiven.

If I have learned to praise, then scars glow, old dry
shiny moon.

3. I walk the hard dirt road

slowly the flow of hillsides
reach of trees
across
my shadow lengthening curving
I empty as I walk.

One time, I saw a bull frog on the dirt
big as a full-spread palm,
brown skin peeled from one muscled thigh
whole body in a pose of high alert
organ spit out the back, empty of life.

Carolyn Gage

For Rachel Crites

On January 20, Rachel Crites, 18, and Rachel Smith, 16, were reported missing by their parents. Crites had left this note in her diary: "Wherever I end up laying, whether buried or cremated, I want to stay with my true love, buried next to her. This is my choice. I'm sorry." On February 2, the bodies of the two girls were discovered in the front seat of the missing car, in a remote wooded area of Virginia. They had committed suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning.

And she said,
"Wherever I end up laying . . .
I want to stay with my true love . . ."
"With my true love . . .
Next to her."

She said:

"This is my choice."
She said.
"This is my choice."
"I'm sorry."

And *I'm* sorry. And I'm sorry. And I'm sorry.

I'm sorry for every sorry time you had to hear "gay" like it was something bad.

I'm sorry for every sorry time they called you dyke and didn't mean that you were fierce, and strong, and true to loving women.

I'm sorry for the sorry Catholic church that called you a sinner.

I'm sorry for all the sorry teachers who never taught you how
natural, how normal it is for women to love women and
for girls to love girls, and that many of the most
brilliant, most daring, most courageous women in
history were lesbians.

I'm sorry.

And if it was up to me,
I would bury you,
Bury you with your true love,
And her with you.

And I'm sorry for the suffocation
That had nothing to do with CO₂.
And I'm sorry for the long, slow freezing
That had nothing to do with temperature.
And I'm sorry they took so long,
Took too long,
To locate you.

Because they'll never find you now.

And if it was up to me,
I would bury you,
Bury you with your true love,
And her with you.

And on the stone, I'd carve
Your last words
In deep granite gashes,
Too deep to wear away,

Those sorry words
You left
To a sorry world—
Rachel, I would carve,

“I'm sorry.”

Charlotte Mew

Absence

Sometimes I know the way
 You walk, up over the bay;
 It is a wind from that far sea
 That blows the fragrance of your hair to me.

Or in this garden
 when the breeze
 Touches my trees
 To stir their dreaming shadows on the grass
 I see you pass.

In sheltered beds, the heart of every rose
 Serenely sleeps to-night. As shut as those
 Your guarded heart; as safe as they from the beat, beat
 Of hooves that tread dropped roses in the street.

Turn never again
 On these eyes blind with a wild rain
 Your eyes; they were stars to me—
 There are things stars may not see.

But call, call, and though Christ stands
 Still with scarred hands
 Over my mouth, I must answer. So
 I will come—He shall let me go!

Note from Carolyn Gage: In “Absence,” Mew expresses her defiance of a Christianity that would keep her away from her love... even suggesting that this lesbian love has the power to convert Christ himself. Traditionally homophobic religious traditions, such as Catholicism or fundamentalist Christianity, contribute to the pressures that drive young lesbians to take their lives.

Charlotte Mew

The Changeling

Toll no bell for me, dear Father dear Mother,
Waste no sighs;
There are my sisters, there is my little brother
Who plays in the place called Paradise,
Your children all, your children for ever;
But I, so wild,
Your disgrace, with the queer brown face, was never,
Never, I know, but half your child!

In the garden at play, all day, last summer,
Far and away I heard
The sweet “tweet-tweet” of a strange new-comer,
The dearest, clearest call of a bird.
It lived down there in the deep green hollow,
My own old home, and the fairies say
The word of a bird is a thing to follow,
So I was away a night and a day.

One evening, too, by the nursery fire,
We snuggled close and sat round so still,
When suddenly as the wind blew higher,
Something scratched on the window-sill,
A pinched brown face peered in—I shivered;
No one listened or seemed to see;
The arms of it waved and the wings of it quivered,
Whoo—I knew it had come for me!
Some are as bad as bad can be!
All night long they danced in the rain,
Round and round in a dripping chain,
Threw their caps at the window-pane,
Tried to make me scream and shout
And fling the bedclothes all about:
I meant to stay in bed that night,
And if only you had left a light
They would never have got me out!

Sometimes I wouldn't speak, you see,
 Or answer when you spoke to me,
 Because in the long, still dusks of Spring
 You can hear the whole world whispering;
 The shy green grasses making love,
 The feathers grow on the dear grey dove,
 The tiny heart of the redstart beat,
 The patter of the squirrel's feet,
 The pebbles pushing in the silver streams,
 The rushes talking in their dreams,
 The swish-swish of the bat's black wings,
 The wild-wood bluebell's sweet ting-tings,
 Humming and hammering at your ear,
 Everything there is to hear
 In the heart of hidden things.
 But not in the midst of the nursery riot,
 That's why I wanted to be quiet,
 Couldn't do my sums, or sing,
 Or settle down to anything.
 And when, for that, I was sent upstairs
 I did kneel down to say my prayers;
 But the King who sits on your high church steeple
 Has nothing to do with us fairy people!

'Times I pleased you, dear Father, dear Mother,
 Learned all my lessons and liked to play,
 And dearly I loved the little pale brother
 Whom some other bird must have called away.
 Why did they bring me here to make me
 Not quite bad and not quite good,
 Why, unless They're wicked, do They want, in spite,
 to take me
 Back to Their wet, wild wood?
 Now, in everything I shall see the windows shining,
 The gold lamp's glow, and the fire's red gleam,
 While the best of us are twining twigs and the rest of us
 are whining
 In the hollow by the stream.
 Black and chill are Their nights on the wold;
 And They live so long and They feel no pain:

I shall grow up, but never grow old,
I shall always, always be very cold,
I shall never come back again!

Note from Carolyn Gage: I chose “The Changeling,” because it expresses a child’s experience of being different from the rest of the family—explaining this difference in terms of having been kidnapped and transformed by fairies. This time, Mew’s defiance of Christianity strikes a more defiantly pagan note: “But the King who sits on your high church steeple/ Has nothing to do with us fairy people!” Sadly, it also articulates a confused sense of “being not quite bad and not quite good.”

Chocolate Waters

Disturbance

The mountain dark treacherous
 wild with loneliness the night
 hiding in its own shadow
 Accented by a kerosene lamp
 The smell of smoke from a wood-burning stove
 a rifle cocked & loaded in the corner.

Tonight three burly men outside my cabin door
 Two Chicanos unkempt but smiling
 The third man fat short white
 a mean wide face
 as greasy as a frying pan.

They stand so easy in my space
 thinking nothing of it
 I play my guitar to all the trees
 The wide one grins
 his teeth as dirty as
 any that I've read about or seen.

"Goodbye Guy," he says
 Curls his lip around the second word
 his way to tell me that he knows
 I am a dyke
 His male ego erect His IQ of minus 20
 His primitive hate the hate of every man
 for a woman
 who sins against his entire sex
 by omission.

My stomach churns at his departure
 Remembering a sawed-off Southern truck driver
 with a crewcut
 and short mean teeth
 Six years ago he tried to rape me
 I was 22
 struggling for my life
 caught between the shelter of the trees

and his semi on the other side
I had taken the half-mile ride
for which I had to pay
inside his arms
His cock unzipped hard
against my unsuspecting jeans.

"I have to be back by four."
I was logical.
He was amused.
He tried to smear his face across my mouth.
I tried to remember how to kill him.
The truth is that he let me go.
His goodwill. His enjoyment.
I ran away thanking him.
My voice high-pitched obsequious
dramatizing the story later
to hide my powerlessness.
Thank ya Thank ya massah
Let this poor defenseless creature go
She is only a woman.

I am only a
woman
remembering that terrified woman's cries
that pulling at survival
that groveling on the ground
The face of his unquestioned power then
His whim to let me go or rape and kill me.

Tonight my rifle makes no sound
But if you come inside that door
Fat Greasy Frying Pan man
Sawed-off Southern Trucker or
Any man who thinks he can
Trample on my space again
I will not hesitate to throw this trigger back
And send your head across the peaceful trees
Then cry only for your violence
That sits aching in my fingers
On the trigger of this gun.

Chocolate Waters

scratch scratch (a performance poem)

in the woods
 w/my girlfriend cindy
 w/my girlfriend cindy black
 cindy black and i were 10yrs. old
 spelling curse words in the woods
 the luscious darkened hairy woods
 alone we were all alone
 w/the lovely teenage boys
 who were 17 maybe 18 maybe 13
 we were cussing/spelling
 funning w/the cussing spelling words
 4 of us alone w/the words
 in the woods
 in the grabbing woods
 the hairy tentacled grabbing woods
 suddenly
 my father
 my red and drunken father
 you didn't come
 home
 your mother said you didn't come home
 what were you doing in these woods
 these probing hairy woods alone
 with your girlfriend cindy black
 and these boys
 these teenage boys
 don't you know they wanted to stick their
 organs into yours
 don't you know
 i didn't know
 i didn't know that/

scratch
 scratch
 scratch 'til you bleed
 scratch this itch of decades long
 one day i pushed

my cunt
into the handle
of the paper cutter/
found relief
oh shit those horrible clichés
all she needs is a good fuck
give this dyke a good long fat fuck
i climbed all over the handle
of that paper cutter
fuck me
cut into me
fuck the shit out of me
push it into me hard
plunge it into me harder
stiffer scratch me
relieve this fucking scratching
this fucking scratching itch
this insufferable itching scratch
fuck the itch out of me

i was spelling curse words
w/my gf cindy black
and the luscious teenage boys
all alone
she came back
home w/me
and my father
we went home
we all went home
we all went
back
home

Sandra H. Tarlin

The Good Times Are Coming

You presented roses to Emperor Haile Selassie when you were five years old. Now, with pomp you direct your niece's funeral, nodding your head or lifting your arm. The family men, Black and Latino, heads covered by white *kippahs*, dig heels into the grass and pull tight the straps around the coffin, lowering Gladys' pine casket into the grave.

As I push my way to the front to see better, Queen Esther, head wrapped in purple and so old, you once told me, she was old when you were young, chuckles behind me, laughing at my rudeness or at how new for me it is to lose a friend so young. The men fill the grave and Zayit, Gladys' daughter, asks me, one hand covering her mouth, "Don't I get to shovel?"

The women gather at your mother's grave. You translate the bronze plaque, "The Good Times Are Coming," and as I bend to place a stone on the grave, a subway token falls out of my pocket and rolls across the Hebrew letters. You say, "It will take more than a dollar twenty five for you to get there." Queen Esther takes my hand and says of your mother, "She was a honeydew."

We feast on rum punch and fish cakes, and pass around photos of Gladys. As a child in Puerto Rico, Gladys watched her grandmother light Sabbath Candles in the closet. A young black rabbi covers his face and sobs, "First the husband, now the wife: never mention of AIDS." The rabbi, thin from his vegan diet, once worked on Wall Street. He exclaims, "How fierce the holy letters, how lonely."

When we sit *shiva* in Zayit's Crown Heights apartment, you are tall, *Eemah*, inside the cramped living room. Though your hands have swollen from the heat, your arms are covered with gold bracelets. You call me "the poetess" and order me to counterpoint your Hebrew with the psalms in English. Nodding to Zayit, you say, "Explain to her what a psalm is, what inspires a poem."

Merry Gangemi

Invitation

Light burst through
 like water pouring,
 sounded like water spilling
 into the room.

This is how it would be remembered
 an invitation—held open—a mother-of-pearl-lined
 maw of an impossible seashell.

She closed her eyes so ears could open
 so mouth could taste what could not be seen
 even if seeing was sight tasted.

She could melt her own bones:
 frail fullness disappearing,
 deliciousness offered— wanting to be
 light colliding
 beneath fingernails and
 toenails
 wanting to breathe
 one last finite breath—
 and know that breath
 before
 it was gone
 like a dream.

Without silence thought escapes memory;
 coy and bereft scantly clad
 faint perseverance
 begging for more
 without fishing
 without baiting the hook
 without filing the point
 sound scraping skin
 shaping whispers
 the way whispers slide
 from woman to woman.

She became silver swallowed
ocean teeming—
contrapuntal breathing
ragged, measured forgiveness.
forgotten whispers
thoughts and vibrations
slipping into
whispers
like two
whispers kissing.

Space blurred where curves
drew breath
pushing her— moving her— balanced and buoyant
exhaled—
as if ocean had arrived.

She was consumed plowed through
rounded again and again
body flamed and perfectly calibrated
textured velvet—
effervescent azure air.

Yes, she thought
this room is not empty
nothing is empty
everything vibrates and rolls
like ships—cleaving through waves
seconds—from everything.

She heard density spinning
lilting lullaby tones
sounds
layered— coming apart— folding—
time—bursting time—
again and again.

The colors of sound are carefully arranged
innumerable

And you have those boxes in the basement
stuffed with newspaper-wrapped mementoes
of being with you,
of knowing your body.

But did they ever know your body?
The way you liked it
the way they thought you liked it
how and why you never told them.
how you swam away
ignorant and wild.

Silence— a belief in yourself
nothing saying nothing
saying something to the mirror
grasping only— what the lie
means— even if you refuse
to hear the mirror cracking
that moment
with something more
than words can
bear—

within words without anything
in particular
missing.

Words with flesh and bone in them
heat and lip and tongue in them
cheek and lash in them
dream and nightmare in them
words lost in slashes on paper
gouges in the desktop

Curves and colors in them
Books with that smell in them
Heated wind and grass in them— desperate
for more than toes in summer sand—
sand more than the driftwood scattered across it
the sharpness of small stones on asphalt

the limping

thinking

wanting

No more newspapers splattered with them

No more wrapped mementoes in them

No more echoes

No more boxes in cellars

No more fishing

No more hooks

No more

No more.

Marilyn Hacker

Sonnet 21 from *Love, Death, and the Changing of the Seasons*

First, I want to make you come in my hand
while I watch you and kiss you, and if you cry,
I'll drink your tears while, with my whole hand, I
hold your drenched loveliness contracting. And
after a breath, I want to make you full
again, and weft. I want to make you come
in my mouth like a storm. No tears now. The sum
of your parts is my whole most beautiful
chart of the constellations—your left breast
in my mouth again. You know you'll have to be
your age. As I lie beside you, cover me
like a gold cloud, hands everywhere, at last
inside me where I trust you, then your tongue
where I need you. I want you to make me come.

Judith Barrington

THE DYKE WITH NO NAME DOESN'T REALLY THINK ABOUT SEX

It's the seventies and she does it a lot, but hardly ever thinks about it. She does try but she can't concentrate: the questions are too big, words looming and spinning like dark planets beyond the Milky Way—

Commitment;

Faithfulness;

Love.

Each one rolls through space while the refrigerator hums its same old note and shudders in ecstasy or disgust. She can't tell which.

It's free love and even the straight girls want to do it with a woman. Late at night, they knock on her door rapping out the rhythm of forbidden words, flirting around the edge of strict taboos:

Monogamy;

Possession;

Jealousy:

each one unthinkable but ever-present, its dead weight lying across the books on her home-made bookshelf as she slips into something called freedom.

Judith Barrington

FROM THE WILD

London or New York or San Francisco or Los Angeles, 1974

Arm in arm, five abreast, boots synchronized
in a slow march, the broad beams or sleek keels
of our behinds sway in blue denim as we pause
one second before each step into the shade cast
by the banner that snaps and sways overhead—
canvas stretching taut then collapsing into itself
the red-painted slogan jumbled and mumbling
till the breeze balloons it out again.

Women in navy suits lean from tenth floor offices.
Some mutter and shrug, others call out, their shouts
drowned by drums and chants—*two, four, six, eight,*
megaphones—*what do we want?*, police sirens,
shrill greetings as sidewalk-runners lap
the unwieldy caterpillar with its million legs,
its body hunching and thrusting inch by inch
towards the center of an imagined world.

Any time now, any day now, a flock of pigeons
will be released and lift off squawking
as we, too, rise from solid ground and advance
like gorgeous horses, our great hoofs stamping,
slender legs dancing, splayed nostrils broadcasting
frothy, grass-stained memories of the wild.
What do we want? The new world. *When do we want it?*
Now. Oh surely, right now.

Joan Larkin

SUMMONS

Are you asleep
Are you mute
Are you empty now
Are you alone

Ewe-mother
shrike-mother
where did you go
frost on a stone

Soft arms and harsh mouth,
you could say I've kept them
but fold a sheet my own way.
I'd like to show you.

I'm six, feverish, you're reading to me:
white alps, your shimmering alto.
Were you awake
when your last string snapped?

I'm yeast and air in a crust
quickly swallowed.

Waking in twisted sheets, I know
how the green-smocked aide hoists you.
When time is done with me,
may there be mercy.

Ewe-mother
shrike-mother
where do you go
frost on a stone

Are you asleep
Are you mute
Are you empty now
Are you alone

Judy Grahn

Slowly: a plainsong from an older woman to a younger woman

am I not olden olden olden
it is unwanted.

wanting, wanting
am I not broken
stolen common

am I not crinkled cranky poison
am I not glinty-eyed and frozen

am I not aged
shaky glazing
am I not hazy
guarded craven

am I not only
stingy little
am I not simple
brittle spitting

was I not over
over ridden?

it is a long story
will you be proud to be my version?

it is unwritten.

writing, writing
am I not ancient
raging patient

am I not able
charming stable

was I not building
forming braving

was I not ruling
guiding naming
was I not brazen
crazy chosen

even the stones would do my bidding?

it is a long story
am I not proud to be your version?

it is unspoken.

speaking, speaking
am I not elder
berry
brandy

are you not wine before you find me
in your own beaker?

Amy Lowell and Maureen Seaton

The Amy Poems

Taking us by and large, we're a queer lot. –“The Sisters,” Amy Lowell

Amy Lowell

Still Life Moonlight Striking Upon a Chess-Board

I am so aching to write
That I could make a song out of a chess-board
And rhyme the intrigues of knights and bishops
And the hollow fate of a checkmated king.
I might have been a queen, but I lack the proper century;
I might have been a poet, but where is the adventure to
 explode me into flame.
Cousin Moon, our kinship is curiously demonstrated,
For I, too, am a bright, cold corpse
Perpetually circling above a living world.

Maureen Seaton

Still Life Malcolm Biting Upon My Left Ankle

I am so aching to write
That I could pull a mitre from the space-time continuum
And stick it, cockeyed, on the head of my jealous cat
And make him alive again and Pope.
He might have been a king, but he lacked cupidity;
He might have been a purebred, but where is the fun
 in brushing and posing.
Malcolm, our affinity is rare and canonical,
For I, too, am all ouch and deconstruction
Perpetually biting you back, you green-eyed god.

Amy Lowell

Carrefour

O You,
Who came upon me once
Stretched under apple-trees just after bathing,
Why did you not strangle me before speaking
Rather than fill me with the wild white honey of your words
And then leave me to the mercy
Of the forest bees.

Maureen Seaton

Chicago

Hey you,
Who fucked me once
Pinioned in the back of your rented SUV,
Why didn't you just go ahead and kill me
Rather than play Dave Matthews over and over, thanks a lot,
And then drop me off in Wrigleyville
Like a losing team.

Queer Study (in Red)

A cento of Amy Lowell lines and fragments composed by
Maureen Seaton

When I am with you, my heart is a frozen pond gleaming with
agitated torches.

When you come, it brims red and trembling with blood,
heart's blood for your drinking.

When I think of you, Beloved.

When I go away from you the world beats dead like a
slackened drum.

When I think of you, it is your hands,

A luster of crimson.

But you—you come only as a harebell comes; one day there is
nothing, and the next your steeped bells are all.

When you came you were like red wine and honey.

For I come at the times which suit me, morning or evening,
and I am cold when I come down the long alleys to you.

A thousand misconceptions may prevent our souls from
coming near enough to blend.

You would quiver like a shot-up spray of water.

I too should tremble, watching.

Lines are from the following Lowell poems:

1. Opal
2. Absence
3. Mise en Scene
4. The Taxi
5. A Sprig of Rosemary
6. The Captured Goddess
7. Footing Up a Total
8. A Decade
9. Paradox
10. Mirage
11. The Artist
12. The Artist

Queer Study (in Blue)

A cento of Maureen Seaton fragments composed by Amy Lowell—as imagined by Maureen Seaton

(After Lowell’s “Thompson’s Lunch Room—Grand Central Station,” “Study in Whites”)

She slips her finger in her mouth and walks me backward.
Her sweet clit and her blue jeans—
Orchids
Out of nowhere.
Blue then green then blue
Opals and quicksilver,
Reflection in cologne,
Dimples of Astroglide,
Lights pointing blue and cool,
Blue as jelly,
Blue-dress eyes.
The heart thrums between pubis and meridian—
Belly belly belly.
Oh transcendent, this aqua blue,
Divine fishes through blue.
She’s gorgeous in her bones and blue.
The blue the blue the blue the blue the blue.

Lines are from the following Seaton poems:

1. Ohio
2. Ohio
3. Passing into Baltimore
4. The Nomenclature of Wind
5. The Myth of the Pileated Woodpecker
6. Secrets of Water
7. Romancing Debussy
8. The Saying
9. Jesus and Puberty
10. When I Was White
11. Endometriosis
12. The Saying
13. The Church of Scrabble
14. Woman Circling Lake
15. Secrets of Water
16. Queen of Jersey
17. Interview with Bonnie Parker

Contributor Biographies

Judith Barrington has published three collections of poetry, most recently *Horses and the Human Soul* (Story Line Press, 2004), finalist for the Oregon Book Award and selected by Oregon State Library for "150 Books for the Sesquicentennial." Previous poetry titles include *History and Geography* and *Trying to be an Honest Woman*. Recent work includes two chapbooks: *Postcard from the Bottom of the Sea* and *Lost Lands* (winner of the Robin Becker Chapbook Award). Her *Lifesaving: A Memoir* won the 2000 Lambda Book Award and was a finalist for the PEN/Martha Albrand Award for the Art of the Memoir. Other awards include The Dulwich Festival International Poetry Prize and, with her partner, Ruth Gundle, The Stuart Holbrook Award from Literary Arts, Inc. "in recognition of significant contributions that have enriched Oregon's literary community." She is a faculty member of the University of Alaska's MFA Program and lives in Oregon. More at <http://www.judithbarrington.com>.

Tamiko Beyer is the author of *bough breaks* (Meritage Press, forthcoming). Her poems have appeared in *Sonora Review*, *OCHO*, *Copper Nickel Review* and elsewhere. She is the poetry editor of *Drunken Boat* and leads writing workshops through the NY Writers Coalition. She is a founding member of the queer, multi-racial writing collective Agent 409, and is a Kundiman fellow. She lives in Brooklyn with her partner.

Adrienne Bradley was born and grew up in New Zealand. She has lived in Australia, the UK, and for the past 40 years in Canada. She trained as a teacher at Auckland Teacher's College, and also received an Advanced Diploma in Fine Arts, from the University of London Goldsmiths College. She has been a teacher, education consultant, mother of two sons, ceramicist, clam farmer, cabin builder, log salvager, ski lodge manager, and traveler of the world. Adrienne's poetry has appeared in *Posted Love*. She appeared in the documentary *Act Your Age!?* Part of her life story has been recorded on video for *Moving Images of LGBTQI Seniors*, a project of Qmunity. Her art work, survival and recovery from a plane crash, will feature in a film in development *9 lives: 6 months*, about disability, art, poverty, dreams, craziness and wonder, in the lives of four women.

A Writer/working in the Theatrical Jazz Aesthetic, New Dramatists member **Sharon Bridgforth**, is a two time Alpert Award Nominee in the Arts in Theatre and is recipient of the 2008 Alpert/Hedgebrook Residency Prize. Fall 2009 Artist In-Residence in Performance Studies at Northwestern University, Bridgforth is listed in the Campus Pride 2009 "HOT LIST" — Top 25 Favorite LGBT Artists, Speakers, Lecturers, Music Acts, Comedians, Activists & Much More. Her work has received support from the National Endowment For The Arts Commissioning Program; The National Endowment For The Arts/Theatre Communications Group Playwright in Residence Program; National Performance Network Commissioning Fund; the Paul Robeson Fund for Independent Media; and

the Rockefeller Foundation Multi-Arts Production Fund Award. Bridgforth is the author of the Lambda Literary Award winning, *the bull-jean stories* and *love conjure/blues*, a performance/novel. Both books are published by RedBone Press. She is an affiliate of The Austin Project, sponsored by The John L. Warfield Center For African and African American Studies, University of Texas at Austin (CAAAS). Bridgforth's Finding Voice Facilitation Manuel will be published in, *Experiments in a Jazz Aesthetic: Art, Activism, Academia, and the Austin Project*, edited by Dr. Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, Director, CAAAS, Associate Professor, Department of Theater and Dance U.T. Austin; Dr. Lisa L. Moore, Associate Professor, English and Women's and Gender Studies, U.T. Austin; and Bridgforth (Summer, 2010 by University of Texas Press). For more go to: sharonbridgforth.com.

Toni Brown (November 11 1952 - April 19, 2008) – Toni's poems and stories have been published in journals and anthologies including: *Night Bites: Vampire Stories by Women*; *Night Shade: Gothic Tales by Women*, *Pillow Talk II*, and most recently *Fireweed*, *American Poetry Review*, *Philadelphia Poets* and *Prairie Schooner*. She was an editor for the *Painted Bride Quarterly* journal and recipient of a Leeway Foundation Emerging Writers Poetry Grant. Toni Brown was also a frequent contributor to *Sinister Wisdom* through the years of her life.

The Clementine poem is previously unpublished (and was transcribed from an audio clip that can be found on www.amusejanetmason.com) An essay about Toni Brown by Janet Mason ["Portrait of a Friendship: Toni P. Brown"] was published in *Sinister Wisdom* 76 "The Open Issue."

Ching-In Chen is the author of *The Heart's Traffic* (Arktoi Books/Red Hen Press). Daughter of Chinese immigrants, Chen is a VONA, Lambda, Kundiman and Macondo Fellow. She has worked in the Asian American communities of San Francisco, Oakland, Riverside and Boston, and her poem-film, *We Will Not Be Moved!: A Story of Oakland Chinatown*, was screened as part of the 2004 National Queer Arts Festival. Her work has been recently published in *Cha*, *Chroma*, *OCHO*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Rio Grande Review*, *BorderSenses*, *Water~Stone Review* and elsewhere. Chen is the co-editor of *The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence Within Activist Communities*, forthcoming from South End Press. You can find her online at www.chinginchen.com

Elizabeth J. Colen's work has recently appeared in *The Normal School*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *RHINO*, and other venues. Her first book of poetry, *Money for Sunsets* was released by Steel Toe Books in 2010. Find out more at: elizabethjcolen.blogspot.com

Sharon Deevey, from Westerville, Ohio, has been a lesbian activist since coming out in 1970. She retired from her varied careers in elementary school teaching, nursing, and librarianship in 2006. She currently writes and dances at a local senior center, and keeps in close touch with a lifetime of lovers and friends.

Carolyn Gage is a lesbian-feminist playwright, performer, director, and activist. The author of seven books on lesbian theatre and fifty-five plays, musicals, and one-woman shows, she specializes in non-traditional roles for women, especially those reclaiming famous lesbians whose stories have been distorted or erased from history. Her collection of plays *The Second Coming of Joan of Arc and Selected Plays* won the 2008 Lambda Literary Award in Drama, the top LGBT book award in the US. Other books include *Nine Short Plays*, *The Spindle and Other Lesbian Fairy Tales*, *Like There's No Tomorrow: Meditations for Women Leaving Patriarchy*, *Sermons for a Lesbian Tent Revival*, *Supplemental Sermons for a Lesbian Tent Revival*, *Black Eye and Other Short Plays*, *The Triple Goddess: Three Plays*, *Three Comedies, Monologues and Scenes for Lesbian Actors*, and *Take Stage! How to Direct and Produce a Lesbian Play*. Her complete catalog is online at www.carolyngage.com.

A graduate of NYU, **Merry Gangemi** holds an MA in comparative literature from SFSU and is currently pursuing a dual-genre MFA at Vermont College of Fine Arts. Merry produces and hosts *Woman-Stirred Radio*, a queer cultural journal; which broadcasts live on Goddard College's WGDR Plainfield. Merry lives in Woodbury, Vermont with her partner Elizabeth Hansen.

In 2011, **Beatrix Gates'** *Nada que ocultar/ Nothing To Hide*, translated by Yolanda Moreto, will be published by Spain's puerta del mar. Gates' collections include *Ten Minutes* and *In the Open*, a Lambda Poetry Award finalist. Gates, with Electa Arenal, translated Spanish poet Jesus Aguado's *The Poems of Vikram Babu* (HOST), and they received a Witter Bynner Translation award to translate Aguado's *lo que dices de mi/what you say about me*, portions of which appeared in *Sirena: Poesia, arte and cultura and Tarpaulin Sky*. As librettist for "The Singing Bridge," Gates & composer Anna Dembska received NEA support for the opera's 2005 premiere at Maine's Stonington Opera House. Gates' poems have appeared in *The Dirty Goat*, *The Kenyon Review*, *The Puckerbrush Review* and *Ploughshares*, and an interview on her poetry and translations will be out in quay. Her poems have appeared in many anthologies, including, recently, *The Tulip Anthology* (Hachette); *The World in Us: Lesbian & Gay Poetry of the Next Wave* and *Gay & Lesbian Poetry in Our Time* (St. Martin's). She edited *The Wild Good: Lesbian Writings and Photographs on Love* (Anchor) and founded Granite Press (1975-1987) where she designed and printed limited editions of poetry and trade paperbacks, including Grace Paley's first book of poems, *Leaning Forward*, 1985; Joan Larkin's *A Long Sound*, 1986; and the bilingual anthology, *IXOK AMAR.GO: Central American Women Poets for Peace*, 1987. Gates has taught writing and worked as an editor for many years and is a member of the Goddard MFA faculty.

To quote Phyllis Matyi, Elsa Gidlow's friend in a 1986 Press Release: 'Born in Yorkshire, England in 1898, six-year-old **Elsa Gidlow** immigrated with

her family of nine to the French Canadian village of Tetreauville. She was mainly self-educated, being allowed what she called, "the untutored space to be". Gidlow left Montreal for New York in 1920, where she became poetry editor for Frank Harris' progressive, much censored Pearson's Magazine. Poet-philosopher Elsa Gidlow died peacefully in her mountain home retreat, "Druid Heights," near Muir Woods, Mill Valley, California on June 8, 1986'. Many of the poems she wrote before 1923 were published that year in her book, *On a Grey Thread*, Will Ransom. Her other work includes: *Sapphic Songs: Seventeen to Seventy*, 1976, Diana Press; *Makings for Meditation : A Collection of Parapoems Reverent and Irreverent*, 1973, Booklegger Press; and *Elsa I Come With My Songs the Autobiography of Elsa Gidlow*, 1985, Booklegger Press. Her work appeared in many journals and anthologies. She had many lovers, as is evident in her poetry. Including when she was a young woman with the older Tommy, Violet Henry-Anderson, whom she met in New York in 1945, and lived with for thirteen years until Tommy's death. In her seventies Elsa lived with Gretchen Muller who was then in her twenties.

Judy Grahn is an internationally known poet, writer, and social theorist. Her work underpins several movements, including Gay, Lesbian, and Queer; Feminist/Woman-Centered; and Women's Spirituality, but it has spread far beyond any of these. She currently serves as Associate Core Faculty for the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto, California, in their Women's Spirituality Master's Program. She is former director of Women's Spirituality MA and Creative Inquiry MFA programs at New College of California, from which she resigned in July of 2007. Her most recent book of poetry is *love belongs to those who do the feeling* (Red Hen, 2009) and her collected prose *The Judy Grahn Reader* (Aunt Lute, 2009) was published recently.

Carol Guess is the author of two novels, *Seeing Dell* and *Switch*; a memoir, *Gaslight*; and two poetry collections, *Femme's Dictionary* and *Tinderbox Lawn*. She teaches Creative Writing and Queer Studies at Western Washington University. Her email address: carolannguess@gmail.com.

Jewelle Gomez, from San Francisco, CA, is an author and activist who has published seven books of poetry and fiction, including the double Lambda Literary Award-winning *Gilda Stories*. She teaches creative writing and popular culture around the United States. Her novel *Televised* is forthcoming, and she is currently at work on a play about James Baldwin.

Marilyn Hacker is a poet, critic, and reviewer. Her books of poetry include *Names* (2009), *Going Back to the River* (1990), *Love, Death, and the Changing of the Seasons* (1986), and *Presentation Piece* (1974), which won the National Book Award. In 2009, Hacker won the PEN Award for Poetry in Translation for *King of a Hundred Horsemen* by Marie Étienne, which also garnered the first Robert Fagles Translation Prize from the

National Poetry Series. In 2010, she received the PEN/Voelcker Award for Poetry.

Susan Hawthorne is an Australian poet who has studied Ancient Greek and Sanskrit. Her poetry is influenced by explorations of language and the histories hidden in mythology. She has published five collections of poetry, a novel and several non-fiction books. Her poetry is available in North America and includes *Bird* (1999), *The Butterfly Effect* (2005) and *Earth's Breath* (2009). She is currently working on a collection *Cow* from which these poems are drawn. Her poems have been published in *Best Australian Poems* anthologies in 2006, 2008 and 2009. In 2009, she was an Asialink Literature Resident in Chennai with support from the Australia Council and Arts Queensland. She is also an aerialist, publisher and Adjunct Professor in the Writing Program at James Cook University, Townsville.

Eloise Klein Healy is the author of six books of poetry: *Building Some Changes* (Beyond Baroque Foundation); *A Packet Beating Like a Heart* (Books Of A Feather Press); *Ordinary Wisdom* (Paradise Press/re-released by Red Hen Press); *Artemis In Echo Park* (Firebrand Books), nominated for the Lambda Book Award and released as a spoken word recording by New Alliance Records; and her collections from Red Hen Press, *Passing* and most recently, *The Islands Project: Poems for Sappho*.

Joan Larkin, born in Boston in 1939, attended Swarthmore and the University of Arizona. She has lived in Brooklyn, mostly, since 1969, and she taught writing at Brooklyn College for 30 years. In her fourth decade of teaching, she has served on the faculty of Sarah Lawrence and Goddard Colleges, and is a member of the core faculty at New England College. She founded Out & Out Books, a women's independent publishing company, active from 1975-1981, publishing early books by Marilyn Hacker and Irena Klepfisz. Larkin co-edited *Amazon Poetry* and *Lesbian Poetry* with Elly Bulkin; and *Gay & Lesbian Poetry In Our Time* (winner of a Lambda Literary Award) with Carl Morse. Joan Larkin has published *Housework* (Out and Out Books); *A Long Sound* (Granite Press); *Cold River* (Painted Leaf Books) and *My Body, New and Selected Poems* (Hanging Loose). She is the author of a prize-winning play, *The Living*, and co-translator with Jaime Manrique of *Sor Juana's Love Poems*. She has received a National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowship, and lives and writes in New York City.

Audre Lorde, born in 1924 in Harlem to West Indian parents from Grenada, is the icon of black lesbian teaching, literary production, and political analyses of difference in the 20th century both in the United States and around the world. Famous for her poetry collections, including *The Black Unicorn* (which includes the poem "Power"), her biomythography *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* and her critical essays in *Sister Outsider*. *Sister Outsider* includes the essay "Eye to Eye: Black Women Hatred and Anger" which includes the proposition "We can learn to mother ourselves." The form of the poem "Power" and the content of the

essay “Eye to Eye” inform the poem “motherourselves” by Alexis Pauline Gumbs.

Amy Lowell (1874-1925) produced six volumes of poetry, two of criticism, a two-volume biography of John Keats, and numerous articles and reviews during her short lifetime. Her books topped best-seller lists, sold out in advance, and went into quick second and third printings. One of three volumes of poetry published posthumously (*What's O'Clock*) won the 1926 Pulitzer Prize. She was a presence and force, a tireless promoter of the art, and a principal of modern poetry who went head to head with Ezra Pound and was called a “modern of the moderns” at her memorial tribute. She wrote and published poems to her lover(s) that are so very out. She has been dropped from a certain “canon,”—who knows why?—yet she keeps popping up. Here she is again—enjoy!

Anne MacKay is a writer and poet living on Long Island's North Fork. She is the author of *Wolf Girls at Vassar: Lesbian and Gay Experiences 1930-1990*, and several volumes of poetry, including *Field Notes of a Lesbian Naturalist*, *Sailing the Edge* and *Gifts*. A theater teacher, she created and directed three lesbian musical revues, including *Taking Liberties* at Symphony Space in New York City, a fundraiser for lesbian causes. She also works with the Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History helping to preserve lesbian voices and experience.

Janet Mason last wrote for *Sinister Wisdom* #76 “The Open Issue” and for #70 “30th Anniversary Issue.” Her literary commentary is regularly featured on This Way Out, an international LGBT radio syndicate aired on more than 400 radio stations in the U.S. and also in Australia, New Zealand, and throughout Europe. Her three chapbooks of poetry include *When I Was Straight* (Insight To Riot Press) and *a woman alone* (Cycladic Press) written about her travels in Greece. Her novel *Hitching To Nirvana* was published in 2010 (Cycladic Press). She teaches at Temple University in Philadelphia and more of her work can be found at www.amusejanetmason.com.

Charlotte Mew was a British poet and short-story writer, born in Bloomsbury in 1869. Virginia Woolf called her the greatest living poetess, and Marianne Moore, a quarter of a century after Mew's death, considered her work “above praise.” Although not explicitly lesbian, Mew's poetry, according to scholar James Najarian, “encodes the emotional pain of hiding her lesbian identity in a world of compulsory heterosexuality.” Her passionate feelings for the writer Ella D'Arcy and for the novelist May Sinclair were not returned, and loss and isolation are major themes of her work. Three of her siblings died in childhood, and two others were institutionalized for insanity. Mew killed herself in a London nursing home in 1928, fearing that the breakdown she had undergone following the deaths of her mother and one of her sisters marked the advent of insanity. Her first collection of poetry, *The Farmer's Bride*, was published in 1915, and the second volume, *The Rambling Sailor* came out the year after her

death. Many believe that her work has never received the recognition that it deserved.

Catherine McNeil, singer-songwriter from Vancouver, BC, the recipient of Milieu's Emerging Writer's Contest for her first collection of poetry *Under the Influence*, has poems from her new manuscript *Emily and Elspeth* in *Queer Chroma* (England), *Rampike* and *One Cool Word*. Publications include *West Coast Line*, *Event*, *Capilano Review*, *Whetstone* and many anthologies including: *Exact Fare Two* (Arsenal) and *The Fed Anthology* (Arsenal).

Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892 – 1950.) Much loved author of lyric poems and dramatic verse, she was also known for her Bohemian years in Greenwich Village where she acted and wrote for, the Provincetown Playhouse. During her life she had many relationships with women and men. In 1923 she married Eugen Jan Boissevain. 1923 was also the year she won the Pulitzer Prize – the first woman to receive this honor.

Pat Parker was a Black lesbian feminist and poet. She was a mother, a lover and an advocate for the minority voice. Her works are an essential part of lesbian and feminist herstory, and her revolutionary voice still speaks to generations of women and lesbians through her printed words.

Adrienne Rich was born in 1929 in Baltimore. Her mother was Protestant and her father an "assimilated Jew." Rich's work was influenced by Muriel Rukeyser. Her work also emerged from the collective effort in the mid-seventies of feminist writers to confront issues such as racism, anti-Semitism, class, sexual identity, and homophobia. Rich was deeply engaged with the dialogic poetry of June Jordan. Rich and her partner Michelle Cliff edited *Sinister Wisdom* during its early years (1981-1983). Rich has published 30 books of poetry and prose. Her work and has been the recipient of numerous awards and has been widely translated. *Diving into the Wreck* (1973), winner of the National Book Award, opened a place in the public sphere for lesbian poetry. Recent titles include *A Human Eye: Essays on Art in Society, 1996-2008*, and *The School Among the Ruins: Poems 2000-2004*, winner of the Book Critics Circle Award.

Born in New York City, December 15, 1913, **Muriel Rukeyser** attended Vassar and spent a short time at Roosevelt Aviation School. She published *Theory of Flight*, the Yale Younger Poets winner, in 1935; then, *A Turning Wind*; *Waterlily Fire*; *The Speed of Darkness*, *Breaking Open*, among others, and translations from the Spanish and Swedish. Pivotal political events of the world, including the Scottsboro trial, West Virginia's Gauley Bridge tragedy, the civil war in Spain, and American aggression in Viet Nam, made a lasting impact on her life and poetry. Naming the place of love in the world, and fighting against dehumanizing categorization and brutality made her feminism and bisexuality a wide, political consciousness. Her poem "To be a Jew in the Twentieth Century", on the theme of Judaism as a gift, was adopted by the American Reform and

Reconstructionist movements for their prayer books. She developed engaged forms of witness and offered vision to the play of science, poetry and questions of technology; while documenting her own emotional experience as a sexual being, and mother. Courageous expansions of form mark her long poems and biographies of Thomas Harriot, Willard Gibbs and Wendell Wilkie. When her attempt to visit poet Kim Chi Ha on death row in South Korea, as PEN's representative, was thwarted, she wrote the title poem, "The Gates," for her last collection in response. Rukeyser died on 12 February 1980. Available: *A Muriel Rukeyser Reader*; *The Collected Poems of Muriel Rukeyser*; *The Life of Poetry*; *Houdini: A Musical*; *The Orgy*.

Sappho—her name is spelled Psappho in Aeolic Greek—was born sometime between 630 and 612 BCE on the island of Lesbos and she died around 570 BCE. She is the inventor of lyric poetry, that is poetry written to be sung accompanied by the lyre. She wrote in Aeolian Greek and she also invented the myxolydian mode, a musical mode, but sadly her music is lost. Her poems are spare and simple but their emotional intensity is huge. Nine books of poetry are recorded by her sorted according to meter, most of it fragmentary. One poem is complete, several are substantial; the fragmentary nature of most of her work makes her all the more elusive. The most recent poem of hers to be discovered was published in 2005 and concerns the subject of getting old.

Ruth L. Schwartz, from Oakland, CA, has published four books of poetry and a memoir, and has received more than a dozen national awards for her poetry. She is currently on the faculty of the low-residency M.F.A. program at Ashland University. Also a lifelong student of consciousness and healing, Ruth has a private healing practice (www.HeartMindIntegration.com) and teaches writing workshops worldwide (www.TheWriterAsShaman.com).

Maureen Seaton's recent publications are *Cave of the Yellow Volkswagen* (Carnegie Mellon UP, 2009), poems, and *Sex Talks to Girls* (University of Wisconsin Press, Living Out Series, 2008), winner of the Lambda Literary Award for lesbian memoir. Her previous collections include *Venus Examines Her Breast* (Carnegie Mellon UP, 2004), winner of the Publishing Triangle's Audre Lorde Award for lesbian poetry; *Furious Cooking* (University of Iowa Press, 1996), winner of the Iowa Poetry Prize and the Lambda Literary Award for lesbian poetry; and *Fear of Subways* (The Eighth Mountain Press, 1991), winner of the Eighth Mountain Poetry Prize. Two collaborative works are due in 2011: *Stealth*, with Samuel Ace (Chax Press); and *Sinéad O'Connor and Her Coat of a Thousand Bluebirds*, winner of the Sentence Book Award (Firewheel Editions), with Neil de la Flor. Seaton teaches poetry at the University of Miami. Her interest in Amy Lowell is purely romantic. She's happy to share that interest with others in every way possible—poetic and polyamorous.

SJ Sindu (www.sjsindu.com) was born in Sri Lanka and came to the U.S.

at the age of seven. Ze writes fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and cultural criticism focused on the experiences of minority voices. Hir work is centered on the life experiences of those who live on the margins of society and in the borderlands between identities.

Gertrude Stein (1874 – 1946) Our famous American living in Paris in the early years of avant-garde art and literature. She lived with her partner Alice B. Toklas from 1907 – 1946, and their salon at 27 Rue de Flores was a center for artists and writers. Her book *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* brought her fame (and a tour) in America. Other books included *The Making of Americans* and *Four Saints in Three Acts*. (Anne MacKay notes that she had the privilege of meeting Alice B. Toklas in the summer of 1949.)

Sandra H. Tarlin was born in Waltham, Massachusetts in 1957. Her upbringing included the observance of Jewish ritual and the study of Jewish ethics. The anti-war movement, civil rights, and desegregation played a strong role in her childhood in the Boston area. During the eighties she lived and worked in New York City in order to be close to the emerging lesbian feminist writing community. Tarlin is Associate Professor of English at Bronx Community College, CUNY. She received her Ph.D. in English and Creative Writing from the University of Houston. Her poems have appeared in such journals as *Ark/angel Review*, *Bridges*, *Möbius*, *Poetica*, and *Western Humanities Review*. She has been the recipient of the PSCUNY grant, an Anna Davidson Rosenberg Award for Poems on the Jewish Experience, and the Inprint Barthelme Fellowship for Poetry. While living in Houston she was an events curator for *Voices Breaking Boundaries*.

For nearly twenty years, **Charzette Torrence** (affectionately known as “Charlie T”) has captured unforgettable moments and documented the power of the human spirit. A quiet yet highly perceptive observer of life, Charlie T. will tell you that she aims to be the best woman photographer the world has ever known. In 1993, Charlie was the first African-American graduate of the photography program at Detroit’s renowned art school College for Creative Studies and produced her first one-woman show entitled *For My People*, exhibited at the Detroit Repertory (later displayed at the Michigan Junior League, Detroit Artist Market, and Art In General in New York.) Currently Charlie has an impressive portfolio of celebrity photography including Aretha Franklin, Alicia Keys, Ray Jay, Ellen Degeneres, and Chaka Kahn. Her published works can be seen in *Black Enterprise*, *Code*, *Hue*, *Essence*, and *Emerge*.

Meg Torwl is an interdisciplinary artist, working in Writing/Performance, Radio, Video, New Media, Arts Advocacy. Her work has been published, performed, broadcast, screened, and exhibited in Canada, USA, UK, and New Zealand. Her writing has been published in *Knowing ME*, *Spin*, *Eat these Sweet Words*, *Linescapes*, *Nuestra Voz*, and her recent poetry chapbook (*in*) *valid*. She has a degree in Social Policy,

and is a commentator with the NZ Disability Media Collective. She has produced three new media projects and four documentaries, which are distributed by Video Out, Canada. She produced and presented 50 half hour radio programs for Radio New Zealand National, including a 6 part series on Disability, Relationships, and Sexuality in 2008; and *The Young and the Mutated*—dealing with cancer in 2007. She was commissioned in 2009 by Balancing Acts, to write and perform a solo interdisciplinary show *That's so gay!*—about solidarity across lines of gender, race, disability, sexuality; and species. She is currently working on a book of short stories, and a book of poetry—*The Synesthete* and the *Kinesthete*. Some of her work is held by LAGANZ—the Lesbian and Gay Archives of New Zealand. Her work can be found online at <http://integralmedia.blogspot.com/>.

Chocolate Waters has been writing and publishing poetry for over four decades. During the second wave of feminism she was one of the first openly lesbian poets to publish, and her contribution has recently been documented in *Feminists Who Changed America 1963-1975* (edited by Barbara Love). Her first three collections: *To the man reporter from the Denver Post*, *Take Me Like A Photograph* and *Charting New Waters* are considered classics of the early women's movement. In addition to her work as a writer, Waters was also a founding mother of the early feminist newspaper, *Big Mama Rag*, which was produced in Denver, Colorado from 1972-1982. She is the recipient of a New York Foundation for the Arts fellowship in Poetry, a fellowship from the Barbara Deming Memorial Fund and was recently awarded a “fruitie” for the best poetry performance in the 2006 Fresh Fruit Festival held in Manhattan. Her poetry, which has won many individual awards in addition to being nominated for several Pushcart prizes, is widely published and anthologized. Currently hailed as the “Poet Laureate of Hell’s Kitchen,” Waters is also a pioneer in the art of performance poetry. She has toured throughout the United States, but makes her home in Manhattan where she teaches poetry workshops, runs a submission service for serious poets, tutors individual clients and is often a participant in the New York City poetry circuit. Waters' limited-edition CD entitled *Chocolate Waters Uncensored*, spans 25 years of the poet's groundbreaking performance work from the NYC nightclub S.N.A.F.U. and other Manhattan venues. Her latest project, a new CD entitled, *Do Birds Get Breast Cancer?*, will be released later this year. She is also in the process of producing two full-length collections: *I Was A Closet Woman* and *Illusion Junkie Downtown*. A chapbook, *The Woman Who Wouldn't Shake Hands*, will be published in 2010 by Poets Wear Prada.

In Memoriam

Judy Freespirit, architect of the fat liberation movement, and all-around lesbian feminist activist, died in S. F. on September 10, 2010, from natural causes. She was 74. Freespirit was a founding member of the Fat Underground and the theater groups Fat Chance and Fat Lip Teaders Theater. In Los Angeles, where she lived for many years before moving to the S. F. Bay Area, she worked as a member of the Radical Therapy Collective, helping women's groups resolve conflict. She worked tirelessly for disabled rights and LGBT people on a hundred fronts, continuing to organize in the Jewish Home for the Aged in S. F., where she lived for the last three years as the only "out" resident. She published and performed in many venues across the U. S. and changed thousands - if not millions - of women's lives. A memorial page has been set up for her at: <http://judyfreespirit.wordpress.com> where anyone can post. A public memorial will be held at the end of October in the Bay Area.

Frances Ann Day passed away on September 24, 2010 at her home in Sebastapol, CA. Fran was the editor of Sinister Wisdom from 2004 until 2010. This is a great loss for Fran's friends and her extended community, including Sinister Wisdom. Fran was an activist, writer and educator who worked for the dignity and freedom of lesbians and all women. Cards and letters can be sent to Fran's partner, Roxanna Fiamma, PO Box 1180, Sebastopol, CA 95473-1180.

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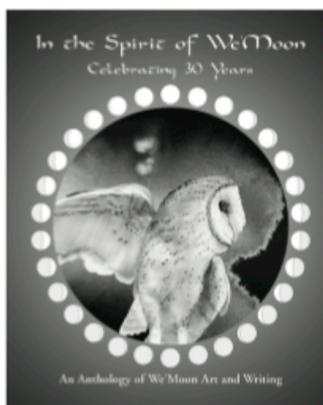
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