

# ONLINE

*a socialist feminist bulletin*

*winter 1988*

*\$3.00*



# CAYENNE

## *in this issue*

<b>Editorial</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Landmark Abortion Ruling</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Feminism Womanism and the Third World</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Repression Increases Under Aquino</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>But Is She A Feminist? Canadian Artist Joyce Wieland</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Interview: Legalizing Midwifery in Ontario</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Surrogate Mothers, Wayward Fetuses and Other Legal Nightmares</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Reviews: Enough is Enough</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Feminist Mysteries</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>I've Heard the Mermaids Singing</b>	<b>26</b>



Yes! I want Cayenne!

Name \_\_\_\_\_

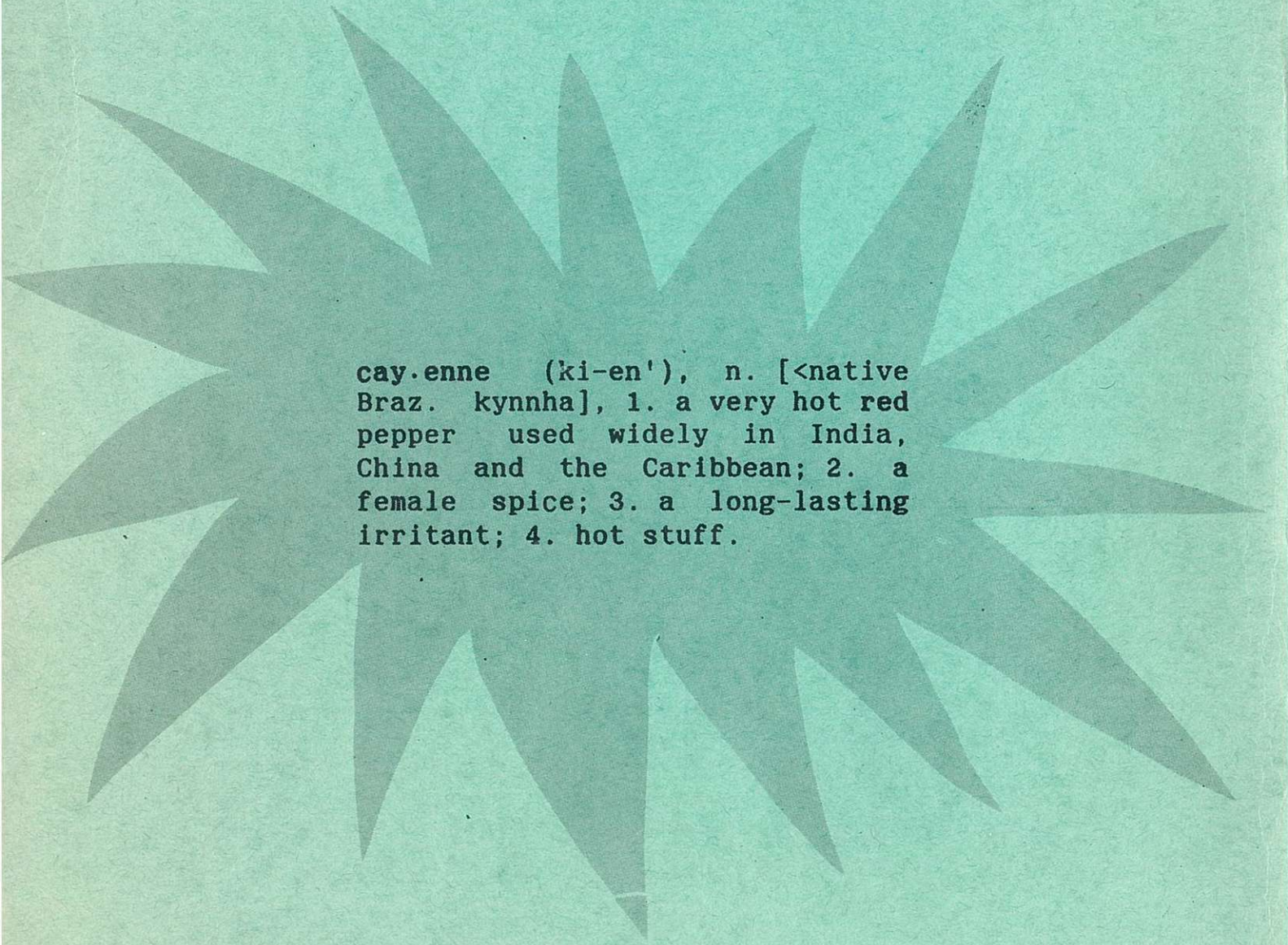
Address \_\_\_\_\_

- Renewal                       Individual \$12                       Institutions \$19  
 New Sub                       Sustainer \$25                       \$50     \$100  
 Gift Sub  
 I cannot afford to send money but would like to receive Cayenne

Send to Cayenne, Suite 309, 229 College Street, Toronto, Ontario M5T 1R4

# CAYENNE

*a socialist feminist bulletin*



cay.enne (ki-en'), n. [<native Braz. kynnha], 1. a very hot red pepper used widely in India, China and the Caribbean; 2. a female spice; 3. a long-lasting irritant; 4. hot stuff.

# CAYENNE

229 College Street,  
Suite 309  
Toronto, Ontario, M5T 1R4.  
(416) 977-8118.

*Cayenne Collective:*

Ruth Beck  
Anne Fourt  
Marie Lorenzo  
Sarah Orlovski  
Judi Stevenson  
Lynda Yanz

*Additional help this issue:*

Marg-Anne Morrison

*Cover design:*

Amy Gottlieb.

*Cover photo:*

David Smiley

ISSN 0827-0732

Issue No. 14, March 1988.

Cayenne is published quarterly.  
Subscription rates are: Individuals \$12/year; abroad \$12 US;  
Institutions \$19/year; abroad \$19 US; Sustainers \$25/\$50/\$100.

Printed at  
Les Presses Solidaires,  
Montreal, Quebec.

## Let's Not Make a Deal

It is time to start talking about free trade between Canada and the United States as what it really is: privatization and de-regulation of our society. The agreement being discussed will not only open the doors to transnational corporations in Canada like never before; future Canadian governments will also find it very difficult to reverse. The "deal" will reinforce the control that private industry already has over our economy and our society. Transnational corporations, such as those already ravaging "free trade zones" in the Philippines and the Caribbean will get the lion's share.

The fight against this free trade agreement has often been clouded by the issue of nationalism. Nationalism can be a dangerous tendency, but it can also represent a healthy desire for self-determination. Canadian people are facing a large and oppressive neighbour who has become a front for the majority

of transnational corporations in the world. Canadian protection from this multinational control is what's really at stake, not simple, bilateral trade with an equal partner. Though there may be unproductive nationalist interests at play in the struggle against "free trade" with the United States, these are not the only, or even the main opposition to the trade deal. The fact remains that the deal is, above all, a powerful attack on working people. Working-class, feminist politics inspire our, and many others', opposition to it.

The agreement will be especially hard on women. The first manufacturing industries that will go are made up of a majority of women, largely immigrants. Other industries threatened form a large part of the service sector, a sector



which not only employs women, but services them as well. In the name of competition with U.S.-based companies, government programs and many of the social benefits women and their families need to be able to work and survive will be eliminated.

For some time now, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), along with the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), has been one of the leading forces against this proposed privatization. Women certainly are not happy with the social services we've been getting from the state. Defeating free trade with the United States is the first step, but only the first. We must push NAC and the CLC to identify the concerns of women workers in the struggle for an alternative to Mulroney economics. We want: medically-insured, accessible abortion, universal daycare, free health insurance, a guaranteed minimum annual income; we could go on and on. We have at most a year to fight this deal before it's too late. Let's start talking about what's really at stake.

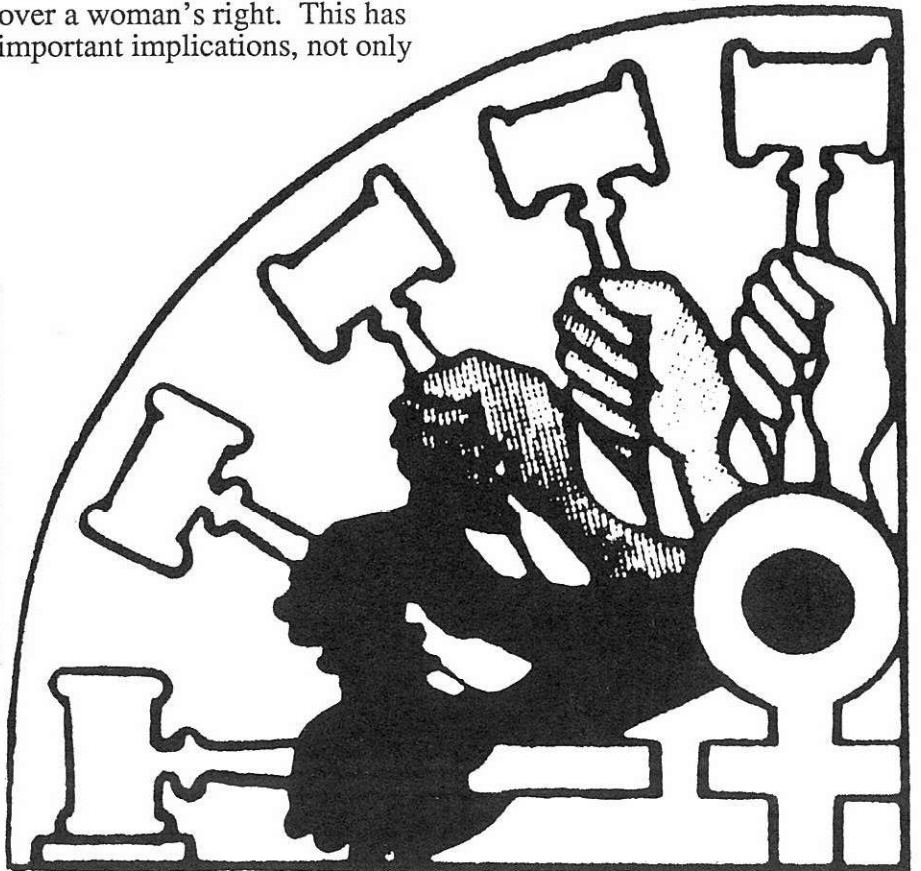
## Abortion Victory

Women won a landmark victory last month with the Supreme Court decision to strike down the abortion section of the Criminal Code. After years of organizing in the face of much opposition and despair, we were finally rewarded with a decision that went beyond most organizers' dreams. Reaction spread swiftly across the country and now we are faced with threats to funding and, therefore, *access*. Anne Fourt's article in this issue analyzes the situation as it's developing in various provinces and within the federal Tory government. The decision asserts the right of women to control our bodies, but it also raises the spectre of protection for the fetus and the need to determine when that should take precedence over a woman's right. This has important implications, not only

for a future abortion law which might restrict abortion in later months of pregnancy, but it could also be used to justify all sorts of medical interventions during pregnancy against a woman's will. The potential nightmares of this are explored in Judi Stevenson's *Surrogate Mothers...*

Finally, Judi's interview with midwife Vicki van Wagner illustrates how midwives in Ontario have gone from working outside the system under secretive, illegal conditions, to being integrated into the health system. This development will interest pro-choice and other political activists who have fought from outside the system. These reproductive issues are posing important challenges for the women's movement today.

This issue we welcome two new *Cayenne* collective members. Ruth Beck and Sarah Orłowski joined *Cayenne's* hard-working team and proved to be able to withstand the pressure! Sarah will be moving to Vancouver soon where she will work hard to represent us there. Welcome Ruth and Sarah!



# Landmark Abortion Ruling



Anne Fourt

The Supreme Court decision striking the abortion law from the Criminal Code is a historic victory. The decision is much more than a personal triumph for Dr. Morgentaler, it is a victory for the women's movement. Pro-choice activists who have weathered drawn-out court cases and clinic raids, organized numerous demonstrations, and held countless meetings and strategy sessions throughout the years, are justifiably proud. Women have challenged the state and won.

The Supreme Court judges did not make this decision in a vacuum. They made it in a context where women have been asserting our right to self-determination through the establishment and maintenance of free-standing abortion clinics in defiance of the law. The clinics provided a focal point from which to wage the battle for public opinion. They provided a concrete manifestation of our determination and strength as a movement. This movement drew its strength from the participation of women across English

Canada and Quebec. The pan-Canadian and bi-national character of our movement is an important development with promise for future organizing.

Judge Wilson's scathing criticism of the law that it "is a direct interference with the woman's physical 'person,'" recognizes the integrity of a woman's body, and reflects the demand and even the language of the pro-choice movement. And in a time when victories are all too infrequent there is all the more reason to celebrate.

In the aftermath of the Supreme Court decision the strategic nature of the struggle for choice becomes even clearer. As a choice activist, I have often asked myself in frustration, what is the big deal here? Abortion rights are vital for women, but the right to choose is hardly a reform that will bring the bourgeoisie to its knees. Why do we meet such resistance?

Clearly, the right to an abortion is one of the cornerstones of women's reproductive freedom. Reproductive freedom, including abortion, is a fundamental political and ideological issue for women's autonomy.

Male [or other] control of women's bodies is an integral part of the patriarchal structure. As such, it has intense symbolic as well as practical significance.

The ferocity of the anti-choice reaction indicates that they, too, see abortion as a strategic issue. From their perspective, restricting or eliminating the right to abortion is a critical step in their agenda to roll back women's gains. Recent history in the United States indicates that anti-choice fanatics here will continue with redoubled ardour their attempt to deny women funds for abortion.

As we celebrate we must prepare to continue the battle. The struggle for choice will continue on two main fronts. The first question is that of access. Already different provinces are developing policies to regulate and, in most cases, limit access to abortions by restricting funding through their provincial health insurance plan. This aggravates the inequities in access which existed under the old law. In Quebec the health plans will pay for abortions in hospitals and community health clinics; the situation is more restricted in other provinces.

The Ontario government has decided it will pay for all abortions whether they are performed in hospitals or in free-standing clinics. However, it has not made any commitment to funding free-standing clinics or to establish them across the province. Since free-standing clinics have overhead and counselling services to finance, women may still encounter financial barriers which limit access. Despite Morgentaler's offers to turn over his clinic to the province and to

train other physicians, Health Minister Elinor Caplan claims she is "not familiar with what his proposal is." The demand for fully accessible abortions will remain high on the agenda of pro-choice activists.

British Columbia is refusing to fund any abortions unless a woman is in a life-threatening situation as determined by two doctors. Premier Vander Zalm has decided to impose his own narrow, pro-life views on the entire province. Abortions will not be funded, while so-called pro-family counselling and adoption centres will receive funding. These reactionary moves will undoubtedly be contested by the province's pro-choice movement. The B.C. movement has been planning to open a free-standing clinic. British Columbia will surely be on centrestage in the next phase of the struggle for choice.

Some provinces have not yet announced what their funding policy will be and are maintaining the status quo. The situation changes weekly. Abortions are still not available in Prince Edward Island and most women in Newfoundland still have to travel out of the province to obtain this now legal service! In New Brunswick access continues to be restricted by limiting funding to this now legal service! In New Brunswick access continues to be restricted by limiting funding to abortions performed in hospitals and which have been deemed medically necessary by two physicians. In almost a parody of old time cowboy movies, Premier McKenna warned Dr. Morgentaler to stay out of his province. Saskatchewan has also limited funding to life-threatening or medically necessary abortions.

Jake Epp, the federal Health Minister, who is person-

ally opposed to abortions, is refusing to assure equal access for this medical service under the Canada Health Act. This complete flaunting of the Supreme Court decision would be unthinkable on other issues.

It may also be the foretaste of the impact the Meech Lake constitutional accord will have on women's rights and equality of services across the country. If the government is willing to tolerate blatant violations of the principle of equal access on this issue, other demands, such as a national daycare program, which also involves federal leadership, may be in deep trouble.

To ensure that the right recognized by the Supreme Court becomes a reality the battle to ensure access must be taken up. We cannot allow the covert re-creation of structures similar to the old therapeutic abortion committees to determine from on high which woman's abortion will be funded.

The second issue concerns possible federal legislation to replace the old abortion law. Justice Minister Hnatyshyn has said the federal government intends to pass a new law on abortion. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court decision, while avoiding the issue of the applicability of the Charter of Rights to the fetus, does recognize the fetus as a separate entity from the woman who carries it. This has important implications for a future abortion law which might restrict abortion in later months of pregnancy.

This aspect of the Supreme Court decision has sparked a hue and cry for a law restricting access to abortion in the final trimester. This is a red herring. Conveniently forgotten in the brouhaha concerning the viability

of the fetus at different stages is the fact that there has never been a legislated time limit restricting abortion to the first trimester or any other given period. Unlike the U.S. law, there was no provision in the old abortion law in this regard. Medical practice shows that in fact abortions beyond twenty weeks are rarely performed. If access to abortion is readily available to all women at an early stage, the problem of more risky late abortions will be even further reduced.

The debate about restricting abortion in the later stages of pregnancy is really an attempt to regulate our reproductive freedom. By maintaining state control over access to abortion the government is reaffirming its "rights" over our wombs. The spectre of state enforced medical intervention during pregnancy with or without the woman's consent is an additional reason that we must oppose any new law on abortion.

The fallout from the Supreme Court decision has not yet settled. But already it is clear that our victory has not ended the war for reproductive freedom although it has changed the terrain of battle. \*



# Feminism, Womanism and the Third World

Angela Davis

*Reprinted from Women's News/Bulletin Femmes, vol. 2 #3, November, 1987*

*Angela Davis teaches black women's studies at San Francisco State University. She was in Montreal on October 16 to speak on "Feminism and Women's Liberation in the Third World." The following is excerpted from her talk.*

I think I would like to begin by asking you to give a definition of feminism, or western feminism. [If I did] the result would be an array of vastly different and more than likely contradictory interpretations. There are conservative feminisms, liberal feminisms, radical feminisms, there is socialist feminism. There are women who don't associate at all with the word feminism. There are women who would discard the label altogether even though they are active in the women's movement. The bottom line is that [we] all strive to improve the lot of women in societies that are manifestly sexist.

But I would have a hard time accepting any notion of a common denominator. As a black woman whose loyalties are with the working class, I would find it extremely difficult to associate myself with women who are striving to reach equality with the boys in the executive suites in the capitalist corporations who support apartheid in South Africa and exploitation at home.

I don't intend to explore all of the contradictions and ambiguities of the many feminisms that have developed over the past century in the capitalist

western countries. So I would simply point out there are ambiguities.

Alice Walker has subtitled her book, *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens*, "womanist prose" rather than "feminist prose." She prefaces the book with a definition of womanist: from womanish, the opposite of



girlish, i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious. A black feminist or feminist of colour. From the black folk expression used by mothers to female children: "you're acting womanish," i.e. like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or wilful behaviour. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered good for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up, being grown up....

But why have black women found it necessary to go to great pains to distance themselves or qualify their association with the mainstream feminist movement even as they have made significant and indispensable contribu-

tions to the development of the campaign for women's equality?

Throughout the history of many of these mainstream movements there has been a chronic problem, one which plagues the movement today to a lesser extent than yesterday, but which nonetheless persists. The problem consists in basing an analysis of sexism on the very specific experiences of one group of women who have most vocally labelled themselves as feminists.

As a consequence, there has been a tendency towards universalizing a particular experience of sexism. And thus oversimplifying the structure of sexism. Of failing to understand that sexism is informed by racism, by class exploitation. By the militarization of our society. By our governments' imperialist policies vis-a-vis the developing countries.

Women of colour and working-class women of all racial backgrounds have instinctively rejected definitions of women's oppression that focus on the domestic and personal expressions of male supremacy to the exclusion of its economic and political dimensions. Women in South Africa, Chile and Nicaragua have also found it difficult to embrace a feminism which has historically ignored the requirements of national liberation.

An issue around which there has developed a great deal of controversy between certain circles of western women and women in Africa and the Middle East concerns practices of genital mutilation. And in some countries in Africa and the Middle East, women are still undergoing clitoridectomies, which is the amputation of the clitoris, and/or



intubulation, which is the sewing together of the vaginal lips.

A number of years ago, several feminist groups in the United States began to campaign against this practice of genital mutilation. It was not difficult to detect the underlying racism characterizing the campaign. I recall speaking with African women in countries where this practice continues, and many of them pointed out that while so often women from the capitalist countries found it so horrifying, so difficult to believe that they could be subjected to such a practice, they themselves could not understand why women in capitalist countries mutilate their breasts and go to plastic surgeons and found it just as hard to understand.

The Association of African Women for Research and Development pointed out: "...In trying to reach their own public, the crusaders have fallen back on sensationalism and have been insensitive to the dignity of the very women they want to save. They are totally unconscious of the latent racism which such a campaign evokes in [their own] country where ethnocentric prejudices are so deep rooted. And in their conviction that this is a just cause, they have forgotten that these women from a different race, a different culture, are human beings and that solidarity can only exist alongside self-affirmation and mutual respect."

Now I want to talk a little about the Women's Movement in the United States, the capitalist country that I know best. Feminist movements and other movements have undergone a process of maturation in recent years. We have had to mature. Ronald Reagan has seen to that.

This process of maturation

has been largely stimulated by the increased economic assaults on the working class, by the intensification of racism, by the violations of human rights, by the policies supporting the most fascist regimes throughout the world. And today we can say that the organized Women's Movement is increasingly acknowledging the centrality of economic issues in the process of attaining women's equality. It was once the case that anti-racist demands were integrated only into the agendas of movements organized by women of colour. These demands have gained acceptance in virtually all progressive circles of the Women's Movement. Anti-imperialist solidarity and peace activism is no longer deemed irrelevant or secondary to the feminist process.

I would argue that a pivotal event for this development in the United States was the 1985 conference that took place in Nairobi marking the end of the UN-declared decade for women. There were unprecedented [numbers of] Afro-American women attending the forum

in Nairobi, and they were able to join women from most of the world's nations in trying to build bridges between women's equality, economic development and peace.

[Their] experience stimulated an even more profound understanding of the global implications of the quest for women's liberation. For the first time in the history of the international Women's Movement, white women from the western capitalist countries found themselves in the minority and of course that minority status accurately reflects the composition of the world population.

On the other hand, women of colour, who unfortunately have grown accustomed to being part of a minority in North America, found ourselves to be part of the majority at Nairobi. The exchange of ideas and experiences between white women and women of colour, between women from the capitalist and the socialist countries, between women from the developed countries and women from the Third World marked a very high point in the international Women's Movement.



# Repression Increases Under Aquino

*Tess Vistro is a member of GABRIELA and works with the Centre of Resources for Women in Manila. She visited Montreal and Toronto recently to participate in a conference on the Feminist Challenge to Adult Education. This was taken from her presentation at the Solidarity Panel of the conference.*

Recalling the days when Cory Aquino took power, women in the Philippines were very proud that it took a woman to finally end the reign of one of the worst-hated dictators. We were expecting the beginning of an era of honour and glory for Filipino women, but unfortunately the turn of events has proved us wrong.

We are now facing the possibility of a national state of emergency declared by the Aquino government just to curb the opposition from both sides, meaning from the right and from the left. This means that even legitimate organizations (like GABRIELA to which I belong) could be included in the attempt of the government to quell this opposition.

This is not the kind of change we wanted when we kicked out Marcos from our country in February 1986. We toppled a dictator. We have had our elections. We were able to restore the Congress, which is the legislative body of our country. But our Congress is predominantly dominated by landlords and millionaires, so that genuine land reform which is the demand of the majority of our peasants, has no chance of being passed.

The Cory Aquino government has had its share of massacres, claiming the lives of many

Filipinos. The most notable was the Mendiola massacre where nineteen unarmed peasants were gunned down in a demonstration near the Malacanang Palace. Another case, which makes us remember the My Lai Massacre in Vietnam, was the massacre of peasants and their families in a village in Central Luzon.

An equally disturbing development is the formation of armed vigilantes all over the country, under the direction of U.S.-backed, right-wing organizations like the World Anti-Communist League. Just yesterday, the Aquino government endorsed the formation and arming of such vigilantes.

It is important to note that this right-wing vigilante movement is part of the U.S.-directed counter-insurgency program. It is misleadingly called a "low-intensity conflict" but, in effect, means total war at the grassroots level. This kind of war uses paramilitary forces to avoid the necessity of using U.S. troops to directly fight the people struggling for freedom against U.S. domination. So this means not only using the Philippine military to fight a U.S. war of aggression on our native soil, but also pitting civilians against fellow civilians as in the case of the vigilante movement.

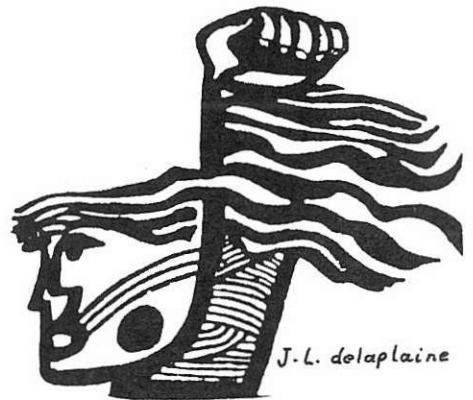
---

## Women Oppressed Under Aquino

---

It is the women who are suffering the most in the crisis engulfing our nation. Multinational corporations flock to our shores, principally for our cheap labour. These multinational cor-

porations utilize the cheap labour of our women, especially in export processing zones where they labour under inhuman and hazardous working conditions. The majority of our women live in



rural areas in conditions of extreme poverty. Land monopoly in the countryside, aggravated by the intrusion of foreign big business corporations, has increasingly denied women access to the land. Instead, they are forced to become agricultural workers in banana, sugar and pineapple plantations, with extremely low wages and hard conditions. At the same time, the lack of such basic necessities as water systems, electricity, health care, schools, transportation and road systems has made life exceedingly difficult.

Against this backdrop of poverty, there is continuing violence against our women. The front pages of our tabloids report cases of rape and sexual abuse of all types of women, from single ladies to mothers and grandmothers. The Aquino government's declaration of war against the insurgents further legitimizes military attacks against our women, who could so easily be



branded as communist or rebel. They are tortured and raped and their homes burned and looted. They are driven out and placed in evacuation camps. Just recently, a six months pregnant peasant organizer from the AMIHAN, a peasant women's organization under GABRIELA, was abducted by the vigilante group called Tadad. Tadad in English literally means to chop. When the woman was found, she was dead with her fetus jutting out from her belly.

Other significant illustrations of the depth to which the status of our women has plummeted are the massive

recruitment of our women into the mail-order bride system, the number of women professionals who become domestic helpers abroad, and the number of young women who are lured into accepting jobs abroad but who end up as prostitutes. It's hard to accept that Filipino women are known world over as either domestic helpers or as hospitality girls. The Aquino government, like the Marcos regime, is a major recipient of the sacrifices of our women in terms of the foreign exchange earning that these women remit to the Philippines. However, the government is ineffectual in the face of

blatant and appalling exploitation of our women in different countries abroad. Our embassies either turn a deaf ear, look the other way, or keep mum about the situation and complaints of our women, blaming the women themselves for the conditions they are in.

Given these conditions of our women, our strategy in the women's movement is to seek to alter the current unequal conditions and structures that continue to define women as inferior to men. This cannot be done, of course, without conscientizing or awakening the women themselves, so that they can work to change

their situation and that of the entire nation. In the Philippines today we are witnessing a militant women's movement that seeks to root out the problems of women in the context of our nation's problems. Protests against rape, the mail-order bride system and abuse of migrant women lead to the uncovering and exposition of the basic ills of our society. In the same manner, protests against high prices, low wages, militarization, U.S. intervention, make women aware of the forces that have caused or intensified their inferior status.

## Women Fighting Back

We have known all along, given our seventeen years of struggle against the Marcos dictatorship, that the emancipation of our women lies in the women themselves, in cooperation with the rest of the Filipino people, and in solidarity with our foreign friends. As such, Filipino women have banded together, formed their own organizations, staged their own protests and waged their own demands. We have hit the streets to join pickets and demonstrations. We have put out manifestos and publications. We have held sit-ins in the slums, in the labour unions, in peasant huts, in miners camps and in mountain tribes. We have organized livelihood projects and set up daycare centres for women.

We have also come to realize that as we suffer from sexual abuse, violence and economic exploitation, women in various countries suffer with us. The

issues of sexism and imperialism continue to haunt the women of the world today, and it is therefore necessary for us to link arms and unite against the forces that oppress us.

International solidarity, global sisterhood--these are what we need today. We say that to be a true feminist one must also be an internationalist. So, although women are separated geographically, culturally, economically and politically, we experience the same exploitation and oppression because of our gender. At the same time, the forces that subjugate women have been so internationalized that unity and action of women worldwide is necessary.

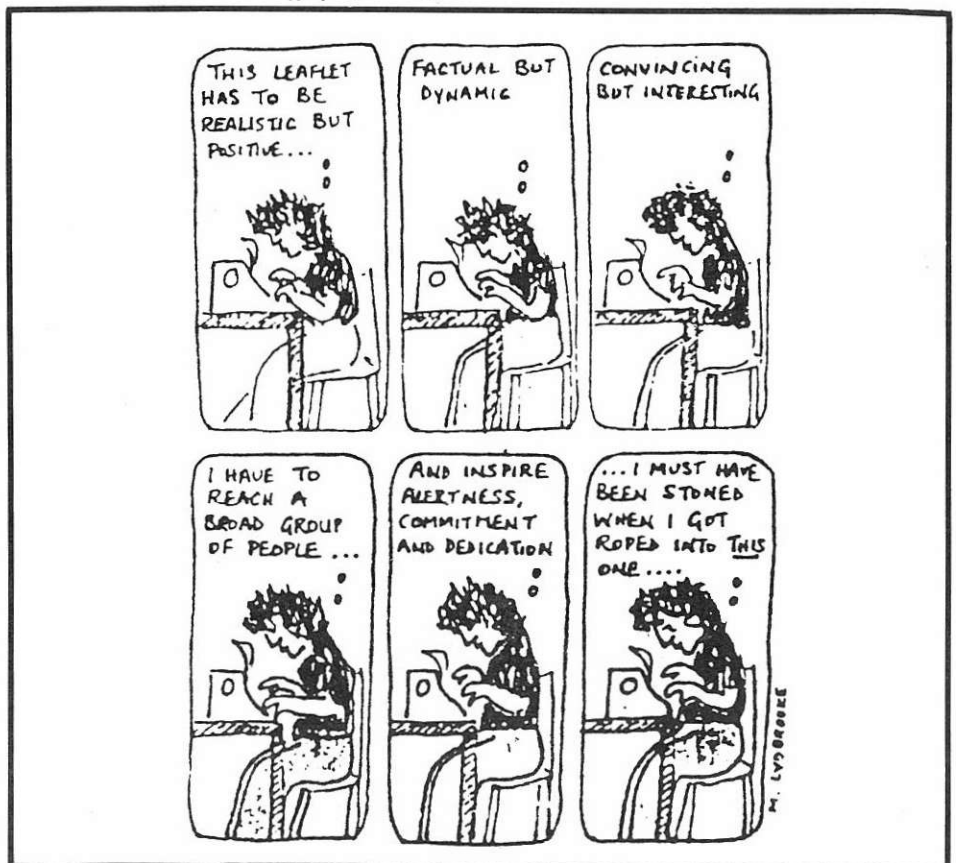
In this regard, we ask you first, among other things, to be one with us in our struggle against U.S. intervention in our country so that our women, along

with the rest of the Filipino people, can chart their own destiny. We ask for your support so that the U.S. will stop sending military aid to the Philippines; remove its military bases; desist from directing and masterminding counter-insurgency programs; and leave the affairs of the Philippines to the Filipinos alone.

We ask you to join in our protest to the Aquino government to stop militarization in our country; to disband right-wing vigilante groups; to prosecute human rights violators; and to stop the sexual abuse, trafficking and prostitution of our women.

From our end, we commit ourselves to expanding and enriching our relations with our sisters in common struggle and unity. For it is only in common struggle that we will witness our liberation as a people, as women.

★



# Act Now! Act Now! Act Now!

*From IXQUIC, Guatemalan Woman, Mexico, January 1988.*

Seven babies, ranging from 11 days to four months old were recently bought by Jose Luis and Michial Roitman, an Israeli couple. The infants are to be sent to the United States and Israel for the purpose of selling their organs to families interested in transplants for their disabled children. According to information from the local press, lawyers Jorge Rodolfo Rivera and Carlos Rene Gonzalez, and pediatrician Joaquin Kackler, were also involved.

The article added that "the Roitmans paid women to breast-feed the babies for 15 days," during which time the babies

were in the clandestine child centre situated in Santa Catarina Pinula before being sent to their final destiny.

Between 1985 to 1987, the sister-in-law of ex-president General Oscar Mejia Victores was implicated in kidnapping and exporting Guatemalan children. According to press reports in March 1987, the reason for the sale of these infants was to effect transplants of their organs to American millionaires' children who suffered from physical defects. Between October, 1985 and March 1986, 166 children have been exported.

*We exhort the international community of human rights organizations and women's groups to raise our voices in protest to*

*the Guatemalan government against this assault on life and the most basic elements of human rights.*

Please send letters and/or telegrams to any of the addresses below:

Pres. Vinicio Cerezo Arevalo  
Palacio Nacional  
Guatemala, Guatemala

Sr. Ministro de Gobernacion  
Juan Jose Rodil Peralta  
Ministerio de Gobernacion  
Palacio Nacional  
Guatemala, Guatemala

Or to your local embassy.



# But is She a Feminist?

## Canadian Artist Joyce Wieland

Barbara Stevenson  
Ottawa

Joyce Wieland is a Canadian artist and filmmaker who has been exploring political and social themes for twenty years: women's issues, Canadian nationalism and environmental protection among them. She has called herself a "cultural activist" and a "protective nationalist," and she has been involved in struggle for change both inside and outside her art. But is she a feminist? I recently put this question to her in the course of interviewing her for my Master's thesis.

To my surprise, Wieland told me that she is uncomfortable with the term feminist, despite--or maybe because of--having been hailed as *the feminist par excellence* of Canadian artists. At the time when feminist concerns were entering the cultural mainstream, she was the best-known Canadian woman artist using provocative female imagery to explore women's issues.

Her discomfort with the word seems to relate to her general reluctance to ally herself with any organization or set of ideas that might tend to box her into an ideological corner or a position not of her own choosing. Wieland told me in no uncertain terms that she has a deep distrust of theory, particularly when it is allowed to take precedence over practice. She feels a personal and intuitive sympathy for women's issues, which she wants to translate directly into her art and life. She neither seeks nor



accepts the mediation of the women's movement, nor does she want to be seen in any way as its spokesperson.

Although she does occasionally use the term "feminist" to describe her work, she prefers the more unfashionable word "feminine." For Wieland it is an extremely positive word, far removed from the primness, reticence and weakness often associated with it. For her it implies the nurturance, strength and procreative power of the female in nature.

I feel that Wieland's art *is* feminist, despite her avoidance of the term. It may be that she and I have different concepts of

what being feminist implies, but to me her imagery displays an empathetic concern with all aspects of women's lives, and a deep conviction about the validity of women's struggles for power, and that makes it feminist.

What does her feminine/feminist imagery involve? Among the first examples are her early abstract paintings with enormous womb shapes, or red paint splattered on white cloth, suggesting menstrual blood on a sheet. She has always been interested in historical women, making Laura Secord, Betsy Ross, the Empress Josephine and Charlotte Corday the subjects of various works. Heterosexual eroticism has been

important in her art. So has the relationship between women and advertising imagery. She has used constructions with photographs of models, plastic flowers, lace doilies, and bare light bulbs to suggest the frequent emptiness of marriage in relation to the romantic dreams of female adolescence.

She often uses the image of the red lip-sticked female mouth: kissing, smoking a cigarette as in a billboard advertisement, mouthing the national anthem, holding a torn American flag. Wieland's mouths are always telling us something. I agree with the suggestion that they are her "personal motif for women's strength and power."

In her most recent works, she has used what she calls "goddess figures" to symbolize various aspects of nature and herself. She paints men and women either in relaxed conversation suggesting their equality, or in violent confrontation, suggesting their struggle.

One of the feminine aspects of Wieland's art which particularly interests me is her quilt-making. She has called her quilts and other textile pieces her "women's work," emphasizing their connection to the needle-and-thread crafts in which women have been working for centuries. As craft rather than art, women's traditional creativity has been undervalued while the male-dominated activities of painting and sculpting have been placed at the top of the artistic hierarchy. Wieland has tried to bring overdue recognition to textile artforms which, like the so-called "high arts," require skill and result in creations of beauty.

Her concept of the quilt as art is connected to her belief that women have not yet taken

their rightful place in the power structures of society. She told me that when she read history, she was outraged to find no mention of women. She felt that by making the quilt a political platform, she could help women to find a significant and acknowledged place in society. They could, she said, "enter history on a basis evolved and expanded from their traditional roles." For quilts are linked to female nurturing in that they are used to keep children warm, and to female forms of cooperation in that they often involved sewing circles and quilting bees. By making them a vehicle for political messages, Wieland hoped to endorse cooperation and negotiation (values she considers fe-

male), as antidotes to the male values of competition and conflict.

The cooperative nature of Wieland's own work is significant. She seldom executed her fabric pieces alone, employing many skilled artists and craftspeople. The exhibition of her work entitled "True Patriot Love" (National Gallery, 1971) featured quilts, embroidered pieces and hooked wall hangings, all with political or social themes. These works were designed by Wieland and sewn by Maritime women who had been engaged in textile craft all their lives. The fact that these skilled women executed traditionally-inspired objects with political subjects seemed to Wieland to make her



show particularly authentic. She had the satisfaction of giving these women national exposure, a public forum and a place within an institution devoted to (male) "high art."

These ideas remind us of Judy Chicago, whose large-scale cooperative works such as "The Dinner Party" and "The Birth Project" were done many years after Wieland's. Chicago was hailed as *the* feminist artist of our time, but I think a comparison of the two definitely favours Wieland. As Susan Crean and others have pointed out, Chicago did not pay her fellow workers, or credit them by name in exhibitions of her work. She relied on traditional patriarchal symbols such as the Trinity in the presentation of women's lives. Much of her message was inaccessible to those who could not afford \$40 for the catalogues which explained "The Dinner Party." And finally, through her highly-publicized and commercially-oriented exhibitions, Chicago was seeking status and prestige in the established, male-dominated art world, rather than working towards the creation of alternative cultural channels more accessible to women.

Feminist art, in fact, political art of any kind, raises the question of the effectiveness of communicating political ideas through artistic media. Because the struggle for social change for women involves changing attitudes as well as altering the material conditions of life, art that encourages people to think in new ways is valuable. Clearly, feminist art is no substitute for feminist social action, but I think art is, nonetheless, a real channel through which to reach people and move them. Art can contribute to political debate, and

it does so in new, fresh, and unexpected ways. But it offers its ideas within the limits of aesthetic form, for art must always be art, not tract or treatise.

Marx was firmly against art which communicated propagandistically, making the aesthetic dimension subservient to the message. He thought instead that humanity's "need for art" meant that ideas expressed through artistic creations of the highest standard would be the most effective.

This point of view gives further political legitimacy to

Wieland's art, for although feminist ideas are always recognizably present, Wieland never loses sight of her aesthetic and creative interests.

*The last year saw Wieland's work achieve a kind of prominence which had eluded her up to now. A major retrospective of her work opened at the Art Gallery of Ontario in April, 1987, and has been travelling around the country ever since. It can still be seen at the MacKenzie Art Gallery in Regina until March 31, 1988.* ★

## Support Diva

*Diva* is a new quarterly journal of South Asian women based in Toronto which needs your support. Our first issue is scheduled to come out in April 1988. This journal was conceived in response to the increasing demand to bring forth the issues faced by South Asian women in Canada, the USA, Europe and South Asia. Our objectives are: 1) to provide a platform where issues could be discussed and concerns could be voiced; 2) to enable women within South Asia to communicate at a broader level and to give support to their struggle from outside their own countries; and 3) to provide the means for publishing feminist literature from different cultures, specifically South Asia. We are a non-profit organization and depend on individual subscriptions and memberships for our financial support. Your contribution, whether it is ideas, articles, poems, short stories, volunteering, donations, or subscriptions, will be of utmost value. Please call or write us at: *Diva*, 253 College Street, Unit 283, Toronto, Ontario, M5T 1R5, (416) 750-4007 or 255-1844.

### SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Individuals: 6 months (2 issues)	\$10.00
1 year	18.00
Organizations & Institutions 1 year	35.00
Supportive Subscription 1 year	40.00
Membership 1 year	100.00
Life	250.00



# Legalizing Midwifery

## Strategies

*Judi Stevenson interviewed Ontario midwife Vicki van Wagner, member of the Midwives Collective of Toronto.*

*Judi: How would you sum up what has been achieved to date in the struggle for the legalization of midwives in Ontario?*

Vicki: The Ministry of Health is publicly committed to legally recognizing midwives, and to legislating midwifery as a self-regulating profession. The Task Force on the Implementation of Midwifery has just released its report. And they recommend many of the principles that we, the Association of Ontario Midwives, were promoting. So in general we're really pleased with their recommendations.

Broadly they are: that midwifery should be self-regulating, to be governed by its own College. Also that there should be a midwifery school established at a health sciences university, where the course would lead to a Bachelor of Science in Midwifery. That is what they are proposing as the "direct entry" stream; there would also be a stream for baccalaureate nurses who wish to enter at a more advanced level.

They talk of course about how to integrate us, the currently practicing midwives, and suggest that a really flexible integration program be established to license current practitioners. They recommend that midwives be able to work in a broad range of models of practice, in a variety of settings, which really pleased us. And they take quite a courageous position on home

birth, and say that health professionals in Ontario should work toward a consensus that all places of birth, including home, should be made as safe as possible.

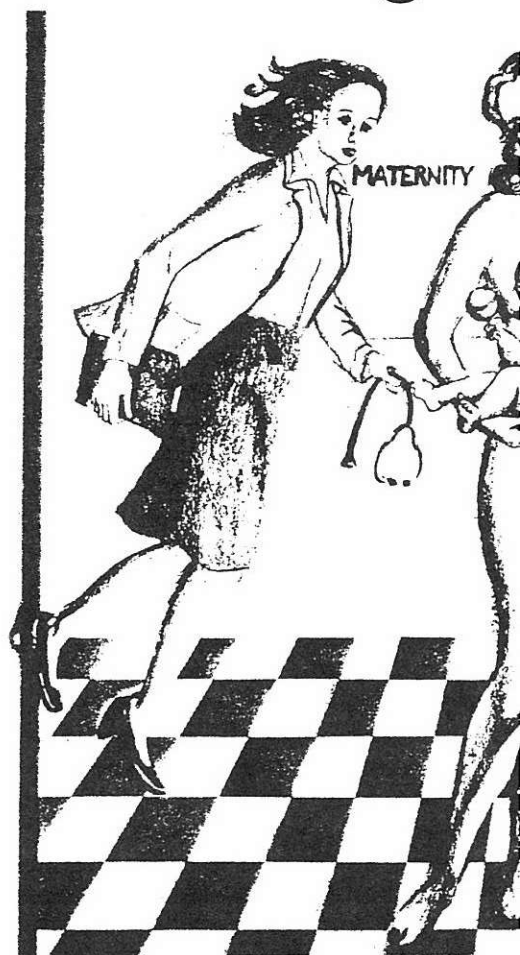
*Judi: Of those recommendations, which is most significant for a politically progressive midwifery profession?*

Vicki: Well, the most significant thing about the Report politically is that it is very, very strong on the question of autonomy, both in terms of who should regulate the profession and in terms of the standards of practice for the profession.

*Judi: What is the model of practice that midwives have about birth that is so different from that of nurses and doctors, that you have wanted to protect by achieving autonomy?*

Vicki: If we are placed under the supervision of the obstetricians, midwives would be forced to give "obstetrical care," care that is predicated on a disease model of pregnancy and birth, care that is interventionist, and so on.

And there is pretty clear evidence that the midwifery model is quite different than the nursing model of care as well. In fact, some people believe that nurses have to do quite a lot of "unlearning" in order to become good midwives. That may be changing. However, the role of the average nurse working on the labour floor of a hospital certainly isn't as an autonomous



caregiver. And her tendency might be to take the medical view of pregnancy which justifies so much intervention that is really unnecessary and dangerous.

*Judi: Are you no longer afraid that professionalization will lead to conservative practices, turning midwives into copies of doctors and nurses?*

Vicki: We've always had that fear. However, it's really ba-

# Midwifery in Ontario

## and Visions



lanced by the fear of legal harassment. Some of us who are radicals would rather be radicals *with* a license than without one. And we'd rather battle with midwives to open up standards, that's much more productive than battling with the state to exist. And in fact, by battling over midwifery standards we can begin to have some influence over medical standards.

*Judi: In Britain, there is both legalization and a profession that*

*is very weak from the feminist point of view. How can you be so confident that won't happen here?*

Vicki: In Britain in the 1950s, they did not have a women's movement helping to define the profession. In Ontario, the profession *is* being defined in part by the women's movement! Historically, that's pretty amazing.

So I think from the outset in the midwifery curriculum for instance, you will have all sorts of feminist values--that has never happened in the health care professions. The British midwives just never had this chance.

*Judi: To get back to the Report of the Task Force on Implementation, is it fully supportive of midwifery as a real, available alternative for women?*

Vicki: The Report recommends vehemently that there has to be enough government support for the profession, its education, the regulatory system, and for actual midwifery services, to make us a real and available alternative. So it recommends government funding not through the OHIP [Ontario Health Insurance Plan] system, but a global budget kind of funding. That means all midwifery practices would have to be approved and funded by the Ministry of Health. So it would be a salaried job.

Now one of our concerns has always been accessibility, like with abortion. We agree with the principle, of course, that women shouldn't have to pay

privately for midwives, because then poor women can't afford us. But it is quite possible that there won't be enough funding to provide services for all the women who want midwives. And the government salary system means that people would not be able to privately hire their own midwives. So there will have to be an illegal midwifery clinic, someday, maybe, to make the point that there aren't enough, that the service isn't really available!

*Judi: So you do have a fear about accessibility, but there is really no indication yet about what levels of funding will be. Any other fears?*

Vicki: Yes. The Task Force recommends an approval process for each midwife's practice which could be a problem. Every practice has to be approved by the Ministry of Health according to principles which they will lay out. This is a potential hassle, because the Ministry of Health is an incredibly conservative institution, filled with physicians. Unless this approval process is administered properly, it could really limit the development of the profession.

The mechanism is not something we see as bad in and of itself, because what it means is that each and every practice must exhibit the characteristics of good, safe and effective midwifery care, like continuity. It's designed to ensure that midwives don't end up simply staffing labour floors, that midwives will work providing the full range of care over the whole of pregnancy

and delivery.

Our concern with it is, again, that midwifery could go the way of the [recently struck down] abortion legislation, that it will be there but the actual service will be limited and inadequate, and that it will be there only for those women who know how to make demands and make the system work for them, in other words, middle class women. And that we will be stuck with it as the liberal compromise. We've always seen that as a problem.

*Judi: None of this is law yet though. What do you expect or want in terms of implementation of the recommendations?*

Vicki: Really, we consider that this stage of strong recommendations for implementation has come about very quickly, that it must be a popular issue within the government, and that implementation will probably happen in as quick a fashion as these things ever can.

*Judi: What about the future?*

Vicki: Hopefully we can press for midwifery services to happen where women don't have access to them now. But I think that the real challenge to the midwifery profession in Ontario, is to lower the rate of prematurity, to work on the socio-economic aspects of women's health and to be seen very much more as community health workers. Even if we work in a hospital, we should develop that orientation.

*Judi: And do you feel that's an orientation held widely among midwives in Ontario now? Are they aware of the class issues in birth and women's health generally?*

Vicki: Yes. Now whether all midwives would be able to express it that way, probably not. But midwives are very much aware that if women don't eat well, babies are born too early. The kind of solutions and treatments that midwives use are very much preventative, which necessarily means that they deal with the socio-economics, the class and poverty issues. So I think midwifery is almost inherently that way, class conscious if you want.

Whether or not midwives will be pulled further into trying to understand the conditions that create that, that's a whole other future thing. But there's a real potential there for a very different perspective, from a class point of view, than the medical profession has now.

---

### A Reproductive Rights Coalition

---

*Judi: I was pleased that the last literature from OCAC [The Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics] mentioned midwifery among the objectives for ongoing reproductive rights work. I don't think that could have happened a couple of years ago. What has changed? Is there a real political alliance building here?*

Vicki: Yes, I think so. In the last two years, midwives have developed much more of an alliance with the abortion movement, and I have to be honest that the alliance has come much more from the abortion movement than from midwifery. Supporters of midwifery have been much less willing to take on a fully developed reproductive rights perspective than the supporters of abortion have.

*Judi: Why do you think that is?*

Vicki: Obviously it is more of a clear advantage for [OCAC] to adopt midwifery and daycare into their program, because daycare and midwifery are a lot nicer, and they make abortion perhaps more respectable. For us, the alliance makes us *less* respectable, so in some sense it may take more courage on our part to take on abortion rights. I think the women's movement tends to romanticize midwives as a symbol of women helping women, and tends to be pretty hard on abortion activists. Midwives are just much more sympathetic characters than abortion activists.

And I think those of us who are feminist midwives will have a very difficult job to persuade the others to widen their perspective here. And that's not the expectation that people in the women's movement have of midwives: like, all midwives must be feminists, right? Wrong, not in the broad sense, not necessarily.

In OCAC, even though there may be some debate about whether broadening the abortion movement to include a reproductive rights perspective might weaken the movement because it's better to work on a single issue--that's strategy, not content, that's not saying "midwifery is bad." And that's very different from the debate within the midwifery movement.

*Judi: How would you describe that debate?*

Vicki: I think that there are some right-to-life supporters of midwifery, and other supporters who see women in a completely traditional way, and see midwifery as extending the traditional roles of women. Because

midwives are talking about women having children, and that's a fundamental thing in the traditional view of women.

To us, the re-creation of midwifery naturally seems like a radical step because we're trying to take it back from the male medical profession. But in many other patriarchal cultures all over the world, and in our own roots, birth was a women's event. So for some of our supporters, it's not such a radical thing to say women should have children the way they want, but it would be a very radical thing for them to say women should have children if they want or when they want.

Because as many as there are feminist and pro-choice midwives and supporters, there are just as many right-to-life or Christian supporters that feel very strongly that abortion is not right.

*Judi: Does the main resistance come from that extreme position, the right-to-life position? What about the middle ground, women who feel simply some discomfort with the idea of abortion? Can they be politicized through their support for midwifery?*

Vicki: I'm really excited about the possibility of some midwives and supporters moving out of

that middle ground, and even out of the right-to-life position. And there are a couple of reasons I see this potentially happening. One is that midwifery supporters do understand "choice", and what that means in birth. So I think that when we can get to a point where it's OK to have the debate about abortion among ourselves, there's a real possibility of trying to push the reluctant ones, to see where it goes. And I'm an optimist about where it might go.

---

## Abortion . . . the biggest cause of maternal mortality

---

The other thing is that the International Confederation of Midwives, along with the World Health Organization [WHO], is taking a real serious look at maternal mortality. In fact, the WHO has adopted a slogan of "safe motherhood," and for the next three years is going to make that a priority issue, sort of their main project in the whole maternal-child health field. And what's the biggest cause of maternal mortality? Abortion. Still! And that's because it's still illegal in most of the world, and the conditions in some countries are just awful.

It's really interesting that this is happening because previously the push was on infant mortality. The big focus for midwives around the world was, save those babies, babies are dying. Finally we're saying, *women* around the world are dying.



At the International Congress of Midwives in The Hague this summer, the director made a very impassioned speech about maternal mortality. There was also a workshop focussing on women's health, and one of the big things that came out of it was the same concern about maternal mortality. And the big rhetorical statement that was being used to very great effect, because it was just at the time that the 747 crashed in Detroit, was that the equivalent of that plane crashes every four hours, filled with women who have died in childbirth.

The important thing about all this for the abortion debate is that if midwives worldwide start to say, maternal mortality is important, and then see that the biggest cause of that is illegal abortion, it is going to be pretty hard for them not to come to the conclusion that something has to change! And this is what I see for feminist midwives as the biggest tool we have to help broaden the scope of thinking among midwives and midwifery supporters.

*Judi: Do you think that it's possible to move forward in that way right now in Ontario, when people's energies are going to be spent on implementing the legalization of midwifery? Aren't people going to say, we're just getting respectable, we shouldn't take any chances with controversial issues?*

Vicki: There's always been a fine line between our need to get respectable and our alliance with the women's movement and those controversial issues. And probably one of the reasons we haven't had a total disaster over the abortion issue, with some of us saying we *have* to take a pro-

choice position, and some of us saying *never*, is that we have all agreed that the most important thing is to get licensed. I think once we are licensed, that debate will emerge in a much more contentious way. Because we will no longer have the protection of that need for a united position.

---

### Women's Health Centre of the Future

---

*Judi: How far do you think midwives might be prepared or able to go in joining the wider agenda of the women's health movement?*

Vicki: I think that in Ontario there is a big push even from the government to place midwifery in a community health and public health context. That doesn't mean that I don't dream that in three years midwives will be working side by side with Henry Morgentaler. I mean first of all, there's a long way to go within the abortion struggle itself, especially if the government follows the Powell Report and provides increased access to abortion in hospitals. We may lose the [free-standing] Harbord Street Clinic, we may not have *any* free-standing abortion centres, and the abortion movement itself may still be fighting for women not to have abortions under general anaesthetic in the hospital setting.

A member of OCAC and I have written a paper on the women's health centre of the future, that has midwives integrated into all of reproductive care, right over the whole spec-

trum--midwives working in northern Ontario nursing stations, midwives working in an obstetrician's practice, midwives in private practice and in hospitals of course, all those different possibilities. And one of our suggestions is that they could work in specific community centres *already working with women*. You could have a midwife who works at the Immigrant Women's Centre, you could have a midwife who works at Jessie's Centre for Teenage Mothers, at the Native Women's Centre--to reach the populations that don't like to go to Toronto General for their prenatal care.

*Judi: Is there work being done now between the Midwives Collective of Toronto and OCAC to promote these ideas?*

---

### Abortion Coalition Midwives Collective Unite

---

Vicki: There are two practical projects that we would like to unite the reproductive rights movement, so to speak. One is to do something on reproductive technology, because certainly there's interest in all of those issues among midwives. And obviously those things have implications for the abortions rights movement too.

That's one project, and the other is much more practical. We're doing a raffle together, the Midwives Collective and OCAC. It's specifically to raise money for our various projects, but *symbolically* it's important because we're going to be seen

publicly to be doing something together.

*Judi: Why is it so important to you to lend your political and organizational strength as midwives to the wider goals of the women's movement? Has the women's movement done as much for you?*

Vicki: My position is that support from the women's movement has been the single most important thing that has helped us to get legal. And I'm not saying that just for rhetorical purposes. I really think that one of the reasons a woman like Mary Eberts [chairperson of the recent Ontario Task Force on the Implementation of Midwifery] understands about midwifery and became such an important ally is because she's a feminist. When Nicky Colodny [a physician who works at the Morgantaler abortion clinic in Toronto] made a presentation to the Task Force for OCAC, Mary Eberts' reply was, thank you for putting this in the proper perspective. I mean, I almost fainted on the spot when she said that! So that all of the feminist historians and the women who have written about the takeover of childbirth, have gotten women like Mary ready to work with us. You see what I mean, there really is an alliance there that we have benefited from, it's not all the other way.

*Judi: Does it go beyond the leadership level, beyond women like Mary Eberts and Nicky Colodny understanding each other as allies? Do you see the wider interest among women to approaching the issue of birth politically, and the openness of government to taking the issue seriously, as being a result of the*

*women's movement as well?*

---

## Women Effecting Change in Society

---

Vicki: I think that's probably the most important part actually. First of all, the lobby group that we have is all women. And it's incredible to think that a bunch of women with babies have been able to put this much pressure on the government, and that may not have been possible twenty years ago. Those women would not have perceived themselves as able to do that. It wouldn't have been part of their world view to say, we want this and so we're going to get organized and get it! And so, just on that very grassroots level, I think yes, the society that we live in now is a product of the women's movement, and that has been very important for midwifery.

And also, a large number of the groups that supported us were women's groups. They were the National Action Committee, the Ontario Association of Women and the Law, the Immigrant Women's Centre, even R.E.A.L. Women, I hate to tell you, (and certainly that helped us to say that the support for midwifery is broad), the provincial Council of Women, the Beaches Women's Group, and I could go on and on.

*Judi: Do you see it as possible that midwives could be co-opted into the old second class role, that birth itself could become denigrated again because women are in control?*

Vicki: I don't think so, but like

I said, I'm an optimist. I tend to hope that history is marching forward for women. One of the reasons we in Ontario have fought for midwives to be the peers of the physician and the nurse is so that midwives and birth won't be pushed into a corner, or turned into second class medicine. ★



# Surrogate Mothers, Wayward Fetuses,



John Klossner

Judi Stevenson

The recent courtroom battle between the birth (surrogate) mother and the contractual parents of "Baby M" for the right to claim and rear her took on all the overheated emotionalism of the afternoon soaps. The American press is like that about certain issues: motherhood and the national honour top the list. But the case raised serious issues for feminists.

A brief to the Baby M hearing authored by Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, Marilyn French and others argued that surrogate motherhood contracts exploit women, and could lead to "the creation of a caste of 'breeders' among the poor women

of [the United States] and the world." It is equally possible however, to take the position that surrogacy, like prostitution, ought to be supported by feminists on the grounds that a woman's body is hers to use as she wishes.

What is significant about the case for socialist feminists is that surrogacy appears to recognize the fetus as an entity separate from the woman carrying it. In other words, it places the crux of the reproductive rights struggle on new political terrain. In the case of Baby M, the court sidestepped all of the political and bio-ethical questions, ruling in favour of the adoptive mother for that most capitalist of all reasons: there was a legal *contract* between the contending

parents. Business is business, after all.

---

## THE BUSINESS OF BIRTHING BABIES

---

Despite my distaste for this logic, I have to confess to mixed feelings about the decision. I did not like what I read of Baby M's birth mother. Most especially I did not like her quasi-mystical claims for the bond of blood between herself and the infant. Those claims are too easily turned against women who must or want to lead productive lives outside the home: "no one can love and care for your child the way you can," say the blood-bond cultists, "so stay

## and Other Legal Nightmares

at home and raise happier kids."

But a bigger part of me was disturbed about the political significance of the court's decision, for it was an affirmation of the patriarchal right of a father to raise his offspring with the woman of his choice. More importantly, the decision posed an old threat to reproductive freedom from a new direction.

A dispute about the rights of a surrogate mother is fundamentally a dispute about the disposition of a fetus. Any scenario in which a fetus comes to have an enforceable fate independent of the wishes of the woman to whom it is attached, is dangerous in terms of its implications for reproductive choice. The dangers are both ideological and legal.

---

### IDEOLOGICAL DANGERS OF SURROGACY

---

Ideologically, the decision would seem to support the political Right, whose chief tactic is to argue that a fetus is a "person" (or person-in-waiting, as I once heard a Catholic theologian phrase it), an entity which the state can take charge of independently of its woman-host. The New Jersey court decision treated Baby M as property, rather than as a person--but the independence of the fetus was likewise dangerously assumed.

From the socialist feminist point of view, the fetus that became Baby M is thought of *not* as a person *or* as a piece of property, but as a part of Mary Beth Whitehead's body. As a part of her body, it could not

have been alienated from her by any superior right of contract. No one, including the biological father, has rights superior to hers. In most jurisdictions, a woman who elects to put a fetus/baby up for adoption has a prescribed time *after its birth* in which to reconsider. This protection of maternal rights ought to be extended to surrogate mothers as well.

---

### LEGAL DANGERS:

#### FETAL RIGHTS

---

Legally, the Baby M precedent fits into a whole series of very disturbing actions taken first by U.S. authorities, and now by a couple of Canadian authorities, to intervene in pregnancy and birth against the wishes of the pregnant woman. All assume the legal independence of the fetus.

Since 1980, the courts in at least five American states have ordered women to undergo caesarians against their will. The most offensive case involved an Alabamian woman--19 years old, poor, black and Muslim. The caesarian she was forced to risk proved to be absolutely unjustified, medically.

And the cases get worse. In the fall of 1986, a San Diego woman was charged with "fetal abuse" in the death of her son, who was born brain-dead with a high level of amphetamines in his bloodstream. The San Diego County district attorney's office acknowledged that it was entering unexplored legal territory when it charged her. Nevertheless, the office contends that the woman is *criminally* liable for the death of the fetus because she

disobeyed doctors' orders when pregnant. If found guilty, she will face a minimum of a year in jail and a \$2000 fine.

In discussing these cases, even *Newsweek* has posed the feminist question: if it is illegal for a pregnant women to deny "proper medical care" (as defined by doctors) to a fetus one week, how can it be legal for her to abort it the next?

No one is happy about the idea of drug-abused newborns, but then presumably no one is happy about drug-abused women, and yet the fuss in the San Diego case is not about women. It is especially constructed around unprotected fetuses. Why?

---

### MEDICAL ESTABLISHMENT

#### TACTICS

---

Right now, medical control over reproduction and birth is under serious assault from the reproductive rights movement, including midwives. It should not surprise us to find new tactics to regain control being tried. New tactics are possible because of new birth technology. Doctors can now perform a vastly increased number of interventions into the natural, woman-controlled process of pregnancy and birth. And they are ideologically disposed to *want* to.

Cynthia Washburn, in *Maternal Health News* (March, 1987), talks about the various levels of coercion to give up control of reproduction that women face: the omnipresence of popular faith in doctors, fear and ignorance of pregnancy and birth, the rise of high tech birth, and looming now the threat of legal intervention



or sanctions if a woman does not "follow doctor's orders" in respect to the fetus she carries, even at the risk of her own health.

**WOMEN  
AS  
CONTAINERS**

There is no other situation in which the law compels an adult, parent or not, to risk her/his own health for another. Relatives do not have to donate a kidney, or even give blood, for a dying child. What then does it say about the social value of maternal life and health if the law is prepared to order women to undergo medical procedures at its whim?

"You can't treat a woman like a container and open her up anytime you want," says Boston University law professor George Annas in *Maternal Health News*, (March, 1987). "She is entitled to the same rights as everyone else is, whether or not she is pregnant." Right on, George.

**SOCIAL  
HYPOCRISY**

The charge of "fetal abuse" smacks of the same hypocrisy common to right-to-lifers. If they were truly concerned about the lives of children, they would surely address the issues of women's poverty, underemployment, and inadequate social services that force countless children to be born into situations of serious deprivation, which they will suffer every day of their lives! And surely, if the medical establishment was concerned about fetal health, doctors would



fight for adequate maternal welfare, through financial and social support for pregnant women, throughout their pregnancies and afterward.

In Belleville, Ontario, the unborn child of a woman who slept in underground parking garages was made a ward of the Children's Aid Society last

March. Authorities apparently cared nothing for *her* homelessness, only that she might impose her homelessness on a child, the valued property of a patriarchal society.

Intervention is a class and race issue, as well as a women's issue. The *New England Journal of Medicine* (May, 1987) reports that the majority of women experiencing court interventions are black, Asian or hispanic, often having few language skills in English, frequently single and poor. The women least able to defend themselves are the most at risk.

So it is not only that the increase in state surveillance over the womb betrays the need of a male-dominated medical profession to control female reproduction; it is also that some women's reproductive activity is more dangerous than others'. ★

**FLASH FLASH FLASH FLASH  
FLASH FLASH FLASH FLASH**

A municipal judge in San Diego threw out the case against a woman charged with criminal neglect of her unborn child--a significant ruling on behalf of the rights of women and infants across the USA. Legal experts agreed, however, that the issue of the rights of the unborn child is far from settled. (Reported in *Maternal Health News*; June, 1987]

# Enough is Enough

as told to Janet Silman  
Toronto: The Women's Press, 1987.

Reviewed by Sarah Orłowski  
Toronto

*Enough is Enough* is a much needed book that sheds light upon the injustices of Native Indian women. Covering the struggles of the Tobique reserve women in New Brunswick from 1976 to 1985, it presents a personal and chronological account by the women themselves. Part of the success of the book lies in its format. The women involved relate the events in an informal manner, allowing them to laugh in retrospect and to acknowledge the struggles still to come.

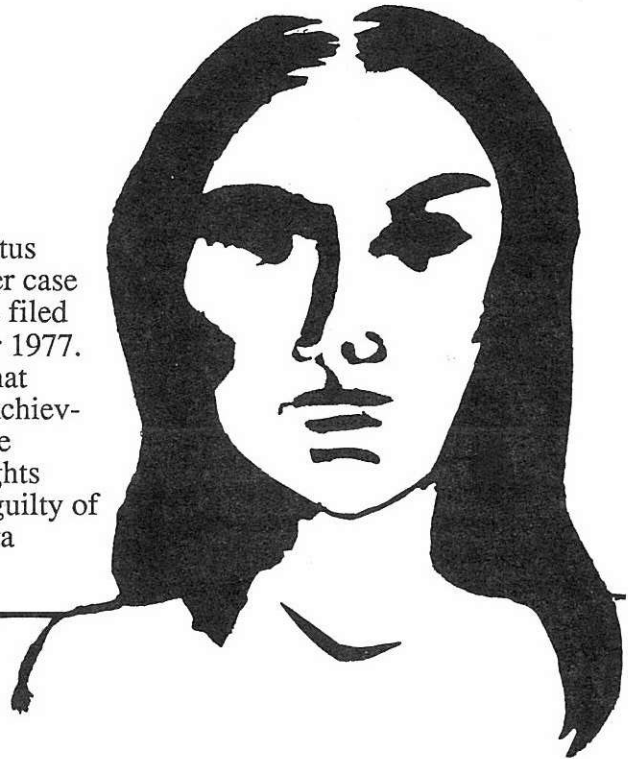
The prelude starts by each woman introducing herself with her own chosen piece of biography: pleasant and painful memories of life on the reserve.

The issues are clear: the discrimination on the reserves resulting in lack of adequate housing for women and their children, the male monopoly of home ownership, and the problem of Native women who lost their rights and status by marrying non-Indians.

The backdrop is the daily grind of poverty and injustice. The lack of aid from government offices (particularly under the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau) and the sexual discrimination within the Native community itself are issues that are repeatedly raised.

The non-status issue was stonewalled in the Canadian justice system for years. Sandra Lovelace, having lost her Indian status by marrying a non-Indian,

agreed to represent non-status Indian women by taking her case to the United Nations. She filed her complaint in December 1977. It wasn't until June 1981 that non-status Native women achieved a major victory when the United Nations Human Rights Committee found Canada guilty of discrimination in the Sandra Lovelace case.



## Housing Key Issue

The main struggle took place at home however, with the housing issue. The band council (all male) had full control of all Native funds. Although file documents indicated the women were receiving funding for housing and housing repairs, in fact the women had not received any funds. The first occupation on the Tobique reserve was in the fall of 1976, though it wasn't until August 1977 that the women and children undertook a major occupation of the band office. It lasted several months, amidst violence, hostility and arson.

As the women realized their strength, they moved towards more national exposure, incorporating the struggle against a sexist and unjust Bill 12 (1)(b) into their fight for rights. This non-status issue was brought into the public eye by the Native women's walk to Ottawa and rally on Parliament Hill in July 1979.

The on-going determination of this small group of women without funding and in spite of the lack of community support is inspiring. It is a clear depiction of feminism being born of motherhood (the needs of their children precipitated the radical action for proper housing).

As the women often mentioned themselves, perhaps the knowledge that originally the Tobiques were a matriarchy strengthened their belief in their actions, and their strength as women.

An inspiring and informative book, *Enough is Enough* covers the whole progression of the Tobique women's struggle. Duly serious and factual, it still has time for some personal anecdotes and maintains its perspective with an admirable sense of humour. It's an important book for all Canadian women activists.

\*\*\*

## Fieldwork

Maureen Moore

Toronto: The Women's Press, 1987.

## Work for a Million

Eve Zaremba

Toronto: Amanita, 1987.

## The Monarchs Are Flying

Marion Foster

Toronto: The Women's Press, 1987.



Reviewed by Ruth Beck  
Toronto

A trio of mystery thrillers by Canadian women writers hit the stands last year, adding some fast-paced fun to our reading lists. For those who generally avoid this genre due to its frequently sexist and class-biased imagery and assumptions, the time is ripe to delve into the current selection.

Of the three books under review, *Fieldwork* is least satisfying in both content and style. The story centres around Marsha Lewis, a single mother and graduate student who is assigned, for one of her courses, to observe the police investigation of the murder of a local breast cancer surgeon.

The story deals with feminist issues explicitly: it exposes the oppression of women at the hands of the medical profession and explores the theoretical question of whether the murder could have been justified on utilitarian grounds if the doctor had been causing harm to women.

However, Marsha's role as assistant to two male police officers fails to challenge traditional attitudes about women as detectives. As well, Marsha has trouble identifying with the struggles of women around her because she relates to the world at a distance. She describes herself: "I look at urban society with the same detachment as an ethnographer." By equating objectivity with integrity and by being unable to clearly see the political content in her own actions, she sometimes acts in contradiction to the feminist views she espouses.

Marsha's intellectual way of dealing with the world is central to the style of the book. The other characters' personalities are revealed to us through Marsha and, as Marsha is distanced from the characters, so are we. At times the pace of the narrative slows because people's lives and stories are being intellectualized rather than woven naturally into the fabric

of the plot.

*Work for a Million* is an entertaining spoof of the typical detective story. It features larger-than-life characters, in particular, dyke detective Helen Keremos in her second sleuthing escapade. Helen is assigned to guard Sonia, a singer whose career is about to take off. Sonia has just won a million-dollar jackpot, and is surrounded by a flock of individuals, one of whom is harassing her. The story line is standard mystery fare—lots of action and suspects with tangled lives and different motives for wanting to get at Sonia.

The political perspective of the novel comes across implicitly in the personalities and actions of Helen and Sonia. Sonia, though clearly used to a male-centred world, rejects the self-interested advice of her doting men in favour of the clear-headed common sense of Helen. Helen, our lesbian heroine, is respected as a detective and is

lusty in her life and her desires. For the most part, she functions within a community where people accept each other's personalities and sexuality with refreshing candor.

As with *Fieldwork*, the tone of the narrative is influenced by the detective's style of operation. Helen says: "I'm not a cerebral type of investigator. Action is more my strong point." *Work for a Million* is fast-paced, funny and direct--just like Helen.

*The Monarchs are Flying* is about Leslie, a closet lesbian living in a small Southern Ontario town, charged in the brutal murder of her former lover. Family and community attitudes are put to the test when Leslie decides to come out. The typical fears and paranoid assumptions faced by many lesbians have a dangerous edge in Leslie's situation because her guilt is predicated on her having attempted to lure a happily-married woman away from her family.

Suspense is skillfully created not only by the urgency of exposing the murderer but by the overwhelming need to overcome the community's (and the jury's) homophobia. It is doubtful whether either can be accomplished, but only one or the other can save Leslie's life.



Harriet, an aggressive corporate lawyer from the big city, takes Leslie's case and pursues both courses of action to the best of her very considerable ability.

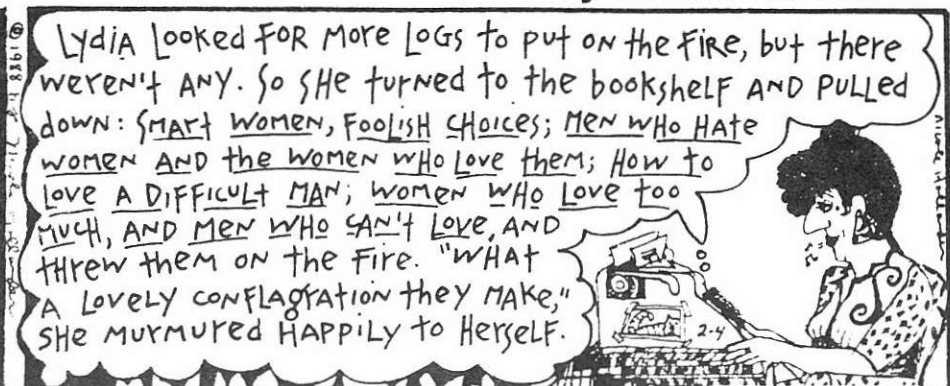
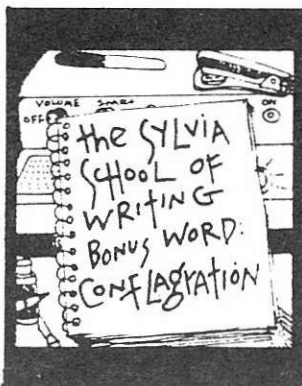
In the process, both women learn things about themselves. Leslie is initially resentful of Harriet's insistence she must come out to her parents, the first step in coming out to the whole town. But the experience bolsters Leslie's confidence in herself and strengthens her determination to defend herself.

Harriet, who is presumably straight and has never taken criminal cases before this one, realizes she has been lonely and restless in both her work and her life. Her defense of Leslie is brilliant and *passionate*, unlike any case she's had in years.

This is an excellently crafted, very suspenseful mystery, which raises the issue of fighting homophobia in a particularly compelling way. ★

**SYLVIA**

by Nicole Hollander



# I've Heard the Mermaids Singing

Directed by Patricia Rozema, 1987.

Sue Chapman  
Toronto

Since the 1960s, women have been tackling the sexist ideology of dominant cinema with the intention of shattering myths about women. "Counter cinema," as the phrase implies, attempts to go against the grain of the mainstream. Women working in the tradition are dedicated to creating new images of women. Alas however, their work is seldom funded, seldom distributed widely, and therefore seldom seen. So when a vaguely counter-cinematic, woman-directed, women-centred, *Canadian* film appears in commercial theatres, we cannot help but stand up and take note.

Patricia Rozema's *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* is the bittersweet story of Polly Vandersma, a simple and naive "person-Friday," who dreams of raising her status through her photographic hobby. Her dreams however, run afoul of the conventions and conspiracies of high art and high society. With an anti-heroic lead character set against these obstacles, the premise of the film is clearly political. Yet *Mermaids* loses sight of its vision, and is ultimately too compromising to make a strong political statement and satisfy its seemingly intended audience.

Historically however, the film must be considered important, for only a few women have ever won the privilege of working as film directors, and fewer still have gained international praise such as Rozema



garnered after the Cannes Film Festival.

In 1940, a film called *Dance Girl Dance* was produced by a major Hollywood studio. The film dealt with a young woman's struggle to become a dancer, and its central questions are the same as *Mermaids*: what is art, and how do (some) women get access? *Dance Girl Dance*

was also directed by a woman, Dorothy Arzner, who as a female director in Hollywood at that time and a woman speaking out in art, was a true pioneer.

The climax of Arzner's classic comes as protagonist Judy sacrifices her art as classical dancer for the lower art of a music hall entertainer. Fed up with the circumstances of her

life and frustrated by the banality of her audience, Judy stops in the middle of a dance and lectures them (and the film's spectators) about their taste and their/our voyeurism. Like Judy, *Mermaids'* Polly is kept in her place by the restrictive conditions of the art world.

Polly dreams her way into the world of art and creativity through her photographs. But this is only part of her dream to better herself. She also fantasizes elaborately (in black and white), creating new truths about herself--and about women. She demonstrates an eloquent language of images, facility in expressing her ideas about art, and, above all, an unconsciously aristocratic air, which Rozema contrasts comically to her lower middle-class background.

But Polly's struggle/dream to better herself is motivated by her idolization of her boss, the beautiful, urbane curator, Gabrielle. The question what is art? arises in this idolization, in that Polly devalues her own art

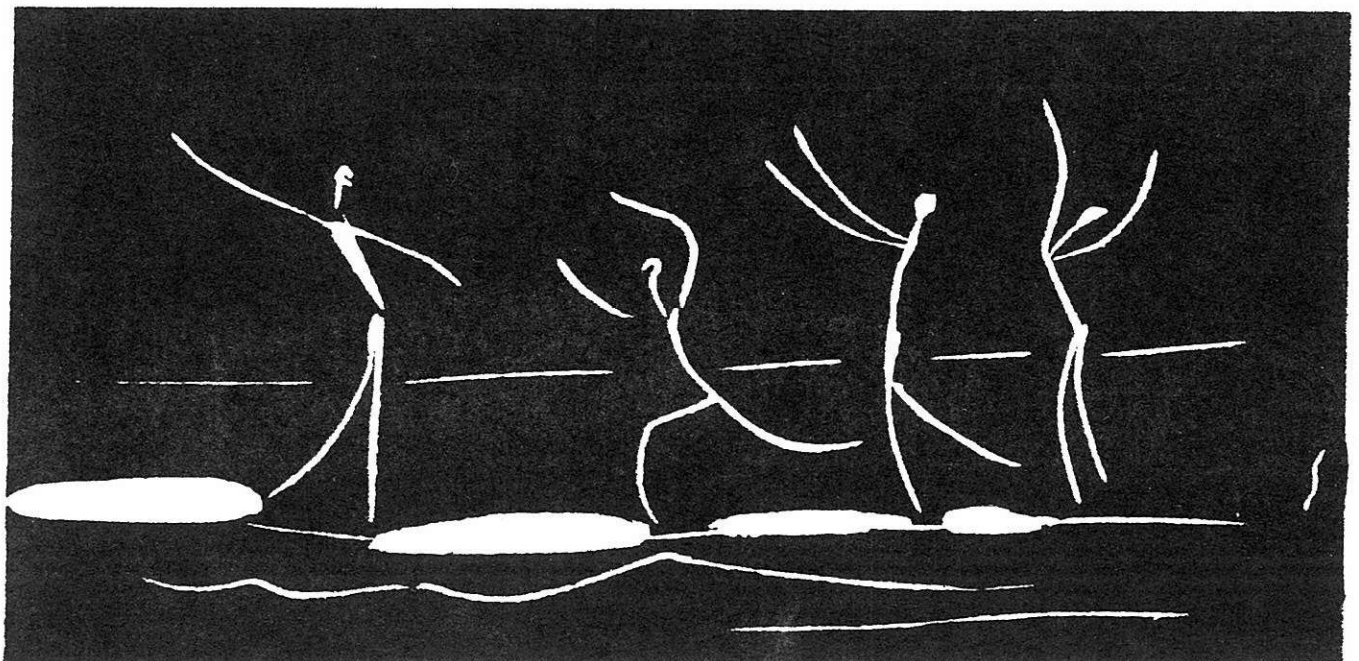
as compared with the curator's (with an irony only revealed at the end). At one point Polly defends the curator's art in a surprisingly bold lecture to a male artist, whose work has yet to be accepted by the Toronto art establishment. Reminiscent of Judy in *Dance Girl Dance*, Polly must confront opposing characters and the audience, using her opinions of art and sexual politics as her weapon.

*Mermaids* challenges mainstream film not only in content, but also in structure. Rozema's use of fantasy vignettes, coupled with Polly's use of the video camera to record her plight, draws the film away from traditional narrative structure and towards counter-cinema. Polly's fantasies are visual essays opposing the stereotyping of women, and projecting new role models for the eighties woman. She discusses her admiration for the curator, her role model, on video and it is through the video that the most political element of the film is revealed. By turning

on the gallery's video camera from her office, Polly discovers that Gabrielle has a *female* lover. Polly's exposure to lesbianism is never first hand, but always delivered through the video monitor. The audience too, learns of the possible feeling of love Polly has for the curator only through Polly's video monologue.

Nowhere in mainstream film has video been used so daringly, and nowhere in mainstream film has lesbianism appeared so accessible--for Polly is "everywoman" in her anti-heroic way.

But *Mermaids* fails to take the next step politically, which would have been to develop Polly as a lesbian or as a clearly defined heterosexual. The ambiguity of the film's stand on sexuality drags it away from being a landmark in mainstream cinema, and leaves it lying in the land of compromises. After all, as Chekhov said, "if you're going to bring a cannon on stage, fire it!" ★



# Dykes to Watch Out For



IT'S SOFTBALL SEASON AGAIN, AND MO'S HAVING A TOUCH OF WELTSCHMERZ IN THE LAST INNING...

