

ANINKA

a socialist feminist bulletin

fall 1988

\$3.00

"Con sangre o sin sangre la raza de los oligarcas explota

del hombre morirá en este siglo" EVITA

EL PERONISMO S REVOLUCIONARIO O NO SERA N

**"YO SE QUE CUANDO ELLOS ME CRITICAN
A MI EN EL MOVIMIENTO, LO QUE EN
FONDO LES DUELE ES LA REVOLUCION
EVA PE**

Las exteriorizaciones históricas de la mascarada peronista, ya desaparece de las calles, pero no abandona la escena; simplemente trasladada su tablado de feria a otro ámbito del parlamento. Allí los bufonescos representantes de los partidos políticos, lucirán sus disfraces y repetirán sus piruetas, tratando de desviar la atención del pueblo de los problemas urgentes: desocupación, alto costo de la vida, ofensiva imperialista para reforzar la de

mocracia burguesa que les permita una cómoda y pacífica explotación y dominio. De ahí el alborozo de la prensa del régimen al destacar las elecciones del 14 de marzo, la "legalidad" de su proceso, la "pureza" del acto comicial, la concurrencia de todo el pueblo sin proscripciones, aludiendo con ello concretamente a la participación en la farsa electoral del movimiento peronista, condecido una vez más por la discreción local burocrática y tral-

Porque la vuelta de Perón a la patria es un hecho revolucionario y la participación electoral del Movimiento Peronista y el ingreso de sus supuestos representantes a la legislatura es un hecho contrarrevolucionario.

En efecto: la presencia física de Perón en el país, despararía de tal modo el ardor combativo de las masas; soliviantaría y aglutinaría de tal manera a todos los desposeídos, explotados y oprimidos por el



CAYENNE

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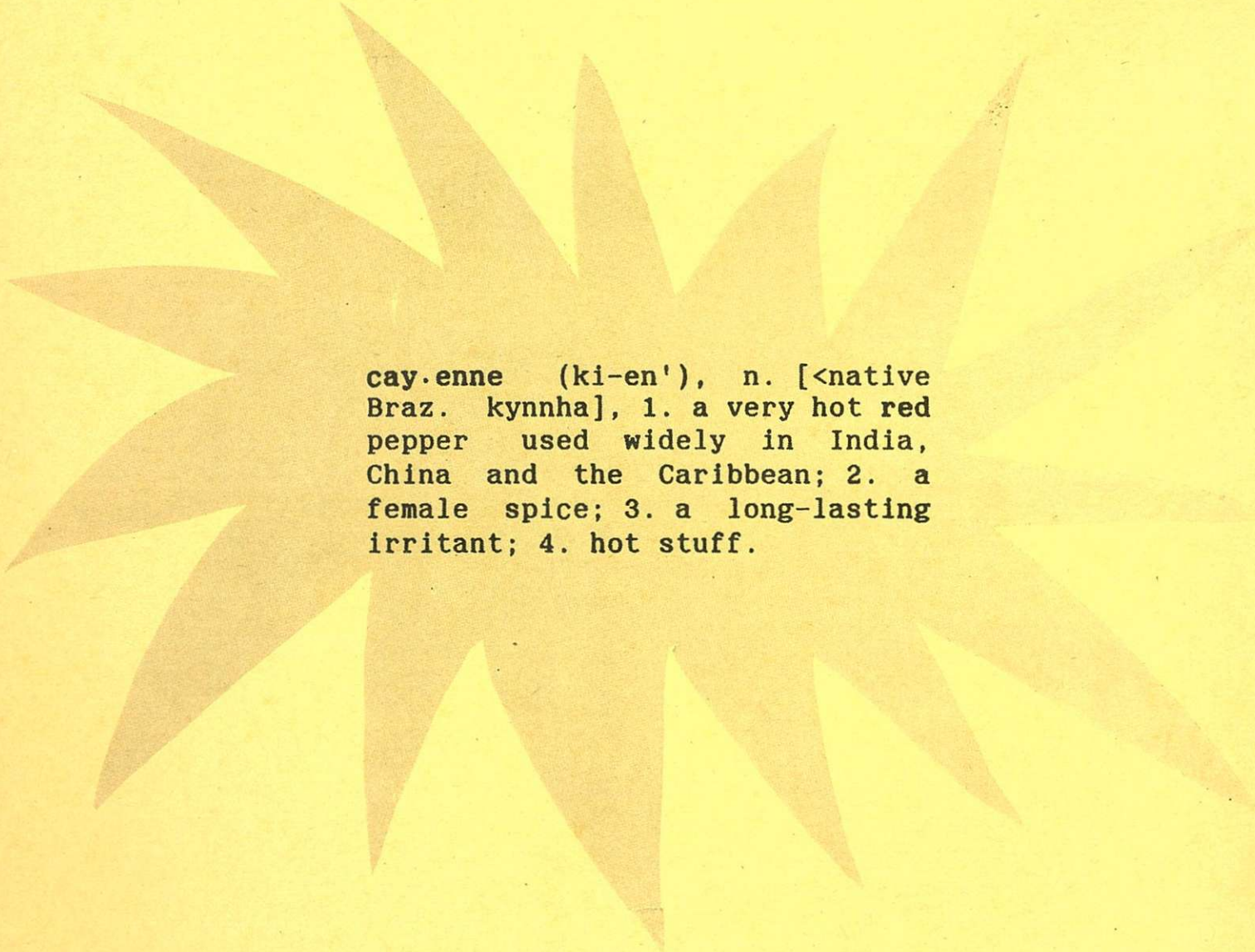
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cay.enne (ki-en'), n. [<native Braz. kynnha], 1. a very hot red pepper used widely in India, China and the Caribbean; 2. a female spice; 3. a long-lasting irritant; 4. hot stuff.

CAYENNE

New Address:
 394 Euclid Avenue
 Suite 308
 Toronto, Ontario
 M6G 2S9
 (416) 324-8766

Cayenne Collective:
 Anne Fourt
 Marie Lorenzo
 Judi Stevenson
 Lynda Yanz

Additional help this issue:
 Annibal Viton
 Marg-Anne Morrison
 Ruth Beck
 Ginny Dickie
 Ann Rowan

Design and Layout:
 Sigrid Blohm
 (& Ventura)

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Dear readers and friends,

Six months ago in an open letter to you, our readers, we shared some of our questions concerning the politics of publishing *Cayenne*.

Many of you responded to our questionnaire and gave us much useful feedback and encouragement. You mentioned analytical articles dealing with critical debates within the women's movement (such as the debate on racism which occurred during International Women's Day 1986 in Toronto) most often as your preferred focus for *Cayenne*. Quite a number of you wanted the quality and quantity of our articles on Canadian issues to be improved. A smaller number remarked that coverage of women's struggles and debates internationally was a valued contribution. Some of you wrote to suggest changes in our style, such as a reduced emphasis on interviews. The praise contained in your responses was heartening and made us feel that *Cayenne* does indeed have the potential for continued growth and relevance, especially as a journal of controversies within the women's liberation movement, as seen from a socialist feminist perspective.

Your encouragement serves to strengthen our resolve to address the demoralizing weakness facing us at *Cayenne*--our relatively limited circulation and inadequate contribution network. We know that many potential readers are simply unaware of our existence. This can only be remedied by a systematic campaign to raise the profile of the magazine, to increase the number of outlets where *Cayenne* is available and generally to turn some of the positive response to *Cayenne* into contributions of labour power.

We stated in that open letter that there was an absolutely crucial need for more women to become active in writing for, producing, and distributing *Cayenne* if the magazine is to survive. Our past neglect of distribution and

promotion has been a reflection of our limited womanpower. It has taken 100% of our energy simply to put out the magazine.

We are no longer willing or able to continue like this--we've just about reached burnout. So we have decided that after this issue our priority for the next three months will be promotion and recruitment. The price is that with our limited resources, we will be obliged to suspend publication for that three month period.

We hope to be able to resume publication in the beginning of the New Year, invigorated with new women's contributions, a higher profile, a streamlined and revamped structure and plan for the upcoming year which will include innovative approaches to some of the key debates socialist feminists are facing.

In the meanwhile, we hope you enjoy this issue. We hope it won't be the last. If you are moved to help reshape *Cayenne*, please send suggestions for articles you would like to write or read, new places for *Cayenne* to be distributed, and any offers to come in and get more directly involved. We've been told we're pretty easy to get along with, and the doors are wide open!

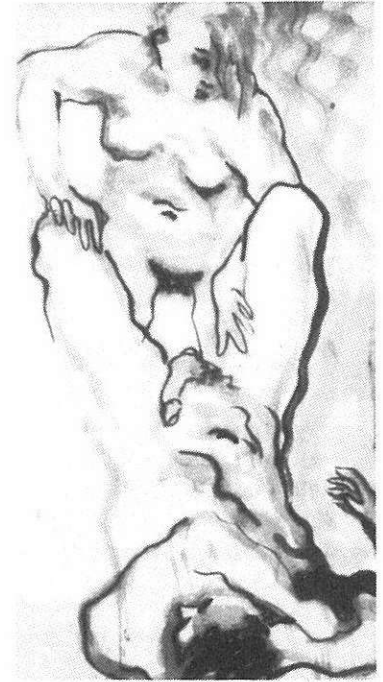


Amy Gottlieb

Sex, Censorship and Violence Against Women



Mindy Mitchell



Marie Lorenzo
Toronto

I read, and looked at the pictures in, the latest U.S. publication on pornography and censorship, *Caught Looking*, with a mixture of delight and chagrin--delight at the images, chagrin at the political message.

Visually, the book is stunning: it is filled with picture after picture after picture of the most exciting and diverse erotic pornography most women will ever have seen. For the authors/editors, the point is this: in the current debate on pornography and censorship very few women actually look at the pornography we're talking about. Even feminists have been conditioned not to look--we are afraid of being "caught looking."

For someone like me, who has thought for a while that sexual repression among feminists and socialists is still painfully high, it was sheer joy to flip through this book and see ecstatic, erotic, playful and liberating sex scenes, full of

sexual abandon, enjoyment and heat. I have used this book a lot.

It's too bad the authors didn't simply give us a truly visually erotic book; it would have been a big success. But unfortunately, these positive images are part of a book designed to rail against censorship, and to attack pro-censorship women in the United States.

Silence on Misogynist Porn

The censorship debate has caused much internal division in the women's movement, and we have to overcome it. We cannot continue to accuse each other of sleeping with the right. But lately, in both the United States and Canada, it has become strangely unpopular for feminists to organize against even the fraction of pornography that includes hateful and violent literature against women. It scares me that socialist feminists in Canada have largely fallen silent on the question of misogynist pornography. This is a billion-dollar, mass media industry, and it's

on the rise in North America. (It will get worse in Canada under the proposed trade deal with the U.S.). It is accompanied by a frightening rise in violence against women in both the U.S. and Canada. Yet in recent discussions of censorship few feminists have expressed concern about this violence or proposed alternatives to censorship to fight it.

My own view is that we shouldn't oppose censorship per se, but rather continue to struggle for our interpretation of what should be censored: both internally in the movement and outside against the state.

Canadian Women's Concern

The amount of hostility toward censorship that has been building up in the Canadian women's movement is hard for me to support, especially when I compare the symbolic violence of censorship to the increased levels of real violence against women in society. Nor can I find a basis for it in Canadian political experience, or traditions of debate.

American feminist politics has long been dominated by a "women as victims" philosophy. In Canada however, there has been a higher level of consciousness about the economic underpinnings of violence against women and the relationship of violence to women's oppression. Why then are we now letting ourselves be swept up into reproducing a U.S. debate? Or are we letting our interests as women be absorbed by the arts community and the gay (male) community in their fight against censorship in Canada?

Of course there is some overlap between these communities, and I am not suggesting that artists and gay men do not have legitimate fears. But as women, we have quite different concerns, I think, around the question of censorship. Neither the arts community nor even the gay male community suffers from the amount and kind of hate literature represented by the proliferation of anti-woman pornography. (If this statement is debatable, then let's debate it in the women's movement.) This hatred is dangerous to women, as it perpetuates and appears to justify the idea of violence against us.

Feminist Anti-censorship: a problem

I cannot go further without mentioning *Women Against Censorship*, in particular Varda Burstyn's article in it, "Some Alternatives . . ." which does propose a myriad of alternatives to censorship to fight hateful pornography. I would argue that they're just not good enough.

Burstyn's main argument against censorship seems to emanate from her position on the state, i.e. that since the state is no friend of women, it will certainly use censorship against us. I agree that the state is no friend of women, but surely this has never stopped us from seeking reforms before--nor

should it. Socialists and most feminists fully appreciate the dangers of state cooptation, and it is unfair of anti-censorship proponents to patronize us in this way. The issue should be seen more subtly: Censorship when? Censorship going how far? Censorship for what trade-offs?

Ironically, a number of Burstyn's own "alternatives" assume the benevolence of state program management and funding. Why would the state be any more amenable to liberal and/or feminist sex education, for instance, if it is hostile to women in other ways?

In some of her alternatives, Burstyn suggests that feminists, no, feminist artists (an even smaller subset!), can counter misogynist literature with alternative, positive visions of sexuality. First of all, for most women artists, since they are not rich, this argument assumes some form of arts funding. Again, why would the state be any less likely to coopt our art than to coopt our censorship? In the second place, this is tantamount to arguing that feminist artists could compete equally in the free market against a transnational, multi-billion dollar industry!

I would argue that to be in favour of state censorship of hate literature (or other mass means of communication) is the proper position for a socialist under a capitalist state. As socialists, we cannot really believe that racist, anti-semitic, genocidal or misogynist attitudes can be eliminated in the "free flow of ideas" that takes place under liberal capitalism. That is why in Canada we support censorship of Zundel, Keegstra and the Ku Klux Klan. Are women to be the exception to this protection?

Porn and Erotica

When we argue for censorship of violent pornography as hate literature against women, we run into the problem that "what is one woman's pornography is another woman's erotica" etc., etc. In the 1970s, we were quite concerned with making distinctions between images of sexuality and images of hatred. Is this no longer a valid enterprise? The distinctions weren't easy to make even then, and it's gotten harder to make them as women continue to explore and reclaim controversial aspects of our sexuality,



Dona Cortese

and to identify the aspects of our oppression. But separating misogyny from erotica is a challenge to our movement, not an argument against censorship.

Bill C-54

This brings me to the hysteria surrounding Bill C-54, now a non-issue as far as the federal government is concerned, but bound to be revived sooner or later. Instead of sitting back and joining in the liberal and libertarian criticisms of the proposed legislation, feminists should have realized there could be something in this that's good for women. We should have organized a women's coalition to try and influence the legislation, much as the Ontario Equal Pay Coalition or the Coalition for Better Daycare have done.

In spite of the lack of feminist organizing around a more progressive censorship bill, from what I know of Bill C-54, it nevertheless appears to be an improvement on the existing legislation. Bill C-54 was proposed as a replacement for Section 138 of the Criminal Code, which deals with censorship of "obscenity." Some people who have studied the bill thoroughly find that it is not typically Tory, i.e. that it is less right-wing than usual. Of course, it still is not progressive enough. It is handicapped with a lot of anti-sex provisions. For example, it prohibits depictions of intercourse, whether vaginal, anal or oral. On the other hand, it removes the prohibition on nudity which exists under current law.

Existing law is based on a proscription against "undue exploitation of sex", a formulation open to widely differing interpretations, and which in the past has allowed violent and misogynist videos to be sold freely at Red Hot Video in Vancouver, while an artistic window display at Pages Bookstore in Toronto based on menstruation was seized and the owners charged. Under Bill C-54, neither of these two things could happen. Nor could classics in libraries, such as works by D.H. Lawrence, Margaret

Laurence or Shakespeare, be censored, contrary to what many claim.

What I think is good about C-54 is that it attempts to be specific about the images that are outlawed, rather than giving free rein to judges' vague notions about "community standards" or what is "undue exploitation of sex." For instance, C-54 explicitly prohibits any kind of child pornography, which I think is a good thing, and starts to try to separate violence and degradation from sex. I agree that its list of specifics is too long and inclusive, but once the precedent is established, women can organize and lobby for a more feminist set of specifics.



Lynda Barry

The point should not be to eliminate censorship, but rather to get the best censorship bill we can possibly get, and work toward a common position among all sectors of the women's movement that would reduce the most violent and exploitative misogynist pornography while encouraging a more healthy view of sexuality.

Socialist feminists have got to participate in this process of further specifying what is unacceptable. We

know we won't achieve the kind of equal pay or childcare legislation we want overnight, but we also know we can't afford to leave the terrain altogether just because there are obstacles in our way: similarly with censorship. It is possible that artists and gay men (and perhaps even sex educators) may be unjustifiably prosecuted under Bill C-54, but isn't this where the battle lies, rather than against censorship itself?

What Do Women Really Want?

It astounds me how many people who opposed this Bill so vociferously had (a) not read it, and (b) assumed the defeat of the Bill would remove the possibility of state censorship altogether. This latter is of course absolutely not in the cards. Whatever we may think about censorship, it ought to be obvious that getting rid of it completely is not on the agenda of this or any other conceivable Canadian government. So let's not confuse the debate. If you want to organize against censorship altogether, do it! If you think Bill C-54 is worse than the current legislation, say that!

I think the proposed Bill C-54 was a step in the right direction, granted its limitations, and that if it is now dead, we still do need some legislation to replace the law we now have. I think that initially our target should be fighting for a law that would make it hard, if not impossible, for big business in pornography to exploit violence against women. (Perhaps disallowing profits in pornography would reduce pictorial violence against women?)

Feminists, and especially socialist feminists, have to enter this difficult and painful area of women's oppression. Too many women's lives depend on it. ■

The Mystique of Feminist Process: A Report From the NAC AGM

by Nancy Adamson and Anne Molgat
Toronto

On the weekend of May 13 to 16, some 500 women gathered in Ottawa for the National Action Committee on the Status of Women's sixteenth Annual General Meeting. When the meeting adjourned late Sunday, delegates had passed fewer than one-fifth of the tabled resolutions; various groups were said to be planning to withdraw from the organization (none have); and many felt that an unbridgeable rift had developed. The "crisis" was widely reported in the mainstream media, and most feminist periodicals have since contained articles on the subject.

As most Cayenne readers are no doubt familiar with the story, it seems pointless to go into great detail: a brief resume will suffice. Early Saturday, delegates voted to slightly alter the order of business, and shortly thereafter passed a motion committing the majority of NAC's financial and human resources to preparation for and lobbying during the upcoming federal election. Organizational review, a process begun two years earlier, was next on the agenda. When it was discussed, most delegates expressed support and were enthusiastic about the recommendations contained in two consultants' reports commissioned by NAC. There were, however, concerns expressed about vague language in the resolutions proposed by the organizational review committee. The principal resolution asked delegates to "approve the organiza-

tional review report and recommendations", problematic for many women because there were two reports (one from Quebec, the other from the rest of the country), one of which most delegates had not seen, and because delegates felt that the resolution asked them to endorse *in toto* reports which they had not had an opportunity to discuss.

In the end the two reports were accepted, and a number of amendments were made to the organizational review committee's resolutions. While neither of us was personally involved in the discussions, we feel that the amendments strengthened reports of which we were already generally supportive. Unfortunately,

them, something both reports called for), was perceived by others as obstructionist.

On Sunday morning Lorraine Greaves, co-chair of the organizational review committee, withdrew from the contest for the presidency, citing unexplained assaults on feminist process. She alluded to the left caucus as the author of these assaults. Her resignation brought to a head other concerns, most notably concerns about the fate of the organizational review, and the use and misuse of Robert's Rules of Order. Uniting all of this was the feeling, articulated by woman after woman, that NAC had somehow strayed from "feminist process", if indeed we had ever been practicing it. Underlying it was a sense that somehow experience and knowledge lead to duping, and the feeling that those women who understand and effectively use Robert's Rules are undemocratic and guilty of silencing other women.

Much of the post-AGM coverage in the feminist press has shared this perception, with pieces in *Kinesis* and *Pandora* adding the wrinkle of central Canadian hegemony. We don't share this point of view. As Lorraine Greaves pointed out, there is a left caucus at NAC; signs advising delegates of its meeting time on the Saturday night were openly posted, so it can hardly be said to operate in secrecy. While some of those in attendance at

the left caucus meeting took part in the discussion surrounding the organizational review resolutions, it is inaccurate to suggest that they played a dominant role. Suggestions that the left was somehow



4e Rapport du Comité de la Condition Féminine CSN

ly, what to many delegates was grassroots involvement in the review process (women from member groups rising to speak on an issue of concern to

responsible for the difficulties are facile and smack of red baiting.

It seems to us that there are two differing points of view, one more explicitly articulated than the other. On the one hand, there are those whose focus is on NAC's political agenda, and who see "feminist process" as a means through which a feminist organization establishes its policies and develops its strategies. Holders of this view tend to be socialist-feminists and liberal-feminists. In the context of the AGM, most of these women tended to see election planning as the crucial issue. This strategy won the approval of the NAC AGM, which committed the majority of NAC's financial and human resources to lobbying. On the other hand there are those for whom process is the focal point. For them the destination is less important than the road we travel to get there. Connie Backhouse's recent article in *Broadside* calling for consciousness-raising discussion groups instead of political debate at the next AGM, sums up many of the concerns of those who hold this latter focus: that structure and organizational rules are inherently patriarchal and hence unsuitable for use by feminists; that leadership is a male concept; and that engaging with the state (with men) is a waste of feminists' time. Holders of this view tend, not surprisingly, to be radical-feminists. In the context of this AGM, most saw organizational review as the major issue facing NAC.

This second group has framed the debate, not in explicitly political terms, but in terms of feminist process. The suggestion seems to be that there is some process which will include all women, validate their skills and teach them new ones, and empower them, AND that all feminists, regardless of their political analysis, will agree on it. We feel that a focus on process obscures the debate which we would argue is actually about differing political analyses and hence differing strategies.

The women's movement in Canada has a long history of struggling

to identify a process which can be labeled "feminist." Women brought into the women's movement the experience of feeling powerless in traditional organizations. Within feminist organizations we have attempted to understand why we were powerless, and out of that has developed a critique of traditional organizational forms. That critique has come to rest on three principles: a rejection of the notions of hierarchy and leadership, an emphasis on personal experience, and a belief in the importance of process. What we have often lost sight of in our discussions of and assumptions about organizational structure and process is that those exist to facilitate a particular political analysis and strategy. They have no meaning in and of themselves. So, to talk about "the feminist process" is almost meaningless outside the context of a particular set of political assumptions. We believe those assumptions need to be discussed.

We take exception to the way the debate has come to be framed in either/or terms (i.e., you're either for this thing called "feminist process" or against it), with those who set the terms of the debate seeming to somehow have a higher moral ground from which to speak. Claiming the label "feminist" as having one meaning only is naive at best, and destructive and divisive at worst.

We do not for a moment disagree with those who say that NAC needs to examine how it operates and the

means by which decisions are made. We too have found Robert's Rules at times confining and confusing. However, we feel that a set of procedural rules is appropriate--though one that is more accessible and open. While we need to be sensitive to developing women's capacity to participate in the running of our organizations, it is also crucial that we recognize that it is not fair to agree upon rules and then dump on the women who know how to use them. The challenge facing NAC in the coming year(s) is to define and develop a way of functioning (a "feminist process") that recognizes the need of individual women to be heard and the need to operate efficiently, to empower women with limited experience in large organizations while at the same time not disempowering women with experience, to confer knowledge to some without denigrating it in others, and to endeavour to build an organization willing and able to accommodate Canadian feminism in all its varieties.

NAC must continue its commitment to organizational review, while not losing sight of its outward political agenda. We who were there and we who care about NAC need to spend less time denouncing what isn't feminist process and more time thinking about what is. ■

(Parts of this article originally appeared in *Rites*, July 1988).

Strike Back



Marie Jakober on the Role of Women in the Military

Excerpted from an interview by Ruth Beck, March 14, 1988

The notion that women shouldn't be in the military or in combat makes me very angry. The current debate about the role of women in the Canadian armed services also makes me angry. I think that as long as there are agents of force in a society, military police or whatever, and as long as women are excluded from those, there is a fundamental weakness in whatever appears to be feminist gains or gains for women.

That is why I was very upset when Nicaraguan women allowed the draft law to be passed without conscription for women. I can understand why it happened but, at the same time, I believe it was a mistake.

Not that women should be out in the bush shooting people, I don't think anyone should. But, the final arbiter in a society is power and the final arbiter of power is violence. I don't feel particularly happy about that situation but I think that it's true. And one of the ways that

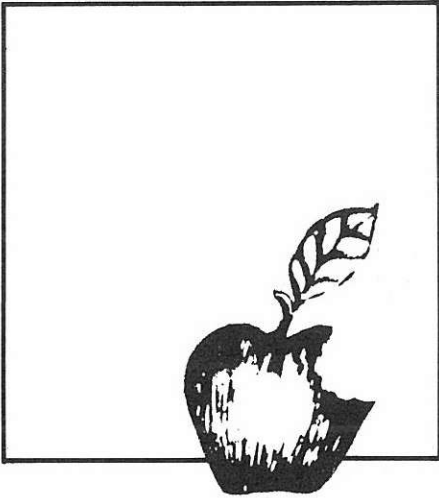


Margaret Randall

the patriarchy has maintained its control as effectively as it has is the way in which it has excluded women from the potential for violence.

This has been done in a number of ways. It has been done by simply forbidding women to take these roles but it has also been done by the creation of the myth of woman as tender, gentle, sweet and nurturing. It's seen as some ultimate betrayal of femininity to use violence.

I think that is absolute nonsense. It's no more a betrayal of femininity than a betrayal of masculinity or of humanity. It's something that one doesn't do unless one has to, but if one has to then there's no reason why a woman shouldn't pick up a gun or hatchet or kick somebody as much as a man. ■



Focus on the Women's Movement in Argentina

Introduction by Lynda Yanz

Feminism, women's organizing, and the women's movement in Argentina are strikingly different than in most other Latin American countries. They're less visible, both internally and internationally, than in Peru, Chile, Nicaragua or Mexico for example. When I first went to Argentina in 1985 for an education conference--the first connection with a people and struggle that has since become an important part of my on-going personal and political involvement--the women's movement was almost impossible to find.

Even now, when I talk with Argentine feminists about the women's movement, a number of things are surprising. First, no one wants to provide an overall analysis or description of the movement. Secondly, the conversation inevitably winds up in discussion of the two contextualizing political issues for the Argentine women's movement: the history of women's involvement in the political struggles of the last 50 years, and the pervasive impact of the most recent experience of repression, terror and silence.

Almost 30,000 Argentines "disappeared" between 1976 and 1979, the most oppressive years of the country's most recent period of military rule, one of the most brutal in Latin America. The

dictatorship succeeded in destroying almost all existing forms of progressive political organization. It also almost completely wiped out a generation of militants, leaders and emerging leaders--in unions, in poor communities, in universities, in clandestine and open political organizations. Those that didn't die and weren't arrested had to go into exile. That defeat and loss continues to frame the possibilities, limitations and visions of Argentine politics, including those of the women's movement.

The dictatorship ended in 1983, when a series of internal defeats (most notably the war with England over the Malvinas) and mounting international pressure forced the military to hold an election. Raúl Alfonsín, the candidate for the right-wing social democratic Radical Party, was elected president over the Peronist candidate. Alfonsín's main election promises were punishment of the military for human rights crimes, economic restoration and, most important, a new era of democratic government in Argentina. None of these promises have been delivered.

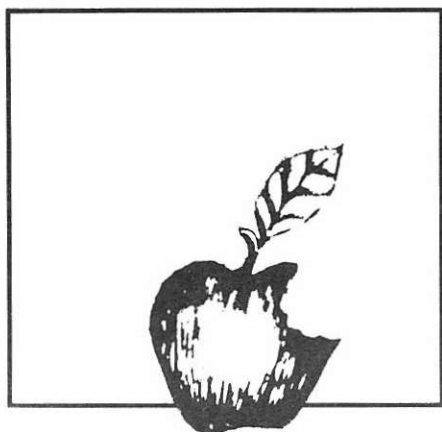
No one in Argentina takes democracy for granted. The military--in alliance with important segments of the bourgeoisie--have too much direct control in the complex economic and political web for that. Thus, the main challenge for politicians from the centre

to the left today is how to institutionalize a democratic system that will work. Equally important is the challenge of finding some response to the economic crisis that almost daily leaves people from the working class and large sections of the middle class with less and less possibility of making ends meet in a situation of a monthly inflation of 30 per cent. Prices augment weekly; rents are indexed to the cost of living and can be raised monthly; wages stay the same; unemployment is on the rise.

Peronism--as movement and party--has been the single most important force influencing the development of Argentina class struggle and politics in the last 50 years. Its politics are almost incomprehensible to progressives outside Argentina (as well as many inside). In October 1989, Argentines will vote again for President and ruling party. People on the street, newspaper sellers, waiters in restaurants, as well as the perhaps less reliable political intelligentsia are convinced that Peronism will win, and thus there is currently a raging battle within the Peronist Party and movement over which tendency will define and control its politics.

It remains in question what impact a change in government will have on the central issues confronting working and popular sectors. ■

Our Political Legacy



by Norma Sanchis

Norma Sanchis is a researcher, writer and activist in the women's movement in Argentina. She recently completed a book, in two parts, on the history of the Peronist Women's Party, with Susana Bianchi. She is currently working as part of an advisory committee in the province of Buenos Aires mandated to initiate and coordinate women's programs within the different government ministries. She also is a member of the Women's Commission to the National Senate. The following is edited from an interview I did with her in August 1987.

You cannot understand the women's movement today in Argentina without understanding its history. Our reality today doesn't begin with the formation of women's groups in the late '70s and early '80s. Argentinian women have a longer and more complicated political history. The movement today has to be understood in that context. Women in our country have never been absent from politics.

Women have always participated. What is true however, is that for the most part when women have participated in politics, they have done so without specific feminist demands. That's what's changing.

By the beginning of this century, there was already a women's movement in Argentina, with two distinct tendencies. One was middle class and intellectual. The other was more trade union and worker oriented; it was socialist or anarchist and was involved in different women's actions. Like women's movements in other parts of the world, there was a strong focus among middle class women on the right to vote and have access to universities. Both tendencies seemed to fade away in the '30s.

1930 began our history of alternating military and civilian governments, electoral fraud and repression. During those years, women of the popular sector were twice marginalized--on the one hand as part of the poor sector which had no political expression at all under the conservative governments, and then as women. The conservative ideology of the time enforced a very strict gender moral code.

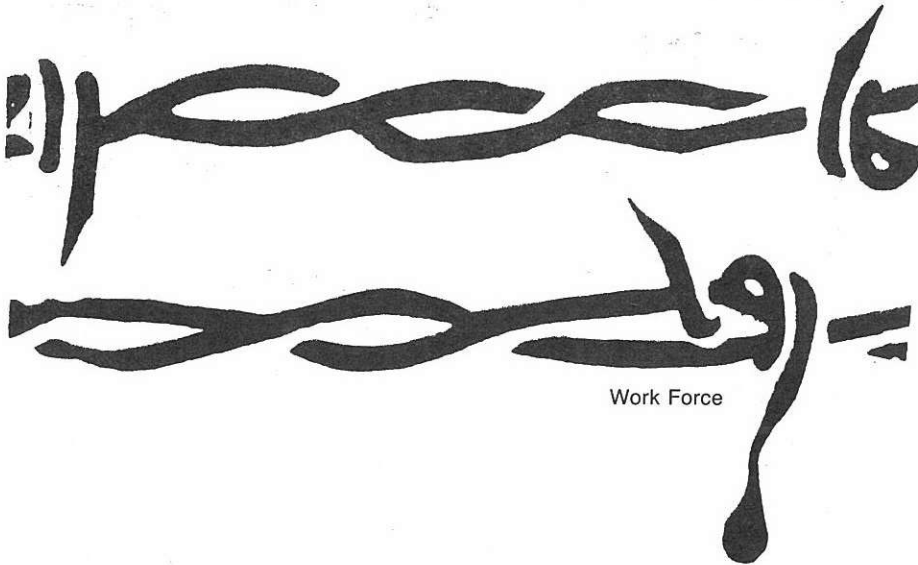


Raquel Partnoy

Peronism Opened a Space for Women

You see again a more massive women's political involvement during the early years of the Peronist movement. Women had (and continue to have) a complicated relationship with both the government and the Peronist





Work Force

movement. In 1944, Perón, then Minister of Labour, provided for the first time some official space to women's issues within the state bureaucracy when he formed the Office of Women's Work Assistance (Dirección de Asistencia al Trabajo de la Mujer). Peron saw how important the incorporation of women into the labour force was for the growing process of industrialization. The Office supported and legitimized women's presence in the labour force. It even talked about women's double working day, about supporting women who were being twice exploited. Women were also influenced by and part of the Peronist policies that institutionalized salary raises, and provided annuity, retirement packages and labour laws.

The Peronist government also opened a space for women to participate in the political process, and even institutionalized this space. For example they organized, through the leadership of Eva Peron, a Feminine Political Party. In 1947, women were given the right to vote, and in 1951 they voted for the first time, and had an influence in re-electing Peron. [In Argentina the polls are divided by gender so it's always clear how men and women vote.]

Of course, the institutionalization of this space also served the purpose of controlling women's political

involvement. But it is important to see women's involvement in the movement at this time as a part of our history of organization as women.

The fact that there were no autonomous proposals in that stage is important. Women depended on someone else, Evita, to express their aspirations and those aspirations were not clear.

Women in the Guerrilla

With the downfall of Peron [in a military coup in 1955] the majority of women activists within Peronism--in the party, in the barrios, in the unions--went back to their homes. But through the years of repression and dictatorships that followed, in the '60s and early '70s, a new generation of women began to actively participate in clandestine politics, under [conditions of] tough repression, and again without raising specific feminist demands.

This isn't specific to Argentina. It's true in all Latin America. Women participate in armed struggle but never in the leadership of the guerrilla. Women participate to almost the same extent as men at the grassroots, in armed actions...everything, but always according to the role assigned by the organization.

To be a leader, a woman had to be a heroine, otherwise it is men who are the leaders. In Argentina, Norma Arrostito was the only woman leader and her role in Montoneros is almost mystical. She survived the legendary Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada [a navy school



which became infamous as one of the most brutal of the dictatorship's concentration camps.] Her image is that of an angel...she was beautiful and she resisted the enemy. And she survived.

The framework that revolutionary organizations during that time were working with said that women had to participate in the frontlines of the revolutionary struggle because as women they would be exempt from violent forms of repression, and because women's involvement gave an image of gentleness to the clandestine organizations.

The Repression of Women

But the experience of the '70s throughout Latin America, showed the serious mistake of this conceptualization. The fact is that women were more harshly repressed than men. They were subjected to all kinds of torture. They were subjected to treatment in the prisons that was twice punitive, for being revolutionaries and then for being women, and thus having deviated from the norms of their gender. Jail guards hated women.

Men and women were tortured the same, but women were raped and humiliated. That's the way the guards demonstrated their power over them, because they had had the audacity to deviate from their gender. There are stories where women were raped by twenty jail guards. Practically every woman prisoner was raped. Women were forced to give birth in the prisons, to clean the place where they had given birth and to give their babies away....

And during those years, the only ones who confronted the military in any systematic way were the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. The Mothers have been organizing since 1977. They are a special chapter in our movement, a theme upon which we're still reflecting, trying to talk about. The revolutionary fact of the Mothers is that from their



Michel Lamothe

traditional roles, they went out in public and became a political group which set itself a public place in the midst of the political scenery of this country. They were a symbol.

Beginning Again, A Movement of Women

It is important to mention all this because it created a new generation of women and laid the basis for how our women's movement has developed. When in the '70's, in other parts of the world many feminist movements

flourished, here women were engaged in political militancy and armed struggle. Feminism as such did not exist. We were active in the revolution. We could not waste time. Then when we realized that did not work, we remembered that personal life existed. Many of us came into contact with feminism for the first time while we were in exile outside the country. It didn't matter if we lived in Sweden, France, Mexico or Peru. Most of us came back in 1982, '83 and '84 having had an important feminist experience, and we are just now putting together the puzzle. ■



Looking Back:

The Girls of that Generation of "Beautiful Youth"

by Ana Lía Glas and Lidia Henales

This is a translated and edited version of an article which appeared in the first issue of Unidas, called "Las Chicas de la Juventud Maravillosa." The "beautiful youth," or "the kids," was a slogan coined by Juan Peron from exile in Spain to refer to the thousands of young Peronists of the early '70s who formed the left and militant sector of the movement. Twelve years later that generation had disappeared, been killed, forced to flee the country or been silenced. The survivors are those that lived (directly or indirectly) through the experiment (and failure) of armed struggle in response to the vicious armed aggression of the Argentinian military.

The majority of the leaders in the women's movement today in Argentina were formed politically during those years, through the vision and then in the defeat. When it first appeared, this article had a strong and--for many--an intensely personal impact, for activists. It named, and claimed, a public space for placing women's experience of the '70s on the political agenda. It tried to set the record straight, and in doing that, to lay a base line for moving on.

The context is so different from our own, yet there are also similarities with the experience here in the late '70s when so many women joined political organizations to live out our commitment to doing revolution. That experience remains in large part unanalyzed in North America as well, yet for hundreds

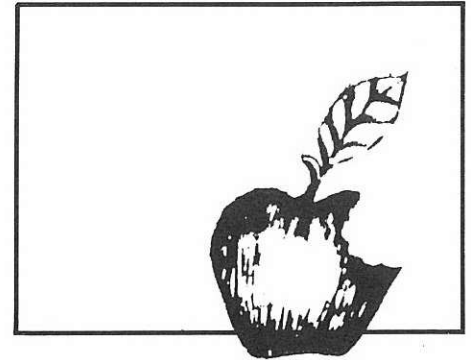
and thousands of women who joined revolutionary organizations, with many of the same overtones as Ana and Lidia describe, those years continue to have a tremendous impact on our personal and political lives and choices.

Our generation has a story to tell. During the last years our story was silenced--by others in order to have us "disappeared", by ourselves because of guilt, fear, and not understanding what had happened to us. Now there is an attempt to recover our memories so we can (once again) insert ourselves in this difficult present and to work for a better future.

The voices that are beginning to be heard now in Argentina almost all belong to men, who shared with us--as equals--the same struggle and the same hopes. But we women, don't we have something to tell, something that's specific to us as women?

In the 1960s in our country, injustice and oppression were the norm. Roads to political participation were closed. At the same time broad sectors of young people eagerly wanted a change, a more just society, a "new man." From 1966 on, revolutionary organizations flourished. Their aim was to confront the military regime.

The music being listened to at that time told of injustice but also of struggles and the possibilities of victory. It was sung by Mercedes Sosa, Daniel Viglietti, Violeta Parra, Los Quilapayún, Zitarrosa, Víctor Jara.



Young people from working class families had memories, or were told by their parents, of a golden era under Peron with vacations, toys and social justice. For other sectors, mostly middle class, it was a desire for justice which pushed them to identify with the poor and the oppressed.

Myths and Heroic Ethics

At that time, we lived the dream of Revolution. Everything was joyous, daring and splendid. Our lives were ruled by the ethics of heroism. It was during this "childhood", the post-war culture of political optimism, that the Cuban Revolution took place. The heroic life of Che Guevara put a mark on all our generation. The books of Fanon and Giap [a Vietnamese military leader], sat beside those of Mao in our home libraries.

Women shared this culture of revolution together with men, but without specific political demands. We did not even dream about such things. We never asked ourselves why there were women combatants but never women leaders in the revolutions we admired so much. If one of us thought of it, it was not transmitted to the compañeros. Women's issues were not a "priority."

In this era of clandestine struggle and dreams of revolution, women had two options: to toughen themselves or to seduce in the name of Revolution. An ethic of sacrifice was shared. Revolu-

tion came first. With their participation in the struggle, women broke away from traditional images, but without creating new anti-patriarchal values.

Sacrifice and Self-destruction

Our generation scorned the "café intellectuals," and instead defined ourselves in terms of action and commitment, prepared to give our lives if necessary. This option demanded sacrifice, contempt for our own lives and our own bodies. Many women's personal actions reflected this way of thinking--the indiscriminate practice of abortion, the lack of care for our children. We still remember our children sleeping, almost asphyxiated by the cigarette smoke of our meetings.

In the early '70s, sexual openness was already accepted in the middle class. Among militant women, this translated into a sort of compulsion to go to bed with the same carelessness we applied to other matters. Many of our present wounds are due to this attitude which is, after all, *machista*. Sex was defined in undisputable masculine terms regarding time, frequency and conditions. When your sexual partner was a militant, the whole relationship was subordinated to political demands, and admiration or comradeship was reason enough to forgive him everything, or at least to not demand your own satisfaction.

We were convinced we were living new times, making history that would carry us to a better society. Women were equal to men, or so we thought.

Then, the holocaust came [the 1976 military coup that within six months had virtually wiped out all clandestine political organizations] and different sectors made different political choices, went different ways.

Thirty percent of the disappeared were women. Those who

didn't die or who weren't arrested had to go into a painful exile in other lands or in their own country. Many of the latter have not resumed political life. They are still living in silence, in a way that they could have not dreamed possible ten years before. When repression was rampant on the streets they went into the reclusion of traditional women's roles. Many of them, too many, feel betrayed, and distrust any political action: now

there are no more romantic maxims to summon them back.

Today, most women that want to participate in politics would like to do so without enlightened vanguards (masculine or feminine) and without absolute trust given to any leader. Yes, we can work together with men, but we will not be treated as objects that can be used politically according to circumstances.

Now we want to participate as the person each one of us is, with her own history and experience, with her own hopes. ■



Outworker's Own #9, Leicester, UK

"Argentinian Women Do Not Write . . . We Don't Put Our Ideas Down on Paper"

Norma Sanchis, Carmen Sara Gonzalez and Lucrecia Oller are part of a ten-woman collective that produces *Unidas*, a women's journal committed to promoting a political discussion among women about women's lives and political roles. *Unidas* is the first journal to claim this space of reflection, about the past and present, about political strategy. It locates itself broadly within the Peronist movement, and thus takes its point of departure from that history.

The interview was done in August 1987.

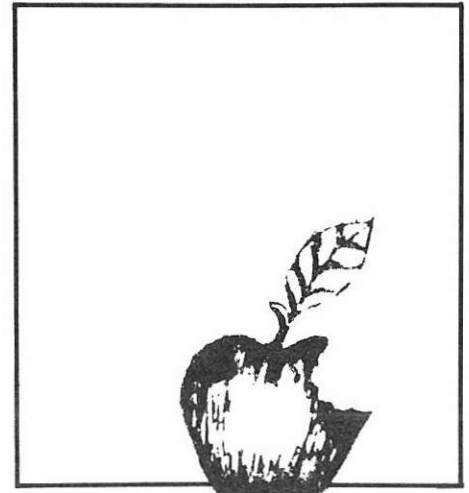
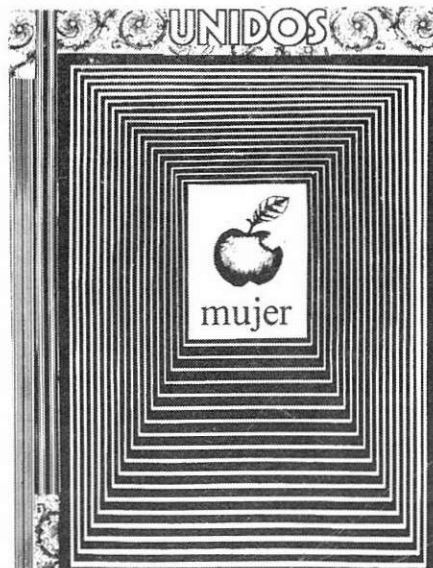
Lynda Yanz: How did UNIDAS start?

Norma: Four of us who were involved in the Peronist movement during the '70's but were by then outside the Party, started thinking, not about having our own publication, but perhaps writing some articles.

Carmen: I work with *Lugar de Mujer* [A Woman's Place], and since 1983 we have been giving assistance to battered women. Some of us involved in these kinds of organizations realized the need for more political discussion. We saw the need for a space to combine our feminist ideas with our political aspirations, which was very difficult

even to talk about, and even more difficult when it came to writing. So we decided to put out a supplement of a left-wing Peronist journal called *Unidos*, which has been publishing since 1983. We called it--*Unidos, Mujer*.

But then the idea and publication had much wider repercussions than we could have imagined. The space of linking political interests and feminist demands was completely empty. The result of even that one effort was that a kind of bridge started to develop: for political activists to begin listening to feminism, and for feminism to speak to



the political institutions of Argentina. It was a very cautious step, the bridges are weak and there are not enough women engaged in either activity.

Lynda: When did you publish the Unidos supplement?

Norma: December 1986. By that time the group had grown and many women had become involved. Some of them were linked to the [Peronist] Party, but others no. After the supplement we decided to continue with a separate journal, called *Unidas*, and to devote each issue to a special theme.

Lynda: What was the response to that first issue?

Carmen: Last December when we inaugurated our new publication with a special meeting, 300 people came. We thought it was going to be much smaller. We are now printing 2000 copies per issue, and that's not even enough. We get many comments from women expressing their interest in the magazine. And we've been in meetings where they had to use one copy between eight or nine of them and they were reading and discussing the articles.

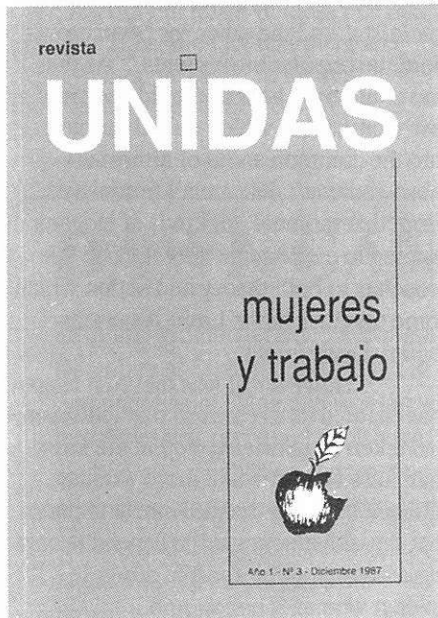
The problem is economics. Although the price is low, many people

can't afford to buy it, and we can't afford to keep printing it.

Lynda: How would you evaluate Unidas thus far?

Norma: On one level it has been successful: it has clearly touched many women. But many of us think that the magazine should question and provoke more, should point more clearly to the need for mobilization.

At a recent political meeting someone got up when they were discussing preparing for the national meeting coming up this June [1988] in Mendoza. They said, and here's something that we should read that will help us to prepare. It's got an analysis of the main issues. They were talking about the recent issue, the third one, on "work".



But it is not yet a tool of expression for women in the way we would like it to be. We want to include more testimonies, where other women (besides ourselves who do most of the writing) can give their views. This means more work, it means not only writing but going out and searching. And of course we're all over-extended in other things.

Lynda: Is there agreement amongst the ten in the group about the role of the magazine?

Lucrecia: There are differences. What Norma says is one part. Those of us who come to it as feminist activists are much happier with Unidas. We think it is very good. It has some problems, things that can be improved, but there are more positive things than problems. I agree it is very important to make improvements, but I think in terms of improving something that is already very good.

Norma: I don't understand why you relate my criticism to the fact of my not coming to Unidas from feminism. Because, I think that my questioning is more from a feminist rather than from a political point of view.

Carmen: Obviously, for feminism in Argentina *Unidas* is very good; for feminism as such, as theory, it is not so.

Lynda: Why do you say that?

Lucrecia: You have to remember that Argentinian women do not write. We have lots of ideas but we don't put them down on paper. That's a fact. So given that, the magazine is pushing us in an important way.

Carmen: Well, for now I'm happy with it. I'm happy with it because of the impact it has had on the people I come into contact with. I hear people talking about the magazine, they like it.

Lynda: What has been the response of political men?

Carmen: The only criticism I've received has come from men. It is clear, they have the traditional view of politics, in which women don't count. So our magazine is shit, worthless. For them women still don't exist. Here what we have to do is the revolution and that is it. Imperialism and that is it. For them women's issues are only a petit-bourgeois game and we are wasting our time.

Men always expect something traditional, what ought to be...so they start to find defects in everything we are doing, the paper, the printing, "why did you write this?", everything.... And this is coming from within our circle, not the right wing. I think that a great part is due to the fact that the magazine annoys them, it departs from what it is supposed to be, it is out of the step of Argentinian politics. ■

These different threads, histories and contradictions are part of what Norma describes as the "puzzle" in which women and women's groups are building a women's movement that is itself struggling, growing and finding its voice. And preparing to host the largest gathering of feminists to date in Latin America, the Fifth Encuentro of Feminists from Latin America and the Caribbean, which has been delayed until immediately following the 1989 national elections.

Thank you to Anibal Viton for translation and for long discussions of interpretation.

Lynda Yanz



Elsa Medina

WE ARE ALL FEMINISTS!

Josefina Aranda
Mexico, D.F.

This article was sent to us by a reader from Mexico City. It's Spanish title is "Todas Somos Feministas." We weren't able to track down the original source.

In October 1987 over 2000 women from almost every country in Latin America came together in Mexico at the fourth regional gathering of feminists. The Latin American women's press is still sorting through the varied assessments coming from different countries, different tendencies and different experiences of that meeting.

One important change since the last meeting, in Brazil in 1985, was the number of feminists who came representing or, as active participants in, popular movements, and who are developing their feminist practice

through those movements. This base, and the political perspectives arising from it, are taking an increasingly central place in discussions of feminist strategy and theory in Latin America. "Popular Feminism" as it's being promoted by some Mexican feminists (as well as feminists within other urban grassroots movements) and Nicaragua's ever stronger version of "feminism" within the Revolution are two important examples.

These theoretical and strategic developments within feminism can offer socialist feminists from outside Latin America much to learn much from. It's now our turn to listen, learn and then bring back to our own reality--something Latin American feminists were able to do with the various currents of North American feminism at an earlier point. (Lynda Yanz)

We are in Taxco, Guerrero (Mexico). It is close to eight o'clock at night and the closing session is ending. There are many different feelings in the air--euphoria, affection and sadness--together with the accumulated tiredness after several days of workshops and every kind of meeting. There is also a predominant feeling that an intense experience which brought so many women together (more than 2,000) is coming to an end. There will be new meetings, at other times and in other places. Right now we must decide where and when we, Latin American and Caribbean feminists, will see each other again.

The debate began and when someone suggested that the next time two meetings be organized, one for "the feminists" and the other for "women from the popular movements." At first you could only hear the timid shouts of a few women, but which quickly turned into the common shout of almost all those gathered: We are all feminists! From that moment, all kinds of slogans erupted to express the very diverse approaches to both theory and action which come together in the Latin American feminist movement.

However, it was that first slogan that enabled us to confirm that feminism had taken a significant step in the sense that there are more and more women who are building the movement and also that the movement itself is indeed becoming a more popular form of struggle against women's oppression.

That brief sum-up makes it appear as if the road we have followed has been short and easy. Nothing could be further from the truth. The road has not only been long, it's also been complex and contradictory. However, 2,000 women being able to affirm that We are All Feminists is one important result of that process, and the impetus for these reflections. This result, which is still not definitive--especially on the theoretical

level--is beginning to be seen in various contexts and is beginning to be recognized by a name: popular feminism.

What is it? How do we learn (and internalize) it? Who are the key actors? How is it different from other approaches to feminism? What theories and actions does it develop? What new objectives does it present? These are some of the questions that feminists have begun to pose and ones we want to find a way of answering.

In general terms, we recognize that feminism is a social movement with profound variations and often with opposing focal points. But ultimately we believe feminism to be based on some common theories which, in the context of its diversity, have enabled a growing consciousness of what it means to be women in our society (so profoundly unequal, not only in terms of class but also gender). Thus, the fact that there are more women involved in the feminist movement means that there are more

women struggling in various ways to radically transform this society.

Popular Feminism

First of all, the term "popular feminism" is used in recognition of the broad sector of women organized in popular movements who have a consciousness of, and are developing, a feminist struggle. Secondly, it is used because of the involvement of some feminists in the popular movements. All of these women have begun to fight against the patriarchal system in the various arenas of the revolutionary struggle.

This forms part of the spectrum which makes up the left in our country, and incorporates both daily reflection and practice, which are also elements of so-called "socialist feminism". Socialist feminism emphasizes the autonomous organization of women, and states the need for destroying every kind of oppression,

acting in a unified way with other movements, etc.

Those of us who come together in this popular feminism are from diverse political tendencies in the left and the popular movements, but we are mainly concerned to ensure that when we destroy capitalism, we have also destroyed a society organized to maintain totally unequal relationships between the sexes and relations of subordination or oppression of women over men in all aspects of life.

For these reasons, our struggle is difficult and contradictory, because we are trying to change the present structure of the society which is based on class and gender. There is still a long way to go but we started a long time ago and now it is important to take more solid and unified steps, because the goal of popular feminism is enormous. ■

DAWN CANADA:

DisAbleD Women's Network Canada is conducting a Secretary of State funded project to determine the needs and priorities of Canadian women with disabilities. A questionnaire, designed to discover the obstacles facing women with disabilities in parenting and childcare, violence against women with disabilities, employment equity, isolation, and recreational needs, is being circulated and interviews will be conducted with women in the Atlantic provinces, in northern B.C., Alberta, and the Yukon. The project will produce three position papers for DAWN-Canada; these will help DAWN set priorities and decide on future activities. The studies will add to the limited available information on Canadian women with disabilities.

DAWN-Canada began in June 1985, when 17 women with disabilities from across the country gathered to discuss issues which were not specifically being addressed by either the women's movement or the disabled consumer's movement. Out of this meeting, the DAWN-

Canada network and its provincial counterparts came into being. DAWN-Canada is affiliated with the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, and the Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped.

If you would like a copy of the questionnaire, could provide assistance in distributing it, or would like more information on the project, write to:

Jillian Ridington
Researcher, DAWN-Canada
3464 27th Ave.
Vancouver, B.C.
V6S 1P6

or

Shirley Masuda
DAWN-Canada,
project coordinator
10401 Findayson
Richmond, B.C.
V6X 2A3

Or call DAWN-Canada at (604) 254-3485 (Voice and TTD)

An Error In Judgement: The Politics Of Medical Care In An Indian-White Community

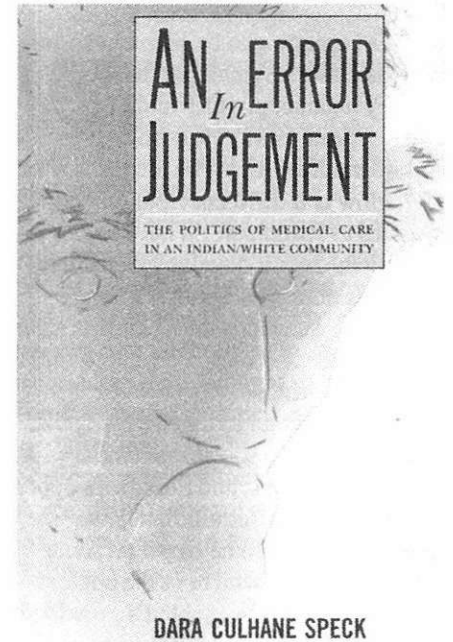
Dara Culhane Speck
Talonbooks, 1987

The Unknown Soldier

George Payerle
Macmillan, 1987

Canadian Content

Nell Waldman and Sarah Norton, eds.
Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1988



reviewed by Cynthia Flood
Vancouver

Thinking back over my reading of the past few months, I find that these three books have all made me react strongly. One way or another, they raise political questions of importance to Canadian socialist feminists.

An Error In Judgement is an ambitious book. Its first task is to tell the sad short story of the life of Renee Smith, a native girl from Alert Bay, British Columbia. She died in 1979 of a ruptured appendix, after a brief and dreadful time in the local hospital; its only doctor was a notorious alcoholic, and badly overworked. Secondly, Speck's book analyses the complex processes at work in Alert Bay as local residents undertook difficult, lengthy political action in response to the child's death. Thirdly, the author places these events in their historical and indeed global context. She shows how the present health care system aggravates native people's dependency and contributes not to well-being, but to its opposite.

When the book went to press, the sole doctor at Alert Bay was

still the one who figures so largely in *An Error in Judgement*, which fact alone validates the book's existence and the struggle it describes. Clearly, what's necessary is intensive involvement of native people in health care, and institutions like UBC's new House of Learning, now actively recruiting native students to train as health care professionals. (But, as with native teacher training, recruitment is only the first step. Next must come the transformation of the curriculum!)

Speck's book is not easy reading, with its dense content and complicated issues; also, its prose is thick with the scar tissue of academic jargon. But the book is absorbing and thorough and solid. Anyone with a serious interest in understanding the post-contact history and the present condition of native people in Canada will find it invaluable.

Also, the book may be unique in its painstaking description of a difficult set of dynamics within a protest organization. Many activists could learn from this component of *An Error in Judgement*.

Not everyone likes war novels, and especially not every feminist. However, I highly recommend George Payerle's *The Unknown Soldier*. It tells the story of the war fought from 1939 to 1945 by Canadian Sam Collister, and more importantly, the wars he fights over the next forty years of his life. In other words, the novel concerns the longterm effects of war on an individual, and through him on his circle of family and friends as the generations continue.

In the opening chapters, Sam Collister is a hard character to like: drunk, mean, mouthy, grouchy, and always in pain. Reading all that hurt hurts. Collister's perceptions of women aren't anything to write home about either, and the semi-stream of consciousness writing style takes some getting used to. Gradually though, Sam wins the reader over with his honesty and conscientiousness and hope. And Payerle makes his readers see that his hero is only one of thousands. These thousands are still walking around Canadian streets like upright canisters of pain, and for every one of them there is a cluster of relatives

and friends on whom the acid of the pain has spilled.

The Unknown Soldier thus explicitly asks mean, mouthy and painful questions about the reasons for wars, and in whose interests they are fought. (Its explicitness may explain why the book has not so far been nominated for any of the prizes it deserves.) The book also shows--most movingly through Sam's link with his dying sister--the value in lives of gentle love. Altogether it is a fine novel, and I was sorry when I came to the last page of Sam.

In my line of work (I teach English at a community college), each spring it is not only tulip time, but also publishers' samples time. Once again it is my task to look for books I might use come September. This spring I was hunting for a collection of essays to use in a composition course. I noted with interest the title, *Canadian Content*, and the fact that its two editors are women.

Then the shock. The table of contents lists fifty-two essays. Exactly seven of them are by women writers. Of this niggardly number, only four are Canadian.

I think--in just a few minutes--of various women essayists in Canada who might well have been included in such an anthology: Michelle Landsberg, June Callwood, Susan Crean, Varda Burstyn, Mariana Valverde, Myrna Kostash, Edna Staebler, Maggie Benston, Anne Innis Dagg, Sharon Yandle, Nora D. Randall, Doris Shadboldt, Jane Jacobs....

I write an angry letter to Holt, Rinehart and Winston. So far, no reply. ■

Sandinista

New Star Books, 1985

A People in Arms

New Star Books, 1987

by Marie Jakober

reviewed by Ruth Beck
Vancouver

The Nicaraguan revolution is a familiar subject of discussion among Canadian socialists, feminists and activists. Many of us have seen documentary films, read analytical tracts, or listened to visiting Nicaraguans inform us about the revolution, reconstruction and the search for peace in the face of continued U.S. aggression. As a Nicaragua solidarity activist, I was initially sceptical when I heard about *Sandinista*, a fictional work about the Nicaraguan revolution, written by a Canadian. How could a novel, and particularly one written by someone outside the revolution and culture of Nicaragua, do justice to the complex and brutal events that transformed Nicaragua and inspired the world?

After reading both *Sandinista* and her newly released second novel, *A People in Arms*, I can say that Marie Jakober's novels meet that challenge. They are exciting, well-written stories that have given me a better understanding of how it must have felt to live in Nicaragua in the two years leading up to the Sandinista victory. Both novels give insights into the conditions of life within Nicaragua prior to the triumph, the brutality of the Guardia, the substance of national political debate and



how it affected people's personal relations, and the strategy and clandestine activities of the FSLN.

Sandinista is set in Managua at the time of the October offensive of 1977. It traces the lives of several members of an FSLN cell group, their families, and a few "internationals" living in Managua at that time. *A People in Arms* continues their story from the taking of the National Palace in August of 1978 until the triumph on July 19, 1979. The characters are dynamic and credible. Each person has his/her own story to tell, and the revolution means something different to each of their lives.

Daniel Chillan is a wiry, street-wise guerrilla, good with his hands and a gifted musician. From the time his father was murdered by the National Guard for his union activities, everything in Daniel's life leads inevitably to his joining the Frente.

Pilar Zelaya is a Sandinista revolutionary who comes from a bourgeois family, linked by marriage to the family of a Guardia commander. The conflicting political alliances of family members are openly revealed at this time of national crisis and the tension threatens to tear apart the Zelaya family. Pilar is not only a revolutionary and a soldier, she is a sexually liberated woman. Through her we witness some of the machismo endemic in Nicaragua

society that was experienced by women within the FSLN. Pilar is not only credible within the Nicaraguan historical context, her character affirms women's right to choose non-traditional roles.

Pilar's cousin, Jadine, is an American living in Managua with the Zelaya family. Self-described as a disillusioned, wandering intellectual who is uninterested in politics, Jadine learns that even her "apolitical" choices have political implications when she volunteers at a barrio medical clinic. Jadine is the character through whom we, the readers, become exposed to different perspectives on the political situation and visions of Nicaraguan society.

It is not coincidental that Marie Jakober portrays Nicaraguan political debate through the eyes of a liberal North American woman. In a March 14 interview, Marie told me that her most important objective with the books was to convey to a North American audience why and how people take up arms to fight against their government. Marie's novels reveal that people won't risk death or torture for themselves or their loved ones unless the material conditions of their lives are intolerable. The risks involved with armed struggle must some-

how be preferable to putting up with those economic and social conditions.

For those of us who are politically supportive of armed revolutionary struggle, this may not be a new message. However, for people who would never attend a documentary film screening or public meeting about Nicaragua, Marie has found a way to increase their understanding of that reality.

What I like best about the books is that in addition to being enjoyable to read, they have helped bring me closer to a feeling of direct experience of the Nicaraguan revolutionary process. The advantage of fiction is that it pushes us to identify with the characters, their motivations, their fears and their joy. In the context of the Nicaraguan revolution, that makes for a moving and powerful story. ■

Agnes Smedley: The Life and Times of An American Radical

Janice R. MacKinnon and Stephen MacKinnon
University of California Press, 1988

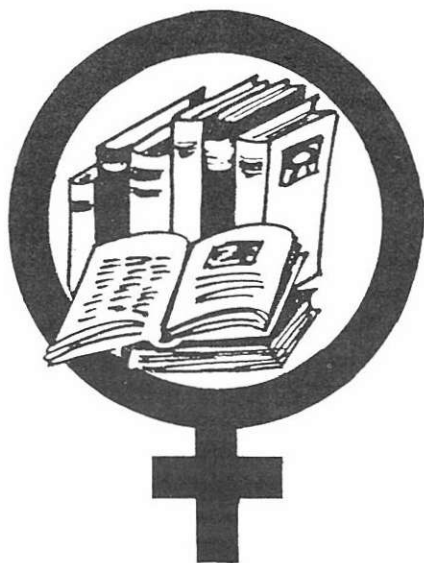
Reviewed by Lynda Yanz
Toronto

I'd almost forgotten about Agnes Smedley when a compañero gave me her biography last Christmas. We'd read *Daughter of Earth*, Smedley's first (autobiographical) novel, together; it must be 15 years ago now. It had an incredible impact on me, at a moment when I was struggling through political and personal changes. It was one of those books you keep giving as presents for all occasions, thinking it will arouse the same insights and passions in others. (I've since learned that's not necessarily true.)

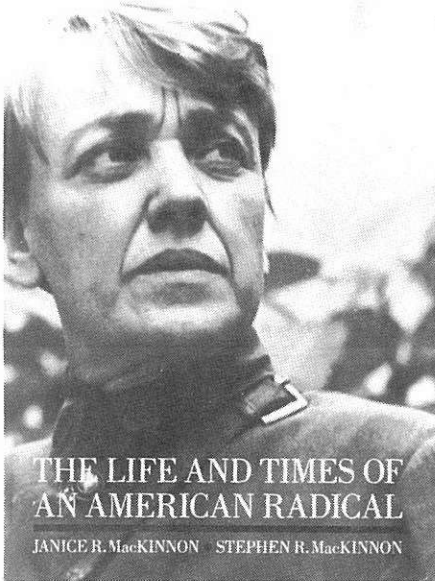
Years later I read *The Great Road*, Smedley's biography of Chu Teh, one of the great working class leaders of the Red Army during the Chinese Revolution. The book is a classic biography. Funny, I don't remember even wondering how the author/protagonist of *Daughter of Earth*, who'd I'd left a twenty-year-old would-be journalist trying to make it in New York, and actively involved in the Indian nationalist struggle, ended up writing a biography based on years of living and trudging around with

the Red Army in the late '30s. It was clearly a project of love and intimate involvement in the Chinese Revolution.

It wasn't until I read Smedley's biography that I realized how remarkable a life Smedley had forged for herself. Remarkable. Not easy. Not safe. And not terribly happy. But remarkable nonetheless. Like Marie Rogers in *Daughter of Earth*, Smedley was born on a tenant farm, and spent the first years of her life moving from mining town to mining town in the western States. From there her life reads like a novel. "By 1918, at the age of twenty-six, she had gained entrée to liberal parlour rooms in New York City, where she fought for Margaret Sanger's birth control movement, wrote muckraking political journalism, and was jailed for helping organize the overseas Indian independence movement. She matured as an activist, feminist, and writer, in Weimar Germany in the 1920s, in China in the 1930s, and in the United States in the 1940s." Smedley died in 1950 in England after being subjected, along with thousands of other progressive Americans, to the ongoing harassment characteristic of the Cold War.



AGNES SMEDLEY



Smedley died alone and poor--without a lover, close friends, movement or organization in her life. At almost every moment in Smedley's life, and certainly at every turning point, two fundamental realities of her history shaped her possibilities and framed her strength and pain: first that she was a woman, and more importantly, that she was a poor white woman. Those two realities didn't mean she had to end up half-crazy and alone, but they did frame her particular possibilities and responses to the dragons that she confronted. Actually, what is so remarkable as you read through chapter after chapter is how she so consistently refused to give in, to convention, to hardship, to her craziness, to her own and the American left's political defeats.

This biography is good, an even balance between story and the accumulation of names, dates and events (although I have to admit it's a bit too academic for me--too many footnotes and endless references to people and places). The book moves you beyond the drama of Smedley's life and lets you get to know her better, her strengths and contradic-

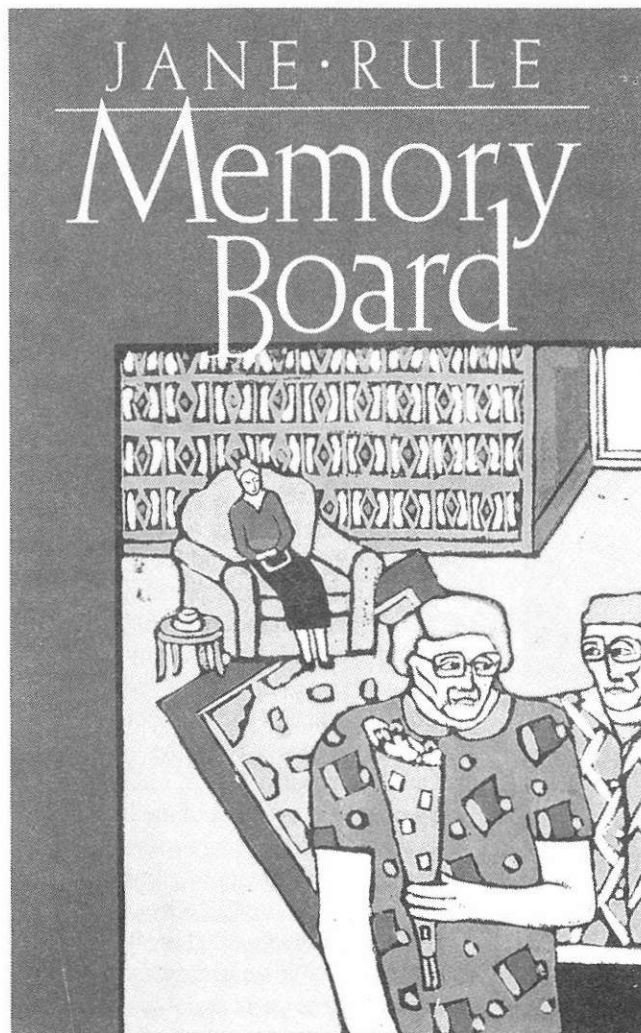
tions. The biographers (a husband and wife team) aren't easy on Smedley but they're fair; they respect her politics and her strengths. The section on China is fascinating, a bonus history in itself. Smedley was one of the journalists closest to the Red Army and spent most of the years from 1929 to 1941 in China.

But most important, for me anyway, was how it kept pushing me to reflect on how Smedley's life and the loneliness that was endemic to it seemed to speak to the fears that haunt many of us who are trying (failing and trying again) to build relations and community/ies that meet our needs for intimacy, for continuity and for inter-dependence in our personal lives, and at the same time support an active political involvement. Smedley was in many ways a sort of pioneer for socialist feminists, although she did not have the expectations generated by the "anti-family" and "personal/political" ideology of the women's movement of the late '60s. She wasn't molded in any sense through a women's movement or feminism as such. She was a strong, independent woman and militant who felt she should be able to participate in organizations and movements on an equal footing with men, to live outside of the traditional trappings and be able to have a sexual life. It's that struggle that makes the book painful reading. It's not easy wading through Smedley's life and realizing what it meant for her to choose to keep fighting as a political militant and in her personal life.

In summing up her personal relationships (which were a continual source of pain and disappointment), Smedley's biographers say "Smedley continually took risks by insisting that any friend or lover must accept her exactly as she was." When I read that--despite its individualist overtones--I thought how many of us would like to have some version of that said about us, and yet we're fighting like hell not to end our days alone. Is that really the choice?

The book deserves a wider readership, especially among women, feminists, and activists, and with luck it will come out in paperback soon, so it doesn't just gather dust on the shelves in progressive and feminist bookstores. It's even worth buying in hardcover. ■





MEMORY BOARD

Jane Rule, Macmillan,
1987

reviewed by Linda Frank
Hamilton

For those of us who know and love Jane Rule's work, (she has previously published eight works of fiction and two essay collections), *Memory Board* has been eagerly anticipated.

Set in Vancouver, the plot centers around a set of twins, David and Diana. As children, they had been "virginal, devoted to each other, setting up cross-currents of desire they hardly understood themselves". As adults, they have had nothing to do with each other for decades except for annual birthday visits. Although their separation is foreshadowed in their adolescence, it is David's wife who insisted on banishing

Diana from the family circle because Diana is a lesbian. David acquiesced to his wife's wishes, and so it isn't until his wife's death that his two daughters and grandchildren find out about Diana's existence. The book vividly and unsentimentally portrays the effects of aging on the characters and their attempts to cope with the changes this imposes on their lives.

Most of the book focuses on David's attempts at reestablishing his relationship with his sister and forming one with Constance, Diana's lover for the past 40 years, a task that inevitably includes a slow and at times painstaking reconciliation between the two halves of his family. Entwined through David's efforts is the story of Diana's life with Con-

stance, whose memory has all but deteriorated and who must rely on Diana and a memory board, or child's lift-up slate, to record and remember for her even the simplest of tasks, crossing off each item as it is accomplished.

Constance is the most riveting character in the book. She certainly has the best lines. They are "non-sequiturs like messages in bottles washing up after years on the shores of her consciousness". ("Why aren't all doctors vegetarians? Flesh must be so real to them".) And it is through Constance, "unencumbered by memory...free to obscure the present" that Rule raises her penetrating questions about gender, sexuality, aging and, of course, memory. "How often Constance's real questions

were taken instead as comments as, in a way, they were. Was it possible to miss what you'd entirely forgotten?"

Rule rarely writes from the point of view of just one protagonist, choosing instead to write simultaneously in several voices, keeping one or two more prominent than the others. Often this has the pleasant effect of bringing the reader closer to her quite vivid secondary characters. But in *Memory Board*, we know too much about David's emotional life and in this case it detracts from Diana's character development.

Diana is a distinctive character type for Jane Rule to use in her fiction. Helen Sonthoff, Rule's lifetime companion wrote that "the people in Jane Rule's fiction move between convention and invention, between attitudes that they have assumed or absorbed or been given somehow, and attitudes they have come upon, discover in themselves" (Canadian Fiction Magazine, No.23, Autumn 1976). Frequently in Rule's work, there is a very strong yet in many ways enigmatic woman at the centre of a cast of more variable but comprehensive characters. This woman often finds her own life determined by the internal lives of those around her (for example Kate in *This Is Not For You*, Amelia in *Against the Season*, Ruth in *The Young in One Another's Arms*, or Dulce from the collection *Inland Passage*).

I adored Constance, as I'm sure most readers will. I discovered however, that I had unresolved interest in Diana. There were too many gaps for me in her life. I wanted to be able to grasp Diana's terseness and her need to devote almost an entire lifetime to preserving Constance's dignity. I became increasingly curious to learn more about the history and connection between Constance and Diana.

And at times I found *Memory Board* to be overly didactic and simplistic, especially in describing David's too liberal desire to understand his sister's sexuality. It was a little too prescribed to bring in the character of

Richard, David's straight grandson Mike's gay friend to confront the issue of AIDS, especially given Rule's poignant analysis of the question in *A Hot-Eyed Moderate*.

I make this criticism keeping in mind that one of the many strengths of Rule's writing has always been that the sexuality in her novels is so complex. Many characters in her other works resist classification into "gay" or "straight" categories. In a 1976 interview with Geoff Hancock of Canadian Fiction Magazine, Rule said:

"One of the difficulties of my fiction is getting through to a sensibility that expects, first of all, it ought to be erotic because that's the only point in writing about people who are homosexual, and second, there is something morally depraved about it.... Many of the characters I write about are not homosexual. I think one of the most offensive things in my work for people who are defensive about it is that the people I write about who are homosexual, are not ghettoized, are not excluded, are not strange, peculiar, sick people."

It is true that Rule's male characters are at times more sympathetic than her women, her heterosexual couples more satisfied than her restless searching lesbians. Often it is vice-versa or a mixture of both. It is part of the eloquence of Rule's work, that as an openly lesbian feminist, with generally left-leaning views, she has managed to avoid the literary pitfalls of one-dimensional characters, determined, as she says, to portray people "as they really are".

I do highly recommend *Memory Board*. While I don't think that it will stand out as Rule's best work, it is nonetheless a remarkable novel, a story that doesn't really have an ending but will live on with you as memory does. For those who love Jane Rule's writing as I do, I would strongly suggest her other books, especially her earliest novels, which are still available through Naiad Press. ■

BOOKS BY JANE RULE

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 THIS IS NOT FOR YOU. 1970; reprinted Naiad Press, 1982.
 DESERT OF THE HEART. 1964; reprinted Talonbooks, 1980 and Naiad Press, 1983.



Dykes to Watch Out For

