

AUG. Winnipeg Women's Liberation Newsletter '76

RHONDA



the Waitress



Rhonda, a troop of Cub Scouts are coming to our fine little restaurant for a tour. Would you like to show them around?

Why, sure, MR. MULLIGAN!



Good Afternoon, Cub Scout Pack # 342. You are about to see one of the finest, little family restaurants in the city...



... a great example of capitalism at work, where the prices are as high as they can be, and the wages lower than the lowest - women workers slaving away for...



The monthly Newsletter is published by Winnipeg Women's Liberation Office at 'A Woman's Place' - 143 Walnut Street, phone 786-4581

If you have any letters, articles, announcements, poems, literary articles to submit, send them to the above address. We would like to hear from you.

Brought to you this month by : Heather, Debbie, Marlyn, Bridgette, Lynda

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE \$3.00 per annum, single copy price 25¢

WOMEN'S LIBERATION NEWSLETTER

_____ I want to be a subscriber

_____ I want to give a gift subscription

SEND GIFT SUBSCRIPTION:

GIFT CARD SHOULD READ FROM:

NAME _____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

CITY _____

TABLE OF CONTENTS

IN PRAISE OF VERA	1	ANNOUNCEMENTS	8
WOMEN: THE NEGLECTED RESOURCE	3	AMAZONS	9
REVIEWS: NEVER DONE	4	WOMEN IN LITERATURE	11
SWEPT AWAY	5	THE POLITICS OF RAPE	12
POETRY	8	LETTERS TO THE EDITOR	15



No major demonstrations or events this month. Even so, all groups are going strong. Many of us spent the weekend of July 10th at the Winnipeg Folk Festival enjoying the music and sun. What many of the performers lacked in terms of feminist/socialist consciousness, Vera Johnson made up for. SHE WAS GREAT.....

IN PRAISE OF VERA

It was originally my intention to write a general review of the (Birds Hill) Winnipeg Folk Festival. However, what began as an objective feminist analysis of a weekend of great music, soon turned into a subjective description of my very favourite woman/writer/singer/musician, Vera Johnson. Rather than pretend to be objective or analytical, I have just decided to change the title of this article to In Praise of Vera.

I first heard Vera Johnson sing on Saturday, July 10, at the Working People's Music workshop. As the audience (some of them), waited politely for working people's songs, they were subjected to truck driver songs, sailor songs, coal miner songs, all produced by musicians labouring under the brilliant idea that songs by and/or for, and/or about people who worked were "working people's songs". Then came Vera Johnson, who announced that it was possible to indict a whole society by observing the fate of one of its victims - then launched into her song about Thomas Arkenstall, a poverty stricken London umbrella-maker who drowned himself in the Thames in 1880.

You're in your grave Thomas Arkenstall.
You cannot cry, can't complain at all.
But we know who to blame
For your grief and your shame
And we'll fight them in your name, Thomas Arkenstall!

Vera's other working people's song was about Caesar Chavey and what it means to belong to a union:

If I were a Teamster
I'd ask my officials why
We scab on Farm Workers
It's enough to make me cry
.....
We should help them all we can
Because although I'm a Teamster
First I am a Union Man.

.....

Vera's music is not often the kind of protest that becomes immortal, like another Blowin In the Wind, but as Peter Gzowski remarked, "No event is too small or insignificant for Vera Johnson to write a song about". She even sang a song about the mosquitoes at the Festival. (When I see a mosquito, or when I see a fly; it's KILL!KILL!KILL! DIE! DIE! DIE!) Her style is often reminiscent of the British music hall - topical and catchy tunes, which make her a popular performer.

Vera Johnson was born some forty years ago in Britain, was raised in Saskatchewan, married with three daughters, is now divorced and living in Vancouver. Her own life has been the subject of many of her songs, one of the most popular at the Festival being the story of her own divorce, which she obtained sans lawyer and high fees, for \$33.50. The song is called The Do-It Yourself Divorce.

Vera Johnson has produced an album on the Sweet Folk-All label; the album is entitled Bald Eagle. This dumpy folk-singing grandmother with her battered old guitar was a refreshing addition to this year's Folk Festival - Yup, she's not afraid to sing about divorce, shit, scabs, and she even has a verse that rhymes with penis. Vera, I am your number one fan and I hope we'll hear you singing in Winnipeg again soon.

There's a big brown and white bird they say
The national emblem of the U.S.A.

Its called the Bald Eagle and it's proud and free
But I wish that bird wouldn't shit on me.

Heather Henderson

WOMEN: THE NEGLECTED RESOURCE

A two-hour plenary session called "Women The Neglected Resource" saw an audience of about 500 women and maybe 25 men at Habitat Froum in Vancouver, June 2, 1976.

The chairwoman was a Vancouver judge, and the speakers were Rosemary Brown, British Columbia M.L.A., Lisa Hobbs, a photo-journalist and Fran Hosken, an American architect and planner.

All three speakers stressed the idea that women must be involved in the planning of cities, communities and especially housing since usually it is women who look after the home and family.

The speakers also said that although International Women's Year (IWY) is over, the spirit must go on for women to attain their niche in life and retain it, as they see it and want it.

As speaker Fran Hosken put it, "Habitat delegations are almost completely dominated by men - as if IWY had never happened. At the opening of the Conference there were fewer than 30 women among more than 500 delegates representing their countries."

"How can this Conference make vital decisions for most of the inhabitants of this earth while half of humankind is excluded from any meaningful participation and representation," she went on.

The point was also raised by a member of the audience that women should not buy Barbara Ward's theme book for Habitat called "The Home of Man" since the title is even sexist.

The audience then passed a resolution forwarded by the University of British Columbia's Women's Resource Center as follows:

WHEREAS: Women should have the right to equal representation in the planning decisions which affect their environment and the quality of their lives and,
WHEREAS: Women everywhere must cope with the deficiencies of Human Settlements, and
WHEREAS: Implementation of the World Plan of Action developed at the World Conference of the International Women's Year demands vigorous, positive implementation and,
WHEREAS: The United Nations has declared the years 1975 to 1985 The Decade for Women
WE RESOLVE: That member countries of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements work toward the equal participation of

of women in all decision-making processes at every level of government:

- a) International delegations and committees;
- b) National governing bodies and advisory boards;
- c) Local decision-making levels.

This resolution was passed by the audience and was later presented to the official U.N. Habitat delegations. May I also add, that nothing happened with it.

The Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) submitted the following report to the U.N. Conference on Human Settlements held in Vancouver, British Columbia from May 31 to June 11, 1976.

ACWW has 8½ million members in 69 countries and is the only international organization whose prime concern is to raise the standard and quality of life for rural women and homemakers.

Over 60% of the world's population lives in rural areas, frequently without adequate clean water supplies, shelter, sanitation, or medical care. Even in the richer countries where rural inhabitants seem to get a fairer share of the nations economic wealth per head, that help rarely goes beyond the real provision of amenities and services because of lack of concentrated numbers. In the poorer countries the distribution of resources may never reach the rural areas, causing the resultant unfortunate migration from country to city, which is happening both in rich and poor nations, with disastrous consequences for both rural and urban areas.

ACWW therefore hopes that the U.N. Conference will deal in depth with the problems of the poorer rural areas. We believe the first priority must be to provide the basic requirements for adequate human existence. Otherwise there is a danger that the essential needs for survival of the individual man, woman and child outside the towns may be submerged and lost in the well-meant but turgid flow of large scale planning

In line with recent UN global development strategies and decisions taken at the World Conferences on Population, Food, and on Women, ACWW urges the establishment of national and community development programs designed to promote the viability of the rural areas and to ensure the full integration of women at all stages of this process.

If this integration is to become a reality, women must be educated on many fronts. There are however, many women already sufficiently educated and experienced to warrant consulting them and making better use of their knowledge and imagination in the planning of settlements, which affects so greatly the quality and standard of family community life - the major preoccupation of most women in their roles as wives, mothers, workers and/or educators of children.

The ultimate aim is that women should take equal part with men in the planning of all human settlements whether urban or rural - and particularly the latter, where their basic knowledge is likely to be greater. Family life and the life of a family does not also have to be a skilled architect, town planner or administrator, in order to have something worthwhile to contribute towards the planning of the smaller settlements.

Bearing these factors in mind, ACWW considers that priority should be given to the more equitable distribution of resources between rural and urban areas, especially with regard to the following:

- 1) Provision of adequate water, shelter and sanitation - as a first requirement.
- 2) More widely and accessible public services, health care facilities and roads and transport.
- 3) Vastly increased allocation of state assistance to increase literacy and provide out-of-school education and training facilities for both sexes including nutrition, child-care and family planning.
- 4) Support for small and intermediate self-help rural community development projects such as water pipes, pumps, and elementary sanitation.
- 5) Creation of employment opportunities through the establishment of rural co-ops, cottage industries, marketing and the encouragement of tourism.
- 6) Provision to ensure that women are consulted about, and involved in, the planning and implementation of all decisions relating to human settlements and the related subjects of the home.

BOOK REVIEW

never done - three centuries of women's work in Canada

I hardly know where to begin in my praise for this book.

It will supply you with both laughs and rage and sorrow. Starting with the advent of Europeans in Canada, it presents us with the story of four foremothers in this country until the time of the First World War.

Never Done is nothin like any history book you can remember from school. The Corrective Collective does what their name implies, by telling us what is always forgotten - the part played in history by the common woman. Although the contributions of the few women whose names have been recorded in history are acknowledged, the book concentrates on the unending labour of the first Canadian women.

The book is well illustrated with sketches that will bring you some laughs with actual or fictionized personal accounts of women's lives. Treating different regions and periods with broad overviews which are well connected to each other, the book is particularly fine reading for recent immigrants or new citizens as well as for all of us who were cheated of so much in Canadian schools.



Imagine a movie about a Jewish landlord who charges exorbitant rents. One of the tenants finally rebels, installs the Jew in a concentration camp, and turns the gas up a little more every day until the Jew cries uncle, kisses the tenant's hand, and agrees always to love and serve him. Now try to conceive of a review which would call the movie with such a plot a "wonderful political and pro-Semitic farce."

Again, imagine a movie about a black man murdering whites who refuse his family lodging in certain quarters and jobs in various businesses. Some white men get angry, tease the black man with a noose, and force him to kiss their hands and to be a loyal and loving slave. Súperb political farce about race relations in present day society?

Then think of a movie about a woman insensitive to the condition of the proletariat. One sexy worker, chafing under the woman's scorn, physically brutalizes, mentally degrades, and almost rapes the woman, whereupon she falls pantingly, desperately in love with him and begs him to sodomize her, so he will be the first, as it were, to "brand" her. Great political and sexual farce?

Maybe the women's movement doesn't have a sense of humor.

But then again, some things just aren't funny.

Granted, the above three cases are not exactly parallel, but in each case, isolating the victimizer and the victim is not as easy as the hypothetical movies might seem to suggest. And in each case, the "weapons" used by the rebel(s) are so loaded with connotations of evil, oppression, and violence that using them to achieve comic effects would be a perilous undertaking.

The third case is, of course, not hypothetical. It is the plot description of Lina Wertmüller's film, *SWEPT AWAY BY AN UNUSUAL DESTINY IN THE BLUE SEA OF AUGUST*. The *Newsweek* reviewer who praised the film for being a "political and sexual farce" says, "In its most simplistic terms the plot is outrageous and an insult to feminists." Indeed it is, suggesting as it does the classic porno fantasy about the woman who luxuriates in her lover's abuse and even surpasses him in devising more exquisite sexual degradations for herself. But this same critic (along with many others) feels that "beneath the easy reading, Wertmüller is giving us food for thought about the kind of society that breeds messed up characters like these," and that she is "concerned with how sex and politics intertwine." Unfortunately, the reviewer doesn't bother to give evidence from the film which would support this interpretation.

Let me try to help her out. Gennarino, the working class hero and crewman on the yacht belonging to Rafella, the capitalist "bitch," "whore," "pig," finds himself stranded on a deserted island with her and begins to insist that she understand what it feels like to slave for a tiny bit of food (some of the lobster he has captured). But, before you can say "dictatorship of the proletariat," a concept which Gennarino takes too literally and too personally, he is gloating over his physical power and sexual superiority and forcing her to call him "Mr. Carrunchio," "lord" and "master" (but she goes him one better by calling him "God"). Perhaps, then, the film is about the hierarchy of victimization enforced by capitalist society: the system exploits the working man, and the working man exploits women. Or, maybe it isn't really about sex and politics at all; maybe the sex in the film is only an allegorical means to convey the film's *Animal Farm* message. Let's consider this possibility first.

In the "comic and provocative reversal of

Swept Away...



roles," says Benjamin De Mott, reviewer of the film for *Atlantic*, we learn that "the oppressed can't be expected to behave better than their oppressors." This interpretation would suggest that we downplay the crucial point that the oppressor, in the beginning, is a woman, the oppressed a man. And certainly Wertmüller glosses over all the complexities inherent in such a situation by making Rafaella an almost impossibly stereotypical virago. Consequently, by the time the pair gets to the island, we're happy to see her at least slapped around a few times. It is easy for us to forget that, in real life, woman is powerless, that she doesn't own the factories or formulate the economic laws which cause food to be burned rather than given to the poor. This truth is, however, latent in the film: Rafaella is mostly guilty of verbally humiliating Gennarino; the only power she has exists in the one-to-one relationship of mistress to servant--and while this is clearly not a desirable situation, it *ought* to be clear that she should not be the prime target of a rebellion. Gennarino's desire for revenge, then, while humanly understandable is, from a political point of view, misguided. Furthermore, given these facts, no simple "reversal of roles" can possibly take place. Whereas Gennarino's oppression on the yacht stemmed solely from his position as a worker, Rafaella's oppression on the island is a result of her threefold powerlessness: as a rich person who has never faced any grueling tests of survival, as a woman who is expected to be inadequate in physical skills and feats of daring, and as a person always vulnerable to sexual assault. Gennarino takes full advantage. So even if Wertmüller wanted to convey only a political message, she has clouded rather than clarified the issues. She should have made both parties male.

Obviously, no analysis of the film can ignore or slight its attitude towards the sexes and sexuality. We return to the first interpretation I suggested: that Wertmüller wants to show women as the most powerless creatures in society and to deplore the macho qualities possessed,

ironically enough, by people extraordinarily sensitive to (if not obsessed by) their own oppression. But I wish to show that the film, far from satirizing and challenging traditional sexual attitudes, upholds and reinforces them.

First, I deny that sexual violence is a possible subject for satire, especially if that violence is depicted in all its brutality, for the would-be satirist must wind up defusing the subject and unwittingly defeating her/his purpose (the same would be true, to use my opening analogy, of anyone wanting to satirize lynching and lynchers by presenting a lynching party on the screen). The purported satire in *SWEPT AWAY*... is clearly unsuccessful, as a glance at the reviews indicates. Stanley Kauffman, for instance, in the *New Republic* says that the "knockdown fights between the pair," which putatively occur prior to the near rape, are "as rough and funny as any physical sex combat I've seen on film." This incredibly obtuse comment completely overlooks the fact that at no point is the contest equal--Rafaella never has a chance. The "combat" is more like a slaughter. Apparently Kauffman needed to rationalize his desire to laugh by altering the plot.

But I don't believe Wertmuller even wants to repudiate the rape mentality. I cannot, for example, agree with Ms. reviewer Barbara Garson, who claims that on the island "sex roles and... class roles peel away" (or, we might say, are "swept away") and the basic humanity of Gennarino and Rafaella slowly emerges. Garson doesn't find the near rape offensive for the precise reason that it is *only* a near rape. After Gennarino slaps Rafaella, chases her, strips off most of her already scanty clothing, thrusts himself on top of her, pins her down, and demands her to admit that she wants "it" badly (which she does), a surprising deviation from the classic porno scene occurs: he tells her she can't have it until she has fallen totally and passionately in love with him. This unexpected turn of events supposedly hails the beginning of Gennarino's

transformation from caveman type to tender admirer who acknowledges the all importance of devotion and caring. But does Rafaella come to love him as an equal and for qualities other than his sadism and his wanton and arbitrary exercise of power? On the contrary, she adores him exclusively for his brutality. She yields to her feelings for him after he has butchered a rabbit and prepares to roast it: "You're cruel," she whispers seductively, and kisses his feet. From that moment on, the couple are lovers. Wertmuller, we can only conclude, has here effected a refinement on the male sexual fantasy. If the man were to give "it" to the woman first and receive her abject devotion after, she might be suspected of having, for a time, used him in some small way; this way, before he gives her anything he must own her, body, mind, heart, and soul.

The next surprise, according to Garson, occurs when Gennarino finds himself loving Rafaella. It's true that while he never allows her to call him anything but Mr. Carrunchio, the beatings become fewer and less severe (in this world, alas, women must be content with small favors); however, he certainly never loves Rafaella, person in her own right, but only her bondage to him and the creature he himself has shaped and molded: right up to the end Rafaella is always in for a slap and a scolding when she uses her own judgment and free choice--for example, when she decides not to hail a passing ship.



Nothing in the film tells us that we should be offended by this state of affairs. Rafaella is clearly improved by her experience, at least in the eyes of the camera. No longer the shrill harpy talking "like a fascist," she becomes tender, giving, soft-looking and soft-spoken. The camera lingers lovingly on her beauty--all taut lines gone from her face, a wreath of fresh little pink flowers in her golden hair. Close-ups of the two smiling tenderly at each other are frequent. Moreover, the island which first looked formidable and ugly later appears paradisiacal, and there are long shots of the heavenly blue sea in August. The music, too, always one of the best elements of a Wertmuller film, changes from sharp and savagely satirical tones to light and almost sentimental ones. Even after the pair is "rescued," and class roles supposedly reassert themselves, Rafaella is a changed and better woman: she has learned to cry, has learned to feel for others, has learned to shut up.

Not only from the change which takes place in Rafaella after her subjugation do we get clear understanding of Wertmuller's opinions about what women need and what they should be, but also from the contrast between the later Rafaella and Gennarino's Sicilian wife, who appears on the scene after the "rescue." At this point, I believe we can establish beyond a shade of doubt that Wertmuller has *no* political message, and certainly not a feminist one. Let me say bluntly (for there is no generous way of putting it) that Wertmuller despises women who are not beautiful. After watching so many shots of the lovely Rafaella, the audience can't help but guffaw at the sight of the overweight, slatternly Sicilian, with an absurd little top knot on her head, clumsily racing toward the reluctant Gennarino, greeting him too loudly and in an unpleasantly shrill voice. Gennarino's earlier words about Sicilian women being on a perpetual diet due to their poverty, which seemed to introduce a political message, are effectually blotted out. The wife is used as a symbol of all the horrors to which Gennarino must now return. A comparison with one of Wertmuller's earlier films, *THE SEDUCTION OF MIMI*, is in order. Mimi, the hero, is driven to redress his lost honor by seducing the wife of his own wife's seducer. We can apply the words of the *Newsweek* reviewer we quoted earlier to MIMI: "In its most simplistic terms the plot is outrageous and an insult to feminists."

There is a second level at which this works. Wertmuller is undoubtedly poking fun at the Italian male macho mentality, since the "cuckholded" hero has not only been unfaithful to his wife, but has set up house with his mistress and fathered a child by her, whereas his wife has only indulged in a one-night stand after much persuasion and out of extreme loneliness. However, a third level of interpretation brings us full circle and persuades us that as feminists we are indeed being insulted. For the satire is effected at the expense of the most innocent party, the woman through whom Mimi gets back at his wife's seducer. She is a middle-aged, overweight woman who at first repeatedly repels Mimi's advances until he comes increasingly importunate and so convincingly persuades her of his desperate love that she finally yields to him. The bedroom scene is one of the most gra-

tuitously misogynistic I have ever seen. The shots continually cut back and forth from the hero's agonized face to the mounds of flesh which emerge as the woman slowly peels off her clothes. Then, as he lies quaking with fear, she lumbers towards him, her face contorted with lust, and falls heavily upon him. The audience goes wild. So here Wertmuller spoofs the hero's extreme macho pride by showing how it lands him in bed with this monstrous grotesque. That the woman is a human being, that she is, actually, the most wronged person in the movie, are points disputed by the antics of the camera and lost in the raucous laughter of the audience.

As in most Wertmuller films, the cameras insistently stress the contrast between beautiful and ugly women--exploring as if in horrible fascination the bodies and faces of the pudgy, graceless "Sicilian types" Wertmuller abhors, and then turning from such scenes to dwell long and voluptuously on gorgeous Mariengela Melato (the actress who portrays Rafaella in *SWEPT AWAY...* and the mistress in *MIMI*). For Wertmuller, physical beauty often seems to equal the good, and ugliness, evil; and, particularly in *SWEPT AWAY...*, the unlovely woman is scarcely more than a thing, an embodiment of the sordid reality from which the hero cannot, finally escape.

We have one further point to consider. Is Wertmuller, as Garson suggests, criticizing Gennarino's masculine pride when she has him insist upon leaving the island to put Rafaella's love to the test? It hardly matters this late in the game. Our point about the film's anti-feminism is proved regardless of whether we condemn or condone Gennarino's action, for in either case we are presupposing his right to decide all by himself upon the proper course of his and Rafaella's lives. Thus, if we say Gennarino is justified in wanting Rafaella to prove her love, then we must conclude that Wertmuller is not, even here, challenging the male's prerogative to possess the woman totally. If, on the other hand, we feel Gennarino is wrong to risk losing Rafaella, we wind up agreeing with the film's assessment of woman, that, given free will, she will always choose the comforts of her position over the meaningful relationship the film tries to present (unsuccessfully, I hope I have shown). And so, following out the logic to its bitter conclusion, we would have to claim that Gennarino should not have given Rafaella the least bit of freedom, but kept her, isolated and in bondage, all to himself.

I probably would never have written this critique had I not been moved to do so by the incredible rave reviews *SWEPT AWAY...* has received, many of them, to my dismay, extolling the film's virtues on quasi-feminist grounds. Most, I suspect, were written in good faith, with the reviewers projecting their own feminist consciousnesses onto the work of the world's most renowned filmmaker. But I fear that some of the film's "feminist" defenses only indicate that we have developed more sophisticated means for justifying our titillation at seeing women put down. □

POEM

From "You Are Happy" by Margaret Atwood

Men with the heads of eagles
no longer interest me
or pig-men, or those who can fly
with the aid of wax and feathers

or those who take off their clothes
to reveal other clothes
or those with skins of blue leather

or those golden and flat as a coat of arms
or those with claws, the stuffed ones
with glass eyes; or those
hierarchic as greaves and steam engines.

All these I could create, manufacture,
or find easily; they swoop and thunder
around this island, common as flies,
sparks flashing, bumping into each other,

on hot days you can watch them
as they melt, come apart,
fall into the ocean
like sick gulls, dethronements, plane crashes.

I search instead for the others,
the ones left over,
the ones who have escaped from these
mythologies with barely their lives;
they have real faces and hands, they think
of themselves as
wrong somehow, they would rather be trees.

The Politics of Rape (cont'd)

Renee Kasinsky, in the article Rape A Normal Act, published in Canadian Forum feels that 'rape' flourishes in an atmosphere of sexism and exploitation for individual or collective gains'. I feel that a capitalist society which benefits from the economic exploitation of women is not interested in taking a strong look at at sexist society in which aggressive sexual behaviour is approved of in the context of normal masculine behaviour. Society's double sexual standard allows men to define and control sexual relations, and encourage sexual exploitation, rather than the protection of women in rape situation. I can only understand what goes on in the courts within this perspective.

The Rape Crisis and Information Centre has been operating in Wpg. for eight months now and the phone number is 453-8777.

Heather Fletcher.

Notice

Two Winnipeg women, Lynne Buchanan and Judy Perkins will be opening a new restaurant called SWALLOWS this fall on the second floor of a remodelled building at River Avenue and Osborne Street. The building which has an indoor courtyard will also have boutiques and offices.

SWALLOWS restaurant will specialize in lunches and will offer homemade soups appropriate to the season. Lunches will range from \$1.50 to \$3.25. The price of full course dinners will be \$4 to \$6.

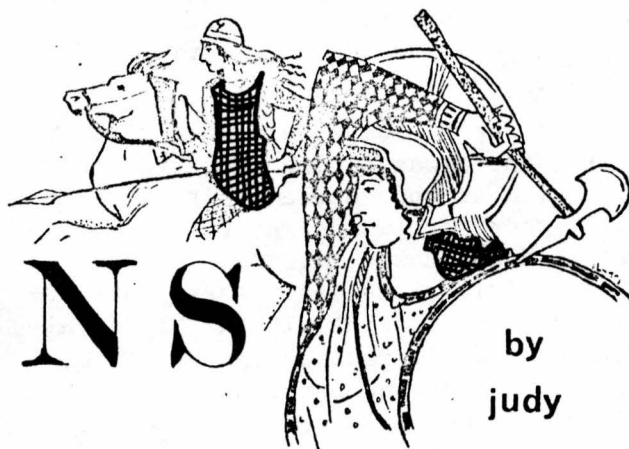
Three varieties of drip coffee and tea will be available during the day and evening.

The room will seat about 45 people and will be brightly furnished with wicker.

When people have been robbed of their own culture and forced to identify with the oppressor's culture, there is no real way they can make a revolution, unless of course they use his means and his weapons and wind up like him. But when, contrarily, people begin to create or regain their own culture, there is no stopping them.

- Harriet Beecher Stowe

AMAZONS



by
judy

Some of the words used to put down woman-identified women are words that originate in Amazon herstory. Lesbian is the name of a tribe of Amazons that lived on the island of Lesbos. Gorgon, used to mean an ugly or shrewish woman, is the name of a fierce tribe of East African Amazons, whose queen was Medusa.

It is not surprising that the words patriarchal society uses to put down women originally referred to strong women. Women are supposed to be weak, after all, and any woman who is strong must be some sort of monster (with snakes instead of hair, and who turns you to stone if you look at her, no less! - far out!).

What happened that made patriarchal society build in so many defences against woman? Is it just a coincidence that we are put down for being lesbians? Is it just because we are a small minority that society hates and fears us? If that were the case why aren't people with red hair also ostracized? White people are a minority, for that matter, and we know that white people aren't oppressed for the colour of their skin.

In this series of articles I would like to suggest that there are very real reasons for the subjugation of women, and lesbians see these reasons in the herstory of what happened to women several thousand years ago.

Reprinted from "The Other Woman" (1973)

Human written history goes back only about five thousand years. It can be traced back much further, though, through studying myths, which are merely history in story-form. When we examine ancient accounts of the world we can see immediately several things:

1. Highly developed civilisations existed long before anyone bothered to keep a record of them.

2. The bulk of human existence has been loosely matriarchal in form.

3. At the point when records started being kept, the world was in the midst of violent, far-reaching changes.

The matriarchy, briefly described, was a communistic society, centred around the female head of an extended family or tribe. The decisions were made by consensus, with the older and wiser women advising in the case of disputes. The most formalized aspect of the matriarchy was religion. In those days, religion meant something different than what it means today. It embodied the communal will, drive and spirit of a group of people.

It was a symbolic and meta-physical statement about life, and at the centre of all life was woman.

Matriarchal philosophy, and it is much more aptly called philosophy than religion, was rich in its understanding of the role of humanity in the natural order of things. It taught a sense of harmony and interaction

between living things. It recognized both the cyclical and dialectic nature of life. It was a complete blend of the material and the spiritual.

For reasons which this paper will not attempt to deal with, there was a rise in patriarchal philosophy - linear thought, a desire to rule nature (and, therefore woman) by force, development of class and caste, material values placed above spiritual values. These patriarchal tribes came in contact with highly developed matriarchal civilizations and by force, coercion or just sheer numbers, managed to take over certain key cultures. They experienced a phenomenal rise in power as they took over more and more of the world, and amassed great wealth.

At first they met with very little resistance. War and aggression were not part of the matriarchal way of life. Cultures were overrun, destroyed and lost forever. Most of the records of the matriarchy were systematically destroyed.

However, before the complete annihilation of the matriarchy, some groups of women learned how to fight back. They were mainly lesbians, who saw very clearly how the patriarchy threatened their way of life. They knew there would be no place for them in the new male world, and so they were fighting for their honour and survival as strong women. These were the Amazons of ancient history. They fought a life-and-death struggle with the invading patriarchies, in the longest and most decisive war of human history. For generations the battle was waged, the cause and responsibility being passed on from mother to daughter. They represented the fiercest non-mechanical fighting force of all time.

Most Amazon tribes had two queens - one in charge of the army and one in charge of the city-state. They remained faithful to the matriarchal clan structure, except that men were seldom allowed any status within the clan. Some tribes killed all male children. Others tolerated their presence, and used them to do menial work.

Sexual contact with men was usually from outside the tribe, and for breeding purposes only. The rest of the time they were strictly woman-identified. They had to be!

Every Amazon woman spent some time of her life in the army. Many made it their full-time career. Most tribes had a minimum requirement of two years in the army, during which time a woman would not become pregnant, and would train as a fighter, with bows and arrows, spears, or the famous double-edged axe, the labyris.

Many Amazon queens have been remembered for their exploits in battle, for the great cities they founded, or for being raped or murdered by a Greek hero!

At the peak of Amazon power, tribes extended throughout Africa, along the Aegean coast and north to the Ural mountains. They received support from established matriarchies, such as Egypt, and threatened any hopes of Greek imperialist expansion. Which was one of the strongest reasons for their systematic extermination by Greek and Greek supported armies.

What is important about Amazon herstory is that they were doing exactly what we are doing now - resisting the patriarchy. We can learn a great deal about our own struggles to fight male supremacy by understanding the struggles of our ancestors. The fact that they were woman-identified is very important, since this meant that they were in a position to make the battle against patriarchy their whole way of life. The old matriarchal cultures were much more humanist and ideal as a way of life, but they were also helpless against aggression. They are a blueprint that we can build a non-sexist world but the means to that world, and of destroying the present order are contained in the seeds of another Amazon like struggle against the patriarchy. Woman identified fighters are the new Amazons, and this time around, we cannot fail!





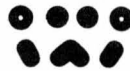
WOMEN IN LITERATURE

In Settlers of the Marsh, the victim protagonist is Niels Lindstedt, a young Swedish immigrant, who comes to the Manitoba marshlands to homestead, and provide the warmth and comfort for the wife and family he hopes to acquire, that his poverty-stricken childhood had denied to him. This dream is shattered. Ellen, the woman he loves, having witnessed since childhood her mother's martyrdom through forced drudgery, pregnancy, and miscarriage, wants their marriage to be devoid of physical intimacy. Niels marries Clara, out of the moral conviction that a man is obliged to marry a woman with whom he has sexual intercourse; their subsequent mutual hate explodes in murder.

But Grove's sympathetic understanding of Niels' tragic dilemma does not diminish his compassion for both Ellen and Clara. He can understand Ellen's equation of sexuality with male brutality, and Clara's mixed feelings of longing, wounded pride and fury, trapped in a marriage she had supposed was based on mutual love. He extends this sympathy to other women characters--Mrs. Amundsen driven to sickness and death by the sexual demand of her husband, Niels' mother scrubbing floors in rich men's mansions to feed her child, Mrs. Lund whose romantic illusions led her to marry an irresponsible idler. He shows the multiple burdens society imposes on poor farm women, unwanted pregnancies, childcare, domestic drudgery, and back-breaking toil. Gove makes the point that Stead also emphasizes in Grain that the settlers' wives work harder than their men, that "they make the living on the pioneer farm",¹ and that the cash they contribute is then spent by the farmer on hired help and machinery for himself, while the woman continues to toil unaided.

"I passed Kelm's place last year", Niels said. "He was breaking with his new tractor. He sat on his engine. But she walked behind the plows, barefooted, and picked out the stones and dragged the roots into piles. Kelm passes as a well-to-do man".²

As in Grain and Ostenso's Wild Geese, Grove paints a far from idyllic picture of rural domestic life. Besides the patriarchal harshness that enslaves the wives and daughters, every rural district has its prostitutes, without whom "the boys wouldn't leave the girls alone."³ Marriage is often a form of prostitution, the exchange of sex for security.



The tortuous relationship of Niels and Clara sheds light on conventional morality. Niels is a victim of the double standard in reverse. The chastity society's sexual code demands of women only, Niels imposes on himself. His fellow farmers cannot understand his abstinence and refusal to visit the local prostitutes. He believes profoundly that sexual intercourse is only justified within marriage. Seduced by Clara, he feels morally obliged to marry her, something she neither expected or demanded. Yet he loathes her, and feels that to continue sexual relations or pretend to love her would be for him tantamount to prostitution. By this unique sex role reversal, Grove is suggesting the kind of prostitution marriage often forces on the woman, except that unlike Niels, who is able to shut himself away from his wife, she is helpless to resist the demands of her husband. Clara has been a prostitute, and known to everyone in the community except Niels as the district whore. Paradoxically when she learns that Niels has married her out of high moral conviction she accuses him of making a convenience of her, of prostituting her by offering her marriage for the price of his clear conscience. But Grove, unlike George Bernard Shaw, does not conclude that marriage is necessarily legalized prostitution. The book ends with the union of Niels and Ellen, and the vision of a relationship based on understanding, equality, and love.

MILLIE LAMB

1 and 2 Grove, Frederick, B. Settlers of the Marsh (New Canadian Library, 1966) p. 75

3 Ibid., p. 118

Watch installment seven for an analysis of Ross Sinclair's As For Me and My House

Reading the newspaper one cannot help but note the large no. of rapes and sexual assault cases reaching the dockets in the last year. In Cda rape has increased 200% over the last few years. Police statistics show that in Wpg last year there was 380 reported sexual offenses, 88 were rape and 205 indecent assault. Statistics Canada shows 101 reported rapes in Manitoba in 1975 with only 8.2% of the accused found guilty of rape. Rape Crisis centres across Cda estimate that 1 in 10 rapes are reported to the police which would roughly mean there were more like 880 rapes committed last year in Winnipeg.

I would like to give other statistical information that I feel adds light to understanding the causes of rape. In contrast to what the police often say and what most people believe, most rapes are not the compulsive, on the spot occurrences where the men suddenly lose control. Studies show that 71% of rapes are planned, usually by a person the victim knows at least by sight, that in over 80% of rapes the meeting place is not a dark alley or street but the woman or man's home, a dating situation, etc. In many incidents more than one person is involved in the rape.

The most prevalent myth around rape is that most rapists are seeking sexual gratification. A study published in the June 75 Washinton Post indicated that the majority of rapists have consenting sexual relationships available to them but chose to rape because they enjoy overpowering their victim. In terms of perpetrators motives, rape bears a closer resemblance in motive to violent crimes such as assault or robbery than it does to sexual intercourse with a consenting female. Statistics show that the average rapist is in the mold of the typical youthful offender - between the ages 15 - 19 with previous criminal record (break and entry, disorderly conduct, common assault) but not usually having a record for a sexual offense. In psychological testing the rapists in this study had no separate pathology from other youthful

offenders. There are several motivated reasons why men rape and certainly the psychological compulsive rapist exists. In a society that sees aggression, competition and winning as favourable traits of men, rape is for the most part a manifestation of the belief that all things are there for the taking.

The question of rape as a sexual act is one of the fundamental reasons why the court process is so grueling for the woman and consequently few women report rape. There are three major factors required to prove rape: 1. positive identification of the rapist; 2. penetration of the penis into the vagina (even if minor) and 3. lack of consent. In a rape trial the crown prosecutor represents the complainant who is a witness in the case. It is he/she who decides if there is a case and what charges will be laid.

Since there are usually no other witnesses, the main factor to prove the case is whether the jury believes the accused's lawyer or the witness (the victim). Often the preliminary hearing, and then the trial, occur months after the accused is picked up which puts the onus on the victim's memory with every deviation from her police statement screwtized by the defense lawyer. In a gang rape or a rape by a stranger, delaying the trial through remands is often a tactic used by defense lawyers because it makes identification difficult. The woman must pick her rapist out of a line or in the court room. Some women find the preliminary so traumatic, they drop the charges before the trial.

Now I would like to mention the legal amendments brought in three months ago as they pertain to rape. First the mandatory caution by the judge has been removed. In the past, if there was little or no corroboratory evidence (signs of violence, a weapon, another witness, semen) the judge was to 'caution' the jury against bringing in a guilty verdict with only the complainant's testimony. Only in rape trials was the 'mandatory caution' used. My speculation of this law was that the court has institutionalized such cherished myths as 'it is easy for a woman to cry rape' and 'that women seldom tell the whole truth'.

Secondly, now the defense lawyer must have a special hearing with the judge and crown prosecutor to give reason why it would be relevant to question the woman's past sexual history (not with the assaulted). Her past sexual relations with the accused are seen as relevant evidence. Previously, past sexual history was seen as a relevant line of questioning to ascertain the witness's credibility - the reasoning being - if she consented before, she likely consented again.

And thirdly, a rape trial used to be open to the public. With the new legislation the judge must give reason to leave the trial open when the witness (victim) is giving her statement.

.....con't.....p

THE OUTCASTS



Since the law has only been in effect 3 months, it is hard to judge what effect this new legislation will have. A defense lawyer and prosecutor told me that although the 'mandatory caution' will no longer be given by the judge, the defense will make the jury well aware that there is no corroboratory evidence. Bruises, torn clothes and other visible effects of struggle help considerably around the question of consent. In other words, if the woman didn't fight, it is often interpreted as proof of consent rather than of fear. Judges have been interpreting the legislation differently around the relevance of questioning about past sexual history, many still allowing such questions. The key question is what effect the new legislation will have on members of the jury. The prejudices of the jury are not questioned, thus a person who feels that any girl who hitchhikes, gets what she deserves could be easily sitting in on a rape trial.

Now I would like to pull out of the specifics of rape and look at societal attitudes as they effect rape and rape victims. There are many myths around rape. (A healthy woman can not be raped by one man alone; a woman with her skirt up can run faster than a man with his pant's down; women say no when they really mean yes; and if you are raped you might as well lay back and enjoy it) One article I read suggested that perhaps the cruelist myth of all was the idea that our society hates rape and feels sympathy and concern for the victim.

In theory this is true, but it can often be a misleading half-truth. There are many moralizing, blaming attitudes that can come the woman's way. Why was she in a bar alone; what did she expect if she allowed herself to go home with a strange man?

People hold different views of exactly what rape is. At a speaking engagement to high school students, I mentioned the following, and asked if they thought it illustrated rape. 'A couple on their third date are 'necking' in a car. The fellow acts as if he can have intercourse - the girl says no. The man went ahead.' I asked if this was rape. Nearly half the group said no. They felt the woman should have realized what would happen and allowed the incident to go past the point where she had 'the right to say no'. The boy was too aroused to control himself. Yet after some discussion, most of the men in the class agreed that they could have stopped at the point that the woman said no - but admitted it was a convenient myth.

I see rape myths as the distorted proverbs that govern female sexuality. Some of these attitudes, reflected in the law, view women as the property of men. Wives can not charge their husbands with rape and if she isn't protected by another man she is there for the taking are just two.

Another assumption hidden in rape myths is the nature of women's sexuality. For decades society distinguishes between the good, virtuous women and the bad women of loose morals. Women are expected to be beautiful and alluring but never falsely encourage or tease a man. If a woman is raped she likely provoked the act.

The mentality that women are victims is reinforced in society. The different sexual conditioning around sports and attitudes around aggressiveness often makes women powerless with fear in confrontations with men. A 'trauma' which is often treated very slightly in court.

»» THE REAL RIGHT TO LIFE IS THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE ««

Eleanor Wright Pelrine, author of ABORTION IN CANADA and MORGENTALER: THE DOCTOR WHO COULDN'T TURN AWAY was the highlight of a public meeting sponsored by CARAL (Canadian Association to Repeal the Abortion Law) attended by about 75 people on June 24th.

The meeting offered a great deal of information regarding the unjust abortion law and the government persecution of Dr. Henry Morgentaler. Chris Rollo from Pregnancy Information Service related up to date information on the lack of availability of abortion and information in Manitoba.

The meeting endorsed the statement of purpose of CARAL and almost everyone sent a letter to a Federal cabinet member in support of Dr. Morgentaler.

It is important that we all continue to pressure the federal government to introduce a bill in the fall for repeal of the abortion law. CARAL is interested in beginning to pressure the provincial government into funding pregnancy information service and counselling. We will be preparing a frief* and requiring your assistance with the gathering of information and the lobbying of MLA's.

If you have not yet joined CARAL or wish more information
CALL ELLEN - 774-5080

.....NOTICE....NOTICE.....
NEXT ACTION COALITION MEETING
ON FAMILY LAW REFORM
AUGUST 19th7PM
:ALL INTERESTED PLEASE ATTEND.....

* Frief - a feminist brief.



Letters to the Editor

Mr. L. E. Ricard, President
Imperial Tobacco Ltd.,
3810 St. Antoine St.,
Montreal, Quebec

Dear Mr. Ricard:

I watched the Canadian Women's Open Championship on CBC TV Sunday June 13. The golf competition ranked with other golf championships as far as skill, performance, and suspense in concerned.

What was unusual about it were the comments of the sportscasters, the video and audio treatment of the event because the contestants were women.

Example: Commentator "Attractive so-and-so."

Video - during the wind-up - sights of women golfers' posteriors and legs to the tune of "the miracle of you."

How does this compare with male golf championships? As a woman, I have never been lured to the TV set by such comments as "Here comes well-hung so-and-so," or scenes of men's crotches to the tune of "the miracle is you".

These women, attractive as they are, are there because of their proficiency at golf. It is not a beauty contest.

Please eliminate sexist telecasting in the interest of true sport. You may be forced to hire a woman broadcaster to bring objectivity to sport.

Yours truly,
Grace Ivey

cc: Women's Liberation Newsletter

Dear Madam:

Please do not send me any more copies of your newsletter. I am not a subscriber and do not wish to be one. I originally read your newsletter in order to inform myself of the range of views on the subject of the women's movement; I have read a variety of views and have made up my mind on

my general stance. I have a good idea what your views are and have no further wish to hear or read about them again.

Since you seem to feel that you have a right to send people literature they don't want (or are you merely too disorganized to take a mere name off a list) I thought I would help you to a broader perspective also by sending you a some literature from which I derive the basic principles of belief and conduct that govern my life. I have read your literature; should you not also read the literature that I believe in?

Best wishes for a happy life and a secure future,
Lydia Penner

EDITOR'S NOTE: Enclosed with this letter was a new English Bible (illustrated)

NOTICE

Theatre Women (Nellie McClung Theatre Group) will be meeting in mid-August to begin preparations for the 1976-77 season. We are always looking for new members. The first meeting will be a garden party and planning session. For time and place contact Millie Lamb at 774-4180, or Heather Henderson at 889-6437.

AUGUST

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	Lesbian Women 8:00	4	5	6
8	W.W.S.C. 7:30	9	Lesbian Women 8:00	10	11	12
15	W.W.S.C. 7:30	16	Lesbian Women 8:00	Action Coalition on Family Law 7P.M. YWCA	18	19
22	W.W.S.C. 7:30	23	Lesbian Women 8:00	24	25	26
29	W.W.S.C. 7:30	30	31			

