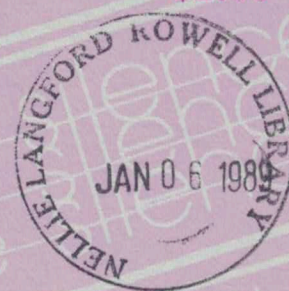


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December 1988

Vol 7:2



# breaking the SILENCE

a feminist quarterly

**Anniversary!**  
**25th issue**

**Anniversary!**  
**25th issue**

**Has the silence been broken?**

Looking back on our story

Les silencieuses : femmes en action communautaire

Women's writing refuses silence

**In the face of violence**

State violence — racist wars in Angola

When home becomes a battlefield

**Poetry..... prose..... and more!**



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**collective:**

Ellen Adelberg, Wendy Gordon, Louise Guénette, Evelyne Guindon-Zador, Alyson Huntly, Joan Holmes, Tünde Nemeth, Amina Nyamburah, Hélène R. Peladeau, Pamela Bentley, Joan Selby, Lucie Lafrance, Linda Dale, Romaine Honey

**with the help of :** Virginia Howard

Christina Galloway Mona Marshy

Sarah Wood Lisa Woodsworth Guity Novin

**about Breaking the Silence**

For too long women's voices — our struggles and our joys — have been silenced. Living in a patriarchal world, we are separated from each other, isolated and silent.

The *Breaking the Silence* collective is committed to providing a voice for women.

A feminist alternative to the mainstream media, *Breaking the Silence: A Feminist Quarterly* covers a wide range of social, political and cultural topics written by and for women, and encourages them to act on Canadian and international issues.

**we love hearing from you**

We invite all women to write about their experiences or to submit original graphics. Please send us letters, too. Include your name, address and phone number and just tell us if you don't want us to use your name. We can't return unsolicited manuscripts, so be sure to keep a copy. Submissions should be typed and doubled spaced, if possible.

Send material to:

*Breaking the Silence*  
P.O. Box 4857  
Station "E"  
Ottawa, Ontario  
Canada  
K1S 5J1

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# from the collective

The theme for this 25th issue of *BTS* is how women continue to break the silence in different areas of their lives. As the content of this issue shows, we are still talking about the same things as we were when we began several years ago. This can be both frustrating and inspiring.

Are we going to be saying the same things forever? Are we just screaming in the void? Once we've "broken the silence," then what do we do?

The first time we say something, a few people might listen. The second time, they might still listen. But then we start getting reactions like, "Not this again" or "Quit whining/ nagging/ bitching." One reason for articulating our experiences, problems, and triumphs is to share them with each other, to identify our commonalities as women. Another reason, surely, is to get people to recognize the validity of our complaints and observations and then join us in doing something to improve our situation.

With this in mind, can we say things in a fresh way so that people continue to think about what are classified as "women's issues"?

The danger for feminists is complacency, the belief that once we've said these things often enough we can take them as givens and move forward, building upon these principles. We *can* do this, but at the same time, we must remember that our assumptions are often not shared, particularly by those who have the power to change things. Hence, we must also continue to say things, and ignore the rolling eyes and the "Not again" comments.

In the last issue, we asked for submissions from our readers on the topic of breaking the silence. Two submissions we received dealt with abortion: "Dignity deserved, dignity found" and "Rompre le silence." Abortion is definitely one area where we've been saying the same things for years and despite the Supreme Court decision of January 1988, this need for comment is not lessened.

Tünde Nemeth's "Women's Stories, Men's Words" explores the difficulties of women writers sharing their ideas and the rewards for us when they do so. "Oscar, Nobel, Stanley ... and now Helen" recounts an attempt to give women recognition for their achievements.

"A Spinster's Tale," using Mary Daly-esque language in which nagging becomes a powerful activity, tells of one woman's experience when she broke the taboo against pointing out classism to her feminist sisters. The poem "Healer" powerfully destroys the concept of woman as receptacle and healer for man's anger and violence.

Susan O'Leary's interview with Ruth Neto, "Angolan Women in Action," shows us how women in that African country have responded to the racist violence mounted and supported by South Africa.

You'll also find a history of *BTS* in this issue in celebration of our 25th issue. We hope to continue to break the silence for many more years, and if that means nagging until something changes, we'll do just that! We thank you for your support over the years as our publication has grown and changed. We couldn't have done it without you.



# L . E . T . T . E . R . S

Breaking the Silence would like to encourage women to write—to make this a forum for your ideas, engage in dialogue on the issues that affect you, or respond to the articles published in BTS. We welcome your input!



Dear Sisters,

Special thanks for the June 1988 issue, especially Ruth Latta's article "Working for Feminist Organizations." As a union member struggling to work with sisters and brothers in building united support for women's autonomy, I found the quotes from women employees provided me with a conscience that's been quiet for a while.

What we want for ourselves, we want for sisters whose work is important in progressing towards those goals.

Thanks for the reminder that unless we listen to each other those goals are unattainable.

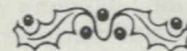
N. P.  
Ottawa

Dear Editor,

Please send me both issues of *Breaking the Silence* on "The Changing Family." The myth of the traditional nuclear family is pervasive and reflected in B.C. social policy.

K.E. Maier, B.S.W., R.S.W.  
Victoria

Design: Lisa Woodsworth



## POEMS

### This is clearly wrong

This is clearly wrong,  
and I quite clearly know this.  
But around me people act  
as if nothing has changed,  
as if we are holy and chosen  
as in ancient times.

While outside, the soldiers  
— the soldiers —  
do things we don't want to  
hear about,  
though we know that this is  
clearly wrong.

Nancy Nachum  
Jerusalem

### Life

Today I met her. She said:  
"The bricklayer wants to make love to me.  
He waits at my door;  
He does not do the job,  
Because I do not agree.  
How can I sleep with him—  
I have a university degree.  
He has none."

I said: "You were married  
To a university intellect.  
Why do you not love him?"

"He lives in his own cell,  
Makes love to a fourteen-year-old,  
Says it is a psycho-therapeutic situation.  
What a cover!  
As if I were an idiot!  
He fooled me.  
I was a maid to him all these years."

I said: "He gave you children."  
"It was only a biological phenomenon.  
They also are gone."

I said: "Isn't that the reality of life?"  
"No. I feel empty and cheated."

Surjit Virdy







up with story lists and themes for the issues. I was only a minor player in the group at the time. It seemed to me that Sherry and Joan did most of the work generated by our talk. They wrote a lot of the content and were very good at convincing other women to write too.

None of us knew we were writers but all of us were thrilled about trying to be.

Within another year, we were functioning as a bona fide collective. Our numbers grew, our meetings became more frequent, and our discussions expanded to include collective process and administering a growing little enterprise.

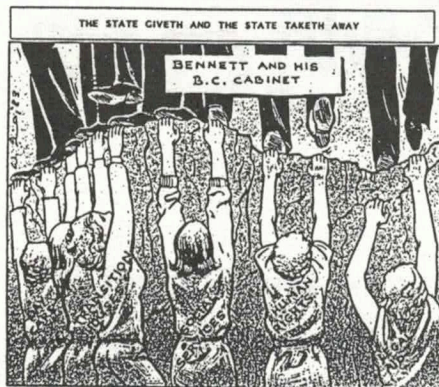
## Breaking the Silence

a newsletter on feminism in social welfare  
research, action, policy and practice

Vol. 1 No. 5

Summer 1983

LAST FREE ISSUE!  
BREAKING THE SILENCE GOES TO  
SUBSCRIPTIONS. PLEASE TURN TO LAST PAGE



Editorial Collective for this issue: Sherry Galey, Joan Riggs, Alma Estable, Alicia Schreuder and Dana Hanson.

Contributors to this issue: Deb Ellis, Joan Riggs, Cindy Player, Alma Estable, Sherry Galey, Alicia Schreuder, Dana Hanson, Anne Bird, Wendy Irvine, Hilarie McMurray, Rosemary Kne, Evelyn Gigante, Maryway Downing.

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Breaking the Silence, School of Social Work,  
Carleton University, Ottawa K1S 5B6

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In early 1984 graphic designer Gabrielle Nawratil joined the collective. She was not thrilled with *BTS*' look. The rest of us weren't either but we still thought we were pretty impressive — at least we could get two columns on each page and stick in little drawings.

Gabrielle started showing us how we could do things better. She designed standard layout boards for us. She showed us how to measure the text so it didn't end in strange places.

Later on, she did a few other amazing things. She built our light tables (used for laying out the pages). Best of all, she designed our logo and our cover.

Gabrielle left the collective last year, but not before a process had been put in place to design and lay out the magazine.

From 1984 onwards, the dozens of collective meetings we've had become a jumble in my mind. Many women have come and gone. Sherry and Joan have both moved on to other things.

At times our meetings were full of heated debate over one feminist issue or another and how it should be covered. At other times we felt swamped by talk of the many unglamorous tasks that are needed to get a magazine out.

Along the way, we've adapted to improve our operation when we could. Thanks in great part to Joan Holmes, we computerized our subscription list and set up a second class mailing system.

We moved to laser printing our copy. The next step, I guess, will be desktop layout.

A constant source of worry has been paying for the magazine. Except for two grants which covered contract salaries each time for one woman to do very specific tasks, none of us has ever been paid for our work on *BTS*.

Even so, we've had to rely on one or two government grants a year to survive. Our subscription revenues cover roughly half our costs. For the rest, we've had to play the what's-hot-on-the-issues-table-for-government-women's-programs-this-year game.

At the risk of bleating, we've always had to struggle to stay alive financially.

What has been wonderful for me about the magazine is the chance to work with other feminists in an informal setting but a highly productive way.



Many of us have developed skills we never knew we had. One of us never used to think she could write. Several *BTS* articles later, she bills herself as an "Ottawa-based writer."

I never used to know how magazines got to look so nice. I do now.

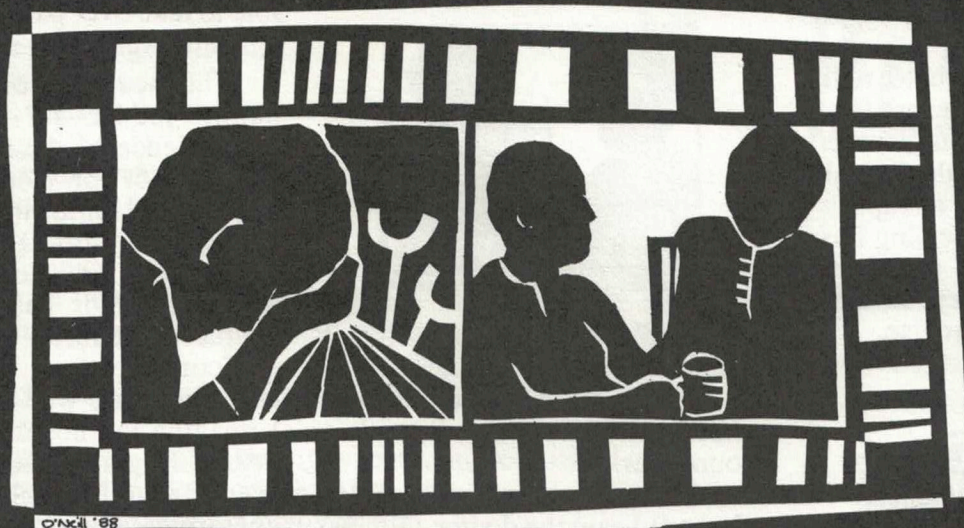
But best of all, from the inside view, has been meeting some of Ottawa's most interesting women, watching their skills (and my own) blossom and having a chance to talk with them and with our authors about women's issues as they change and advance.

I wish us all a very happy 25th issue.

bts

*Ellen Adelberg has been a member (with a few sabbaticals) of the BTS collective for five years. She was so inspired by the collective that she went and became a certified journalist two years ago. She now works for the Co-operative Housing Foundation of Canada as their communications co-ordinator.*





Design: Mona Marshy

Illustration: Catherine O'Neill

## Dignity deserved, dignity found

by Donna Howse

When my family doctor informed me I was pregnant, it didn't take me long to decide to have an abortion. I had had one several years ago at Ottawa's Civic Hospital, so I had some idea of what I was in for.

In an effort to get more sympathetic treatment than I had received from the Civic's all-male crew, I requested a female gynecologist. My doctor referred me to one whose practice was at the Queensway Carleton Hospital.

My visit to the female gyn confirmed my belief. She was wonderfully sympathetic and professional. I felt comfortable with her. I was scheduled to go into the hospital a week later and was to have bloodwork and a meeting with the nurse two days before that.

I felt as positive as I could under the circumstances. Certainly the Q.C.H. was being more responsible about administering a general anaesthetic. The Civic had done no bloodwork and no one had bothered to describe the procedure to me.

I went to my conference with the nurse and found out how little difference a female gyn makes when dealing with a male-structured institution.

First, the nurse told me there was a no visitors policy. Apparently the abortion section is not important enough to allocate space for support people. She told me my husband was to drop me off and pick me up. This is the man who supported me through our son's home birth —

the one person who had a right to see me through this.

When I burst into tears the nurse suggested I have their counsellor sit with me. I agreed, since this was my only option. It would seem that the counsellor takes up less space than my mate would have!

Then she informed me that I was to change into a hospital gown immediately after admission. I would then have to wait up to three hours — alone, undressed and in a distressed state of mind — for the "procedure" (the word abortion never left this woman's lips).

I was appalled!

I had to confess my status as a victim of sexual violence just to be permitted to wear my own housecoat. I understood that I



was to be an exception in this matter.

It was suggested that I make child care arrangements for a couple of days following surgery since a general anaesthetic really knocks the system for a loop.

I left the hospital feeling I had been scheduled to be humiliated and raped. I was angry, sickened and I don't know what else.

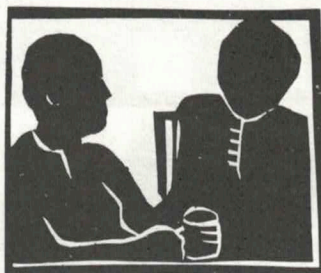


It was a chance angry remark from my mother during a particularly teary phone call that set me on the right track. She said something about the Morgentaler clinic being hassle-free and "you don't even take your bra off for god's sake."

I dialled Planned Parenthood for further information. The woman at the other end of the line was as appalled as I was at the way I'd been treated at the Queensway Carleton Hospital. She asked me to file a report with Planned Parenthood, and gave me the number of the Montreal Morgentaler clinic.

I called the clinic on a Tuesday and was scheduled for Friday of the same week.

The clinic is in a bungalow in a residential district. I was immediately comfortable with the homey, un-hospital-like atmosphere. The receptionist was friendly, cheerful and efficient. The papers she gave me to read contained words like "abortion,"



"vagina," and "fetal tissue" — not a euphemism to be found!

I filled out a medical history sheet and went over it with a counsellor.

After a short wait (fully clothed) I saw the doctor. Bonus, a woman! She went over my medical history again and made sure I understood what was to happen.

The doctor showed me into the operating room, where she asked me to change into a gown. A nurse handed me a mask that would dispense "laughing gas" if I needed it, and she held my hand throughout the abortion. She asked me if I wanted to know what was happening, and was wonderful about telling me in a straightforward manner.

The nurse put my panties back on as soon as my legs were out of the stirrups and told me I could put the rest of my clothes on whenever I wanted. My mate was called to my side as soon as I was settled in the recovery room — we had been separated for no more than 20 minutes.

It seemed to me that in setting up the clinic, Dr. Morgentaler had had the sensitivity to take his clients' needs into account and (gasp) to structure the system around that! At no time was my dignity or autonomy compromised. I was a full participant in the entire matter. I was in and out in just over two hours. I was having lunch back in Ottawa that afternoon and was

able to take over partial child care right after lunch.

The hospital, on the other hand, seems set up for the convenience of the staff and the system, not for women having abortions. I think it's absolutely ridiculous, not to mention dangerous, to use a general anaesthetic for such a quick, simple procedure. The dangers and complications of a general anaesthetic are well documented. I imagine the hospitals use it to justify larger OHIP claims, to keep their clients pliant and co-operative, and to protect their image of guardian angel — solving your problems for you.

The OHIP system only funds abortions that take place in hospitals. This means the treatment offered at the Morgentaler clinic is a luxury few women can afford. It seems that we have, for the time being, won the right to choice and that's supposed to be enough. Well it is not enough! I, like all women, should be able to have a free abortion, less than a mile from my home, without sacrificing my dignity or control over how the abortion is performed.

To that end, I have filed a report with Planned Parenthood and the Canadian Abortion Rights Action League (CARAL). I have also written letters to the Queensway Carleton Hospital and the Ontario Medical Association.

I hope breaking this particular silence helps other women realize they have options. Women who have suffered through the hospital system can file a report with Planned Parenthood or CARAL, who are working to change existing systems and can use all the ammunition they can get.

b t s

*Donna Howse is a pseudonym.*



Georgina Paul

# Healer

She is tumbling off the bed  
she has been kicked  
again, the soft thud of leather against cloth, against flesh.

Done with screaming.  
This has been going on now for three hours  
in a highrise apartment  
full of people  
no longer listening for the loud knock on her door, the concerned shouts from her hallway.  
How many stereos were turned up that night, she will later wonder?

His open hand collides with her face  
ashtrays fly  
the coffee table moves through the air, hurtles toward her  
she leaps out from the armchair  
he shouts accusations, a litany of filth  
down in the streets, beyond the balcony, that magical medley of late night traffic.

Clumsy, these words, not big enough to contain the surprise  
if nothing else, the engulfing shock.

That special someone to wipe away his pain  
an eternity of empathy, a well of insight into his anguish  
and all the other healer stuff that is coming out like so much bullshit  
now that his fist is slamming into her eye, into my eye  
now that I am crying out for forgiveness  
for making him so very, very angry  
for the fist in my eye  
me, begging forgiveness for his fist in my eye  
all this coming out, now, like so much bullshit.

And the traffic rolls on, plays on, down in the streets.  
Yes, of course, I will follow you outside  
thank Christ, she is thinking, yes of course.  
Into the night and the renewal of screaming  
the kicking  
the litany of filth  
his laughter  
or whatever else to name this screeching, remembered  
throwing myself at a taxi  
scrambling in  
locking doors  
demanding a ride to a women's shelter  
whimpering, screaming  
healer.

Wanting to leave a message  
to detail a horror  
the words not big enough to dispel the shock  
to dispute the mutual, all-sustaining bullshit  
healer  
eager to discuss discrepancies.



Illustration and Design: Guity Novin





Illustration: Guity Novin

Design: Romaine Honey

by Tünde Nemeth

Women who write do so against great odds. The way we use language and tell stories has been determined by men, whose experience of the world is quite different from our own. Women's experience has been rendered invisible and silent in male culture.

The odds are stacked against us from the start.

We're timid about speaking up because we've been raised to believe we talk too much.

We know that we are silenced in our society (women and children should be seen and not heard!), but we also know we're perceived as overly talkative, regardless of how much we actually speak. We're seen as gossipy, nagging, nattering, babbling, never saying anything important ... (I'm sure you can fill in many more words used to undermine our communication with each other and in public).

Women are poorer than men and have more social and family responsibilities, including bearing the brunt of the housework and child care. We're less likely to have a space to ourselves where we can work.

In the past, most successful women writers had no children and didn't marry until relatively late in life. Many (like Jane Austen and George Eliot) had servants and were of the leisured class. Today women who write must still struggle, and precious few of us ever get recognition, especially if we're not white and middle class.

If we do spend time writing, we feel guilty that we're neglecting our families or our social responsibilities. Our writing often takes a back seat to everything else. Women in earlier days resorted to ingenious means so they could write and be published. The Brontë sisters used to pretend to be writing letters or embroidering when in fact they were writing novels; when someone came into the room, they'd hide the novel under

**Getting our meaning across:**

**women's stories,**

**men's words.**



something. Many women (the Brontës, for instance) wrote under male pseudonyms; Mary Shelley allowed the world to think *Frankenstein* was written by her husband Percy Bysshe Shelley, for no one believed such a young, innocent woman could write such a horrifying novel.

Today most of us no longer have to resort to such nonsense, but we still don't get the recognition we deserve. This is true even in Canada, where many of our leading novelists are women: studies have shown we still don't get equal treatment from granting agencies or the publishing industry; most of us don't make nearly as much money as male writers do, and even they are starving.

Some of these things are changing a little, as a few of us gain economic power. Some of us have more supportive relationships than did women in the past, allowing us to pursue our art with less guilt. Many of us just stubbornly sit down to do it against all odds.

While writing is hard work for both women and men, we face an added difficulty: we have to write in men's words. Our language and our frame of reference are those of the patriarchal culture in which we live.

Because our culture is male-dominated, the ideas that get into the mainstream (or "malestream") are by and large those held by men. While many of these ideas are also held by women, the opposite isn't true: there's a huge range of "women-only" topics not thought to be important enough to be part of the malestream.

Not only are these topics considered not very important, but they're even considered "taboo." Proper, polite people don't talk about them in public.

Margaret Atwood lists some examples of these taboo topics in her short story "Significant moments in the life of my mother": "romantic betrayals, unwanted

pregnancies, illnesses of various horrible kinds, marital infidelities, mental breakdowns, tragic suicides, unpleasant lingering deaths." Each of us could add to this list our own items, such as abuse in all its forms, menstruation, childbirth stories, or women's special love for each other.

We can talk about these things amongst ourselves, in private, because we share a kind of code without words that's deeply grounded in our experience of the world as women. We share a disadvantaged position in relation to men in our patriarchal culture, regardless of our colour, race, creed or class. It never ceases to amaze me that this code allows links between women whose differences are otherwise irreconcilable.



Women's writing brings these women-only, taboo topics into the public, malestream realm where the code of shared female experience can't be relied on to get our meaning across.

And herein lies the problem: how do we express our real experience in words alone, in a way that can be understood?

Feminist researcher Cheris Kramarae says women must use what is for us an "impoverished" language. This is a part of women's silence.

Breaking the silence is always a struggle.

When we try to write we struggle against the sexism built into both language itself and the structure or pattern of storytelling.

The most obvious example of how sexism is built into language is the so-called generic use of "he" or "Man" which, studies have shown, even very young children understand to mean "male" but not "female."

But the idea of gender bias being built into the pattern of storytelling is a newer and considerably more complex notion based on research in linguistics and literature.

Some scholars argue that our storytelling follows a particular structure, or pattern, that is always the same: the hero moves through the text in search of an object at the end of it. In this pattern, the hero is always male, the object always female — a good example is the classic fairy tale with the princess as the prize at the end.

This structure is extremely restrictive for women writers. How are we supposed to create strong female heroes if the only pattern we have limits women to the position of object?

It's always a struggle for women writers to overcome the limiting patterns of the way stories are traditionally told.

But women manage, somehow.

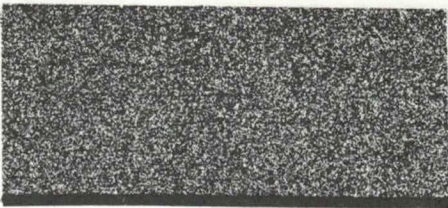
We may never be totally satisfied with our work but we have been getting our ideas across, creating new words (such as "sexism," "malestream" or "Ms") and reclaiming old ones (such as "hag" and "crone"), and finding different patterns to use in our fiction.

Canadian writers Audrey Thomas, Sharon Riis, Betsy Warland, Daphne Marlatt, France Théoret and Nicole Brossard are just a few of the many women I could name who are getting their meaning across and using these exciting techniques to do so.

For example, the structure of Thomas's novel *Intertidal Life* is fragmentary rather than linear. It also contains many instances of wordplay, where the main character

*continued on page 32*



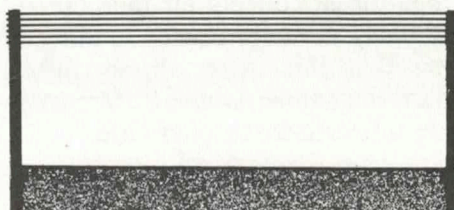


# Why I Chose Not to Attend the Mary Daly Lecture:

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## A Spinster's Tale

---



by *Waterfall*

i had mixed feelings about going to hear Mary Daly speak in Halifax. i wanted to go to be enriched/ nourished by her words/ musings. A part of me felt i *needed* to hear her speak. i work in a very deadening environment. i knew i would be fed by Mary Daly.

Simple economics dictated that i could not afford to travel to Halifax — even with a free ride down and cheap accommodations. i live in extreme poverty. i will earn approximately \$150 this month. i live alone with my crone cat. i will be eligible for approximately \$200 income assistance from the province of New Brunswick. You can appreciate that my living expenses far exceed my means as my rent, not including heat, is \$350.

In spite of this reality, i love to wonder lust\* and attempt to trust the Fates. That's no fooling around trusting, it's out and out Faith.

Why then did i have this sick feeling about attending the Mary Daly lecture? i posed this question

to my Self and had difficulty answering it.

Perhaps because of the pain — the risk involved in naming my reality. i still haven't recovered from my experience of confronting womoon at the Women's Network Conference in Moncton about Classism in the Women's Movement.

Why was i so surprised when i received angry, blaming, derogatory remarks in response to this confrontation? i felt hurt/ negated/ oppressed by womoon i thought were my sisters. But when it comes to a Class Analysis i have to ask my Self, who and where are my sisters?

My circle lessened after the confrontation in Moncton. It was as if at that Conference i had stepped over an unspeakable line. Or maybe i had walked through the veil and entered the realm of Avalon. i attempted to embrace the void/ the darkness/ the unknown when i returned to Fredericton from that Conference. It was a frightening experience.

News travels fast in Fredericton. It seemed that many people who once smiled at me and said, "Hi — how are you doing?" turned their faces away from me as i approached them on the street.

Paranoia set in with endless questions/ worries like:

Maybe i'll never be able to get a job in the system again?

How am i going to pay my rent?

i don't feel strong enough to work!

What if the womoon who owns the building i live in heard about "IT"? — she'll kick me out!

But i just moved. i can't move again. Winter is coming.

i don't have the energy.

My U.I. will be running out in December, what will i do?

Yes, i was paranoid, but i affirmed my paranoia by asserting that "paranoia is a heightened state of awareness!" I knew that i had stepped out of line (1) — that i had broken the rules. What would i do? How could i survive without my sisters?



Two months later, my health began to suffer. First it was the flu, then a stomach ulcer, then three weeks on my back with severe back pain. i didn't have money to buy food and pay for medical expenses. i was unable to work. Only one womoon from the old circle of sisters came to visit me — to make me tea, to make me soup, to drive me to doctor's appointments. Dear Zabeth, may the goddess bless her soul.

i was forced into embracing the void, knowing i had no other choice. Norns\* came to wait on me with meals, presents, flowers — they came to wash my dishes, to bring me food/ love/ friendship. It eased the pain of the void, and in the moistness of that deep dark void, i gave birth to stronger visions.

i have re-dedicated my life to Feminism. It is not just a talk — it is a walk, a way of life. i work daily with womoon who come to me on a barter or sliding scale basis. Together we work to name our reality — of the experience of poverty, of a history of incest and other forms of abuse, of imposed Re-recovery from addictions (2). i work to create an environment that is safe to share this sacred story telling.

In my journey i have found ways to heal from the effects of this dis-eased world, without demeaning/ deadening services from systems. i share this unconditionally, even though it involves much risk. i was sexually assaulted last fall because of my activism.

My life is ACTIVISM. i spin — i spark\* — i spook\* through NAMING,\* ANALYSIS, STRATEGY and VISION. When i'm not working with other womoon, i write, i sing, i chant, i embrace the elements, i dance, i fly.

My journey is painful. It reeks of the void. i live with much

suffering. i've learned to sit with my SELF. i thank the goddess/ god for my cat, for Zabeth, for the Norns, and am now learning/ becoming open to the whisperings from plant spirits.

Tell me, sisters in Halifax — you who were at the Mary Daly lecture, would you oppress me if i raised Classism in your community? Would you try to understand me and respect where i'm coming from? Or would you say things like womoon say to me in Fredericton, that i'm too hard, i'm not assertive, i hurt their feelings, or that i'm too idealistic, i'm unrealistic, i'm philosophical? Tell me, have you ever heard of the philosophy of the poor? That would be an interesting study — let's do a feasibility study first. HA!

Would you value my work/ my abilities/ my commitment? Would you support me, emotionally/ spiritually/ physically? Would you give me gifts of money? (We grass roots womoon need sound economics — not government grants. We need community-based economics. That means sharing resources/ sources/ information/ money! It means sharing/ giving unconditionally, without elitist/ classist remarks/ assumptions about poor womoon's competencies/ capabilities re: money management, work skills, etc.)

Or would you take from my Energy/ Power that comes from the very pit of my Be-ing and use that Energy/ Power to continue

Design: Virginia Howard

Classist/ Elitist practices against *your sisters* in Halifax who are experiencing poverty?

i took a separatist stance by not attending the Mary Daly lecture. Forgive me for making assumptions as i am not familiar with your community. i *could not* risk sharing my ELEMENTAL\* LAUGHTER with persons in the audience who perpetuate Class Oppression. With my present analysis, i felt that my attendance at the lecture would not be "politically correct."

i encourage feedback on this article, as it will enrich and expand this analysis (3). Angry/ Hostile or otherwise oppressive comments/ remarks will not be accepted. It should go without saying that any comments coming from womoon who are fortunate enough to live with means will be accepted graciously with donations of money included.

In closing i would like to share with you some words that are on a poster in the Reading Room in Fredericton: "*Class consciousness* is knowing which side of the fence you're on. *Class Analysis* is figuring out who is there with you."

Blessed Be!

b t s

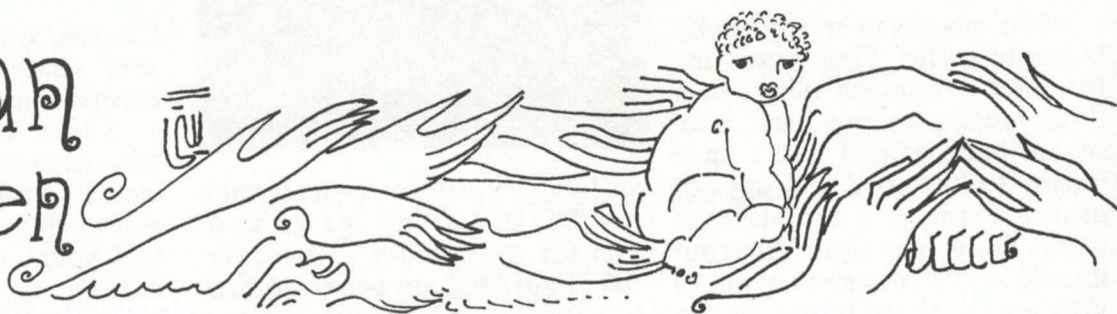
\*Glossary of terms used by Mary Daly in *Pure Lust* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984) and in *Gyn/Ecology* (Beacon Press, 1978)

**Wonderlust:** "Fierce resistance to being fixed" (*Pure Lust*, x-xi). Using "Wild wisdom and wit, which cut through the mazes of man-made mystification, breaking the mindbindings of master-minded doublethink" (ibid, xi). "Wanderlust/ Wonderlust ... motivates exploration/ creation" (ibid, 11).

continued on page 32



# Angolan Women



in action

by Susan O'Leary

Almost 13 years after winning independence from its Portuguese colonizers, Angola has yet to know a day of peace.

South Africa has launched at least six major invasions through neighbouring occupied Namibia and installed 9,000 troops in the south of Angola. Both South Africa and the United States support and arm the terrorist Unita counterrevolutionaries who are active in the country.

The result is a country practically laid to waste.

Half of Angola's urban inhabitants and the estimated 700,000 displaced people face acute shortages of staple foods. Anti-personnel mines placed by Unita in fields and along paths leading to streams and wells have left Angola with 35,000 amputees, most of them women and children.

The war has halted ambitious literacy and health programs in large parts of the south.

Though ravaged by this racist aggression, Angola stands at the forefront of the fight against apartheid. It is host not only to tens of thousands of Namibian and South African refugees but also to military bases of the African National Congress (ANC) and the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO). The Popular Liberation Movement of Angola (MPLA) led the 14-year armed struggle for independence.

When founded in 1956, it proclaimed the equality of all

Angolans, regardless of ethnic or regional origin, sex or any other factor. Consequently, the role of women and the need for them to mobilize around specific concerns was recognized from the start.

In December 1962, the Organization of Angolan Women (OMA) was set up. During the liberation struggle, OMA performed many essential tasks. Women undertook military training and fought as combatants; they were responsible for agricultural production (along with the National Union of Angolan Workers), they implemented literacy programs, and, as well, wrote and produced radio programs and publications to mobilize support for the Angolan struggle.

In the first years after independence, OMA's main activities were in support of government programs, and it played a major role in vaccination and literacy campaigns. Wherever women and children required a solution, OMA was present. The organization grew rapidly, and by 1983 had over one million members in all parts of the country — a remarkable achievement in a country as large as Angola with a dispersed population estimated at eight million.

Ruth Neto is the National Secretary of the Organization of Angolan Women and the Secretary-General of the Pan-African Women's Organization. Susan O'Leary spoke to Neto

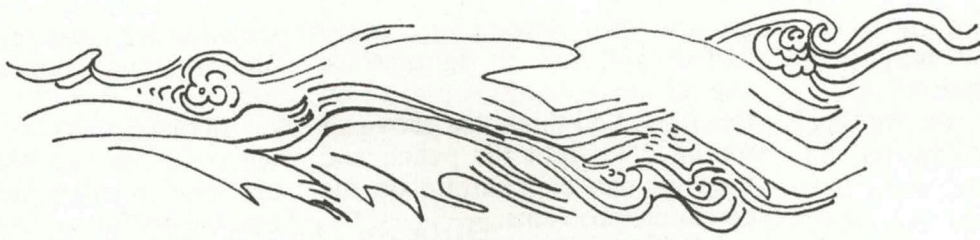
when she visited Canada in April 1988 for the launching of the first Canadian Task Force on Angola.

**BTS:** Could you give us some impressions of the problems that Angolan women are facing right now, especially those most affected by the war?

**Neto:** The women of Angola suffer a great deal of pain and humiliation when they see that their own sons are being killed, that their daughters are being raped and assaulted, that their homes are being destroyed and their possessions are being lost. How many tears have the women shed when we have seen all of these bullets that kill our youth, when we have seen the businesses all destroyed. And, in these very difficult times, it has meant that men and women have come together to fight against South Africa and its puppets, Unita.

And, of course, the cause of this destabilization, the economic and political destabilization, is the war — which causes so many social problems, which causes so much suffering to the women and to the whole population. People outside the country do not know the reality — they speak about "civil war" when, in fact, we suffer aggression and an invasion by a foreign country.





## An interview with Ruth Neto

Illustration and Design: Guity Novin

**BTS:** What types of programs has the Organization of Angolan Women launched to deal with the problems war creates for women?

**Neto:** We develop assistance programs to help the displaced people, the widows, the orphans. We also organize campaigns to raise funds to obtain clothes, food and school materials, so that lives in those areas do not come to a complete halt. We also mobilize teachers to continue the work in schools even if the conditions are very poor. We sometimes have to construct small buildings or shelters so that they can continue to give lectures to the people who live in those areas.

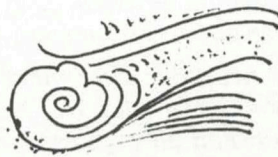
**BTS:** Does OMA rely on the government of Angola to coordinate and carry out these programs or do you bring a program to them and say "We need resources but we will carry out the program"?

**Neto:** Some programs are done together with the government — for instance, with respect to schools we have to deal with the Ministry for Education. But in the programs that are specific to our organization we can do the work ourselves. For instance, if you talk about the situation of supplying material, or of training women, even in simple tasks like sewing, or cooking —

these are things we do ourselves.

**BTS:** How does the Organization of Angolan Women describe its mandate, its objectives?

**Neto:** Our main objective concerns decision making because we participated in the struggle for liberation and we are still fighting. So, our main task is to affirm our rights and assert ourselves. In our constitution it says we have equal



rights with men, but what we must do is to attain the necessary levels (of empowerment) to make those rights a reality.

Of course, to obtain this level in decision making we have to go a long way: we have to mobilize women and elevate their educational level; we have to carry out literacy campaigns so they can participate in all levels of our society.

OMA has done a lot of work in legal matters, for instance by providing information to women. It has tried to get rid of some of the discriminatory clauses in the previous legislation that are

somewhat out of date, and it has tried to make sure that these new pieces of legislation are applied.

The family code also has ensured equality between men and women and has ensured reciprocity between men and women. In fact, this family code required a good deal of consultation before it was applied.

OMA also holds conferences and delivers talks to women to make them aware of the legislation and what it means to them. The areas of legislation that have been dealt with in this context are constitutional, family and labour law.

Women are becoming far more involved in the reconstruction of their country and they are participating a great deal more. Women are becoming far more aware of the value of their work, not only for themselves and for their family, but for their country as a whole.

**BTS:** What successes can you point to that the Organization of Angolan Women and Angolan women in general have achieved?

**Neto:** We can say with pride that we have obtained some positive results. In spite of the fact that we are a country that achieved independence a short time ago, we can say that more women are educated now, some have entered the structures of the



party (MPLA), some are in the government, in the National Assembly, and in other fields.

In terms of our organizations, in March OMA held its second convention and there were 600 delegates who came from all of the provinces of Angola. This was an exceedingly successful meeting, a very democratic one. In fact, President Eduardo Dos Santos said that it was a conference of extremely high quality because at this conference questions which had previously been hidden or distorted because of certain preconceptions were dealt with in a courageous and direct way. From this conference, one recommendation was that women should be integrated into the FAPLA, the armed forces, but as volunteers, so that women would have their influence felt in all of the different areas of the armed forces, as well.

**BTS:** *The late Samora Machel once said: "The antagonistic contradiction is not between women and men but between women and the social order, between all exploited, both men, women and the social order." Do you agree?*

**Neto:** I'm very touched that you quote President Machel because he was one of the great leaders who was concerned about the situation of women. In fact, what he is saying is that the whole society has to fight against the forces that oppress us, which oppress us mainly in our country. We have many economic problems on our continent. We have the problems of war, and the problems of aggression, and I think Samora Machel, by making the statement, meant to involve women in the economic struggle of the continent.

In fact to improve our situation we need peace — every country, every continent needs peace.

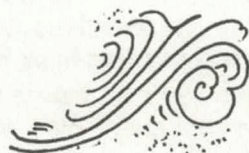
In our country we have a war, we fight for independence. We

are now an independent country and we still have to fight, so we use all our economic means on this fight. So I think that above all we need to fight for peace and then we can concentrate on the economic problems.

**BTS:** *It's sometimes said by African men that the women's movement is borrowing too much from Western feminism and that the traditions in the country, in the culture, suffer. Is this the case in Angola?*

**Neto:** No, in Angola it's different — we can't mix up the terms. Feminism to us means a fight against men and this is not what we intend to do. Our fight is a fight for equality. We know that society in general is composed of men and women, so our fight is alongside men, it is a common fight.

**BTS:** *But there are specific forms of discrimination women*



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**BTS:** *But there are specific forms of discrimination women suffer — things like polygamy, not being allowed access to birth control, having an excess workload, working the fields, raising the children and then having to satisfy the husband sexually. Are these not problems that are unique to women?*

**Neto:** Indeed, we think these problems are particularly suffered by women. We know that in all societies women are the ones who are the most exploited. They have to do the domestic work, sometimes they even work outside their homes and so, in this sense, I would say that they are the most exploited in all societies.

We know that in the past women were used for economic reasons, so men used to have several women so they would help him to work in the fields. But today it is different because men, especially in urban areas, have obtained different

*continued on page 33*



## Rompre le Silence

On n'a jamais fini de rompre le silence.  
Même si l'on parle depuis plus de vingt ans de notre volonté  
d'avoir le contrôle de notre corps, la liberté de l'avortement  
est plus que jamais remise en question.  
C'est le moment de dire et de redire notre exploitation  
et de poser nos conditions.

Non, je n'ai pas le choix de faire un enfant quand mon  
partenaire me violente, me méprise et me rejette  
me laisse tout le soin de l'«amour»  
sans aucun prestige ni rémunération.  
Oui, j'ai le droit de refuser la solitude et la pauvreté  
d'être la victime du hasard, de l'inconscience et de la cruauté  
masculines  
et d'exposer mon enfant à son tour à la subordination.

Je ne jouerai mon rôle de reproductrice que lorsqu'il aura sa  
place dans la société  
lorsque j'aurai accès à un nombre raisonnable d'heures de travail  
par semaine, flexibles, compatibles avec mes tâches ménagères  
bien rémunérées et ouvrant droit à pension  
ou que je serai payée plein salaire pour élever ma famille  
lorsque je pourrai compter sur des services de garderie gratuits  
ouverts à l'année, sept jours par semaine, jour et nuit  
de sorte que je puisse continuer d'évoluer comme personne humaine  
à part entière même si j'ai des seins et un vagin.

L'avortement n'est pas un problème de conscience individuelle  
comme essaient de nous le faire croire les médias  
mais de conscience COLLECTIVE.

Rompre le silence, hier comme aujourd'hui et demain,  
c'est sortir de l'individualisation et donc de la culpabilisation  
pour amorcer une réflexion sociale et politique indispensables à  
l'abolissement de notre condition d'esclavage.

Vive la revue *Breaking the Silence* qui a su préserver ses  
objectifs au fil de ses 25 parutions.

*Diane Archambault*



# Les femmes en action communautaire

par Denyse Côté

L'action communautaire n'a que très rarement été examinée à la lumière des rapports entre les hommes et les femmes. Les spécialistes et praticiens ont beaucoup tardé, et tardent encore, à se pencher sur la question. Pour certains, le silence est complice. Pour d'autres, les priorités sont ailleurs. Pourtant l'enjeu est de taille puisque de plus en plus d'activités de soins sont reléguées systématiquement à la «communauté».

L'élasticité de la notion de communauté s'apparente à celle attribuée depuis longtemps à la sphère privée. Jouissant d'un encadrement particulier, celle-ci est oubliée, invisible mais nécessaire au fonctionnement de l'économie à marché. La rémunération des activités et des fonctions rattachées à la sphère privée, et, par extension, la reconnaissance du travail qui s'y accomplit, sont inexistantes. Et la majorité des personnes qui accomplissent ce travail sont des femmes.

Dans le contexte actuel de privatisation des services sociaux, il est urgent d'appréhender le travail communautaire des femmes, et de développer des modèles d'interprétation qui intègrent leur expérience

communautaire. Cet article est une première tentative en ce sens.

Examinons dans un premier temps comment sont traduites les activités communautaires des femmes. Les femmes sont très nombreuses à prioriser le bénévolat de service (popotes roulantes, services aux malades, etc.). Elles sont majoritaires dans les groupes communautaires. Pourtant, les mesures utilisées pour saisir la présence communautaire des femmes laissent à désirer. Les mesures statistiques ne saisissent pas le nombre de femmes actives dans des groupes communautaires ou les heures qu'elles consacrent à «donner un coup de main» dans un organisme ou à un voisin.

Ces chiffres ne font plus état de la qualité de la participation des femmes. On peut chiffrer tant bien que mal le nombre de femmes participant à des instances décisionnelles de groupes populaires, mais on a vite fait d'oublier qui a eu l'initiative de former un groupe au tout début, qui y a consacré des centaines d'heures de travail non-rémunéré sans demander son compte.

Vous aidez vos voisins à régler un problème concernant la sécurité des enfants en route pour l'école; vous faites pression par le biais d'un comité de citoyens pour recevoir du logement subventionné; vous aidez à régler une chicane entre voisins; vous mettez sur pied une garderie communautaire. Aucune de ces activités n'est comptabilisée, aucune de ces activités n'est reconnue officiellement.

L'action communautaire des femmes peut s'effectuer dans le cadre d'un groupe de femmes ou d'un groupe populaire. Les groupes de femmes interviennent sur des problèmes causés par des rapports de domination sexuelle.

Leur analyse et leur action mettent en lumière les hommes et les femmes comme groupes sociaux et le patriarcat comme système.

Les groupes populaires sont des groupes mixtes à majorité féminine. Les rapports de domination entre mieux et moins bien nantis y sont priorisés, à l'exclusion (très souvent) de la



# re: La genèse d'une présence silencieuse.

Les énergies qu'elles y canalisent, la façon dont elles interviennent, la marge de manoeuvre particulière dont elles disposent restent dans l'ombre.

variable sexuelle. Les rapports entre les sexes sont souvent ainsi relégués bas de la liste de priorités. L'invisibilité et la neutralité sexuelles infiltrent alors les projets, qu'il s'agisse du changement de structures et des rapports de domination, des services pour satisfaire les besoins des plus démunis ou des projets orientés vers le développement communautaire. C'est ainsi que les problèmes spécifiques des femmes comme locataires ou comme assistées sociales, par exemple, ont tardé à être reconnus.

En 1988, les têtes d'affiche en action communautaire mixte sont encore plus souvent qu'à leur tour des hommes. Tous reconnaissent que les femmes sont majoritaires dans les groupes mixtes, mais on les y voit toujours plus facilement comme participantes, consommatrices et dispensatrices de services. La place des femmes comme instigatrices, pionnières, premières responsables, militantes, intervenantes dans des projets autres que ceux destinés spécifiquement aux femmes (1) est moins facilement reconnue.

Nous retrouvons un exemple de cette vision asexuée (donc masculine) de l'action communautaire dans la notion même de communauté. Les définitions, quoique très variées, associent sans exception la communauté à la sphère publique; c'est le domaine du «local politics» (les institutions et leurs représentants locaux, les groupes constitués oeuvrant dans le quartier, les problèmes relevant du domaine public). Tout ce qui serait associé à la sphère privée (et par le fait même à une aire d'activité et de responsabilité féminine) est éliminé: rapports de voisinage, rapports de parenté, rapports communautaires informels ou non-formalisés. Il s'agit pourtant d'un domaine et de rapports essentiels à la survie de toute communauté privée et publique, essentiels pour les femmes en particulier, qui sont en général responsables du privé.

Les rapports communauté-famille, et le travail nécessaire de production-reproduction d'une


communauté sont rendus invisibles. Qui se charge du travail de mise en place et de régénérescence des réseaux, des associations, tant au sein de la famille que de la parenté, du quartier, du lieu de travail? Ne s'agit-il pas là d'un travail communautaire, qui nécessite un investissement d'énergies, et dont l'importance (et non la reconnaissance sociale) équivaut largement à celle des autres activités ou transactions formelles

qu'il rend possibles? Les femmes font fonctionner des réseaux informels au travers desquels s'effectue un partage des ressources: soin des enfants, survie d'une famille et organisation d'une communauté pour faire face à une pénurie. Ces processus constituent une activité de travail, de gestion, de mise en place, de changement d'une communauté, et constituent à ce titre une action communautaire.

Je crois que l'action communautaire des femmes est multiple et variée, mais influencée et produite par les rapports entre les sexes. Il ne s'agit pas de créer ou de défendre l'existence d'un modèle unique d'action communautaire des femmes, mais de changer nos termes de

continued on page 31





# Lesbians in the pulpit

## *New decision or no decision*

Design: Christina Galloway

It is 5:00 a.m. when the phone rings — 2:00 a.m. in Victoria where the United Church is holding its General Council meeting. Pj's voice sounds worn and tired: "They've just packed it in for the night and will be back at it again in a few hours. But I think we're through the worst." Then she fills me in on what has happened so far, on the debates and amendments as the church inches its way through four pages of recommendations on the ordination of homosexual ministers.

It takes me a long time to fall back to sleep as I ponder what the church has and has not done. When I finally sleep, I dream I am in Victoria with Pj and the other members of Affirm (a United Church organizations of gays and lesbians) who are observing, and in some cases participating in, the debate. I awaken to the 7:00 o'clock news. "United Church votes to ordain homosexuals...." Not quite, I think.

Since last winter the United Church has been very much in the public eye. The media were seemingly obsessed with one question: would the United Church agree to ordain gays and lesbians? Every church meeting that addressed this topic was closely observed and reported on in great detail.

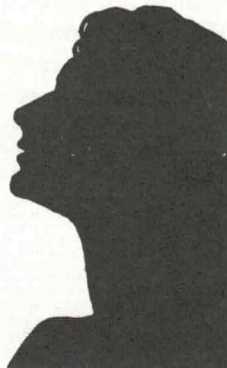
The media and the church people who led these debates had picked one statement out of dozens of recommendations. That statement read: "... all persons regardless of their sexual orientation who profess faith in Jesus Christ are welcome to be or to become full members of the

church. All members of the church are eligible to be considered for ordered ministry."

This is in fact a statement of the status quo. The United Church has never barred gays and lesbians from membership. Four years ago the United Church made a very similar statement about membership being open to all and affirmed "our acceptance of all human beings made in the image of God, regardless of their sexual orientation." All church members are eligible to be considered for ordered ministry, through a selection process that involves local congregations and local and regional committees. Furthermore, the United Church has ordained many lesbians and gays in the past (Pj is a case in point), sometimes knowingly.

After considerable debate the General Council voted to approve the recommendation. But this does not mean that the church said it would ordain gays and lesbians. All it said was that it would consider them. A n y congregation, presbytery or conference can still use sexual orientation as grounds for rejecting a candidate. As one

by  
*Alyson Huntly*





member of Affirm stated: "This decision is crumbs. We've been invited to sit at the table, but we have been given very low stools so we still can't reach the food."

While Affirm members were disheartened at the limitations of the decision, those opposing the recommendation were bitterly disappointed that it had been approved. The feelings surrounding the debate were highly charged, unparalleled except perhaps by the church's decision 50 years ago to ordain women. Many within the United Church remember the threats of a "split in the church" that occurred then.

The disagreement and lack of consensus is not surprising in an institution as large and diverse as the United Church. In fact, it is surprising that any decision was reached at all. The recommendations committee at the Victoria meeting consisted of 25 members. These people were selected to represent a cross-section of views held by the United Church and thus the full range of opinions on this issue. The committee worked to reach consensus.

There were many issues the committee did not comment on because it could not come to a unanimous agreement. The only recommendations it presented were those that had received the support of all committee members. These recommendations, including one that says it is inappropriate to ask a candidate's sexual orientation in the selection process, offer little or no protection for candidates or for lesbian and gay ministers. As Pj said to me on the phone, "It's a little scary. A lot of people took a lot of risks in this debate. And now we're wide open for a witch-hunt."

If what the church decided seems rather minor, what it did not do is perhaps more significant. The church did not

reject categorically the possibility of homosexual ordination — something the right wing of the church wanted. That this was a possible outcome was brought home to us earlier this year. The United Methodist Church in the United States, often seen as a kind of older sister of the United Church, rejected homosexual ordination for the second time in a row.

The right wing in the United Church wanted total exclusion of gays and lesbians. Even a preliminary recommendation by



the Montreal-Ottawa region to add a celibacy clause which would permit "non-practising homosexuals" to be ordained was rejected by the right as "unenforceable" and merely the thin edge of a wedge leading to a "homosexual takeover of the church."

Nor did the church condemn homosexuality itself. Given the tremendous pressure exerted by the right — ranging from threats to cut off donations, to some ministers saying they would lead their congregations out of the United Church — the statements the church made about sexual orientation are even more surprising.

One of the statements at the August meeting was a confession of sin — a confession that "as a Christian community we have participated in a history of injustice and persecution against gay and lesbian persons." The

confession went on to say that such actions are in "violation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ" and urged all levels of the church, and indeed levels of government and other social institutions, to work to end such discrimination.

Another thing the church did not do was separate sexual orientation from sexual activity though it was under considerable pressure to do so. Many of us were expecting this "compromise" position — accept gays and lesbians, but not sexually active ones, and accept gay and lesbian ministers provided they agree to remain celibate. The latter position is held by the Anglican Church. Interestingly enough, this was also a condition when the United Church first agreed to ordain women — that they remain celibate (meaning unmarried).

The United Church made few pronouncements on sexual activity. Its only comment was to reiterate criteria which it believes should apply to all relationships — that they be "faithful, responsible, just, loving, health-giving, healing, and sustaining of community and self." The church also reaffirmed a long-standing commitment to the institutions of marriage and family, while recognizing the "commitment that exists" in other kinds of relationships.

Most importantly of all, the United Church did not avoid the issue. Many within the church had expected that the General Council would simply be unable to reach a decision and that it would say nothing at all rather than risk splitting the church. The church engaged in the discussion with surprising directness. During the Victoria meeting the church also made a commitment to continue the process of dialogue and discussion and to delegate some of its staff and monetary resources toward making this possible.



The United Church did not make any earth-shattering decisions at its meeting last August. But it did engage in a process of discussion and self-education which has ramifications far beyond its doors. It vowed to continue that process of dialogue with its gay and lesbian members. It committed itself to working to end discrimination within and outside its own walls. And it demonstrated that a major Canadian institution, one seen by many to be conservative and unchanging, is capable of learning, risking and moving on.

The church is not known for frank discussion of sexuality and there were certainly many within the church who wished this topic had never been raised. Yet the United Church did talk, and to such an extent that when people spoke of "the issue" no one had any doubt which issue it was.

This process of discussion, study and debate meant that a great many people found themselves having public conversations about issues of sexuality, including homosexuality, for the first time in their lives. Many people met for the first time someone they knew was gay or lesbian. A few congregations invited openly gay or lesbian people to participate with them in study groups. One congregation even asked a gay man to preach. For all the limits of some of the so-called "dialogue" that took place, it was impossible for the church to hide its head and hope it would all just go away. It didn't and it won't.

This learning process for the church revealed, not surprisingly, a high degree of ignorance about human sexuality. In one regional meeting a woman was heard to declare that all candidates for ordination should be asked if they had an orientation, "and if they say yes, we should reject them!"

Another person insisted that the church should refuse to ordain any homosexuals and heterosexuals (we think she meant gays and lesbians!).

But a great deal of learning also took place. At a meeting I attended in the Ottawa area, a man in his mid-seventies stood up to speak. He said that he didn't understand homosexuality very well; that perhaps he was of a different generation. He said how



...but a  
great deal  
of learning  
took place...

he had got to know a group of young people in his congregation while working on projects with them. He described the great admiration he had for these people. As his congregation conducted discussions on the recommendation to ordain homosexuals, he was surprised to find that several of these young people were gay and lesbian. "But that doesn't change one iota how I feel about them," he said.

One woman remembered how she came to the Victoria meeting with her mind firmly made up. Her views changed, she said, on the basis of what she saw going on at the Affirm information table.

"I saw a lot of love and support and caring and openness there," she said, "compared to all the judgemental, negative and unloving behaviour over there." She pointed to the information table set up by the right-wing organization called the Community of Concern.

This is clearly an important decision for gays and lesbians in the church. While it is certainly not everything that could be hoped for, the doors have been opened a crack and there are signs of movement. I asked a lesbian United Church minister who observed the proceedings what she thought. "It isn't exactly a victory, except perhaps for the church as a whole. It's a step though, a first step in a long journey."

There were times during the course of the United Church debate when those of us involved, who felt so much personal pain, wondered if it was at all worth it. Why not just pull out and let the church decide whatever the hell it wants? I didn't because I believed, and still do, that what the church decides has implications for all lesbians, not just those in the church.

A lot of people watching this debate were looking for the church's moral stamp of approval — a statement of right or wrong. That carries weight — more than it should, but weight nonetheless. So perhaps this degree of openness and acceptance will have some influence in society at large. Perhaps the church's commitment to work toward ending discrimination will move us a small step closer to that goal. There is hope and possibility to be found here.

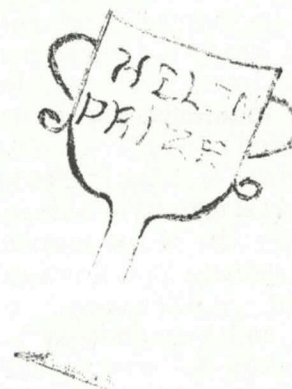
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*Alyson Huntly is an Ottawa feminist and a member of the BTS collective.*



# Oscar, Nobel, Stanley ...

## and now Helen



by Gwenda Lambton

Why aren't there prizes for women, named after women? Women seem to be routinely ignored when it comes to recognizing our achievements through awarding prizes.

In the past, one reason for this has been the idea that women were the invisible helpers, supporters and sustainers of the individual "male genius."

There were exceptions to this: women like Madame Curie, who could not be ignored.

But many women writers hid behind male pseudonyms (George Eliot, George Sands), while women artists of the nineteenth century often signed their paintings and sketches simply "by a lady," so their work was seldom even recognized as theirs, let alone awarded prizes.

This has changed, up to a point, in recent times: Antonine Maillet received the Prix Goncourt in 1979. The Booker Prize and even the Nobel Prize have occasionally been given to women, but the prizes were all still named after men.

In Quebec, only eight years after getting the vote for women in 1940, half of those who signed the culturally revolutionary *Refus Global* (a manifesto refusing all restraints imposed by the Church and government) were women; but the Prix Bourduas, awarded by the Quebec government for artistic excellence, was named after Paul Bourduas, the best-known male artist in that group. Marcelle Ferron, one of the most remarkable painters and stained glass artists in Quebec, who had co-signed *Refus Global*, had no prize named after her; and in fact was not awarded the Prix Bourduas until 1983, nearly a quarter century after Bourduas's death.

Because my own preoccupation is with women artists, about whom I have thought and written for the last two years, I am focusing on art here. But there are many other fields in which women have had the same experience: that of silence surrounding their remarkable achievements.

Some feminist art critics (Lucy Lippard in the United States, Griselda Pollock in Britain and Susan Crean in Canada) see the less competitive nature of women artists as one reason for this silence.

To have a prize, there has to be a hierarchy. Some feminist artists have rejected hierarchies established in traditional art histories, which are written as if the art of all ages had been produced by a string of male stars, each one "doing something first."

Women artists often opt for cooperation and mutual support, the symbol for which has been the quilt. For centuries women have worked on quilts communally, often achieving excellence yet remaining anonymous. Contemporary women artist (Miriam Shapiro, Joyce Wieland, Gathie Falk) have revived the quilt.

In bypassing the star system of the international art market, these women have also put themselves outside the range of



competition and their achievements have become harder to measure.

Some feminist critics would like to see art history rewritten, because of its destructive stereotyping of women. They oppose the powerful twentieth-century critics whose "ideology operates to protect the dominant system and stamp the work that women produce, even within radical art practices, with its stereotypes and values" (1).

"Maybe the existing forms of art for the ideas men have had are inadequate for the ideas women have" (2), remarks one feminist critic. The inadequacy of vocabulary and methodology in assessing ideas by women has been pointed out by a number of critics in other fields — writing and music, for instance.

However, women writers have, on the whole, received far more attention from feminist critics and organizations than other artists have: their words can be quoted by those who also use words. At the International Congress on Women in Dublin in 1987 there were roughly 10 times as many papers on women writers than on women in other arts.

In Dublin, several of us got together to try and find a way to establish a universal prize for women that was not necessarily confined to a particular field: a prize that could, for instance, be given to a woman who opened a house for AIDS victims; a prize that could also be for a communal undertaking rather than an individual one.

As I mentioned in my article on the Dublin conference for *Breaking the Silence* (March 1988), we were all deeply impressed by two speakers who pointed out that the real originator of the Nobel Prize had been a woman, Bertha von Zuckner. We considered establishing a prize in honour of this forgotten peace activist.

Then, on the last day, we listened to a more contemporary voice, that of Australian peace activist Helen Caldicott (3). One of the founders of the movement, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Caldicott was ignored when the Nobel Prize was given to men in this organization. We were impressed not only with Caldicott's compelling and terrifying speech, but with her dedication and commitment to the goal of global peace. Here, we thought, was an even more appropriate role model for whom to name a prize.

An organization was established to award a prize named after Helen Caldicott, to be known as the *Helen Prize for Women*.

A Montreal executive headed by Akhtar Naraghi was established, and membership in this organization has since spread to other parts of Canada and to 15 other countries. The group includes well-known feminists Rosemary Sullivan, Joan Anne Gordon (of the Voice of Women) and Barbara Roberts (of the Simone de Beauvoir Institute, Concordia University).

The organization hopes to award the first Helen Prize during the Fourth International Interdisciplinary Conference on Women in New York City in June 1990.

Meanwhile, new members and all types of support are welcome.

To contact Montreal headquarters, write to the International Organization of the Helen Prize for Women, P.O. Box 781, Place du Parc, Montreal, Quebec H2W 2P3, or telephone (514) 931-1911. Membership fees are \$20 for regular members, \$10 for students.

There will soon be regional coordinators for various areas and anyone who would like to take over this function in their area

should state this on their membership form.

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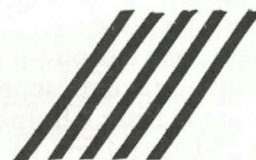


### Notes.

(1) Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 136.

(2) *Ibid.*, p. 7.

(3) *Editor's note*: In Gwenda's article in the March 1988 issue of *BTS* we said Helen Caldicott was American, not Australian. We apologize for the error — our mistake, not Gwenda's!



*Gwenda Lambton is an artist living on a farm in western Quebec, where she belongs to a craft co-op. She holds a Master's degree from Carleton University's Institute of Canadian Studies, where she wrote a thesis on women in public art.*

Design: Lucie Lafrance



# the refugee

Design: Joan Selby



Illustration: Guity Novin

by P. Buncel

*News bulletin: "Ottawa acts to stop torrent of refugees ... Tough measures to be announced today."*

For reading week break we went to Ottawa to skate on the Rideau Canal. It was a "Winterlude" ("Le Bal de neige") in the Nation's Capital. We took pictures of translucent ice sculptures — pictures of a train, the eternal "Transcontinental Dream" à la Pierre Berton. Snoopy was sleeping on a large block of ice in front. In the back, a woman in country-western garb was waving.

Round the corner, another ice-sculpture depicted an Indian with frozen-clear icicles for multi-coloured feathers. Quite

grandiose. One immediately felt proud to be a Canadian-Canadien. Great heritage and all.

We rode a free shuttle bus to Dow's Lake. There at -25°C with a bitter arctic wind, the ice-sculptures were covered with a thin dusting of fresh snow. They stood desolate like haunted ghosts of another planet.

We headed straight to the Pavillion for shelter. It was no loitering temperature. Somewhat sadly we occasionally turned around to catch our breath against the bitter wind and glance furtively at these imaginative fantasies.

Inside the Pavillion, the radio was blaring the latest news bulletin.

Later, outside the Chateau Laurier, my bio-organic synthesizer suddenly went haywild. ("Suddenly" is a manner of speaking, because if you want the truth, this has been choking me for ever so long. In any case, as soon as I let it out I felt immensely relieved.)

"I hate this fairytale city. It has no smell. My vibes are all clogged up and I'm beginning to suffocate. I need to get out of here quick."

E. was visibly disturbed and alarmed. He sensed that behind this lack of odour lingered the distilled smell of manure. (E. ought to know, he was after all a chemist and worked on the Experimental Farm in Ottawa.)

E. tried to be helpful. He handed me two swabs of cotton wool to block my nostrils and suggested we go into a Canadiana store.

That was a wrong move. As soon as I marched into yet another Canadiana store and touched what I was told "not to handle" — a cute little Sealskin purse — I saw the big imploring eyes of the baby Seals, and the bloody horrible patch on the white arctic ice.

E. reminded me to go out before I got too hot. (You see, my bio-organic synthesizer was subject to menopausal hot flashes.)

I looked up at the Indian masks grimacing from the walls. I heard the Indian tom-tom beating in the foggy dawn. On the verge of fainting, I heard this young voice: "Anything I can help you



with today?"

I answered: "Yes, any more of this detoxicated Indian craft coupled with this sterile Inuit art and I'll enroll in a Suicide Mission, any Suicide Mission..." and I stormed out.

To recover, I found myself crouched with a cup of coffee on a bench on Sparks Street. This old bum sat next to me. He turned out to be "that" Anonymous Senior Canadian Official (1) (with shining buttons, you see lots of them by the National Defence Building on Laurier Bridge). In the midst of a rambling off-the-record discussion, I asked him, point blank:

"How many Jews do you think should have been allowed into Canada after the war?"

His response (which seemed to "reflect the prevailing view of a substantial number of his fellow citizens") was:

"None is too many."

That's when I felt really welcomed.

E. said: "It's fun to skate on the canal — the longest skating rink in the world. Beside, in this country you can at least speak your mind without getting arrested." (You see, E. comes from behind the Iron Curtain, so he ought to know.)

He added: "Ottawa isn't much in the winter, anyways. We'll have to come back in the spring for the Tulip Festival. There'll be beds and beds of blooming tulips."

(Everyone knows that the tulip bulbs were donated by the Dutch to Canada, in eternal gratitude for having hosted their Princess Beatrix during the war.)

My bio-organic synthesizer said: "I don't like the sickening sweet smell of those tulips. I need reality."

So I went up to Parliament. Up in the Gallery. Below, a

Senator was reading a speech on Immigration policy. The floor was empty except for the three stooges surrounding the podium and the Speaker of the House. It was Friday afternoon and everybody had gone home for the long weekend.

On Sunday we took the bus to Montreal. As usual we stayed at the three-star Maritime Hotel on Dorchester and Guy. In the lobby, instead of soft sedate music, strange out-of-place characters were gesticulating on the majestic armchairs and on the pastel-coloured settees.

In and out of the hotel a tragic



scenario was unfolding itself. With closed eyes on my memory-screen, I sensed the stages.

On the mezzanine floor, food was being served for about 150 refugees. Long makeshift tables covered with white bare sheets for tablecloths were vaguely familiar. They spoke of welfare-refugee-aid committees — of non-Deportation. They spoke of Immigration and Naturalization Services.

"Refugee status is granted to those fleeing political or religious persecution in their homelands. Under present federal law and policies, people from 18 countries

in turmoil are routinely allowed to stay, if they claim such status, on Canadian soil."

In the elevator, a father and a mother in jeans spoke Spanish to three little ones with dark-black dazed eyes.

Me, in cords, hugging my fur jacket.

"Sources confirmed that the Immigration Department has reached an agreement with officials at the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services, whereby Salvadoreans and Guatemalans will be permitted to remain in the United States until their inquiry can take place in Canada ..."

Not so long ago, after World War II, a young girl with watery dazed blue eyes was bussed around borders' Customs checkpoints, Immigration and Naturalization Services. The memories were of long dormitories where "transients" slept on mattresses on the floor, of communal washrooms and communal soup banks.

E. was adamant. He was changing hotels. He didn't "need" this on "His" reading week break. On Sunday morning, he went up the mountain — Mount Royal. He was now a tenured professor at Queen's. He spoke perfect Queen's English, without a trace of an accent (except when he was mad): "Who needs these hungry destitute refugees breathing down your throat on your reading week break? We'll move to the Holiday Inn." No surprises at the Holiday Inn (as the ad says).

This was London, England, a couple of years after World War II. I was 15. Joined my father who lived on a quiet residential street in North London. I arrived in England at the end of the summer, dazed, just in time for school in early September. No English.



On a fine Monday morning in mid-September, my father gave me three pennies for my bus ride there and back and one shilling for my school lunch. He kissed me goodbye as he went to work in the City "Import and Export."

Somehow I got to school; somehow, I got back from school. The next day, I couldn't remember how I had done it. I knew that if you want to go South in London, you had to catch a bus in the opposite direction. That was Rule Number One in London. Of course, before that, you still had to know "intuitively" in which direction you really wanted to go. Several buses passed by as I stood pondering.

School was a nightmare. Although 15 years old, I was placed in a classroom with 10-year-olds because of my language "difficulties." I couldn't understand a single word. Half the time they were doing additions and subtractions on a slate while I had already mastered basic algebra in France.

Many years before, I had been in a similar situation. I first went to school in France, when I was eight. As I knew no French, I was placed in a classroom with first-graders. The teacher elected to seat me at the far end of the classroom with the other outcast, a mentally handicapped girl. Here, in London, we all grabbed desks as we pleased.

Days went by slowly. Before falling asleep, I would rehearse a few sentences. Upon waking in the morning, with the sunshine through the attic window, the words would march in fully dressed in their British splendour. Except that in London most days were chilly, foggy days.

Mother said: "I never go London. Weather no good for me." She suffered from chronic bronchitis. She didn't get on with my father. Wanted a divorce.

Mother was a difficult person to get on with.

And then came Agatha. She was pale-faced, about my age, with blond braids. No English. She came straight from Poland. Was staying with the Roses down the road.

We went home together. When Agatha smiled, she looked beautiful, but Agatha was usually frowning.

At lunch, we went to the school cafeteria together. Steak and kidney pie it was called, I learned much later. Agatha had one look at it and pushed it aside.



Would not even touch the dessert — custard and gooseberries. Passed it over to me.

Once a week, we had painting class. Brushes and paper and lots of watercolours. A bouquet in a vase was placed in the centre of the classroom. You could do as you pleased. All of a sudden I forgot my little friends; we all painted. Smeared paint all over. My flowers had the deepest hues. I took Agatha by the hand as we went home.

But Agatha was crying, homesick. She was forever wiping her clear, watery blue eyes. I said, "Aga, we go together." Agatha did not answer.

Her English did not improve. I said, "Aga, we go to pictures." *David Copperfield* was playing locally. Agatha just frowned, said "No."

I went anyway. Handed over a shilling, said "singles" and triumphantly walked into the dark theatre.

At school, once a week we had gym. In bloomers my classmates were dancing and hopping to the sound of a blaring polka. Those English kids looked crazy to me. No way was I going to put on those bloomers. Agatha and I stood in the back.

Then suddenly, I didn't see Agatha any more. I called at her house. Agatha refused to get up in the morning. Stayed in bed all day. Mrs. Rose was shaking her head in consternation.

Agatha wants to go back to Poland.

Mrs. Rose said in broken English: "Me and younger sister in line-up. They said 'You go here, sister go there.' Never saw sister again."

Agatha came back to school, but she had started the red tape to get her back to Poland. I never took her hand again. I sensed she had something I didn't, a homeland, maybe a mother to go back to. On the other hand, maybe I had something she didn't.

bts

## Notes

(1) In the preface of their book, *None Is Too Many*, Irving Abella and Harold Trooper ask this question of an "anonymous senior Canadian official" and receive the answer "none is too many."

*P. Buncel lives in Kingston and is currently working on a PhD in French literature at the University of Ottawa.*



# BOOK REVIEWS

## **Mothers and Shadows**

by *Martha Traba*

London: Readers International,  
1986

reviewed by *Louise Guénette*

*Mothers and Shadows* reveals the lives of four women — Irene, Dolores, Elena, and Victoria — caught in the political terror that reigned in Argentina and Uruguay during the early seventies and that still reigns in Chile today.

The four women lead very different lives. Dolores is a young woman involved in the revolutionary movement. Irene is a middle-aged actress. Elena is a wealthy, sophisticated socialite whose daughter Victoria has disappeared.

Irene and Dolores reveal their doubts and fears in an afternoon conversation that explores women's experience of the military regimes in the South American countries and of the revolutionary struggle.

Like most people, Irene, the actress, has spent much of her life refusing to see the repression that surrounds her. After a brief exposure to the revolutionary struggle and the state's response to it, and after her son's disappearance in Chile, Irene suddenly finds herself on the other side. She realizes that she too can become the "enemy of the fatherland" in knowing the truth.

During the afternoon, Irene recalls her relationship with her childhood friend Elena, who clings to the grim and hopeless ritual of the Plaza de Mayo where over a thousand women meet every week carrying pictures of

their loved ones who have disappeared.

Dolores, the young revolutionary, has lost her unborn child, her husband and her friends to the torturers. After her afternoon visit with Irene she reviews her own experiences and the events that led to the disappearance of Elena's daughter, Victoria.

Dolores and Victoria are young and unable to accept the lies and the violence of the regime they must live under. They live with the reality of death from day to day, rejecting life as it has been presented to them, striving to create a better society.

The older women, Irene and Elena, rose to their positions by looking out for themselves. But they have been forced to recognize the state of terror they live in, as it crashes into their lives, shattering the image of a democratic society. They react by wanting to protect their children no matter what.

Women are affected at the deepest level by the disappearance of their children. Unable to mourn, they continue to search for years, through law courts, police stations, prison waiting rooms, not daring to give up, just in case their child is still alive somewhere.

"They'd dealt her the killing blow, as they stun a cow on entering the slaughterhouse, not when they took her away but later on, when no one, anywhere she went, in any office, would admit to having seen her or known her or filed her name or imprisoned her or interrogated her; no one had ever set eyes on her, she

never went through the door of any police station, she never went down any corridor, they never kept her standing for hours on end in front of anyone, they never moved her from place to place, they never bundled her into any car without a number plate, they never threw her into any cell, they never entered her name on any list. Never heard of the girl."

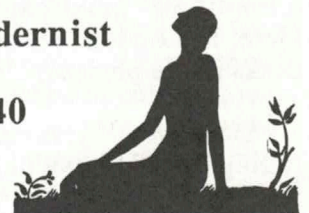
In *Mothers and Shadows*, Marta Traba pays a moving tribute to the courage of women who oppose the overwhelming force of fascist regimes, in the face of devastating fear for themselves and their children.

bts

*Louise Guénette is a BTS collective member who works in the field of women and development.*

## **Writing for Their Lives:**

### **The Modernist Women 1910-1940**



by *Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia L. Smyers*  
Toronto: Women's Press, 1987

reviewed by *Pamela Bentley*

The working partnership of Virginia L. Smyers and Gillian Hanscombe has produced a fascinating "story of connections" between numerous women



writers and patrons of the first decades of this century.

These include Dorothy Richardson, Bryher, Sylvia Beach, Djuna Barnes, Mary Butts, Frances Gregg, Marianne Moore, May Sinclair, H.D., Amy Lowell, Harriet Weaver, Gertrude Stein and Mina Loy. I have included such a lengthy list because for those familiar with modernism or with one or more of these writers, the book will spark immediate interest. The strength of *Writing for Their Lives*, however, is that even for those unfamiliar with these artists, their lives, individually and as a creative network, are compelling.

At times, the abundance of names can be confusing but this reflects the complexity and originality of the lives of these women.

Hanscombe and Smyers develop the group biography by addressing the question "Was it for them (and perhaps for us) evident that a woman artist must not only be original in her art but must also (to achieve the art) be original in her lifestyle?" Was it because these women lived differently that they were able to write differently as modernists? *Writing for Their Lives* elaborates on these questions.

Each chapter concentrates on one or two of the writers and how their lives and relationships affected their work and each other. Many of the women represented found the most satisfaction in lesbian relationships; several spent their lives alone at a time when this choice stigmatized women as undesirable. Others had unconventional marriages, often for convenience or public appearance.

These relationships form much of the biographical detail of the chapters, but Smyers and Hanscombe resist slipping into a gossip-column-type account.

They choose instead to relate their subjects' choices to the modernist attempt to write in a new way, bringing in proof of this hypothesis from the work of each woman they present.

As interesting as the romantic lives are the stories of growing friendships and business (writing and patronage) relationships between the women, who were, at various times, living in the U.S., Britain and on the European continent. The connections between these modernist women are intricate and numerous.

Bryher, for example, as an heiress, provided financial support for other writers and helped publish their works, as well as for 42 years giving H.D. the emotional support she needed for her writing. Amy Lowell helped other writers and periodicals financially, while also acting as a mentor to several of her contemporaries. She was determined in her efforts to have H.D.'s work published in the United States, and was largely responsible for the initial meeting between Bryher and H.D., having introduced Bryher to the latter's poetry.

The enthusiasm that Smyers and Hanscombe have for their subjects permeates *Writing for Their Lives*. They have achieved an uncommon mix of academic research and dramatic energy. The combination brings these women artists to life for us, breaking the silence surrounding a segment of our collective cultural history. As Gillian Hanscombe asserts in the preface, "how these women lived-what-they-wrote or wrote-what-they-lived is part of the jigsaw of women's cultural tradition and part, too, of the conditions we still write in and from."

bts

*Pamela Bentley is a member of the BTS collective.*

## The Animals in Their Elements

by Cynthia Flood

Vancouver: Talon Books, 1987

reviewed by Tünde Nemeth

Cynthia Flood has a rare talent indeed.

It's not just her elegant and controlled prose. It's not just that she's a brilliant story-teller, although both are true.

What sets this Vancouver writer apart is the remarkable versatility of her voice.

The protagonists in this collection of unconnected short stories are totally different, one from the other. Yet each of them is utterly convincing, because the author's voice — her tone, syntax and choice of words — changes to suit each protagonist (in one story, there are even two protagonists with two distinct voices).

This versatility of voice bespeaks Flood's compassion and rare ability to place herself so fully inside each character that a reader cannot help but follow.

When she speaks from inside a child, she uses a child's observations, a child's framework of understanding.

The four-year-old protagonist of "Neighbours," for example, notices the gold hairs around his neighbour's mouth, which make him think she looks like a deer; his parents don't understand this. In "Imperatives," the child's point of view is established by the use of quotation marks around new words — such as "colic," "thesis" and "degree" — and by the child's tendency to take things absolutely literally.

Flood's skill shines equally in her handling of very old protagonists.

For example, the man in the title story perceives his own aging as an accumulation of little things that add up to simply slowing



down — such as finding it harder to get up the stairs or finding that time is leaving him behind. Rather than saying that he suffers a stroke, Flood lets him tell us what it feels like, in his own words, from his own point of view.

*The Animals in Their Elements* contains a wealth of strong women characters who were a real joy to discover, though I did miss finding lesbians among them.

But there are women who love women, women who mother, women who, with humour, courage and wit, cope with family dilemmas and problems at work. There's one woman who's determined to "make a good death," another who wants a good birthing.

Despite the broad diversity of character, which is carried through in a variety of theme, time and place, this collection of short stories hangs together well, linked by Flood's political consciousness.

There's a clearly feminist/leftist analysis behind the author's portrait of a Communist activist in the story "Beatrice," told from the point of view of the now-adult nephew Beatrice raised from the age of 14. The analysis comes out through the nephew's retrospective questions and observations: where did his aunt find the energy to look after him, work at her paid job every day **and** do her political work? how did she find time for a personal life, and how many men were there around who would appeal to a woman revolutionary? His observations include, for example, descriptions of the composition of the movement of the early sixties ("the downwardly-mobile envoys from Rosedale," the "housewife-helper of the bigshot Marxist," the "big construction workers, their hands permanently crusted with chalky stuff").

*The Animals in Their Elements* is full of a humour and compassion seldom found in writing that is also so well-rooted politically. With this collection Cynthia Flood joins the ranks of important new Canadian authors (so many of them women) who bring to their writing both technical finesse and a political context.

Reading fine fiction that has both is one of my greatest pleasures. I know I'll want to read these stories again and again.

bts

*BTS collective member Tünde Nemeth is a feminist writer and editor who makes her home in Ottawa.*

### **The Inside Stories: 13 Valiant Women Challenging the Church** *Edited by Annie Lally Milhaven*

Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1987

*reviewed by barb janes*

What a title! What a concept! Thirteen (that radical, politically correct number) Roman Catholic women — nuns, academics, laity — telling about the particular kind of hot water they're in vis-à-vis the hierarchy. What a let-down.

First of all, unless one is as terribly witty as Vicki Gaboreau, the interview format does not translate well to the written page. The intrusion of square-bracketed clarifications in the text of the interviewees made me crossly wonder what these women really said.

The book is also marred by aggravating grammatical errors ("You're role ...")

More distressing is the content. It is severely hampered by its American limitation, as if

the only Roman Catholic women giving grief to the Vatican were in the United States.

This ideological monolithic thinking pervades the book. Although the two options of dissent and exodus are noted, for instance, no exodus women are interviewed.

And almost all of the 13 dissenters are in trouble for issues related to mainstream sexuality (women's ordination, abortion). No mention is made of the Roman Catholic women who are active in anti-nuclear struggles or ministry to lesbian and gay folk.

What really makes this book disappointing is the format. Had the 13 women been allowed to speak for themselves, the book would have been like a crisp wind. But the interviewer seems to have fallen into the Roman church's trap of repression rather than expression. The interviewer/editor was neither investigative nor celebratory, resulting in a rather stultifying read.

There are a few bright moments.

Mary Gordon, a novelist, states that Mother Teresa "irritates me, quite frankly."

Academic Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza tells a delightful childhood story of entering in her Mardi Gras costume the church in which she had always been instructed to be stiff and quiet. She stood in the middle aisle and laughed loudly, and the ground did not open up and swallow her, as she had been threatened.

Mary Hunt, another academic, manages to rise above the interviewer to raise the issue of women's co-optation and assimilation within the church, offering as an alternative to the presently perverted church the WomenChurch movement with its strong cornerstones of experience, analysis, celebration and strategy.

*continued on page 33*



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référence et de fonder les nouveaux termes choisis sur l'expérience collective des femmes.

Je suggérerais à ce titre l'utilisation de la notion de travail maternel. Par travail maternel, j'entends l'ensemble des travaux d'entretien matériel, psychique et affectif, les interventions éducatives, les considérations organisationnelles qu'une mère effectue sur une base régulière pour les enfants dont elle a la charge, et par extension, pour sa famille et son entourage (2).

Ne s'agit-il pas là justement de ce que font, bénévolement, des milliers de femmes, au sein de groupes constitués ou en dehors de ceux-ci?

Le travail maternel se définit comme l'ensemble des activités nécessaires au développement d'un bébé en personne adulte et socialisée. Ces activités varient selon l'environnement, l'époque, la culture. Ce sont des activités de soins, matérielles, psychiques et éducatives, basées sur un rapport privilégié entre la mère (ou son substitut) et l'enfant. De nombreuses études ont démontré l'importance de ce rapport pour le développement des enfants.

Les femmes sont socialisées à

se charger du travail maternel, gratuitement, silencieusement. Si l'on observe la place offerte volontiers aux femmes dans les groupes communautaires mixtes, le parallèle devient plus clair: elles peuvent librement créer une vie interne, voir aux détails matériels nécessaires à la vie d'un groupe, inspirer, suggérer, participer, se charger des tâches répétitives et défendre publiquement les besoins d'un groupe naissant. Elles peuvent moins facilement affirmer leur autorité, exercer des représentations extérieures au groupe ou diriger une équipe mixte. Les femmes semblent avoir toute latitude lorsque le groupe est nouveau, et proportionnellement moins de latitude lorsque les budgets sont importants et le groupe reconnu publiquement.

Bien sûr, l'activité maternelle étant dévalorisée dans notre société, son utilisation comme concept peut poser problème. Elle a le mérite cependant de mettre en lumière un pan de l'activité communautaire des femmes resté dans l'ombre.

b t s

## Notes

(1) A ce sujet, l'Institut canadien

d'éducation des adultes a mené une recherche-action sur la place des femmes dans les groupes populaires, à laquelle a participé activement l'auteur de cet article.

(2) La définition que je propose se rapproche sensiblement de celle proposée dans l'éditorial de *Woman: A Journal of Liberation*, 7, 2, p. 68: «the labour of birthing, raising, tending, guiding and caring for children within the home and the extension of this work into the community and labour market...Motherwork is one of the most intense and sophisticated forms of choreography in which one must plan and coordinate a series of often simultaneous or disparate movements in both a daily and lifelong pattern».

*Denyse Côté, organisatrice communautaire et participante à diverses activités communautaires, est actuellement professeure en Travail social à l'Université du Québec à Hull. Elle accueillerait avec enthousiasme tout commentaire sur cet article, la première version duquel a déjà paru dans Women's Éducation des femmes, 6, 3.*



continued from page 11

asks questions like, what does the word "mother" really mean and where does it come from?

Marlatt and Warland have found powerful ways of using words to express their love and sexuality in separate but linked works of poetry and prose.

As we find or create words for our experiences, we bring into the public realm new theories and concepts.

My favourite example is housework, because I so clearly remember what a revelation it was for me to find out that other women also thought housework was real work!

This was never talked about publicly until the 1950s or 60s. Now it's something feminists take as a given, and even the slow-to-change world at large is beginning to weed out expressions like "working women" or "working mothers" because feminist slogans like "all women work!" are finally

sinking in.

We are renaming our experience and our oppression, and thus empowering ourselves.

We are breaking the silence. And what a relief that is!

bts

### Resources

DeLauretis, Teresa. *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984.

Frank, Francine, and Frank Anshen. *Language and the Sexes*. Albany, N.Y.: State U of New York P, 1983.

Kramarae, Cheris. *Women and Men Speaking: Frameworks for Analysis*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1981.

Miller, Casey, and Kate Swift. *Words and Women: New Language in New Times*. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor-Doubleday, 1976.

Olsen, Tillie. *Silences*. New York: Laurel/Seymour Lawrence-Dell,

1983.

Russ, Joanna. *How to Suppress Women's Writing*. London: Women's P, 1983.

Spender, Dale. *Man Made Language*. 2d ed. London: RKP, 1985.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. 1929. London: Granada, 1977.

*This article is based on the introduction to BTS collective member Tünde Nemeth's Master's thesis in women's studies (Canadian Studies, Carleton University, 1987), "Breaking the taboos: The dynamic of silence and voice in Canadian women's writing." One chapter of the thesis is soon to be published as a CRIAW Paper. Tünde would like to thank Ellen Adelberg for her inspired help in transforming this article into its present form.*

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**Norns:** One type of "sister-Nagster[s] all fueled with Elemental Fury" (ibid, 12).

**Spark:** "Sparkling is igniting the divine Spark in women. Light and warmth, which are necessary for creating and moving, are results of Sparking. Sparking is creating a room of one's own ..." (Gyn/Ecology, 319).

**Spook:** "Spooking is both cognitive and tactical. Cognitively, it means pattern-detecting. It means understanding the time-warps through which women are divided from each other — since each woman comes to consciousness through the unique events of her own history...Tactically it means

learning to hear and respond to the call of the wild, learning ways of en-couraging and en-spiriting the Self and other Spinsters ..." (Gyn/Ecology, 318).

**Naming:** "In Naming/ reclaiming passionate Elemental knowing, knowing that is intuitive/ immediate, not mediated by the omnipresent myths of phallicism, we call forth hope and courage to transcend appearances" (Pure Lust, ix).

**Elemental:** "Movements within the soul that express deep Fire/ Desire" (ibid, 198). "True to our Originality" (ibid, 4-5).

### Notes

(1) Nym Hughes et al., *Stepping*

*Out of Line* (Vancouver, 1984).

(2) I have written an article, "A Global Analysis of Services to Women Who Are Chemically Dependent."

(3) You can write to me c/o The Reading Room, 384 Queen Street, Suite 7, Fredericton, N.B. E3B 1B2.

*i have taken the liberty of giving for my Self credentials as a Spinster in Wisdom and Witchery. i am presently being initiated into Hag's Studies. It will be a great day when Weird Witches like my Self receive Scholarships — or rather Furyships — to ease the pain of the void.*



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But these insightful flashes are the exceptions rather than the rule in this rather dull read. The interviewer let the fire go out, and wrote a book on civil disobedience that, to use the phrase of one of the interviewees, isn't terribly disobedient but is awfully civil.

bts

*barb janes is a feminist and a United Church minister, currently living in Saskatoon.*

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educational levels, so they don't need to use women in these ways any more. So, we think this is degrading for women. But we know that we can't change things like this overnight because this is an African tradition, and we know that some elderly people are still very conservative about this. But we can say that if, for instance, a law is enforced so that, say, polygamy is legalized, we will do everything to see that polyandry is also legalized.

**BTS:** *In the past, Western feminists seem to have had a problem understanding women's movements in Africa. How is it possible for us to work with African women's organizations like OMA?*

**Neto:** I think the thing we have in common is our solidarity. Many of the feminist organizations understand our struggle — in spite of their problems. They develop solidarity activities, sending material and so on, they provide us with programs using new methods, the so-called appropriate methods, women in rural areas are getting new facilities. Many feminist groups concentrate on these

programs.

Discussions were held during the Decade of Women Conference in Nairobi and we've discussed several questions which affect all women. So, in fact, the main thing we have in common is our struggle for emancipation.

And I would like to make an appeal to women who read this interview: try to get better informed about what is happening in southern Africa. Many people still do not care or don't know what is happening

The racist South Africans still attack many countries in this region — countries like Angola. And we have many casualties — we have widows, orphans, abandoned children, maimed people, displaced people, all because of South Africa's aggression. I think women in their discussions should think about this situation and try and make an analysis of it.

### Resources

Angolan Women's Organization,  
Rua Commandate Gika no. 199,  
Luanda, Angola.

For more information on the Task Force on Angola, contact: Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC), 200 Isabella Street, Suite 300, Ottawa, Ontario K1S 1V7.

bts

*Susan O'Leary, a long-time Ottawa feminist, has a special interest in liberation struggles and their effects on women's lives. The interview with Ruth Neto was originally conducted for CKCU-FM's "Off the Pedestal," a feminist radio program of which Susan is co-producer.*

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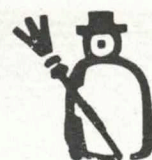
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# RESOURCES



**Directory of Canadian Women Specializing in Global Survival Policy Issues** was launched as a Canadian Council for International Cooperation project with a start-up grant from the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security in Spring 1988. The directory will include women from diverse related disciplines and will illustrate their capability and potential for playing a much greater role in the formulation and conduct of these Canadian policy issues than they do at present.

Ideas for project development and help with funding will be most welcome. For further information please contact Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg, Project Coordinator at Canadian Council for International Cooperation, 1 Nicholas Street, 3rd floor, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7B7. Tel.: (613) 236-4547.



**Jeunes Femmes**, un groupe de jeunes femmes féministes d'origines diverses qui sont en train de composer un livre au sujet des jeunes femmes. Elles sont à la recherche des soumissions que reflètent les idées, les expériences et les besoins des jeunes femmes partout au Canada. Des femmes de n'importe quel âge sont invitées à partager leurs expériences comme jeunes femmes. Envoyez votre art, poésie, prose, essais, photographie, pièces de théâtre, ouvrages multi-média, lettres, érotica, bandes illustrées, etc. avec votre nom, adresse, numéro de téléphone et âge avant 15 février 1989 à The New School of Dawson College, a/s Le Comité des Jeunes Femmes, 3040, Sherbrooke Ouest, Montréal, Québec H3Z 1A4.

**Crossing Boundaries in Feminist History**, the 8th Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, will be held on June 7-10, 1990 at Douglass College, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J. Submit proposals *in triplicate* by 1 February 1989 to Jane Caplan, Dept. of History, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, PA 19010, or Nancy Cott, American Studies Program, 1504A Yale Station, New Haven, CT 06520. Further details available from either.



**A Guide to Fighting Workplace Sexual Harassment/ Assault** by Bonnie Robichaud. This booklet clearly defines sexual harassment/assault and guides victims on the steps to follow if they wish to stay in their jobs and fight their harassment. Written primarily for residents of Ontario, its main objective is protecting employment, and outlining employment rights. Bonnie Robichaud herself recently won a complaint of sexual harassment against the Department of National Defence and her supervisor. In its decision, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the discriminatory acts of an employee were considered the discriminatory acts of the employer (whether the acts were known or not by the employer) and thus made the employer responsible for providing a healthy work environment. To

obtain your copy of the guide, contact Bonnie Robichaud, P.O. Box 149, Osgoode, Ontario, K0A 2W0. Tel: (613) 826-2150.

**The Politics of Reproduction** — a call for papers from *Resources for Feminist Research (RFR/ DRF)*. An upcoming issue has been inspired by the work of Mary O'Brien, and the RFR/ DRF seeks submissions which engage critically with it. Work exploring and debating O'Brien's philosophy of birth and critique of dominant Western intellectual traditions is invited. Papers are also encouraged that critique ideologies of reproduction in non-Western philosophy and theory.

Submissions should not exceed 3000 words and must be received by February 1, 1989. Please send contributions, in either English or French, to Somer Brodribb, Guest Editor, c/o Resources for Feminist Research, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 252 Bloor St. West, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1V6. Tel: (416) 923-6641, ext. 2278.

**Mothers for Peace seeks submissions** to an anthology intended to document the story and imagery of those women whose lives are intimately bound to the future of humanity through their children. This small group of mothers with young children is pursuing aspects and issues of peace with a family perspective. Mothers for Peace invites women in the National Capital region to contribute to or participate in the development of the anthology, which will be circulated provincially. Send submissions of art or writing to Mothers for Peace, c/o Meredith Kost, 22 Forsyth Lane, Nepean, Ontario K2H 9E9. Tel.: (613) 828-1996. Deadline for entries is Friday, December 31, 1988.





Because of the rising cost of publishing the magazine and the lack of ongoing funding, the *BTS* Collective has decided to accept paid advertising. Our advertising rates are:

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