

FIREWEED



A Women's Literary & Cultural Journal

Fireweed: A Women's Literary & Cultural Journal

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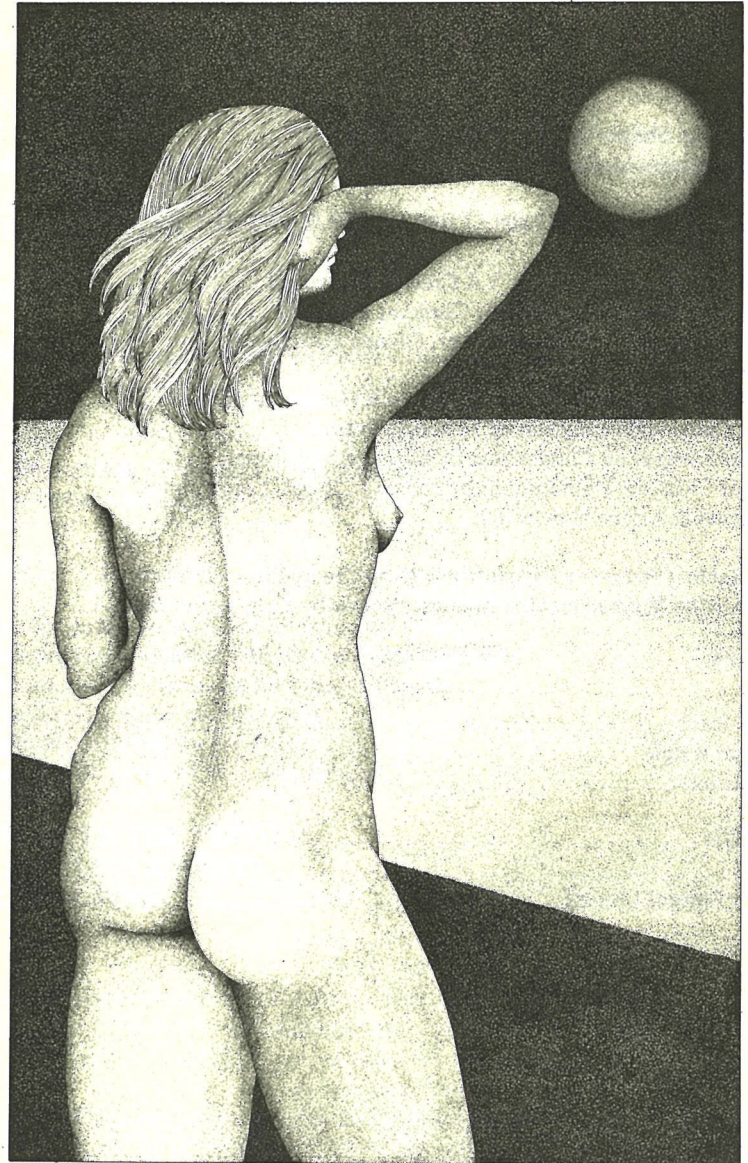


Illustration by Lynne Fernie

CONTENTS

FEATURES

- Doris Lessing: Shapes of Pain, Patterns of Recovery** 8
by Carole Spearin McCauley

SPECIAL SECTION: INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE CHILD

- “Our Most Precious Resource”: A Critical Analysis of
International Year of the Child** by Christine Bearchell 31
Poetry by Klara Balla, Cécile Cloutier, Gianna Patriarca &
Janis Rapoport 37
Illustrations with Poetry by Jennifer Foote & Helena Hamilton
Review: Come With Us reviewed by Nancy Prasad 43
Some Perspectives on Child Abuse by Kathleen McDonnell 46
Images of Children: Photographs by Annette Clough, Laura Jones,
Gail Kenney & Arlene Moscovitch 51
- Understanding Women’s Psychotropic Drug Use** by Ruth Cooperstock 57
Brief Notes on Women and the Political Process by Kathryn Jordan 70

POETRY

- Ayanna Black 19
Catherine Wright 24
Gwen Hauser 72

FICTION

- Night** by Margot Livesey 63

VISUAL ART

- Ink Drawings** by Julie Voyce 66

PHOTOGRAPHY

- Stephanie Colvey 20

REVIEW SECTION

FILM

- An Unmarried Woman** reviewed by Karen Lynne-Henderson 75

THEATRE

- Dusa, Fish, Stas & Vi** reviewed by Liz Nickson 76
Rites of Passage reviewed by Rina Fraticelli 78

BOOKS

- Ces enfants de ma vie** reviewed by Jeannette Urbas 80
Considering Her Condition reviewed by Hilda Kirkwood 81
Old Woman at Play reviewed by Elizabeth Brady 83
Jody Said reviewed by Maria Jacobs 87
Seeing Stone reviewed by Joy Parks 89
Tree of August reviewed by Libby Scheier 90

- LETTERS TO THE EDITORS** 99

- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** 92

- CONTRIBUTORS** 93

EDITORIAL VOICES

In most of the interviews we have been involved in during recent months for the launching of *Fireweed*, representatives from the media have posed a double-barrelled, recurring question: "Don't you think that the women's movement has reached a stage where a feminist journal is no longer necessary? Isn't it now time for women to utilize the concepts which have emerged from the movement by instituting changes on personal and career levels?" To this question we must give a mixed response. Many of the most basic feminist demands have been around for a number of years (some would say for centuries) and there have materialized deep changes in the awareness of many women. However, there exists such a great disparity between this feeling of advancement — which is, in reality, based on an illusion of progress — and the sad truth that the few concrete gains achieved on behalf of women are being steadily eroded at present. We are forced to conclude that yes, without doubt, there is today an even greater need for feminist information.

A major factor contributing to the illusion of progress is the manner in which the media select and shape 'news' about women. Daily we encounter profiles of women who are champion athletes; award-winning artists, writers and performers; upwardly-mobile executives, etc. — manifestations of Wonder Woman in her myriad miracle guises. Although this media focus serves the positive function of providing us with role models, it also encourages the public to regard these women as somehow representative of the majority of women. The existence of a handful of super-successful women does not imply that all of us have at hand similar opportunities for the realization of our aspirations and potential. Unfortunately we do not.

As a feminist alternative to the established media *Fireweed* is fully engaged in the struggle for social change. Because we are a non-profit rather than a commercial enterprise, we are not committed to supporting any policy/group/institution that works against the improvement of our status and the amelioration of our condition. Because we represent no one 'special interest' group but are sincerely attempting to provide a forum for *all* women (regardless of race, religion, politics, class, sexual preference, education, marital status, etc.), our focus is clear: we are all in this together. We hope to be instrumental in overcoming those who would happily contribute to perpetuating the notion that feminists are so fragmented and divisive a lot we will never become an effective lobby for our own advancement.

Anyone who believes that the battle is almost won would do well to consider just what is at stake should feminist demands be translated into action. Feminist ideology has moved from demanding equality for women in the work place, home, educational system, public service, etc. to analyzing and re-defining the very priorities upon which our society functions. Women may decide, for example, that a sizable portion of the defence budget should be diverted to improve day care,

education and social services. Women in power means that our society's aims and means of attaining them will be radically changed. Such changes will have profound ramifications upon how our money is spent; this, in turn, means that the wielding of feminist influence will adversely affect the affluent, powerful minority who presently dominate our society. Is it any wonder, then, that those men (well, *mostly* men) who head corporations and institutions and who hold legislative authority are not passionately committed to feminism?

It is time to focus our attention on the *truths* of our situation — before we are led down yet another path to one more garden we had no real share in creating.

The Popular Mood

Let's face it. It doesn't look good out there. Even the least pessimistic and cynical observers, even the paranoia-free few must agree. It definitely doesn't look good. And it doesn't feel very good either.

The wind that is bringing with it the present changes in the "popular mood" is an ill wind. Let us not mistake that.

It has become almost irrelevant to single out a specific event or action for focus when the overall pattern is being so clearly and grimly articulated:

- consciously and wilfully uninformed "trustees of education" are empowering themselves to censor the literary diet of students, basing their judgements on the "popular mood" and dust jacket blurbs;
- funds for essential services in grass-roots social, health and child care are being siphoned away in order to bring government spending into closer alignment with the "popular mood;"
- acts of verbal, political and rhetorical violence are repeatedly being committed against individuals and groups who belong to "unpopular" minorities;
- "official" studies and reports are being circulated which attempt to resurrect and validate the most vile, destructive and denigrating image of women;
- the legal validity of a single newspaper article has become the flimsy excuse for a broad and concerted attack on the very right to freedom of (unpopular) expression.

There may not be a great deal of certainty about the sources and implications of this reactionary wave. But the popular mood is no less formidable a foe for that. What must be clear to each of us is the absolute necessity for certainty about our own beliefs, positions, and values, and our degree of commitment to these. If necessary, we may compare ourselves to those "safe houses" which once marked for fugitive black slaves the points of relief, reassurance and safety along the path of the underground railroad. The comfort we, as individuals, can offer one another may not be politically significant; but the quality of trust between us must be complete.

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DORIS LESSING: SHAPES OF PAIN, PATTERNS OF RECOVERY

Carole Spearin McCauley

"This editor in my brain. He cuts film beautifully."

(The Four-Gated City)

Doris Lessing is a curious writer. Does that mean curious/peculiar or curious/inquisitive? Both.

For twenty-five years she has described truths about female experience, yet she denies association with the new feminist movement. She is community-minded, even Utopian in vision, yet she has lived her way through and beyond work in the Communist, or any organized, party. The topics that inflame her characters (What is truth? sanity? the good life? justice in relationships? Does humanity, after all, have a purpose?) are traditional religious questions. Yet organized religion, except for Sufism and the ESP movement which she mentions, repels her.

It would be inaccurate to claim that surviving this mass of contradictions is the Universal Human Condition. Many people either don't sense such paradoxes or remain so comfortably placed in job, marriage, or community that they couldn't care less. They're both fortunate and unfortunate; such blindness is one of Lessing's themes.

The women's movement seeks models — normal (maybe supernormal) women who "make it" in areas previously occupied by men. Lessing's characters, however, hardly excel at this task. Their periods of pessimism and self-hatred, of disintegration and willingness to court

mental breakdown for its illuminating self-knowledge, are negative experiences upon which to model oneself, or to recommend to friend or daughter.

It would be exciting to claim that Lessing or one of her heroines has reconciled all contradictions, become an archetype of How to Live Now as a Free Woman. Does this approach work? The breakdowns — and breakups — haunt her pages. World catastrophe, including social chaos, precedes one utopia at the end of *The Four-Gated City* and is detailed in another book, *The Memoirs of a Survivor*.

Doom and Victimization

Doris Lessing writes of real women in a real world. Fears and hopes form persistent themes throughout her twenty books. Since her work from *The Grass is Singing*, through *Children of Violence* to the late novels, *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, *The Summer Before the Dark*, and *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, details individual or social breakdown, I'll first discuss the fear themes. I'll also examine how Lessing treats the paradoxes just described, especially the role of intellect ("this editor in my brain") in her women's lives.¹

Lessing possesses an apocalyptic imagination. Her books indict Western society for the effects of war, racism, sexism, hypocrisy, economic lust — the panorama of injustice. Martha Quest

views sexism, for example, as "the pompous, hypocritical, and essentially male fabric of society" (*Ripple from the Storm*). In *The Golden Notebook* Anna Wulf's view is wider, maturer. While she resents her lover Michael's desiring her just when it's morning time to rise, fuss over breakfast and get her daughter to school, remember to buy tea, etc., she also envies this Michael who

... will spend his day, served by secretaries, nurses, women in all kinds of capacities, who will take this weight off him.... But the anger is not related to him.... I learned that the resentment, the anger, is impersonal. It is the disease of women in our time.... The woman's emotion: resentment against injustice, an impersonal poison. The unlucky ones who do not know it is impersonal turn it against their men. The lucky ones like me — fight it. (GN, P.285)

Her characters' prime fear stems from a sense of doom — personal and collective. *Children Of Violence* exhibits Martha Quest, her husbands, lovers, and relatives in Africa and England, as "doomed individuals, carrying their doom inside them like the seeds of a fatal disease. Nothing could alter the pattern." Martha was no exception. She was

... born at the end of one world war, and had spent all her adolescence in the atmosphere of preparations for another which had lasted five years and had inflicted such wounds on the human race that no one had any ideas of what the results would be. Martha did not believe in violence. Martha

was the essence of violence, she had been conceived, bred, fed and reared on violence. (L, p.222)

One important factor in this doom is horror of repetition — that "great bourgeois monster." Not only do individuals seem condemned to torture one another by generations in "that knot of tension, the family," but the race never seems to evolve beyond a pattern of adolescent rebellion followed by middle-aged conformity. "Nothing one does makes any difference, and by the time we're middle-aged we'll be as stupid and reactionary as our parents — and so it all goes on" (*PM*, p.294). Martha's "first, fierce tenet in life was hatred for the tyranny of the family," personified by an interfering martyr of a mother. Kate Brown, who is middle-aged, notes:

It seemed as if the street was filled suddenly with young women, unmarried girls, or girls with babies, and they all of them moved — yes, that was where you could see it, in how they moved — with a calm, casual, swinging grace, freedom. It was confidence. It was everything she, Kate, had lost in excesses of self-consciousness, in awareness of the consequences of what she did....

Twenty years was the difference, that was all it needed, to set these brave faces into caution, and suspicion. Or, they had a foolish good nature, the victim's good nature, an awful defenceless niceness — like the weak laugh that sounds as if it is going to ebb into tears. They moved as if their limbs had slowed because they were afraid of being trapped by something,

afraid of knocking into something; they moved as if surrounded by invisible enemies.

Kate spent the morning walking slowly up and down, up and down that long crammed street, taking in this truth, that the faces and movements of most middle-aged women are those of prisoners or slaves. (SD, pp. 103-4)

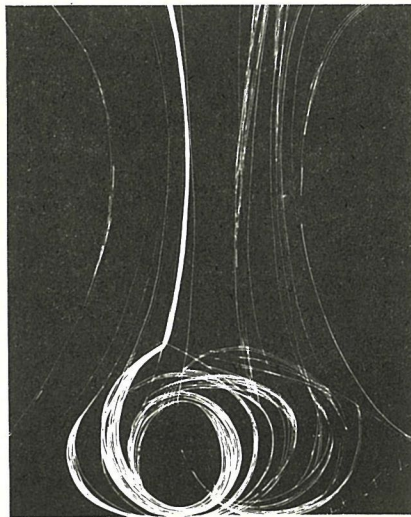
In *Memoirs* the middle-aged narrator reports another version of this. She watches Emily, the teenager whom societal upheaval and return to tribalism have matured into an old woman before she was ever a girl:

... her eyes met mine; they were the eyes of a mature woman, of about thirty-five or forty; she would never willingly suffer any of it again. Like the jaded women of our dead civilization, she knew love to be a fever, to be suffered, to be lived through; "falling in love" was an illness to be endured, a trap which might lead to betraying her own nature, her good sense, and her real purposes....She exuded her weariness, her willingness to give out if absolutely necessary, to give without belief. (P.197)

The most that a weary woman like the narrator may achieve is numbness to this level of reality, a dispassionate watching from the window onto the youngsters' tribal life of fire, music, animal slaughter.

Civilized society is built upon "the norm, the usual, the standard." Although these conventions have

crippled women, a world without them makes one's ordinary reactions (feeling, explaining, questioning) seem pointless. Unlike Emily, the narrator can no longer involve herself with the demands of a tribal chieftain like Gerald or his commune of dependents — children who need meals, help with food growing and, most of all, socializing out of the murderous brathood described in the book. That the narrator, like the grandmother, has disqualified herself by age or temperament from passionate re-involvement should not be mourned. Why *not* leave these tasks to the young women or men with the heart, energy, or illusions for them — and realize that the older woman has achieved other work, other talents?



Martha Quest's urges for romance and love as means to integrate or focus her life culminate in two divorces and the death of her lover Thomas Stern. Some of Lessing's women (Anna Wulf, Kate Brown) manage to keep a good friendship with another woman or girl.

But because mothers are such retrogressive elements in these books, no daughter enjoys prolonged companionship with any woman of courage and stature upon whom to model herself. In different books young Maureen and Emily do enjoy the temporary company of middle-aged Kate and the narrator.

Doom implies the death of hope. These factors — repetition, boredom, sense of victimization by marriage, family, society — create middle-aged characters (Jack Orkney, Martha Quest in London, Kate Brown) who seem competent at such adult tasks as political analysis, lovemaking, earning a living. They have, however, lost or never learned the one quality that Lessing believes will assure future life on this planet. They no longer feel deeply, or they cannot care in a nondestructive way.

Here is Martha on her wedding day:

When Douglas asked her whom she wanted to invite, she looked at him in amazement, and replied that she didn't mind. For she persisted in feeling that all this was quite unimportant, her only part in it was to get through with the distasteful business as quickly as possible. (MQ, p.255)

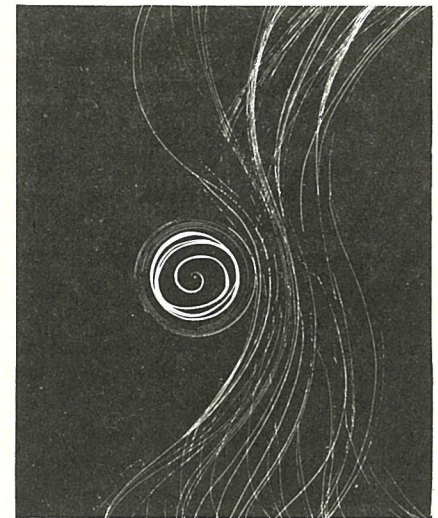
What puzzled her most was that she was a success. The last few weeks, confused, hectic, hilarious had one thread running through it: the delight of other people in this marriage.... Everyone was so happy about it — and why? For — and this was surely the core of the matter? — how could they be so happy, so welcoming when they didn't know her? She, Martha, was not involved in it at all; and so in

her heart she was convicting them of insincerity. They could not possibly mean it, she concluded at last, dismissing all these friends and acquaintances, the circle into which she was marrying. The whole thing was a gigantic social deception. (PM, p.296)

For a time Martha's discovery of international Communism offers her an antidote to cynicism:

It was as if her eyes had been opened and her ears made to hear; it was like a rebirth. For the first time in her life she had been offered an ideal to live for. (PM, p.545)

However, this political fervor (which resembles religious conversion) gradually seems another youthful fling. It cannot avert the general trend of characters to become "narrow, conventional, intolerant, insensitive" — Martha's opinion of her mother.



All Illustrations by Christiane Poisson

In the story "Winter in July," Julia becomes a "critical ghost" afflicted with "dryness of the senses" who says to her husband and his brother, "I mean, we don't care. We just don't care." Lessing's women are people like Julia, young Martha Quest, young Mary Turner (*The Grass Is Singing*), whose superficial, socialized selves shock them into realizing there must be more to life. Or, they are older women who tried to care, to be honest, only to discover their best efforts reduced to twenty years of family fussing over housekeeping and childrearing. They rightly feel cheated that life has offered nothing grander to be or dream. Mental independence drains from them — unless a crisis (death of Orkney's father, travel for all Kate's family) restores them to themselves. Like worms on a hook, they squirm, nibbled to death by others' expectations. They are blinded not only to others' suffering but eventually, through boredom or outrage, to their own.

I find this an understandable progression given the powerlessness that afflicts a woman with no adequate professional training or employability, therefore no "handle" on any work or institution that society deems important, such as government, law, medicine, business, the university. There is also the special impotence that afflicts a white Rhodesian or South African who desires to combat racism and finds tyranny is the mortar that cements a law-and-order society. In a 1969 interview Doris Lessing stated, "I don't feel particularly jolly about the future. The human race has an infinite capacity for absorbing human suffering."²

Doom and Self-consciousness

A writer, or a Lessing character like Anna Wulf who suffers writer's block, endures an extra twist in the double bind (damned if you do, damned if you don't). She seeks to record the truth of what she observes of life and people. Mentally Kate Brown also dons different words in the attempt somehow to control experience by describing it. And Martha Quest is "of a generation dedicated above all to self-knowledge" (*PM*, p.520). This is all a very 'writerly' thing to do. However, it is this recording process — "the editor in my brain" — that seems detached and heartless to Anna. She grows ashamed of her own talent and professional skill.

In *Landlocked* Martha Quest judges Rhodesian white women:

... they watched their own deterioration like merciless onlookers. These days, all over the world, there are people like these, mostly women: the states of mind that once only afflicted people on death-beds or at moments of acute crisis are their permanent condition. Lives that appear to them meaningless, wasted, hang around their necks like decaying carcasses. They are hypnotised into futility by self-observation. It is as if self-consciousness itself has speeded up the process, a curve of destruction. (pp.233-4)

And judges herself:

Even more painful than this cold-minded analysis was the knowledge that it was all so banal; just as the stare from that dispassionate cool eye, which judged herself as adolescent, and therefore inevitably contradictory

and dissatisfied, was harder to bear than the condition of adolescence itself. She was, in fact, suffering from the form of moral exhaustion which is caused by seeing oneself as an isolated person, without origin or destination. But since the very condition of her revolt, her very existence had been that driving individualism, what could she do now? (MO, p.175)

The result of this process (defiance-guilt-self judgment-self hatred) is

I was a woman terribly vulnerable, critical, using femaleness as a sort of standard or yardstick to measure and discard men....I was an Anna who invited defeat from men without even being conscious of it....I was stuck fast in an emotion common to women of our time, that can turn them bitter, or Lesbian, or solitary. (GN, p.410)

I assume "femaleness" means a combination of sexual yearning for a male plus the traditional sensitivity to nuances of relationships that women are supposed to excel at. Whether it does them any good is another question. Men are better at the self-confidence that allows them defiance with an apparent minimum of guilt.

Like Anna, Doris Lessing feels art-making is rooted in arrogance and egotism (the bad side of passion for the truth). She has said, "There is a kind of cold detachment at the core of any writer or artist." A writer is blocked when she feels "It's bad to spend my time writing books because I ought to be doing something about the state of the peasants somewhere. It's immoral to write when people are suffering."³

Lessing characters often seem to be nineteenth-century humanists who, yearning for peace and harmony, wander in a twentieth-century world of cruelty and vengeance. Doris Lessing has mentioned "the warmth, compassion, the humanity, the love of people which illuminated the literature of the nineteenth century and which makes all these novels a statement of faith in man himself." Modern Communist and democratic literatures are both incomplete. They are "opposite sides of the same coin. One sees man as the isolated individual unable to communicate, helpless, and solitary, the other as collective man with a collective conscience." We need "a resting point, a place of decision, hard to reach and precariously balanced....The point of rest should be the writer's recognition of man, the responsible individual, voluntarily submitting his will to the collective, but never finally, and insisting on making his own personal and private judgments before every act of submission."⁴ In the Roman Catholic tradition, this is a familiar description of a religious community.

This may work for a "he" but will it work for a "she," especially one socialized, oversensitized to others' demands? In *The Golden Notebook* Ella meditates:

women's emotions are all still fitted for a kind of society that no longer exists. My deep emotions, my real ones, are to do with my relationship with a man. One man. But I don't live that kind of life, and I know few women who do. So what I feel is irrelevant and silly... I am always coming to the conclusion that my real emotions are foolish, I am always having, as it were, to cancel myself

out. I ought to be a man, caring more for my work than for people. (p.269)

Integrating Self, Intellect, Society

Given these portraits of alienated breakdown, is there any hope for personal or collective integration? Should one ask this of a writer whose aim is to shock the reader into caring, into righting wrongs?

The answer I deduce from Lessing's work is this: there is some personal and collective hope, provided individuals can survive the temptations of suicide or permanent insanity, can care without "fussing."

On the personal level, there is one kind of woman whom Lessing characters envy. Virginia Woolf, subject to similar guilts, calls this person "a real woman." Lessing describes her as the (supposedly) uncomplicated native woman, black or brown, "calm, maternal, radiant" (*PM*, 294). She belongs to that class of easy females who can be "women in peace, according to their instincts, without being made to think and disintegrate themselves into fragments." By contrast, "There were moments when she (Martha) felt she was strenuously held together by nothing more than an act of will" (p.323). By education, temperament, and interests, no Lessing heroine is likely to be one of these uncomplicated women relaxing in their maternal or grand-maternal wisdom.

The key to individual integration is:

that all sanity depends on this: that it should be a delight to feel the roughness of a carpet under smooth soles, a delight to feel the heat strike the skin, a delight to stand upright, knowing the bones are moving easily

under flesh. If this goes, then the conviction of life goes too. (GN, p.525)

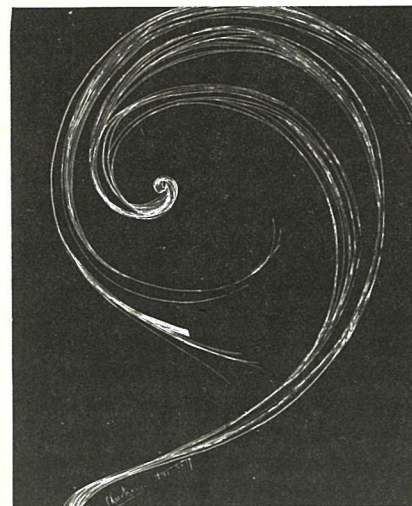
In the story "Dialogue" the woman, outdoors after leaving the man's chilling apartment house, knows a momentary peace: "It's true that what I think contradicts what I feel. It's all meaningless, with my mind I know it....But all the same, everything gives me pleasure all the time."

Lessing characters have moments of illumination that are keystones to the structure of the novels and to the major themes that haunt the books. These mystic moments, however, are apt to be painful ("difficult knowledge") rather than joyful: for example, the theatre scene when Kate Brown perceives both audience and actors as animals posturing on their hindlegs; or when Kate returns to her neighborhood in such a dress and hairdo that only a local spaniel (as in the ancient *Odyssey*) recognizes her. Outside the needs and notice of other people, she is now "invisible."

Kate's history of ultra-compliance in order to avoid others' anger — the self-alienation of the slave — is a special trap for women, particularly one eager to feel herself a man's woman. At the beginning of "Winter in July" Julia is an excellent secretary, not merely because she is competent

but because of her peculiar fluid sympathy for the men she worked with. Her employers found that she quickly, intuitively, fitted herself in with what they wanted: it was a sort of directed passivity, a receptiveness toward people.

At the beginning of *Four-Gated City*, Martha is forced to greet the old



Matty personality she hoped she had left behind in Africa — the Matty who, by deliberate clumsiness and by playing the jester, the "foolish but lovable puppy," attempted to decoy people from noticing she was not about to do their bidding (p.5).

Jack Orkney's illumination after his father's death reveals truth about others as well as himself:

Yet now, looking at Walter's handsome face, so well known to everyone from newspaper and television, it had over it a mask of vanity. This was so extraordinary a metamorphosis of Jack's view of his friend that he felt as if an alien was inhabiting him: a film had come over his eyes, distorting the faces of everyone he looked at. He was looking at masks of vanity, complacency, stupidity or, in the case of Walter's Norah, a foolish admiration. Then Jack's sense of what was happening changed: it was not that he was looking through distorting film, but that a film had been stripped off what

he looked at. He was staring at faces that horrified him because of their naked self-centeredness: he searched for faces that must be like his own, for something he could admire or need. And hastily he wiped his hand down over his face, for he knew that on it was fastened a mask of vanity.

There are different kinds of madness. Charles Watkins' (*Briefing*) or Kate Brown's involves descent into the pit of the self, into humanity's animal origins when conformity-through-instinct was necessary for survival. Anna Wulf suffers the division of one human being into fragmented selves.

Why does the insanity interlude so tempt characters like Orkney who, through minimal caring have lived life aridly, or Kate Brown whose virtues and discipline seem vices, who have overcared themselves into machines for others? Because insanity offers them a way, however self-destructive, beyond "the prison, the nets, the cages, the traps" (Charles Watkins) of other people's expectations, of responsibility and demands from one's own common sense or conscience.

Along with ability to feel simple pleasure, *it is these characters' very intellect — that Lessing ordinarily decries as an instrument of alienation and injustice — that pulls these people back from the "pity and horror."* Their minds finally make an act of will, renew faith in themselves despite previous failures.

Anna Wulf also pulls herself back from the brink of madness:

I said to myself: I must write a play about Anna and Saul and the tiger. The part of my mind concerned with this play went on working, thinking

about it like a child moving bricks about the floor — a child, moreover, who has been forbidden to play, because she knew it was an evasion, making patterns of Anna and Saul and the tiger was an excuse not to think; the patterns of what Anna and Saul would do and say were shapes of pain, the 'story' of the play would be shaped by pain, and that would be an evasion. Meanwhile with the part of my mind which, I knew, was the disinterested personality who had saved me from disintegration, I began to control my sleep. This controlling person insisted that I must put aside the play about the tiger, must stop playing with the bricks. He said that instead of doing what I always do, making up stories about life, so as not to look at it straight, I should go back and look at scenes from my life. (GN, p.527)

Reviewers of Doris Lessing's books remark that because her characters after mad or sad episodes return to their old lives, nothing has been gained. Won't they just crack again under the same responsibility? Perhaps. Or perhaps not. Doris Lessing senses that some characters can return to their former lives simply because they need no longer fear those lives so much. The internal civil war is neither won nor lost; it is transcended. They confront madness by transforming it into a learning experience, even to a state of superior knowingness.

The *Memoirs* narrator, for example, meditates on the sunlit wall of her apartment. Then she travels through this wall to wander among rooms, witness flashback scenes of Emily's inadequate

parents raising their daughter. Because she views these scenes as dispassionate spectator rather than as militant feminist or socialist (to name two possibilities), she experiences a remarkable self-transformation to a state that has not been portrayed before in Lessing's books.

Very strong was the feeling that I did as I was bid and as I must; that I was being taken, was being led, was being shown, was held always in the hollow of a great hand which enclosed my life....

Because of this feeling, born of the experiences behind the wall, I was changing. A restlessness, a hunger that had been with me all my life, that had always been accompanied by a rage of protest (but against what?) was being assuaged....I observed. I looked at every new event quietly, to see if I could understand it. (p.100)

This is a momentous occurrence for this narrator. It is the first time in Lessing's books that relinquishing selfhood, including the emotional turmoil of personal ambition, has brought believable peace and growth, rather than annihilation. She functions here as a conscious, observant intellect who does not use this as a weapon of "sharp, cold analysis" but as a means to preserve her sanity while society disintegrates. Finally she invites others to join her journey behind the wall. And the prerequisite for this dispassionate growth seems to be that her body is no longer involved in the possessive cares of parenthood — Emily is neither her child nor grandchild.

I did not find the very end of *Memoirs* believable. That an individual can have

and report mystical experiences "beyond the wall" is understandable. However, that a group of miscellaneous people, some of them used to murder and related atrocities, should experience collective bliss with the narrator and Emily is not believable. Or we lack the words to embody it yet.

Lessing's Future Vision

One of the less defined (because not yet existent) beacons of Lessing land is a city of human love, a secular New Jerusalem of "sober, mutual trust," where the men are not "false, cynical, disparaging" and the women "not fussy and aggressive but generous" (*MQ*).

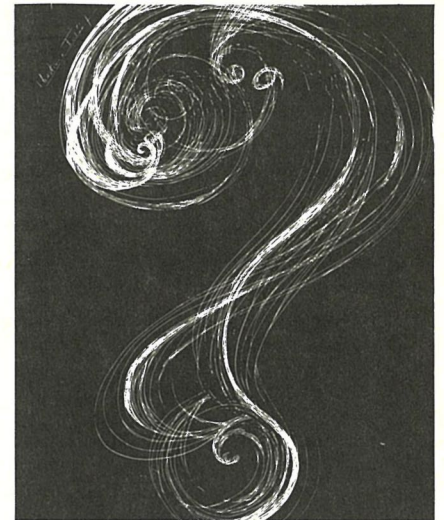
Anna Wulf envisions herself as a Sisyphus pushing her share of the boulder:

'There's a great black mountain. It's human stupidity. There are a group of people who push a boulder up the mountain. When they've got a few feet up, there's a war, or the wrong sort of revolution, and the boulder rolls down — not to the bottom....So the group of people put their shoulders to the boulder and start pushing again. Meanwhile, at the top of the mountain stand a few great men. Sometimes they look down and nod and say: Good, the boulder pushers are still on duty. But meanwhile we are meditating about the nature of space, or what it will be like when the world is full of people who don't hate and fear and murder.'

'Hmm. Well, I want to be one of the great men on top of the mountain.'

Anna: 'Bad luck for both of us, we are both boulder pushers.' (GN, p. 537)

Personal integration seems impossible for Martha Quest until the radical restructuring of society (end of the world we know) that follows the semi-science fiction nerve gas disaster (end of *Four-Gated City* and *Children of Violence* series). She describes human mutation, interdependence based on ESP, clairvoyance, and rugged communal life on an island off Scotland.



In *Memoirs*, too, integration follows social upheaval. One communal vision that occurs twice in the book is of a group of humans cooperating to match cloth fragments against a carpet — a metaphor for human existence on earth.

On the floor was spread a carpet, but it was a carpet without its life: it had a design, but the colours had an imminent existence, a potential, no

more....Some people were standing about the room. Then one of them detached a piece of material from the jumble on the trestles and bent to match it with the carpet.... This piece was laid exactly on the design, and brought it to life. A recognition, a quick move, a smile of pleasure or of relief, a congratulatory glance from one of the others — there was no competition here, only the soberest and most loving cooperation....I, too, sought for fragments of materials that could bring life to the carpet, and did in fact find one, and bent down to match the fit, before some pressure moved me on again. I realized that everywhere around, in all the other rooms, were people who would in their turn drift in here, see this central activity, find their matching piece. (p.78)

What Doris Lessing wants most is belief in her witness to what is new under the sun, to how one breaks out of apathy, boredom, terror and into belief. Anna Wulf insists:

I don't want to be told when I wake up terrified by a dream of sudden annihilation, because of the H-bomb exploding, that people felt that way about the cross bow. It isn't true. There is something new in the world.... I don't want to be told when I suddenly have a vision...of a life that isn't full of hatred and fear and envy and competition every minute of the night and day that this is simply the old dream of the golden age brought up to date.... The dream of the golden age is a million times more powerful because it's possible, just as total destruction is possible. Probably because both are possible...I want to

be able to separate in myself what is old and cyclic, the recurring history, the myth, from what is new. (p.404)

Doris Lessing is solidly interested in documenting the world we live in. That's good. She will be taken the more seriously for refusing to chuck this world and write science fiction — “beautiful, impossible blueprints.” She is grounded in the reality we all know — fears, hopes, paradoxes, duties, pleasures. It is a territory mapped by her intellect, by her search for unity and peace achieved through rational expression of what has terrified her.

The English writer Margaret Drabble has called her a “Cassandra”:

She is also prophetic, but not in a vague, exhortatory, passionate mode. Her judgments are practical, based on sound observation. Her grasp of what is actually happening in the world is ministerial. She is one of the very few novelists who have refused to believe the world is too complicated to understand.⁵

NOTES

¹ The following editions of Doris Lessing's works have been consulted:

African Stories (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965).

Briefing for a Descent into Hell (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1971). Hereafter cited in the text as *BDH*.

Children of Violence series:
vols. 1 & 2, *Martha Quest, A Proper Marriage* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964). Hereafter cited as *MQ* and *PM*.

vol. 3, *A Ripple from the Storm* (London:

Michael Joseph, 1958). Hereafter cited as *RS*.
vol. 4, *Landlocked* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1965). Hereafter cited as *L*.
vol. 5, *The Four-Gated City* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1969). Hereafter cited as *FGC*.
The Golden Notebook (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962). Hereafter cited as *GN*.
The Grass is Singing (London: Michael Joseph, 1950). Hereafter cited as *GS*.
In Pursuit of the English (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961).
The Memoirs of a Survivor (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1975). Hereafter cited as *MS*.
The Summer Before the Dark (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1973). Hereafter cited as *SD*.
The Temptation of Jack Orkney and Other Stories (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1972).

This Was the Old Chief's Country (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1952).

² Barbara Bannon, “Authors and Editors,” *Publishers' Weekly*, 195 (June 2, 1969), 51-4.

³ Quoted in Dorothy Brewster, *Doris Lessing* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1965), p. 144.

⁴ Quoted in S. Burkom, “Only Connect: Form and Content in the Novels of Doris Lessing,” *Critique*, XI (I, 1968), 51-68.

⁵ Margaret Drabble, “Cassandra in a World Under Siege,” *Ramparts*, 10 (February, 1972), 50-4.



Illustration by Kathryn Gormley

TOUCH

Ayanna Black

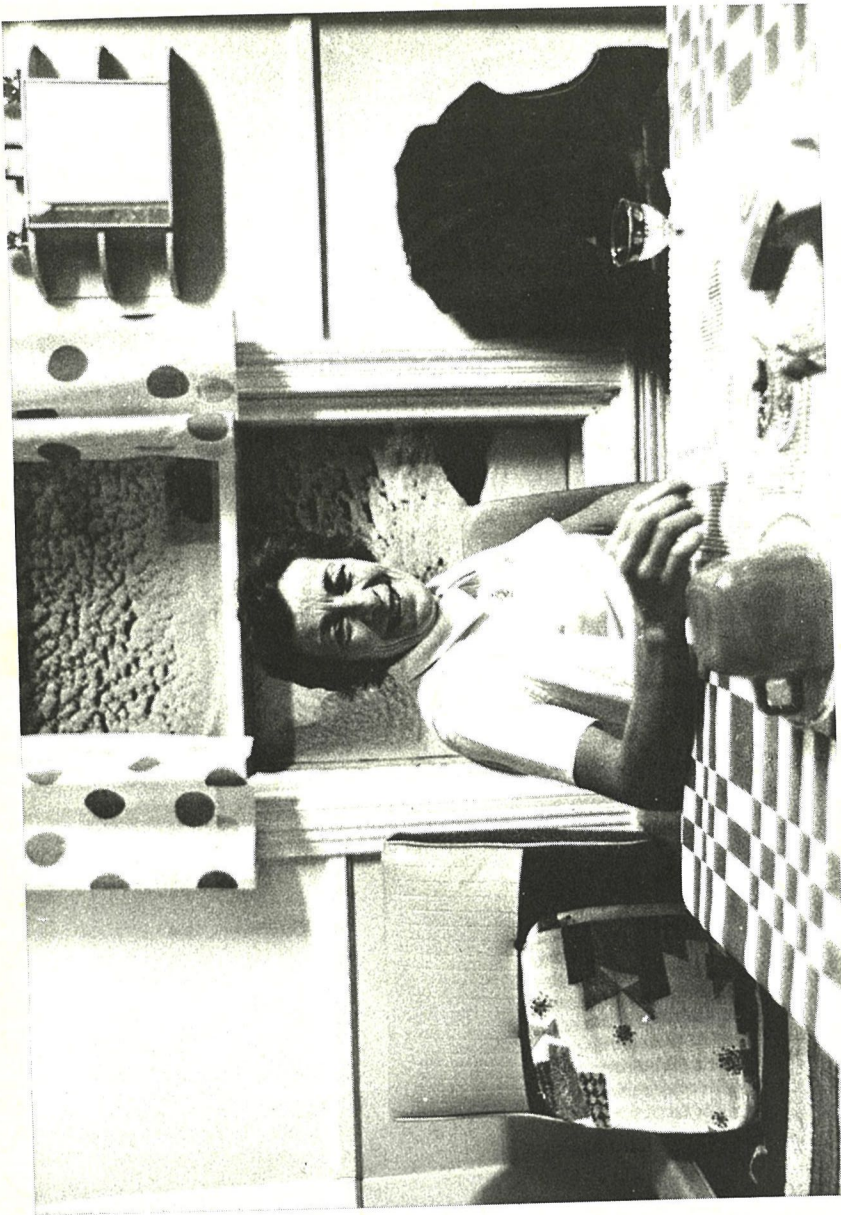
touch
touch me with your vibrant
gentle finger tips
i'm a grand piano
play me in
c or d or e or fgabc
cbagf or d/c
dont sing a word
let your mind
discover my infinite universe
improvise yes improvise
and just
touch me
feel my eyes
listen, listen to my inner voice
and touch me
touch me
touch me



Lima, 1976 by Stephanie Colvey



Montreal, 1978 by Stephanie Colvey



Ste. Anne de la Perade, Quebec, 1976 by Stephanie Colvey



Montreal, 1978 by Stephanie Colvey

MONTH OF MOONS IN SOUTHERN ILLINOIS

Catherine Wright

Everynight the moon (impossibly)
was more or less full.
We knew the old logic:

*The world fortunately and unfortunately
is in flux.*

*That we could not step in the same
river twice.*

We knew somewhere in California
giant sequoias were growing
towards the year 4,000.
A giant tortoise was living
out its 300 year old life.
Men and women were being
born repeatedly
and dying repeatedly
some seventy or eighty
years later.

Yet everynight we insisted
that this was it (somehow in its
own sameness).
We stared hard at the moon
to ascertain its fullness.
We claimed that the moon had been
swollen for days,
and indeed was ready.
We noted that on these nights
hospitals were known to be
unusually busy with labouring mothers,
that school children were
noticeably crazy.

Everynight we exclaimed:

Now *that* is a full moon.
This is it for sure.

The infant was ready.
We were ready.
The pond residents agreed
in loud frog-chorus.

Now Now

But the school children were
not noticeably crazy.
The hospitals were not
unusually busy.
We sank in the night's fullness,
slept heavily and woke to another
hot day.

Night after night the air
was weighted with sound.
The cicadas wound up and down
predictably.
And everynight it was but it wasn't.
We sat poised and shiftless,
held in a moment without movement,
deathless, our skins moist
and untouchable.
The mother's distended stomach
suspended like a ripe globe
in mid air

waiting waiting

we waited and waited and for all
our waiting we missed it
for the moon
was gone suddenly
and the night black suddenly
the insects silent
everything shut down

suddenly suddenly

tomatoes burst their skins on the vine
and wasted
peaches dropped from the trees

and soured
bull frogs no longer croaked: *Growth Growth*
the infant stopped kicking in the
interior of its mother

suddenly suddenly

everything started dying.

LATE TUESDAY EVENING/EARLY WEDNESDAY MORNING SINGING FOR HER SUPPER

Catherine Wright

Let us, say, arrange
so-and-so in the most
intimate of her postures:

a rude bum in the air,
or,
examining the fine hair
on her belly.

Let us call this: *Navel Gazing*

(she has a large raw scar there,
a diagonal track gouged thoughtlessly
across her abdomen;
she hardly ever thinks of it;
she thinks: flatness and brownness.)

Or, let us, say, arrange
her as we find Tintoretto's
Susanna: not surprised by the Elders,
plump and naked in the garden,
taking her bath.
In one arrange her staring out
of the canvas, catching your eye
in a look of recognition.

In another have her gazing absorbedly
into a mirror, partaking of herself
as a vision, along with the wicked
judges.

Let us call this: *Of Doubtful Authenticity*
(now she stands unfashionably dressed:
a tightly drawn wide belt controls
her already too thin centre.
Looking into the mirror she does not
see the gaunt emaciated figure that
she is.
She sees the most beautiful young woman
and standing outside the glass she is
all maleness and hardness contemplating
the seduction of her female self locked
within that glass.)

Or, consider arranging
her in a posture of passion
(a little more rouge, kohl
for the eyes),
Again she will be (of course)
naked, but this time of more
correct proportions.
Thrust an object of power
into her hand,
stand her beside the offending
Adam,
but have her look straight
into the camera.

Let us call this: *Fashionable Bestiality*

(already she's a whore
singing for her supper
her singing a grotesque
parody of something
we call Lust
her singing raucous and wrong.)

No, better we arrange
her in the puffed-up song
of herself,
giving her a disease,

cerebral or otherwise.
Allow her to probe and re-probe
her pain,
talk of blood and semen and
death.
Permit her the gesture of
madness.

Let us call this: *Not Quite Unique*

(she is passed pornographic papers;
she stands in front of your mirror
she is saying yes, she sees now how
she is; yes, really she does:
"But I can't hold onto it.")

Or, suppose we simply
let her be,
dispense with the propositions.
Let her talk of the larger things
that matter.
Allow the *I* to no longer blossom
in gross obscenity.
Let us finally, say,
not call this anything.

(she is naked, not as they see her,
but as she is.)

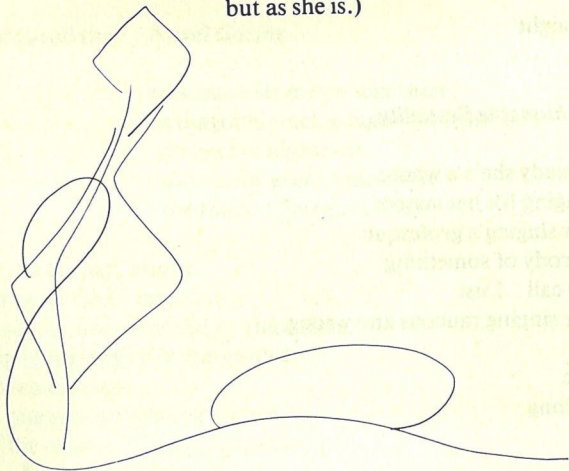


Illustration by Kathryn Gormley

THE WOMAN IS NOT SARA*

Catherine Wright

There is a reflection in the train window;
it is being watched.
There is a tiny mirror in the palm
of someone's hand,
it is a bruise;
it is also being watched.

There is a woman behind
the reflection in the train window.
She is watching two scars
on the milk-white underbelly
of her wrist.
She is amused by seeing their
reflection in glass.
They do not speak of suicide.
She pretends that they do.
She knows the accidents an iron
 a motorcycle
 the mirrors put in her room
 someone calling it *Vanity*

There is a woman, it may be
the same woman caught by mirrors,
she is thinking: *voyeur voyeur*
To her it could be:
a sound on her tongue,
a huge bird undulating in the sky,
a seeing mysteriously into the future,
a sliding quietly over deep black rivers.

*From a work-in-progress entitled *Sara Tobias: A Document*



Laura Jones

“OUR MOST PRECIOUS RESOURCE”: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE CHILD

Christine Bearchell

International Year of the Child has been declared according to the United Nations, “For one and a half billion reasons — most of them under ten years old.” Many of us, for most of our lives, have been bombarded with images of children — millions of them, the world over — who will die needlessly from hunger and disease, and tens of millions more who will suffer permanent impairment of their ability to lead fulfilled lives. Whether we sponsor foster children or just give pennies to UNICEF on Hallowe’en, most of us have, to some degree, been manipulated by the appeals that accompany the presentation of this information. These children are being used — exploited — not because their needs are not real, and not just because crass advertising techniques are used to communicate them, but because the solutions proposed within these appeals are not real solutions.

Regardless of the intentions of the people who make the appeals and administer the funds, even if there is never any graft or corruption associated with them, what is going on is an elaborate con job. Our attention is directed towards suffering of such magnitude that we cannot possibly grasp it (indeed, we are often in danger of becoming deadened to the meaning of it); meanwhile, we are directed away from any exploration of what causes this

suffering in the first place. We are first encouraged to believe that the problems are so large they are beyond comprehension, and then we are advised that our few pennies or dollars are all that are required to set things right.

Implicit in all the propaganda is the notion that this terrible suffering is the responsibility of the individual, that no matter how little most of us have, someone else has much less. This presentation of the situation ignores, or avoids, the larger and deeper responsibility at the root of the problem: that suffering of such significant proportions is, in reality, a result of the overall organization of our society, not just the result of economic “accidents.”

Because the suffering of these children is everyone’s responsibility, it is really no one’s. Apparently all that must be done to correct such wide-spread deprivation is to make people and their governments aware of its existence. Governments and social structures are not to blame; they are simply blind. Instead it becomes the responsibility of each good citizen to see and remedy the problem by giving as generously as s/he can to charity. And every time we look, with anguish, at the misfortunes of children across a border or an ocean, it becomes easier to overlook children right here whose needs are being neglected by the same kind of government or social institution.

The United Nation’s celebration of

the twentieth anniversary of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child promises to be this same trick on a grand scale, with a few new twists thrown in for good measure.

The origin of the Declaration actually goes back to the post World War I era when a fine example of British liberalism, Eglantine Jebb, decided to do what she could to help war orphans. She prompted the Swiss Red Cross and a number of like-minded organizations to help her form the International Save the Children Union. Ms. Jebb's group took their charter, a declaration of the rights of the child, first to the League of Nations and then, in 1945, to the United Nations. It wasn't until 1959 that the list of rights, in its present form, was adopted by the General Assembly.

The document is a statement of wide-ranging good intentions:

The right to affection, love and understanding. To adequate nutrition and medical care. To free education. To full opportunity for play and recreation. To a name and a nationality. To special care if handicapped. To be among the first to receive relief in times of disaster. To learn to be a useful member of society and to develop individual abilities. To be brought up in a spirit of peace and universal brotherhood. To enjoy these rights regardless of race, colour, sex, religion, nationality or social origin.

Just as the faces of suffering children evoke almost universal sympathy, so too does this statement of proposed children's rights. But a closer look is in order.

International Year of the Child is

being brought to us by the same folks who provided us with entertainment throughout 1975 under the banner of International Women's Year. International Women's Year saw fancy buttons and posters, expensive conferences, and an extensive pro-government PR campaign. But it brought about very little in the way of concrete or ongoing changes for women. In fact a whole wave of cutbacks adversely affecting women was just getting under way at the very time the government of this country was patting itself on the back for its contribution to the liberation of women.¹

One thing that the UN and their co-participants in the International Women's Year festivities seem to have learned is that overly extravagant expenditures — like the conference held that year — do not work as PR devices.

Women saw through the hypocrisy of spending millions of dollars on conferences rather than on abortion clinics and day care centres.

International Year of the Child hopes to avoid the conference syndrome; instead, the emphasis will be on programmes of local, non-governmental organizations like UNICEF, the Boy Scouts, and Four 'H' Clubs, in which these groups will try to identify and then meet the needs of their communities. The shorthand term used by cynical critics of inadequate social services to describe this kind of programme is "bandaid solution."

If we are going to get anything out of IYC, it will be in the development of our critical faculties: in learning how to see through, and say 'no' to these con games; in examining how our society treats children (the various subtle and non-so-subtle ways in which they are

used); and in questioning the relationship between the needs and rights of children and those of women.

International Year of the Child has more to teach us through what it is not than through what it is.

IYC is not proposing greater freedom or autonomy for children. It promotes a typically charitable view of children, a thinly disguised objectification of them. It is not to be a "Children's Year" at the instigation of, or under the direction of, young people in their own interests; nor is it an attempt by adults to find out just what children perceive their interests to be. It is the "Year of the Child" as conceived by adults for adults, and it is designed to leave intact adults' preconceived notions about children and their needs.

Much of the UN propaganda stresses that "children are our future... our most precious resource." This is not altogether a selfless attitude. The fact is that too often children are used as global symbols of the *status quo*; the protection of the standards and mores of the power-holders of today and the continuance of these in the future is too often what is meant beneath the rhetoric of 'child protection.'²

IYC is not about to change that strange perception of humanity that allowed its predecessor, International Women's Year, to avoid all issues — from lesbianism to abortion law reform — related to sexuality. One of the rights notably absent from the Declaration is the right of the child to the determination of her/his own sexuality and sexual identity, free from the interference of adults and the state.

Today in Canada there exist laws which, though ostensibly drafted to

deter and punish adults who might abuse children, have as their main (and sometimes only) effect that of controlling and molding the sexual attitudes and development of our young people. While some young women are actually incarcerated in reformatories, others are punished for their sexuality in other ways.³ Being denied information about contraception or access to safe, legal abortions without the necessary consent of their parents results in many of them becoming unwilling and unprepared mothers, some of whom are coerced into untimely and unwanted marriages; others are forced into illegal measures to circumvent these laws and restrictions.

IYC is not, ultimately, a campaign for the protection of children, though many of its proponents may see it that way. First of all, an overwhelming amount of violence directed at children originates within the family home. The United Nations and its host of liberal and charitable followers propose no challenge to the power, the compulsory nature, or the isolation of the family unit which often brings about child abuse. Secondly, the concept of the "protection" of one sector of society by another, more powerful sector smacks of "serfdom." For a very long time women were presumed not to need rights because they could rely, instead, on the "protection" of men. So it is with the rights of the child versus the power of the family; the women's self-defense movement has provided a concise description of the flaw in this sort of logic, that is, that the power to protect is the same as the power to oppress.

Finally, IYC is not going to question society's age-old attempt to use women and children to manipulate each other. If anything, women are likely to be

called upon to reinforce the traditional roles of mother and homemaker in support of this project. One X chromosome plus one X chromosome is not the magic genetic code for the creation of a fulfilled, skilled, nurturing mother. Convincing women that their biological capacity to bear children indicates an innate capacity to rear them is an old rhetorical trick. Its continuing appeal is not surprising, however, when one considers the fact that child care is one of the few fields in which women have been allowed to consider themselves expert.

This obviously has implications for the environment, emotional, psychological and economic, in which a child will be raised. For even now many women do not have the opportunity to develop in any other way, to explore any other role than that of mother; and they therefore are reluctant to relinquish what little is positive in that definition of themselves. We may forget that this definition is neither ours nor nature's: it is derived from and, in turn, serves our social structure conveniently and profitably, and is often part of the argument that excludes us from broader, more varied endeavours. The problem is not that women are mothers. The problem is that being a mother often means no opportunity to be anything else. It means, for many women, that they become isolated in their homes, emotionally dependent on their children and families, and economically dependent on individual men or the state. Provisions for the complete and fulfilling integration of women into the productive social fabric of daily life are almost non-existent. Thus children act as a means of trapping women in their homes, while women often act as the sole and arbitrary authority in the lives

of children, entrapping them in turn.

Not until women have complete and informed control over their reproductive lives, equal access to education and information, and the option of good responsible day care and education for their children will we be able to separate our biological from our social functions. And not until then will the deepest rights and aspirations of childhood be protected.

Upon closer examination, the 'rights' included in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child seem vague and token. Who could deny a child's right to love and understanding? But then again, who could guarantee it? And who is to prevent "love and understanding" from continuing to be what a child receives in return for conforming to parental and social expectations? Some of the other 'rights' in this document are even more vague. What really constitutes "growing up as a useful member of society?" Most people have some answer to that question, but probably no two answers are alike. I am not very likely to agree with an answer Anita Bryant might give, for instance.

Organizations like UNICEF, the Boy Scouts, and Four 'H' Clubs are pathetically ineffective in meeting the needs of the children they are attempting to serve, and are pathetically ineffective when compared with resources available through governing bodies of our cities, provinces and country — bodies that should be held responsible for services like health care, education and child care and yet are falling all over themselves to cut back funding in just those areas. International Year of the Child is unlikely to be anything more than a puppet show for the *status quo* — the same old sleight-of-hand trick with a new '70's veneer. We will be enticed into

watching the hand that holds the empty promises, while the other hand pockets the profits that are derived from keeping women and children in the home and cutting back on social services that might have allowed us all a little more freedom.

NOTES

¹ That was 1975 and, if anything, things have become worse since then for essential women's services (hostels for battered women and their children, rape crisis centres, counselling centres) contraceptive information has not been made any more readily available to young women; women's studies programmes have been curtailed; the application of abortion legislation has been tightened up; and life has gone 'as usual' for women.

² One area of concern to women in general and lesbians in particular is the treatment of children as property in the custody awards of divorce cases. The very terms 'award' and 'custody' betray the notion of ownership underlying the entire procedure. Seldom are children consulted about the parent they wish to live with; and their choice, when sought at all, is too easily overridden by the court's desire to impose its own values upon those

who are subject to it. This reality is ironic in the face of the court's claim to represent the best interests of the child. Best interests, of course, but according to whom?

One common consequence of a judge's inability to find any grounds — other than sexual preference — to deny a lesbian mother custody of her children, is the imposition of severe restrictions on her lifestyle. Lesbians are often forbidden or severely discouraged from living with their lovers if they wish to maintain custody; such a restriction makes it extremely difficult for them to live within the framework of honesty, emotional support and economic comfort that should be at the base of a family life.*

³ For engaging in sexual activity other than that sanctioned by their parents or guardians, young women, and, in particular, young lesbians, can have their sexual behaviour made subject to the Criminal Code of Canada until they reach the age of twenty-one.

*Editors' note: see "Lesbian mother is awarded custody of her two children," *The Globe and Mail* (Thursday, January 18, 1979). The article notes that "The judge made it a condition of custody that no person live with the mother without the approval of the court. He said it was his intention to prevent any open and avowed lesbian or homosexual relationship in the mother's home" (p. T2).

In Memoriam

Margaret Mead

1901-1978



DAUGHTERS

Gianna Patriarca

my father called me "whore"
and my mother cried

a young Italian woman's
claim to prostitution
is any activity past
the midnight hour

his eyes like coral
he rammed his fist
inside my mouth
reminding me of his
masculinity

and my mother screamed

the walls are knocking
how will they face the
neighbours in the morning?

if only I could be more like
my married sister
or like the virgin daughters
of the virgin neighbours

and how did the Devil
come to live inside our house?

and my mother prays



Illustration by Jennifer Foote

Cécile Cloutier

J'ai
 une fille-fleur
 et
 une fille-fruit

Je les file comme des bijoux

Je leur apprends
 la terre
 la laine
 et les épis

Je leur dis
 le soleil
 l'oeuf
 la roue
 et l'homme

Je les remplis de commencements

CINNAMON

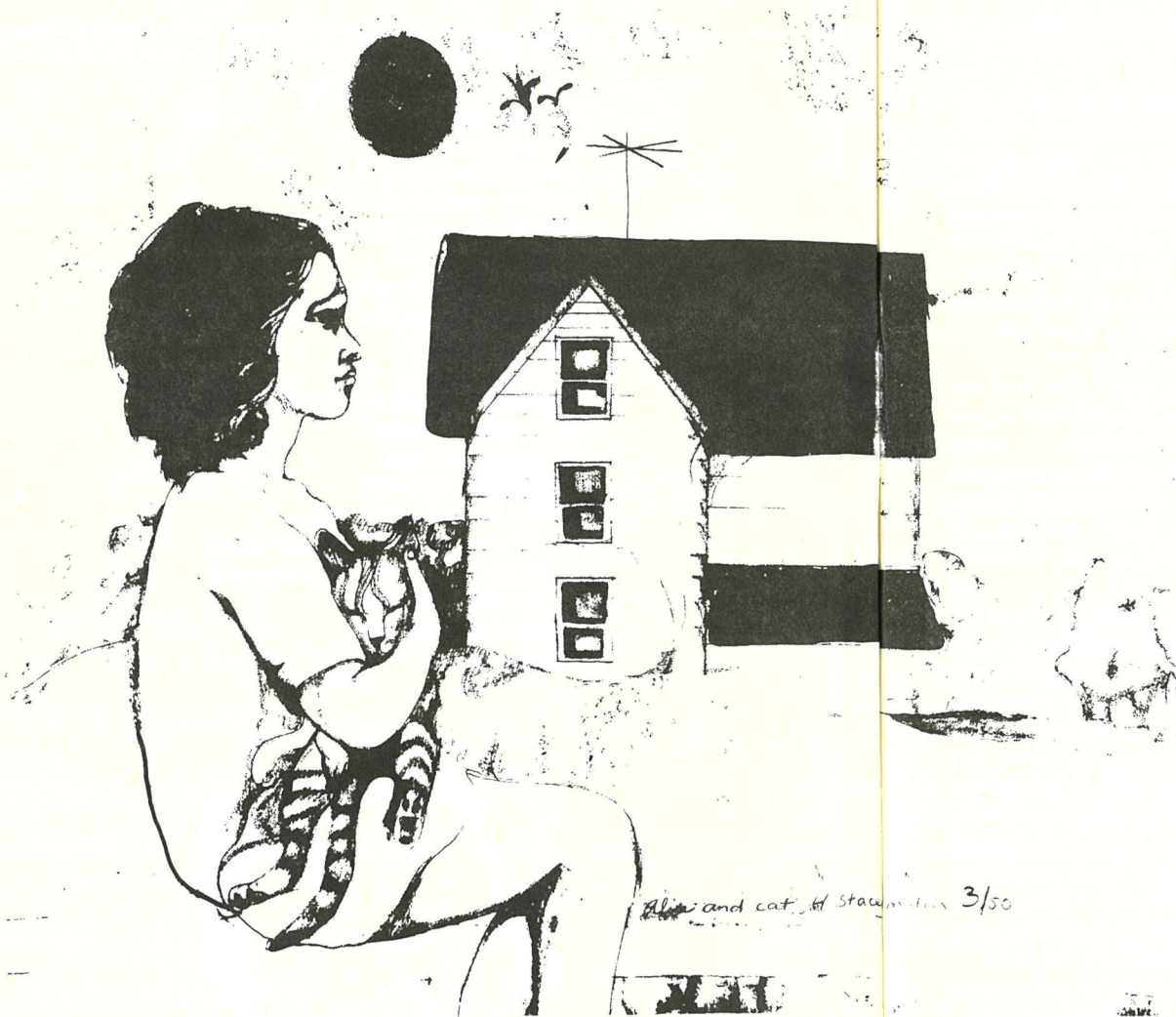
(For Cica)

Klara Balla

She's a cinnamon child
 in a cinnamon world
 with cinnamon clouds
 above her cinnamon earth
 sitting by a cinnamon table
 on a cinnamon chair
 dipping cinnamon sticks
 into her cinnamon tea
 her cinnamon pet
 is a cinnamon cat
 and cinnamon birds
 with cinnamon beaks
 sing cinnamon songs
 in her cinnamon trees
 she says her cinnamon prayer
 to a cinnamon god
 "...for thine is the cinnamon kingdom
 and the cinnamon power
 and the cinnamon glory
 cinnamen..."



Illustration by Jennifer Foote



Alia and cat at Stacey's 3/50

CHILD'S PAINTING 2

Janis Rapoport

The house you live in
has two sides, a yellow and a red.
The door you will enter
like the walls: bright bold lines of blue.
Above the house, the sky:
a single horizontal wave.
Beneath the wave a blaze of sun,
a wheel whose long spokes you've blown inside out,
their tips brushing the roof of the house.

Outside, dancing on the pointed teeth of grass,
your mother waits for you.
Flat against a whitened space
she wears a modest matchbox dress
that doubles as a torso
with a curled bellybutton.
The tendrils of her hair point toward the sky.
Her face is the shape of the sun.

Janis Rapoport

The careful boat sails, in summer outline, across the ribboned water. As company for this boat, assorted fish and octopi swim close by, underneath its hull. They number five, which is also the number for the artist's family. She has transformed herself, her mother, brother, father and sister into sunshaped fish and she has painted them in their favourite colours: red, orange, yellow, green and violet. This pattern and these colours are repeated for the portholes, the colours for the sky that is almost filled by rainbow stripes. A yellow flower from the ocean shines above the rainbow. Its petals light up the sky and water for the boat and fish as they continue on whatever journey it is the artist has imagined for them.

Come With Us: Children Speak for Themselves, Coordinated by Judy McClard and Naomi Wall, Toronto, The Women's Educational Press, 1978, 120p., illus., \$5.95, paper. ISBN 0-88961-045-2.

This is an amazing collection of art, poetry and prose created by inner-city children. Over a hundred written selections (half a dozen written and translated from their mother tongues) are included under sections titled *Why We Came & Where We Came From, Streets and Schools, Work, Racism, and We See Ourselves*. The experience for a reader is like being privy to personal letters and diaries; often I didn't know whether to laugh or weep at the disclosures. Each entry — the longest is two pages; the shortest, a few lines under a picture — contains the essence of a life. More than thirty full colour and numerous black and white illustrations complete the picture visually of children of immigrant families.

The cover is symbolic. A row of brightly coloured houses jostle one another against a windy sky. Grass, earth and a large excavation fill the foreground. The middle zone features a pile of tools, a truck and one lone workman ascending a ladder out of the hole he has dug; but it is the workbench with its sign "At Work" in the centre of the page that catches our eye. This is to be a main theme of the book: people working at making a place for themselves, finding friends, learning a new language as well as customs. That is not to discount the playful, humorous, whimsical side of life; it too is present, like the sun that always shines in children's pictures.

The beginnings for most of these children involve leaving their homelands; the reasons are mainly economic and political. In many countries there is war. We hear, "Soldiers put cannons and machine guns...in the beach. My cousin died in the fighting." "All the shops are in ruins." There is food rationing because the crops are not doing well; there is hard work and little pay, and "the poor people...work the most." A child reports how one father came to Canada because "he thought we wouldn't be poor." Other reasons for coming are more personal. "I came to Canada because my father was lonely," says one child. And we can certainly feel the tensions behind, "We wanted to get out of Hong Kong because my father and mother were arguing too much. They wanted a divorce and we were afraid." Then there is the humorous account of a father missing a ship (he was a member of the crew) and being allowed by Immigration to stay.

Once one or two members of a family have come over, a chain reaction is set in motion; one writer describes this phenomenon in a delightful style reminiscent of "The House that Jack Built." "So my father came and told my aunt to come and my aunt told my grandfather to come and my grandfather told my grandmother to come, but she couldn't..."

Speaking of style, the compilers, Judy McClard and Naomi Wall are to be congratulated for editing with a light touch. They have corrected spelling, but in permitting the children to write in their own idiom, grammatical or not, they have truly allowed them to "speak for themselves." The result is an authentic style,

endearing in its eccentricities.

A child who has just come to Canada says in a poem, "I felt like a mouse/being surrounded by cats./Now that I know/a little English,/I don't feel/like that/no more."

The immigrant families move in to streets full of the contrasts one encounters in the core of any large city. Allan Gardens, beautiful with flowers, is juxtaposed to Moss Park, "a rotten place where bums sleep." There are lanes full of beer bottles and the smell of garbage; areas where there is at least one fire a day or an accident on the highway. Elsewhere, children enjoy listening to the music and laughter coming from the dance halls at night. Little is kept behind closed doors in this world; the children see all there is to see and report on it candidly. One writer tells about the police coming to take away a man who has been sleeping on the grass. His wife comes out and starts yelling and the police take them both. Whatever the neighbourhood, the children describe it enthusiastically. One sums it up by saying, "I don't really mind living in my neighbourhood because there is always excitement."

The next step involves school and friends and, if one doesn't know the language, it is difficult to progress with either. One child doesn't go to school "for one whole month" because he didn't know any English. A girl is asked at school, "What's your name?" She interprets this as "Wash your name" and is confused because she didn't know what "Wash your name" was. Many are told to go to special English classes. A child fails because he "wasn't thinking right." Difficulty seems to pile up on difficulty until we meet the girl who states with pride, "I'm pretty good at speaking Macedonian for a kid who talks English the whole day."

Although some still miss friends or relatives in their homelands, most find new friends in their new homes. Some even like to mention their enemies, "I had lots of friends and lots of enemies." We see loyalty for a friend who has robbed a store for the first time: "I felt sad when he went to jail...I still like him." However, the ultimate friendship is the case of Roger, who is black, and the author, who states unequivocally, "We are lifetime friends. We'll always remember each other. We'll never break up unless something happens," unaware of all the forces that can weaken the bonds between the best of friends.

In family life, we feel the push and pull of personalities struggling for identity. "My brother and I fight all the time." "What complicates my life is my mother and my family." "My mom's Italian. She's stricter than English." "If I like boys, it's my problem." And finally, "Sometimes I feel stupid...then I act tough."

When it comes to work, many children live under the shadow of parents' accidents at work and their fear of being laid off. Some days there is bad news such as "four fingers were cut by the power saws." The standard nine-to-five hours don't apply here. Says one child, "When we eat, my dad ain't home. He goes to work before we're up." We are happy for the child who can say, "I think my father likes his work because he always comes home happy," — and for the child whose mother is a dressmaker: "The good thing about her job is that she works at home."

We hear the voice of the social critic when one writer reports that his mother doesn't get as much as the men who work with her. "Women are humans too," he concludes.

One mother working in a factory sometimes gets burned with hot plastic. Once when this happened she asked if she could go home. The boss said, "No. Work for a bit longer." The child comments, "This is cruel. What we need is better working conditions."

They speak with pride about their own work. "On Sundays I deliver newspapers...fifty two papers... I deliver two to my friend's house." Another boy works in the market where he is told the lowest price each item can sell for. Wise in the ways of the business world, he proceeds to give the customer a higher price, but then makes a discount. "I never give a thing away for the lowest price." There is a tender moment when a girl who has worked hard all day at her brother's job because he is sick, comes home tired and goes to bed. Her father asks, "Where is Fernanda?" and is told she is sleeping (and, we presume, the reason for her tiredness). "My father went upstairs and kissed me."

All aspects of family life are discussed from weddings to divorces. One of the highlights of the book is a humorous account of a father waiting with his camera in the labour room. The bag of waters breaks. "Fifteen pounds of water all over the floor!" says the author with glee. "But my father didn't care. He kept taking pictures of the fathers picking up their feet with angry looks on their faces. He kept snapping pictures all the way to the delivery room. He sure didn't let those nurses get him out. He even took my birth picture."

Near the end of the anthology, we come to the *Racism* section. Introducing the topic, a writer rhetorically asks "Where does prejudice come from?" and proceeds to show us how it usually comes from the parents. In his case, "My mom isn't prejudice. My dad's prejudice with some people from other countries...he tries to pass it on to his kids...and it just keeps getting passed on." Another child from Jamaica is more intimately involved; he says he never knew words like "Dummy" and "that word" but soon finds out that it means "they're telling us that we're ugly and they're beautiful." An Indian child says simply, "I'd rather do the program (Crafts) on a reserve instead of in Toronto. On the reserve there are more Indians." Then, when we're about to give in to despair, we hear what, we hope, is the voice of the future in, "Black guys are the same as us except we're white and they're Black."

After reading this book, I believe it will be as difficult for you as it is for me to see a child from another culture without flashing back to *Come With Us*, which was, I am sure, one of the reasons for compiling this anthology.

What began in prose ends with a poem. The final selection sends us back to the world with a song:

*I like to be a singer because I like it.
I like to sing in Toronto,
I like to sing with passionate music.
I like to sing with an orchestra.*

— Nancy Prasad

SOME PERSPECTIVES ON CHILD ABUSE

Kathleen McDonnell

The past year and a half has seen an unprecedented wave of concern in Canada about the problem of "child abuse." Beginning with the highly sensationalized coverage of the death of infant Vicki Ellis in the summer of 1977, the Toronto media have carried an unremitting stream of stories on the subject. A variety of studies and task forces on child abuse have been undertaken both at the provincial and federal levels. And in 1978 the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services launched controversial investigations of two regional Children's Aid Societies for mismanagement of child abuse cases. The results of both investigations were harshly critical of the Societies in question. The designation of 1979 as International Year of the Child will undoubtedly feed into the growing sense of public outrage.

There is no doubt that the raising of this issue is in many ways a healthy development. It is high time we began to speak of the rights of children and put forever to rest the notion that they are the "property" of their parents and that physical punishment is an acceptable form of discipline. But what we need in order to bring about the true liberation of children is an understanding of their present situation, and of the *milieu* in which their "oppression" is apparently based — the family. Does the current discussion of child abuse, both in the popular media and in the professional social service journals, really contribute

to this understanding?

In large measure, the answer is no. The bitter fact is that the issue is being increasingly presented in a fashion which obscures rather than illuminates the causes of the problem. "Child abusers" have, in fact, taken their place — along with the postal workers, gays and Third-World immigrants — as the chief scapegoats of the current social and economic crisis. Many people genuinely feel that parents who abuse their children are part of a generalized wave of "selfishness" that is undermining the traditional, bedrock values of our society — hard work, self-sacrifice, and family cohesiveness. This attitude was encouraged, for instance, in the press coverage of the Vicki Ellis inquest, which carried headlines such as "She loves luxury but three children die in squalor," followed by a lurid description of the mother's makeup-strewn dressing table on the day of her infant daughter's death.

Posed in this way, the solution to the problem of child abuse then becomes, as it has in many other areas, a hard-line, rather simplistic one: increased pressure for early removal of children, for surveillance methods such as "risk scans" which would identify abuse-prone parents, and for outright sterilization of "bad" parents. There is less and less room for even the traditional liberal approach of social work, which aims at "rehabilitation" of the violent parent through some form of

psychotherapy. The social worker in the Vicki Ellis case, a woman with a supervisory position and a high reputation in the field, was castigated by the coroner, the media and many of her colleagues for chancing such a rehabilitative approach with the "hopeless" Mrs. Ellis. In the child abuse drama, the hard-liners are becoming the heroes, fearless champions of children's rights, while liberals are increasingly dismissed as bleeding hearts who are unwilling to take the tough measures demanded by the problem.

In fact, a particular theory of child abuse is gaining currency in social service institutions which fits comfortably with the shift away from the more liberal, "helping" model. It is the notion that child abuse is primarily caused by the early life experiences and resulting psychological make-up of the parent or parents. An abused child will almost inevitably grow up to be an abusing parent, so the argument goes. Only removal from the violent situation can prevent such children from repeating the cycle of abuse when they grow up. As a result, the thrust in child abuse prevention programmes is increasingly toward early identification of these "abuse-prone" personality types. This identification is made through psychological profiles obtained from medical records, interviews, psychological tests and personal observations of various professionals — physicians, nurses, social workers. These "risk scans" may take place in a variety of situations — when a woman comes in for a pre-natal checkup, for instance. The object of the scan may or may not know that she is being assessed in this way. A number of things may happen if the result of the scan indicates an abuse-prone personality. The parent may

simply be observed more carefully in the future, or receive counselling. The doctor or counsellor might press for sterilization, or for immediate removal of the subject's children.

Punitive and ominous as much of this sounds, in an important sense it is not a departure from the rehabilitative approach at all. In both, child abuse is seen not as a many-faceted social problem, but primarily as a disease requiring treatment. This approach, which has been called the "medical model," "locates the source of trouble as well as the place of treatment primarily in individuals ... making the etiology of the trouble impersonal (e.g. virulent bacteria or hormonal imbalance)."¹ An important feature of the medical model is the power it gives to the various professionals who deliver the services and administer the treatment. Another is the way it attempts to isolate a single cause for a phenomenon, allowing for a similar one-dimensional approach to "treating" or solving it. Most of our social services — social welfare agencies, correctional institutions — long ago adopted the medical model wholesale.

The medical model serves a particular ideological function in these interventions: it deflects attention from the possible social causes of the problem. If we perceive problems such as child abuse as defects in the basic structure of a relatively small collection of individual psyches, rather than as indicative of something wrong in the structure of society at large, we can clearly excuse ourselves from any sense of collective responsibility and from the obligation to make basic adjustments in the social structure. The "overmedicated housewife" syndrome is perhaps the most dramatic illustration

of this process. Until the advent of the women's movement, mood-modifying drugs were accepted uncritically as the "treatment of choice" for the sense of inadequacy and isolation felt by many women playing out their "normal" female roles.

A remarkable feature of the medical model, as with other liberal ideologies, is its flexibility, particularly in the area of costs. With child abuse, the rehabilitative model prevailed as long as governments were willing to spend large amounts of money on social services. The new hard-line approach, however, fits in nicely with the present effort to cut back spending in these areas. In fact, economic reasons are one of the major arguments put forward in favour of the new approach: "There is a small percentage of parents who cannot be helped and it is high time we recognized that fact and stopped spending money and valuable resources to preserve the family in such cases."² The Toronto media made much of the fact that "over \$2 million" in social services was spent on the Ellis family over the years.

None of this is to deny that many abusing parents are emotionally disturbed and in need of psychotherapy, nor that there are situations in which children must be removed from home for their own safety. But the weakness of the medical model is one it shares with Western medicine as a whole: it frequently aims at eradication of the symptom, rather than seeking to right the underlying organic imbalance that is causing the symptom in the first place. A programme to prevent child abuse can only work if it identifies the problem in all its complexity — as a social, economic and psychological phenomenon — and proposes solutions that confront the problem at all these

levels.

What would a more comprehensive view of child abuse entail? First, it would recognize the importance of economic stress in producing situations in which family violence is likely to occur. A few authorities, such as the American sociologist David Gil, have emphasized the role of factors such as poverty and unemployment, but they remain minority voices. Yet the fact is that most reported child abuse takes place among low-income groups — both because of the greater stress of coping with poverty, and because they are more likely to come to the attention of social service agencies. These people are all too familiar with the inadequacy of much of the assistance lent them by their social workers — e.g. instruction in better budget management, when the problem would clearly be better dealt with by increasing the family's income.

A comprehensive view of child abuse would also look critically at the nature of these social interventions. In practice, most social agencies encourage dependency in their clients, rather than helping them to develop mutual support systems and strategies so that they eventually won't need the agency. The assumption is that only the professionals, not ordinary people themselves, can solve their problems. The only self-help organization devoted to child abuse, Parents Anonymous, is eyed nervously by many professionals precisely because it questions this myth of the "expert" and encourages mutual support groups for abusing parents.

But the roots of the problem go deeper than poverty and the nature of social work. We must also look at the structure of the family itself and the demands placed upon it by the capitalist

system. According to the Marxist writer Eli Zaretsky, the family has taken on a new role with the rise of industrial capitalism, that of sole repository of personal and emotional life. Having lost its identity as a productive economic unit during the pre-capitalist period, the contemporary family is expected to bear the much less tangible burden of creating a haven from the alienating world of work, and fulfilling the emotional needs of its members. In addition, as the locus of "private" life, it is expected to do this in isolation from the larger community. Zaretsky concludes that the demands placed upon the family are, in the end, impossible to meet: "Under capitalism almost all of our personal needs are restricted to the family. This is what gives the family its resilience, in spite of the constant predictions of its demise, and this also explains its inner torment; it simply can't meet the pressure of being the only refuge in a brutal society."³

Furthermore, our society has greatly romanticized this function of the family, and it is too painful for most of us to admit the degree to which our actual experiences fall short of the fantasy. There is tremendous pressure upon us to present a happy, united face to the community, to "not wash our dirty linen in public." Yet it is this very extreme isolation that allows much physical and emotional violence to go on in the family. Family members are forced to put all their emotional eggs in one basket, much as women have long been expected to find their "all" in "a single man." Yet when pressures, both internal and external, build to the point where the cracks in the structure can no longer be ignored, family members have nowhere to turn but to one another to vent their frustrations and sense of

betrayal. Child abuse, and other forms of family violence, may be in a very real sense the explosion of the myth that the family is a happy one, that it can really meet the impossible expectations placed upon it.

The focus on child abuse as a medical problem that involves only a few "pathological" families soothes the fear that there might be anything wrong with the family itself. The current shift to the right, with its emphasis on strengthening the family and reasserting the traditional roles of mother, father and children, is in part a frightened response to the growing questioning of the family — whether it is truly a "natural" phenomenon, whether it is the only, or even the best, mechanism for raising children and meeting emotional needs. One of the chief targets of child abuse programmes is single mothers. They are generally assumed to be unfit parents, more because they depart from the normal two-parent nuclear family arrangement than because they lack the resource and support networks they need to care for their families properly. Gay people, who are also perceived as an implicit threat to the nuclear family, are another target in the campaign against sexual abuse of children, in spite of the fact that most sexual abuse is heterosexual in character and occurs *within* the family.

In the face of the conservative swing back to the traditional family, child welfare authorities are taking a public stance which at face value, appears to depart from that trend. They are increasingly heard to insist that the biological family is no longer sacrosanct, and that the rights of children must be paramount. However, this stance allows the authorities to move in and break up the dysfunctional families, generally

from low-income and minority groups, who are cracking under the strain and exposing the weaknesses in the system. The oppressive system itself persists, unabated and unquestioned. This is another example of the astonishing adaptability of liberal ideology — the family is simultaneously sacred and not sacred.

What concrete strategies can we propose to combat child abuse and other forms of family violence? One is indisputably to oppose the cutbacks in social services. Inadequate and paternalistic though some of these services are, they constitute important outlets and support networks (in many cases the only ones) for individuals and families who are under the greatest economic and social stress. It is ludicrous for a government to declare on the one hand its overriding commitment to child welfare and safety, and on the other that such support services for families as day care, drop-ins, emergency hostels, community centres, counselling and job retraining courses are expendable commodities. We must put an end to the notion that social services are frills to be expanded in flush times and cut to the bone in leaner ones.

As well, we must work to change the nature of social service institutions so that they assist people in realizing their own power rather than accommodating them to their powerlessness. What we have now are institutions that, on the whole, reinforce the prevailing ideologies — that the family is the only natural human social unit, that poor people must pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. What we need are services that give real support to people and families, but not necessarily “the family” to the exclusion of other kinds of social bonds people choose to form. We need services that

reject a “blame the victim” attitude and that view people’s problems in their totality.

Finally, we need to continue developing a new perspective on children. The concept of “children’s rights,” though it is often used in a divisive way by government and social service professionals to pit the interests of children against their parents, is nevertheless an important one. We are only beginning to understand how to meet the special needs of children to be nurtured and respected. We need to alter our concepts in a way that neither sentimentalizes nor exploits their vulnerability and dependency on us. Perhaps we should start by listening more to the children around us, and to the child within each one of us.

NOTES

¹ Irving Kenneth Zola, “In the Name of Health and Illness: On Some Socio-Political Consequences of Medical Influence,” *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (February, 1975), 85.

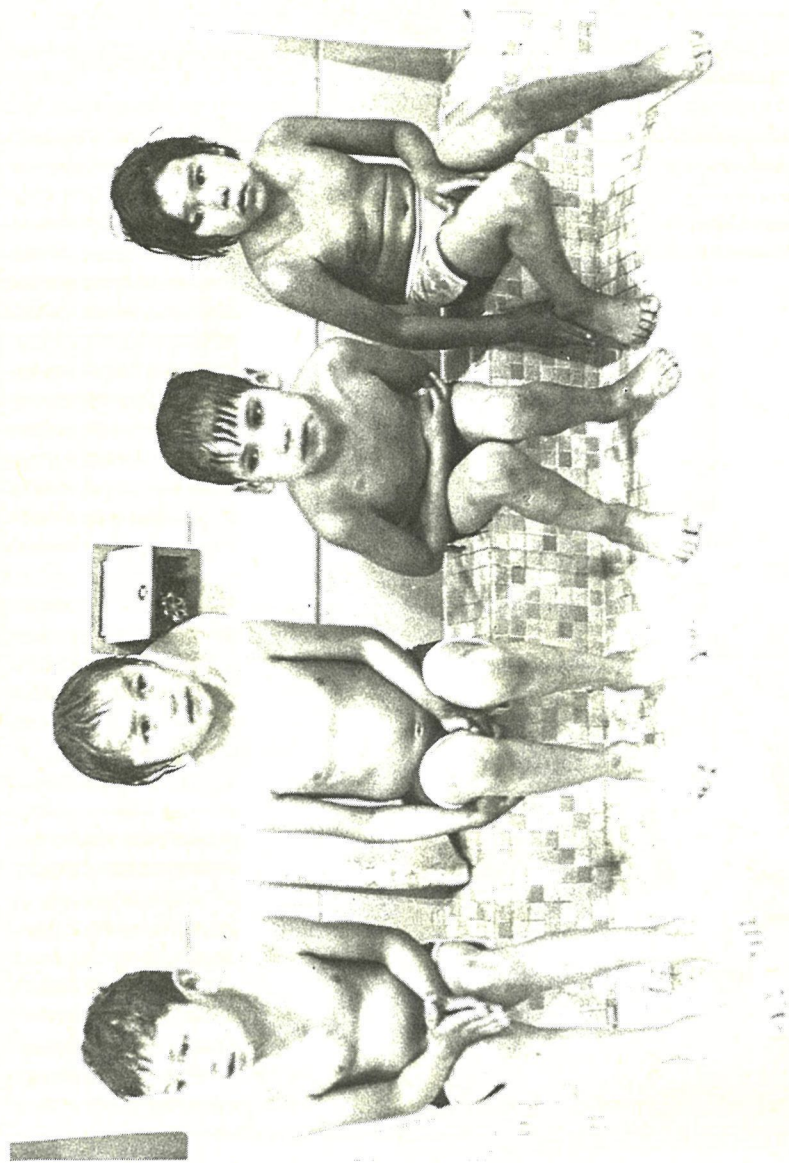
² Elie Cass, M.D., “Children At Risk,” *The Canadian Magazine* (April 1, 1978), 8.

³ Eli Zaretsky, *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), pp.140-41.

IMAGES OF CHILDREN



Gail Kenney



Arlene Moscovitch



Arlene Moscovitch



Annette Clough



Gail Kenney



Laura Jones

UNDERSTANDING WOMEN'S PSYCHOTROPIC DRUG USE

Ruth Cooperstock

In its original form, this paper was presented in the symposium "The Woman Patient," Canadian Psychiatric Association, annual meeting, Saskatoon, September 29, 1977. In the present version, references have been omitted for ease of reading, but full documentation is available from the author at the Addiction Research Foundation, 33 Russell Street, Toronto, M5S 2S1. The author notes that, as used here, the term 'psychotropic' refers to those central nervous system drugs intended to affect mood. These are primarily tranquilizers and sleeping medications, antidepressants and some stimulant drugs. The tranquilizers and sleeping medications together make up more than 80% of all psychotropics.

A recent issue of the *Guardian* contained an article about a women's writing class in London, England in which the members read extracts of their work for criticism. One person in the group narrated a scene in which a young woman went to her doctor to complain of a stomach ache:

"The doctor in her story was uncomprehending and unsympathetic. He saw the girl as one of a long list of women who came to him perpetually with complaints he didn't understand — headaches, sleeplessness, etc.

"He asked the girl trite questions such as, 'Have you got a boyfriend?' and 'Are you happy?' The girl replied that, far from being unhappy, she couldn't stop laughing all the time, at the absurdity of life... The doctor merely gave her some tranquilizers and sent her away."

This excerpt from the popular press illustrates findings of epidemiologists

and medical sociologists regarding women and psychotropic drug use: women often define their symptoms poorly; physicians tend to think of these symptoms as "trivia" and find such vague symptoms frustrating and uninteresting. Such encounters result in a prescription, one per physician visit on average, and the vague complaint makes it likely that the prescribed medication will be equally non-specific, i.e. a tranquilizer.

Consumption Patterns in Canada

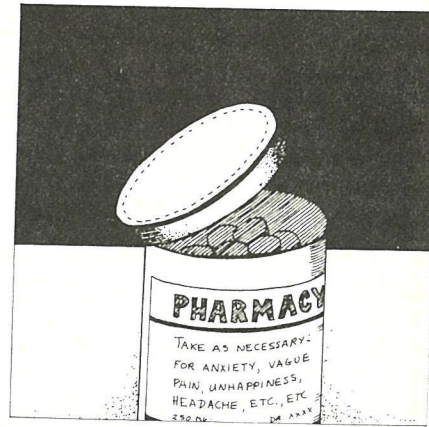
It has been consistently demonstrated that females receive more prescriptions of all drugs than males; the Saskatchewan Department of Health, for example, reported 62.9 per cent for females and 37.9 per cent for males. The difference in the proportions of psychotropics dispensed is, in all studies examined, greater than that in all other drug classes. Between 67 and 72 per cent of psychotropics go to women.

Table 1 presents data on consumption patterns in Canada from 1970 to 1977. The ratios of male to female use are more consistent between studies than the total quantities reported consumed by either sex. The variations in the amounts reported may well be an artifact of the different methods employed, including prescription studies, mail questionnaires, personal interviews; and regional differences in consumption. The time period asked about also affected results. It is generally agreed that asking about consumption over periods longer than two weeks leads to memory problems and hence to underreporting.

For tranquilizer drugs in particular there is a consistency in the findings. The Etobicoke Committee and Guse *et al.* asked the most detailed questions and report the highest consumption. In Winnipeg, 20 per cent of the women reported use in the previous two weeks, while in Etobicoke, 15 per cent of a sample of adult women claimed they had used a tranquilizer in the previous two days.

The Gallup data, in which people were asked their use over three time periods, supports the findings of other studies, that while more women reported use of these drugs in a one or two day period, the difference in consumption between men and women widens the longer the period studied. A study of a Southern Ontario insurance plan found that more females than males received multiple tranquilizer prescriptions during the year. More than twice the number of females as males received ten or more prescriptions, indicating steady use, while only slightly more females than males (6.3 per cent versus 4.5 per cent) received only one prescription over the year studied. Skegg *et al.*, in a similar

study in the United Kingdom, report the same phenomena.



Characteristics of Consumers

Since a very small proportion of consumers of psychotropic drugs obtain them illegally, the most obvious characteristic of consumers of these drugs is that they consult physicians. This helps identify psychotropic drug users in a crude fashion, although the difference in physician visits between the sexes does not account for all of the excess prescribing to women.

A number of studies have examined the age at which men and women are prescribed psychotropics. Typically, male consumption rises steadily with increasing age, reaching its highest point in middle years or in the oldest age group. Although some surveys of psychotropic drug use found peak use of minor tranquilizers among young women in the United States, most studies have found peak use in the middle years. When sedatives and hypnotics are combined with minor tranquilizers the peak age tends to rise. In one of the few recent large-scale studies of prescriptions which examined

age and type of psychotropic drug, the highest frequency of use of antidepressant medications among males was in those over 75 years (7.2 per cent), while the peak age among females was 45-59 (11.2 per cent).

Because of the limitations of the existing data base, especially because of differences in linking prescription data to other demographic information, there are no clear links between psychotropic drug use and marital status, economic status or class.

One variable, that of work status, remains consistent in its relationship with psychotropic drug use among members of both sexes. Those who are retired, unemployed, or not in the labour force, are the highest consumers of psychotropic drugs. These findings need careful examination since they could be largely due to age. Guse *et al.*, however, found that at each age level, women who worked outside their homes reported lower psychotropic drug use than those who did not. They even found a significant relationship between the amount of time spent in working outside the home and drug use: 11 per cent of those in full-time jobs, 19 per cent of those with part-time jobs, and 25 per cent of those at home full-time, reported use in the previous two weeks.

The same study asked about social activities outside the home such as club participation, sports, and visits to friends. Relating this "activity level" to psychotropic drug use, it was found that as activity decreases psychotropic drug use increases.

A possible intervening variable between work status, activity level and drug use is general health. Again holding age constant, Guse *et al.* found that use of psychotropics increased as the women's subjective health rating

became more negative. The Etobicoke study also found higher use among those reporting a poorer health rating.

These data do not distinguish between actual illness and perceptions of illness, in relation to drug use. Two studies did examine drug use and diagnosed illness, but because their methods differed the evidence is inconclusive.

Twenty per cent of patients entering medical and surgical wards in Boston hospitals reported use of a psychotropic drug in the previous three months, with differences between diagnostic groups. The highest frequency of use was among those with neurological disorders (30 per cent), ischemic heart disease (27 per cent) and musculoskeletal disorders (25 per cent). The male-female differences were still striking, with 25 per cent of women and 15 per cent of men reporting use.

Pflanz *et al.*, in a study of 50-year-olds in Hanover, Germany, assessed the medical status of their sample and found no differences between users and non-users of psychotropics in the prevalence of hypertension, rheumatic diseases, angina, dyspnea and chronic bronchitis. Among males only, there was a difference in the prevalence of peptic ulcer. There were, however, differences between users and non-users in indices of health-related behaviour. Users were significantly more likely to have visited a physician in the previous two months, to be concerned about their weight (males only), and to report their health as poor.

To summarize our findings to date:

1. Females receive more prescriptions than males in all classes of drugs, but the greatest difference is in psychotropics.
2. Females are more likely than males to be frequent and steady users of

psychotropics.

3. Frequency of use increases with age in both sexes, though the peak use of minor tranquilizers for women is in the middle years.
4. Use is highly correlated with work status in both sexes.
5. Use is also highly correlated with use of physician services (though this factor alone cannot explain the excess prescriptions to women).
6. Use is related to subjective ratings of poor health, but not necessarily to actual ill-health.

Help-Seeking Behaviour

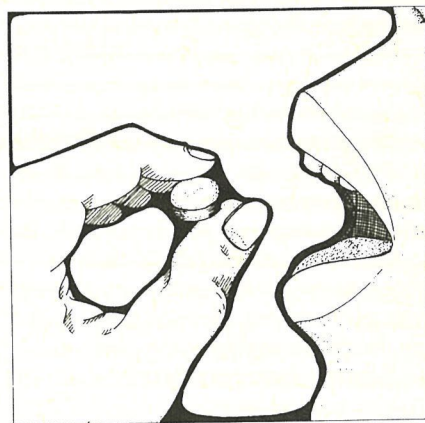
To date there is little conclusive evidence that any major biological differences between the sexes explains these findings; thus we must postulate other explanations. One factor is the difference in reporting of symptoms by men and women. Women consistently report more distress, anxiety and depression than men. Whether this greater awareness stems from role strains in contemporary western society or from the greater cultural freedom of expression given to females, one must still ask about the translation of this greater awareness into help-seeking behaviour. Our concern is primarily with the use of health services, but it is important to examine the whole range of help-seeking.

Horwitz, in a recent study of psychiatric patients in a community mental health facility, tested two hypotheses: that women would be more likely than men to recognize the existence of their problems; and that before seeking psychiatric help, women would be more likely to look to members of their intimate networks. In this

respect, 44 per cent of men reported themselves friendless, but only 14 per cent of women. Men discussed their problems with only one person outside their nuclear family, on average, while women spoke to 4.5 such people. Men typically reported speaking only to their spouse, while women spoke to husbands and other family members, friends, and workmates. While both sexes were equally likely to attend a physician for help, women consulted clergymen, marriage counselors and other social agencies more than men, as has been shown elsewhere. This study found that women accept the self-label of psychiatric illness, that having spoken to more intimates about their problem they enter treatment more willingly, and that they accept the role of patient more readily than men, who are more typically coerced into treatment.

Paths to the Health Care System

Ideally, one should do a prospective study of the help-seeking behaviour of a large population to examine the development of awareness of distress, the number and types of people



approached for help, and how these are related to the use of physician services. As the above study has the limitation of using a population already in the health care system, the sexes are similar in their use of physician services.

Coleman and Patrick studied attendance at a prepaid primary care facility and found that patients with "chronic emotional problems" (85 per cent of whom were said to be neurotic or suffering situational disorders) made over four times the number of visits as did patients without emotional disorders. A group with non-chronic emotional problems made three times the number of visits as those without emotional complaints. In both groups with emotional problems, the number of prescriptions corresponded with the number of visits.

Also relevant to help-seeking behaviour and attendance at physicians' offices, and lending further support to the socio-cultural explanation of excess female psychotropic use, is the finding that the more severe the symptoms or the more problems reported, the fewer socio-cultural or sex differences appear, though they continue to exist. Again, analyses of sex differences in psychiatric diagnoses show gross sex differences in the least serious and most poorly defined diagnoses: neurosis, and psychosomatic illness.

At all ages, females attend physicians' offices more than males. Increasing age, work status and the existence of chronic illness predispose to more frequent visits. This parallels our findings on drug use. But after entering the health care system, are there differences between the sexes in requests for psychotropic drugs and, more important, do men and women presenting with the same symptoms receive the same number of

these drugs?

There has been little documentation for the common clinical impression that females request drugs more often than males. Winstead *et al.* studied the drug-seeking behaviour of psychiatric inpatients by offering diazepam on demand up to four times daily over six months. Women sought and used more drugs than males. Interestingly, high demand correlated significantly with a patient's self-rating of anxiety but not with the diagnosis. Particularly relevant was the finding that patients requested tranquilizers on average only every three days in contrast to the typical physicians' pattern of prescribing daily use. The crucial question is whether physicians prescribe differently to males and females with the same symptoms or complaints. Of two recent studies, one examined tranquilizer prescribing in a family practice setting in a teaching hospital, and the other studied major tranquilizers dispensed in a long term care facility for the elderly. The latter study found more women than men defined by the staff as anxious, but with the anxiety level held constant significantly more women than men were dispensed drugs.

Since almost 70 per cent of tranquilizer prescriptions in Canada are written by general practitioners, it seems appropriate to examine prescribing patterns in a family practice clinic. All patients with the following complaints were included in the study: 1. unhappy, crying, depressed, 2. nervous, and 3. worried, restless and tense. At first contact, no differences existed between sexes in the proportion counselled or receiving a drug other than a minor tranquilizer; however, the latter were more often prescribed to females. Males received slightly more physical therapies

and laboratory tests. Six months later, investigators found that the prescribing differential to these same patients had

increased. Prescriptions for tranquilizers increased in proportion to total female visits, but this was not so for male visits.

Conclusions

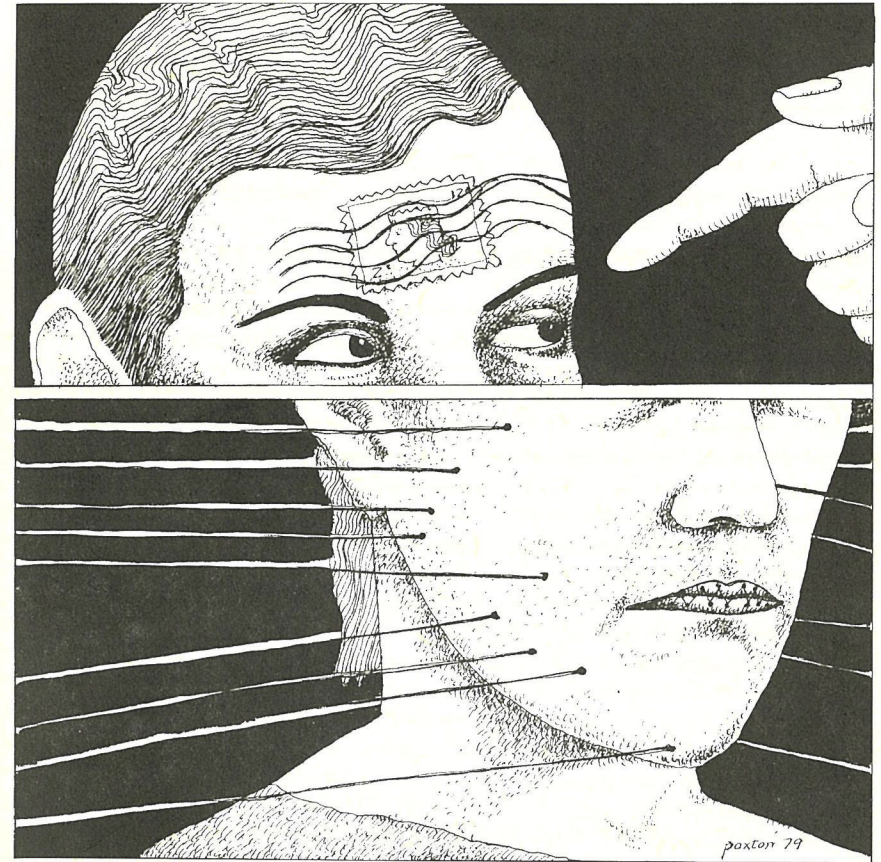
Women are more willing to discuss their problems with their network of intimates, to attend physicians because of these problems and to request drugs.

At the same time the situation seems to be compounded by the fact that physicians are more likely to offer tranquilizers to women than to men presenting with the same complaints.

TABLE 1

CANADIAN DATA (1970-1977) ON SEX DIFFERENCES IN PSYCHOTROPIC DRUG USE

AUTHOR PLACE	TIME DATE FRAME	SEDATIVES %			TRANQUILIZERS %			SED.'S & TRANQ.'S	ALL PSYCH. DRUGS
		TOTAL	M	F	TOTAL	M	F		
Chaiton <i>et al.</i> Small Ontario Community	1971 0-2 days							use 2.2 more freq. among F. than M.	
Etobicoke Committee Etobicoke, Ontario	1977 0-2 days						15.0		
Gallup/N.M.U.D.D. National Sample	0-2 days	2.1	1.3	3.0	3.9	3.2	4.6		
	0-14 days	2.9	1.7	4.2	5.7	4.7	7.2		
	1977 0-2 mons.	3.5	1.9	5.2	7.2	5.2	9.2		
Guse <i>et al.</i> Winnipeg	1976 0-14 days						20.0		
Fejer and Smart Metro Toronto	1972 past year				12.7	7.2	16.3		
Smart and Goodstat Ontario	1976 past year	8.6	8.1	11.1	13.7	8.2	19.3		
Cooperstock, Greenshield Ontario	1973/4 1 year		4.9	7.1		9.0	15.3		
Guse <i>et al.</i> Winnipeg	1975 1 year		31.0	69.0		28.0	72.0		ratio of 2.32:1



NIGHT

Margot Livesey

"I thought you'd like to know," he said.

That was the first night I went for a walk. I used to know everything, every gate, every path, where there were holes in the hedges, which trees I could climb in seconds, but it's changed. The houses have come closer, gathering all around as if they spring from seeds; and the path I followed led me into someone's back garden. I stopped just in time; against the lighted windows of the house I saw a man and a woman sitting on a bench and the glowing prongs of their cigarettes. Further along I saw a man who looked as if he were roaring but there was no sound. All the other houses were dark. Occasionally I heard cats and the rustling continual noise of night.

The world has a way of letting you know things you'd rather it kept secret and then the things that you need to know, that your very life depends on, they'll be hidden away with not even a sign to let you know of their existence.

At night and in the early morning I'm not afraid, I feel I belong. Things are different than during the day. I used to go out during the day but not anymore. It is too noticeable, all the bright business. I came to a bridge over the river and sat down. In my pocket I pricked my hand as I felt for the scissors, was that bad luck? Like being given a knife, or breaking a mirror, or spilling salt? Yes, spilling blood was like spilling salt. Perhaps if I let some fall in the river that would do. While I wriggled off my sandal I kept my hand held out over the water. Then I began to cut the toenails of my left foot so that the clippings would fall into the water below. Perhaps it's stupid, all those old stories about hair and toenails and photographs. The body's clippings have nothing to do with it but there's no harm in being careful. I feel safer giving these things to the river.

He doesn't know I go out every night now. After he has his tea he starts yawning his head off and I yawn a bit too, to encourage him. Jesus how I hate his slippers, the fawn socks peeping through the red and black. Then he'll pat me and say, "I think it's time you were off to bed," and off I'll go. I lie there for a time floating in the darkness, I don't know how long. I try to imagine my body and the room and somewhere above a ceiling and then a floor and then a bed and then him, floating in the darkness. I would be afraid of falling to sleep so high up, but he's not afraid of anything.

In the morning the first sound I hear is the snap of the locked door, then I'm safe.

I was cutting my toenails when I heard a sound which a moment later I realised was a zip being opened and the sound of water so I knew what he was doing. I felt sure that he wouldn't be able to see me, not if I relaxed into the darkness. I closed my eyes and sat very still. A hand grasped the top of my head, I felt the warmth of the palm.

"Why did you stop?"

"I always stop here."

Would he be one of them? First one thing and then another.

"Tonight it's so dark, no moon, no stars to pain us with their light. When it's this dark one doesn't have to be afraid. It's safe. If there's a god I'm sure he's a god of darkness, light is satanic not divine, you only have to look at what it reveals to know that."

I was silent but it didn't seem to matter. Afterwards I thought more about being free to come and go as I chose. I could live in the house very quietly with no pot-plants, no cat, nothing to deceive the peace. This pattern Henry's made of my life makes me feel like an animal in a cage, everything seen through an orderly mesh, square by square.

Henry comes home. He brings a newspaper, a cabbage, a loaf of bread, a packet of bacon. I hate the food he chooses, there must be other kinds of food. The cabbage is so proper and organised, the bacon damp, tender and horribly vulnerable, the bread crumbles under the knife. He cooks. From time to time he says, "I must teach you to cook. This is ridiculous. I work all day I shouldn't have to come home and work." I'm glad it never comes to anything, I don't think I could bear it. It's bad enough to have to sit and watch him sliding the sharp steel into everything, nothing

must be left whole.

As he cooks he talks. I think really that is why he keeps me, to listen.

"I arrived a little early this morning just a few minutes but it was pleasant. It meant I had time to polish the glass, the cleaner never does it properly. I used windolene and a duster, a new one so that it wouldn't just smear fluff everywhere. It's very important that the glass should be clean, very. When the others arrive and see me polishing they start to make jokes. Stupid jokes. Louise and Paul and Alan. The new girl, Judy, is still very quiet, thank goodness. She doesn't encourage those awful jokes about bachelors." He translated the last word for me, I forget words like that. I forget what they're for.

"The glass shone. Sometimes you see people stand too close. They think I won't notice them or won't hear them. Then they stand too close and they huff and puff on the glass."

He wipes the table and puts the bacon in the frying pan, the cabbage in the saucepan. It is always like this, a long saga of stamps and pensions, (he makes himself seem very powerful), all these people depend on him to get money or send letters, and he's the only one who knows everything, how much it costs to send a letter to China or a pot of jam to St. Louis. Then when he's finished telling everything he asks what I did today. If I say nothing or I don't remember, then he seems upset so now I always say that I cleaned the kitchen and did some gardening and washing and watched T.V. although I never do any of those things. Henry asks whether the kitchen was dirty and what I watched on television. We make up little conversations. I begin by toying with the food until he says, why aren't you eating, there's nothing wrong with this food, so then I eat everything and he praises me.

Once a month there is something different. Henry goes to the doctor and gets pills for me. It used to be harder before but now they're in a sort of skin, black and red and shiny, like small fierce animals. It used to frighten me to put them in my mouth but now I don't mind, they are my allies. I have learned to hoard them, each night I cut them open and pour the powder into Henry's cup.

It is my night-time friend who exposes me. I begin to know the way he walks and talks. He talks without questions or pauses and his silence is like a river. I feel safe; there will be no questions, no stones, no walls, no broken glass. If there is moonlight he shows me flowers. I am sad if he does not come to the bridge.

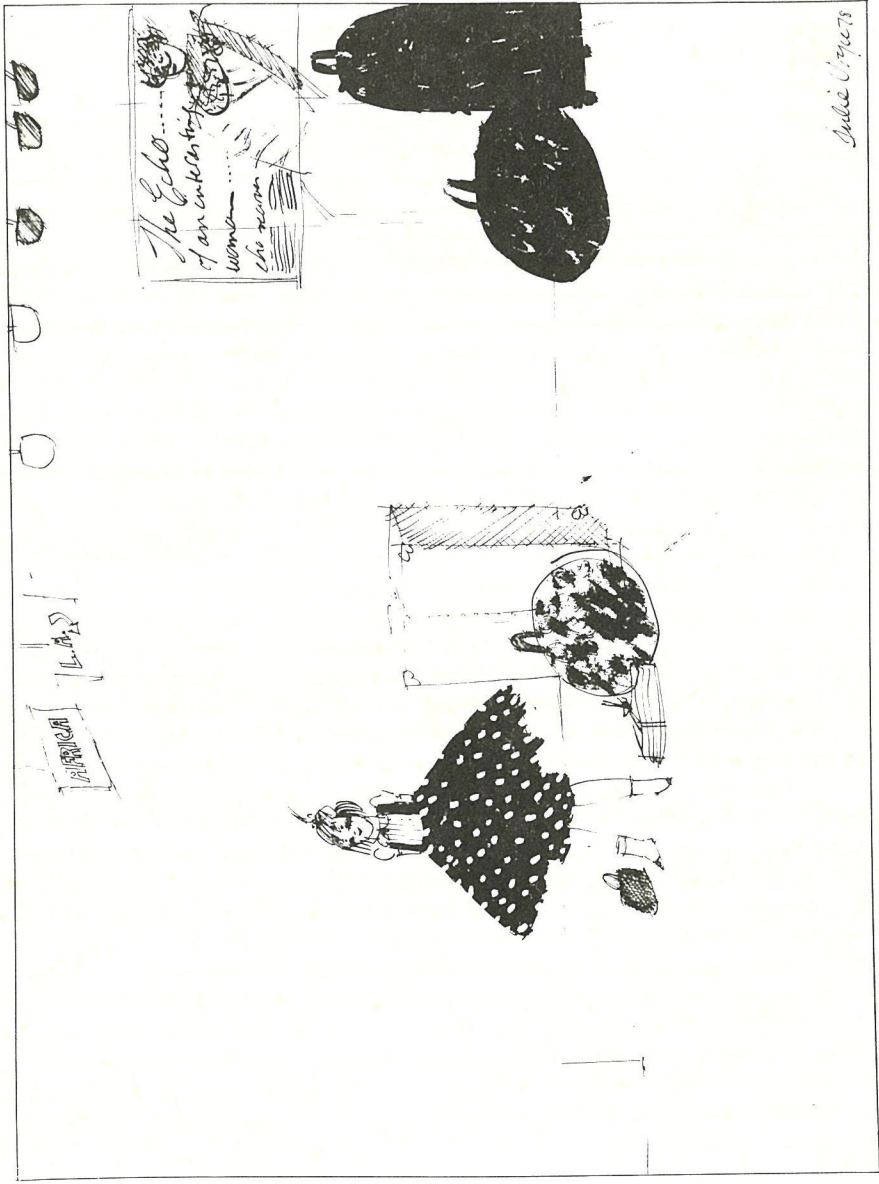
One night Henry steps from behind my door. "Bitch," he says. "Where have you been bitch? Oh, you're so fine and silent. What do you suppose it means? Where have you been?"

"A walk. I couldn't sleep. I had to get out, it was so tight." I know at once that this is the worst thing to say, he'll remember. He grabs my arm and wheels me towards the cupboard. I struggle and plead, then he shoves me in and the darkness assaults me. It is utterly different from the outside dark where there is space and air. I try to slump down and relax in the space available but I can't and I feel I must not give an inch to the darkness or it will drown in me, fly into my mouth. That's what happened to Miranda, she was drowned in all the darkness Henry made me eat.

The voice starts, softer than his voice.

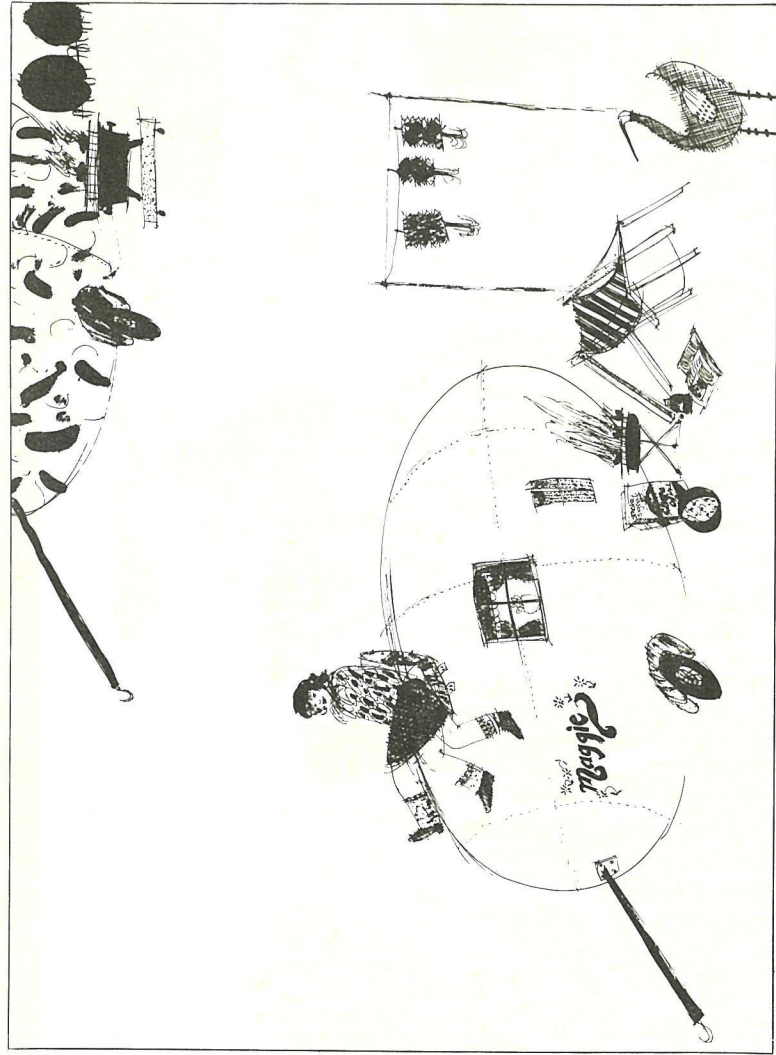
"Where did you go? Did you meet anyone?"

I can't speak. I am terrified of opening my mouth.

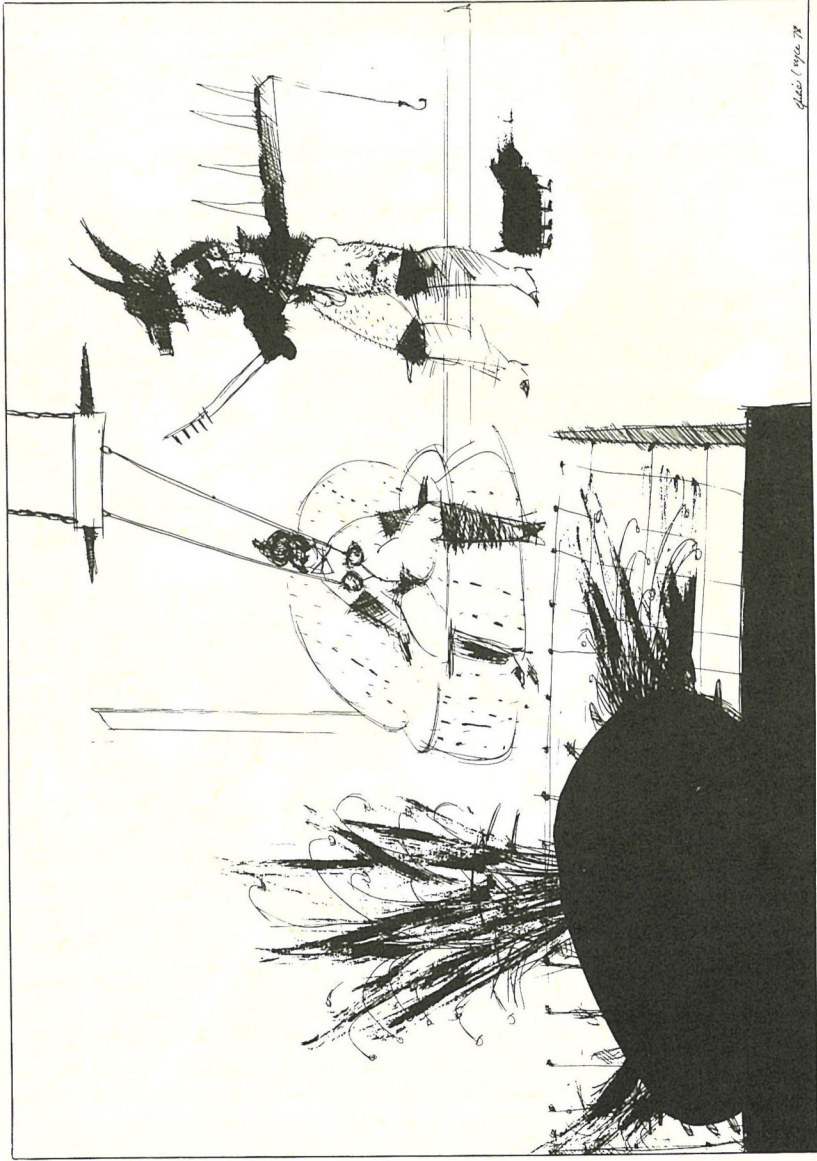


Julie Voyce '78

Ink on paper by Julie Voyce



Ink on paper by Julie Voyce



Ink on paper by Julie Voyce



Ink on paper by Julie Voyce

BRIEF NOTES ON WOMEN AND THE POLITICAL PROCESS

Kathryn Jordan

No statement of enlightened policy by Government — no pious declaration of principle will, by itself, make legislation an instrument for positive change.... The instrument for that kind of change can only come from the political arena...

Grace Hartman, President of CUPE, concluded her keynote address to "The Economic Facts of Life," an NDP women's conference, with the above words, encouraging women to seek solutions for our economic problems through political activity.

Women are among the first to suffer the impact of economic hardship. As part-time and non-unionized workers, women are particularly vulnerable to lay-offs. Government cut-backs often affect clerical staff — who are predominantly women — first.

The attitude that women are "secondary wage earners" who, because they are greedy, shamelessly take jobs away from men, contributes to a higher unemployment rate for women at the best of times. Socialization, isolation in the home, and a narrow range of career choices create special problems for women who want to work. Women are not favoured for Canada Manpower retraining programs because of the alleged discriminatory politics of Manpower employment officers.

Women comprise only 4% of management level employees. Women earn an average of 58% of what men do. The list of economic grievances goes on, lengthened by personal horror stories.

The question is, how can we, as women, take the kind of political initiative Grace Hartman spoke of?

The Women's Movement has a history as a lobbying group. It has attempted to educate women about social injustice and suggest alternatives. It has urged governments to institute special programs for women to meet specific needs.

However, I think it is fair to say that women have not emerged as a political force in Canada. Look at Employment Minister Bud Cullen's decision to cut back on funding for the Outreach Projects aimed directly at women, programs like the Rape Crisis Centre, Times Change Employment agency, and the Women's Counselling, Referral and Education Centre.

If women had a powerful voice, no Minister would knowingly alienate such a large element of the electorate, particularly in an election year.

In order to accomplish political change within the present political structure women must become involved both as party members and candidates. The goal is

not to introduce "women's legislation" alone, as important as that may be: we also need to establish ourselves as concerned, intelligent and articulate leaders.

Women often lack the necessary confidence to become candidates for public office. Even women who have an intimate knowledge of the political process on an administrative level balk at the thought of being in the spotlight. And, because there are still so few women politicians, women in public roles are noticed. This gives them the advantage of an attentive press (even though it may not be entirely sympathetic), but also denies them anonymity when they make those inevitable initial mistakes.

The demands of time, travel and commitment impose a conflict between family and career for elected representatives. This choice, which is difficult enough for men, is even more difficult for a woman if she is a mother or a wife. However much we may deplore the limitations of traditional roles, family commitments do enter into the decision of a woman who is considering running for public office.

The third major deterrent is rooted in the democratic process itself. Candidates are chosen at the party level by a majority vote of party members. The support of party workers is crucial in a successful campaign, not simply in gaining a nomination but also in the election battle. Canvassers and fundraisers are the bread and butter of a campaign. When a party has a fighting chance of winning a seat in a riding, there is usually competition for the party-endorsed candidacy. Men seek nominations too. The male party members who still think that a woman's place is in the home or at the office, but not on the hustings or in the legislature, elect a "leader of men."

When the nomination is uncontested, it is often a "lost" riding, one which the party has an extremely slim chance of winning. Women are learning to resist the "sacrificial lamb" role. No one wants to fight the same losing battle twice.

Women have a role to play within the party structure in strategy development and election planning. Women should take leadership positions in decision making, as Presidents of Riding Associations, instead of as Secretaries. My point is not to minimize the importance of support roles, but to urge women not to be self-limiting.

The entire matter of women in politics can be simplified to express the feminist ideal of women supporting women. Women as members of a political party can support women candidates who can fight for legislation which will benefit Canadian women. If any politician could count on the women's vote, that candidate need never be defeated.

Change begins with attitudes, but it is enforced by legislation. Only when women start to claim an active part in the political process of the country, will feminist reforms be reflected in the laws of the land.

my little town

Gwen Hauser

in my little town
we vote NDPee;
we are all into
Kommunity Organizing;
we spend all our time
solving The World's Problems
eat health-food
& live in
Middle-Klass Ko-ops;
we have the last word on
Urban Planning
which freeway should not
be built where
multiculturalism
zoning laws
etcetera
but some of us
still drag ourselves out
to work in factories
for \$3.00 an hour;
we have our drunks
& our starving poor
(usually kicked out
of wherever we are
or left to have the decency
to starve
quietly
(somewhere else please))
and yes we have
our mental patients, too...

in my little town
the air is very clean
& it's always forgetting about
the outskirts where the factories are...

still i can't complain
it's a good
neighbourhood
(if you can get past
the hookers
& all the cops)
not like lower Jarvis
nosirree
my little town
is the place to be

there are heaps of sparrows
& they sing
a good song
but something's always left out
in my little town...

the botticelli maiden

(poem for M. Atwood, based on a picture by Graeme Gibson)

Gwen Hauser

there has always been
something strange
about the botticelli
maiden;
look at her
long enough
& she might be
botticelli's venus
rising on
the half-shell
but then
look again
there is something strange
about the botticelli
venus, it is
the coldness
of the left eye, (not exactly suited
to the gal
on the half-shell)
& the well-developed
candour & innocence
of the right eye
(but look long enough
& the left
looks more innocent
actually)

there has always been
something strange
about the botticelli
maiden (called by some people
the ice-
maiden)

the right/left split
of everybody's

face
is here
as in most
case
es; the sun in
scorpio, moon
in taurus, the mars
-venus
combination
that always
jars
by it's incomplete
synthesis
of opposites

there has always been
something strange
about the eyes:
the iciness
like the ice-crown
of the Empress
in the tarot-deck
but look again
& the face is
innocent
(filled with
childlike
truthfulness
& candour).
Or it is the face
of a North American
Indian
about to attack.



Illustration by Lynne Fernie

dinasauers

Gwen Hauser

i dreamed
that we were
being chast
by dinasauers
& that i wuz
in luv with yu —
then we wur
hiding
in a littul
house

& dinasauers
kept poking
their hedds
in th front
nd the bak
door — i'd just
chop off
the hedd of whun
wen
sure enuf
there wuz
anuthur
at th
bak dore.
(what do yu think
the dinasauers meant?)

REVIEW SECTION

FILM

An Unmarried Woman

Starring Jill Clayburgh

Written and Directed by Paul Mazursky

In one of the earlier scenes in *An Unmarried Woman*, Erica Benton (Jill Clayburgh), in one of her weekly "meetings" with her triumvirate of close friends and supporters, Elaine (Kelly Bishop, Sue (Pat Quinn) and Jeanette (Linda Miller), bemoans the fact that so few movies today revolve around women. They cite the best of the 30's and 40's — Greta Garbo, Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, Jean Arthur and Katherine Hepburn (a list which leaves out many others) — and wonder, now that they have feminism, where are the great women stars?

In fact, it is this dearth of movies about real women which prompted director Paul Mazursky to write this somewhat controversial film. We saw a few good films last year (*Annie Hall* and *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* with Keaton, *The Turning Point* with MacLaine and Bancroft, and *Julia* with Fonda and Redgrave), but these few hardly depict the realities of life for most women in today's world. Women are fighting to gain equal status in a male-dominated world; perhaps Hollywood is afraid to show our accomplishments and many potential strengths for fear of undermining the all-too-important male ego.

Mazursky evidently has no such fear. He chose the little-known Clayburgh for the main role because to him, the importance of the part must not be diminished by star glamour. He could not have been disappointed, for although Clayburgh showed moderate ability in *Silver Streak* with Gene Wilder, she handles the role of Erica Benton with great aplomb and clarity of understanding of her sex and the realities of a harsh society, as Mazursky handles the subject with wit, sensitivity and compassion.

Erica Benton is a happily-married woman with an attentive husband Martin (Michael Murphy), a good sex-life, and almost too-good-to-be-true rapport with her 15-year-old daughter Patty (Linda Lucas). The movie begins with her happily dancing to Swan Lake around her expensive New York apartment, after morning sex with Martin, then it moves into the job she enjoys at an art gallery ("I studied art, but I never painted"), and finally her meeting with her friends. They are like a small C-R group, supportive of each other, but critical as well. Erica is envied for her problem-free life. Then, after sex that night, and lunch with Martin the next day, the bombshell is dropped. Martin has been in love with a younger woman for a year and is leaving her. Erica does not cry or even let off much steam, but walks away with her mouth hanging open. The audience is equally stunned, and when she vomits at the

street corner, still in shock, we can feel the constriction in our gut, too.

Contradictory advice from her friends says she should get rid of the bastard (Elaine hopes he “gets a permanent case of the clap and his pecker falls off”), or wait and let him come back (from the compromising Sue). But after 16 years of marriage, a solution is hardly simple or glibly prescribable. Daughter Patty first hates her father and her boyfriend, so Erica must deal with her trauma as well as her own.

Erica at first cannot cope. Her doctor suggests a drink with him and she calls it a “definite fucking pass!” In fact, her paranoia that all men show interest now she is ‘available,’ are interested only in sex, is not unfounded. She is attacked in the back seat of a cab on a blind date, and an artist Charlie (Cliff Gorman) continues to proposition her. Her feelings that they are insensitive are more understandable considering that Martin, evidently a man with some sensitivity, broke down and cried when he confessed.

She sees a woman therapist, Tanya Brickell (played by a real therapist, Pamela Russianoff) and voices her fears and joys about menstruation, her guilt, and her horror of getting back into the mainstream of life, especially with men. Most women viewers can identify easily.

This she does wilfully by finally taking up the persistent Charlie for a one-night stand, which she finds less than satisfactory. Then she meets an artist, Saul Kaplan (Alan Bates), who loves her because she is a “bright, wilful, courageous woman, who is also a sex object.” He admits that she is driving him crazy by refusing to go to his summer place in Vermont with him. She has already definitely refused to take back the now-rejected Martin, and knows she cannot take an easy way out. Still the final scene makes a symbolic statement about her newly-gained ability to cope independently and love again.

An Unmarried Woman is the portrait of a marriage break-up with all of the emotional and practical problems it entails; even more it is a portrait of a woman who finally takes her life into her own hands and copes, albeit with help from friends, therapist and lover. Jill Clayburgh is totally believable in the role, thus confirming Mazursky’s choice. Expect award nominations for both and pray that a trend of films which deal sensitively and realistically with today’s woman is on the uprise.

— Karen Lynne-Henderson

THEATRE

Dusa, Fish, Stas & Vi

Written by Pam Gems

Directed by Pam Brighton

Recently it has been fashionable to talk about two women in the theatre. That these women are both ‘older,’ British and obviously talented is really not the point: other women in Canadian theatre meet this description. It is that these two, playwright

Pam Gems and director Pam Brighton, have joined forces to exploit that new art: *commercial feminism*. *Dusa, Fish, Stas & Vi* opened at Theatre Plus in Toronto’s St. Lawrence Centre on September 13, 1978 and immediately elicited an enthusiastic audience response — and the expected cry from Theatre Plus management about the lack of a transfer house for ‘Canadian Hits.’ The play has been produced EVERYWHERE, and has been hailed as the beginning of the long-hoped-for-renaissance of women’s expression in the theatre. It therefore warrants attention.

The play was originally written for a feminist theatre company in Britain called the Women’s Company. Originally titled *Dead Fish*, and structured as a rock opera, it went through various rewrites and came to the West End in London and to North America as a series of short scenes usually ending with blackouts and loud contemporary taped music. In Montreal, the music choice was last year’s disco hits; in Toronto, it was traumatic Motown, a touch of punk and some lyrics by various chanteuses.

The play is about four women who live together in a flat in London which is a grown-up dormitory; all are on their way somewhere else (they hope). The four women are recognizable ‘types;’ Fish (Diane D’Aquila) is the upper-class socialist worker destructively in love with a fellow worker who detests her ‘strength.’ Dusa (Maja Ardale) is a middle-class provincial housewife whose husband, bored by her varicose veins, has taken their children to Argentina to start a new life. Vi (Mary Ann McDonald) is an anorexic punk whose diabolical self-centredness is mitigated by her spoiled child’s charm. Stas (Susan Hogan), the strongest member of the quartet, is a hooker who treats autistic children during the day, and who is saving to study marine biology at the University of Hawaii. Got it? We are in for an evening of fun and frolic in the theatre: Gems and Brighton do not disappoint us. Over a period of two weeks in this trendy flat in Kensington, we observe two marriages, three attempted suicides, the continuing saga of the missing children in Argentina and their eventual return, the collapse of the punk from self-starvation, and that ‘healthy’ girl’s shoplifting and tricking her way to Hawaii.

Dusa, Fish, Stas & Vi is a media burn. In a recent interview in the *Toronto Theatre Review*, Gems states that she started to write for T.V. That’s obvious. Brighton, the director, has been hailed as a hitmaker, and with the caricatures she presents as ‘real women’ she should do well with a Neil Simon audience raised on bad Shakespeare and six-technical-tricks-a-second prime-time television. The play does not offer anything to the contemporary woman living in an ambiguous world. The final suicide attempt which ends the play is successful and the note read over the body of Fish is the well-known cliché “We are changing and they don’t like it. What are we to do? What are we to do?” C’mon Pam, we are *all* tired; we are all uncertain. But, in the words of our mothers, we pick up and go on. Writing a document like *Dusa, Fish, Stas & Vi* only perpetuates the myth of the self-indulgent, weak woman whose ‘liberation’ is only a cry for a return to adolescence.

I would like to have seen the images in the play (which, for all my carping, are finely crafted) reworked by the Hummer Sisters and Government — or by any performance group who can separate fiction, romance and upper-middle class self-absorption from drama, humour and reality. Now that’s Glamour.

— Liz Nickson

Rites of Passage

Written by B.A. Cameron (Cam Hubert)
Directed by Svetlana Zylín

The entire script of the play appears in *Room of One's Own*, Vol. III, no. 2 (1977).

West Coast poet, playwright and screen writer B.A. Cameron (Cam Hubert) is best known for her CBC television dramas *Dreamspeaker* and *A Matter of Choice*. These films brought to the Canadian screen a combination of intelligence, sensitivity and craft rarely enjoyed by that medium, certainly in this country. *Dreamspeaker* was the recipient of several Canadian Film Awards, including that for Best Canadian Television Drama and Best Original Screenplay. And *A Matter of Choice* treated the painful and awkward subject of rape with unusual subtlety and sophistication.

Rites of Passage was presented at Toronto Free Theatre by the Great Canadian Theatre Company under the direction of Svetlana Zylín in November and December, 1978. It is Cameron's 1975 stage play about points of transition and insight in the lives of three women, three generations of a B.C. mining family. There is a good deal of intelligence and beauty in this writing. Cameron carves out language with enduring passion and honesty; her words resonate with the pain and the love of the world she sees.

The three women of *Rites* address themselves, each according to her perspective and age, to the probing of their identities, dreams and fears. And as they do, their lines of thought and experience overlap at the constant reminders of the restrictive world which they share and which shapes them. Thirteen year-old Maggie is on the verge of adolescent confusions; her mother Beth takes the first difficult steps away from a misconceived, overburdened marriage; and Beth's own mother, Bess, has the gentle wisdom and calm of her maturity painfully jarred by the reawakening of an old nightmare.

The play is set in a mining community in which the company's priorities settle on the lives of the people like the everpresent and deathly coal dust. While the physical action and the set of the play are restricted to a few rooms of a modest home, the presence of the nearby mine is consistently maintained through Cameron's language. The mine, with its heavy smells, sombre colours, grinding noises and daily schedule of foreboding, wraps the stage as it knits itself ever more deeply into the rhythm of the characters' lives — the absent ones; those who enter the long tunnels day after day; and those who wait above, captive observers of the mine's power to take and take, sometimes with shattering swiftness, sometimes at its own unmercifully slow pace.

Rites of Passage is a loosely structured play which unfolds in a slow, episodic manner through a series of monologues and dialogues. There are poetic moments in the women's speeches which draw the audience intimately into a character's soul,

through her world and beyond, to our own. In one instance, Grandma Bess describes the horror of waiting outside the mine, standing in the rain, shoulder to shoulder with the other townswomen:

A hundred heads wrapped in shawls, standing like...deformed trees in a silence so deep a body could drown in it...praying and hating the need for prayers. Oh, God, don't let it be my Will...anything, God, but not that... Let it be her man, or hers or hers, somebody's son, anybody's son, but not my man...

The moment is created delicately, but with an understated depth that chills with its raw honesty and sorrow.

Moments such as this one, and there are others, blend rich language with emotional truth. But while Cameron is virtually complete master of her language, she is far less capable in her control over the medium of the stage. The play often sags between moments of verbal brilliance, and the overall construction of the piece is shaky, lacking the immediacy and the momentum which should come with stage action.

The play is chiefly a verbal, aural experience. The material of the play, however dramatic for the characters, is second-hand for the audience; it occurs off-stage, usually at other times, and is recalled and recounted on stage. So the characters' sharing with the audience is largely descriptive and poetic. This certainly does not reduce the power of the writing — except as theatre.

This structural weakness is particularly felt in the characters' attempted engagement with one another. Their presence, chiefly as storytellers, has been designed primarily for communication with the audience. This seriously undermines the dramatic potential of the play. In the encounters between Maggie and Beth, for example, Cameron writes unconvincingly: mother and daughter continue to talk to themselves or to the audience, rather than with each other.

While these problems are rooted in the script, this production did little to circumvent them. Indeed, in cutting the minor character of Niall, Beth's husband, from the script, the production lost the script's single occasion of on-stage engagement and confrontation. This is more than an aesthetic loss, I think, for in this play about deeply felt entrapment the audience hungers for the antagonists, human, social or otherwise, to meet and engage. Such flesh-and-blood encounters are the soul of theatre.

Zylín's direction was technically competent, but lacked imagination and vision. As a result, the actors were offered only a minimal physical framework to support the roles established by the script. The actors carried out simple household tasks on stage, but these were extraneous activities imposed on the words like set decoration. The physical action, what little there was, had only the thinnest symbolic connection to the words being spoken and to the theatrical moment, and never grew as a natural extension of it. Even the simple set, finally, seemed conspicuous by its presence.

There is no question of B.A. Cameron's gifts as a writer. Her language is

wonderfully crafted, eloquent and moving. And here, as in *Dreamspeaker* and *A Matter of Choice*, her subject and perspective command our interest and attention. The only question, in fact, that remains about *Rites of Passage* is its viability as theatre.

— Rina Fraticelli

BOOKS

Ces enfants de ma vie, by Gabrielle Roy, Montreal, Stanké, 1977, 212 p., \$6.95, paper. ISBN O-88566-065-X.
(English translation by Alan Brown, *Children of My Life*, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart.)

Gabrielle Roy's latest book, *Ces enfants de ma vie*, returns to her experiences as a young teacher in rural Manitoba, a theme already touched on in *Where Nests the Water Hen* and *Street of Riches*, where the teachers' knowledge and understanding burn like beacons in the isolated areas to which she is sent. In *Ces enfants de ma vie* the same communion between teacher and child exists but the exaltation is darkened by deep anxiety. It is the teacher's first assignment in a little prairie village during the Depression. Here she becomes panic-stricken at the thought of being imprisoned in this profession for life, growing as weary and methodically routine as the older teachers around her. Barely out of her adolescent years she has difficulty resigning herself to the compromises demanded by the adult world and almost feels tempted to ally herself with the children, urging them on to freedom rather than confining them in the school-house along with herself.

The inner conflicts of the young teacher are set against the hardships of her pupils and their parents, many of them of immigrant extraction. The opening story, "Vincento," fittingly recounts a young child's first fearful and resistant entry into the unknown world of school, far removed from the security of home. The poverty of the surrounding neighborhood is brought out in "L'enfant de Noël" in which the children are hard-pressed to find even a simple Christmas present for their adored teacher. In "L'alouette" a child's gift of song serves to transcend the limitations of a drab, restrictive environment and disturbingly brings back memories of the past to the very old and the mentally ill. The purity of Nil Galaida's rendition, learned from his mother, appears as a compensation for the physical and emotional deprivation around him, which he is still too young to grasp. "Demetriooff" describes how an ignorant, brutal father, whose ignorance and brutality have adversely marked all of his numerous progeny, is unexpectedly moved to emotion and pride by the discovery of an unexpected talent in his youngest son.

"La maison gardée" reveals the often pitiful plight of women living on poor, lonely prairie farms. In this first year of the Great Depression, André Pasquier, the guardian of the house, is ten years old going on eleven. His father has gone off for the winter to the lumber camps in the North to earn money to pay off their debts.

André is left in charge, responsible for the farm chores, and for looking after his five year-old brother and his pregnant mother who, as in her two previous pregnancies, must stay in bed until the child is born. The mother confesses to the teacher that she wanted the other two children, but not this one, not at the beginning. She feels she cannot turn to her neighbour, Mme Badiou, for help because Mme Badiou already has six children of whom the eldest is not yet seven. Though Mme Badiou's pregnancies are not complicated, her deliveries cause her endless pain; the last one went on for three interminable days. Both teacher and mother weep over "la misère féminine," the misery to which women are subjected by their womanhood.

André prepares a meal under his mother's direction. As the two children coax their mother to swallow some dessert, the teacher is reminded of a queen bee expertly attended by her devoted little servants, all for the sake of her "terrible task of purveyor of the species."

The concluding story, "De la truite dans l'eau glacée," is about Médéric, the child of a Métis mother and a white father. Rodrigue Eymard fell in love with and carried off a beautiful Indian woman, who till then had lived with her tribe on a reservation. A wealthy man, he showered his Indian bride with all the gifts money could buy, even servants to wait on her, but after a year of marriage she escaped back to the tribe, preferring the hardships of life in a tent to the luxuries of civilization.

Fourteen year-old Médéric, the oldest of her pupils, falls in love with the teacher, so close to him in age, yet so far removed in background and education. The teacher's feelings for him are equally complex as she struggles to arouse in him a love of learning by appealing to his own immediate interests. The boy's awakening love and the teacher's reactions are sensitively portrayed against the backdrop of conflict between Médéric, who has inherited his mother's love of nature and freedom, and his father, who values formal learning at the expense of spontaneous contact with natural elements.

Ces enfants de ma vie is infused with the warmth and humanity that characterizes all of Gabrielle Roy's writing, reflecting as it does her ability to find in everyday people and everyday events those profound, soul-stirring emotions that are the stuff of tragedy and hope. At the end of the term the teacher is offered a better position in a city school. As she returns the key to the secretary of the School Commission with tears in her eyes, he scolds her with the warning that, had she stayed on longer, her fervour and zest inevitably would have died down, as a prairie fire dies with time. However accurate his prediction might have been, to the reader it is abundantly clear that she has brought a spark to her dim surroundings, a spark which served to ignite others.

— Jeannette Urbas

Considering Her Condition, by Margaret Gibson, Toronto, Gage, 1978, 120p., \$8.95, cloth. ISBN 0-7715-9324-4.

Alone among the women writers in English Canada, if one excepts Joyce Carol Oates, Margaret Gibson's concern is with earth's crooked children, with the

abnormal and bizarre, with madness, failure, alcoholism, illness, death and self-destruction — in a word, with the grotesque. It is in the borderland between sanity and madness that her chief characters trace their paths — a wide territory which has always been explored by writers of fiction, if seldom as intensely as to-day.

Gibson's story, "Making It," from her first collection *The Butterfly Ward* (which was published under the name Gibson Gilboord) became the basis for the very successful avant garde film *Outrageous*. In that story, as in the present ones, she is concerned almost entirely with the exceptional, with those who live outside the conventional molds. The extraordinary aspects of the ordinary do not occupy her as they do Margaret Laurence and Alice Munro; nor has Gibson achieved the technical proficiency of these two more experienced writers. She inhabits, and peoples, a very different world.

"It can be said at once," says Eudora Welty, "that morality as shown through human relationships is the whole heart of fiction, and the serious writer never lived who dealt with anything else." She is not of course speaking of the zeal to reform, nor is it this obsession which informs the stories of Margaret Gibson. Far from it. Her stories cry out in anguish for the victims of our society and for the appalling blindness we as individuals have to one another's needs. She shows us brilliantly in "Brian Tattoo, his Life and Times," that there are matters at the heart of things-gone-wrong far beyond the comprehension and sensibilities of Dave, the maddeningly complacent, if well-intentioned, social worker who is the minor character of the story's triad. Dave is a first cousin of Robertson Davies' normal Norm.

In Gibson's stories the social disorders are lit up as if on x-ray plates through those mysterious creations, her victims, the hopeless and helpless. They signal to us, as from the abyss, the dangers surrounding us all. It is not my intention in a short review to provide the reader with outlines of the plots; that would be as unnecessary as it is unfair, but as an example of this writer's exceptionally compassionate insight, none of the stories reaches the level of "Brian Tatoo." There is such subtlety of interaction here, and it evokes more vividly than anything I have ever read the deep, unnamed fear experienced by an educated, healthy young woman (albeit recovering from a nervous break-down) in her relationship with a ruined young motor-cycle club tough whose desperate need for a sympathetic human being turns to sexual hunger.

The work in this collection is extremely uneven. There are minor lapses in style and some just plain tiresome repetitions, as in the first story "Dark Angel" which suffers somewhat from cliché-ism and repeated descriptions of costume, especially blue denims. A little judicious editing would have improved matters here and elsewhere where the craftsmanship falters. These details are nothing compared with the power and depth of understanding with which she draws us into such a story as "Still Life." There are two stories the theme of which is the smothering parent of an adult child. The first concerns mother and son; the second, a mother and daughter. The second is a little masterpiece.

Aside from her felicitous phrases ("she waded through a wall of mewling cats"), and her kitchen images, ("a litany of woe spills across the blueberry muffins and the

yellow coffee cups"), there is the main issue of this story, the destruction of Jane, a forty-two year old Momma's baby, drowning in a sea of Scotch whiskey and suffocating possessiveness, and looking on at her own disintegration through a now clouded intelligence. The mother's total unawareness of her destroying influence, her "kindness" as she hands out the regular booze allowance — "a little something for yourself dear" — has the frightening quality of a totally silent film murder. This is a quietly terrifying, chilling and beautifully handled story.

Making reality real is the artist's job. I will never walk down Sherbourne Street again without looking for Brian Tattoo, or go into Loblaw's without expecting Jane to stagger down the aisle, her Scotch in her shopping cart. One can scarcely say more except that Margaret Gibson is still a very young woman and as her technique develops and she enriches her word-store a little, she will be making an important contribution to our literature. Her stories are seen from a woman's viewpoint. Sometimes it is a view of hell.

— Hilda Kirkwood

Old Woman At Play, by Adele Wiseman, Clarke, Irwin, 1978, 148p., illus., \$14.95, cloth. ISBN 0-7720-1230-x

That Adele Wiseman has achieved the stature of a major novelist on the strength of two novels is a testimony to the exceptionally rich achievement of *The Sacrifice* (1955) and *Crackpot* (1974). Together they embody a world more culturally and spiritually resonant than does a bookcase containing the works of less gifted novelists. I have often wondered how a few writers manage to accomplish within a relatively brief compass what others, equally intelligent, spend the entire course of their careers working towards — why a dozen Iris Murdoch novels still do not add up to two Adele Wiseman's.

Minor writers give us fleeting intimations of their creative striving towards the realization of a felt world, a world which they only partially re-create in a single book, or more fully express only within the totality of an *oeuvre*. This is the more common literary experience. The fusion of intention with a language and form strong enough to embody it whole is a rare phenomenon.

I think one senses this happy constellation of proportionate vision and craft in, for example, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*, Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*. Reading those books I felt instinctively convinced that here were created worlds that are somehow emphatically 'right,' aesthetically complete and true to their own imaginative devisings. At the same time I felt perplexed and frustrated when I entered into the critical act of retrieval, that lunatic attempt to analyse the 'why' and 'how' of the creation. Somehow neither the literary critics and professors nor my own analytical stumblings ever sufficed to adequately address themselves to the books' power as unified responses to experience. What I didn't realize is that I never understood the creative process; years of education had convinced me that it was some rather arcane and certainly élitist code comprehensible only to those gifted cuckoos who look up into the trees and hear nightingales twittering away in Greek on the branches.

Old Woman At Play has taught me that “I didn’t know how much I didn’t know.” Here is Wiseman speaking about how she apprehends the creative process:

I can assess far better the quality of what a person knows if I am given to understand how he or she knows it, and even more if I can recreate his or her experience of it. And though the created thing can be approached as a separate, objective fact, the process of its making will never be apprehended in the coarse nets of strictly linear thought.

Wiseman appropriately rejects an objective treatment of her subject in favour of a deeply personal approach — the subject she celebrates is the life, and craft as a dollmaker, of her eighty-two year-old mother, Chaika Wiseman. And her deliberate selection of a non-linear structure for her book says much about her own convictions concerning the creative process: a work of art necessarily assumes a rhythmic form which approximates the very flow of life, a recognizably human shape which bodies forth the illuminations of the receptive heart.

Chaika Wiseman, seamstress by trade, emigrated with her husband from the Ukraine to North Winnipeg in the 1920s; they left behind them — but never ‘behind’ them — the unspeakable legacy ‘civilization’ had bequeathed to European Jews of their generation: persecution, poverty, hunger, pogroms, murder, and betrayal. Throughout the Depression and the war years they toiled selflessly in the service of their four children. When the failure of the family tailoring business coincided with the outbreak of the polio epidemic in 1950, Chaika turned her talent and her heart to working as a volunteer ward aid in the Princess Elizabeth Hospital. From that time until today she has been creating a profuse world of dolls — all “to please the children.”

Astonished, humbled and bewildered by her mother’s ceaseless play, Adele Wiseman found herself driven to answer a recurring question, “Why do you make the dolls?” The reasons underlying her peculiarly urgent need to know provide the *raison d’être* — and the importance — of this book:

Innocently productive, artistically naive, if she could be brought to articulate the why of herself and her work, not only might we come to understand better the kind of being she is, but we might learn something about the phenomenon of creativity itself, so that we might begin to deal more intelligently with the children, among whom so few survive to be seminally productive, lone guerrillas the world over, in school systems and societies which would destroy them, though professing always the best of intentions.

That her mother is an “innocent” or “naive” artist is particularly significant to Wiseman:

I stress the non-threatening nature of her activity because whenever one tries to approach the subject of creativity through those manifestations to which most lip-service is paid in our society, capitalized ART or SCIENCE, people

feel impelled to don masks, take up attitudes, strike poses, affirm stances, mount hobby horses, go all heady and rarefied, or simply retreat altogether...

Wiseman’s intention to repatriate (I really want to say ‘rematriate’) ART to its rightful place in the lives of “simple, ordinary folk” is achieved by a literary strategem so fluid and successful in execution she makes it look like child’s play. She has structured her book as wisely and instinctively as her mother perceives the appropriate ‘form’ underlying each of her dolls. *Old Woman At Play* alternates between italicized passages which carry her conversations with Chaika, and longer passages of text, set in Roman typeface, which convey the writer’s musings and “experimental conclusions” concerning what has been expressed in the preceding dialogues with her mother. And in neither of the sections has she restricted her handling of the subject to any chronological straitjacket: instead we follow her mind as it leaps forwards and backwards in time, occasionally pausing to rest in the present, to weave together the fine threads of her wandering.

The results are stunning. This juxtaposition of voices serves to recreate the fifty year-old, ongoing dialogue between mother and daughter. One senses a lovely tension between Adele Wiseman, writer, leaping onto the creative high wire, juggling and balancing words adroitly, gleefully, as if they were so many coloured balls — and Adele Wiseman, Chaika’s middle-aged daughter, catching herself just as she is in danger of becoming a bit highfalutin, pulling herself back to mom’s unpretentious Yiddish wisdom. The technique also personalizes and charges with immediacy Wiseman’s own intellectual and personal growth by presenting it *in process*, rather than mimicking the conventional lecture-hall style of delivering Aesthetic Pronouncements as though they had been delivered directly to the speaker from Mount Olympus. Wiseman insists upon allowing personal relationships to mediate between the work of art and her aesthetic theorizing. This is an absolute ‘no-no’ in academic circles: it is reputed to get in the way of objectivity and so threaten the definitive nature of one’s propositions. I suspect she knows this — and doesn’t give a hoot!

The risk is more than justified, for it renders wholly accessible to the common reader some very complex, sophisticated perceptions about creativity which, always, are traced back to the dolls, to the still figure of her mother sewing them into life. Thus does she illuminate key concepts such as figure/ground relationships; the role of chance in the genesis of a work of art; symbolism; analogical systems; creativity and madness — and more philosophical considerations, such as the relationship of the artist to society and to nature; the functions of art; the manner in which a work is informed, sometimes inspired by the artist’s awareness of disease and deformity as integral parts of creation; and the centrality of creativity in the life of the whole person. The entire book is enlivened by thirty full-colour, and sixteen black-and-white photographs of the dolls taken by Tom Tsuji, and carefully placed in the margins beside the passages they illuminate.

Old Woman At Play offers such abundant riches I can only hint at a few passages so richly informed with intelligent feeling that I have tucked them away in memory for instant retrieval on the black days: her earliest memory of her mother, before the

harsh judgments of the outside world got in the way of her pure, joyous affirmation of herself as Chaika's daughter; the scene in which she describes her then two year-old daughter bathing her aged grandmother — an incident which, in the retelling, becomes a kind of flesh-sacrament between Tamara and *bobba*; Chaika's response to her husband's death and to her cancer (both revelations came to the family while the book was being written).

Old Woman At Play is, perhaps pre-eminently, about women, our craft of hands, our body craft. That Chaika is a woman is central to the kinds of knowing/loving she embodies:

The point of interaction between all worlds, is, for my mother, the natural world, which, I suppose, is not too surprising, since her history has been a woman's history. Her experience has been the experience of wet hands and working fingers and the incredible earthquakes of birth, and cradled arms and swollen, running breasts, and telling time by when the baby finally stopped crying, and knowing pain as she knew joy, not only within the limits of her own physical being, but as she apprehended them in all of us, the extensions of her being.

If Adele Wiseman is to be 'faulted' for anything, it may be for unintentionally making some of her readers yearn for such a mother as her own. To launch the publication of *Old Woman At Play* two performances of the writer's Doll Show were presented by the NDWT Company at The Bathurst Street Theatre in Toronto on October 22nd. Surrounded by her personal collection of Chaika's dolls, wearing a splendid silk-tie dress made by her mother, and sharing the stage with Tamara and Chaika, Wiseman gave her one-woman show, based on the book. The performance I attended received a standing ovation; few eyes in the house remained dry. Leaving the theatre I overheard a middle-aged woman mutter fiercely to her female companion, "It made me god-damned angry all over again at my own mother, at her inadequacies!" Ultimately, though, *Old Woman At Play* is a healing book: through the writer's loving portrait of her mother we share vicariously in Chaika's abundant mothering. She has enough for all of us.

Here is Chaika, talking about why she has felt impelled to draw into the creation of many of her dolls her own painful awareness of the existence of deformed, suffering children:

Nature gives it out. Something is in it and it reminds me and I try to create the same thing, to see something that I went through it...as a youngster, but it still comes back to me. It brings memories. I saw life and I went through it. I don't want to say it makes me happy, but I want to see it again. It's like a dream... It reminds me. Nature gives it out...there must be something in it...and I want to see it. I hope it would improve, and there shouldn't be crippled children, there shouldn't be children suffering.

Within her belief that such healing transformations may be creatively possible is sufficient strength to endure — perhaps with grace — what is otherwise unbearable.

— Elizabeth Brady

Jody Said, by Beth Jankola, Vancouver, B.C., Press Gang Publishers, 1977. 63 p., \$2.95 paper. ISBN 0-88974-002-x.

Because Beth Jankola's book arrived on my doorstep when I had no time to sit down and review it immediately, I decided to read a few poems to think about. Two hours later I got up, unhappy about my lack of discipline, but happy about Jankola's ability to keep me reading. During the next few weeks, whenever I had a chance, I thought about the book with pleasure and doubt in even measure. There was not a single line or phrase I could remember, the poet's themes — city dwelling and its drawbacks, marriage and its drawbacks, women, children, hometown — were not startling, nor did she make the familiar in any way unfamiliar, and yet I had enjoyed some of the poems very much.

A second and more careful look at the poems revealed that their appeal lies in their simplicity and in their very familiarity of subject. They read easily and show what they mean to show in a flowing, conversational tone. "Psychiatrist" is written in the form of interior monologue, wisely laid out as the prose poem it is, with line breaks indicated by oblique strokes. It deals with women's illusions about men ("he likes me the way I am/and my poems/things don't happen in a vacuum"), and I particularly liked the way the poet left the self unaware of the fact that they were illusions. This restraint is not characteristic of Jankola. Another stream-of-consciousness poem, "Saturday Night," talks about communication difficulties, insensitivity, incompatibility in the strident whine of a child asking for the moon ("my husband never asked me to dance/I adore dancing/I danced with the other man/ . . . /I wanted to dance with my husband"), and though Jankola does not ask us to take her poetic self very seriously, she nevertheless conveys the misery of forever living separately together.

These two poems are fairly representative of the poet's style. Even though not all are set out as prose poems, all come across as prose, mostly as little stories or quick impressions, often with a clear, explicit message. Two I liked for their ideas were "Sociology" and "Encounter." In "Sociology" the poet capitalizes all key words leading up to the final O. Henry: her would-be lover's sociological reasons for wanting her, "A MIDDLEAGED/WORKING CLASS/GENTILE/MARRIED/WOMAN." This typographical emphasis brings home the point a little too forcefully for my taste, and though amusing enough, "Sociology" is a little object lesson, not quite a poem. "Encounter" has something more serious to say:

Encounter/Gestalt/The Primal Scream

Tried it?

It's sort of like

the natives prying

the shell off

a living tortoise

tortoise shell

combs/cigarette box

dressing table object

*Throw the creature back
raw
into the sea
in hopes
that it will survive
to grow
another shell
Does it?
About one in a hundred does*

The two questions, and the line "It's sort of like" seriously mar the effect. Instead of an extended metaphor, we get an extended simile which weakens the impact of an otherwise exciting analogy.

Beth Jankola is most successful in her medium-length poems. The longer ones ("My Son John," "Hometown," and especially "Frenchie") do not hold the reader's attention, perhaps because the treatment of their central idea is not rich enough to support the length. "My Son John" has an excellent story line and a nice subdued ending, but it would work better in a severely pruned form. This is my greatest reservation about Jankola's work — that it is short prose, not poetry. Her voice is cool, descriptive, plain-speaking, and flat. There are few surprises in her use of language, she rarely employs metaphor, symbol, or any other stylistic devices; and in her longer poems she generally shows little concern with cutting and paring. As a result we hear little music. The very short verse ("A Round Fat Black Duck," "The Cuty," "Crow,"), though not suffering from excessive verbiage, suffer instead from the lack of a new or significant idea; take, for example, these lines from "In the Shower:"

*In the shower
this morning
I watched the spaces
that define
my each and separate toe
and was amazed
at that
which is not*

In the medium-length prose poems Jankola uses one idea, one experience, with the control necessary to interest and arrest. "Russian Men Irked" reports dispassionately on the male attitude to changing female behaviour in the USSR. Though a bit repetitive and long-drawn-out, the poem ends in a masterly bit of dry newspaper reporting, deflating all male 'demands' for femininity: "Women assume a great share of the Soviet workload. / They make up 52 per cent of the collective farm workers / and 48 per cent of the factory workers." Another good exit occurs in "Kitty" when the poet's daughter brings in a woodpecker the cat just caught: "my god it's the WOODPECKER / as though he were a myth / and what was he doing / being real there in her arms / and wounded."

But there are limitations to even Jankola's best verse. The poetry is almost invariably based on thoughts and experiences familiar to the audience. The projected self appears to be identical to the poet's everyday self, and while this makes the poems simple and direct, it also limits the space needed by the reader to identify and generalize. And finally, the point of the poem is often made too explicit, and expressed in unimaginative, journalistic language. If I was initially captivated by the easy reading Beth Jankola's work provides — we don't have to work too hard to recognize our own ideas and experiences in the plainly expressed ideas and experiences of the poet — I am sorry to conclude that a rereading is less rewarding. There is little in either theme or craft that excites us more a second time around.

— Maria Jacobs

Seeing Stone, by Marta Zaborska, Windsor, Black Moss Press, 1978, 31 p., \$3.00, paper. ISBN-0-88753-044-3.

Marta Zaborska's poetry, without politics, without punches pulled, is an example of art for the sake of creation itself. Ms. Zaborska speaks the language of the desert — an ancient lonesome tongue dripping with colour and sound. Her poems are based on reflections of nature — elements present in her life on a mid-west farm. With a scarcity of words she evokes precise images of the barrenness and lonely beauty of her world. The result is poetry written for beauty alone, leaving the reader breathless for a cold taste of the wild.

Zaborska is a painstaking poet who takes time to choose the perfect word. This kind of craft produces poetry that is both rich and revealing. The effect is starkly visual:

*A range of mountains like
any other around here, it
stands blazing, parchment dry
else brittle and cracking
with cold.*

Her repeated themes of isolation indicate that the poet is not saddened by her feelings of solitude; rather she draws beauty and peace from the isolation of her world.

In "Quitobaquito Pond at Sunset" she paints a gentle sense of space:

*Little here to show
the sun is soon to set
few things to make
the shadows long except
The mountains themselves have turned to shadow
released their purples
violets reds*

*The sky has caught them
the stone no longer glows.*

Another persistent theme is that of inner loneliness, another perception of the distance of the writer's internal and external landscape. The poet not only relates to seclusion from the world, but in "Objectification" portrays the trapping of one inside oneself.

I wanted to say something

*like rubber bands, the words
they twisted and stretched
slammed back in my teeth*

Marta Zaborska has the distinct talent of combining strong physical imagery with a perceptive inner design to create poetry that transfixes the mind. Not bound by a theory or restricted by an ideology, her poetry is pure and its message clear. A collection that demands attention.

— Joy Parks

Tree of August, by Mary di Michele, Toronto, Three Trees Press, 1978. 48p., \$3.95 paper. ISBN 0-88823-003-x.

I first became acquainted with Mary di Michele's work from the women's poetry anthology, *Landscape*, and the reading event which accompanied its publication. As I wrote in a review for *Poetry Toronto* at the time, she impressed me as one of the most outstanding contributors to *Landscape*. I especially liked a poem she read which communicated the trauma of breaking from the stultifying traditional role demanded by her Italian-immigrant family, and one of the anthologized poems about the murder of a pregnant Belfast woman which I called a "striking and jolting work" ("The Seeds of the Pomegranate"). In *Tree of August*, di Michele's first volume of poems, her ability to draw on her Italian Catholic background for themes and imagery, and her talent with the simple, powerful poem are again in evidence.

Two of the best poems in *Tree of August* are "By the Road" and "Heart of a Ruby," the first and last poems in the book. These are self-portraits of the writer which do not describe her as such, but present her engaged in an activity through a striking set of "real-life" images ("By the Road"), or through a compact surrealist portrait ("Heart of a Ruby"). These personal poems are stronger than di Michele's more confessional, diary-like personal poems such as "Middle of the Night," "Menses," and "Love in Venice." There is a focus, tightness and distance in "By the Road" and "Heart of a Ruby" which suggest a good direction for di Michele to take in poems of this type.

Some of her most complex poems stem from Catholic themes. The strongest of these deal with the oppression of Catholic women, which di Michele conveys without a trace of maudlin sentimentality or sloganeering. The young Italian widow whose life is over appears in "Cemetery Plot" and "Two Steps Back," and the young "spinster" whose life is over is beautifully evoked in the title poem, "Tree of August." I did not think *Tree of August* was a particularly catchy book title, but since it brings attention to one of the best poems in the book, it seems a good choice

after all. Perhaps di Michele sees the "Tree of August" as a symbol for herself. In addition to the title poem, another excellent poem evoking the Catholic-woman theme is called "Born in August," and is a declared self-portrait. "Sunday Dinner" is also a fine poem on the same theme; a straight narrative departing somewhat from di Michele's characteristic use of rich imagery, it focuses on an oppressive father-daughter relationship (the mother making a brief, helpless appearance), concluding with a clever, ironic reference to church ritual.

Di Michele's poems which make use of priest and church dogma themes were less successful for me. I found poems like "Still Life" and "Resurrection" confusing, though both have an originality of language and line which are impressive.

Di Michele is good at contrasting and comparing the other-worldly or exotic with ordinary life, bringing all things down to their earthy essentials. In "Corpus" she writes: "So art too is mortal, / It seems, / Like the nose of any Madonna." And, in "First Communion," di Michele writes of her subject: "Rita knows all about sex / from herding pigs and chickens." Again, in "Sunday Dinner," the poem about family tensions I mentioned earlier, the poet feels unable to respond to her father's attacks and is reminded of the church:

*I remember how the eucharist
used to stick to the roof
of my mouth, a gummy wafer
I had to peel back with my tongue.*

Some things will not be swallowed.

Di Michele is fond of and good at puncturing sacred cows of the Catholic Church, at the same time drawing sharp portraits of the suffering the church has inflicted on individuals.

Tree of August is an uneven book. Some poems might have been better left out, and others from di Michele's work included; for example, "The Seeds of the Pomegranate," anthologized in *Landscape* but absent here, is an excellent poem. I would like to see di Michele do more work like "Pomegranate" — that is, handle political themes, or larger themes of social life, with her strong, simple, shocking style. Di Michele's background as an Italian-Catholic immigrant woman is also part of her artistic capital and we will no doubt see more work from this source. I look forward to seeing new work from this talented young poet.

Mention should be made of the good technical quality of the book's production. The first Three Trees books contained the predictable errors of a new publisher, but the books have become better each time; *Tree of August* is truly a professional, attractive volume with only one or two typos, and a strange word ("existentialist") in the otherwise interesting biographical note on the back cover (it also wasn't clear why di Michele is described as a "would-be" feminist). Since Tree Trees has thus far chosen quality work to publish (e.g., George Miller, Brian Purdy, Pier Giorgio di Cicco, and now, Mary di Michele), it is satisfying to see the quality of the book production improving.

— Libby Scheier

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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contraception.

A group of women in Toronto are attempting to do research on the use of DES in Canada. If you or your mother took this drug during pregnancy, or if you have any information about its use in Canada, both past and present, we would appreciate hearing about it.

DES has been available in Canada under the names Stilbestrol and Estrobene, among others.

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A Conference at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
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If you are interested in contributing ideas to the development of the conference, or would like to attend the conference, please contact: The Women Learning Conference, c/o Lynda Yanz, the Department of Sociology, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 252 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario. M5S 1V6.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

The first issue of *Fireweed* is impressive indeed. I had not realized it was to be so serious a venture, or so expensively and indeed elegantly produced; and with an emphasis on the élitist rather than the popular approach. That's all fine if there's a market for it. You will find that distribution across Canada is one of the most painful headaches for small literary magazines. They tend to stay in their own bailiwick and this leads to incest!

Marvyne Jenoff's review of my book *The Woman I Am* seems to emphasize these problems. I admire her gifts and her fine sensitive reviewing (seen recently in *CV/II*) and I agree with all her criticisms about my sloppily printed paperback. But the assumption that because "Bartok and the Geranium" and "On Looking Into Henry Moore" are "beautiful poems" they should therefore not be seen by people who can only afford a cheap paperback is really puzzling! Jenoff notes at the outset that the book is aimed at "general readership," but does that mean that élitist readership is somehow more to be desired? Emphatically I say no! We have had far too much of poetry edited by small cliques for small cliques. The book *The Woman I Am* was planned to present selections which are most often asked for at my public readings; for a non-poetry reader audience, particularly of women. (The letters I receive from strangers are evidence that this readership is developing). There was no need to have a 200-page collection of my work, because *Collected Poems: The Two Seasons* is still in print and may be had from McGraw Hill Ryerson for \$6.95.

Therefore, along with my congratulations to the editors of *Fireweed* I append this warning: don't allow poets to review poets. Spread your net wide and encourage women to develop as critics. Do not spurn critical material that might be forthcoming from

men. Find time to be witty!

Yours in good faith,
Dorothy Livesay
Galiano Island, B.C.

Editor's Note: While we are not exactly certain what Ms. Livesay finds élitist (as opposed to popular) in Fireweed since she does not specify, we did not consider any aspect of its format or design to be a signal or flag-raising event with a planned appeal to a specific or desired readership.

The members of the Fireweed Collective encompass a staggering (to us, at least) variety of backgrounds, perspectives and experience; all Journal-related decisions and choices are made by group decision (perhaps more accurately described as "passionate infighting"). So, although a discernible "style" may develop over the course of our growth, for the moment "eclectic is the only reasonably accurate description we can find for our choices.

(Ms. Jenoff will respond to Ms. Livesay's reactions to her review of The Woman I Am in Issue 3 & 4.)

Congratulations on *Fireweed*! I think... (it's) extremely fine... *Fireweed* seems to me an impressive publication in every way. The creative pieces are of high quality, the articles interesting, and the linocuts are striking. I especially liked the contributions by Orenstein and Duncan, as well as your introductory article on *Landscape and Fireweed*, which sets just the right tone for the journal.... Keep up the fine work of your talented feminist collective! I'm enclosing my subscription fee for future issues of the magazine and will look forward to following the progress of its development.

Suzette Henke
New York

Just had to write and say what a great treat it was to see poetry in three languages (in addition to good old Anglais); presented so simply, as a matter of course. Loved it!

Kate Alexander
Montreal

AFTERWORD



The Fireweed Collective published a thousand copies of its first issue in September, 1978, all of which have been distributed. *Fireweed* is a non-profit corporation privately financed by advertisements, subscription and individual sales, donations from supportive friends, and community fund-raising events. Distribution is both local and, to an ever-increasing extent, national. *Fireweed* is now in many homes, offices, libraries, and resource centres.

The Fireweed Collective was formed in February, 1978 to create a new feminist journal devoted to stimulating dialogue, knowledge and creativity among women. We are committed to an editorial policy of diversity, and we do not intend to represent a particular style or aesthetic. We recognize the importance of an exchange among the various sectors of the women's community. The journal is devoted to the concept of women learning from and sharing with one another. The journal itself will provide an "on the job" learning experience for those who become involved in its production.

The women involved in *Fireweed* operate as a collective with each member participating in all areas of production. The four founding members of the collective are delighted to welcome two new members, Rina Fraticelli and Liz Brady, who have joined *Fireweed* for the production of Issue Two. The Collective has received help from many generous and supportive women who have volunteered to share their time and skills during the promotion and production of each issue. All work is done on a voluntary, unpaid basis. We welcome any advice, help, suggestions or questions from interested people.

JOIN US IN THE SPIRIT OF FIREWEED!

NOTES TO POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTORS:

FIREWEED is a feminist journal dedicated to publishing work from a wide range of viewpoints and cultures. We welcome submissions from new and established writers on politics, the arts, grass roots feminism, ideology, herstory, personal discoveries and interviews. We also welcome article outlines or descriptions for consideration. FIREWEED will print articles, essays, reviews, poetry, fiction, visual art, cartoons and photography.

Submission Guidelines:

Manuscripts should be typewritten, double spaced on 8 1/2 by 11 inch paper with footnotes and illustrative material, if any, fully captioned. If you are submitting visual work, please send a photograph, slide or xerox. FIREWEED cannot take responsibility for unsolicited original material. Only work accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope of an appropriate size will be returned. Decisions as to acceptance of submitted work are made by the Editorial Collective; we cannot guarantee acceptance of submitted material. Payment for accepted material is a contributor's copy of the issue of FIREWEED in which the work appears.

FIREWEED is currently soliciting material for the following issues:

Issue 3 & 4: Women and the Arts (a double issue): Theatre; Literature; Performance; Video; Dance; Film; Painting; Sculpture; Drawing; Printmaking; Music; Experimental Arts.
Deadline: April 20, 1979.

Issue 5: Language: Aspects of language; How women use words, privately and publicly; Graffiti; Recent stylistic innovations; Rhetoric, jargon and "obscenity"; Language and sexism, communication, advertising; The role which ethnic, education and class differences play in communication; Non-verbal language. We are particularly interested in receiving experimental poetry and short fiction for this issue.
Deadline: July 15, 1979.

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CONTENTS

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“Our Most Precious Resource”: A Critical Analysis of International Year of the Child
by Christine Bearchell

Perspectives on Child Abuse
by Kathleen McDonnell

Images of Children
photographs by Annette Clough, Laura Jones, Gail Kenney, Arlene Moscovitch

Poetry
by Klara Balla, Cécile Cloutier, Gianna Patriarca, Janis Rapoport
Illustrated by Jennifer Foote, Helena Hamilton

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Doris Lessing: Shapes of Pain, Patterns of Recovery
by Carole Spearin McCauley

Short Fiction
by Margot Livesey

Visual Art
by Julie Voyce

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by Ruth Cooperstock

Notes on Women and the Political Process
by Kathryn Jordan

Poetry
Ayanna Black, Gwen Hauser, Catherine Wright

Photography
by Stephanie Colvey

Reviews