

Trouble & Strife

A radical feminist magazine

Putting politics back into sex
Well of Loneliness revisited
Pornography and pollution
Arab women seek freedom
Prostitute women count the cost



No. 15
£1.95

Trouble and Strife is cockney rhyming slang for wife. We chose this name because it acknowledges the reality of conflict in relations between women and men. As radical feminists, our politics come directly from this tension between men's power and women's resistance.

Trouble & Strife is produced collectively by Lynn Alderson, Margot Farnham, Cath Jackson, Susanne Kappeler, Liz Kelly, Sophie Laws, Lyn May and Sara Scott, with help from Harriet Wistrich (taping), Judy Stevens, Catherine Tidnam, Antonia Bystram (paste-up), Hilary Allen (index). With many thanks to the Women's Health and Reproductive Rights Centre for the use of their space and resources.

Typeset by SuperSetting (01-960-4402)

Printed by In-Speed Printers, Unit 1, Portland Industrial Units, Kingsway, Luton LU4 8HA (0582 405686)

Distributed by Turnaround (01-609 7836)

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Contents No. 15

Trouble & Strife

Letters	2
Matters of Life and Death <i>Patricia Hines</i>	3
Lives of Lawbreaking Women <i>Mary Smeeth</i>	11
Putting Politics Back into Sex <i>Joan Scanlon and Susanne Kappeler</i>	15
Hysteria or Resistance? The Great Freudian Cover-up Part II <i>Jane Rondot</i>	18
Ordeals <i>Marieme Hélie-Lucas</i> reviews <i>Both Left and Right Handed</i>	25
Counting the Cost <i>Cecilie Høigård and Liv Finstad</i>	19
Justice Unbalanced review by <i>Deborah Cameron</i>	35
Bad News: report from <i>Saheli Women's Resource Centre</i>	37
Well, well, well . . . a classic review of <i>The Well of Loneliness Cath Jackson</i>	40
Outwrite: <i>Margot Farnham</i> interviews women from the <i>Outwrite Collective</i>	46

**5th Birthday
issue**

LETTERS

★ Dear Trouble and Strife,
To respond to all the points of criticism and misinterpretation of my article in Gail Chester's letter would probably take up half this issue of Trouble and Strife. However, there are a couple of points she makes that require some comment.

Firstly, on drawing lessons from history, I agree with Gail that it is a crucial process for our understanding of and strategies for the political present. However, to make this process effective analogies must be appropriate and facts correct. Hence, I do not think it is merely pedantic to challenge Gail's statement, "We must not forget that another six million people died in the gas chambers alongside the six million Jews."

In actual fact of the six million Jews that were murdered by the Nazis, about half that number were actually killed in the gas chambers. The others were shot by Einsatzgruppen (special execution squads) or died of disease and starvation in the ghettos and the concentration camps. A relatively small number of non-Jews were killed in the gas chambers, although millions were murdered by the Nazis (by other methods) for being Communists, gypsies, homosexuals, mentally handicapped, as well as 'ordinary' citizens living under the extremely brutal conditions of Nazi occupation. The significance of the gas chambers, as opposed to Nazi brutality in general, was that they were constructed specifically to effect, in the most efficient way, the final solution - to exterminate all Jews. Antisemitism was the cornerstone of Nazism to the extent that towards the end of the war, effecting the extermination programme took priority over winning the war.

To make this point does not entail in any way (as Gail suggests I imply) that the Jews have uniquely suffered. As Gail rightly points out there are other examples in world history of mass genocide from which we may learn lessons. But, the point I was making, is that we must be careful about the way in which we draw analogies. For instance, I would say that the anti-NF campaigns of the mid 1970s made very appropriate analogies with the experience of the Jews under the Nazis - if the NF were allowed to thrive it could very

well lead to the gas chambers. Why was it, though, that the anti-Clause campaign made those same particular analogies? There are countless other examples of repressive states throughout the world and history that have made laws against homosexuality. Why evoke images of Nazism? Could there be any connection with the growth of sado-masochism (particularly in the gay male community), its eroticisation of Nazism as witnessed very visibly in the present cult of black leather?

The second point I want to address is that of choice. There is a difference between acknowledging that all labels - e.g. 'woman', 'Jew', 'lesbian', 'feminist', 'hippy' etc are social constructions, and implying that we have the same amount or lack of choice about them. I was born female and I was born to Jewish parents; how I live my life as a woman or a Jew is to some extent up to me. I don't have to adopt the ultrafeminine role, I do not have to observe the Jewish religion. The extent to which we can defy our social constructions depends on all sorts of outside forces (e.g. availability of feminist ideas, money, strength of the family etc). I was *not* born a lesbian or a feminist, at some point I *chose* to adopt those labels. It may be more difficult for me to unchoose them particularly if I've been out of the closet, if not up on the soapbox!

It is the sort of comment at the end of Gail's letter that I object to: "Butch dykes, effeminate pansies, loud Jews with large noses and curly hair - we all exist and none of us can assimilate." Being a butch dyke or effeminate pansy is a lifestyle choice, a form of behaviour, a set of values one has adopted. Having curly hair and a big nose is a biological fact.

As a critique of heterosexuality, an institution central to the maintenance of male power, lesbianism is not merely a preference, it has the potential to be a very radical feminist act. It is never a *free* choice and it may be a much easier choice for some women than others. However, it is undoubtedly a very positive feminist choice.
In sisterhood,
Harriet Wistrich,
London N16

Matters of Life and Death

'If GPA can define toxicity in an industrial world saturated with synthetic chemicals, then why can't we define pornography in literature, art and film?'
Patricia Hynes compares the struggles against pornography with those against pollution. An exciting, wide-ranging analysis emerges which takes the ground from beneath familiar arguments on censorship and freedom and creates a radical manifesto.

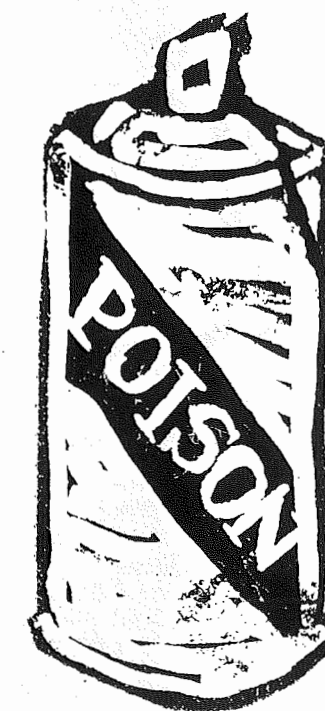
Ten years ago ecofeminism appeared to be terrain where one could synthesize the liberation of women with the integrity of nature. The findings of environmental science were directly applicable to the conditions of women in patriarchy. Polluted and stressed environments are identified by their low species diversity and low occupational diversity. Species die off - often the complex ones - and the ecosystem becomes more homogeneous. Many women live under severe and stressful conditions of poverty, powerlessness, and sexual violence. Like polluted ecosystems, women in sexist societies have low occupational diversity and few resources. Large numbers of women in industrial societies are concentrated in few, low-status occupations: housewife, secretary, and the service professions, so that women have limited power and self-expression in society.

In the ensuing ten years, ecofeminism has become a fast moving current of the women's movement, attracting women who are not scientists but notably deficient in women who are. Dialogue among women scientists has yielded a promising literature on feminism and science, mainly in the field of biology where most women scientists are located. 'Deep ecology' has developed into a male counterpart to ecofeminism, but largely

inattentive to feminism. Environmentalism has broadened with a wide range of non-profit environmental activist groups. Environmental protection has generated a profession of engineers and lawyers who enforce a burgeoning number of environmental laws.

As these currents progress, certain contradictions have emerged. One can be a successful professional environmentalist by being a good bureaucrat. One can be a deep ecologist and illiterate in feminism. One can be an ecofeminist who denounces 'rape' of the planet but is reticent to denounce pornography, sexual violence, and the traffic in women. Lawyers who would cut down a polluting industry in court, champion the legal standing of the pornography industry. Some of these contradictions form the starting point of my analysis.

For most of the past ten years, I have worked as an environmental engineer enforcing environmental laws. Many of these laws and their amendments have come into effect, caused a limited, but remarkable change in consciousness, and become an established reality within a decade. Simultaneously, I have worked in the anti-pornography movement, particularly for the anti-pornography ordinance (the Dworkin-MacKinnon amendment) introduced into



numerous US city governments. The work of organising and educating for the ordinance has raised some consciousness; but, unlike environmental law, the ordinance has a very tenuous and embattled existence. At every step, liberal lawyers swarm like flies to protect the pornography industry's 'free speech', even though — in the case of pornography — a man's speech is a woman's terror. Yet, the same lawyers would and do limit the freedom

of industry to pollute, because — in the case of pollution — one man's freedom is another man's hazard.

My earlier analysis of women and ecosystems under extreme conditions still holds. But, as the movements to end pollution and pornography mature, I find increasingly critical differences between the conditions of women under patriarchy and nature under patriarchy.



Judy Stevens

Because feminism is tangential to deep ecology (ecofeminism being regarded as a small lens that *women* bring to ecology), deep ecologists can borrow unabashedly from the 'feminine' imagery of 'male erotica' to describe nature. In some deep ecology writing, nature is sexualised with imagery — pictures and words — used in pornography. Deep ecologists do not pinpoint male dominance as the cause of alienation from nature. Rather, industrial countries develop at the expense of nature because, they explain, 'people are damaged' by egoism, abstraction, competition, and domination.

'People are damaged' is a passive construction. 'People are damaged' does not say *whose* egoism, abstraction, competition, and dominance creates the damage. Women do not hold up half that sky. With few exceptions and without complete success, women are induced to be selfless, feeling, co-operative, and submissive as a base of support for male egoism, abstraction, competition, and dominance. (Using a kind of moral alchemy, some feminists are making virtues out of these permitted 'feminine' behaviors.) If deep ecologists would split out the responsibility of men who degrade nature, by virtue of economic, military, and political power, from the responsibility of women who, for example, wear fur coats — then their often elegant treatises on *human* alienation from nature would better fit reality.

Ecofeminism appeared to be terrain where fundamental connections between women and nature could be made — for our liberation, for the integrity of nature. However, ecofeminist writing is reticent to look at the specific sexual dominance of women by men and to call it sexual violence and a violation of women's civil rights, while it is specific, detailed and clear on violence done to nature. Male dominance of women is explained by ecofeminists as originating in 'male fear and resentment of the elemental power of the female'. This explanation of patriarchy emphasises the limits and weakness of men before women, and obscures their power and dominance of women. 'Fear and resentment' is a passive description of hatred, and could almost make you feel pity for the 'fearful'. It does not describe or explain the worst of what men do to women — encouraged by pornography — and the pleasure men

find in sadistic sex. Pornography, incest, woman-battering, traffic in women: all this ugly, necrophilic degradation is 'women's nuclear winter'. But ecofeminism is braver, more explicit, angrier and more effective about the threat of nuclear winter than the fact of an epidemic in male violence against women.

Why is it less threatening to talk about the dominance and death of rainforests and the unnamed species which disappear with them, than the dominance and death of women in pornography, prostitution and sex slavery? Why is language of rape — borrowed from the worst of what men do to women and applied to what men do to nature — now used more easily, frequently and publicly about nature than about women? One effect of this uncritical use of rape is to reduce women's issues of pornography, prostitution, and sexual slavery to small, domestic and individual concerns while the large, global and collective concerns of the earth are the arms race, nuclear power, global warming, the disappearance of species. The ecology movement will rush off in small dinghies against nuclear powered ships and whaling vessels; but they hold back against — and thus protect — the Destroyer — male dominance. The environmental movement is popular *and respected*, especially when dissenting from dominant industrial and political powers; the anti-pornography movement is controversial and embattled *for* dissenting from men, male sexuality, and the institutional male pimping of women. This difference makes men, like George Bush, want to be known as environmentalists, even when they are not. This difference makes women not want to be called feminists (the feared 'f-word'), even when they are.

Despite these points of discontinuity in the two movements, there are important connections between pornography and pollution to be explored here. There are also gains in environmental consciousness and action which we can apply to our work against pornography. If these points embolden ecofeminism and push deep ecology to confront the epidemic of violence against women, all the better.

About seven years ago I sat in safety training for engineers and scientists working in hazardous waste. The instructor, an ex-Vietnam veteran who turned to hazardous



Pornography reaches every corner of the world through mass media, as remote from where it was produced as is DDT in polar ice caps.

1. A toxic compound used in a range of industrial projects, now seldom put into new equipment. The particular problem with PCBs is that they are only destroyed at very high temperatures; if the incineration is not hot enough they can be transformed into even more toxic chemicals which are released into the atmosphere.

Those who commit the world to living with risk are generally not the ones who suffer the risks of their actions.

waste safety training when the war was over, enlivened his course with stories of toxic waste dumps full of explosive and combustible chemicals, dead bodies, and 'lists of prostitutes'. The implication was that all of this was equally deadly, dirty and dangerous business. I filed this away knowing the association of prostitutes with toxic waste was a rich vein to be mined. We went different ways with the association. He saw prostitutes as agents in an underworld of hazard and crime; I saw the system of prostitution as hazardous for women caught in it.

A few years later, Alan Dershowitz debated Andrea Dworkin on the issue of pornography. Dershowitz is a self-described above-average, ambitious Harvard lawyer, who has made his fame defending the First Amendment rights of neo-nazis and pornographers, and wins his cases on legal technicalities, not substance. By the time of the debate, I had worked for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) sufficiently long to know that a law on toxic substances had been used to ban the manufacture of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and to phase out PCBs currently used in transformers and capacitors. The grounds for the ban had been the toxicity and potential misuse of the chemical: it had endangered some lives in a spill which contaminated cooking oil and could potentially harm others. It occurred to me during the debate that environmental attorneys justify banning certain chemicals in a free market economy, even though the ban is a limitation on free enterprise, and is a threat to profit and to industrial licence. The right of society to an existence unendangered by PCBs supercedes the right of industries in a 'free market' system to use an industrially important, toxic chemical. Industry resisted and still resists the encroaching nature of environmental regulation, saying that EPA could exercise arbitrary power in determining what constitutes endangerment to human health and the environment.

If they can ban a chemical for its toxicity, why can't they ban magazines and films which poison and destroy women's lives, I thought, as I listened to Dershowitz defend free speech. If they can limit 'free enterprise' without damage to a free market economy, then why can't they limit 'free speech' without damage to First Amendment rights. If EPA can define toxicity in an industrial world

saturated with synthetic chemicals, then why can't we define pornography in literature, art and film. My thoughts that evening were the background to this fuller analysis of pollution and pornography: their connections, their dissimilarities, the lesson in one for the other.

'Drift' of pollution and pornography

Toxic chemicals cannot be restricted to where they are generated or used. Pesticides sprayed on plants are carried by wind and redeposited in soil and lakes. Residue is washed from plant and plant environment into groundwater and is drawn by the influence of a pumping well to the kitchen for drinking water. Other residue is carried in driving rain as surface runoff to nearby streams where, with stream water, it flows to rivers and ultimately the sea. Other is ingested by insects, which are eaten by other insects, who are eaten by fish then by a bird which is captured by a predator animal. These are the connections between local use of pollutants and global pollution. This is why the bald-headed eagle, remote from where DDT was sprayed, could be rendered nearly extinct by it.

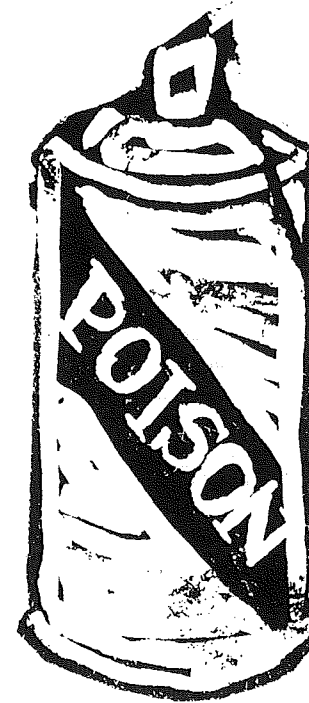
A similar principle exists in pornography. Pornography reaches every corner of the world through mass media, as remote from where it was produced as is DDT in polar ice caps. It is on newstands, billboards, and calendars in the workplace in parts per million residues of the big industry where it is concentrated in porn magazines, movies, videos, peep shows. Not only are individual women in the industry victimised, but pornography endangers all of us. Pornography encourages violence against all women by making it appear exciting for men to rape women and pleasurable for women to be raped. Men and boys who read pornography become inured to the repulsion of rape and degradation of women; pornography legitimises their doing in their private life what they see done to women in videos, movies and magazines. These are the connections between the private use of pornography and the universal degradation of women. This is why any woman, no matter how remote from where pornography is made or used, can be the victim of it.

And if, for the sake of saving the bald eagle, DDT was banned from use, then why

cannot pornography be banned for the sake of stemming violence against women?

Informed consent

Selling poisons and making pornography are justified by the argument that as long as people know what they are getting into and choose it, it is okay. The US pesticide law allows DDT and other pesticides banned from use in the United States to be exported for use in other countries, provided the country is informed what the pesticides are and accepts them. Increasingly, chemical manufacturing industries are being relocated to developing countries, where labor is cheap and occupational health standards are not firmly established. Increasingly toxic wastes from industrial countries are being shipped for disposal to the Third World. Debt, economic bondage, foreign aid plus pesticides, foreign aid plus waste, forgiveness of debt if waste is taken — these are the conditions which make it almost impossible for developing countries to refuse hazardous waste, toxic manufacturing facilities, and pesticides. Are these hazards, then, freely accepted or chosen, because the recipient country is informed of their toxicity? When they are accepted within a downward spiral of poverty, famine, debt and loss of natural resources — is this free choice?



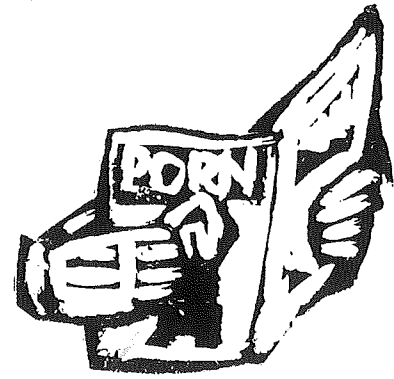
An analogous system of poverty and forced dependency exists for women. It explains why women and girls enter systems of pornography and prostitution, and why they stay in situations where they are battered. The moral issue at stake in prostitution and pornography is not whether a woman consents. The issue at stake is not addressed by arresting prostitutes as agents of the system of prostitution. Nor is it addressed by improving the 'working' conditions of prostitutes with health and safety measures — no more than clean, non-corrosive, well-marked containers for hazardous waste solve the problem of waste generation. The ethical issues for women are to eliminate poverty, to educate for independence, to deconstruct the eroticizing of rape, incest, and batter and to call it for what it is. These are the necessary social and political conditions for women to make free choices.

Use vs abuse

EPA regulates toxics at the waste end and, with few exceptions like PCBs and DDT, tolerates the proliferation of toxic substances, as if environmental protection is about abuse rather than *use* of toxic chemicals. Industrial accidents, like Bhopal, are blamed on the ignorance of unskilled workers and the backwardness of developing countries' health regulations.

Industrial accidents happen because the chemicals and processes used have a certain risk of failure and because, however remote the risk, there are always unforeseen occurrences which cannot be predicted in advance. For this reason, even nuclear power advocates would not locate nuclear plants at the hub of a large, metropolitan area. For this reason, all nuclear power plants have emergency evacuation plans. For this reason, some of us protest any use of nuclear power and call for the shut down of existing plants.

Regulating pornography by calling it adult literature and not selling to minors suggests that pornography embodies sophisticated risk which is safe for some — adults — and unsafe for others — minors. It suggests that, like high-risk technology, safety is a question of the accidental abuse of risk, not the use of risk. It suggests that adult men are moral, reasonable, not suggestible to rape and sadistic sex, not likely to do what they are entertained with in pornography, not likely to



A recent poll in the United States found that 85% of 13-year-old boys think that it is okay for a husband to rape his wife. Keeping pornography out of the hands of minors is pseudo-control . . .

be desensitized to it and stand by and watch while someone else does it. A recent poll in the United States found that 85% of 13 year old boys think that it is okay for a husband to rape his wife. Keeping pornography out of the hands of minors is a pseudo-control, when it has already drifted down in male culture from men to boys — that girls and women are their property. The pervasiveness of pornography, the 'normality' of pornography contributes to the 'normality' of violence against women. The use of pornography — no matter whose hands it is in — is hazardous for women. For this reason, we want the use of pornography and the abuse of women ended.

Living with risk: pleasure with danger

When the argument that the use and proliferation, not just the abuse, of hazardous chemicals challenges the toxics industry, the industry counters with the trendy philosophy of modern living, called 'living with risk'. The industry has moved from denial of risk and harm in the 1950s and 1960s at the incipience of the environmental movement, to rationalistic risk-benefit calculation in support of alleged benefits of toxics in the 1970s and 1980s, to 'living with risk' as a modern, progressive attitude of the late 1980s. Pollution is the price we pay for living 'well'; risk is the underside of progress.

But who lives well? Not the poor who generally live closest to contamination, not the victims of pollution, not women who care-take victims, not workers in industry and industrial neighbourhoods who have higher cancer rates because of that industry, not the relocated people of Chernobyl whose town is buried, not the women of Bhopal abandoned and shunned because they can't bear healthy children. Those who commit the world to living with risk are generally not the ones who suffer the risk of their actions. The risk-makers, calling themselves the risktakers, enjoy the financial and political benefits of high risk technologies in offices and homes remote from the hazards. Some pay the price for others to live well.

Defenders of pornography use a similar progression of arguments. First, they deny that there is any connection between the use and proliferation of pornography and violence against women. Then they assert that the risks of losing speech, literature and art outweigh

the benefits of banning pornography or giving women standing to sue pornographers and their merchants for their loss of civil rights from pornography. And recently, they have embraced the trendy philosophy of 'pleasure and danger'. Pornography is actually being defended as necessary for liberated, robust sexuality. Danger is the price, the complementary underside of sexual pleasure.

But who is endangered? Not those who finance, write, purvey, buy and use pornography. (The American Civil Liberties Union — ACLU — is vigilant in protecting them from the danger of being sued by women injured by pornography.) Women and children are the objects of pornography: in the industry and in the home. They are the targets of male sexual fantasy, turned on by pornography; acting on it; and accustomed to the degradation of women and children by the cultural normalcy of male violence.

Dressing up the danger

Industries cover up their toxic activities with environmentally neutral and beneficent language: thus weed killers are 'plant inhibitors'; and herbicide spray plans are 'vegetation management plans'; and incineration is 'resource recovery'. Similarly, the industry dresses itself in a mantle of goodwill and progress. The General Electric slogan of the 1950s, when the war chemical industry and the atom bomb project were being recycled into peacetime uses, was 'a better life through chemistry'. This has given way to 'we bring good things to life' as major chemical companies have retooled for the age of biology and genetic engineering.

Similarly with pornography, a book review in *The New York Times* exalts the 'luxuriant outcrop of Victorian pornography'. Magazines which depict women gagged, bound, and being beaten are called 'adult' and 'erotic' literature and 'robust' sexuality. And, I was told recently, the Playboy Foundation likes to fund feminist projects — as phoney and morally bankrupt a gesture as a weapons manufacturing plant garnishing itself with artificial wetlands and a childcare centre.

How clean is 'clean'?

Pollution is universal, in gross concentrations from direct use and disposal, in infinitesimal levels from drift and fallout. The industry blames the heightened concern that this

knowledge engenders on detection instruments. Increasingly sensitive instruments enable us to find parts per trillion pollutants where once we could measure only parts per thousand, so that what used to be 'clean' no longer is. How clean is 'clean' nags every environmental decision because one person's 'clean' is another person's polluted. Proponents of pollution blame sensitive detection for alarming people with the universality of pollution. They charge that the environment is not worsening. It only appears to be because we monitor more, we measure more, we report more, consciousness is higher, instruments are more sensitive.

The purveyors of pornography charge that it is impossible to define what is and what isn't pornography, that great art and literature and subversive, counter-cultural work and even feminist work are equally threatened by

any movement to ban pornography. They thwart any attempt to define pornography by alleging that everything can be called pornography. They blame radical feminists for creating a climate of 'pollution' around sexuality when we document the extent of violence against women and the connection between male sexuality and male violence.

This blaming the messenger for the message has not held environmental agencies in inaction. Environmental agencies and environmentalists have overcome the paralysis possible when you find dirt everywhere. Feminism, however, faces much more complex opposition than environmentalism. Most polluters don't pollute because they like the dirt. They like the profits of a polluting enterprise; they resent the costs of anti-pollution devices. A few are turned on by risk-laden technology, when the danger is intimately



Judy Stevens

Pornography is actually being defended as necessary for liberated, robust sexuality. Danger is the price, the complementary underside of sexual pleasure. But who is endangered?



mixed with their pleasure, as in the development of the atomic bomb where male ego, male bonding and the romance of technical adventure, competition and dominance came together. But *most* defenders of pornography like pornography. They are not just protecting profit and free speech; they are protecting sexuality based on dominance, degradation and humiliation. They are protecting their right to play around with misogynistic and violent sex.

The forces of opposition are much greater against those who make connections between the global traffic in women and misogynistic sex eroticized in pornography than against those who have exposed the international traffic in pollution. Feminists who oppose pornography are ridiculed as moralistic, sexless prudes. Environmentalists were trivialized as quacks, luddites, nature freaks, and 'leisured'. But the change in global consciousness has enabled environmentalists to break through the name-calling, to convince the world that the earth is endangered. Environmentalists are now respected and admired. Two per cent of the Swedish population are members of Greenpeace. Would that the same per cent of any country comprised a woman-centred anti-pornography movement.

Potential harm and actual harm

Proving harm is more rigorous for victims of pornography than victims of pollution. Increasingly, the presence of toxins, not proof that they caused harm is sufficient cause for action. If organic chemicals are detected in groundwater of a town's aquifer, the groundwater must be renovated and the source of contamination removed, whether anyone drinking the water has been proven harmed or not. The presumption is that these chemicals are toxic and will most likely harm humans in their drinking water and should be eliminated.

Feminists are constantly challenged to prove the connections between pornography and violence against women — that pornography harms women. Why is it that people dying from cancer due to contaminated drinking water provoke more action and more liability claims than women killed in the underworlds of prostitution, pornography, and systems of sexual slavery? Why, even with the dead bodies of women, can we not put pornography on trial, when we need only

detect toxic chemicals in groundwater without any evidence of harm to sue an industry? Can we not live well, comfortably, and healthily without poisoning the earth? Environmentalists are urging a concept of 'sustainable' development and technology, that is, growing food, using energy, building cities and transportation systems in ways that do not ravage and deplete nature's soil, reserves of water, air, and species of plant, insect and animal. 'Think globally and act locally' expresses the environmental understanding of 'the personal is political'. Environmentalists believe that pollution is not a necessary consequence of progressive living. It is a failure to respect nature, to see ourselves as part of nature, and to design our existence accordingly. It is a result of inequity, where those who benefit from pollution and exhaustion of natural resources live apart from those who suffer from it. It is a consequence of environmental protection resources being siphoned off for military, weapons, and defence systems.

Can we not produce a rich, diverse literature without pornography? Can we not enjoy a vigorous and robust sexuality without rape, battery, dominance and subordination? Like pollution, eroticizing the humiliation of and violence against women is a failure of respect and equity, and a consequence of male dominance expressed in sexuality. Of how much consequence is a global environmental movement to save all other species of being, when one half of the human race is subordinated by the other? We want no less of a change in consciousness about pornography than environmentalists want about the destruction of rainforests. We want it recognized that pornography endangers women for the pleasure of men. We want it recognized that male sexuality premised on the humiliation of women is no more sustainable for women than slashing and burning rainforest is for the ecology of the Amazon basin. We want no less in law than has been gained by environmental lawyers. We want redress in law, as victims of pollution now have, based on the fact that pornography is a violation of women's civil rights. We want no less than terrestrial ecologists demand for endangered species. We want women and girls to live in a world that has respect for our existence, where women's dignity and our life cannot be snuffed out for male sexual pleasure. □



Lives of Lawbreaking Women

Mary Smeeth reviews two books about women activists whose lives are a source of inspiration. Constance Lytton's book shows that autobiography can be fun, but our intrepid reviewer gets lost in the *Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison*.

Up until now, I have to confess, the popularity of the autobiographical/biographical genre has puzzled me. At the word 'autobiography' my eyes glaze over, my heartbeat slows down, and I experience that desperate, dull, sinking feeling more commonly evoked by the sight of some acquaintance who has just given up smoking, or just got back from 'doing' India, advancing upon me with a look of steely resolve that tells me I am going to 'hear all about it'.

It was not, then, with the most positive attitude in the world that I turned my attention to Constance Lytton's newly republished work entitled *Prisons and Prisoners* with the — to my mind — unhappy addition 'Some Personal Experiences'. Virago have certainly not done themselves or Lady Constance any favours with the cover. The cover is boring. The cover is very boring. The book is not. The book's, quite simply, spellbinding. I am aware that, like all recent converts, my crusading spirit could get the better of me here, but at the very least, allow me to say: read this book.

Constance Lytton's story is remarkable. She began her career as a militant member of the Women's Suffrage Movement when she was over forty years old. Her life up to that time as a semi-invalid in genteel poverty hardly paved the way. At times one almost suspects she is being disingenuous:

In 1896 and successive years, I had given secretarial help to my aunt, Mrs C.W. Earle, in the writing of her wonderfully delightful books, beginning with 'Pot Pourri from a Surrey Garden'.

Her 'conversion' to the cause of Women's Suffrage took place in similarly unlikely circumstances — "It was in August-September, 1908, at the Green Lady Hostel, Littlehampton, the holiday house of the Esperance Girls' Club . . ." This conversion, which stemmed from meeting two militant members of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), was not just a conversion to the Women's Movement but, eventually, to a belief in militant action as the only means of achieving social justice.

"Rebellion Against Tyrants is Obedience to God" was the message wrapped around the

Prisons and Prisoners, Some Personal Experiences by Constance Lytton. Virago. £6.95

The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison by Liz Stanley with Ann Morley. The Women's Press. £5.95

stone which Lytton threw at Lloyd George's car after he had, once again, reneged on his promise to back women's suffrage in the House of Commons. An act which led to her second term of imprisonment. "Deeds Not Words" was another favourite slogan which typified the ethos of Constance and her militant sisters, and led them to continue with their campaign of direct action in the face of increasingly inhumane punishment.

Constance Lytton's commentary is a bizarre mixture of refined observation and hard-hitting analysis. She despised her own background; of women like herself she wrote "a maiming subserviency is so conditional to their very existence that it becomes an aim in itself, an ideal."

There are moments when Lytton is disarmingly funny about her experiences. Even as she exposes the corruption and brutality of the judicial and penal system, she notes its comic absurdities. Before her first trial, she and the women arrested with her were obliged to stand in a line, each woman facing her arresting officer, until called to the dock. "It looked," Lytton observes, "as if we were vis-a-vis partners waiting for a country dance to strike up." Her matter-of-factness in the face of adversity is often more effective than any tirade of outrage: "Sir Albert de Rützen was

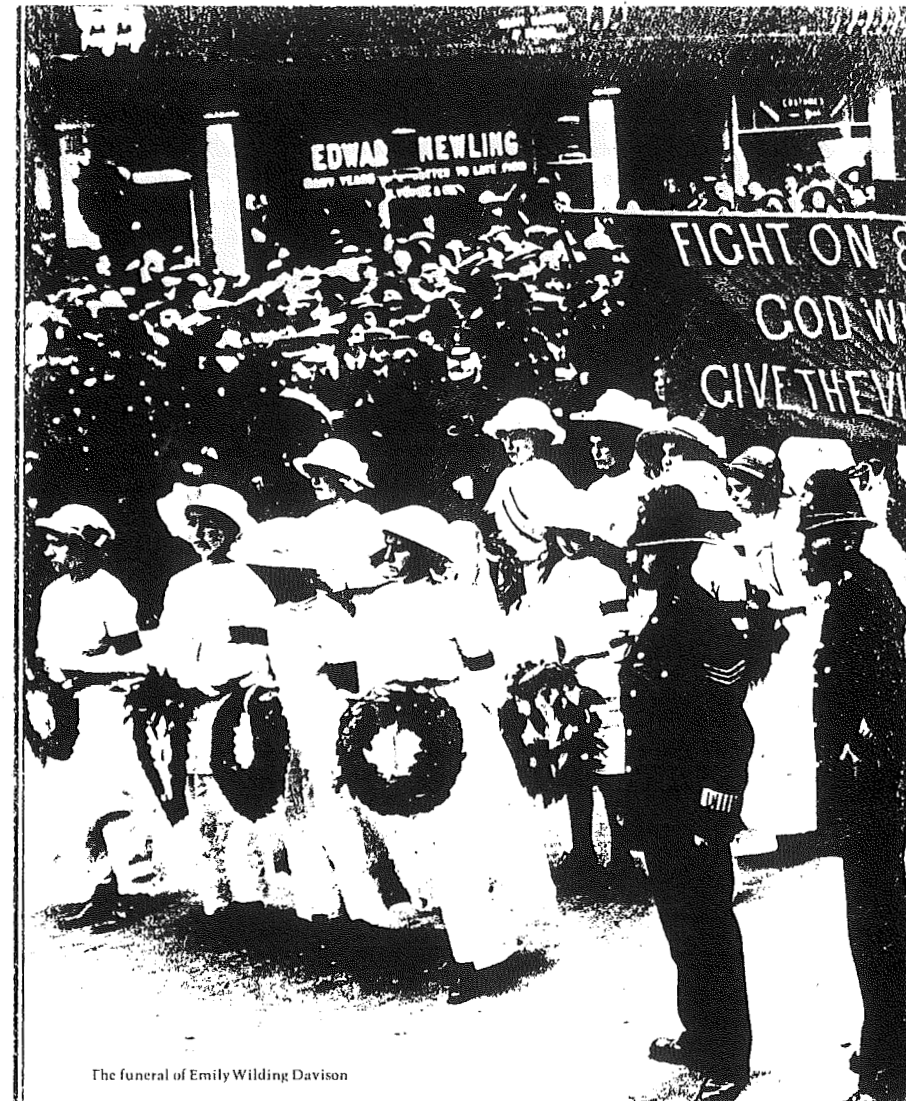
the magistrate," she explains beautifully, "he seemed old for the work."

There is, of course, a more brutal side to her story. Her accounts of being force fed, of hearing the screams of other women prisoners and being powerless to act, are harrowing in the extreme. Thereafter, the threat of more violence at the hands of male 'doctors' in prison is ever present, and fear haunts the narrative. Yet there is a complete absence of self dramatisation or self pity. Acutely aware of her own class privileges – which she did everything in her power to disown – Constance Lytton never felt she had done enough.

It is easy, in the cynical 80s, to be coolly mocking of women like Constance Lytton: so fervent, so naively optimistic. Their ardour makes them easy prey to more sophisticated modern 'strategists'. But nobody reading *Prisons and Prisoners* could write off Lytton's commitment as misguided passion or confuse her clear-sightedness with reductionism. Her wide-ranging critique of society involves a genuine, if sometimes awkward, attempt to deal with complex issues like class in the Women's Movement. She is continually critical of her own position as 'Lady Constance', the implications of which became increasingly clear to her through her



Constance Lytton



The funeral of Emily Wilding Davison

experiences in prison.

The strongest and most lasting impact of this book is the immediacy and urgency with which the ideas within it are transformed into action: indeed the two are barely separable. *Prisons and Prisoners* has a crucial relevance for us today. In describing ourselves as 'activists' are we not sometimes overstating the case – do we run the risks, and take the consequences in the same undaunted way that Lytton and her sisters did before us? 'Deeds Not Words' is a philosophy which should still inspire us and goad us into action. Militancy is a part of our legacy, and one we may have neglected for too long.

Activism in the library

One of the women Constance Lytton met through her work was Emily Wilding Davison. They were together when Lytton threw her stone at Lloyd George's car, although later it was Emily who took the stones and the law into her own hands, after acting on her own, without the knowledge of the WSPU. Her dramatic death, which occurred when she threw herself under the King's horse at the Derby in 1913, is a legend in women's history. But what of the woman? Why did she take that final, fatal course of action?

My prejudice against the biographical



Emily Wilding Davison

mode somewhat assuaged by *Prisons and Prisoners*, I began reading *The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison* in a much more 'author-friendly' frame of mind. I wanted to like this book and I certainly wanted to find out more about Emily Wilding Davison. Oh, unhappy life, I was unlucky on both counts.

I did enjoy reading a biography (or 'hagiography' – a word used by Liz Stanley and a potential candidate for a new phobia of mine) of E.W.D. by one of her contemporaries, Gertrude Colmore, which is reprinted at the beginning of the book. After that, however, the print shrank, and so did my interest. I can appreciate the painstaking work which Ann Morley and Liz Stanley put into researching this book – I can appreciate it because Liz Stanley constantly refers to it. This book is not, however, about Emily Wilding Davison. It is about Ann Morley and Liz Stanley trying to write a book. Liz explains,

Our idea of 'feminist biography' is that it should look beyond the famous dead. It should eschew the 'spotlight on the famous dead woman' approach, and instead locate the women who are its subjects within the social, political and intellectual context in which they lived and worked.

Laudable aims, but in this case, Stanley and Morley eschewed the spotlight so successfully, that the bewildered reader is left banging about in the dark.

To be fair – I am trying – Liz Stanley does declare herself in the introduction:

... in keeping with our feminist ideas about research processes ... we have eschewed presenting the reader with a 'final product', the biographic equivalent of a can of baked beans. Instead, we have tried to write about the process of finding out about Emily Wilding Davison, and all the many confusions, gaps and puzzles this *still* involves.

The first question this raised for me was why, then, call the book *The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison*? Why not 'Research Techniques in Contemporary Britain' or 'Liz and Ann go the Library'?

Secondly, and more seriously, I have to question just what the criteria are for putting the research process itself above the subject of that research in presumed reader interest. "History and biography are much more interesting than historians and biographers let on", Liz tells us gleefully. Well they are a lot more interesting than Liz lets on, that's for sure.

I actually find this insistence that the reader experience every triumph and every disaster, every laugh and every tear, quite offensive, not to say nauseating. "We had to go to libraries, order books, and microfilms, thumb our way through countless notebooks, letters ..." says Liz. And later, oh revelation of revelations, "We had to *think*". Yes, *think* – imagine that. Going to libraries *and* thinking.

Writing is, like it or not, a privileged activity. Research is a very privileged activity. Writing a book is a very, very privileged activity. To demystify this 'awesome' process, feminists should not, in my opinion, spend their time writing to explain how difficult writing is. Writing/research is a job of work, and this is how it should be approached. The results will then, hopefully, be correspondingly professional. This book made me angry because it lays itself open to every kind of criticism currently being directed at feminists. We need progressive, aggressive writing, not introspective 'experimentation'. For the mass of us more vulgar lot who lack the sensibilities to appreciate methodological subtleties: we need the can of baked beans.

The book itself – remember that? – is tortuously difficult to read. Threads of investigation are picked up and then put down again – "but more of that later" promises Liz, wickedly tempting. By the time we get back to "more of that" the bemused reader, having in the interim been forced to pursue several false leads ("we have drawn a blank with Miss Clarke ... The Miss E. Morrison active in Kensington from June 1909 was not Edith at all ...") cannot possibly have any recollection of to what or to whom the resumed investigation refers. *The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison* is like one of those Russian novels where all the characters keep changing their names and one has to keep going back 1,000 pages to find out who and what on earth is going on.

By the end of the book, I felt 'clue phobia' – a new disease – coming on, and I was totally knackered, though none the wiser about E.W.D. The final straw came when I thought the worst was over. Closing the book and glancing at the blurb on the back, I read in a disbelieving daze "... reads as excitingly as any detective novel ...". Come back Agatha Christie, all is forgiven. □

PUTTING THE POLITICS BACK INTO SEX

In September 1988, in the aftermath of Section 28, Sheba organised a mixed gay/lesbian panel discussion in London entitled 'Putting Sex Back Into Politics'. Here we print the speeches given by Joan Scanlon and Susanne Kappeler, which counter the implicit attacks on radical feminism in gay and lesbian politics.

Romanticism or Equality?

I want to begin by saying that I do believe in the possibility of a political coalition between different groups – including gay men and lesbians – but I also believe that the acknowledgment of difference is crucial to such a coalition. The possibility of alliance lies not only in challenging heterosexuality as an institution, but in the fight against racism, sexism and all other forms of oppression. Whether within the gay movement or within the women's liberation movement, if we regard questions of race and gender, or any other power relations, as a digression, a diversion from the 'real issue', then we are not fighting oppression. Feminists are fighting not for the right to sameness – but for equality. Liberalism has always confused equality with sameness, as one way of maintaining the

status quo. To feminism, equality means an end to degradation, subordination, social powerlessness and injustice. We stand against all such hierarchies, including gender hierarchy. What I am talking about, therefore, is the possibility of an alliance between the gay liberation movement and the women's liberation movement – not simply between gay men and lesbians – because there can be no common political ground based on the myth of a shared sexual identity between gay men and lesbians – i.e. between men and women.

A coalition is not possible either around a shared plea for tolerance of a sexual minority or around sexual naughtiness, exhibitionism and publicity – even if these are strategies adopted by some gay men and lesbians too. The plea for tolerance from the heterosexual

S

world (the victimisation model) and the plea for tolerance amongst ourselves (the sexual pluralism model in which 'anything goes') are usually the terms on which lesbians are invited to form an alliance with gay men. Both of these cancel out issues central to a feminist political agenda; both of these presuppose a shared identity which cuts across gender, amongst other things. We are told that we share either a homosexual identity (the tragic stance) or a homosexual sexuality defined by transgression (the cult of the forbidden fruit). Both of these – however moderate, however shocking – stem from romanticism and place themselves within a heterosexual tradition and not in opposition to it. In other words, to settle for being a sexual outlaw is at best self-defeating and presents no threat to the establishment. As feminists, we see this romanticism as even more alarming; we see a danger in the glorification of outlaw status – the danger of making it part of one's identity – the danger of not wanting to relinquish it, and of not wanting to challenge the circumstances which make people into outlaws. Heroes, martyrs and rebels can only exist so long as there is oppression and inequality.

M

For some gay men, this romanticisation of the figure of the sexual rebel means not only desiring what is forbidden – another man – but *being* what is forbidden to men in a patriarchy – an object of desire. Women have always been sexual objects, and that is precisely what we are trying to get away from. And it isn't simply a question of inversion – that we all want to reverse our sexual roles. As feminists we want to do away with roles, with dominance and submission in all its forms, and we want to do away with sexual definitions of ourselves. That is why we are not about to start defining ourselves that way as lesbians. That is why, as political lesbians, we are not into identity politics.

X

If we are to form a coalition with gay men, it will depend on expanding the political agenda. Such a coalition clearly cannot depend on sexuality or sexual practice. Expanding the political agenda means that we cannot be expected, as feminists, to cross certain items off our list of concerns, such as pornography, child abuse, violence against women. It means that gay men have to take these issues on board too. It means, for a start, that gay men have to tackle sexism

within their own community. It means that gay men have to take responsibility for being men.

Joan Scanlon

Sexual subjects not sexual objects

We've been asked to talk about 'putting sex back into politics'. My concern as a radical feminist is rather to talk about putting politics back into sex. For feminists, sex has always been at the centre of politics – don't forget where the term sexual politics came from. But the present mood around us seems to be rather to forget about the politics and get on with the sex. And to think that we can fight for lesbian and gay rights on the basis of sex instead of politics.

Let's not forget that Section 28, as law, is not an attack on sex and sexuality, but on political work around sexuality. The kind of work that doesn't make a profit and isn't a business, and for which we need public funding. Free enterprise promotion of homosexuality and lesbianism – the self-financing business of pornography, does not fall under this law. It meshes quite well with the government's commitment to free trade and self-regulating markets.

What is a threat to the government and the heterosexual world is political work, a politics which makes it clear that the promotion of lesbian and gay rights is simultaneously a critique of heterosexuality and heterosexism – the basis of 'normality' in our

'n p o l i t i c s

society. From a feminist perspective it makes no sense to ask for rights for lesbians and gay men without challenging heterosexuality and its privileges. And that means patriarchy and the privileges of men. You can't challenge heterosexuality, patriarchy, racism by celebrating your minority sex; you can only challenge it with politics – sexual politics and political action.

By politics I mean politics of social relations,

not identity politics. Defining your identity doesn't yet amount to politics and political action – but in the present climate of vying oppressions, of street credentials and competitive right-on-ness, there seems to be a notion that being a gay man, or being a lesbian, is itself so political that we don't need to worry about any other kinds of oppression.

It should be obvious that gay liberation won't bring lesbians liberation without women's liberation. There can be no civil rights for gays and lesbians in a society where women don't have equal civil rights with men. Gay men, even though they are discriminated against on the basis of sexuality, are still men in a world where men have power and privilege over women. I hardly need remind you for instance that the gay male community collectively commands massively more wealth and resources than does the lesbian community.

We've come together as a mixed audience and panel of lesbians and gay men in order to try and establish a dialogue, and to think about the possibilities of a joint politics and a joint campaign against the infamous Section 28. In order to be able to have such a dialogue, a few minimal conditions need to be fulfilled.

If we want to talk together, I expect us all to understand what feminist politics is. I expect you to be able to tell the difference between feminist politics and conservative authoritarianism; the difference between a feminist critique of pornography and the Mary

Whitehouse campaign, to be able to tell the difference between a civil rights law and a censorship law.

We keep hearing that the feminist critique of pornography, and of child abuse – heterosexual and homosexual – is a stumbling block to a joint lesbian and gay politics, and that feminist analysis constitutes a thought-police and censorship. I expect us to know the difference between a statement of political

analysis, and a police force. If feminism changes the way people think, it is because it makes sense to them, not because it has any power of enforcement.

There may be other misunderstandings to be cleared up between us, for instance the notion that because feminists are committed to politics and political action, we're against sex. The two, for us, are not mutually exclusive. But we do think that 'sex' and 'sexual practices' as well as the various buzz words of the contemporary sex discourse, such as 'desire', 'pleasure', 'danger', should be opened up to political analysis.

Sex isn't just sex, and desire isn't just desire, and pleasure isn't just pleasure – the question is precisely how these are structured. We think for instance that there is a world of difference between the desire for a lover who desires you, and the desire for a fictional image on a piece of paper.

We hear that feminists don't go in enough for the celebration of sex. The question is not whether we do – but whether you would know about it. We think that you celebrate sex by doing it – but the current consensus seems to be that you celebrate it by talking about it, writing about it, making a picture or a film about it. In fact, there seems to be an anxiety that unless there is a representation of it and an audience, it isn't real.

As feminists, we are not interested in the production of second-hand sex for an audience. Our objective is sex and desire as processes between people in a context of

equality, not the production of desire in the privacy of your identity. We're interested in the kind of desire which relates to another person – a sexual subject, not a sex object, or an image or a text or a pin-up or a set of clothes. The latter, for us, belong to the love of literature or the cinema or fashion – not to sex and sexual desire.

Susanne Kappeler

HYSTERIA OR RESISTANCE?

Dora: the great Freudian cover-up Part II

In the early 1970s Florence Rush began the public exposé of Freud's deliberate denial of child sexual abuse. Jane Rondot continues this feminist project by re-reading the famous case history of 'Dora', the 'hysteric', in this context and exposing Freud's perverse and wilful manipulation of the evidence.

In 1896 Freud publicly stated that hysterical symptoms were caused by sexual abuse in childhood and supported this claim by citing 18 case histories. "The behaviour of the patients who reproduce these infantile experiences of sexual abuse is in every respect incompatible with the assumption that the scenes are anything but a most distressing reality . . ." The similarity of the experiences convinced Freud of their validity yet he declined to support his evidence by references to other sources which documented the frequency of the sexual abuse of children.²

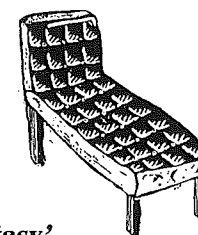
Moreover, Freud distorted his findings by stressing that "seducers" (a euphemism for abusers) were frequently women servants or siblings, tagging on that "unhappily" they were "all too often" an ambiguous "near relation". This is incompatible with evidence Freud gathered from his patients, the vast majority of whom were bourgeois women (although he cited a misleadingly high

proportion of male cases), and who overwhelmingly named their fathers as abusers. "Almost all my women patients told me that they had been seduced by their father."³

Despite these distortions, the paper "The Aetiology of Hysteria" received an "icy reception" from the all-male medical profession, which promptly dismissed it as a "scientific fairy tale".⁴ It was not reviewed in medical journals and Freud was ostracised by his colleagues.⁵ Why was the reaction so extreme? If, as Freud suggested, children were mostly at risk from women servants, whom patriarchy had no interest in protecting, why wasn't the medical establishment anxious to investigate the matter further?

My suggestion is that since doctors physically examined and questioned both children and hysterical patients, as well as writing and reading reports of child sexual abuse, they knew of its prevalence and that fathers

were the main culprits. Furthermore, they knew that abusers were not only 'uncivilised' lower class fathers, because medical consultations were expensive and most patients, and hence their fathers, were of the same class as themselves. Most likely some of them were culpable. The issue was literally too close to home for medical men who benefited from bourgeois patriarchy in both the public and private spheres. In both spheres patriarchy was being justified by the myth that bourgeois men were protectors – of public morality, and of their female relatives. If such men were named as abusers, the justification for patriarchal rule would be undermined. Although Freud avoided implicating fathers, his colleagues must have known that once child sexual abuse was established as fact, fathers would sooner or later be named as abusers.



The birth of a 'phantasy'

In the event their fears were groundless, since between 1896 and 1905 Freud renounced the "seduction" theory and explained hysteria with the "phantasy" theory which lay the ground for the Oedipal theory.⁶

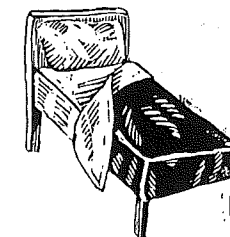
Almost all my women patients told me that they had been seduced by their father. I was driven to realise . . . that these reports were untrue and so came to realise that the hysterical symptoms are derived from phantasies and not from real occurrences.⁷

Armed with the Oedipal theory, he turned women's fact into fantasy. The Oedipal theory deified Freud and has become the foundation stone of the psychoanalytic establishment where it is handed down as gospel and applied as scientific law. In contrast the "seduction" theory is considered a 'mistake' despite the wealth of evidence which illustrates the frequency of child sexual abuse and the mental injuries it causes. Recent attempts to review the "seduction" theory have either been ignored by the Freudian Institute or met with the same "icy reception" which greeted Freud in 1896. Florence Rush was ignored, and Jeffrey Masson expelled from his position as president of the Freudian Institute in 1981.

The usefulness of 'Dora'

It strikes me that the case of Ida Bauer, 'Dora', falls between the two theories. Dora was analysed in late 1899, two years after Freud conceived of the Oedipal theory, and her case written up in early 1900. It seems a strange coincidence that Freud withheld publication until 1905, the year in which he retracted his seduction theory and explained hysterical symptoms via the Oedipal theory (in *Sexuality and the Neuroses*). Freud intended it to support the Oedipal theory, yet there are implicit suggestions that Dora was sexually abused as a child. In his determination to prove his theory, Freud marginalises the reality of Dora's situation. Had he been less single-minded, Dora's case may have vindicated the seduction theory.

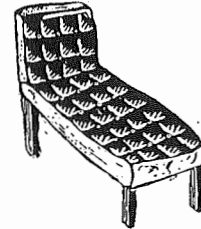
Dora went to Freud for treatment at the age of 18, on her father's insistence. At the age of eight she began to suffer from "neurotic symptoms", such as nervous asthma, at 12 from headaches or migraine, and from attacks of nervous coughing, which started from a complete loss of voice. At 18, "low spirits and an alteration in her character had... become the main features of her illness". (*Dora*, pp. 51-3)



Dora's father was having an affair with Frau K, whose husband, Herr K, assaulted Dora when she was fourteen. "When Dora was embittered she used to be overcome by the idea that she had been handed over to Herr K as the price (sic) of his tolerating relations between her father and his (Herr K's) wife; and her rage at her father's making such a use of her was visible behind her affection for him." (*Dora*, pp. 66)

Dora's case has become "the psychoanalytic model for the etiology of hysteria"⁸, a supposedly scientific, objective precedent for Freudian analysis. There is nothing objective about this case history. It is Freud's version of part of Dora's history filtered through his memory, "the case history itself was committed from memory". Freud's memory may have reached back to the age of two, but it

was not infallible or unselective. He remembers and records what he thinks is significant to his theory, not what may be highly significant to Dora's illness. He purposely excludes some material: "a number of the results of the analysis have been omitted". And when Freud fails to find enough evidence from the "facts", which are often no more than highly debatable interpretations, he borrows from other cases to bolster the theory: "I've restored what is missing".⁹



A scientific model

The technique whereby Freud arrives at his interpretation of Dora's words, actions and dreams is omitted because it would confuse the reader. However, I gather that the technique involves a series of guesses which always turn out to be spot on: "I could now hazard a guess"; "I ought to have guessed".¹⁰ His dream interpretations are also speculative and unprovable. Freud's "insights" are usually denied by Dora but, he assures us, when she says "no" she actually means "yes".¹¹ The "yes" is desired because it supports the theory, but when it is not forthcoming, "no" confirms it just as well.

The text is loaded with Freud's prejudices; he dictates what is "normal" and, having stated that physicians should put "personal tastes on one side", he goes on to talk about "excessively repulsive perversions".¹² Dora is "abnormal" because, aged 14, she runs away and is disgusted when attacked by Herr K.

The behaviour of this child of fourteen was already entirely and completely hysterical. I should without question consider a person hysterical in whom an occasion for sexual excitement elicited feelings that were preponderantly and exclusively unpleasurable.¹³

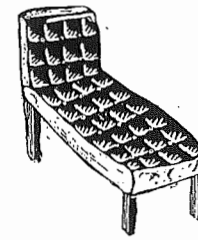
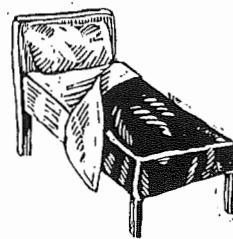
If a "child" is cornered and pounced upon by a middle-aged man she should find this sexually pleasurable; if she does not, she is "without question" hysterical.

No evidence is offered to back this astonishingly confident statement. Freud assumes that a "normal" girl has (adult) sexual desire, that it is heterosexual, and that a sexual

attack is an erotic experience rather than an occasion for fear and outrage. I find Dora's reaction completely understandable, and so do women who have experienced similar sexual attacks and reacted like Dora. The difference is that I accept women's evidence, whilst Freud denies it in order to make it fit patriarchal assumptions that male sexual violence is 'normal', and that women who are distressed by it are mentally disturbed *before* the experience, not as a consequence of it. Hence Freud implies that all women are hysterical, "abnormal". He provided the precedent; the medical profession regard it as law, and women who contradict Freud's truth with their own truth are silenced – they are hysterical liars.

Whose behaviour is incomprehensible?

The fact that Dora told her mother when Herr K. made a "proposal" by the lake is cited as further evidence of her "abnormality", her sexual repression and desire for revenge; "a normal girl . . . will deal with a situation of this kind herself."¹⁴ Freud finds nothing unusual in Herr K's "proposal". What he finds unusual is Dora's reaction to it (she wants to leave with her father, rather than stay alone with the K's). He does not divulge what the proposal was but implies that it was a proposal for marriage, referring to Herr K's "suit" and "the man's love". Yet he knows that the proposal is a sexual proposition. He quotes Dora's father asserting that "Dora's tale of the man's immoral suggestion is a phantasy".¹⁵ Freud is amazed at Dora's behaviour, not Herr K's: "her behaviour must have seemed as incomprehensible to the man after she had left him as to us."¹⁶ I find Dora's behaviour entirely comprehensible; she is threatened, she resists, and goes to her mother for protection. Herr K was not proposing marriage. He had followed her in the street, molested her when she was 14, and then called her a liar (he flatly denies the "proposal").



Freud appears to admire Herr K whose proposal is "unlucky". He wonders if Herr K would have "done any better if he had pressed his suit with a passion".¹⁷ What sort of passion is he talking about? "Pressed" indicates force. Freud knew Herr K's intentions were "immoral" yet speaks as if he was conducting a romantic Victorian courtship. According to Freud, Herr K should have forced himself upon Dora, because she slapped his face and ran away, but this "by no means signified a final no".¹⁸ Freud has already explained that Dora always says "no" when she means "yes", particularly where sex is concerned. Freud adds a 'scientific' gloss to the myth that women *really* want to be dominated. This is very convenient for patriarchy, women's mental and physical injuries from sexual violence are swept aside by the medical and legal profession because "no" means "yes" – Freud says so. It is not surprising that many women suffer in silence; they know what the reaction will be if they speak out.

Royal road to the unconscious?

I suspect that Freud is sexually aroused by Dora, he notes she is "in the first bloom of youth", with "engaging looks", and his description of Dora and the "reticule" (a small purse) is particularly voyeuristic. On what grounds is Dora's reticule "nothing but a representation of [her] genitals", and why is her putting her fingers into it an "unmistakable . . . announcement of what she would like to do with them", rather than nervous fiddling? The interpretation sounds like a result of Freud's desire, not of Dora's; "what she would like to do" should read "what he would like to do".

Small wonder that Dora calls off her analysis. Freud persistently identifies with her abuser, interprets everything she says, does, dreams as expressions of sexual impulses she doesn't have, and finally suggests that marriage to Herr K "would have been the only possible solution for all the parties concerned".¹⁹ Marriage, according to Freud, is just the thing to "cure" hysterical symptoms

which, he asserts, are also caused both by masturbation and by abstinence from it. "normal sexual intercourse" is prescribed; i.e. normal for Freud, within marriage. Freud's belief in the medicinal power of the penis is both laughable and tragic. Yet Freud appears to advocate it, not only as the solution to Dora's problems, but to all women's problems.

Freud's aggressive attitude towards Dora is evident from his violent and intimidating language. She is urged to "confess" the "secret" which Freud is determined to "tear from her". Confession implies guilt – her illness is the result of forbidden sexual activity (masturbation) and repressed sexual drives, but nothing to do with her appalling circumstances. "Facts" are established not to help but to conquer – "a fact which I did not fail to use against her";²⁰ she must be "forced to submit", to "yield" to Freud and to Herr K's "temptation", a euphemism for sexual exploitation. By submitting to male power Dora will be "cured", become "normal" (tractable) and agree to whatever Freud decides she means, and whatever her father, and Herr K, demand from her.

Freud wants Dora to get well not because he has her welfare at heart but because it will prove his theory, satisfy her father, who pays fees, and Herr K, with whom he identifies. Why should Dora's breaking off the analysis be "an unmistakable act of vengeance on her part"²¹ unless Freud was using the analysis to advance his career via the Oedipal theory? Dora's father wants Freud to bring Dora to reason, that is, to make her submit.



How to deal with female resistance

My final suggestion why this case remains a central precedent for the psychoanalytical establishment is that it is an account of failure. It is Freud's failure, but he blames it on Dora's refusal to agree with his interpretations and her decision to halt the analysis. Thus, the case can be interpreted as 'evidence' that women can only be cured by submission to patriarchal authority. Health

and conformity to male definitions of 'normal' (submissive obedience) are synonymous. According to Freud, Dora was ill because she refused to submit to Herr K; she remained ill because she refused to submit to Freud. This implies that bullying is an essential part of the treatment. Freud failed because he did not bully hard enough. Surely Dora gave up because she realised Freud could not help her, he was on the side of her abusers. "She disputed . . . no longer" because there was no point; Freud distorted everything she said. Yet his approach is considered by the psychoanalytical establishment as a programme for success – patriarchal success based on breaking down women's resistance and brainwashing them into 'normality'.

Dora's reality

Because he is obsessed with fitting the "facts" about Dora into the Oedipal theory Freud marginalises her reality. He cannot understand why Dora is "embittered" when her father takes Herr K's word against her own. Isn't the fact that she is threatened, humiliated and without parental support sufficient reason for her anger and bitterness? Freud admits that Dora is proffered to Herr K in exchange for his wife – "her father did not wish to look too closely into Herr K's behaviour with his daughter, for fear of being disturbed in his own love-affair with Frau K" – but cites Dora's former "silent acquiescence" as evidence that "she had all these years been in love with Herr K".³ From the age of about eight? What choice did Dora have? She was a child, she had no control over her father and she probably did not want to cause more trouble between her warring

parents by drawing attention to the affair. She may also have felt that if she did speak out, no-one would believe her, which is exactly what happened when she reported the "proposal". Dora looks after the K's children, which Freud offers as evidence that she is in love with Herr K – her interest in the children is "evidently a cloak" to disguise this. I would think that a girl who has an unhappy home life would find some solace in the company of children, particularly since her relationships with adults are stressful. Reality is pushed aside to make way for Freud's theory.

Dora rejects her role as submissive, domesticated daughter and object of exchange. She resists housework and stops wearing jewellery given to her by her father, and possibly also Herr K (he gave her "an expensive jewel-case"). Dora is aware that jewellery is a male pay-off for women's domestic and sexual services – both her mother and Frau K are given jewellery by her father – and she recognises the obligation implied by the gifts. In his pursuit of the significance of jewel-cases which, of course, symbolise female genitals, Freud ignores this sign of resistance – to role, not to sexual desire. Herr K also takes Dora for walks. This gives me an uneasy feeling about him, men who take little girls for walks and continually give them presents often have ulterior motives. Herr K watched Dora, followed her in the street, and molested her when she was 14. I wonder if he made previous approaches. Even at the age of eight Dora had begun to develop neurotic symptoms and this is about the time Herr K appeared on the scene. The childhood symptoms and the First Dream also arouse my suspicions about Dora's father.

A plausible explanation

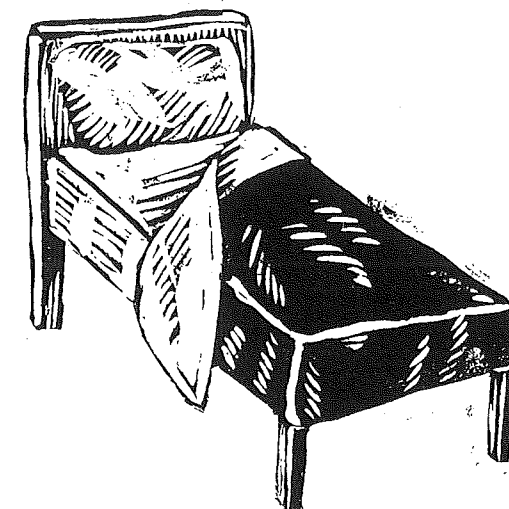
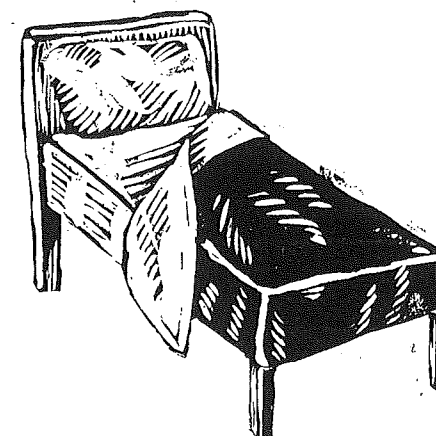
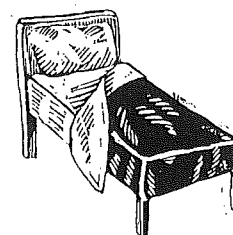
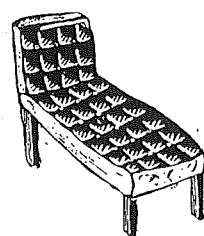
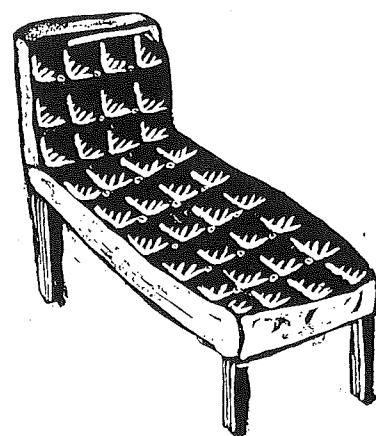
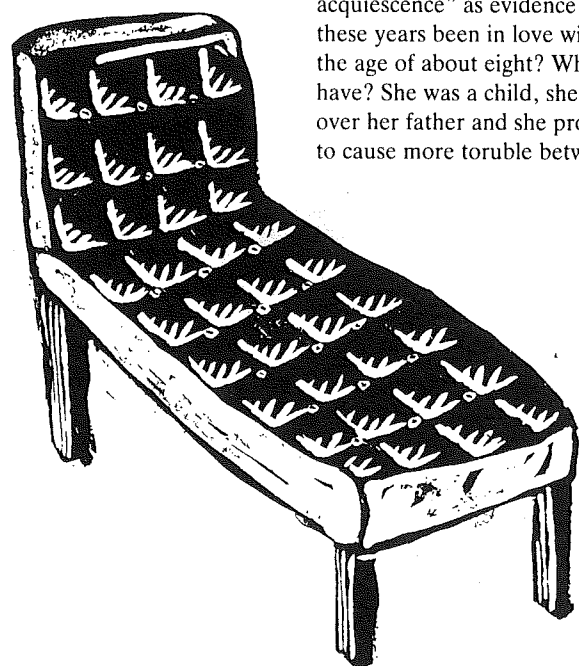
Why did Dora develop all these anxiety symptoms in childhood? Certainly not because of incestuous desire or masturbation, which are Freud's explanations. The plausible explanation is that Dora was seriously disturbed in her home life; a syphilitic father who is having an affair does not make for domestic harmony. Freud virtually deletes Dora's mother but it is clear that she was deeply unhappy, which is not surprising in view of her husband's disease and behaviour. If she had an obsession with cleanliness it is not difficult to see why, although Freud does not think her husband's syphilis is a relevant factor and castigates the mother as an uncultivated neurotic Hausfrau who is both Bad Wife and Bad Mother.⁴

From the limited facts which Freud provides about Dora I cannot prove that she suffered sexual abuse as a child. My aim is rather to show how my suspicions arise. A recent study of father-daughter incest reports several findings which are almost identical to some of the details of Dora's case.²⁴ The majority of the women in the study were first assaulted when they were between the ages of six and nine; Dora's symptoms begin when she is eight. Tyrannical fathers are the most frequent abusers; Dora's father was the "dominant figure" in the family. "Almost all victims expressed some warm feelings towards their fathers"; Dora was "most tenderly attached" to her father until her rebellion. The "victims respond to their father's social status and power" just like Dora who identified with her father's lifestyle which was infinitely more attractive than her mother's. The women in the study were their father's

"confidantes" as children; Dora is her father's "confidante while still a child". In the study "the most striking [similarity] was the almost uniform estrangement of the mother and daughter"; Dora's relations with her mother had been "unfriendly for years", although it is notable that she turns to her mother after the episode by the lake. The women in the study feel isolated, find communication difficult and suffer from depression; Dora shuns society, cannot communicate – she literally loses her voice – and is depressed; she writes a suicide note.

Freud claims that Dora's cough, which developed when she was twelve, was due to a fantasy of fellatio which he parades as evidence that she was "really in love with her father". Dora says she knows about fellatio, but "the source of her knowledge was untraceable". Freud suggests that Dora may have learnt about sex from her governess, her mother, Frau K or the encyclopaedia, and concludes that she learnt it from Frau K, but repressed it because she was sexually attracted to her. There is little to suggest that Dora was 'in love' with Frau K; she admired her, and enjoyed her attention, but this is not evidence of sexual love. If Dora was "amnesic" about the source of her knowledge, or was conscious of it but refused to divulge it, isn't it likely that her sexual knowledge came from either her father or Herr K? Yet Freud does not consider this – in print. It makes more sense to link Dora's cough with the reality of enforced fellatio (choking, gagging) than a fantasy.

Dora says she knows her father is impotent, which raises the question of how she knows. I wonder if Freud was right when



Judy Stevens

he said "It was she and not her mother whom Frau K's appearance had driven out of more than one position"; not because Dora was in love with her father, but because he sexually abused her. The impotence factor may explain the fellatio.

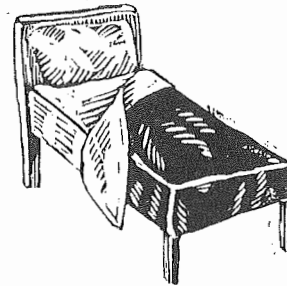
Dora's first dream adds to this suspicion. Herr K intruded upon Dora whilst she was asleep and she woke to find him standing beside her bed. After this incident Dora has a recurring dream, which she says she has had many times before. In it her father is standing beside her bed and the house is on fire. In his analysis of this dream Freud claims that the fire represents the danger of bed-wetting and that her father wakens her to protect her from this 'danger'. Freud surmises that this actually happened – her father woke Dora to stop her wetting the bed which began at age seven or eight. Is this likely unless he had ulterior motives? In a household such as Dora's this would have been a job for the nurse or Dora's mother. Freud then links bed-wetting to masturbation and claims that Dora repeats the dream because she is summoning up her father's protection against her sexual desire for Herr K. I am not surprised that Dora refuses this interpretation, but as always, Freud claims that her denial is confirmation.

According to Freud "a recurrent dream has two causes, an exciting cause and some momentous event in the years of childhood". The exciting cause may be the fright of waking to see the threatening, not tempting, figure of Herr K beside her bed. The "momentous event in childhood" may be waking to see the threatening, not protecting, figure of her father. Aged 16, Dora wants the key to her bedroom to keep Herr K out; perhaps she also wanted to be locked into her bedroom in childhood, as her brother was, to keep her father out. Freud's connection of bed-wetting and masturbation is rubbish, so why did Dora begin to wet the bed? An onset of bed-wetting indicates that there is a serious disturbance in a child's life. Bed-wetting is also a common signal of possible sexual abuse.

During this same session of analysis Dora asks why she has fallen ill and, before Freud can tell her the usual saga about sexual desire, she "put[s] the blame on her father".²⁵ Her opinion, not Freud's. Freud claims that Dora had probably confused syphilis with

gonorrhoea because she has a vaginal discharge, "the beginning of which she cannot remember", but which she blames on her father.²⁶ Freud attributes this discharge to masturbation (more rubbish) and claims that this is why she is afraid of doctors. Apart from the fear which a medical examination would arouse, perhaps Dora is additionally afraid that doctors may discover that she has been abused and that her discharge is the same venereal infection from which her mother appears to suffer.

Freud harps back to masturbation and incestuous infantile desire to explain away a further childhood symptom which became chronic – "dyspnoea" or chronic asthma. According to Freud, Dora's breathlessness occurs because she overhears her father panting during intercourse (although Dora's parents are estranged, Freud is assuming that Dora's father insists on his 'conjugal rights'). Isn't it more credible that Dora's 'symptom' of breathlessness is linked to sexual abuse which may have included fellatio?



My suggestions that Dora suffered sexual abuse as a child are not 'lucky guesses'; they are suspicions which have arisen from hints in the text and which are strengthened by reading about the "seduction" theory, its cover-up, and contemporary studies of child sexual abuse. If my suspicions are aroused, surely Freud's were too? But he ignored them, or he deliberately omitted them from his case history. Either way he protected fathers at the expense of daughters, protected patriarchy at the expense of women.

Freud's methods and dubious motives, coupled with the unsound basis of the Oedipal theory and the independent evidence for the "seduction" theory, raise many questions. These questions, which raise more questions, show that the case history – a patriarchal precedent – is not solid or scientific but full of cracks, and ripe for demolition. □

Ordeals

Marieme Hélie-Lucas welcomes Bouthaina Shaaban's book, bringing the truths of experience to bear against many myths about Arab women's lives. Arab women speak about the family, sexuality, and, virtually for the first time, about lesbian relationships. But why, she asks, are so many women attracted to religious fundamentalism?

"Ten years ago, perhaps, none of the women interviewed would have said anything against their husbands and fathers" (p.236) . . .

This is how Bouthaina Shaaban concludes her collection of interviews with Arab women. And indeed this is what is striking in today's Muslim world – and not only the Arab world – women everywhere have become aware of their oppression and of their rights, women everywhere develop new strategies to assert their identity as independent human beings.

Bouthaina's book achieves two goals: for Arab, or more generally Muslim women, it definitely proves that problems are similar enough in each of our different countries to

inspire each other's strategies, and it breaks the isolation of struggles usually waged within each national context; by showing the commonalities of the problems faced by women, it helps free them from guilt feelings of 'betraying' their community, their religion, their culture, etc . . . as we are always accused of doing when we stand up for our rights. For a wider public outside the Muslim world, it gets rid of the stereotype of submissive and passive Arab (Muslim) women which even progressive people buy in the West, despite all historical evidence.

Bouthaina rightly presents the women she interviewed as:

Footnotes

1. J. Riviere (ed), *Sigmund Freud, Collected Papers, Vol 1* (Hogarth Press, 1924), p 199.
2. J.M. Masson, *The Assault on Truth* (Penguin, 1984) pp 14 and 54.
3. S. Freud, *The Complete Introductory Lectures of Psychoanalysis* (Norton and Co, 1966) p 584.
4. Freud quoted in Masson, p 9.
5. Masson, p 6.
6. Florence Rush, 'The Great Freudian Cover-Up', in *Trouble & Strife* 4, pp 29 and 32.
7. *Introductory Lectures*, p 584.
8. L. Bernheimer and C. Kahane (eds), *In Dora's Case* (Virago, 1985) p 19.
9. S. Freud, *A Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria – Dora* (Penguin, 1977) pp 38, 143 and 41.
- 10-23. *Ibid.*
24. J. Herman and J. Hirshman, 'Father-Daughter Incest' in *Signs Reader* (University of Chicago Press, 1983).
25. *Fragment of an Analysis*, p 111.
26. *Ibid.*, p 112.



women who defied every stereotype of the passive, compliant Arab women. They were not dutiful wives and daughters that, we had been taught, the prophet demanded, and that the law demands in many Arab countries. (p 1)

Bouthaina often uses the word "ordeal" when she refers to the lives described by these women: what do they want? what do men and laws deprive them of? They want to have their say in basic choices in life – to study, to choose one's husband, one's profession, to choose where to live and what to wear. They are denied such rights, and when they do rebel, the price to pay is terribly high, from the threat of being killed by father, brothers or cousins to avenge family honour, to being totally excluded from the family and losing forever one's mother and sisters: "Indeed the word 'fear' is quite central to my feminist analysis" (p 15).

I had the most terrible nightmares about what he planned to do to me (p 8) . . . I, too, would love to see my parents . . . but my father has flatly refused either to receive me or to let my mother – who, I am told, would also love to see us – come to visit me. He has reiterated to all mediators that, as I decided to choose my husband independently, he took the independent decision to consider me dead and he no longer wants to know whether I am dead or alive. My older brothers, who are university graduates, have never seen me since my separation from my parents either. (p 26)

Family – myths and realities

Throughout the interviews, one can hear the expression of the strong family bond and love in spite of all abuses from male authority. Being deprived of one's family is the supreme punishment, family is one of the values that all women want to keep and identify as central to their culture and identity, one of the elements of their feminism which they feel is lacking in 'western' feminism.

At the same time, the family is clearly denounced as *the* major means of implementing a repressive culture, along with religion.

In passing, Bouthaina gets rid of another orientalist stereotype: the extended family which is both supposed to lighten the burden of domestic labour by spreading the tasks among several women, and to ensure solidarity and support to individual members. One of the women interviewed opposes to the myth, the reality of an awful extended family in which orphans are starved, girls married off, etc . . .

To most Arab women, extended families mean one thing: extra male authority. I can think of many women who have been prevented from marrying men of their choice or from following up a certain career or profession because a cousin, or a father's or mother's cousin, did not approve of their decision. Women are even killed by their cousins if they are thought to defile the family honour, but we have yet to hear of a woman whose life has been saved, happiness achieved or even chances improved by a cousin . . . Thus extended families guarantee a tighter grip and exert efficient male domination over women (p 75)

Index to TROUBLE AND STRIFE issues 10-14

- A** **Abortion:** Judy Hunt, (Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation), 'Abortion and Disability' - issues raised by the Alton Bill, 13:37
- Ageism:** Sue Leigh, 'Growing Old Disgracefully', 10:20
- AIDS:** Hannah Edemikpong, 'AIDS, Female Circumcision and African Women', (Letter), 11:2;
Sara Scott, 'Sex and Danger: Feminism and AIDS', 11:13
- Alderson, Lynn:** - interviewing Romi Bowen and Bernadette Manning on the London Rape Crisis Group, 10:49;
'In Labour' - interviewing Sarah Roeloffs on Women in the Labour Party, 12:33;
'Clause 29' - Radical Feminist Perspectives, 13:3
- Algeria:** Marie-Aimee Helie-Lucas, 'Against Nationalism' - the betrayal of Algerian Women, 11:29
- Attar, Dena:** 'The Controversial Feminist', 12:16;
'Who's Holding the Bottle? - the Politics of Breastfeeding', 13:33;
'Sally Rockett', (Letter), 14:2
- Auchmuty, Rosemary:** 'You're a Dyke, Angela' - the rise and fall of the schoolgirl story, 10:23
- Azania:** Margot Farnham, 'Building a Stairway to the Stars' - a tribute to Bessie Head, 10:31;
'Hijacking in the Name of Solidarity', Liz Kelly interviewing Julia Ndaba, 14:31
- B** **Bahaire, Ella:** 'Yuppie Feminism' - the State of the Movement, 11:56
- Battered Women:** See Violence against women
- Berer, Marge:** for discussion of Marge Berer's article in Issue 9, see **Reproductive Technologies**
- Bindel, Julie:** 'The State of the Movement', 13:50
- Biological Determinism:** 'Dangerous and Deadly' - extract from Andrea Dworkin, 'Letters from a War Zone', 14:42
- Black Women:** Zehra, 'Different Roots, Different Routes' - Ethnic minority Lesbians, 10:11;
Dorothy Francis, 'A Whiter Shade of Purple', (reviewing Spielberg's film of Alice Walker's book: 'The Colour Purple'), 10:18;
Margot Farnham, 'Building a Stairway to the Stars' - a tribute to Bessie Head, 10:31;
Gail Chester, 'A Goldmine of Knowledge' - SIDA rips off 800 African Women, 10:35;
Hannah Edemikpong, 'AIDS, Female Circumcision and African Women', (Letter), 11:2;
Ruth Chigwada, 'Not Victims, Not Superwomen' - black girls and education, 11:19;
'Coalitions Leadership and Power' - Liz Kelly interviewing Beth Ritchie on the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 12:5;
Joan Grant, 'Call Loud - the History of Mary Prince, Caribbean Abolitionist', 14:9;
'Hijacking in the Name of Solidarity', Julia Ndaba interviewed by Liz Kelly on Azanian Liberation, 14:31
- Botswana:** Margot Farnham, 'Building a Stairway to the Stars' - a tribute to Bessie Head, 10:31

Bowen, Romi: interviewed by Lynn Alderson & Liz Kelly about the London Rape Crisis Centre, 10:49

Brazil, Angela: 'You're a Dyke, Angela', (Rosemary Auchmuty reviewing Brazil's schoolgirl stories), 10:23

Breast-feeding: Dena Attar: 'Who's Holding the Bottle?' The Politics of Breast-feeding, 13:33

Cameron, Debbie: 'That's Entertainment?' - Jack the Ripper and the Celebration of Sexual Violence, 13:17;
Jill Radford, 'Sexual Murder' - Review of Deborah Cameron and Liz Frazer: 'Lust to Kill', 13:47

Caribbean Women: See **Black Women**

Chester, Gail: 'A Goldmine of Knowledge' - SIDA rips off 800 African Women, 10:35;
'Section 28', (letter), 14:3

Chigwada, Ruth: 'Not Victims, Not Superwomen' - black girls and education, 11:19

Children - Sexual abuse: Hooper, Carol A, 'Getting Him Off The Hook', 12:20

Circumcision, female: Hannah Edemikpong, 'AIDS, Female Circumcision and African Women', (letter), 11:2

Clause 27/28/29, Local Government Act: Lynn Alderson, 'Clause 29 - radical feminist perspectives', 13:3;
Harriet Wistrich, 'Clause 29', 13:7;
Gail Chester, 'Section 28', (letter), 14:6

Coalition building: 'Coalitions Leadership and Power': Liz Kelly interviewing Beth Ritchie on the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 12:5;

Lynn Alderson, 'Clause 29', 13:3;
Gail Chester, 'Section 28', (letter), 14:6

Cath Jackson interviewing Liza Maza on the Filipino women's coalition, 'When the Revolution Came', 14:13;
'Hijacking in the Name of Solidarity', Julia Ndaba interviewed on Azanian Liberation by Liz Kelly, 14:31

Colour Purple, The: Dorothy Francis, 'A Whiter Shade of Purple', (film review), 10:18

Cooper, Angie: interviewed by Sara Scott and Al Dickens, 'The Mancunian Way' 12:49

Corea, Gena: 'Counterpoint', (letter), 11:4

Delacoste, Frederique: Nickie Roberts, 'So Much to Say' - Review of Frederique Delacoste and Priscilla Alexander (eds), 'Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry', 14:23

Dickens, Al: 'The Mancunian Way' - interviewing Angie Cooper on Feminism in Manchester, 12:49;
'Controlling with Kindness', the 'softly-softly' approach to Rape, 13:40

Direct Action: 'Rising in Resistance', Mary Lee Sargent interviewed by T&S, 11:7;
Mary Lee Sargent, (letter), 13:2

Disability: Judy Hunt, (Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation), 'Abortion and Disability' - Issues Raised by the Alton Bill, 13:37

Dworkin, Andrea: Susanne Kappeler, 'Who's Afraid of Andrea Dworkin?' - review of Andrea Dworkin, 'Intercourse', 12:44;
'Dangerous and Deadly' - extract from 'Letters from a War Zone', 14:42

Edemikpong, Hannah: 'AIDS, Female Circumcision and African Women', (letter), 11:2

Education: Ruth Chigwada, 'Not Victims, Not Superwomen' - black girls and education, 11:19

Family Politics: Carol A Hooper, 'Getting Him Off The Hook' - the theory and practice of mother-blaming in child sex abuse, 12:20;
Dena Attar: 'Who's Holding the Bottle?' The Politics of Breast-feeding, 13:33;
Judy Hunt, (Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation), 'Abortion & Disability' - Issues raised by the Alton Bill, 13:37;
Helen Palmer, 'In Sisterhood', 14:26

Farnham, Margot: 'Building a Stairway to the Stars' - a tribute to black novelist, Bessie Head, 10:31;
'As I am', interviewing Tina Jenkins on Fat Liberation, 13:20

Farraday, Annabel: 'Lesbian Outlaws' - legislation against Lesbians, 13:9

Fascism: Gail Chester, 'Section 28', (letter), 14:3;
Andrea Dworkin, 'Dangerous and Deadly' - extract from 'Letters from a War Zone', 14:42

Fat Liberation: Tina Jenkins interviewed by Margot Farnham, 'As I Am', 13:20

Filipino Women: Iyori Naoko, 'Sick and Tired of Japan' - interviews with Filipina entertainers in Tokyo, 12:13;
Cath Jackson interviewing Liza Maza of the Filipino women's coalition, 'When the Revolution Came', 14:13

FINRRAGE: 'What is FINRRAGE?' (letter), 10:2;
Pat Spallone, 'A plurality of opinions', (letter), 10:5;

Jalna Hanmer & Sheila Saunders, 'Personal Attacks', (letter), 10:9;
Alice Henry, 'Knowledge is Power' (letter), 10:10;
Gena Corea, 'Counterpoint', (letter), 11:4

Fitness: Anna Wilson, 'Fit for what?', (review of Jeanette Winterson's 'Fit for the Future'), 10:17

Fostér, Bridget: 'Tales from a Labour ward', (review of Julia Voznesenskaya's 'The Women's Decameron'), 10:45

Francis, Dorothy: 'A Whiter Shade of Purple', (review of Spielberg's film of Alice Walker's novel 'The Colour Purple'), 10:18

Frazer, Liz: Jill Radford, 'Sexual Murder' - Review of Deborah Cameron and Liz Frazer: 'Lust to Kill', 13:47

Grant, Joan: 'Call Loud - the History of Mary Prince, Caribbean Abolitionist', 14:9

Hanmer, Jalna: 'Personal Attacks', (letter), 10:9

Haruhi, Tono: 'Military Occupation and Prostitution Tourism', 12:10;
'A Heightening Appetite for Asian Women', 12:14

Head, Bessie: Margot Farnham, 'Building a Stairway to the Stars' - a tribute to Bessie Head, 10:31

Health Care: Laura Potts, 'With Women', (review of 'Feminist Practice in Women's Health Care', edited by Christine Webb), 11:43

Helie-Lucas, Marie-Aimee: 'Against Nationalism' - the betrayal of Algerian Women, 11:29

Henry, Alice: 'Knowledge is Power' (letter), 10:10

Homosexuality: See **Lesbianism: Clause 27/28/29**

Hooper, Carol Ann: 'Getting Him Off The Hook' - the theory and practice of mother-blaming in child sexual abuse, 12:20

Humour: Wendy Kerrison and Wendy Ward, 'Antidotes to despair', (letter), 11:2

Hunt, Judy, (Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation), Abortion and Disability' - issues raised by the Alton Bill, 13:37

Ireland: Christina Loughran, 'Organizing Against the Odds' - 10 years of feminism in Northern Ireland, 11:48; Margaret Ward, 'A difficult, dangerous honesty' - Conference Report, the Women's Movement in Northern Ireland in the 1980's, 12:36; Ailbhe Smyth, Pauline Jackson, Caroline McCamley and Ann Speed, 'States of Emergence' - 15 years of feminism in Northern Ireland, 14:46

'Jack the Ripper': Debbie Cameron, 'That's Entertainment?' - Jack the Ripper and the Celebration of Sexual Violence, 13:17

Jackson, Cath: 'When the Revolution Came', interviewing Liza Maza on 'Gabriela', the Filipino women's coalition, 14:13

Jackson, Margaret: 'The Spinster and her Discontents', (review of Sheila Jeffreys' 'The Spinster & Her Enemies'), 10:40

Jackson, Pauline: 'States of Emergence' - Feminism in Northern Ireland, 14:46

Japan: Tono Haruhi, 'Military Occupation and Prostitution Tourism', 12:10;

Tsukamoto Yumi, 'Trafficking in Women: Sex Tours Come Home to Japan', 12:11; Iyori Naoko, 'Sick and Tired of Japan', 12:13;

Tono Haruhi 'A Heightening Appetite for Asian Women', 12:14;

Fujieda Mioko, 'Japan's First Wave' - interview by Diana Leonard, 12:26

Jeffreys, Sheila: Margaret Jackson, 'The Spinster and her Discontents', (review of Jeffreys' 'The Spinster & Her Enemies'), 10:40

Jenkins, Tina: 'As I am', interview by Margot Farnham on Fat Liberation, 13:20

Jennings, Mary: 'Don't close off the debate', (letter), 12:2

Jewish Women: Gail Chester, 'Section 28', (letter), 14:3;

Jola Scicinska, 'Proud to be Jewish, Glad to be Gay', (papercuts), 14:8

Kappeler, Susanne: interviewing Janice Raymond, 'The Politics of Passion', 11:38; 'Who's Afraid of Andrea Dworkin?' - on feminist book reviewing, 12:44; 'International Struggles Against Pornography', 13:27

Kelly, Liz: - interviewing Romi Bowen and Bernadette Manning on the London Rape Crisis group, 10:49; interviewing Janice Raymond, 'The Politics of Passion', 11:38; 'The New Defeatism', (review of Lynne Segal's 'Is the Future Female?'), 11:23; 'Coalitions, Leadership and Power': interviewing Beth Ritchie, 12:5; 'Hijacking in the Name of Solidarity', interview with Julia Ndaba, 14:31

Kerrison, Wendy: 'Antidotes to despair', (letter), 11:2

Love between women

Women's behaviour, and more especially sexual behaviour, is seen as crucial to family honour; virginity being the most important symbol of patriarchal domination. But Bouthaina goes much further than denouncing this state of affairs, she points at the never-ever-discussed consequences of seclusion and segregation: sexual poverty and homosexuality - and this is a première! Countering efficiently another stereotype concerning Arab women and their supposed over-sexuality (a stereotype which prevails not only in the orientalist imagery but also in our own male population), the women she interviewed expose what it means to "live in a homosexual society and still fulfil heterosexual duties" (as Nawal El Saadawi recently put it).

Most Arab women live in two totally different worlds before and after marriage. Before marriage they are supposed to be saints, holy virgins who never like to know or hear about sex... once they are married, they are supposed magically to change into sexy wives and wonderful mothers (p 125)

Thousands of Arab women spend their lives with their husbands and breed children without being able to accept sex as a good thing to have and without ever enjoying it. For many of them it is another role they have to play. It is something they have to do for their husbands, just like preparing a meal or washing the clothes, and as with these things, they are relieved when it is all finished. (p 126)

And if men-women relationships are deprived of all humanity, only women to women relationships are left to express affection, tenderness, mutual respect, love and sexual desires. It is crucial to understand that homosexuality, in such a context, is very different from the free choice exerted by homosexuals in more tolerant societies: first of all it is totally hidden, and overtly despised, although I am convinced that it is more common than in societies where men and women have access to each other; and finally it is in lesbian relationships that women can hope and find some humanity, in contrast to how totally inhuman their relations with their husbands are. A moving testimony (pp 120-122) states how persistent love feelings between two women were, although the woman concerned tries to deny it and stands by her heterosexual (and family) choice:

In the summer of 1972, almost immediately after I broke with my boyfriend... I had my first and last lesbian relationship... I was rather deprived of love and affection at that point, so I responded to her and it was quite a pleasant relationship; it was genuine. It was quite an experience for me - not just physically. There was a lot of sharing, talking and understanding. It was not just a matter of sleeping together. So I really enjoyed that time, despite all the conditioning we are subjected to about such relationships... I wanted to have a family, to have children... I had to take some very hard measures to break from her.

Bouthaina then asks this woman,

"But you seem to have made extraordinary efforts to break away from her. Surely this means you were in love with her?" Tears come to the eyes of the woman: "I suppose I was. What frightens me is that I might still be in love. In love or not I shall never see her again; I have two children and a very nice husband and I want to keep my family together."

... Most Arab women don't feel comfortable with men because society has not encouraged the relationship between men and women. So you feel more comfortable with your own sex... The fact remains that there are more lesbians in the Arab world than there are in Europe. These are not open relationships and the women cannot speak out...

She then mentions "the immense pressure to which lesbians in the Arab world are subjected". Other women interviewed mention the frequency of lesbian relationships and the fact that it is not spoken of.

Men exert such a control over whom their wives talk to that Bouthaina herself describes in the following terms how she relates to one of the women she interviews:

"I soon noticed that she did not like seeing or talking to me when her husband was around because, as she explained later, he did not like her to talk to anyone except him... so we became as two discreet lovers, waiting for her husband's absence to meet and talk. (p 72)

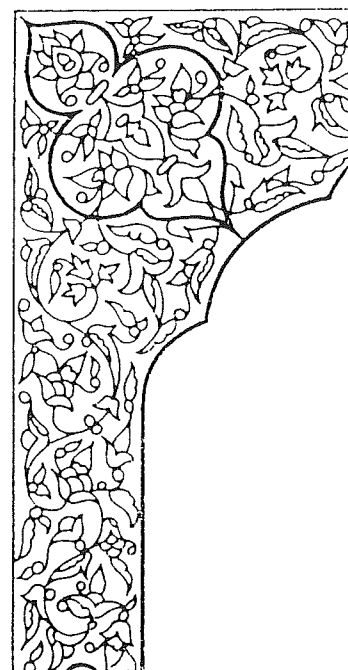
If it were only for unveiling this reality, Bouthaina's book deserves to be read; but she also briefly tackles another exceptional theme which borders incest:

Judging from the way he looked and behaved, I could see that he was not able to contemplate handing me over to another man. He once said to me about a man I had fallen in love with during my university years and wanted to marry: "How could you kiss him? His lips are so thick!" I had never thought of that detail, but he seemed to have thought about it on my behalf. (p 8)

Incestuous fathers and brothers, I believe, are quite common in our countries and we will

Bouthaina Shaaban, *Both Left and Right Handed: Arab women talk about their lives* (The Women's Press, 1988)

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have to explore the link between segregation of sexes, sexual-poverty as well as sexual deprivation, total power of the patriarch including in the most day-to-day detail of life over *his* women, sexual mutilation, incest and over-emphasis on sexuality.

Women and religious fundamentalism

It is definitely in relation to these problems that one should look at a recent and frightening phenomenon: how women massively join fundamentalist movements. Recent history has shown the failure of national liberation movements to liberate women, on the contrary nationalism has been used against women – the need to go back to one's roots, traditions and values to stress a national identity in the face of colonisation.

In an attempt to keep our Arab identity, the men seem to have frozen habits, traditions, morals and values . . . women are still subjected to outmoded and outdated ideas . . . we seem to have retained all the very old fashioned bad habits which belittle women (p 140)

Individual revolt being so highly paid for, and social movements having betrayed women, with an unprecedented sense of entryism, women turn to religion. Although they point to the fact that culture entwined with religion is the root of their oppression, although they denounce the fact that laws of the state inspired by conservative interpretations of the Koran deprive them of all rights (no right to marry, no right to divorce, no right to custody, unequal rights of inheritance, restriction to their freedom to travel, restriction to their freedom to work), they are joining in religious fundamentalism, in spite of the recent Iranian example, in greater and greater numbers. We cannot ignore it, nor can we deny the benefits women get out of it: freedom of movement, freedom of choice of their husband if they choose it within the fundamentalist group they belong to, respect and consideration from their male relatives, and men at large. Far more than the left ever offered them . . .

I would say that even if Islam did not ask me to wear [Islamic dress] I would have worn it anyway. I don't like to be treated as a female body . . . I want to be able to feel a proper human being rather than just a sexual entity (p 95)

For one thing, this dress guarantees me free movement and peace of mind . . . For another thing, men no longer follow me in the streets

uttering obscene words and dirty jokes. All Arab men respect women who wear [Islamic dress]. This is why I feel this dress strengthens my character and confirms my independence. (p 84)

What is interesting is that my father who used to be the only supreme authority in the house, never takes any decision now concerning the family without consulting me first . . . Sometimes I stay out till eleven o'clock at night and when I come back they give me dinner without ever asking where I have been. For they know that I must have been working somewhere. I feel that they have an utter and complete confidence in me now. Women in the [movement] have proved their ability to play a responsible role in their country's affairs and most people acknowledge that. (p 85)

It is quite normal for men in [the movement] to marry women who devote all their time to the movement. We never imagined that our men would reach this stage of understanding women's position – even in a hundred years, but there you are. (p 86)

During the war [the movement] played a crucial role in feeding, sheltering and protecting our people. (p 85)

Fundamentalist movements all over the Muslim world have taken care of the basic needs of the people; to women, they have offered bread, and what they think is dignity. They have international connections, and enormous funds. One should not forget that fascist movements were also popular movements.

Voices of women in Bouthaina's book come from Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Algeria; I heard them as one and wished to present them as one; the same voice could come from Muslim women in Nigeria, in Sudan, in Bangla Desh, in Pakistan, in India or in Indonesia, etc.

Bouthaina points to the fact that we 'still suffer from the grim consequences of the lack of genuine organisations for women'. (p18) If it is true enough that women's joining fundamentalism reflects the stage of our organisation and struggle, we should also acknowledge the fact that women's organisations exist and grow all over the muslim world, that linking up with one another and with the women's movement at large has opened new horizons. Bouthaina's book precisely serves the purpose of comparing our situations, struggles and strategies, examines commonalities and differences. In the long run it cannot but strengthen women's organisations, evolve new awareness and alternatives both to the present situation and to taking refuge into fundamentalism. □

Counting the Cost

What are the long-term consequences of prostitution on the women involved? Basing their analysis on Norwegian women's accounts, Cecilie Høigård and Liv Finstad count the cost of prostitution for women and draw the connections with other forms of men's use and abuse of women.

It is Friday afternoon in Oslo. I am sitting talking to Marianne. She describes how her work week has gone: Sunday, one or three tricks, she doesn't quite remember. Monday three tricks, Tuesday none. Wednesday three tricks. Thursday two tricks. Marianne tells about her last trick:

It was yesterday afternoon. It was raining. I was standing down there somewhere, I think it was Dronningensgate. He stopped his car. I look in, he's a skinny little guy. I open the car door and ask if he wants a date.

'Yeah, get in,' he answers. So I get into the car.

'Well, do you want a date?' I repeat.

'Yeah, what'll it be if we go to my place. I live in Kolbotn.'

'It'll be 350 kroner and you'll have to drive me back.'

That's fine with him. I get the money.

On the way to his place, I ask, 'What do you do?'

'I work for the government,' he says sort of proud, 'in the Postal Service.'

'Is it nice?' I ask, but don't bother to listen to his answer.

When we come up on the ridge out at Ekeberg, I start talking again, 'God, what a beautiful view.' I also ask him if he comes down to the district a lot.

'No, but I've been there a few times. I wish it wasn't like this.'

He rented a room in a big house in Kolbotn. We went down to the cellar, through the furnace room and into a little room. I took my boots off. He put those

things in them to keep them warm. The room was spotless. He didn't even take the spread off the sofa. I started to undress, but kept my blouse and socks on. He was taking his goddamned time. Then I put a rubber on him. I lay under him. He began very carefully and slowly.

God, this is going to take an hour, I thought. So I started to breathe heavily to get him excited. He didn't say a word, didn't even breathe heavily. The whole thing took five minutes. He didn't try to kiss me or anything like that.

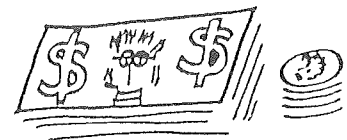
I went and washed myself. I looked around the room a little. He only had one record. "You've gotta start buying records." That was all that was said in the room.

On the way to town he told me that he was unmarried. Otherwise we didn't say a word. Oh yes, he did talk about something or other. That he was going to take the university entrance exam. I didn't say anything; I just answered politely to whatever he said. He dropped me off at Egertorvet.

This is how Marianne talks about an ordinary trick: a bit dull, boring and tiresome – but fair enough. During our years of research we have heard hundreds of stories like Marianne's.

Defining prostitution

Much can be said about the problem of defining prostitution. We have resisted the temptation. We have a simple definition of prostitution: the purchase and sale, involving cash payment, of sex. We are interested in





what happens in the actual exchange of sex for money, and what happens with the parties behind this exchange.

Some readers will have met women like Marianne. Some may have hurried past them on their way home, others may respond with pity. There will probably be fewer who will search for connections between the lives they live and Marianne's. How is prostitution possible? What are the similarities and differences in the encounters that take place between participants in prostitution and other encounters between men and women? What are the images of women and men that make prostitution possible? What can prostitution tell us about the conditions of sexuality in our society? In prostitution certain aspects of the relationship between the sexes are dramatized, exaggerated, typified. An analysis of prostitution can act like a magnifying glass on our own lives. 'Deviation' can illuminate what is 'normal'. *Backstreets* is also a book about the backstreets in our own lives.

The backstreets of prostitution show up a wide variety of different lives. The prostitution of boys and transsexuals flourishes alongside the prostitution of women and girls. Prostitution takes place outside in the streets and indoors in restaurants and hotels. These lives can be tragic, but they also have humour, friendship and compassion. In this article we will concentrate on describing the content of the sex trade, as it looks from the perspective of the prostitutes.

How do you avoid prostituting yourself?

How do you avoid prostituting yourself when you work as a prostitute? Doesn't the statement contradict itself? On the contrary: it is the fundamental question for prostitutes around the world. To prostitute yourself is to give something of value for money, to give something that can't be translated to the language of money without being destroyed. The vagina is rented out. But nothing more. You never get my thoughts. Not my mind, not my soul, not my mouth. There is something that is mine alone and that you'll never get hold of. I'm not really there. Prostitutes have worked out an ingenious, complex system to protect 'the true me', the self, the personality from being invaded and destroyed by customers.

To preserve her integrity and protect herself a prostitute must maintain clear bound-

aries. She can't allow the customer anything that has a personal meaning for her. The prostitute thus creates a clearly defined split between the 'private' and the 'public' self. That is how prostitutes attempt to preserve the most important thing, their ability to feel.

One way of protecting yourself is by turning off. Lisa who is out working the street almost every day and who has up to eight customers a day, says: "Ugh, the whole thing is sickening. I close my eyes and ears. I cut all my feelings off. It's never, never okay." One method of turning off is to consciously think of something else. Elisabeth says: "Otherwise all you can do is to stop thinking. When I was working the most, it was just to get money for drugs. What I thought about during the job was if I'd manage to score, how much money I needed and so on."

Another way of protecting yourself is to avoid kissing and caressing. Certain parts of the body are reserved for use other than prostitution. To the question of whether there's anything the customer shouldn't be allowed to do, Katherine gestures dramatically to her shoulders. "My boundary is here. He's not allowed to kiss or caress me. He's not allowed to touch my hair either. He's paying to stick his willy in, nothing more." In prostitution the relative worth of the body parts has changed place. Lower down is allowed. The mouth is taboo. Aside from the usual sickening double standard this is an odd, twisted system of values. As it is written in Pat Barker's novel *Blow your house down*: "Always remember your mouth's your own. When he's shot his muck you've got to go back and kiss them bairns."

A third mechanism of protection is to make it quick. What's important is not to have enough time to think about it so much. Waiting gives one time for second thoughts; it's painful. But the most important thing is that the trick itself takes a short time. For the less time a john has, the less chance he has to be invasive. The contagious period becomes as short as possible. You almost never find a prostitute who prefers the trick to go on for a long time. In this way prostitution is similar to typical contract labour: earning as much money as possible in the smallest amount of time. For the woman it's smart to play turned on and to give signals that the john's performance has given her a lot of pleasure.

A fourth mechanism is to hide your true

self. Prostitutes usually don't like customers to ask about their private lives. "It's none of their business." If they have to answer, they prefer to come up with a story they believe the customer would like to hear, like that of the poor student who has to supplement her student loan and who believes that prostitution is a good way to combine work and pleasure. There are also more literal ways of hiding one's private self. Some prostitutes avail themselves of working names, all or some of the time. The customers don't get to know their private name. Some hide themselves behind wigs and special 'whore clothes'. This actually serves more purposes than just to hide the private self. The fear of being recognised or the attempt to play up to the customer's idea of how a 'whore' should look is a good reason to use wigs and other clothes. But we believe that such devices can also have a second and deeper function.

Desire?

A fifth mechanism is to avoid attractive customers. Individual prostitutes protect themselves by shutting out certain groups of customers. Female, lesbian customers are very infrequent, but there are exceptions. It says a great deal about the battle to keep emotional distance that every single lesbian prostitute we interviewed visibly reacted when questioned about whether they could imagine having female customers. Pia puts it this way: "It would make dirty something that I think of as so fine. It would be like compromising; it would be prostituting myself." Some prostitutes also avoid young men. "I was with a twenty year old once. It was disgusting. What do they think they're doing? Normal straight boys shouldn't have to resort to that kind of thing", says Randi.

In most literary representations of prostitutes' lives it's not unusual to find a prostitute waiting for her dream customer. The prince on a white steed who'll take her away from the degradation of the street, marry her and make her an honest woman. Only one of those we interviewed had been the lover of someone who had first been a customer. That doesn't necessarily mean that there aren't more prostitutes clinging to that dream. But we believe it is quite exceptional, simply because prostitutes don't allow themselves to have feelings when it comes to customers. Falling in love isn't part of the scenario that

those who prostitute themselves set up. It is just not relevant. If something like that happens, the connection must be dropped. "Once I met a baker. I liked him a lot. He wanted me to move in with him, for us to be together. Then I had to say to him that I liked him a whole lot but that it could never develop into anything since I had met him on the street," Brita tells us sadly.

The system is comprehensive and to some extent artful and ingenious. None of the prostitutes we interviewed availed themselves of all of these techniques. Far from it. They select a few. Nor do they use all they select all the time. It depends on what kind of mood they're in. But the overwhelming aspect is this: during every act of prostitution almost all of them strive to keep a wholly necessary distance. Many apparently bizarre or peripheral details of prostitution have thus a deeper meaning. The strategies contribute to safeguarding one's own sexuality.

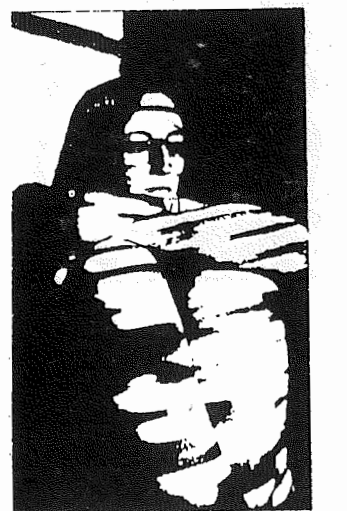
But the intention is more comprehensive than that. It extends to safeguarding one's emotional life in its entirety and avoiding every form of closeness and intimacy. In an extensive 'pretend-it's-a-game' the 'true' self is protected. In this way prostitution develops its own distorted and unpleasant logic. While elsewhere in society it's seen as wrong or irresponsible to sleep with someone without having strong feelings for them, in prostitution it is wrong or irresponsible to have any positive feelings at all during sex. From the women's standpoint the sex trade is a grotesque masquerade where nothing is what it seems to be.

Long-term consequences

The next question to ask is: do these defence mechanisms work? What are the long-term consequences of hiding yourself and turning off your feelings? These are questions of the greatest significance. They have scarcely been touched on in earlier prostitution research.

Katrine believes it works for her:

It's changed me. Some will think that's a negative thing. I myself think it's positive. It makes me arrogant and affected. I know exactly what I'm worth. And that's a lot more than a simple wine whore who puts out for an evening of cheap red wine. Not to mention married women. They sleep with their husbands one night a week in order to be taken care of. It's vulgar, it really is, and so hypocritical. They're the first to attack what they call the 'bar ladies'. My relationship to men is discriminating; I





despise them quicker. I think that's positive. My girl friends talk about this one and that one being cute. Then I can cut in and say: "Yes, that's on the surface though. What do you think his undershorts look like?" That makes their chins drop.

* Katrine is alone in finding a positive value in the consequences. The others feel like Brenda in Pat Barker's novel:

Gradually Brenda learned to switch off. She never managed to do it completely, there were always times when she came back and found herself lying under some sweating hulk, and then she wanted to cry out in horror, *No, it isn't me*. But these times became less and less frequent. If anything, she started to have the opposite problem. She couldn't switch herself on again during the day. Everything seemed to be happening on the other side of a dirty glass. But it was worth it: a skin had formed over her mind, and she was free inside it. (*Blow Your House Down*, p.47)

A ruined heterosexual life is part of the price of prostitution. Benedicte has a straightforward and understandable answer to why that is. It becomes, quite simply, boring. Anna says:

Prostitution changes the women. I definitely feel it too. I feel it in relationships with guys. I can't sleep with a guy when I'm on the street. My body just feels rotten to me. I can't stand for a guy who's all right to use my body in the same way. "Go to hell," I say then. I would have thrown up if a friend had started that sickening talk. I was together with one guy for a year and a half. But that doesn't work now. I'm not too excited about having a sexual relationship. My body isn't mine when I work there. Anyway I'm a dirty slut. When I myself feel so dirty there's nothing okay about having a relationship.

We are in our bodies. Every minute. We are our bodies. Prostitutes form a relationship to their own bodies that makes it seem as if they're moving through life inside a boil or one huge blemish.

One sign of a damaged sexuality is that the ability to orgasm is lost. We didn't ask the women during the interviews if they could have orgasms. We don't have any statistical data on this. We only have impressions. But a few of the women later became our friends and also friends with each other and the loss of the ability to orgasm has often come up in conversation as a frightening, frequent collective experience.

"I think I've been misused"

There's also something else frightening about

these conversations. It's one thing to experience bitterness and loathing towards men. It's not so difficult to understand, after the women's particular experiences with men. But in general the 'public' self grows like a tumour, steadily craving more space and displacing the 'private' self. The boundaries are wiped out. Strategies and tricks from prostitution begin to take room in the women's lives outside prostitution and after prostitution. The women believe that only a few lovers are of such calibre that they can accept her absence of physical reactions without experiencing great emotional problems. Perhaps this isn't unreasonable. As if to protect him, the women continue to play the prostitutes' game of pretending. He must not be hurt. Orgasms are simulated. At the same time this faking game becomes so bothersome and degrading that you want it over quickly. So you're back to the rapid breathing and excited movements. Some tell with bitter humour how they have led their lover to believe he is the first to give them an orgasm since they stopped prostitution, and how endlessly happy he is at this miracle. It's easy to imagine the fertile soil this creates for self-disgust, disgust for the other person and for the whole relationship. Women who have quit prostitution have also found it more than usually difficult to establish stable lover relationships.

And it's not just feelings connected with sexuality that are damaged. One's entire emotional life is attacked. The vocabulary tells it all: 'corrupt', 'hard' and 'cold' are words the women use to describe their own emotional lives. Inga: "I'm bitter, I think I've been misused. I'm getting more wasted and worn out. My feelings are changing too. I'm getting hard." Benedicte says:

You somehow start to despise yourself when you work down there. It's completely normal, of course. But it kept shifting back and forth, it varied how I looked at myself. And you can imagine how my self-respect went up and down. If you start despising yourself, it's not long before others start despising you. In addition to the fact that you're changing the whole time, without noticing. You tell yourself that you are just as good as all the others, but you don't really think that; you're as good, but with a minus sign attached.

Ida sums up her reactions like this:

I was wrong. Once again. It's not easy money. I can't point to anything in

particular. Not any single thing, or a single customer. Not the violence. It's more the regular, daily tricks. It's so huge. Small, unnoticeable scratches. Each scratch helps to separate my body from my head. The feelings I had, I've left behind on the street. They're lying there now. Sometimes I dream of being like I was before prostitution. Of feeling something. It's like I've burned up a hundred kroner bill and am trying to make a new one out of the ashes. It's gone. Only my head belongs to me now. I've left my body on the street.

Elisabeth writes to us after having read the first draft of the book:

It's embarrassing, but sometimes I long to be back on the street. Please don't imagine stupid things like a life of irresponsibility and so forth. It's not that. What I long for is the laughter, not being alone, not having to pretend - exactly that. And here comes your manuscript, with just that, about longing not to have to fool people. I don't know whether I should laugh or cry, but the feeling returns over and over, not all the time, but over and over. The feeling of pretending to be nice, smart and proper, when you know inside yourself it's not true. You're none of these things. You're lying right in people's faces when they believe that. The exams you take, you don't have any right to.

I want to write some shameful secrets. I use tampons all the time. Even when I'm not having my period. It's because I'm afraid of stinking. I never sit too close to people. I wash my ears ten times a day because I'm afraid gunk is running out of them. That's next to *not* wearing nice clothes, *not* covering up blemishes or *not* using make-up to hide ugly or spotty skin. It's a feeling of being constantly divided. Wanting to accept my filth on the one hand. Letting others see it, letting them be disgusted by it, letting them help me push it away. And on the other hand, being the pure, odourless person who gets up in meetings and says a mouthful of things. And who becomes so fucking marvellous exactly because people see me and think of my 'old life'. So for me, at least, it's right what you've written. Imagine being so divided that you almost write with two pens and speak with two tongues. But that's how it is.

Anger, hate and aggression

Finally we want to include a longer quote from Randi. In a remarkable way she puts into words what can eventually happen to the women's emotional life:

I've got a certain amount of hatred. I'm vindictive, it's a great handicap to me. I feel so divided. I'm also a person who has a job and an education. The other person speaks in very cultivated ways. I can't fuse the two

people together into a wholeness that functions normally.

I can fall in love. But it soon reminds me of the street. That they are in some way only with me to satisfy themselves. I start hating myself, my body is filthy. I can get truly depressed by it. And when I'm in love I also become suspicious. I think of all the happy, decent women. I'm just a disappointment. The people I'm with, they never smile. They get depressed. My relationships never last long.

I've had two abortions. Because I didn't want a child to grow in my hell. I have to get out of it first. But it would have been nice to have someone to give something to. That's when I feel alive. But I can't manage to accept anything. Praise is just fake. "No reason to feel sorry for someone who's gotten into this mess herself." That's what they really think. Now I'm just playing games with myself. I have an incredible amount of aggression inside me. Some people say it's easy money. Easy! If you really think about all the shit, about all the oppression you've swallowed. When you stand there on the street it's exactly as if you were tearing a newspaper into pieces.

I've tried suicide a lot of times. One time I took 50 milligrammes of Truxal and then 40 mg. I drank wine and lay down. I woke up at the hospital. I was really furious when I woke up. As if I'd done it just so that people would feel sorry for me. The psychologist there was a real nitwit. I signed myself out after a few days. All I felt was that I had disturbed them in their job. When I drink, I hate myself. One time I stabbed my chest with a knife. I kept pressing on it. It was like I was dreaming. It got too painful. But in my subconscious I know that I'll succeed next time. I'm too much of a coward when I'm sober. I must drink. The only revenge I've had is revenge on myself.

Actually, I want to go to school and start all over again. I don't know what kind of school it should be. I could imagine working with people, yes, with young people. That would be really all right, I think. But I'm not used to making plans. I live one day at a time. My plans have always been just plans. What happens, happens. It's too little to fill my life with just myself. If I'm going to live just this one life, it's too little. To be honest, I could imagine moving away from the city and being completely different. Being happier with myself, liking myself. That's the only goal I have. It's more important than a lot of furniture. Being happy with myself. Now I hate myself. That's the only feeling I have left.

A form of violence

To sum up: prostitution plays games with your feelings. Pretend you're favourably inclined, absorbed in the customer, hot and excited -





when really you feel indifference or maybe revulsion and hatred. Feelings have their price; they can be translated into money like all other wares and are therefore, ironically enough, *worth* nothing in themselves. Feelings are an illusion.

Self-respect and self-image are also destroyed. To sell oneself 'willingly' — that is the worst, most offensive thing a woman can do. It's frightening to see what a burden of guilt, shame and self-disgust former prostitutes drag after themselves for years. No matter how well they manage their new life, deep inside them is a sense that all they really are is a 'cheap whore'. That friends maintain otherwise only shows that the woman is able to fool new friends. We have been brought to the edge of despair several times by this.

The impoverishment and destruction of the women's emotional lives make it reasonable, in our view, to say that customers practise gross violence against prostitutes. The customers' traditional physical/sexual violence against prostitutes is also massively common, and it creates fear among prostitutes. However, when prostitutes talk about the injurious effects of prostitution, it's not those traditional forms of violence that they emphasise most. Fractured jaws can be mended, split lips heal. Even fear can be muted. It's more difficult to regain self-respect and to recreate an emotional life.

The reaction of the women to prostitution has much in common with the reactions of women who are survivors of incest and rape. The feelings that are burned out of the body, the self-disgust, the guilt, and the sense of being a split personality are also central in accounts by these women. Emotional reactions to incest and rape, to these types of sexual violations, are established knowledge. But in relation to prostitution, these are *new* insights.

This is the most important discovery we've made in our research. In our study of prostitution some of the impressions we had beforehand have been strengthened and deepened, others have been weakened or invalidated. But the idea of prostitution as a gross form of violence wasn't even a vague hunch before we began our work.

Prostitution is a classic subject in the sociology of deviance. A lengthy bibliography could easily be composed. In retrospect it is striking how entirely absent our central theme

is from earlier research. There are indications, in quotes from prostitutes: but they are consistently overlooked.

The reasons why researchers have not charted this area are partly the same as why 'most people' don't consider the concept of violence when referring to prostitution. One of the most important issues is that prostitution is tied to the concepts of 'free will' and consent. Even sociologists who acknowledge structural oppressions in society find it difficult to explain why women subject themselves to gross violence, apparently 'willingly'.

Secondly, it is the *sum* of prostitution acts that give them their destructive effect. Whilst each individual customer doesn't appear so censurable, and each act doesn't seem so important, each customer and every single trick adds to build up a cumulative effect. This explains why the destructive effects of prostitution often do not appear until much later. Just as with survivors of incest and rape the damaging consequences do not necessarily show up right after the experience and can take years to manifest themselves.

A third reason lies in the method of gathering information. Before the newer Scandinavian research of the seventies and eighties, the primary method in prostitution research was document analysis. It describes background variables and other statistics, but does not deal with emotions and experiences. The methodology of in-depth interviews combined with keeping in close contact with the women for years, has enabled radically new insights. It reveals the connections between prostitution and other forms of sexual violence, and women's experience of heterosexuality in general. And it requires us to look at the same connection between men's role in prostitution and in heterosexuality. This is, of course, another complicated issue, but we'll finish simply with one woman's thoughts on this. Ulla says: "They do it to simply empty themselves. That's all." In Pia's opinion men's sexuality is quite unbelievable:

I don't understand men's sexuality. They are devoid of feelings. They're controlled by their pricks. They have their brains between their legs, that's what controls all their behaviour.

Benedicte says:

Down with one pant leg. The whole thing probably takes about two and a half minutes. Men's sexuality is totally unbelievable, and the worst thing is that they come back to the street again and again. □

JUSTICE UNBALANCED

Twice as many women as men, convicted of violent crime, are sentenced under psychiatric orders. Deborah Cameron reviews Hilary Allen's 'Justice Unbalanced' and challenges her conclusions that this discrepancy stems from the shambolic state of the judicial system.

The subject of this book is a striking sex difference in the workings of the English/Welsh judicial system. Women offenders are more than twice as likely as men to be 'psychiatrised', that is, made subject to psychiatric probation orders or hospital orders under the Mental Health Act, rather than simply going to prison, on the grounds that their offences stem from mental illness.

The question Hilary Allen asks is how and why this sex difference arises. She examines the relevant legal provisions, considers the documents (court files, medical and social enquiry reports) relating to a sample of male and female case histories (mainly violent crimes like murder, assault and arson) and interviews various professionals like psychiatrists and police who deal with offenders. The conclusion she reaches is that the issue is complex — more complex than either feminists or antifeminists tend to think.

One obvious possibility is that the sex difference in judicial treatment just mirrors reality; ie more female offenders are in fact mentally disturbed. But Allen shows this will not wash, because when you compare two offenders with a similar profile the woman is more likely to be psychiatrised than the man — in one case, a man went to prison and a woman got a psychiatric probation order for the same crime, even though he had a record of mental illness and she did not.

At this point, a fairly familiar argument about women offenders crops up. Traditional criminologists take the position that sending women to hospital rather than prison is a form of 'chivalry' which treats women more leniently than men in the same situation. Feminists by contrast would argue that psychiatrising women is a patriarchal way of neutralising female antisocial behaviour, making women 'mad not bad'. It could also be argued that there is nothing lenient about the regime of psychiatric hospitals — like

prison they are oppressive and socially stigmatising.

Hilary Allen accepts neither of these arguments. She thinks the psychiatrising of women is caused by the interaction of two things.

Sexist perceptions

One of these is indeed the sexist perception of women as not really responsible for anything they do. Reading medical reports on men and women she was struck by the stereotypical differences in descriptions of their behaviour — though the behaviour itself was often very similar. Men's lives were described in terms of externals (what they did), women's in terms of internals (how they felt — or how the describer thought they might feel). Furthermore, women's crimes were presented as things that 'just happened' to them, as events of which they were the victims. A woman who poured a gallon of paraffin over her lodger and set him alight because he refused to eat his supper got the comment, "It would be hard to overestimate the effect which these events have had on Mrs Harris". Quotations like these are used convincingly to show how psychiatric discourse suppresses any idea of women like Mrs Harris deliberately causing 'these events' for some reason. Allen points out that one effect of the suppression, intended or not, is to make a woman offender seem morally less culpable (she didn't do it, it just happened to her) so that courts are less eager to impose retributive punishment.

The other factor, though, is a lack of facilities for psychiatrically ill male offenders. Hilary Allen makes the point that the stereotype 'mad' offender, the one described to her many times by police officers as a 'raving nutter', is actually a man rather than a woman. If men of this type go to prison rather than to hospital, it is not because courts fail to notice their disturbance. It is because they are perceived as dangerously and incurably mad, so that psychiatric hospitals either cannot or will not take them.

Hilary Allen concludes that the system she is dealing with is an appalling shambles rather than a sexist conspiracy, and that if anything it is unfair to men since they are often denied much-needed treatment. Overall Allen calls for an end to judicial double standards which in her view benefit neither sex.

Incomplete picture

This book certainly makes a good case that there are double standards and in this local instance they favour women. But Hilary Allen presents a curiously incomplete picture, giving too little weight to the idea of the law as a global system maintaining social order rather than just an almighty muddle. What is at stake in the system comes out clearly if you look at cases where the usual trend is reversed. For instance, men who murder wives and children are often in effect psychiatrised by being allowed to plead diminished responsibility. This pathologises (ie presents as sick and abnormal) a kind of violence which is actually routine and related to the power structure of the patriarchal family. By contrast we have cases like that of the Maw sisters who killed their violent father. Here the full weight of the law descended without mitigation of the women's responsibility. Counter-examples like these surely support the radical feminist position: where women do something genuinely threatening to male authority and cannot be portrayed as passive victims, they will be punished.

The other notable quarrel I have with Allen is that she seems to me to be unduly optimistic about the benignity of psychiatry and the effectiveness of legal and other reform. Many of her recommendations for more and better facilities are sound enough, but the ingrained stereotype attitudes professionals have are not so easily changed by legislation. In other words, I don't feel that everything can be left to the experts.

Over the last few years, criminalised women have organised effectively to resist the way they are treated in prison and, more generally, the way they are defined and described. It would be good to hear from psychiatrised women too: what becomes of the Mrs Harrises and what do they think of it? There is nothing wrong with analysing expert discourse as Hilary Allen does; it is a useful tool for understanding why things are as they are. But change has to come from using the analysis in grassroots political organising. □

Hilary Allen, *Justice Unbalanced: Gender, Psychiatry and Judicial Decisions* (Open University Press, 1988)

Bad News

Techniques designed to test for genetic abnormality are being promoted to eliminate female fetuses. This report, from a coalition of women activists, monitors the proliferating abuses of high technology medicine in India and women's resistance to them.

24 November 1988 is being observed as a national protest day against the misuse of medical technology to selectively eliminate the female sex. Forums in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, and the Union Territories of Chandigarh and Delhi will be registering their protest through Garba, skits by girls, mother-daughter rallies and public meetings. These forums consist of women's groups, human rights organizations, people's science and health groups, mass organizations, sensitive lawyers, doctors, journalists and educationists.

Most of us are aware that amniocentesis is being misused to detect the sex of the unborn child and that this practice is leading to the selective elimination of the female foetus. However, today amniocentesis is only one on a long list of medical technologies which are being misused to predetermine the sex of the foetus or even to preselect the sex of the would-be child. It has taken a mere ten years for these technologies to proliferate even in a country like India. It is shocking to find that places like Bijnor district in Uttar Pradesh, Dhulia, Satara and Sangli districts in Maharashtra, or Saurashtra in Gujarat, which do not have basic amenities such as potable water and electricity, today have flourishing clinics for doing amniocentesis. Hoardings, adver-

tisements, wall writing in several regional languages unscrupulously announce amniocentesis as a solution to the dowry problem.

A profitable business

Rural health centres in Gujarat and Maharashtra, where facilities do not exist to examine sputum for tuberculosis or to maintain the cold chain for oral polio vaccine, are sending samples of amniotic fluid in ice packs through courier service to district towns of Rajkot, Bhavnagar, Anand, Ahmedabad etc for sex determination.

Business has become so profitable that in a span of three years, a backward tribal district like Dhulia has doubled the number of clinics offering amniocentesis. Even marginal farmers and landless labourers were found to be willing to pay 25% compound interest on loans from moneylenders to avail of these tests.

In cities of course, aside from amniocentesis there are at least five more techniques being popularised to preselect or determine the sex of the foetus, eg sonography, fetoscopy, needling, chorion biopsy and genetic manipulation.

The medical lobby, which justifies the use of these techniques on philanthropic grounds of saving women from repeated pregnancies

in anticipation of a son, eliminating the stress and distress of producing an unwanted female child, preventing later murders and suicide in the adult female population by aborting them before they are born, quite forget the basic purpose for which these technologies were developed.

The government and the sycophants of population control are actively colluding with the medical profession in their mindless and ruthless pursuit of achieving a Net Reproductive Rate of One (one female child per woman). Therefore it lies in their interest to not regulate any technology which has even the remote potential of helping them achieve this goal.

No equipment for Bhopal

The irony of the situation is that these reproductive technologies are not available when needed most and for the purpose they were intended to serve. This is best illustrated by the medical response after the Bhopal gas disaster. When activist groups in Bhopal demanded that amniocentesis be made available to pregnant women who were exposed to the toxic gas, no equipment was provided in Bhopal for the socially relevant purpose of averting the birth of congenitally malformed babies. It is thus the avarice of the medical establishment which dictates how and where these technologies will be used.

The mystification of medical technology together with the myths in the minds of even

the progressive intelligentsia, has led to women being perceived as mere commodities. Consequently, we are confronted with bizarre arguments such as women's value will automatically increase if their number decreases. Reality contradicts this viewpoint as all societies with a low female-male sex ratio have a high incidence of sex based crimes as well as the attendant low status of women. In fact, contemporary Indian society provides enough evidence to support our contention; high female sex ratio in Kerala, for instance, goes hand in hand with higher female literacy rate and higher work participation as compared to states with low female sex ratio such as Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Passive and active resistance of all these forces which constitute the pro-femicide lobby has prevented any regulation of sex determination and sex preselection techniques despite concerted efforts on the part of concerned groups for the last eight years.

It has taken all these years of relentless struggle on the part of women's and people's science groups, especially in Maharashtra, to get state legislation regulating the use of these technologies. The central government, apparently desirous of regulating these technologies for the last two years, has still to introduce a Bill to this effect.

The campaign

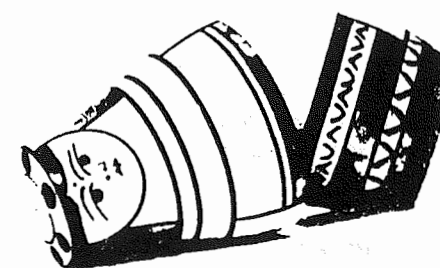
In 1974, amniocentesis was being tested in India as a technique for detecting genetic abnormalities, in government run hospitals. The survey outcome of 11,000 couples who had volunteered for this test revealed that the basic motivation for such an enthusiastic response had been the possibility of getting to know the sex of the child in-utero, which was followed by a preponderance of abortion of female foetuses. Following the publication of these results in 1976, six women's groups from Bombay registered the first protest and demanded a ban on these tests. As a result of this protest, these tests were banned in government run hospitals during the Janata regime. However, it did not take long for the vested interests in the private medical sector to exploit these technologies for commercial purposes. By 1980, the private medical sector began to blatantly advertise these techniques for the specific use of sex determination through wall writing, hoardings, pamphlets etc. The issue was taken up in a major way by

women's groups, science and health groups in the early '80s but the response of the government remained one of passive silence. Occasionally one heard support for the misuse of these technologies as a tool of population control.

In order to highlight the enormity of the problem, it became necessary for activist groups to gather primary data on the extent of misuse of amniocentesis. Investigations also revealed that workers were submitting large medical bills to company health insurance after having undergone amniocentesis in a bid to bear male children.

A two-day seminar in Bombay to discuss this issue brought home the fact that except for some feminists and activists, the majority of lawyers, doctors etc were vehement in their support for the new found use of amniocentesis. This seminar clarified the need to focus on the technical aspects of these tests; the socio-economic, cultural and religious factors which shaped attitudes towards the use of these tests; a creative way of organizing the campaign to raise consciousness; and to struggle for legal regulation of these technologies.

In the last five years, the campaign had intensified in terms of daughters' rally, picketing in front of hospitals conducting these tests, songs, skits, exhibitions, three video films ('Samadhan', 'Ajata' and 'Boy or Girl') dedicated to the cause. All these efforts have raised public awareness and increasing numbers of sensitive doctors, lawyers, journalists, artists, social scientists and mass organizations have got involved in this issue. Many activists with a background in medicine, law and social science have consciously done research to build up a successful campaign.



Eliminate inequality, not women.

Taking the campaign forward

In spite of public protest, the alarming rate at which new reproductive technologies are penetrating the core of Indian society is really nightmarish. Sex determination is only one menace. There are a series of medical technologies such as genetic engineering, cloning, test tube babies, surrogate motherhood, which are being glorified by the medical lobby. The inherent sexist, racist and class bias of these techniques which reduce women to 'male producing machines' and raw material for scientists/doctors lusting to enhance the 'quality of the population' by conquering the imperfections of nature need to be exposed. Since all these techniques are now internationally patented, and big money is involved, we need to build international resistance to these practices.

It is time for all concerned individuals to pressurize the government to take a principled stand on science and technology related to reproduction. The government must also show the political will to create effective and innovative ways to monitor and regulate these technologies. Women's organizations, consumer groups and human rights organizations need to urgently pool their resources to monitor these technologies and act as a watchdog.

Medical bodies such as the Medical Council of India, Indian Medical Association, Federation of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists must come out vociferously against malpractice by their members and urgently take steps to de-register all doctors violating medical ethics.

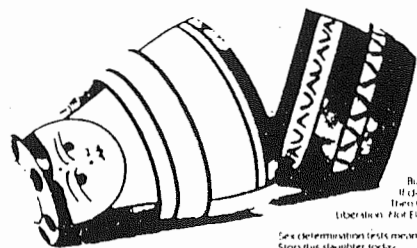
Mechanisms also need to be devised to enable the public to sue erring doctors. This necessarily requires strict record-keeping by doctors and access to these records by monitoring agencies. The media on their part need to give detailed and extensive coverage to such medical malpractice. They should also ban forthwith carrying all advertisements for sex determination and sex preselection.

It is time that people from all walks of life view the misuse of sex determination and sex preselection techniques as a reflection and part of the overall discrimination, degradation and violence perpetrated on women. □

Prepared by the Forum Against Sex Determination and Sex Preselection, Bombay and Saheli Women's Resource Centre, Delhi.

Saheli Women's Resource Centre
Unit above Shop 105 to 108
Shopping Centre (South Side)
Defence Colony Bridge
NEW DELHI - 110024

Have you killed your daughter lately?



Of 8000 abortions following amniocentesis 1900 foetuses were found to be female.

Think ahead!
Do you support male foetus?
Or female infanticide?

Then why allow sex determination tests?
If any couple that can't produce children
are allowed. They produce daughters to be killed
in the womb. It's not just you, it's the whole
world that's the victim of social discrimination
Silently.

But does that make it less of a crime
if daughters are considered a burden today,
then the answer is Equality
Liberalize Birth Control.

Sex determination tests mean the slow decimation of Indian women and
stop this slaughter today.

Eliminate inequality, not women.

Women's
Centre

Forum Against Sex Determination and Sex Preselection, Bombay

well, well, well . . .

A brave early text, or a betrayal of lesbianism? The infamous 'Well of Loneliness' was the 'Spycatcher' of its day, tried and banned and fought for. For many of us it was the first book we found when we began the search for lesbianism in our culture. Cath Jackson explores the fascination and the failures of the novel in today's political context.

When I was little I longed to be a boy. I used to go to sleep at night praying that I would wake up magically transformed. I can still vividly remember the day I persuaded my mother to buy me my first pair of proper jeans with the zip up the *front* and the snake belt to go with them. It was like coming home.

Aged seven or eight, I was very clear about what being a boy would mean. It would mean freedom to climb trees, to get my clothes dirty, to be rough and tough and roll around on the grass without being self-conscious about my knickers showing. It would mean I wouldn't grow breasts that got in the way (I used to lie in the bath and mourn the bits of my chest I would no longer be able to see when I had breasts). It would mean I wouldn't have fat legs.

But, most fundamental of all, I was convinced that if I was a boy I would feel that my body and I belonged to each other; that I would look on the outside the way I felt I was inside. I desperately wanted to have my hair cut short. On the rare occasions when my mother managed to force me into a dress, I felt as though I was dressing up as someone else, uncomfortable and dislocated from what I thought of as my real self.



Apart from my (then) short round stature, I could have been Radclyffe Hall's young Stephen Gordon to the life.

Freud would have labelled me a classic case of penis-envy. Radclyffe Hall, along with Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis and a host of other late 19th century sexologists, would have proclaimed me a classic 'invert', a hybrid human, woman outside, man inside, a member of the 'third sex'.

Mercifully I didn't encounter the theories of Havelock and his chums until I was very much much older and had worked out the subtle difference between being a woman and being expected to behave in ways that society considered appropriate for my sex. Even aged eight I had worked out that I didn't like the way girls' cookies were supposed to crumble; but since everyone else seemed to be happy enough with the situation, I not unnaturally blamed the girl, not the cookie. It was an innocent infant biological fatalism that could easily have found a rationale in *The Well of Loneliness*.

The bible of lesbianism

The Well of Loneliness has to be both the most famous and most infamous book about female same-sex love of the 20th century. The circumstances of its publication in 1928, when

it was tried and officially banned as obscene, made it a *Spycatcher* of its day. The publicity surrounding its trial turned a book which otherwise would have been allowed to sink without trace into an anti-establishment, civil libertarian cult.

It was probably this — its notoriety among heterosexuals rather than its popularity among lesbians — that earned it the title of 'the bible of lesbianism'; an odd title, because it isn't about lesbians at all. Any woman, finding herself sexually attracted to other women and turning to *The Well* in search of enlightenment and explanation, would surely be totally baffled and dismayed by its definition of female homosexuality.

The Well of Loneliness is very specifically about 'inverts'. It divides human sexuality into three categories: men who love women; women who love men; and "the third sex", so-called 'inverts', genetically neither man nor woman, who are sexually attracted to the same sex to which, according to their biological gender apparatus, they belong.

Stephen Gordon, the heroine of the book, is a female 'invert'; that is, she has a woman's sexual genitalia (above the waist at least — Radclyffe Hall's prudery and the conventions of the day forbade explicit mention of anything beneath the sacrosanct cut-off line) but the physique and character attributes that convention deems proper only to men. She likes "boys' games": riding, fencing, driving fast cars, physical exercise. She is independent, socially gauche, untidy and headstrong. She prefers suits and riding breeches to dresses. At her birth she is described as a "little tadpole of a baby"; as an adult woman she has "muscular shoulders . . . small compact breasts . . . (the) slender flanks of an athlete". All this, according to Radclyffe Hall, makes her fated to love women and be sexually repulsed by men.

The other 'inverts' are built on much the same pattern, men and women: male inverts like Stephen Brockett with his "soft white hands" and "white-skinned, effeminate fingers"; Jamie (female), "loose-limbed, raw-boned"; Wanda (female) who "poor soul, never knew how to dress for the best. If she dressed like a woman she looked like a man, if she dressed like a man she looked like a woman!"; Pat, whose "ankles were too strong and too heavy for those of a female".

"Few", however, "were as pronounced as

Stephen Gordon."

These, then, are the principal 'true' inverts in the book. The female inverts' lovers are described very differently, however, for they are 'real' women. There's Jamie's 'friend' Barbara:

a wisp of a girl very faithful and loving, but all woman as far as one could detect, with a woman's clinging dependence on Jamie.

and, of course, Mary Llewellyn, Stephen Gordon's lover, who is constantly described as "all woman", helpless and dependent.

Such is her insistence on the otherness of inverts — their absolute difference from 'normal' men and women — that it is equally impossible to say that *The Well* is even about same-sex love. Inverts are said to rarely fall in love with each other. It is as though Radclyffe Hall is trying to avoid any association with homosexuality. It would, in effect, be "same-sex" love if two inverts were to have a sexual relationship.

Stephen Gordon, like a heterosexual man, falls in love only with 'female' women like Mary and the femme fatale Angela Crosby, a married woman who strings Stephen along for light entertainment and relief from her husband.

The nature of the invert relationship is equally stereotypically male/female:

And Stephen as she held the girl in her arms, would feel that indeed she was all things to Mary; father, mother, friend and lover, all things; and Mary all things to her — the child, the friend, the beloved, all things. But Mary, because she was perfect woman, would rest without thought, without exultation, without question; finding no need to question since for her there was now only one thing — Stephen.

It is a straightforward mimicry of heterosexual coupling, with Stephen very definitely the man and Mary the 'little woman' to be held and cherished against life's vicissitudes. Mary darns her lover's "heavy silk masculine underwear" and stockings while Stephen gets on with her writing and her fight to out-man men.

The world of the invert, Radclyffe Hall's perception of the 1920s Parisian gay scene, is either the "garish tragic night life . . . that lies open to such people as Stephen Gordon", drunken, drugged and debauched; or the superficial, promiscuous bitchiness of Valerie Seymour's salon. These, it seems, are the only alternatives to isolated couplehood, which is itself doomed because while Stephen, the

super-invert, has enough of the 'masculine' ingredient to find self-sufficiency in creativity, 'real' women like Mary find it impossible to "stand up to a hostile world by proving she could get on without it".

Nature's way

Having set up these outlandish caricatures Radclyffe Hall is insistent, however, that they are an intrinsic part of God's great scheme of things. Throughout the book she is at pains to



emphasise that while inverts may be 'abnormal' they are most definitely not 'unnatural'. 'Nature' has deliberately created them that way — indeed Nature is on their side and is 'trying to do her bit' by creating even more of them so that "after a while their numbers would tell even with the fools who still ignored Nature".

It's a definition distressingly analogous in fact to that of a hybrid chicken; a non-breed produced from the mating of two 'normal' breeds. What is more, like the hybrid chicken, the invert and her relationships are constantly described as "barren" and "sterile".

Radclyffe Hall makes no attempt whatever to question what she defines as normality; normality is heterosexuality. Her plea is that heterosexuals should not condemn and destroy these hapless inverts, "those whom God marked on the forehead" with the mark of Cain, basically because it isn't a way for nice people to behave. Her argument is that inverts cannot help themselves and should be pitied, not harried to death like the unfortunate fox whose grisly demise early in the book finally puts Stephen off hunting.

The implications of such a theory for women's sexuality are appalling. Out goes all notion of choice or even preference. Inverts, lesbians, are born, not self-selecting. It is the familiar medical model and even our physical appearance gives us away, marked as we are with "all the outward stigmata of the abnormal — verily the wounds of One nailed to a cross".

Nor is there anything good about being an invert. Stephen Gordon and her like are doomed. Their choices are either to cling together against the world or to sacrifice themselves and their lovers on the altar of 'normal' humanity. Thus Stephen Gordon, who is presented as one of the few inverts to retain some nobility of soul, drives her 'normal' lover Mary into the arms of heterosexual marriage to save her from the degenerative effects of the invert ghetto. This, in Radclyffe Hall's scale of values, is the only right and proper thing for an invert to do; to save her lover from the hell of homosexuality.

The Well of Loneliness is appallingly bleak and reactionary in this total absence of choice or positive volition. Sexuality is seen as an entirely God-given thing. If you are a 'real' woman you are weak, delicate, easily-frightened and passive; you are instinctively

attracted to dominance — to the extent that you can easily fall in love with an invert, mistaking her mimicry of masculinity for the real thing.

If you are an invert, you are equally inescapably drawn to 'female' women, the majority of whom won't have you because you are not a real man. There is no notion of sexual continuity, no connection whatever between Stephen's and Mary's sexualities. They are totally unrelated beings.

Betrayal

The publicity surrounding its publication made *The Well of Loneliness* into a cause celebre and gave it a reputation as a revolutionary text when it is, in truth, nothing of the kind. It is an abject apology and a shocking betrayal of lesbians.

Radclyffe Hall's fundamentally reactionary world-view is unmistakable throughout the book. Stephen Gordon is a child of the upper classes. The implication throughout is that if she had been Sir Stephen of Morton Hall, God would have been in his place and all would have been well with the world. A wicked twist of fate had set matters awry but those values which Sir Stephen would have embodied and upheld still obtain, unchallenged. One of those values is pity and compassion for the 'unfortunates' of society, for people who cannot help themselves. But nowhere does Radclyffe Hall question the righteousness of the status quo.

The theory of inversion fitted all too well with these politics. Lesbians, including Radclyffe Hall herself, had to be congenitally so; it was unthinkable that women could deliberately choose to deviate from the 'normal' social order. Her desire for a place within this social order, for acceptability, meant that Radclyffe Hall was forced to accept an ideology that declared her absolutely unacceptable.

These days it is to be hoped that few if any women teetering on the brink of defining their own sexuality as lesbian turn to *The Well* for enlightenment and support. Alison Hennegan, in her introduction to the 1982 Virago edition, paints a romantic picture of 'tremulous daughters (giving) it to their mothers, preparing the ground for revelations yet to come; mothers (giving) it to daughters to indicate that personal revelations will be sympathetically received' and 'close female

friends (giving) it to each other as a delicate hint that friendship could include yet more'.

What a thoroughly depressing thought.

Straight from the heart

Yet, despite all this, I can't condemn *The Well of Loneliness* outright. There are (admittedly rare) moments when Radclyffe Hall stops rhapsodising about 'Nature' and 'normality' and lecturing the reader about inversion, when she seems to be writing straight from the heart about the quintessential awfulness, the miserable confusion of being in love with another woman without words, customs or culture to define what is going on and no-one to talk to about it.

Stephen Gordon's childhood — the misfit girl teased and laughed at by other children; her longing to be able to speak to her mother about her impossible love for the terrible Angela Crossby, and her longing to be able to take Mary 'home'; at moments like these it is obvious that Radclyffe Hall knows all too well what it is like to be a rejected and rebuffed misfit, desperate to be allowed to belong.



A pair of lovers walking by arm in arm . . . would in her envious eyes be invested with glory and pride passing all understanding. For were Angela and she those fortunate lovers, they could stand before Anna happy and triumphant. Anna, the mother, would smile and speak gently, tolerant because of her own days of loving.

It is dreadfully over-written and sentimental, but it is at times like those that I am forced to admit: "Yes, I've been there".

A book like *The Well of Loneliness*, the utter isolation it describes, is only possible in a world without sexual politics, where lesbians are seen as totally separate from the rest of womankind. Radical feminist politics place lesbians firmly in the context of womankind; we are at one extreme of the continuum of women's sexuality.

There was a time, before I discovered feminism, when I felt every bit a member of a 'third sex' and when I liked to think of myself as 'one of the boys'. Despite defining myself as a gay woman, I still wanted to be accepted by heterosexual men because I felt I had more in common with them, if only because we were both attracted to the same love-object. Gay women, lesbians, were all potential lovers, therefore I looked for friendship and support from gay men, who at least understood what it was like to be an outcast.

What is more, I liked it. When I wasn't suffering the agonies of unrequited love for heterosexual women I liked what I saw as the romantic image of the cross-dressing, solitary gay woman, standing aloof on the edge of society. I was, in fact, tremendously resistant to feminist politics and deplored the whole notion that every woman could (or should) be a lesbian. It would, I felt, devalue the currency. I also tended to slightly despise those lesbians who came out through feminism. How could they possibly be true lesbians? They would never know what it was like to buck convention and love where few women have loved before. They were just following the crowd.

There was something deliciously comfortable about defining myself as a 'deviant'. It suited me well enough to be thought of as 'sick and sorry', a passive victim of circumstance, be it a distant father-figure, an unpleasant experience at a tender age, education in an all-girls boarding school, even faulty genes. If heterosexuals pitied me, they were less likely to attack me and it certainly

couldn't be my fault or responsibility if my mother was crying herself to sleep.

A self-confessing, apologetic deviant has a certain protected status in a liberal social climate. 'Normal' society can be tolerant enough when its superiority goes unchallenged. It's the familiar attitude that says "we don't mind what you do so long as you don't keep telling us about it and expecting us to think it's a good idea". It's only when deviants start getting together to produce an ideology and a politics which challenges notions of normality and deviance that they become a problem that must be dealt with. Individually, in our closets, lesbians are pitiable, pathetic. Collectively we become a threat.

Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* unashamedly feeds into this cult of the victim deviant, safely in the closet. It openly proposes that women who love women would be happier if they had never existed and, instead of placing the blame for this self-hatred on the society which rejects them, side-steps the issue completely by blaming it on God.

This, then, is one lesson we can take from *The Well of Loneliness*; the dangers of a ghetto lesbian sub-culture which glorifies the image of lesbian as rebel and creates a distinction between lesbians and heterosexual women. It is a message that is, perhaps, more relevant today than it has been for the past 20 years.

Contemporary parallels

Such a book as *The Well* could only be written, as I have said, in a context where lesbian sexuality is seen as totally separate from women's sexuality. Inverts are 'other', a 'third sex'. A parallel divide today is being drawn between feminists and lesbians. Numbers of lesbians are rejecting feminism as proscriptive and rejecting feminism's overall perspective on sex and sexuality, on issues of sado-masochism, of power and role-playing within sexual relationships in particular. It is argued that lesbian sexuality is intrinsically separate and different from heterosexual women's; that the absence of men in the lesbian sexual equation means that inequalities of power are not an issue here.

The effect of this has been a revival of the cult of role-playing, of butches and femmes, of that whole charade where lesbians mimicked heterosexual roles for lack of any

other models on which to base their relationships. It is not many steps from this to Radclyffe Hall's far-fetched and ludicrous (if they weren't so tragic) scenarios of lesbian coupledom.

Today's cult revival by born-again lesbians of butch/femme role-play takes on a quality of tacky pathos when seen in the light of *The Well of Loneliness*. Radclyffe Hall makes a positive virtue of Stephen Gordon's embodiment of many of the least attractive attributes of men; her emotional distance and withholding, her patronising and dominant behaviour, her sexual brutality:

That night Stephen took the girl roughly in her arms. "I love you — I love you so much . . .", she stammered; and she kissed Mary many times on the mouth, but cruelly so that her kisses were pain — the pain her heart leapt out through her lips: "God! It's too terrible to love like this — it's hell — there are times when I can't endure it!"

She was in the grip of strong nervous excitation; nothing seemed able any more to appease her. She seemed to be striving to obliterate, not only herself, but the whole hostile world through some strange and agonised merging with Mary. It was terrible indeed, very like unto death, and it left them both completely exhausted.

The world had achieved its first victory. It is the over-blown language of the romantic gothic paperback transposed into a glorification of one woman sexually brutalising another.

Section 28

Equally pertinent is the issue of the 'acceptability', the 'normality' of homosexuality, which has been raised again recently by Section 28 of the Local Government Bill.

The proponents of Section 28 were smart. They weren't seeking anything so crass as a ban on homosexuality. What they were after was a ban on the acceptance of homosexuality as 'normal', as an expression of one aspect of human sexuality. Section 28 exists to prevent anyone putting forward the notion that same-sex love is good. People can be homosexual, but only if they tacitly agree to it being unacceptable by agreeing not to 'promote' it, not to justify it nor to suggest it as a viable alternative to heterosexuality.

Section 28, or rather the protests against Clause 28, produced a tremendous revival in women's participation in a gay liberation movement. Many women had left 'gay' liberation, with its emphasis on homosexuality, for

the women's liberation movement with its perspective on lesbian sexuality as an issue for all women. The Clause 28 protests reproduced the old 'straight/gay' divide, where heterosexuals supported homosexuals in the name of civil libertarian arguments about freedom of the individual.

These are fine enough reasons to dispute the government's attack on homosexuality, but they don't address issues of 'normality' at all. The civil liberties argument simply asks that people have a right to deviate from the norm. It never questions that norm, nor whether homosexuality is a deviation.

Finally, today in the 1980s it is more important than ever that we should be vociferously rejecting the victim status and medical model that liberals would have us adopt and *The Well of Loneliness* promotes. The arrival of AIDS and its concentration among homosexuals has given bigots an excuse to condemn us further and liberals even more encouragement to pity us. 'Sick and sorry' may seem superficially a safer place to be but unless lesbians continue to refuse to be divided off from the rest of womankind, our fight for the recognition of women's sexuality as active and independent from men's is as doomed as 'sterile' Stephen Gordon.

I was a late starter by some accounts. I was 17 and still living at home with my parents when I first consciously realised I was sexually attracted to women. It was a confused and horrible time. I didn't so much 'come out' to my parents as break out in a rash. Neither my mother nor I had any emotional or sexual vocabulary with which to talk about the situation. She suggested I talk to the local vicar and in desperation I agreed. I don't remember what he said to me, nor I to him, but a few days later he called on my mother to reassure her. She really shouldn't be worrying, he told her; I seemed a nice, normal enough girl to him. Why, he'd known a real lesbian at college — a strange, lonely woman with short hair who went around in men's clothing.

My mother and I soon stopped trying to discuss my sexuality. We took to fighting bitterly about my clothes and hairstyle instead.

Who needs *The Well of Loneliness*; sanctimonious ignorance is just as effective and comes freely as tap water. □

Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (Virago, 1982)



Cath Jackson



Writing Our Own History

Outwrite

women's newspaper

Outwrite has published its last issue, but the group refuses to disappear into history. Four collective members, Shaila Shah, Teresa Hope, Frances Ellery and Nanda Sirker, talk with Margot Farnham about Outwrite's place in 80s feminism and what the Women's Movement needs to survive into the next generation.

Margot Farnham: *When, why and how did you start Outwrite?*

Shaila Shah: About ten years ago, some of us met at a conference on feminist publications in Manchester where we discussed setting up a national weekly newspaper for women. And then, at the end of 1980, five of us got together in London to explore the idea further. We all felt the need to provide a forum for voices that had not been heard in the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) and to give women news and information about feminist struggles in other parts of the world, especially the Third World. The concept of internationalism was almost alien to the British WLM and Western feminists in general who believed their brand of feminism to be universal and one which could be exported. We wanted to show that this was not so, that there was a developing feminist consciousness and militancy in the Third World, that Black women in this country were defining their own feminist priorities for themselves . . . and we wanted to invite these women to speak of their own struggles and experiences.

British insularity

At the time, *Spare Rib* was the only national women's liberation magazine, and

the bias of its contents reflected the composition of the collective, which was white. In setting up an internationalist feminist publication, we wanted to break with British insularity, not just for the sake of reporting events happening elsewhere, but to point to particular developments, some of which were the direct result of British imperialism, so that feminists could learn from other women's struggles, how they were defining their priorities, and the tactics they were using in countries where resources were quite different, or just not available.

Anyway, in the year that followed, we had two or three national meetings which about 30 to 40 women from all over the country attended. And our collective of fifteen met at A Woman's Place to plan the launch. None of us were professional journalists; we perceived the newspaper as a political project and there was a lot we had to learn. Some of us had worked on magazines and newsletters, so we pooled what knowledge we had, and also met several people who helped us. A woman from what was then *Socialist Challenge* briefed us about what it was like to actually produce something on a weekly or fortnightly basis, and we met with women from *Spare Rib*.



Finally, many meetings later, on March 8, 1982, we published the first issue of *Outwrite*.

Frances Ellery: In the year leading up to that, we had various sub-groups to work on different aspects like production, publicity, newsgathering. We met weekly at AWP to discuss the politics and contents of the paper and in our sub-groups we looked for printers, premises, contacts, contributors, etc. We decided to go ahead and launch the paper when we received an anonymous donation which was enough to pay for three issues.

MF: *How did you finance yourselves after that?*

FE: For a year we published monthly with no paid workers at all. In January 1983, we got a GLC grant for three paid workers and some equipment, and then in '84 got a salary grant from the GLC for six paid workers which lasted until March '86 when, with the demise of the GLC, we lost all our funding again. Then with the help of a few small grants, donations and fundraising by women's groups, three of us were able to stay on as part-time workers keeping the office going and relying once more on collective members and volunteers. In July '87 we had no more money to carry on

paying even the part-time workers so we stopped publication for six months to co-ordinate fund-raising and try to get more women into the collective. In January '88 we were able to start publishing again and survived for a year.

MF: *How did you perceive the WLM at that time?*

Teresa Hope: Throughout the '70s, the feminist movement did not have an international perspective. It was very much concentrated on the realities of middle class British women; the demands and the agitational work of the movement were directed towards meeting the needs of British women. Then a number of Black and Third World women started making their voices heard about events, conditions and their experiences in Iran, Palestine, Chile, and so on, as well as in Britain. And they had important things to say about national liberation, reproductive rights, imperialism, immigration controls and racism. Somehow, these women didn't have as much trouble reconciling socialism and feminism as maybe middle class white women did. As a collective, we were directly involved with these issues, and some of us had been raising them within the WLM. And the contents of *Outwrite* reflect that. We always ensured

that at least 50% of the collective was made up of Black/Third World women in order to maintain that political commitment.

MF: What would you say were the politics of the paper?

TH: We all started from the basis that we were women and feminists and engaged in a political struggle which included anti-imperialism, anti-racism, socialism and the fight against lesbian oppression. Some of us were radical feminists but not at the expense of cancelling out socialist politics. We remained radical feminists, or lesbian feminists or whatever. Because we were a collective of women from different backgrounds and different experiences and also from different countries, we had a very versatile view of politics. You have to make alliances in order to survive and grow politically. You adopt certain politics but that doesn't mean that whatever you have accumulated beforehand has to be suspended.

FE: We were fighting for women's liberation and there was no way we could see women's liberation without it being anti-imperialist and socialist. We were women's liberationists in an all-embracing sense.

SS: And this led to our being seen in such a variety of ways – some lesbian feminists saw us as socialists and just that, some white women thought we were involved only with black politics, and some saw us just as a lesbian collective, despite the fact that we were trying to embrace all of those. I don't think our politics were clearly understood by those women working only in specialist campaigns or networks.

MF: What has being involved in 'Outwrite' for seven years meant to you?

(Laughter . . . and a few tears.)

FE: We're all a bit tired and emotional at the moment!

TH: being involved in *Outwrite* for seven years has meant a lot of learning for me. I think one of the most important things is discovering that the struggle of women is the same everywhere. The conditions differ, the level of repression differs as well but nonetheless the ideological oppression that women suffer is the same under patriarchy. For me as a Chilean it was a real privilege to be in a position where I could compare the struggle of Chilean women to that of

Filipina women, for example, whose political histories are very similar. That was of enormous benefit to my political growth. Somehow, different countries were all of a sudden not as different or alien as you thought they were.

Through *Outwrite* we were able to break through those barriers which are imposed by the dominant ideology. When you push them aside and – start to make connections, you find that our objectives are the same.

FE: For me too it has been an enormous learning experience, my knowledge of the world increased tremendously, which outweighed all the late nights and hard work. We really did put everything into it at the beginning to get it off the ground and that excitement was tremendous. We were energised and dynamic. I feel incredibly privileged to have worked on it. And the information about what women were doing in other places . . . I was incredibly nourished by that. I felt that my horizons broadened. I think too that I was hovering between radical and socialist feminism because of being a lesbian and because of the split that had emerged between socialist and radical feminism in this country.

A sense of history

There was no comfortable place to be because I was a socialist but I wasn't in a party and *Outwrite* brought things together for me. Personally I think it involved more of me. And I found that *Outwrite* brought a sense of history as well as projecting into the future.

SS: I share what Fran and Teresa have said, principally about learning, not just from women who sent us information or whom we met (we've got friends all over the world now), but also within the collective . . . the discussions we had, learning about each other's experiences and the way we felt. Also for me, who hasn't always lived here, in a way it was politically like coming home in an alien country. Although at first I was involved with mostly white women's groups in York, and I didn't want to completely divorce myself from them, I wanted to find somewhere that would reflect my life, my cultural experiences; things I had seen and done. I found that place at *Outwrite* with the group that we

had because it was such a varied group and there were women from so many different countries through the years: Iran, Lebanon, South America, India, East Africa. I think that whole process of sifting together what was common for us as well as what was different was really energising.

MF: I remember in some of the early meetings, there was quite a lot of discussion about what this paper should look like. How far is it like a conventional newspaper? How far not?

SS: We don't think it looks like a conventional newspaper. We can see a change with the years. I look back at the first issue with horror! As I said, none of us had really been trained. We learned by trial and error and experimentation. Different women put their stamp on the paper visually through the years.

FE: There was a big debate about whether to have standard sections and we always fought against that. We weren't going to have the divide between 'Home' and 'Foreign', for example, because we were trying to break that division. Also our concept of news was obviously different than that of a traditional paper because often we were reporting on things that had never appeared elsewhere and so were news even despite being months old. We had to go for some kind of standardisation – monthly publication was impossible without it – but there was always a bit of a dynamic between standardisation and informality and that has carried on, I think.

SS: I also think we maintained that informality to make the paper more accessible. We wanted women to feel that they could get their work printed in it.

MF: What was the international newsgathering network like when you started? How has that developed?

SS: We got a list from ISIS and wrote off to various groups, and made extensive contacts. We also had exchange agreements with feminist magazines all over the world. Because we came from certain countries, obviously some of our contacts were stronger than others because we had friends in those countries. I think that unequal balance has been reflected in *Outwrite* through the years. For example, I think our

coverage of Latin America has been exceptionally strong and consistent and a lot of that was because of Teresa being in the collective. I think we've also had good coverage from some Asian countries, again because there have been several Asian women involved in the collective. But mostly, we built up a network through solidarity groups, conferences, interviewing women, visiting our home countries . . . And we kept in touch.

FE: Initially, we also used the mainstream press as a news source to extract information about women internationally – this was incredibly difficult. As we built up more contacts we were able to use direct sources. Over the last seven years many feminist publications began appearing, especially in Third World countries.

MF: What has been the most difficult time for you as a collective in the last seven years?

SS: Practical circumstances, when we hadn't any money. We worked in a very small space where we did everything: the typesetting, the layout, the writing, everything bar the printing, and what we couldn't, we took home! People who have come to the office have always been amazed that it's so tiny. Politically, of course we've had intense debates when it's taken us quite a long time to discuss something thoroughly enough to reach some sort of consensus of opinion, which meant everybody participating in the process of understanding why a particular route of thinking was being followed. We operated on the basis of doing things by consensus and never voted or outvoted anybody.

MF: Has anything strained the consensus?

FE: Yes, chiefly around anti-imperialist issues.

TH: Although I don't think there was any issue that would have endangered the collective, or the paper for that matter, about five years ago, for example we started debating whether we could offer unconditional support to all national liberation struggles. All of us felt we should support them, and wanted to emphasise the role of women within them but some of us also felt we should denounce the injustices and the oppression that women suffer within those organisations. There were rows



over that and lots of tears, and some women even left, but *Outwrite* survived.

FE: The paper had to come out whatever. If committed to that, then you didn't just disappear because you were upset or because it hadn't gone exactly the way you'd wanted it to.

MF: *While we're looking at 'problems', I notice in the editorial in your last issue that you say that you've not always been 'popular'. Why did you say that?*

FE: I think in the editorial 'popularity' refers to stands we took, for example, on anti-zionism. In '82, just after we started coming out, the Palestinian camps of Chatilla and Sabra were bombed. We took a clear stand against Israel and denounced the zionist state. This provoked a response. Some of us even got death threats at home.

SS: We were being branded as anti-semitic. I think we took great care to politically differentiate between anti-zionism and anti-semitism, and to explain what we meant by the two terms. And how, yes, we were certainly anti-zionist and we weren't going to compromise on that position at all.

FE: The editorial goes on to say about events having taken over. Today Israel's policy is seen more in the way we saw it initially. Since '82 world opinion has changed.

MF: *When you began, I remember that the Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent (OWAAD) was quite central in Black feminist experience, especially in London. And then I feel that the women's movement really became quite concerned with the whole issue of coalition and how you work coalitions.*

What have been the issues, the big feminist issues as far as you perceive it as a collective over the last seven years?

SS: The development of Black Feminism, international feminism, the fight against violence against women . . .

As far as coalitions go, I don't know whether the collective would necessarily agree, but I think the WLM has become very splintered and fragmented. And that's partly because if there were moves to make coalitions, they didn't work, maybe because they came too late. The failure of the mainstream WLM to recognise different

oppressions led many women to set up autonomous groups, whether it was as working class women, lesbians, Jewish women, Black women, or women with disabilities. Although these have in many ways been positive, the absence of a cohesive structure that would unite us all has meant a central disintegration. We haven't had a National Women's Liberation Conference for ten years, and there has never been any central co-ordinating body, there hasn't been a broader coming together to discuss strategies, tactics, priorities for the movement. Today Feminism is so immediately concerned with yourself, your workplace and your identity.

Campaigning Spirit

TH: Looking back at the seven demands of the WLM they were all demands of a reformist nature and I think errors were made. The problem is that there hasn't been a national network or organisation that could learn from those errors and continue organising.

Throughout Europe, where liberal governments did pass progressive legislation, the women's movement was robbed of its campaigning spirit. But this has not been true of the experience of many Third World women, who although they may have pressed for similar demands have voiced their feminism in terms of more radical and fundamental changes. I think there is still a need for reformist demands, but the problem is that once laws are passed women are led to believe that there is no need for campaigning any more.

MF: *How would you see that in terms of sexual violence? I feel that comparison that you're making with the legislature doesn't quite work, does it?*

FE: Except that when issues like child abuse and violence against women have been taken up by the media, however badly, there was no big feminist response, for example to Cleveland. There was a feminist coalition set up but we had very little to say about the issue, and we should have. In terms of violence against women, refuges, for example, have in some areas become part of social services and are now being defended, not as part of the feminist struggle, but within the anti-cuts campaigns. It's no longer a campaign to get demands

recognised, to get the issues recognised. We don't quite know how to pitch in now that some of our demands have been 'taken on board', and still direct what is going on and keep up the fight. We saw the same happen around lesbian issues and Clause 28 which mobilised a large number of women but, once again, in reaction to right-wing legislation, not as part of a women's liberation movement which believes women should have control over and define their own sexuality.

SS: Campaigning networks such as WAVAW, Reclaim the Night marches, the Rape in Marriage Campaign, direct action . . ., all those have slid into history.

MF: *Do you want to say something about your idea of a network, the feminist federation you mention in your editorial?*

FE: There are a lot of individual groups working around specific issues, but there's no co-ordinating body which to feed those into or to develop both strategy and ideology. Also, we're not tapping into each others' networks. We can't mobilise any more. The last demonstration against violence against women which was organised by Black women in London had much fewer white feminists on it than would have been there a few years ago.

I think that because of the stagnation caused by fragmentation, probably a lot of women would now move towards building alliances.

But we haven't got any organised network in which to do so. And when coalitions have been set up, they have tended to be temporary, like Women Against Pit Closures. Now, with the nurses, there's nothing like the coalition that was built up in support of the miners strike. Why not? The majority of that profession is women. So why aren't we doing something?

Working with structures

One of the reasons for '78 being the last Women's liberation conference was that it was practically impossible to carry on having those big mass gatherings any more without some sort of structure. I think that we've been very nervous of that in the WLM, by which I mean dealing with big structures or even acknowledging that there might be some structure needed. Also we're not going to have any sense of history

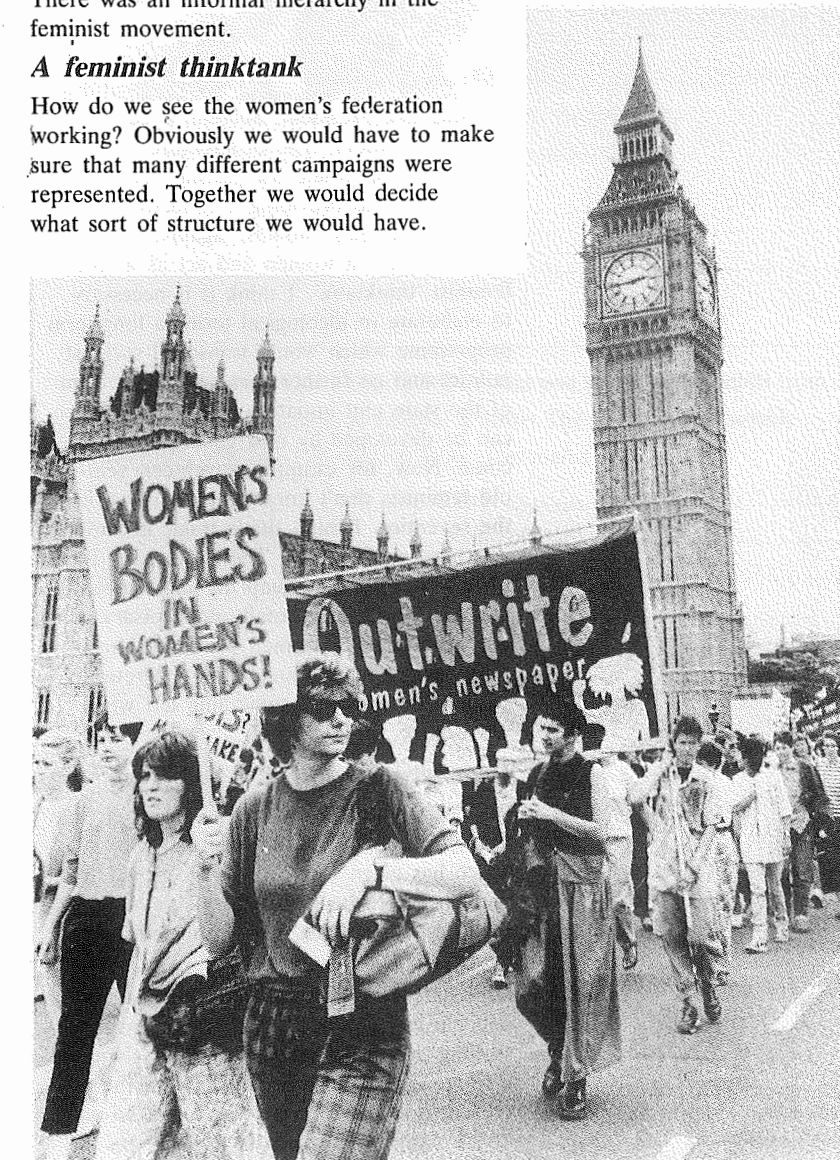
unless we do something about it. We need to give ourselves some kind of long-term perspective, both in terms of the past and the future. The fact that we fall out every now and then doesn't mean that we want to destroy each other. We lose sight of the goals that we have in common.

MF: *How do we develop this network?*

TH: Well, we dream. Going back to what Fran was saying about feminists being allergic to any formal organisation, in a way that's also a myth because there have always been women who have had access to the media, who were able to publish books. There was an informal hierarchy in the feminist movement.

A feminist thinktank

How do we see the women's federation working? Obviously we would have to make sure that many different campaigns were represented. Together we would decide what sort of structure we would have.





Nothing like President, Secretary, but a collective rotating type of structure which would be responsible for putting out a publication and providing a collective voice to plan strategies, mobilise against government attacks on women and act as a sort of feminist 'thinktank'. I think it is necessary to elaborate in ideological terms a long-term programme which would transcend socialist politics and go further than just the reform of the state and initiate a programme which can be developed by new generations to come. Now, for example, seventeen year-old feminists don't know what went on in the seventies. I think that's tragic because it was hard work for us. There's nothing there to tell them so they keep making the same mistakes and that is totally unnecessary. It's our generation of women who have the responsibility to set something concrete up so that there will be something left when we're gone.

Regenerating anger

SS: For me what is missing is an anger that I feel used to be very widespread and which has given way to complacency. I feel there needs to be something that's going to regenerate the anger that we all felt.

FE: Turn it outwards again! I think to a large extent women are still feeling angry but you can only sustain impotent anger for so long or you go batty. You start giving way more and more just to live. In the present political climate, what else can you do? You can't afford to have anger on the

boil all the time, unless you're doing something.

MF: *This must be a very emotional time for all of you. What do you think is your place in history?*

(Long pause)

FE: I think that we did have an impact in terms of women's politics and internationalism and we came at a particular time when the movement was ready for that impact.

SS: Although we weren't here to educate, I think inadvertently we've done that. I think we've taught women quite a bit about women in other countries.

TH: I think that the few hundred copies that went off to Latin America certainly had an impact.

FE: And that wasn't just women in Latin America learning about here or vice versa. A woman's group in Latin America could find out what was happening with a women's group in India and exchange information with them.

SS: I hope that the demise of *Outwrite* is not going to mean that international issues are once again shoved aside or ignored in the feminist press.

FE: Or that they are taken up tokenistically, without any political analysis.

SS: We all hope that those feminist publications that do exist will develop and increase their coverage of international issues. I think we would all like to feed into those even though *Outwrite* isn't going to be here. □

Outwrite can be contacted at: Oxford House, Derbyshire Street, London E2

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Spring 1989

Letters	2
Matters of Life and Death <i>Patricia Hines</i>	3
Lives of Lawbreaking Women <i>Mary Smeeth</i>	11
Putting Politics Back into Sex <i>Joan Scanlon and Susanne Kappeler</i>	15
Hysteria or Resistance? The Great Freudian Cover-up Part II <i>Jane Rondot</i>	18
Ordeals <i>Marieme Hélie-Lucas</i> reviews <i>Both Left and Right Handed</i>	25
Counting the Cost <i>Cecilie Høigård and Liv Finstad</i>	19
Justice Unbalanced review by <i>Deborah Cameron</i>	35
Bad News: report from <i>Saheli Women's Resource Centre</i>	37
Well, well, well . . . a classic review of <i>The Well of Loneliness</i> <i>Cath Jackson</i>	40
Outwrite: <i>Margot Farnham</i> interviews women from the <i>Outwrite Collective</i>	46

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