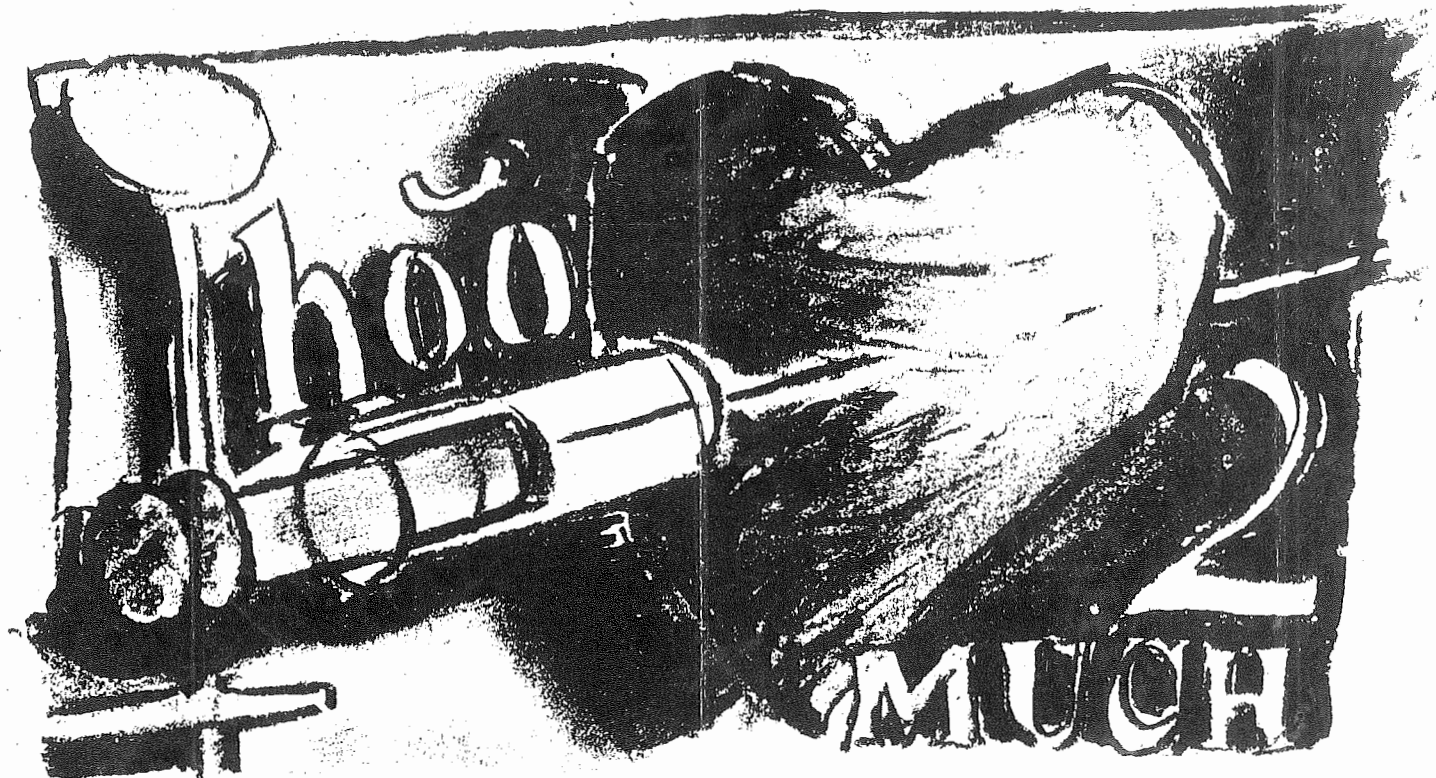


Trouble

The radical feminist magazine

& Strife



Women who love too much

Sex – the body remembers

Reproductive rights: the conflict escalates

Women's liberation in Turkey

A night at the opera

No.17
£2.50

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, and Sara Scott, with help from Judy Stevens, Catherine Tidnam and Harriet Wistrich. With many thanks to the Women's Health and Reproductive Rights Information 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 Central Books (01-407 5447)
Trouble & Strife is available on tape.


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Letters

Breath of fresh air

Dear Trouble & Strife,

It never ceases to surprise me what a breath of fresh air it is to read your magazine. I read it, then I forget all about it, then months later I pick it up and sigh with relief that something like this is still going.

I like the incisive quality of your writing, its clarity and above all its courage in not bowing to the hyena-ish mentality of the present that seems to have invaded all and all.

I particularly welcomed, in your issue 16, the articles on violence between women, feminist theatre, *Intimate Questions* and black feminism.

All the best,
Nina Rapi,
London

Challenging the march of oppression

Dear Trouble & Strife,

We have been reading some of your previous numbers and find them both stirring and highly enriching to our talks and meetings. We would like to join in your discussion about the state of the movement.

As young feminists of the second and third generation from "some other country" we are facing specific topics and problems – although they are not so different from those of other women all over the world, as we can read in your articles and letters. On the one hand the uneven paths of the past are paved. We do not necessarily have to marry, get children, be the beautiful ornament of a nice husband, the sunshine of a family etc. . . . Values and idea(l)s may have changed (thanks to the second feminist movement) up to a certain point. But now that women are seen to be too offensive and self-confident, the other hand is shown. Violence against women (especially by the fascists) on all levels is getting worse and stronger: be it on the streets, in the underground, at home in families; be it physical or psychological. Our three women's refuges are overcrowded with battered women; a refuge for girls is urgently needed (but bureaucracy works slowly even

under a Red-Green Feminat), assaults against feminist activists by fascist youngsters become stronger. All these developments are clear proofs of the relation between the new attraction for male conservative idea(l)s and the march of the "Republikaner" into our local parliament. A lot of males seem to be encouraged by the attitudes and behaviour of these fascists. But there are, of course, plans to change mainstream politics as Susanne Kappeler so correctly pointed out in her letter.

And again: our out-lesbian Senator Anne Klein has had to face attacks. Berlin's tabloid press (with the right-wing behind it) has started a campaign against Anne this summer, which is totally based on her private life and has nothing to do with politics (oh, sorry: the personal is political, isn't it?). It will not do her much harm yet, but we fear there is still more to come as the public is yearning for sensation about a lesbian politician. In the end they might judge her as being unbearable for family and young people's affairs.

Next there are the plans to expand women's studies and to support women in higher education. As students we are involved in the new politics at university. It looks great at first sight but means a lot of trouble, struggle and fight against a front of men who cannot stand the progress of feminist studies. The latest example in our department was the vote against a fairly middle position for women's studies by the staff, which is male-dominated, of course. This is a severe blow against our urgent needs and interests (we will have to arrange courses on our own to work on feminist issues).

Besides this, we permanently work in anti-rape, anti-porn, anti-sex-trade groups all over the town. And it gives us a lot of fun and strength, too (working and living with women in Gyn/affection, I mean). We are very optimistic indeed, but know of the restrictions only too well.

So we will go on to struggle and fight.
In sisterhood,
Claudia Mehlmann,
"Spider's Web",
Berlin.

Violence between lesbians

Dear Trouble & Strife,

Many thanks for beginning to break the silence and open up a debate on the subject of lesbian battering/abuse in lesbian relationships.

As a lesbian who ended my most recent relationship earlier this year because of physical violence directed against me, I'm interested in setting up a self help/support group in London for lesbians in a similar situation to me. I'd like the group to be a safe space where we can come together to share our experiences, to support one another and to begin to find a voice in demanding what we need from our lesbian communities.

I have arranged to set up the group through London Lesbian Line. Any lesbian who is interested in the group can contact me by phoning the Line number and leaving a number or address where I can get back to her; when there are a few of us, we will set up an initial meeting at an accessible venue in London.

Many thanks,
Ann c/o London Lesbian Line,
Tel: 01-251 6911

***The hormonal fix**

Dear Trouble & Strife,

Medical and lay journals alike are increasingly promoting the use of hormone replacement therapy (HRT): estrogen/progestin prescribed as pills or patches applied to the skin. Not only is HRT advised for menopausal women to alleviate hot flushes, it is also by many thought to be beneficial for women *before* they reach menopause (sometimes after IVF) or *after* the menopausal years. HRT is said to guarantee "eternal youth", to counteract osteoporosis ("brittle bones") and even to reduce coronary heart disease.

The reality of HRT is that its beneficial claims are very controversial and its safety remains unproven: cancer of the endometrium is listed as a health warning by the manufacturers despite some counterclaims that progestin eliminates this danger. Long term studies

on the effects of HRT on women's bodies do not exist.

I would like to hear from feminists who are taking HRT as well as from others who decided against its use. What influenced your decision? To what extent is fear of ageing and loss of 'sexuality' implicated? Is this different for heterosexual and lesbian women? What, if anything were you told about 'adverse effects' by your gynaecologists? Do you experience 'side effects'? If yes what are they? Do you worry about long-term effects?

Please send me your experiences as essays (max 15-20 pages) or diary entries, short stories and poetry. I also welcome critical accounts of HRT by feminist gynaecologists, therapy, infertility specialists and health workers. All contributions should be written in a way that makes them accessible to a broad range of international women readers. Please send two copies of all articles to Dr. Renate D. Klein, School of Humanities, Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria 3217, Australia, NO LATER THAN DECEMBER 15, 1989. Please contact me at the above address if you have queries, comments or further suggestions. Total confidentiality and anonymity are assured.
Renate D. Klein,
Australia

Abuse in the name of therapy

Dear Trouble & Strife,

Serious allegations of sexual abuse were made in June 1989 against Brian Lotfi-Hubbard, a psychotherapist working in Sheffield. A client he was seeing alleged that he had been having sex with her, both in and out of paid sessions. The therapist to whom this was revealed had challenged Brian two years previously over him having sex with another female client in sessions – at that time he admitted his behaviour and undertook not to repeat it. On discovering that he was alleged to be continuing to have sex with clients, the therapist called together a meeting of other practitioners in Sheffield to discuss the issue. At this meeting, and subsequently, it transpired that several other women had complained to practitioners about Brian's

*Letter has been shortened.

Letters

behaviour, but that the practitioners had felt unable to act because of being bound by confidentiality.

Women who have suffered sexual abuse and exploitation have good reasons to be wary of public reactions: all too often it is women who are blamed for sexual assault – if, that is, their allegations are believed at all. Sexual assault is notoriously difficult to prove, even where the attack has been a violent one. No wonder then that women who felt manipulated into sexual activity by someone they had gone to in trust as a client should wish to keep silent. This collective silence was broken by one woman feeling able to speak out despite these problems. Once they felt they were not alone other women also felt able to come forward – but how many more have stayed silent? It is now well known that less than one in ten assaults are reported to the police, and Rape Crisis Centres know that many women never feel safe enough to tell anyone of their experience.

When these women spoke out in June it was immediately apparent that there was no mechanism at all to deal with issues of this sort in the therapeutic community in Sheffield. The therapeutic organisations that Brian was very active and central in initially felt it was not within their terms of reference to consider censuring him. His employers at Flame Foundation (who own Unstone Grange, the conference centre used by many therapy groups where he was resident caretaker) and those at the University did not feel able to take any action unless some other organisation had done something first. There was no professional validating body to appeal to for assistance with disciplinary procedures, although if only one such complaint had been upheld against a GP he would have been immediately and permanently struck off the register. There was no recourse in law, and even if there had been it is a notoriously difficult and distressing process to invoke. There was considerable disbelief within the therapeutic community that the women were telling the truth, or even that they were able to tell it from fantasy. There was also considerable sympathy for Brian and several practitioners wanted the whole business kept quiet.

Finally a group of concerned women in Sheffield met, at the request of the woman who had first spoken out in June, to discuss what could be done. A letter writing campaign was started, urging relevant organisations to take action to restore women's confidence in their concern for women's safety as clients and service users.

The campaign was successful in the sense that action was taken – the two therapeutic organisations in Sheffield have publicly dissociated from Brian and his practice, and his employment with Flame Foundation and the University was ended. More importantly, Towards Healing and Therapy (an organisation of practitioners in and around Sheffield), are writing a code of ethics that practitioner members must sign, and are devising a grievance and disciplinary procedure; and people in Sheffield (an organisation that produces a quarterly newsletter advertising therapists and events) has also established a clearer complaints procedure and is considering the adoption of a common code of ethics.

So why this letter? Brian Lotfi-Hubbard is still practising in Sheffield, still seeing women clients. And what has happened in Sheffield with regard to Brian Lotfi-Hubbard is an issue that all practitioners and therapy/alternative healing related organisations should be considering. If a woman came to you as a practitioner saying that her therapist has been sexually exploiting her, is there a code of ethics you could refer to? a grievance procedure you could turn to? If there are neither, wouldn't you feel isolated and unsure of how best to proceed, and mightn't that make it harder to do anything about challenging her abuser? If she came to you as a friend, how would you feel if you realised that there was no organisation that her therapist was a member of which would take any responsibility in dealing with her complaint? Not exactly guaranteed to inspire confidence in alternative therapies or therapists. . . Small peer group organisations obviously can't thoroughly vet everybody who applies to join – but they can work to a standard and take it upon themselves to censure practitioners who don't keep to it. Women's safety is at stake. Sheffield Rape Crisis Centre.

BACK FROM THE BRINK

Abortion rights in the USA

On 3rd July 1989 the US Supreme Court upheld a number of clauses in the Missouri state abortion law. These directly prohibit abortion in state-funded facilities and open the way for further restrictions. Marge Berer looks at the implications of this, the first successful challenge to the 1973 Roe vs Wade ruling which legalised abortion as a woman's right, and at the increased activity world-wide of anti-abortionists.

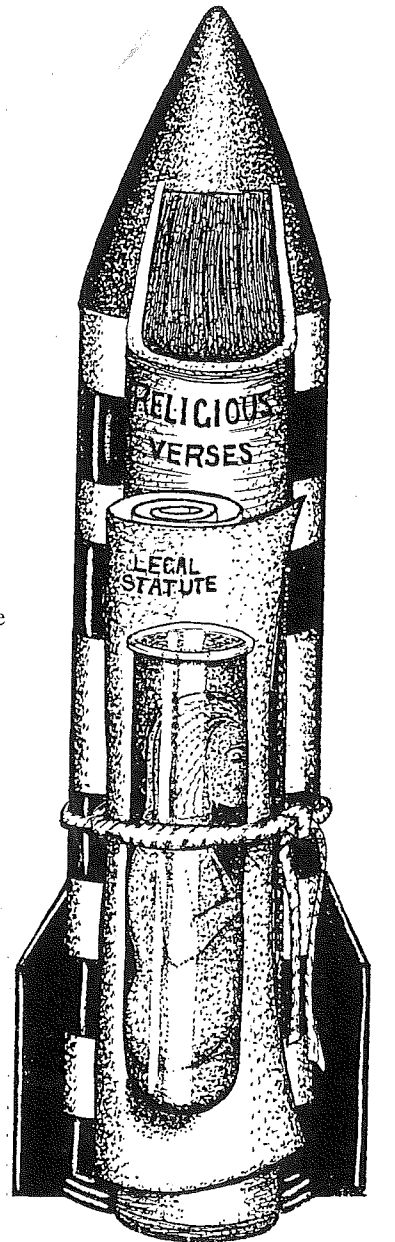
Rights belong to those people who are willing to struggle for them, sometimes repeatedly.
Ira Glasser, American Civil Liberties Union, USA, 8 April 1989.

As many countries in the world struggle towards the liberalisation of their abortion laws, events in the United States are setting a dangerous precedent for reversing that trend. In the past decades, most developed countries have made safe, medically-provided abortion available to women through a combination of legal reform and provision of clinical facilities. Although most of these countries have put the abortion decision in the hands of the doctors or committees of some kind, rather than in women's hands entirely, a generation of women have grown up free from the fear for their health and lives that backstreet abortion entails. Where the law has been restrictive, some women have been able to travel for abortions to other parts of their own countries or to neighbouring countries. Deaths from abortion have virtually disappeared.

In those countries where abortion is still illegal and done in the backstreets, pressures from the women's health movement and

progressive doctors, and the cost to public health systems of treating women with septic abortions in hospital, have led to increasing calls for laws to be changed. International campaigns to prevent maternal mortality have contributed to this pressure. It has felt for some time that women have slowly been winning this life and death argument all over the world, even if there is a long way to go in some countries.

Many of us have been complacent about the ability of the anti-abortion movement to threaten what we have gained in any serious way. What has now happened in the USA however, forces us to sit up and take serious note of something we would rather not have to notice. The anti-abortion movement can threaten what we have gained, and in a more serious way than we have thus far acknowledged to ourselves. As a minority, as a movement in opposition to worldwide trends, and most importantly, as a movement increasingly motivated by fundamentalist religious fervour, anti-abortionists are on a crusade internationally which will stop at nothing to win its aims.



Angela Karach

Whether it is the violence of bombing abortion clinics or the violence of hundreds of screaming men and women harassing and threatening women going to clinics – not just in the USA, but in Canada, New Zealand, and now in Britain, and who knows where else next week – many anti-abortionists are no longer trying to win their battle politely in political debate. Their violence is beginning to affect the thinking of those who sit at the front of courtrooms, as well as those who formulate the laws. Behind the violence, within the religious fervour that motivates it, lies a moral philosophy which has dominated thinking for centuries, which has clearly not been put to rest, which sees women as no more than vessels for creating children. Feminists have stood for women's absolute right to decide if and when to have children: the unremitting call for "the right to life and protection of the unborn" is a fundamental rejection of women having any such right.

Basis in law

At parliamentary and courtroom level, even while birth control and abortion have been liberalised, attempts have been made to achieve balance between these two "extremes". The state's interest in protecting its future children has been translated into a legal judgement that women cannot alone decide to abort without restrictions. In particular, the state has reserved the right to increasingly restrict whether a foetus may be aborted, at specified stages of its development.

The anti-abortion appeal to save babies is more than a mindless emotional cry – it continues to have a basis in the law everywhere, even if the law has stopped short of giving the embryo/fetus independent rights; even if the law has finally acknowledged that women do have some rights in this regard, and lives worth protecting. As the anti-abortion movement grows in proportion to its

own failures, as it becomes increasingly professional on one level and dangerous through its violence on another, the traditional moral philosophy it espouses has begun to get a lot of press, carrying its influence far beyond its numbers, appealing to a way of thinking that is still in the minds of even those who know rationally that we cannot go back to the backstreets.

The Supreme Court Decision

What the US Supreme Court did in July 1989 had been on the cards for years. However, it not only surprised, it shocked. The National Opinion Research Centre in Chicago had assessed current US public opinion: 10 per cent against abortion in all circumstances; 30 per cent for abortion on demand; the remaining 60 per cent waverers. The US public has just elected its third fundamentalist-supported and its second anti-abortion President in a row, with no regard for the consequences for abortion rights. The wavering of that 60 per cent has proved fatal.

Reagan was able to appoint three new judges to the Supreme Court, all anti-abortion to some extent. Serious weaknesses in the 1973 Supreme Court decision on the case of Roe v Wade, which was a model of its time in giving abortion rights to women, in fact led to the erosion of poor women's access to financial help for abortions in most states, starting in the late '70s. The complicated local/state/federal legal and court system gave anti-abortionists virtually unlimited territory for posing challenges and tying them up on appeals in the court for years. The case the Supreme Court agreed to hear at the urging of President Bush and Reagan before him, was a Missouri state law, which, in content not unlike dozens that had preceded it and which are sitting pending somewhere in the court system, managed to climb through the courts to the top and be heard.

Seventy-three major legal briefs were filed in opposition to that law, from the American Civil Liberties Union, the American Medical Association, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the American Public Health Association, as well as the major abortion rights campaigning organisations. But the 1989 US Supreme Court, with four of its members totally anti-abortion, and the fifth – the first woman Justice – virtually so, had the power to ignore the 1973 decision and use it.

On 3 July, they upheld as constitutional the following clauses in the Missouri law:

- the declaration in the preamble to the law, that life begins from the moment of conception. The Court said this was no more than a value judgement, which does not regulate abortion or any other aspect of medical practice. They said that as a value judgement, it favoured childbirth over abortion, and that a state was free to make this value judgement if it wished to.
- the prohibition of abortion in publicly funded Missouri facilities, i.e. hospitals. In Missouri, and probably in most parts of the country, most hospital abortions are for women beyond 12 weeks of pregnancy, (earlier abortions are mainly done in private independent clinics); and the majority of women seeking a publicly funded service from such hospitals are poor women and women of colour. The immediate effect of this part of their decision was that the one hospital in the state of Missouri which provided 97 per cent of all hospital abortions, has had to stop doing them.
- a requirement that doctors test for viability of a fetus if an abortion is requested after 20 weeks of pregnancy. If viability is shown, the abortion cannot take place. While the Court specified that any such test had to be useful, there is of course no such test, a fact which they did not bother to take into account.

decision in Roe vs Wade, based on freedom of speech and privacy of women, was not actually referred to in the Missouri statute and was therefore not an issue this time. In other words, they pretended that they did not actually discuss or overturn that decision. However, by upholding parts of a state law which limits women's access to abortion and abortion facilities funding, the Court was permitting all other states to put the same limits in their laws, and openly inviting them to try to impose still other limits on abortion rights.

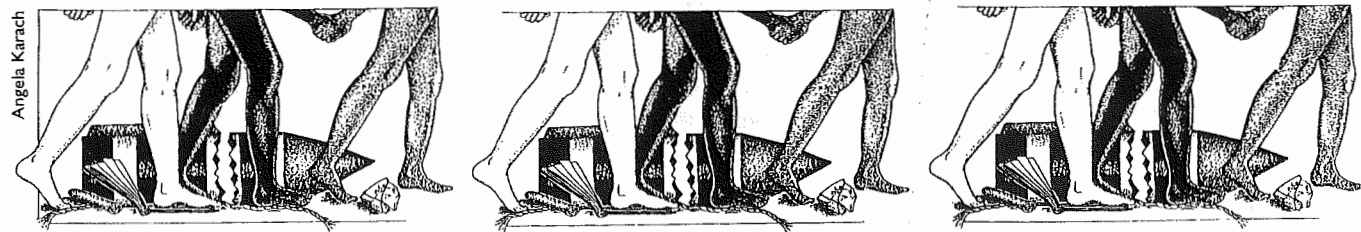
This ruling has created a call for state-by-state legislative bills on abortion law, proposed by feminists on the one side and anti-abortionists on the other. But the Missouri precedent of accepting limits will make it very difficult to defeat others in future, particularly with these same Supreme Court Justices sitting at the end of the appeals procedure.

Nor is the Missouri decision the only blow they intend to deal. The Court have also agreed to hear three other cases which challenge state restrictions on abortion rights. One of these statutes requires that every woman is advised of alternatives to abortion, and that every abortion clinic has back-up facilities equivalent to those in a hospital, even for abortions under 12 weeks. Many clinics which could not afford such facilities would have to close. The other two cases require parental notification or a court order for under-16s to get an abortion. Twenty-four states already have such requirements, all of which still stand or fall with the Court's judgement.

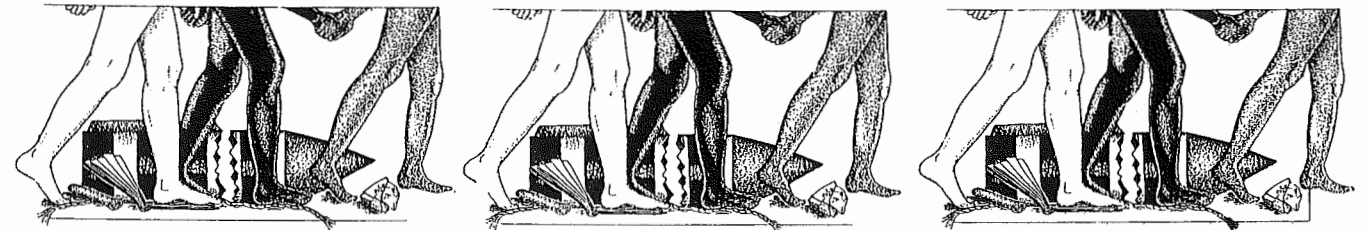
Immediate consequences

Four Justices disagreed with the Missouri majority decisions; three of them are aged over 80. Most outspoken was Justice Harry Blackmun, who played a crucial role in determining and writing the 1973 liberal decision and who publicly said:

Lastly, the Court said that the 1973



Angela Karach



Angela Karach

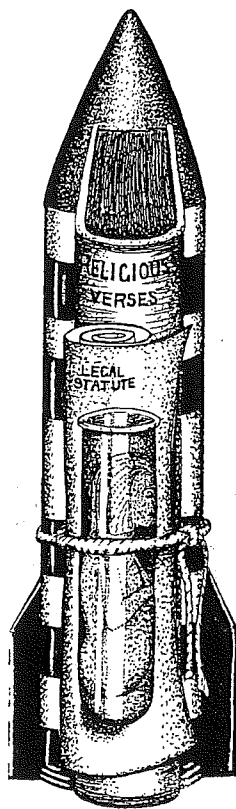
Never in my memory has a plurality (majority of the Justices) announced a judgement of this Court that so foments disregard for the law and for our standing decisions. Nor in my memory has a plurality gone about its business in such a deceptive fashion.

He accused them of:

a deafening silence about the constitutional protections it would jettison . . . The simple truth is that Roe would not survive the plurality's analysis, and that the plurality provides no substitute for Roe's protective umbrella . . . Thus, not with a bang but a whimper, the plurality discards a landmark case of the last generation and casts into darkness the hopes and visions of every woman in this country . . . I fear for the liberty and equality of the millions of women who have lived and come of age in the 16 years since Roe was decided. I fear for the integrity of, and public esteem for, this Court.

Roe vs Wade has been the basis of legal judgements in more than 2,000 cases since 1973, on privacy, childbearing, sexuality, and patients' rights. Without it, implications for women's rights and civil liberties in the USA are serious. No one thought they would dare change the abortion laws, but they did dare and they will dare again and again unless the feminist movement is able to mobilise the 30 per cent who are sure in their support of women's rights and unless they again begin to influence the wavering 60 per cent.

Meanwhile, in a country where access to quality health care, or any health care, depends entirely on money, poor women will be the worst hit. Women with incomes below the official poverty line have one-third of the 1.5 million abortions in the USA every year. Women of colour are 17 per cent of the female population of childbearing age, but they have 32 per cent of all abortions. Thirty-seven of the 50 states have withdrawn state-funded payment for privately-done abortions for poor women in the past ten years. Now it is legal for any state to shut publicly-funded abortion facilities. While women with money will always be able to travel to liberal states for abortions, it is probably inevitable that backstreet abortion will again become a widespread reality for poor women. Another impact of the public funding part of the court's decision, if it is repeated in many states, will be that US doctors in public hospitals may get no abortion training unless they specifically go and find it privately.



How will resistance develop?

While this Court decision did not make abortion illegal in the USA, it has come so close that there is already speculation on what would happen if they did. One big unknown is how many doctors would defy the law, or will backstreet abortion have to come back to convince them? Before 1973 there was an abortion underground run by feminists who used a network of committed doctors willing to risk their professional lives. But as Vicky Leonard (National Women's Health Network) said, "We've had legal abortion for 16 years now, so young doctors haven't seen firsthand the consequences of botched and septic abortions".

Writer Brett Harvey in *Mother Jones* says:

Most feminist activists predict that if worse does come to worst, we will see a rejuvenation of the old feminist self-help networks. After all, the thousands of people who have been working in abortion clinics over the past 16 years have acquired a lot of expertise – and new technology.

But will they use it? And will private clinics in the meantime start providing free abortions for the women most affected by this Court ruling?

Meanwhile, the violent arm of the anti-abortion movement – "Operation Rescue" – continues to travel in hundreds from city to city, forcing local feminists and clinics to spend weeks convincing the police to help, getting court injunctions to stop them, organising counter-actions, reassuring and supporting clinic staff and women. Fifteen thousand of these bully-boys have been arrested so far in military-style actions outside abortion clinics round the US. Insurance rates for clinics have skyrocketed because of them.

A major question is, how many states will pass liberal rather than restrictive laws? A survey released earlier this year by the National Abortion Rights Action League found that legislatures in 24 states were in favour of making abortions illegal. In only nine states and the District of Columbia were legislatures clearly in favour of keeping abortions legal. The remaining 17 were divided in opinion. Some states, like Florida, were expected to move against abortion very quickly. A few already out of session for the summer even considered calling special

sessions to put laws through quickly, before feminists could organise to stop them. All candidates for state office will now have to decide which side their political bread is buttered on, whether they like it or not.

This is a very volatile situation. Women in the USA are likely to begin organising on a mass scale for the first time in many years. Legislative opinion may quickly find itself having to shift to a pro-choice stance to stay in office. Feminist writers like Gloria Steinem in *Ms Magazine* believe that Bush's Republican party politicians will find themselves in the dilemma of having to take a pro-choice stand, against Bush, in order to keep their seats. This is no joke. Bush might not have made it into the White House if he hadn't agreed to speak against abortion – his pro-choice wife is not allowed to say what she thinks any more.

Many in the abortion rights movement in the USA are seeking a new basis for their campaigns. Women's rights per se are no longer seen as sufficient justification for a liberal law. The discussion has become more complex than the rejection of fetal rights. A demand that women have to take more responsibility for avoiding unwanted pregnancy is now on the agenda, whether feminists like it or not. In fact, feminism itself is being threatened. As Janet Benshoof of the American Civil Liberties Union said:

There's obviously something very threatening about the empowerment of women, when you see that the one Supreme Court decision that gives women more power over their lives than anything else in two hundred years, is the only constitutional right that the government has ever asked to have taken away.

International threats to women's rights

While much of this is unique to the political and religious climate of the States, it also serves as a warning to us all. In Britain, a group called "Rescue" (modelled on "Operation Rescue") has formed in Scotland and has already held one action outside a Manchester clinic: there have been severe cuts in family planning services – with no mass protest; the NHS White Paper ignores women's health care generally. More and

more judgements are being made against abortion counsellors and/or providers in Ireland, Belgium, Germany, and Spain. Catholic activists in Poland, boosted by Solidarity's rise, have already tried to revoke their liberal law. Even in countries like Argentina and Honduras, where the chances of abortion soon-being legalised are almost nonexistent, antiabortionists have become more active. In most third world countries, they have shown their total opposition to all forms of birth control, let alone abortion.

Even in Canada, where only 20 months ago their Supreme Court supported women's right to decide to have an abortion, there were three court cases in three different provinces in the summer of 1989 alone, in which men, albeit unsuccessfully, tried to prevent women from having abortions.

Antiabortion threats of an international boycott have succeeded in frightening the German pharmaceutical giant Hoechst into not applying for a licence anywhere overseas for the new early abortion method RU486. This nonsurgical method, developed by Roussel-Uclaf, one of their subsidiary companies in France, is now licensed only in France – against the company's wishes, and only through government insistence. Yet many countries, including Britain, have indicated they would probably license it; there is no doubt it would be extremely profitable. Another pharmaceutical company, recently taken over by Kodak, stopped research on a similar compound, and a third is seriously considering doing so.

There can be no doubt that the anti-abortion movement means business. The Catholic Church has put \$45 million into anti-abortion activity in the USA alone over the past 15 years. Opposition is mounting from the international Knights of Columbus and the Christian fundamentalists. It is clear that this is not an issue that feminists will win easily. Most women in developed countries, after 15-20 years of unremitting activity, were tired of campaigning for abortion rights by 1980. But with the new threats, a new sense of wanting to fight back has arisen. "These guys have no idea what's coming down the pike at them," said one woman campaigner in the USA, not long after the July decision was announced. Let's hope she's right. □

Most of the information in this article was originally researched by the author for the article "Abortion and the Law: International News" in the *Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights Newsletter* No 29, April-June 1989. pp4-10. Available from WGNRR, Nwz Voorburgwal 32, 1012 RZ Amsterdam, Netherlands. Subscription 50 Dfl per year.

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12 STEPS TO HEAVEN

There's nothing new about the theory that women like being beaten up by men. It's a convenient explanation for those who prefer not to acknowledge men's violence. Cath Jackson reviews Robin Norwood's "Women Who Love Too Much", the bestseller book behind the DIY cure for what Norwood describes as a genetically-inherited addiction and feminists describe as reality.

* Is having 'somebody to love' the most important thing in your life?

* Do you constantly believe that with 'the right man' you would no longer feel depressed or lonely?

* Are you bored with 'nice guys' who are open, honest and dependable?

Then, lady, you are *sick* and do I have the cure for you.

Robin Norwood's *Women Who Love Too Much* is the latest – oh, if only it was the last – self-help text to cross the Atlantic, sweep to the top of the bestseller lists and spawn a nationwide cult of women's health groups working around its suggested "program of recovery".

Norwood's thesis is that women can be addicted to men, in the same way as we can be addicted to drugs, alcohol, high carbohydrate foods. Women who repeatedly find themselves involved in destructive relationships with "unhealthy, unloving partners" are

suffering from "loving too much".

WWL2M, first published in the UK in 1986, and its sequel, *Letters from Women Who Love Too Much*, have spawned WWL2M groups all over the country. A recent survey of Well Woman Centres reveals that WWL2M self-help groups are among the top three most popular, together with sexual abuse and compulsive eating. WWL2M has upstaged not only classics like *Fat is a Feminist Issue* but all the other "I've been there too" and "female-friendly" how-to books covering women's sexual and emotional well-being, from incest survival to the joys of heterosex. By the devastatingly simple tactic of including everything from compulsive eating to apparent frigidity as sub clauses to its own thesis, WWL2M has made itself a seemingly impossible act to follow – although this may be wishful thinking on my part.

"Loving too much" is, says Norwood,

the inability of women to detach themselves from destructive, physically and/or emotionally violent relationships with men.

Typical of the whole genre of self-help books, Norwood is careful to point out that she herself, although currently working as a therapist, is not writing as an objective expert; she is "a woman who loved too much most of my life"; she not only understands; she has been there too.

Again in common with others of the genre, WWL2M is written as a series of case histories interspersed with analysis and solution, building up to the "Road to Recovery" in the final chapter.

The case histories are pathetically repetitive: Jill, "pert and petite, with blond Orphan Annie curls", who can never keep her man; Trudi, who drove her car over a cliff because her married lover chucked in their relationship; Lisa, artist and "beauty", who married a Mexican transvestite to get away from home and then got involved with a drug-addict who slashed all her paintings; Brenda, the bulimic model, whose alcoholic husband Rudy sleeps around with other women.

These women, says Norwood, have all grown up in a "dysfunctional home in which (their) emotional needs were not met", and this, she believes is the root of their problem. It is an analysis which now also dominates establishment explanations of child sexual abuse: the family is "dysfunctional", not the abuser.

Her definition of "dysfunctional" is pretty encyclopaedic, including alcohol or substance abuse, compulsive behaviour (obsessive eating, working, cleaning, dieting . . .), "inappropriate sexual behaviour", constant arguing and tension and more.

Another major factor is that villain of the piece, the absent, emotionally distant father and his side kick, the clinging, demanding, over-emotional mother.

The child from such a home only feels "comfortable" in an adult relationship which reproduces the "dysfunctional" pattern of her family, with its emotional highs and lows, intensity, violence and threat of rejection. It also makes her desperate to win affection and approval, to patch up the cracks, to compensate for her own unmet emotional needs by "becoming care-giver, especially to men who appear in some way needy". She constantly makes excuses for the behaviour of her man

and puts up with psychological and physical violence and abuse because this, says Norwood, is the only way she knows how to relate intimately.

Defining the problem

So how do we know when we are "loving too much"?

When being in love means being in pain we are loving too much. When most of our conversations with intimate friends are about him, his problems, his thoughts, his feelings – and nearly all our sentences begin with "he . . .", we are loving too much.

When we excuse his moodiness, bad temper, indifference or put-downs as problems due to an unhappy childhood and we try to become his therapist, we are loving too much.

When we read a self-help book and underline all the passages we think would help *him*, we are loving too much.

When we don't like many of his basic characteristics, values and behaviours, but we put up with them thinking that if we are only attractive and loving enough he'll want to change for us, we are loving too much.

When our relationship jeopardizes our emotional well-being and perhaps even our physical health and safety, we are definitely loving too much.

Recovery is achieved through individual therapy combined with the so-called "twelve step program" of the Anonymous groups – Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, Sexaholics Anonymous and other such 'survivor' groups.

How do we know when we have recovered?

Recovery is the ability to sustain a relationship with a "steady, dependable, cheerful, stable" man – "nice . . . even if . . . a little boring". Recovery is also the ability to transcend the initial "chaotic emotional experience" of first love and go on to the "ever-deeper exploration of what D H Lawrence calls 'the joyful mysteries' between a man and a woman who are committed to each other" – a combination of *Agape* ("feelings of serenity, security, devotion, understanding, companionship, mutual support, and comfort") with *Eros* (passion).

Only the utterly blinkered heterophile would deny that women all too often find themselves trapped in an unhappy relationship with a man, ranging from the demanding and unfulfilling to the outright violent and abusive.

Nor is there anything controversial about Norwood's analysis of the 'game' where each partner adopts a particular role and both become locked in a repetitive pattern of inter-relating. Relationship counselling commonly includes the simple ways to defuse these circular 'games' which Norwood herself suggests: distancing oneself from the situation, refusing to make the expected responses, to adopt the familiar roles of aggrieved victim and guilty, self-justifying aggressor. To this extent WWL2M is a practical and useful manual to tuck under the marital pillow and does no doubt offer great comfort to women locked in the stranglehold of a stale and embittered relationship.

Faulty genes

The problems with WWL2M and Norwood's thesis come when she goes on to elaborate her theory of "loving too much". For, says Norwood, women involved in destructive relationship are in the grip, not just of an unhappy partnership, but of an addiction to "dysfunctional" relationships with men of such intensity it warrants the classification of a *disease*.

I am thoroughly convinced that what afflicts women who love too much is not *like* a disease process; it *is* a disease process, requiring a specific diagnosis and a specific treatment. (WWL2M p.187)

More than that, it can be a fatal disease:

Whatever the apparent cause of death . . . loving too much can kill you. (WWL2M p.195)

And beyond that still, "loving too much" is an inherited, physiological disorder that is passed from addicted mother to addict daughter, like some faulty gene:

Lisa, in relation to Gary, like her mother in relation to alcohol, suffered from a disease process, a destructive compulsion over which she had no control by herself. Just as her mother had developed an addiction to alcohol and was unable to stop drinking on her own, so Lisa had developed what was also an addictive relationship with Gary.

Some, like the unfortunate compulsive-eating Brenda, have an additional substance addiction all of their own - in her case an "allergy-addiction" to refined carbohydrates, which she has inherited from her mother, a compulsive eater and "which almost exactly parallel(s) her father's allergy-addiction to alcohol". Allergy-addiction forms the underlying analysis of the Anonymous self-help pro-

grammes. It is said to be an inherited chemical reaction to certain substances, such as alcohol or refined sugar, which creates an uncontrollable craving in the sufferer for whatever contains that substance. Thus the Anonymous treatment of total abstinence.

In combination the "dysfunctional" family background and the predisposition to addiction make for disastrous consequences:

Many women like Margo, because of their emotional histories of living with constant and/or severe episodes of stress in childhood (and also because they may have inherited a biochemical vulnerability to depression from an alcoholic or otherwise biochemically inefficient parent), are basically depressives . . . Such women may unconsciously seek the powerful stimulation of a difficult and dramatic relationship in order to stir their glands to release adrenaline . . . (WWL2M p.183)

Eat your heart out, Erin Pizzey.

So we start with the outlines of the fairly typical "how to be a happy heterosexual" text and end with a fully fledged pathology, underpinned by plausible, sub-Freudian psychobabble. Norwood's breadth of examples makes it easy for her reader to identify with enough 'symptoms' to be convinced. It amounts to a self-fulfilling prophecy.

"Tell me about yourself", I requested as gently as I could, even though I knew what was coming.

Challenging concepts of female 'inadequacy'

Susie Orbach's *Fat is a feminist issue* . . . was if not the first, certainly the most influential of this breed of self-help therapy texts. Whatever its failings (see *T&S* 7), *FIFI* has the undisputed merit of genuinely applied feminist principles. Orbach took the radical step of 'naming', identifying as a disorder, what was widely assumed to be a symptom of female inadequacy. Women who were overweight, who ate quantities of food beyond their physiological requirement, were not 'greedy'; food obsession was a rational response to women's gender-specific social circumstances: to the pressure to conform to male definitions of acceptability and normality; to women's powerlessness. Food obsession was, Orbach proposed, clearly linked to the self-hatred engendered when, denied the power to change the situation, women are left with only themselves to punish and blame.

Orbach used explanation to achieve understanding and, by explaining, provided the basis for recovery. More than that, she placed recovery in the hands of women themselves, outside conventional psychiatric and therapeutic medicine. An important part of that was that Orbach claimed herself to have been a compulsive eater; thus she was not an objective expert pronouncing on other women's failings, but a co-sufferer and a proven 'survivor'.

Norwood appears to start from the same spot, that of 'naming' and 'sharing' as a recognisable condition what is commonly perceived - by men and women alike - as female inadequacy. But gradually, as the book unfolds, what began as a description of all-too-common patterns of heterosexual relationships mirroring the inequalities of power between men and women, becomes a description of a specific, medical condition.

With mesmerising simplicity she reduces a complex and universal situation to a single-issue, individual problem that will respond only to a specific prescription, the "twelve steps" to recovery:

. . . in my personal and professional experience, I have never seen a woman who took these steps fail to recover, and I have never seen a woman recover who failed to take these steps. If that sounds like a guarantee, it is. Women who follow these steps will get well. (WWL2M p.198)

And still thousands upon thousands of women read her books and say, 'Yes, that's me'.

Dear Ms. Norwood,

I just purchased a copy of WWL2M and I have had to stop reading it at work because my cries of "Oh, my God!" are disturbing my boss. For twenty years I have been married to a man who, when not actively drinking, is on a dry drunk . . . (Letters from WWL2M p.51)

Dear Ms. Norwood,

I fit the prototype in your book quite exactly, and if I had known you, I would have been quite upset that you wrote about me and spread my intimate thoughts and feelings on the pages of your book for the world to see.

Reclothing old arguments

So what's the problem? Many of us are only too familiar with the desire to develop some concrete physical ailment on which to pin the mental and emotional misery we feel. It's okay to be depressed and miserable when you are

ill; it's okay to be pathetic and needy when you're flat on your back with flu. We all know the attraction of the concept of the 'pill for every ill' and there's something strangely comforting about finding there is a diagnosed physiological explanation for why we feel so bad. Thus, perhaps, the enthusiasm with which we take on board as a medical 'condition' pre-menstrual tension; thus the enthusiasm with which women accept the premise that the menopause is a deficiency, a disease in fact, for which hormone replacement therapy is a 'cure'.

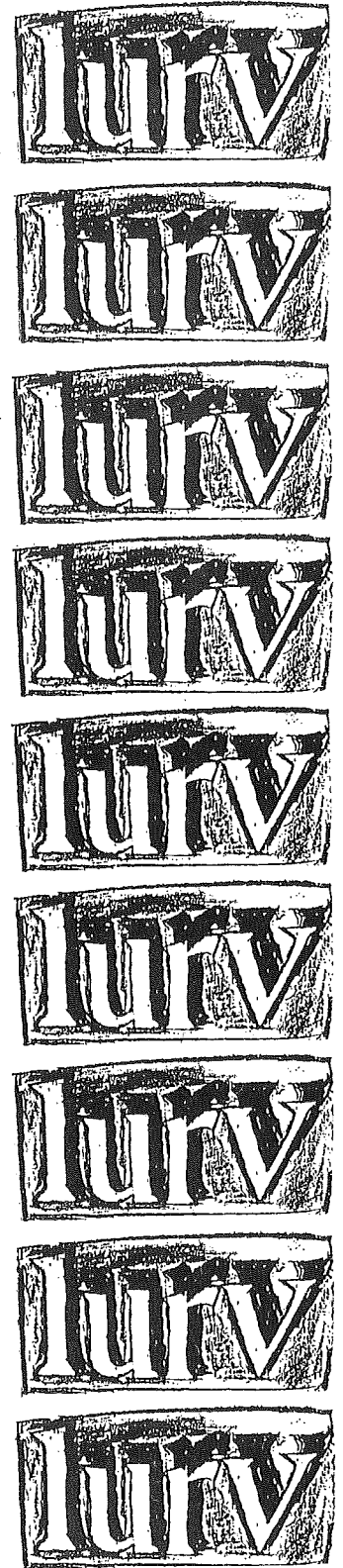
But what does this approach mean in terms of heterosexual relationships?

When Erin Pizzey put forward her theory that women in violent heterosexual relationships were biologically addicted to violence itself, there was a widespread outcry and condemnation from feminists. Pizzey's theory was that women who either stayed with, returned to or repeatedly got involved with violent men were hooked on the high they got from the rush of adrenaline when the fists began to fly.

Feminists pointed out that such theorising was simply reclothing the old argument that women 'ask for it' in pseudo-medical jargon. It was, they said, letting men off the hook yet again. It was also paying court to the convenient convention that women are 'martyrs' to their biology; that women cannot help themselves when it comes to the dictates of their glands.

Beyond that, it was a recipe for passivity. What would be the point of walking out of a violent relationship if you were doomed by your hormones either to return to it or to repeat the pattern? What was the point of looking for other reasons for violent relationships, such as inequality of power, male violence, male ownership of women and children, women's limited freedom of choice, if the cause was biological?

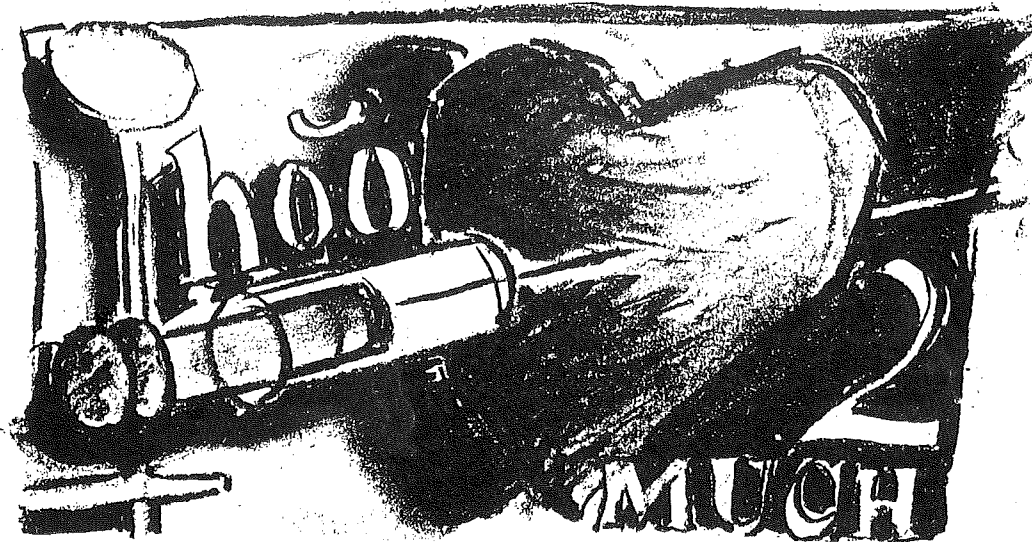
Yet here we have Norwood putting forward a theory that is different only in terms of the words she uses. Some women - many women it seems from the response to her book - actively seek violent, destructive relationships with men. It's the same old story of woman as martyr to her physiology, as willing victim, as active protagonist in her own victimisation. Norwood's approach differs from common prejudice only in suggesting that women actively seek and stay in violent



Catherine Tidnam

relationships not because we like it but because we are helpless in the grip of our physiology, genetically too sick to leave. Yet, for this 'genetic disorder', she offers only a social cure – behavioural therapy. The contra-

Catherine Tidham



diction takes your breath away with its enormity: it also utterly destroys her argument. Nowhere does she seriously question the nature of heterosexual relationships themselves.

Indeed in the sequel volume, *Letters from women who love too much*, Norwood takes pains to distance herself from an implication that "loving too much" is a strictly heterosexual syndrome. With disarming innocence she writes:

I seem to have inadvertently implied that I thought all relationship addicts were heterosexual. I know better than that.

The truth of the matter is that, herself a heterosexual, "that was (and is) the variety of relationship addiction I know and understand best". Too late she realises the awful implications of her narrow focus: that what she describes is intrinsic to the heterosexual nature of the relationships she analyses. Norwood works entirely with the assumption that the sexes are in all ways equal protagonists. She writes about choice:

Most of us who love too much are caught up in blaming others for the unhappiness in our lives, while denying our own faults and our own choices. This is a cancerous approach to life that must be rooted out

and eliminated . . . When you let go of blaming others and take responsibility for your own choices, you become free to embrace all kinds of options that were not available to you when you saw yourself as a victim of others . . . (WWL2M p.224)

The only element of influence to which she admits is that of *culture*, located purely in the interaction between men and women as equal partners in what she calls the "dance" – that "special sense of belonging with the man who allows us, as his partner, to dance the steps we already know" thanks to dysfunctional family pre-programming.

Lisa's condition wasn't helped any by the fact that both suffering for love and being addicted to a relationship are romanticised by our culture. From popular songs to opera, from classical literature to Harlequin romances, from daily soap operas to critically acclaimed movies and plays, we are surrounded by countless examples of unrewarding, immature relationships that are glorified and glamorized . . . We accept that suffering is a natural part of love and that the willingness to suffer for the sake of love is a positive rather than a negative trait.

Beauty and the Patriarch

Norwood devotes a whole section to what she describes as a significant misinterpretation of the fairy tale "Beauty and the Beast". Her opinion of the 'true' interpretation is telling indeed. This popular fairy tale of the young woman forced to marry a "repulsive and

frightening monster" in order to "save her family from his wrath" is, says Norwood, *misinterpreted* to mean that a woman can change a man for the better by the power of her love. Women who love too much are the victims of the cultural reinforcement of this romanticised notion that women can "redeem" wayward men "through the gift of their selfless, perfect, all-accepting love", Norwood explains. Thus the way they are constantly drawn to apparent "losers". It is, she believes, an attitude which is repeatedly reinforced in women's magazines and in the "Judeo-Christian ethic".

We are taught that it is our duty to respond with compassion and generosity when someone has a problem.

Norwood's own interpretation, revealing the "profound spiritual lesson" of the fairy tale – and her own blinkered analysis – is that it is a story about "acceptance" – "a willingness to recognize what reality is and to allow that reality to be, without a need to change it".

Beauty accepts the Beast as he is, hairy and repulsive, thereby "freeing" him to "become his own best self" and achieving for herself "a happiness that issues from . . . developing inner peace, even in the face of challenges and difficulties".

Women who love too much try too hard to change their man, to improve him. They should, suggests Norwood, leave him alone and get on with "cultivating whatever needs developing in yourself".

Under a very different analysis "Beauty and the Beast" reveals itself in quite another form: a poisonous little tale about the abuse of women as male property, useful as political currency to further the interests of men, dished up to tiny female tots to acclimatise them to their fate.

Norwood's glib interpretation slots neatly into the world view that exonerates men who murder their 'nagging' wives who are post-humously accused of so criticising and undermining their husband's self-esteem that he was 'understandably' driven to throttle her.

When a woman who loves too much gives up her crusade to change the man in her life, he is then left to ponder the consequences of his own behavior . . . he may choose to struggle with disengaging from his obsession and becoming more physically and emotionally available. *Or he may not.* But no matter what he chooses to do, by accepting the man in her life exactly as he is, a woman becomes free, one way or another, to live her own life – happily ever

after. (WWL2M p.162)

Nobody asks whether men should be expected to change. Such a question has been wiped off the agenda (if, indeed, it was ever there).

Being with him ceases to be The Problem and leaving him ceases to be The Solution. Instead, the relationship becomes one of the many considerations that must be addressed in the overall picture of how they live their lives. (WWL2M p.201)

What about the dependency created by lack of money, the presence of children, the physical and social vulnerability of women without men? These factors are, it seems, just avoidance tactics, "contingencies" that women use as an "excuse" not to "recover".

Cover all the contingencies – child care, money, time, transportation – without using him as a resource (or an excuse!). (WWL2M p.225)

The very potent emotional and practical factors which govern women's freedom to stay in a damaging relationship are dismissed as symptoms of the addiction itself. Pathologising the situation allows Norwood to skip lightly over the very ordinary fact that, having invested their financial and emotional security in a relationship, women are understandably reluctant to abandon it for the terrors of the unknown and understandably keen to believe him when he promises to change.

Anonymous steps

Norwood's Alcoholics Anonymous-based programme of recovery fits perfectly with this concept of the guilty victim. She adapts the basic AA twelve steps to recovery to reflect the particular addiction she is setting out to cure:

Anonymous programmes, more usually drawn up as self-help therapeutic recovery programmes for people addicted to alcohol, drugs and other substances including food, are heavy with pseudo-Christian overtones. The process towards recovery follows the identical path to Christian redemption: transgression, confession, avowal to no longer 'sin', redemption/recovery. Like Christianity, they are confused about predestination and free will. On the one hand, they work on the assumption that an addiction has a physiological root cause – inherited "allergy-addiction". On the other they demand that the individual admit personal blame for their failure to resist the addiction. An addict is predisposed to addic-

Relationships-Anonymous Twelve Step Programme

1. We admitted we were powerless over relationships – that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others who love too much, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

tion, just as man is born to sin: recovery is begun by an admission of guilt and responsibility just as salvation can only follow an admission of sin. In both cases redemption can only follow a "surrender" of will to a "Higher Power".

AA may work well enough with alcohol or other substance addiction, but it is important to remember the programmes rely on total abstinence from the addictive substance. Applied to heterosexual relations, the process is sinister to an extreme. If there was any doubt that Norwood holds women individually responsible for their mental and physical abuse at the hands of their partners, her "RA" (Relationships-Anonymous) programme makes her position all too clear.

Women should, she says, learn to "surrender" any attempts they are making to exert control over their lives ("control" in the hands of women is a very dirty word in the Norwood book), or over the lives of their partners or children; "accept" their partners' unacceptable behaviour; become "selfish" – that is, put themselves and their own needs first; learn to love themselves; overcome their fear of rejection and, finally, re-engage in "the sexual realm" in a new way which "requires not only that we be naked and vulnerable physically, but that we be emotionally and spiritually naked and vulnerable as well".

When the going gets tough Norwood has a selection of "affirmations" to take the pain away.

Twice daily, for three minutes each time, maintain eye contact with yourself in a mirror as you *say out loud* . . .

I am free of pain, anger and fear . . .

I enjoy perfect peace and well-being . . .

All problems and struggles now fade away; I am serene . . .

I am free and filled with light.

and more, sung to the tune of ad nauseam.

It is yet more of the deception – and self-deception – applied to women over the centuries to lull, daze, numb them into an acceptance of the status quo. Often it is only when the lulling and numbing, the distracting fails, that the violence really begins.

Indeed it is significant that books like WWL2M only really took off when feminists began to actively and vociferously question the inevitability of heterosexuality, when women began, in large and organised numbers, to fight back.

In this respect WWL2M groups belong to

the category of the tupperware and sex toys parties where women have a legitimate excuse to get together and discuss 'women's things' while hubby is out. Sex toy parties are not the solution to women's sexual needs. Nor, in all probability, are men.

Evangelical addiction

Norwood's whole approach appears to rest on masking the harsh reality of the here and now by advocating a new addiction in its own right: that of self-help therapy. With her books, her programmes, the spawn of therapeutic groups faithfully following her steps to recovery, WWL2M bears more than a passing resemblance to the multiple charismatic Christian movements sweeping America and, increasingly, the UK.

Religions of any kind have always been a useful tool for those with power and privilege to control the less advantaged. The message that we will receive our 'just rewards' in heaven, by promising first retribution for those abusing us and, second, recompense for our suffering in 'another life', has always been an extremely effective way to defuse protest here on earth. The trick is to make the down-trodden adopt the religious doctrine as their own. Thus religion becomes Marx's "opium of the people", used to dull the injustice and suffering of the here and now with the promise of better to come. And always before us is held the vision of those who have "been rewarded", have overcome their addiction to "unhealthy" men – like Norwood herself – to spur us on to greater efforts of "surrender". You too can overcome the daily grind, *if only you believe*; if only you "surrender" your perceptions of reality. Norwood's affirmations are hymn-singing by another name; the self-hypnotic mass chanting of the evangelical christian movement.

It is interesting to note that there are now Anonymous groups and programmes for people addicted to evangelical religions.

Reading the *Letters* it becomes painfully obvious that many of Norwood's readers need help in overcoming their addiction to self-help itself.

Ms Norwood,

I've just finished reading your book. I thought after the first few pages I would never pick up that book again. I cried because I found out that I had yet another disease. I'm already a recovering addict and

alcoholic. I've been in Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous for over a year . . . I've been in therapy for a year and a half and I've also been in two rehabs. I'm an adult child of an alcoholic and I probably qualify for Overeaters Anonymous.

Dear Robin Norwood,

I am a recovering person, involved in Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous and Al-Anon. Recently I came to terms with my sexual addiction also and I am now in recovery for that too in Sexaholics Anonymous. I also see a therapist, and a substance abuse counselor. I am an Adult Child of Alcoholics as well . . .

Norwood is simply offering women yet another distraction, another fake solution; yet another addiction with which to mask the anguish of women who have – for want of a more subtle description – been fucked over by men.

Extremity and the norm

The key to the success of the whole genre of self-help books – is that they should offer what amounts to fast-food therapy; a simple, attractively packaged solution to a superficial problem that can be 'grazed on the hoof' like a take-away beef burger. Norwood's book is just another in the long line of palliatives which range from Christian religion to diet-sheets: an interpretation, a doctrine, a self-denying programme of "recovery" and the suggestion that it's your choice, your responsibility, if you stay in hell.

That women are buying WWL2M and following its programme in such numbers is a sign, not of its worth but of the extent of women's need to find an answer to the question: "How can we stop men doing all this to us?"

It is also vivid proof of how unhappy the majority of women are with their heterosexual relationships. What Norwood describes as an extreme has been seized on by so many women that it is almost impossible not to conclude that what she calls loving too much" is, in fact, to her readers the norm.

Comparison with a parallel book written for men makes this analysis even clearer.

The Casanova Complex is for men what WWL2M is for women. According to the author, Peter Trachtenburg (himself a "recovered" Casanova), some men are addicted to multiple relationships, constant

"womanising", one night stands and chronic infidelity. The reasons for this "polygyny" are, says Trachtenburg, again the "dysfunctional" family upbringing: the absent father, the over-dominant mother.

Casanovas are, he says, "powerless over their sexual compulsions", addicted to "using women as drugs":

To be a Casanova is to conquer and manipulate women, to *act on* them. What a relief to those who in childhood felt colonised and invaded by omnipotent mothers and still fear being subjugated as adults! Every time these men seduce women, they turn them into drugs – inanimate objects that can be ingested and then disposed of.

Here, yet again, an extreme expression of the power imbalance in male-female relationships is pathologised and excused away. The irony is that, intentionally or otherwise, Trachtenburg is using the vocabulary of radical feminist condemnation of the institution of heterosexuality itself.

And what, according to Trachtenburg, are the motivations for men to abandon this way of life? They may, says Trachtenburg, lose their jobs, lose their friends, run the risk of catching AIDS or, worse still, discover:

they are too old to attract new partners and find themselves alone, without the comforting supports of age, and afflicted with desires that they no longer have the means or health to satisfy. Even this pain may not be enough: at sixty three, Fred is still desperately seeking new sexual opportunities, though his heart condition makes them potentially fatal. (CC p.270)

It's like capitalist industrialists suddenly going green: not because they have any genuine respect for or belief in the philosophy of conservation or regeneration but because they have suddenly woken up to the harsh fact that they are running out of the very resources on which their continuing viability depends.

The Casanova Complex is the mirror image of WWL2M. Trachtenburg even refers to it as a useful resource for "the ladykiller's lady". Together they attempt to conceal behind pathology the inescapable fact that heterosexual relationships in the context of socially endorsed sexual inequality are "dysfunctional" by definition.

Without an analysis which examines that imbalance, which traces it back to its roots in male ownership of women, such DIY manuals remain a microwave meal with the listeria still festering within. □



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The Casanova Complex, Peter Trachtenburg, Angus & Robertson (UK), 1989.

Not tomorrow —

Out of a period of political repression, the Turkish women's movement is emerging as a force to be reckoned with. On a recent visit to Turkey, Algin Saydar interviewed Gül Özlen, a radical feminist activist. She has translated the interview for Trouble and Strife and gives an account of the first ever Turkish women's conference.

I lived in Holland for eight years with my husband. I was married for five years. Towards the end of my marriage I started getting involved with the women's movement there partly because I was just beginning to conquer the language. Women in Holland were campaigning to change the abortion legislation. I started having contact with women's refugees to help the Turkish women who were there.

I started reading about feminism and attending discussions around it. Before I used to read a lot about Marxism. I come from a socialist background. My transition into feminism was via socialist feminists, thinking socialism alone was not going to bring about the liberation of women. I used to try and explain it all to my socialist comrades at the beginning. I am a long way from all that now. Now I talk to women.

In 1984 I decided to come back to Turkey. I came to Istanbul to have an idea of what was happening around women. I heard there was a women's publishers called Circle of Women. Turkey was under martial law then. Meetings were outlawed. If five people got together they were committing a crime. It was also forbidden to set up any kind of organisation. So five women got together and set up a company. They were given a page in a weekly magazine to write about feminism. This company was originally set up as a legal consultancy for women in 1982 or so. At that time, because of martial law there were no publications of any description. Publishing magazines was banned. Later on, they set up a book club which meant members could subscribe and they could attend club meetings as this was not seen as anything subversive. This coincides with my return to Turkey. This book club translated and published some feminist non-fiction literature into Turkish.

We used to meet twice a week. Someone would introduce a topic and we would all discuss it. Once a month these discussions were open to men. We were discussing sexuality, socialism, radical feminism, marriage and so on. It was an amazing feat under military rule when all else was silenced. This went on until about 1986 when the ban on setting up organisations was lifted. Some of the women now wanted to set up an organisation. After extensive discussions a group split from us and set up the Organisation of Women Against Discrimination. Hardly any of these women are left in that organisation now. The women who are now members of this organisation are much closer to us in ideology than the ones who set it up.

The second split came out of discussions around publishing a magazine. These discussions lasted about a year, illuminating the differences between some of us on how we saw the liberation of women, feminist organising and the meaning of feminism. It was obvious we could not publish a magazine together. Some women left the group and eventually published the socialist feminist monthly journal *Kaktüs*. We wanted something much more radical; much less bound by rules and therefore we published *Feminist*. *Feminist* comes out now and again, when we have something to say. About a year ago another group of women split from us on the issue of communicating our thoughts to socialist men. We did not wish to explain anything to men.

What I have said so far is all about the women's movement during the eighties. Before then, it was much more of a socialist movement. IKD (Progressive Women's Movement) dominated the late seventies. This was not a feminist movement but it has to be said

N O W !

that they only organised with women. The movement took its direction from socialist parties and organisations which meant that socialist men set the agenda. The 1980 military coup wiped out all socialist opposition which created a gap in the Turkish political scene. Women moved into this gap and started setting up their own agenda and organising by themselves. This was largely due to the fact that women had neither the space nor the opportunity before 1980 to organise autonomously around women's issues.

Since 1987 other women's organisations have been set up which work together with men. I find it hard to call them women's organisations. Their first political action was to call a rally against price rises. Why price rises should be of concern only to women is beyond me. They are really socialist organisations.

Last year International Women's Day was celebrated by different socialist women's groups, autonomous women's groups and different feminist groups. It was the first time so many different women came together. We wanted to make a banner saying "*The Future is Female*". Socialist women were dead against it. They proposed a slogan for the rally and march that we could not accept: "Men and Women hand in hand". We all compromised and decided we would only shout out the slogans that we had all agreed on, that the rest would be on banners, and that men would not come on the march. The socialist women who had agreed to all this forgot them all on the actual day as they marched with their male partners shouting slogans we had asked them not to use.

After 8 March we tried to discuss why this had happened — did it now mean that we could not in all honesty work with these women any more? The proposition around having a women's conference coincides with this process. It was proposed by the Women's Section of the Human Rights Organisation. It was a very top down decision. Before we

The first ever Women's Conference in Turkey took place between 19 and 21 May 1989 in Istanbul. The following account of events leading up to the conference itself is a summary of interviews done with women from two autonomous women's groups: Women's Cultural House and Feminists.

The Conference was proposed by the Women's Section of the Turkish Human Rights Organisation. It took approximately eight months of preparation involving a wide spectrum of women from radical feminists, socialist feminists to women who did not call themselves feminist. The conference was aiming to provide a platform for women to meet, to discuss issues of concern to them and to voice their concerns to Turkish society at large. As there was a broad representation of women's perspectives focused in small groups, it was vital to bring them all together in a conference to establish what each group stood for.

The conference rallied around a slogan of "Not tomorrow, now", listing a number of demands. What transpired in the build-up to the conference and during the conference was that there was a split between women who believed in an autonomous women's movement and women who identified strongly with the socialist movement. There are also women who see it all as a process of transition from one camp to the other; namely socialist women who are more and more seeing the need to organise autonomously. This process was also interpreted by some women as getting closer to identifying themselves as feminists.

The conference ended with a number of groups and individual women pulling out disappointed and angry at the way things had been handled during the conference.

So far campaigns have been run around violence against women and against wife beating; against virginity tests given to women applying for civil service jobs and against terminating the employment of pregnant women. Civil law and the legal power men exercise over their wives seemed to be the next obvious step for a campaign. There is also ongoing work in relation to negative images of women in the media and pornography. Women are now pushing for "the right to be the offended party" where the law does not allow for an individual, for example, to sue a newspaper if there is no individual attack on a woman as a person but the image or article is generally offensive to women.

The conference also showed differences between women who wanted to organise around a central structure and women who wanted to organise loosely. More and more women are feeling coordination between loose groups and coming together around particular platforms is preferable to centrally governed organisations.

It is generally accepted that women in Turkish society see their lot as the natural state of affairs. They do not see it as something that can change or that there are other ways of being. Yet women's role in society has started being the topic of conversation in recent years. Books and films questioning the position of women attract a lot of attention. This is seen as a way forward, especially since even women from the Islamic movement participated in some of the campaigns and discussed some of the issues raised by these campaigns.

realised what it was all about we found ourselves in the midst of organising it. After a couple of meetings we as radical feminists realised this conference would not be a women's conference. We decided to pull out of the organisation and just take part in discussions during the conference and submit statements.

The conference took place between 19-21 May, 1989. Before we pulled out of the organisation one of the contentious issues brewing was whether men should be present at the conference. We felt this depended on the content and aim of the conference. If the conference was going to be an academic discussion of women's status and its sociological explanations, then men could be invited to come and speak. If, on the other hand, it was going to be a platform where personal accounts of women's issues are cited then there was no place for men in a conference like that. It was then said that after women had gone in men would be let in if there was space. This was totally wrong as it lacked all political clarity as a decision. Yet it became the admission policy of the conference. At one point during the conference a man was allowed to speak in spite of the fact that there was not enough time for all the women who wanted to speak. There were also transvestites and transsexuals who were not allowed to speak. Some of them were prostitutes and they wanted to talk about prostitution and poverty. We wanted them to. Some women from *Kaktüs*, some from Women Against Discrimination and from *Feminist* got together during the lunch break to work out if we should leave the conference. We compiled a statement to read after the break. The woman from the Human Rights Organisation chairing the afternoon session would not allow us to read the statement and tore it up. This was really unfortunate for a woman who is supposed to be a democrat. We left the conference after one of us explained from the microphone why we were leaving and how we did not feel this was a women's conference.

There is now going to be a booklet published on the conference including all the statements compiled for the conference. If this booklet does not include our statements then we shall have to publish another booklet. I no longer have the confidence in any of these women from socialist organisations to get involved in planning future political

actions with them. I remember the first ever march we organised. It was a march against wife beatings – violence against women. There were about 3,000 women involved but women from socialist organisations were not there. Men walked at the back of the march in silence to support the women. None of the problems encountered during the International Women's Day march and the conference were there because the march was organised around a single women's issue.

My understanding of feminism is not that there is one feminism that applies equally to all, but there is something all women share. Women are oppressed and exploited by men. There are obviously different issues for black women or working class women. Feminist organising actually means organising separately around your common oppression. I also believe it is perceived and applied differently from country to country. I think it is fair to say, for example, that feminists in the women's movement in Turkey today all come from a socialist background. This plays a part in the way we organise. The first women's campaign in Turkey was the one against domestic violence whereas voting rights campaigns or abortion campaigns might have been the first campaigns elsewhere. Women in Turkey have had the vote since the early days of the Republic and abortion was legalised by the military in 1982.

For a long time I wanted to just call myself a feminist. Now I say I am a radical feminist. My definition of a radical feminist is a woman who is struggling to change the order of things, not just effect change in legislation. I don't see men as part of this struggle. I still have one to one relationships with men with great difficulty but still . . .

Feminism will have to look at how the liberation of women will be realised next and how to organise to achieve this. We will have to discuss if women are oppressed or exploited. Bosses exploit workers and from this toil the boss profits. I think the same is true of women, of course, not in the exact same way but still men profit from the exploitation of women. Men have a vested interest in seeing the continuation of institutionalised sexism. What we are doing now is working towards the emancipation of women. Liberation of women involves a different world and requires us to have stamina. □

The Body Remembers

How can feminists develop new ways of understanding our own sexuality? In critically reviewing some recent publications – Joan Nestle's "A Restricted Country", Sheba's "Serious Pleasure" and the new lesbian magazine "Quim" – Margot Farnham explores a different path towards sexual integrity.

'We demand games with great seriousness' (Situationist slogan)

'You know this game has been strictly forbidden by your father.' (Leonora Carrington)

It's a year now since the Conway Hall debate on sexuality: "Putting Sex Back Into Politics", organised to launch Joan Nestle's book *A Restricted Country*.¹ For lesbians the event and book kept kindling a preoccupation with lesbian sexual practice and various publishing projects followed. But the utterances that have emerged are locked still by the dualities that locked that debate: those of pleasure/danger, expression/repression, freedom/censorship. I believe that radical feminism has always attempted to unlock these dualities, in my experience has always encouraged the exploration of ambiguous feelings about sex. I suspect, though, that much of our talk about sexual expression is with our friends and so not 'public speech'.

Compared with gay men's highly publicised sexual practice, lesbian sex still seemed beyond the public sphere — something now being addressed by recent publications. My wish with this article is to delineate the space that the recent writings and representations of sex have fallen into.

My sexual life is I suspect as complex as anyone else's; one thing is simple though: my wish for sexual integrity. The desire is simple but sexual consciousness is not, involving as it does a need to listen to many voices, of repulsion, of beauty. Many spirits and goblins are awakened by sex, some kind, others vengeful.



Judy Stevens

The following organisations would be glad to be in contact with groups in other countries and would appreciate books and articles being sent to them on a regular basis:

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AKKD
Ergenekon Cad.
Türkbeysi Sokak
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Sex can also have a metaphoric existence. How much one is 'there' in sex can also seem like a sign of one's presentness in life generally, coming, arriving, being held or not in the world. Often women find healing in lesbian sex; and it can be sheer hell. More than anything else, sexual consciousness needs memory: the ability to bring past life into present sensibility.

My questioning of three contemporary lesbian texts is concerned with memory: that of the body, and our own political history. And it is concerned with the recent lesbian conceptualisation of the 'outlaw', a sexual identity I would describe as one in flight from

body remembers too, becomes for a time its occupation, driving or swimming, or engaging in familiar activities, the physical patterns of which the body recalls.

In a very basic way, touch cannot be divorced from its memory. Women's sexuality does not exist distinct from its culture which tolerates great harms against the female body and the physical humiliation of children, all of which the body remembers at one level or another. The body may remember even as the mind attempts to forget, and when the body wishes to forget, it tries to develop its own protective amnesia: numbness.

Partly too the current cultural exchanges



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memory, both from the memories of each lesbian body and the political memory of the lesbian 'community' which has witnessed different historical phases.

These are my thoughts on the significance of memory and the way I see the background to our current concerns.

The body has its own history, its memory. In the simplest sense, occupation inscribes the body: a finger becomes calloused, or the eyes of workers in the micro electronics industry are thrown into dementia by the intricacies of circuitry. Because the centre of control is the head, memory is accredited not to the muscle or skin but to the brain, but the

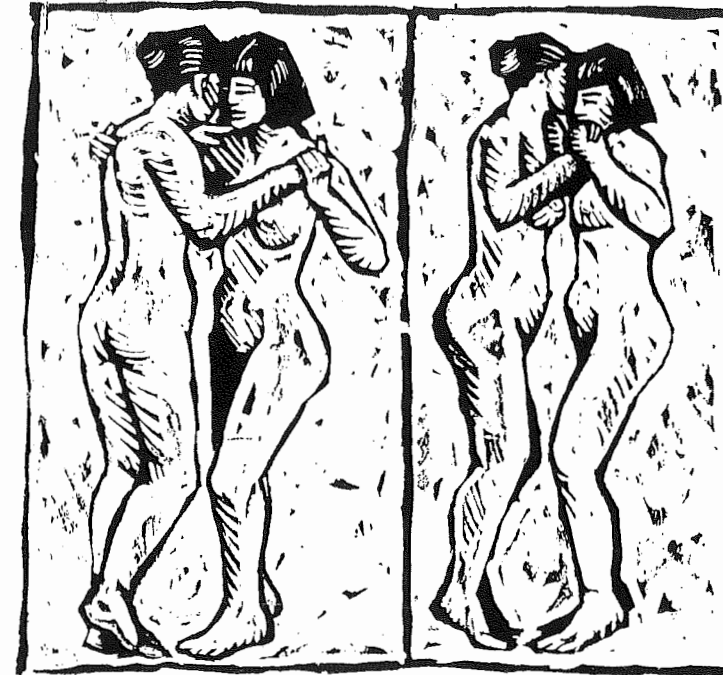
on the subject of sexuality within lesbian artistic and publishing circles cannot be understood without looking at the relationship of seventies feminism with our own time.

Ros Coward recently commented on the key words in feminist sexual discourse from the seventies to now: the seventies was preoccupied with 'sexuality', the early eighties with 'desire', the late eighties with 'lust'.² A crude description might be that seventies feminism emerged with a spontaneous articulation of the banality, the poverty of heterosexual sex as many women experienced it and centred by the end of the decade on sexual violence. What came to be heavily emphas-

ised was the political meanings of sexuality, one of the stormiest debates of the decade concerning political lesbianism. In the course of time, women who stressed and campaigned against sexual violence were criticised for neglecting 'pleasure'.

What seems to be overlooked today is that seventies feminism emerged in a climate of supposed 'pleasure': the sexual revolution. Our analysis was shaped by our disaffection with the sexual revolution, was formed partly in reaction to its mindlessness in terms of women's experience. Within lesbian political circles it was also a time of affirmation of lesbian sexual pleasure, an affirmation which

and unreliable. What is emphasised is the shifting nature of meaning, an approach which can either inspire one to illuminate a problem with a wide perspective, or to total silence and introspection, pondering the impossibility of 'ever shifting meanings' which never stand still long enough to say what they 'mean'. It is not surprising that so much of today's cultural criticism centres on 'representation' (how something is shown rather than what it is), a concern which formed a significant part of the pornography debates of the mid-eighties. Liz Kelly identified a polarisation within feminism at that time (sexual violence v sexual freedom), with FACT describing their view of the



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today may seem naive, but which at the time inspired quite a few women to become lesbians.

Janice Raymond³ views the transition to the eighties and the change within lesbianism as a capitulation: from political movement to lesbian lifestyle. Some may observe that people have given up hope for a politics able to operate in the public world, and so find looking at one's own life and desires in a political way unbearable. Others may view the changed climate as one of postmodernist cynicism: when everything is so fractured, why even try to put things together again?

Certainly reality can seem treacherous

problems of legally focused anti-pornography campaigns for lesbians: the potential for state suppression of sex information and lesbian 'erotica', the 'problem' that some women get sexual pleasure from pornography.⁴

The early eighties saw a preoccupation with psychoanalytic ideas about desire, and now "lust", desire's degraded sister, the term which Coward believes sums up contemporary feminist fiction, violating "the erstwhile feminist ideal that when women can have more say in sex it will be nice, cosy, and even egalitarian". Coward observes that when writers have investigated heterosexual lust, they invariably tapped despair. What is it that

'lust' longs for, What is the nature of lesbian 'lust'?

"Touch me not my mother's fixed me." (Ludus)

The first of the two Sheba books marketed as 'erotic' writing, Joan Nestle's *A Restricted Country*, can be read as a woman's attempt to establish her history in various parts: her own sexual history, her mother's, and what she views as lesbian 'heritage', a heritage celebrated by Nestle's creation of 'erotic' stories.

Nestle is concerned with the body's memory and regrets its neglect: "It is the body that has been most often cheated out of its own historical language . . ."

For me the strongest pieces of writing are the earliest ones where Nestle evokes the shaping experiences and influences of her sexual, political and emotional life, 'Jean' who shows her as a teenager the potentiality of women's bodies: "I knew women's bodies were for sex, but I did not know they could cut through the water or leap straight up into the air." She describes the claustrophobia of the Macarthyst fifties from her perceptions as a child and teenager: the fresh air of Robeson, the Russian Ballet, the alternative culture of the American Communist Party. She also offers a personal documentary of American anti-semitism and of the Civil Rights movement.

Nestle's writing about her mother is an evocative, troubled account of that dangerous ground where both mother and daughter stand. My unease about it concerns not the writer's portrait of her mother but the interpretations Nestle places on her mother's stories in her analysis of the meaning of sexual culture. Nestle has a lot invested in viewing her mother and herself as courageous outlaws and this is the way Nestle promotes herself and the work of the history archives she co-founded. The celebration of her mother's sexual life, "My mother liked to fuck" is written as if in vindicating sex, Nestle were vindicating her mother's life itself.

The most contentious political issue Nestle raises is the meaning of lesbian sexual practice. Much of her concern is to honour the butch-femme practice of the fifties, which she mostly experienced herself in the sixties. The motivation for her writing came from a

surfacing of "pain and anger at hearing so much of my past judged unacceptable".

Nestle comments on the seventies' critiques of butch-femme relationships: "The irony of social change has made a radical, sexual political statement of the 1950s appear today as a reactionary nonfeminist experience."

This touches on a crucial matter when looking at the history of the body or of sexuality. Society inscribes different meanings on the body, and sex has different significances in different cultures and times; I think



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feminist writing on sex should aim to open up meanings, not close them down. Nestle does not question the past but settles it in light with her own desire, views sexual feeling as fixed and views the butch-femme dynamic of the fifties as a timeless lesbian dynamic.

Importantly, Nestle talks about the fifties police raids on queer bars and the arrogance which went along with some of the political analysis of the seventies: dismissals of other people's time and place without knowledge or understanding or commitment to find out. In that sense Nestle provides a valuable opening for us to look at the fifties, while she does seem to overlook that many of the fiercest

critics of the butch-femme lesbian scene came from women who did experience it firsthand. But then as the writer begins to make wider political gestures with her words I come to dislike them. By viewing the process of memory as either a betrayal or a celebration, Nestle settles for a romanticised version of the past.

Nestle implies and states a belief in "lesbian erotic heritage". This heritage involves codes for butch and femme and for femme graduation towards a butch sexuality after one turns forty. When Nestle says "Let me be butch for you; I have been a femme for so long", she believes that "I have become our own mythology". I'm sure many feminists with a different analysis are familiar with the sexual impulses and kinds of expression Nestle talks about, yet she writes as if these forms of sexual relating only exist in a butch-femme subculture. For example Nestle talks about a seventies feminist lover who makes love by rubbing herself against her leg, as existing in an "old butch tradition". Nestle does not acknowledge that other feminists may recognise the kinds of sex she writes about but place them in a wholly different history: one which recognises women's struggles to love their body in a culture which hates them or objectifies them; one which recognises that other dramas over personal power and self-esteem, love and neglect may be enacted in sex. (The language of sex itself is revealing about this. I think of the ambiguities in the word 'abandonment' for example.)

As part of her focus on the hidden history of sexual outlaws, Nestle looks at the history of prostitutes. Yet again Nestle has a rather mystical view of communities of outlaws, describes prostitutes as an undifferentiated 'people'. It is true that the police view prostitutes as a group and enforce laws against them and it is important for that history to be researched and prostitute culture of 'survival and resistance' to be acknowledged but Nestle is naive about how a prostitute history may be constructed: "A rich untapped source of Lesbian history is diaries and biographies of courtesans, madams, strippers and other sex workers." Nestle does not question the context in which so called 'memoirs' are written. Many of those which emerged were written either as moral tracts or as pornography and their authorship is questionable.

Why does Nestle trust 'history' to tell us about prostitutes?

Many poor women do not leave records of their lives; prostitutes have much in common with other unrecognised working women. Nestle views prostitutes as a vanguard of sexually adventurous women. Equally well she may have looked at the authenticated letters of Maimie Pinzer, a Jewish American prostitute who recorded her struggles to survive in correspondence with a middle class Bostonian between 1910 and 1922, who by the time she was twenty-one had syphilis, was addicted to morphine and had lost an eye.⁵

Having completed her tour of lesbian sexual history, Nestle rallies lesbians with a celebration of "wetness". "Being a sexual people is our gift to the world." Because she does not want gay men to carry the "sexuality bag", she criticises women who want to be "good deviants". "It is tempting to some Lesbians to see themselves as the clean sex deviant, to disassociate themselves from public sexual activity, multiple partners, and intergenerational sex. . . . Lesbian purity. . .", she argues, "helps no-one." I agree, but failing to differentiate "lustful crushes of young Lesbians on older women" from "intergenerational sex" from the sexual abuse of children is also unhelpful. A lesbian sexuality that talks more about itself will not be the same as gay men's sexuality. Nestle's campaign to upgrade lesbian sexual image dismisses women who are troubled by sex and women who choose to be celibate. Perhaps only in sexual outlawhood can one forget one's history as a woman.

Nestle's 'erotic' stories are part of her celebration. I felt unmoved, embarrassed by them as I do with much self-consciously erotic writing which tries to step outside its emotional body. Nestle's stories are located in her own desires and attractions which happen to be my nightmare. "A Different Place" for example is about a butch woman who decides to fuck her femme lover's ass for a change, hence the coy title. The description of the "black-slipped woman" lying on her stomach exposing her purple stockings, just brings to mind to me all the wretched mums and dads leatherettiness of the way sex was conceptualised in the fifties (smut, naughtiness) which I was desperate to escape from as a

teenager. Taken out of the context of 'life', I think other people's fantasies, are condemned to be read voyeuristically (watching without possibility of understanding) as corny, sentimental, embarrassing or weird.

Nestle views the New York Lesbian History Archives as a "memorial". Here in heritage Britain we have learned to be wary of historical tableaux. Memorials frame memories so that after time one cannot conceptualise the past beyond the truth enshrined there. Nestle's work is motivated by the valid concern that a part of her past has been ignored. No one wants their past sexual incarnation labelled as neanderthal lesbian. But in terms of a lesbian history I think we have to find a way beyond our own territorial concerns over the past. Nestle's implied message is to forget: forget that many different versions could be recorded about the butch femme experience. Unless history, oral history especially is just an undifferentiated chorus of voices, what people say needs to be contextualised, what we want from the past needs to be acknowledged. Otherwise the past is just what each woman makes it and we can continue to fight over it rather than engage in difficult debate about the present.

II

The introduction to the anthology of lesbian erotic stories and poetry *Serious Pleasure* creates certain expectations: the writing will engage with questions of memory and history, politics and representation, fantasy and arousal.⁶

The introductory poem closes with this line: "hey, poeta, memory is your only redemption". ("Living as a Lesbian Underground: futuristic fantasy ii" by Cheryl Clarke.) Memory is linked to survival; and sex is seen as "the very force which drives our lives and our passions". It is implied that previous feminism neglected lesbian sex. The collective see the anthology as appearing amidst debate concerning the construction of lesbian sexuality, and about 'representation'; it refers to ongoing discussion about the difference between erotica and pornography. The anthology is "informed by a radical approach to the politics of sex, race, class and culture" and aims to represent diversity of experience as well as desires and sexual practice. The other interest of the publishers is to

include stories which will arouse us, its lesbian audience.

That would be a lot to expect from stories and poems, which while they may inspire political insights are not 'about' anything other than themselves. It is surprising that the essay form is omitted, which can deal more directly with political questions. No mention is made of the editorial method and criteria, except for the encouragement of 'diversity'. Certain key issues are in fact evaded. When Pat Califia wrote elsewhere that lesbians do not talk about what really makes them excited, I think she was right. Califia uses that insight to justify taking her place amongst the



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ranks of misogynist creeps in the porn industry, but it is still a pertinent observation. Would the Sheba collective have published stories about fucking men or about fantasies of rape or abuse? One of the most painful aspects of women's sexuality generally is that we can be turned on sometimes by the most woman-hating crap – not surprising considering the construction of female sexuality in our culture. To ignore what may have accounted for a quietude concerning lesbian sex among lesbians is to ignore the most valuable clue of all.

Another assumption is made, that the

aim to arouse people is totally compatible with the aim to produce art. I think that is contentious. Susan Sontag's discussion of the difference between pornography and art is interesting: "Pornography has a 'content' and is designed to make us connect (with disgust, desire) with that content. It is a substitute for life. But art does not excite; or, if it does the excitation is appeased, within the terms of the aesthetic experience." Sontag refers to a statement by Jean Genet, who I think is a great sexual writer because touch and fucking and sexual ritual in his writing are resonant with drama about power and subservience and always linked in the most deadly way to political power. Genet said that if people were aroused sexually by his books, "they're badly written, because the poetic emotion should be so strong that no reader is moved sexually. Insofar as my books are pornographic I don't reject them. I simply say that I lacked grace."

Another aesthetic concern is ignored: that of form, style, what a lesbian literature of sex could be like. Can a lesbian or anyone liberate sexual writing by using the conventions of pornography? I doubt it. Why do lesbians (excluding exceptions like Monique Wittig) often write about sex in the style of personal reverie or autobiography or with a journalistic voice? Why do many women, when they wish to explore fantasy or sex outside of realism, employ the conventions of pornography to do so? A book which honestly wanted to contribute to the discourse concerning sexual writing, would need to discuss style and how lesbian sexual writing relates to conventional pornography.

What of the writings themselves? It is difficult to do justice to some forty contributors, but only rarely do they touch upon the questions raised in the introduction. The introduction insists that sex is in life, but here sex is located in a locked room in the imagination; there is little sense of movement or historical or emotional exploration in the anthology. Perhaps it is easier to extract sex from life than it is to put 'life' into representations of sex.

While the anthology as a whole does not live up to its own expectations of itself, certain contributors open up interesting doorways. Cultural memory is described in L.A. Levy's "Mish-Mish Rimon". "My parents had sex. They had that particular closeness. Friday

night and my mother would dress up: her perfume, her jewels, it was a mitzvah." She also writes about the drama as opposed to the fantasy of sex: "We could dream anything up." But what are readers to make of the statement: "My lover and I are both Jews, so we don't have that body/mind split." It is one thing to enrich one's life with your community's cultural history, another to romanticise it out of the real world.

Diane Biondo's "Monopoly" wittily dissects control in sexual encounters by creating a story around the theme of sky-diving. Cuntessa de Mons Veneris's "A Visit to the Hairdresser" opens beautifully with the character recalling a childhood desire to suck, and a memory of her mother's breasts, and then the story slides into a predictable fantasy about fucking the hairdresser who inspires this memory: "I tie each of her wrists to the taps . . ."

Barbara Smith's "The Art of Poise" exceptionally seeks directly to deal with the political meaning of sexual practice. She uses the buzz words of cultural criticism, "gaze", "object", to describe what happens in sex with her lover – but in the most banal way: "We kiss . . . as candle wax melted into ice along and down my back and then we talk about the politics of 'burning'."

Jewelle Gomez's "White Flowers" places sex in relation to the world of work. Mandy Dee tenderly evokes the vulnerability of her body which can at different times be healed or wrecked by sex: "Could you hold me tomorrow/ When confusion and shaking take me?"

But on the whole I think that the current interest in commoditising 'lust' has narrowed the scope of the book. Recently I read an anthology dealing with death; there were stories of ghosts and beloved people who had gone; some writing dealt with journeys. There death was – in life. The only journey recorded on my memory after putting down *Serious Pleasure* was the often repeated one of hands fucking cunts. By the close of the book I had a sense of the lesbian body as terribly mechanical, becoming wet, coming. And another image recurs, that of women being 'held down'. But just like the experience of 'abandonment', the state of being 'held down' carries many meanings for women not all of which are located in a murky unknowable unconscious, but these remain unquestioned

by the anthology.

III

*"In Boot Hill there are only two graves that belong to women and they are the only known suicides in that graveyard."
(Michael Ondaatje)*

Quim claims its momentum from the events of last year: Joan Nestle's visit, the screening of the film "She Must Be Seeing Things", the sadomasochism and the Conway Hall debates. The magazine takes its name from pornography, relinquishes sexual politics: "We've been off our backs . . . now . . . were finally up our quims", (congratulatory letter). The editorial takes its gushing style from pornography; the magazine is personalised as a woman: "Quim is wet for you." The editorial is also framed in the feminist rhetoric of diversity: "Quim will be discussing how our class, race, age, physical capabilities, education, politics and sexual histories effect our sex and relationships with our lover or lovers." The magazine promises "practical grassroots information about safer sex" and imagery which is "original" and "thoughtful".

There is no practical information about "safer sex" or self help. What information there is is consumerist: one can find out where to buy dildoes, a lesbian equivalent of Ann Summers lingerie parties. (The radical young women's magazine, *Shocking Pink*, on the other hand has recently covered safer sex for lesbians.)

While I am sure that the contributors come from different backgrounds, none of the stories or features place themselves in personal or cultural history. Why does the magazine specifically promise what it does not deliver?

I think the magazine is locked by the duality expression/repression and so is thwarted from a political exploration of lesbian sexual practice: "Too much had been kept shut away and it had to be set free". The metaphor of encagement is inappropriate, because caged or free, lesbian sexuality and sexual expression comes from somewhere (our histories and that of the cultures we live in and come from) and means something, many things.

We have been very exposed in the eighties to the positive images/negative images

way of viewing representations of lesbianism, and gayness. The editorial collective of *Quim* feel an urgency to "celebrate what makes us lesbians - our sex with women". This statement ignores women who chose lesbianism for political as well as erotic reasons, and again it leaves stranded any woman who feels ambivalence about sex. Celebration creates a framework where criticism is placed as non-celebration, anti-sex. I believe celebration would be involved in explorations about sex and desire, but why begin there? An anxiety seems to underlie this approach - that without constant celebration lesbian sex may



Judy Stevens

disappear.

I think a progressive lesbian representation of desire or sex would need to work beyond the sexual genres as we know them: pornography or romance. A political treatment of lesbian sex would have to reckon with lesbian lives as women's lives, with the socialisation of girls and the reality of pernicious sexual violence. A political treatment of lesbian sex in its widest sense would be informed by other knowledge too: by our experiences of women's bodies and touch at all stages in our lives. Once criticism is construed as anti-sex there is no room for politics; once politics and memory are relinquished, the scene is set

for the creation of an 'outlaw' sexuality - one which is in flight, without possibility of engagement with society. An outlaw needs a judge, and this partly accounts for the way that criticism is currently construed as a censorial voice.

Quim can be placed within outlawism. To break out of the expression/repression duality one would need to begin critically to explore the content of desire, to investigate its roots. Many of the contributions to *Quim* conclude where I think it would be more meaningful to begin.

For example, it is highly offensive to many women to present uncritically an image of a woman wearing a nazi uniform. If a woman reflects on her sexual desire and finds that nazi's walk there, this would be something of great value to explore in photography, but Della Grace's work is 'fixed' within a conventional framework, not exploration but fetish.

A recent review of Grace's exhibition 'Lesberados' includes a quote from her:

'These are lesbian desperados, lesbian outlaws,' says Della. 'Women that are strong, sexy, quite feminine but not sissies. They're tough and they like to play, but the playing is also for real. And they are all me, I dress like this. Often my models wear my clothes, so they look the way I want to look, I project my fantasies onto their already strong images. The toning is to soften them up, because I want people to see past their prejudices.'

The reviewer continues:

In the end, it's up to you to decide whether these women are self-determining pioneers pushing back the sexual frontiers, romanticised metaphors yearning for sexual anarchy, or voluptuous prison guards preserving the status quo by steadfastly patrolling the outer limits.

All these readings miss the point - work which uses uncritically the images of pornography, cannot reach beyond them. The way that Grace comments on her use of "her" models also falls within the way the male artist traditionally uses his model: "I project my fantasies." I suppose it shouldn't be surprising, looking at production and distribution for a moment, that Grace's postcards are sold alongside straight pornography in Soho.

Other contributions to *Quim* similarly fail to break out of the codes of conventional treatments. Barbara Smith's "Psychoanalytic" is framed in Hitchcock's misogyny (but with a twisted end).

The woman raises her arm as if to defend herself, we see her pushed against the tiled walls, we see a hand at her throat, we see her arms drop limply at her side . . . But the unknown presence is not that of an emotionally impaired and dangerous man - it is a lesbian. The story "The Nun" exactly mimics the pornographic 'catalogue' of violent sexual acts. Would it have been too difficult to explore what propelled women into s/m relationships or why, yearning for intensity, women settle instead for violence? Tessa Boffin's nature girl photographs, reminiscent of the health and efficiency imagery of the fifties, are not contextualised and so the place these unlikely amazons inhabit in her imagination is never explored or revealed.

Desire is isolated and confined. Apart from a lone voice on the letters page, no one addresses what I would have thought were lesbians' most common sexual problems - desire in long term relationships, resonances about abuse and violence, the dilemmas of intimacy. In our society, despite the writings which have come out of the radical history of the last twenty years, information and support is withheld from young lesbians, who still have to embark upon a difficult journey alone.

We are about to leave a decade for which the concept of 'commodity' has a particularly powerful resonance. It is difficult to resist viewing the body as a commodity in such a climate, but we will be better able to deal with this culture's deeper problems concerning physicality if we are able to assimilate our own physical and political past. This would involve a physical memory that acknowledged that sex is connected with everything our bodies have experienced and done and everything done to our bodies which we had no control over. This would involve a political memory which acknowledged both the inspired energy of the seventies, and the insights of the eighties. Armed with these understandings we could attempt to remedy the present schisms in sexual discourse, illuminate 'pleasure' and 'danger' with women's life experiences, unlock the dualities which still manage to polarise sexual debate, and give a true home to that orphan of our selves - our body.

*"And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul?"
(Walt Whitman.)* □

Notes

1. Joan Nestle, *A Restricted Country* (Sheba, 1988).
2. Ros Coward, "Sexual Outlaws", *New Statesman and Society*, 9 June 1989.
3. Janice Raymond, *Putting the Politics Back Into Lesbianism*, Women's Studies Program, University of Massachusetts, USA (originally a talk given to the Lesbian Summer School July 1988.)
4. Liz Kelly, "Feminists v Feminists", *Trouble and Strife*, no 7.
5. Ruth Rosen and Sue Davidson (eds.), *The Maimie Papers* (Virago, 1979).
6. Sheba Collective, *Serious Pleasure* (Sheba, 1989).
7. Barbara Smith, "Lesberados", *Pink Paper*, 1989.

a class of our own

Pat Mahoney praises "Learning the Hard Way: women's oppression in men's education" by the Taking Liberties Collective.

Learning the Hard Way is a brilliant book and ought to be compulsory reading for all women involved in education. For those of us who are teachers it may remind us or teach us for the first time of our power to sabotage the education of working class girls and women. For those of us who are students it will give us strength and confidence to know that our experiences of being oppressed by the education system are not unique. Maybe with the help of this book, we will find the courage to say so.

Learning the Hard Way is an incredible book. Fifty-seven women participated in writing it – some black, some lesbian, most working class and all involved in the Second Chance for Women course in Southampton. It represents the best in a tradition of feminist writing in which personal experience is the raw material of political insight and understanding. As we begin our journey through its pages we learn about the realities of the authors' lives and of their struggles with poverty, with the state and with individual men, to get an education. We learn too of their experience of education both as children and as adults, which left many feeling undermined, unimportant and inferior. And all this in a language which is clear, accessible and

stimulating.

In being very firmly a feminist book the authors state quite clearly that they wanted to produce a book that was for women rather than about them. This they have certainly achieved and in doing so raise an interesting question as to what counts as a feminist review. (Certainly not a conventional one in which the book is picked over and poked at as an object off which the reviewer can score as many points as possible).

Learning the Hard Way had a profound effect on me. It reminded me of my own experiences of school and of Higher Education and an old anger about the classist nature of both was rekindled. It provoked me to look again at my position now as a university lecturer and to question how far my move away from 'us' and into the world of 'them' had blinkered me – and I had to ask "Are there things I now don't see?" It made me less tolerant than ever of the hypocritical rhetoric that all too often stands in place of proper discussion about what people need and want from education. Perhaps, though, most important of all for me is that I ended up knowing again in my guts why I remain a teacher.

I recommend you to read this book. It's important.

Learning the Hard Way: women's oppression in men's education, Taking Liberties Collective, Macmillan, 1989.

I come downstairs just as my husband is putting the phone down. He collapses in the chair muttering about being knackered and asks me to make him a cup of tea when I've finished the dishes. No wonder women like me don't often write books about our lives for publishers like Macmillan. ●

We don't want men to be present to give it bogus 'status' or respectability. We don't need it. Women's Education is the most important activity that we have engaged in our lives; it already has the highest possible status in our eyes, and we don't care what men think of it. ●

I began to liken myself to the last onion in the vegetable rack, the one we get so familiar with we don't notice until it gets beyond use; the one that when we finally start to peel off layers of skin, emerges as a bright and firm and very usable onion after all. ●

The course helped me more than I can say, and it must remain open to all women regardless of their financial status. I am now doing a degree course. I owe that to some remarkable women who believed in me and not my cheque book. ●

... anger makes a lot of difference. It separates us off somehow, puts us on the line, makes our behaviour, our words, our actions – unacceptable. Our will to live is too fierce for comfort, too loud, too raucous, too insistent – it puts us outside, it makes us something 'other' – living without men, without guilt, without respect for the law of the powerful, without shame, and mostly without a proper sense of helplessness. It really grates, and what grates most of all is that we're not frightened any more. ●

The ironic thing was that in the first year they taught us about Bernstein's theory of restricted and elaborated language codes – that working class people are disadvantaged in the education system because of the complex language of the middle class – but the joke was they taught us this in the elaborated code so I couldn't understand it! ●

I couldn't believe it. There were three blokes doing our course on the Changing Experience of Women. One of them was a 'right on' social worker – well used to taking women's kids into care and 'getting families back together again' after fathers had abused children. I didn't trust him an inch. Another kept going on about his wife's feelings of isolation and frustration. Claimed he'd come on the course to 'understand her point of view a bit better' – whilst she was stuck at home feeling isolated and frustrated no doubt. The third one was a pervert I'd say, and kept wanting to 'get onto the bit in the course about sex and violence'. ●

I remember some teachers taking a liking to me but as I got older they got fewer. I was always 'average' at school, I didn't feel anyone really noticed me most of the time. In my last year at school I was very unhappy and played truant almost continuously, yet I was never once asked to explain my absences. ●

We couldn't imagine what it would be like mixing with all those bright students, taking part in intellectual discussions, listening to inspired brilliant lecturers and soaking up really important ideas. After being mothers and housewives for years, the whole idea of University was intoxicating. However, we were in for a big disappointment. Lectures were often boring, as were many of the books. When we learned to decipher the jargon and complicated language, the ideas often seemed obvious, and measured by my experience, pretty irrelevant too. ●

This course should be the right of all women, not only for the skills but also for the confidence and self-esteem. It's an awakening. ●

My strongest feeling about school, especially secondary school, was that it had nothing to do with my home life or the outside world. I certainly never linked the work I did in the classroom to earning a living – how could you use algebra when you were a shop assistant or a typist? Even the domestic subjects were a nonsense – I could make a dress at home in a few hours, at school it took weeks. ●

The chap from the CQSW was really blatant about it. He more or less said they don't accept working class women or single parents. They only accept mature women if their husbands can afford to pay for childminders and cleaners so that domestic responsibilities don't 'interfere' with the course. We gave him a hard time about it but it made no difference. He's in charge of selection and none of us were selected. ●

As a lesbian I teach lesbian students, but there are few lesbian voices in the books. Actually it's worse than this. Many of the writers are lesbian, but they are not writing as lesbians. The message then I'm offering students in referring them to the books is not a strengthening one. It's more, if you want to be accepted hide your lesbianism. ●

Before this course I felt like I was in a cocoon, unable to break out. Since starting I have broken out and am just spreading my wings. My colours are starting to show through. I know that by the end of it I will have learnt to fly. ●

QUEEN for a NIGHT

Bourgeois, nationalist, femicidal, expensive – opera is nevertheless enjoyed by many people. Rachel Hasted reviews “Opera, or the Undoing of Women” and wonders why, despite the obvious objections, she is still to be found sucking mint imperials in the balcony.

When the curtain goes up on Wagner’s “Valkyrie” at Covent Garden this autumn, you will find me in the Stalls Circle with a cushion and a thermos flask, anticipating five hours in Valhalla.

The first time I went to the opera was on a school trip to the Coliseum when I was about 12. We saw “La Bohème” and I wept for most of the final act. My friend Lizzie got so carried away over Mimi’s death that she dropped our bag of mint imperials from the balcony, ruining a poignant moment for the stalls audience beneath. We didn’t care; we just wanted to die like that, centre stage, spot-lit, coughing delicately, with four distraught men and a loyal girl friend in tears. The ultimate adolescent fantasy: “When I’m dead you’ll all be sorry”.

My tastes may have changed since then; now I could probably manage without the four men; but I am still going to the opera, and so are quite a few feminists I know. I have never let myself think too much about the pleasure it gives me: analysis can ruin your best fantasies; but I was interested to see

Catherine Clement’s book *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*. I thought it might help me to understand the attraction.

After all, opera is an art form which has been dominated for most of its history by white, male, bourgeois culture in a very obvious way. I have never heard an opera written by a woman, or one written by anyone outside Europe and North America.

When I go to the opera I do what so many people outside the dominant group of white, male cultural producers and consumers must do: I pick out the pieces I can wholeheartedly enjoy and try to pretend that I am screening out the damaging, denying, exclusionary messages that go along with it. I am privileged. As an able-bodied, middle class, white woman there are many ways in which I am not excluded from the opera. One of them is that I can pay the price of a ticket.

Politically tainted

I would have liked this book to say more about the practical ways in which the majority of women are excluded from opera by the

class, economic and access restrictions, and by the racism that for so long tolerated Black participation only in the role of exotic singing star, if that. This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of a notorious occasion when the Daughters of the American Revolution cancelled a concert by the internationally celebrated Beverley Anderson because they would not hear a Black woman sing.

Well, who cares now? Opera is a minority pastime, and too politically tainted to deserve a feminist critique. Surely it can be consigned to the dustbin of history as an absurd and irrelevant survival of 19th century values? I am left wondering why, in that case, I still find in it the most powerful and direct emotional experience I get from any art form.

Increasing numbers of people, it seems, are attracted to the opera. New magazines appear every few months; performances are sold out; promoters can fill Wembley Stadium for *Carmen* or *Aida*. Every other film has opera on the soundtrack; *Diva* was a cult success; and now it’s on the TV ads, for cars (Monteverdi spoof), liqueurs (Offenbach), and toilet cleaner (Wagner). Is this just an appeal to yuppie snobbery? Another Victorian value rising from its grave to join the Thatcherite undead? Perhaps it is time for feminists to take a look at the most expensive and prestigious of the performing arts.

Catherine Clement’s book originally appeared in France in 1979, and has waited almost ten years to be picked up by American and British publishers on the back of the opera revival. I do not think, although I have not seen the original, that Clement has been well served by her translator, Betsy Wing. Her style is, in any case, dense and individual, but the use of words such as “tristful”, “occultation”, and “imaginary” instead of “imagination” throughout, gives one a frustrating sense of wading through Franglais to get at the meaning.

Overwhelmingly male

Clement presents an analysis of about 30 opera plots, from Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* (1787) to Puccini’s *Turandot* (1926). Although she describes herself as a literary critic rather than a musicologist, Clement also provides some illuminating passages on the way in which composers interrelate text and music to heighten emotional effect. The greater part of

the book, however, concentrates on the opera texts or “libretti” themselves.

In her introduction to the book Susan McClary says that “what Clement is attempting here is nothing less than an anthropology of high European culture”. By analysing the content of the opera plots and uncovering the messages they give about gender organisation in European culture, Clement sets out to “examine European middle class constructions of gender and sexuality”. The author aims to be the ethnologist observing her own society.

A similar approach might be taken to the production of scholarly books such as this. What does the text tell us about current “gender organisation” amongst French intellectuals? From the outset, the author makes it clear that she is addressing herself exclusively to a male reader:

My passion is addressed to a man. To him, so that later he will be able to see and hear. To him, so that he will understand, and a bit of my life and his will change. Perhaps it is a man I love. Perhaps it is my son . . . Perhaps it is you. It is you.

Turning to the notes and bibliography at the end I could find only two references to work by women amongst a roll-call of the Great Men of European Culture that almost paralysed me. The only direct reference to feminism comes in the introduction, where Susan McClary talks dismissively of the “drab suppression of sexuality which informs much



Anne Collins as Queen of the Fairies, “Iolanthe”



Cath Jackson

The frame of reference for this book is overwhelmingly male. It engages exclusively in a debate with a male, academic world, and once again women are the casualties. While highlighting the victimisation of women, both as singers, and fictional characters in opera, Clement engages in some unpleasant objectification of her own. The singer Montserrat Caballe is at one point described as "A tremendous pile of meat that sings for us . . .", and a "deformed idol".

Clement argues that male critics have too often ignored the content of opera in an attempt to promote it as a "purely" musical experience and avoid engaging with the political issues it raises as an art practice. As a woman, she is aware that, while she loves the music, she is disturbed by the plots and cannot let their acceptance go unchallenged. She sees that

. . . beyond the romantic ideology, lines are being woven, tying up the characters and leading them to death by transgression - for transgressions of familial roles, political rules, the things at stake in sexual and authoritarian power.

The "transgressions" of women in opera are, Clement believes, all oversteppings of the limits of patriarchal order. Women are constructed as the carriers of forbidden desires, "intermediaries between the order of nature and that of culture", who set up a dramatic

tension which is emotionally and musically only to be resolved by their death.

While many of the interpretations of opera plots which Clement offers are striking and offer new insights, the idea that opera plots are frequently misogynistic and reflect the values of the times which produced them could hardly come as a surprise to the most casual observer. Being so clearly directed to a male reader, the book ignores the, to me, more interesting questions:

Why do women find opera attractive at all?

Do women always interpret products of patriarchal culture in quite the way they are intended to?

Freudian influence

Before pursuing those questions further, I want to say something about the approach which Clement has adopted in the book, her use of psychoanalysis and ethnology as critical tools. For me, this method seemed to create a vacuum around the texts under discussion, which were then considered as dreams of an individual, or myths of a unified society, whose method of production was somehow unknown and unquestionable. The idea that opera, or any art form, provides some sort of "royal road" to the unconscious seems very questionable to me, and unhelpful in developing any sort of feminist analysis. Men are not, after all, doomed to write operas because they miss their mothers.

Although Clement is very critical of Freud, his influence is apparently inescapable. She sets out to reclaim the term "hysteric" as a positive description for women reacting to the real damage they suffer from men. Opera for Clement is an art form in which women are allowed to enact their "hysteria" freely in a non-rational rebellion against patriarchal laws:

Opera comes to me . . . from the womb . . . There and there alone history is expressed in the first person.

This acceptance of women as fundamentally irrational on the grounds of a theory written by one man and operas written by several more, seemed to me both unconvincing and disturbing.

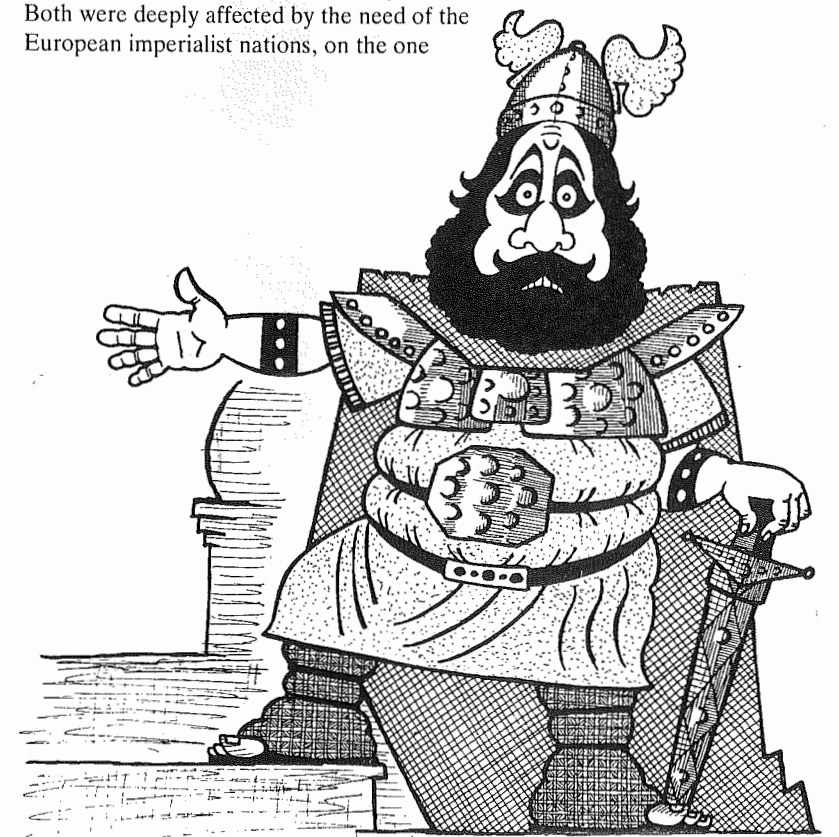
Jung's idea of a collective unconscious is also influential on Clement and allows her to tie in the material she takes from ethnological accounts of Amazon Indian mythology to her

analysis of operas such as *Turandot*, in which a pale, cold princess linked to images of the moon and blood finds true happiness in the arms of a persistent prince.

I really cannot see that the widespread existence of myths linking menstruation to the lunar cycle around the world is a good enough reason to argue that some collective unconscious urge linked the Amerindians to Carlo Gozzi, Schiller and the 20 other dramatists who used the *Turandot* story before Puccini found it in the 1920s.

If we are going to talk about the links between Amazon Indians and opera, we might do better to consider the opera house at Manaus, 1,000 miles up the Amazon, built with the profits of the European rubber boom of the late 19th century, for the benefit of European settlers, "whose Indian victims, alas, had no chance to appreciate *Il Trovatore*".

Clement fails to locate the more obvious link between the development of ethnology as a study in the 19th century and the opera. Both were deeply affected by the need of the European imperialist nations, on the one



hand to create a unified national identity capable of binding together the classes at home while inspiring a spirit of superiority which would foster colonial conquests abroad; and on the other, their desire to use colonised cultures as exotic "raw material" to enrich European traditions.



Leontyne Price as Aida

The search for a national spirit in the art of the often newly defined nation states of Europe was often led by the linguists, folklorists and folk music enthusiasts who pioneered ethnographic work. Glinka's opera *Ivan Susanin* or *A Life for the Tsar* is an early example of this kind of nationalistic, folkloric opera, while Puccini's study of oriental music represents the exoticising trend in *Madama Butterfly* and *Turandot*.

The failure of psychoanalytic and ethnographic methods of analysis to take account of historical context, and the political vacuum this creates in such work, are amply illustrated by this book. Clement raises the issues of imperialism, racism and class in specific works, but as she does not differentiate between the context in which Mozart wrote *Flight from the Seraglio* in the late 18th century, and that in which Wagner's *Ring* was produced one hundred years later, she cannot say anything very convincing about the way in which opera as a form deals with these matters, or what they meant to the society which produced them.

Nationalism, racism, imperialism

Opera has, from its beginnings in the 17th century, been associated very strongly with two opposing trends. It was, and remains to a large extent, part of the culture of a particular class, at first aristocratic, later bourgeois. The opera house by the 19th century was a social map in which the seating arrangements delineated prestige quite precisely. For this reason it often features as a setting in European novels, indicating the social standing of characters. This class culture was, to a large extent, international.

At the same time opera became linked to European nationalist movements, and later imperialism. Italian opera was attacked as a foreign invasion of British culture by John Gay's *Beggars' Opera* (1728), Mozart's use of German texts rather than Italian in some operas was a nationalist gesture, and Italian opera itself had by the mid-19th century become a coded language of revolt against Austrian domination. Wagner's glorification of the roots of German identity was an inspiration to Hitler's dreams of racist supremacy.

Opera houses in the late 19th century have been called "the characteristic cathedrals of bourgeois culture" and, more obviously than any other art form, opera came to enshrine the imperialist ideals of that time; not only in the subject matter, with its exotic locations or appeals to racist stereotypes, but by its imposition as a cultural form worldwide.

Verdi's *Aida*, commissioned to celebrate the opening of the Suez Canal in a new opera house at Cairo, must be the classic example of cultural imperialism. A vast European engineering project celebrated by an Italian work which borrows only the exotic forms of ancient Egyptian culture, itself annexed since Napoleon's time to European rather than African history. Trade might follow the flag, but a touring opera company was never far behind.

No attempt to understand the meanings of opera can afford to ignore a history like this, and Clement's reliance on ethnology, with its tendency to universalise human experience and overlook the political relations between observer and observed, and psychoanalysis, against which much the same criticisms can be levelled, leaves this largely untouched.

Where Clement does engage with political issues, her attempt to align women as a

group with the colonised and oppressed begs the question. Women are not a single group. They are represented at the opera by singers and those in the audience, usually members of a privileged group in a 'developed' nation. Their relationship to characters who represent oppressed groups – Carmen, Aida, Butterfly – is problematic. Here are Gypsies, Africans, Japanese, played in all probability by white women, suffering and dying under a white, male, gaze.

Suffering is suffering

Clement sees the suffering of the opera heroine as victorious:

They suffer but nothing can affect the resistant centre. The opera will not succeed in getting to the end of it. And in these indefinitely repeated murders, it is killing dead women who have already come back to life.

Unfortunately, every day we can see that when men kill women, women do not come back to life. Suffering is suffering, it may be beautifully expressed, but that is not in itself a victory for women.

Clement's generalisations about women as portrayed in opera start as an attempt to analyse the views of male composers, librettists and audiences; to uncover messages about the role of women within music and text. This seems a legitimate project, although I found myself asking why opera was singled out for this purpose, without a side-glance at the plays, novels and paintings which provided the plots and settings for many of them. It is not only in opera that women are seen as "ambivalent intermediaries between the order of nature and that of culture", or that "to love is to wish to die". These are commonplaces of romantic art.

However, at times Clement moves away from an analysis of the plots to using them as evidence of the way things are in European society. At the end of the book she addresses her male reader:

You saw the traps where women are caught, you heard the marvellous music with which the West is still able to cover up its most intimate murders . . .

It is as if Clement feels the operas lay bare the experience of real women directly. This seems to me about as reasonable as attempting to measure the position of women in America today from the film *Batman*. Nowhere does Clement allow for the possibility that the creators and consumers of opera always knew

there was a difference between art and life.

Yet this is obviously so; indeed the gap between the Romantic Heroine and the experience of real women was a well-worked theme in literature from Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* to Flaubert's *Mme Bovary*. Limiting herself entirely to the texts, and to male scholarship, Clement gives no examples of women's reactions to opera heroines other than her own – something which would be crucial to any feminist understanding of the works.

The meanings and resonances that a woman may find in a work will inevitably reflect a very different reality, experience and emotional world to those of a man. For me an opera singer is a powerful woman artist; above all, a woman who has found a voice and uses it to express profound emotion, centre stage, without the slightest inhibition.



Birgit Nilsson as Turandot

In a world where women are too often silenced, a soprano voice hitting the back wall of a huge, silent auditorium in a wave of pure sound, conveying rage, joy, pain, grief or desire, can send shivers down my spine.

Rebel heroines

My search for information about women's reactions to opera in the past proved unsuccessful, but in Charlotte Brontë's novel *Villette* (1853), there is a description of a great classic actress which, for me, suggests that some women have always found alternative

meanings in the doomed heroines of male drama:

Before calamity she is a tigress; she rends her woes, shivers them in convulsed abhorrence. Pain, for her, has no result in good; tears water no harvest of wisdom; sickness, or death itself, she looks on with the eye of a rebel. Wicked, perhaps, she is, but also she is strong. . .

The strong magnetism of genius drew my heart out of its wonted orbit; the sunflower turned from the south to a fierce light, not solar – a rushing, red cometary light – hot on vision and to sensation. I had seen acting before, but never anything like this . . . which . . . disclosed power like a deep, swollen winter river, thundering in cataract, and bearing the soul like a leaf, on the steep and steely sweep of its descent.

Whatever the limitations of women's roles in the romantic dramas of 19th century opera, and Clement clearly exposes the cult of the victim and the doomed rebel; they provided alternative images to the idea of the bourgeois "angel in the home". The composer Bizet wrote in 1866:

As a musician, I declare that if you suppress adultery, fanaticism, crime, fallacy, the supernatural, there is no longer any means of writing a note.

Clement highlights the long line of rebel heroines in opera who resist patriarchal power to create a conflict that can only be resolved, dramatically and musically, by their death. Created by men, "these furies, these goddesses, these women with fearsome arms and inspired eyes" nonetheless open up for a brief space perceptions of women not usually promoted by the public cultures of Europe in the 19th century.

It may also be a mistake to assume that women in the audience always identify with the heroine. One of the roles of music which Clement points out is to allow the audience complete identification with the characters. We get to experience all the emotions. Clement suggests that the Prima Donna is in some ways a Drag Queen, allowing men vicarious expression of suppressed homosexual desires, but she does not speculate on lesbian readings.

Audience research among friends reveals that the crossdressing roles in *Fidelio*, *Rigoletto*, and *Der Rosencavalier*, favourite love duets, leather-clad Valkyries, *Norma* and Adalgisa, and lovely sopranos, were all cherished by lesbians in the audience.

Clement declares that opera is a dead art-

form. She passes over the productions of the 20th century after Puccini. No mention of Janacek, Kurt Weill, Shostakovich, Britten, Tippett, Glass, *Porgy and Bess*. In a way she is right. Opera has lost its certainties; become apologetic and a little self-conscious for a while, borrowed heavily from other cultural traditions again – reflecting, perhaps, the fortunes of the bourgeoisie who have patronised it for so long.

Powerful cultural forms do not, however, simply disappear, and Clement makes no reference to the impact of cinema on the fortunes of opera in the 20th century. Film out-did the stage in presenting exotic spectacles with a cast of thousands from the days of D W Griffiths on. Hollywood imported and co-opted the techniques and the subject-matter of the opera and, perhaps even better than the opera, provided audiences that opportunity for unquestioning identification with the characters in close-up on the screen.

Many people now went to do their crying at the movies, but the film-makers worked over the same material, the stock plots and conventions of the opera librettist: the wicked woman, the female sacrifice, True Love. Both media shared an economic structure which required enormous financial risk-taking by backers, a huge production staff with varied technical skills, and stars to attract the public. In both media the only role available to women was that of star.

Opera and mainstream cinema in America and Europe share this completely male power structure. Men fund the performance, write, design, conduct or direct it, make up the majority of those performing, and then render themselves invisible by pushing to the front of the stage a single woman – the star, the Diva – who gets to be Queen for a Night.

The foregrounding of women as problematic but essential in a male world is well analysed by this book. I would however have liked to see more about the total absence of women as composers. The cultural dominance of men really came home to me when I realised that I could not imagine what an opera written by a woman might be like. □

Opera, or the Undoing of Women, Catherine Clement, Virago, 1989.

Notes:
1. *The Age of Empire 1875-1914*, E.J. Hobsbawm, Sphere Books, 1989.

in search of common ground

Heated debates about zionism, anti-semitism and racism raged in the feminist press and in public meetings in the early '80s. One group of Black and Jewish feminists met regularly for over two years to discuss these issues and find some common ground. This article records its history.

Our group first met in autumn 1983. In a roundabout way, it was a spin-off from the summer of 1982, when the state of Israel invaded the Lebanon. This generated an unprecedented level of political support in Britain for the Palestinian people and their plight. The issue was also taken up within the Women's Liberation Movement. Many women, both Jewish and non-Jewish, including ourselves, were united in condemning the aggression. At the same time, issues were raised that had not been talked about in the WLM, except by those directly affected by them. These included the prevalence and history of anti-semitism, anti-zionism and between anti-semitism, anti-Zionism and zionism. There were heated debates in the

feminist press – *Spare Rib*, *Outwrite* and the London Women's Liberation Newsletter, which became increasingly bitter and destructive. One disastrous meeting was held at A Woman's Place in July 1983, when tensions were already too great for any meaningful dialogue to take place. The meeting was intended to be a forum for discussion and debate: instead there were bitter arguments and no one appeared to want to listen to each other. In particular there was polarisation between Black and Jewish women.

Some of us attending this meeting came out of it feeling angry and unhappy, but we were not going to give up. Some of us knew each other politically and personally, had a long history of struggle, and could still

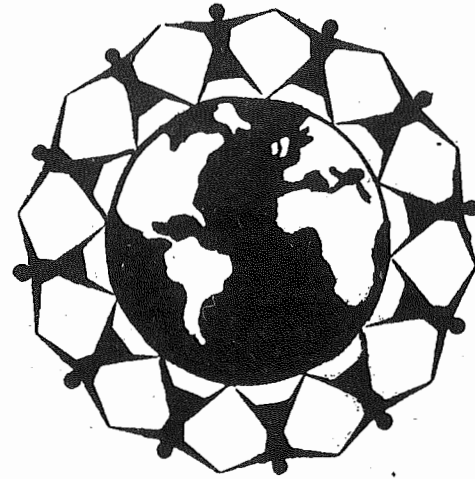
maintain trust and respect for each other. Despite our disagreements we still felt ourselves to be natural allies. A society which subjects us to its racism, albeit in a variety of forms, had given us, ironically, enough strength to consider that we had common ground.

At the beginning we were five white Jewish and four Black gentile women, lesbian and heterosexual, working and middle class, all defining ourselves as feminists. Over a period of time, two Jewish women and one Black woman left the group, one for personal reasons, another for ill-health and the third because the group continued for longer than her original time commitment. The Black women had come from a variety of backgrounds, some born and brought up in 'Third World' countries. Some grew up with a Black identity, others took on the term as a political definition. Whilst differing from each other culturally, all shared the common experience of being on the receiving end of racism and imperialism. All the Jewish women in the group were Ashkenazi (originating from Eastern Europe) and from a variety of backgrounds, from Orthodox Jewish to Communist. All shared the experience of racism in the form of anti-semitism.

We met to discuss some of the issues and contradictions that had provoked such fierce debate. We were clear that this was a mammoth undertaking. Yet a dialogue did take place. As principled feminists, we allowed each other space to talk and listened. We exchanged and shared both our personal and political experiences. We tried to be open with each other and many meetings left us emotionally charged. Yet we managed to create a relatively safe and supportive environment where we explored such difficult and complex issues as racism, anti-semitism, anti-zionism, zionism and their impact on our lives, both as individual women and as a part of a people.

At the beginning, we talked about our personal backgrounds – encompassing what that meant in many different dimensions. We found that there were connections between different individual women, also that many experiences were shared. We talked about the debate that had been raging and the issues that it raised. There were extensive discussions about the use and meaning of certain

words, terms that had been used and misused in the debate. We recorded our discussions, transcribed the recordings and intended to produce a pamphlet. The pamphlet never materialised: everyone had their own pressures that prevented them from being able to finish the project. This article includes extracts from the working draft of that pamphlet put together by some of the members of the group, therefore by no means reflects all the issues that were discussed and may appear not to represent as broad a perspective as we would like.



Israel, zionism, anti-zionism and anti-semitism

It was important to discuss openly what we felt about Israel and what was happening to the Palestinian people. We were all critical of the Israeli government's policies, had condemned the invasion of Lebanon, and expressed support for the Palestinian people in various ways. We were critical of the way in which all groups of people in Israel had been lumped together as well as all Jews, in the debate in the WLM. For example, there had been little acknowledgment of opposition within Israel and abroad. We believed that the notion that all people of any race are the 'same' is a myth. Many people on the receiving end of racism are faced with this misconception.

Some of the Jewish women in the group felt that attacks on the Israeli government had been anti-semitic because they involved attacks on all Jews, and utilised traditional anti-semitic clichés. For example, the

Leveller, a left wing magazine, published a cartoon showing a map of the world with every country marked 'Israel'. Underneath there was a caption saying 'At last, Menachim, safe borders'. This attack on Israeli expansionist policies drew on the anti-semitic stereotype of the 'Jewish world conspiracy' – the same cartoon had appeared in a National Front publication.

When words like 'Nazi' were used to describe the Israeli leaders, a lot of Jewish people were alienated. No one in the group resented valid criticism of Israeli leaders, but this resort to the use of empty slogans was felt to undermine potential support of the Palestinian people. Similarly, using the term 'Final Solution' to describe the situation of the Palestinian people had the same effect. Then, in the Women's Movement, some Jewish women would react defensively, and accuse their opponents of anti-semitism, be unable to listen to criticism and be pushed further away from sympathising with the Palestinian cause.

Moving beyond this sort of emotive argument, it was possible to discuss the connections between the governments of Israel and the USA, Israel and Iran, the role of Israel as a vehicle for imperialism and increasing militarisation in the area, connections that were not to be denied. Such discussions made visible very different perspectives on the Middle East/West Asia dependent largely on which part of the world you were from.

Women coming from 'Third World' countries, with anti-imperialist politics, had developed an anti-zionism which was not informed by European anti-semitism. As one Black woman in the group said,

For me, I wanted to make clear that anti-zionism and anti-semitism were separate issues.

Both Black and Jewish women from the West became aware through these discussions of the Euro-centrism of their perspective on zionism and anti-zionism.

We all felt that feminist analysis and political discussion of these issues had been lacking in the 'British' WLM. Instead some anti-zionist analysis from anti-imperialist women had contained thinly disguised anti-semitism, the kind that can be found in the left in general. Accusations of anti-semitism were denied. As well as this, some white gentile 'radical feminists' supported either 'pro-Palestinian' or 'pro-Jewish' arguments on the basis

of individual women's experiences without taking on board the politics of imperialism. This resulted in an ongoing slanging match rather than a debate. In this polarisation, alliances were made on dubious grounds. Women were pushed defensively into camps which neither reflected the diversity of opinion nor allowed for productive debate.

Zionism

The original notion of Zion dating back to the Old Testament was of a spiritual homeland where the Jews would congregate after the coming of the Messiah free of persecution. The political movement to establish a Jewish state was a historical response to the plight of the Jews in nineteenth century Europe where they were being killed, forced into ghettos, driven off the land, conscripted into the oppressors' armies, forced to convert to Christianity and restricted from different areas of work.

There were different responses to persecution. Many Jews joined radical movements, communist, socialist, anarchist, that were anti-zionist because of their internationalist perspectives. Within the zionist movement, there was a wide range of political beliefs, many were marxists, others were nationalists, aiming to guarantee the survival of the Jews at any cost. Religious Jews opposed the movement, believing that the Messiah had not yet arrived, and that Zion was a spiritual not political homeland. Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, zionism had acquired different meanings. For example, the oppression of Palestinian people at the hands of successive Israeli governments illustrates a change in the implications of zionism. For the Palestinians, zionism is an ideology of oppression. However for many Jews living in the diaspora, zionism retains the notion of a safe homeland.

The use and misuse of the terms zionism, anti-zionism and anti-semitism featured predominantly in the debate and was discussed extensively in the group. There appeared to have been a lot of confusion about the meaning of zionism. The experience of many Jewish women was that the wide range of ideas and trends within the zionist movement had been ignored. 'Zionist' became a term of insult rather than a description of a political stance, used as a blanket term instead of

really looking at what was imperialist or fascist. Jewish women in the group felt that this made it difficult for other Jewish women to enter into the debate, because of their own views on what Zionism signified in Jewish experience. In one woman's words:

I can understand when you use Zionism in a negative context, but it's one thing to say that something is bad, and another to use Zionism as a collective term for all things that are bad. In this context, I think that it is anti-semitic because Jews have often been blamed for all the world's problems.

Both Zionists and anti-Zionists had been accused of being anti-semitic. Anti-Zionist women had argued that the Zionist position was anti-semitic because historically anti-semites had supported the demand for a separate Jewish state to segregate the Jews and get them out of Europe.

Women who are anti-imperialist (particularly those coming from Third World countries), take up an anti-Zionist position. It was acknowledged in the group that this has a significant impact. These women see imperialism more clearly, being on the receiving end, and therefore clearly perceive the connections between, for example, the Israeli military regime and the Shah of Iran. However, they may not be as sensitive to the ways in which anti-Zionist statements feed into dormant anti-semitism in Europe. As one Black woman said:

If I take up a pro-Palestinian position, I am accused of being anti-semitic. I don't have any room to say what I feel Zionism is doing now.

While a Jewish woman said:

I still won't stand up and say I'm anti-Zionist in some situations, because it will be read as Jew-hating.

Nationalism and imperialism

In our discussions we recognised the connections between patriarchy, imperialism and nationalism. Nationalism means a lot of different things, from possessing a British passport to national liberation struggles. We therefore felt that one word was not enough to represent centuries of history and political struggles. We tried to look at different definitions and what nationalism meant to us. There were differences between women in the group because for some of us nationalism was a positive force, whereas for others it was

clearly negative. We also looked at the implications of our beliefs around nationalism: for example, we face a dilemma when we support a national liberation struggle on the basis of its anti-imperialist nature but also have misgivings about the national chauvinism.

Imperialism uses nationalist concepts in order to establish its superiority. We were all very aware of British chauvinism in this respect: this is expressed as patriotism here in Britain, and worldwide, in the form of colonialism. We were all united in our anti-imperialist views. Some of us had been on the receiving end of imperialism.

The conflict in the Middle East/West Asia is perceived and reported in the media as a conflict between national identities. But it is a lot more than that: it is a struggle for survival, for access to resources and land. Above and beyond this, there are the intricacies of worldwide power politics which intensify the struggle. If we can look at this, and other struggles more clearly, in terms of these power relations, rather than in terms of group identities, perhaps we can avoid racism and anti-semitism. However, when these issues are reported and discussed here, they are represented as a conflict which involves Jewish and Palestinian people, and this inevitably invites racism and anti-semitism.



Racism and anti-semitism (and the feminist press)

Early on in our meetings we acknowledged that while as a group of Black gentile and white Jewish feminists, there were large

differences between us, it was our common oppression as minorities in a white Eurocentric Christian society which brought us together in the first place. As such, we had been disturbed at the way in which many white gentile women with little or no personal stake in the Zionist/anti-Zionist debate, had wittingly or unwittingly scored points at our expense, taking sides or adopting a benevolently neutral stance, without getting to grips with the real issues and feelings involved. The current conflict was the product of western governments pitting Jews against Arabs over decades, and it was felt that there was an analogy with what was happening in the WLM. It was for that reason that white gentile women had been consciously excluded from the group.

Women acted provocatively, taking sides, opposing each other, they did not help at all, and therefore we have to stick together in order to challenge their racism and sort things out by ourselves.

As time went on and trust developed, it became possible to admit that there were some differences that we had to confront between us as Black and white women, gentile and Jewish. We acknowledged that there was no reason why we should trust each other to discuss anti-Black racism/anti-semitism in this group. There are differences between the histories of racism against Black and Jewish people, and their experiences in contemporary Britain.

We discussed the survival techniques of 'passing'. Some of the Black and Jewish women in the group had attempted to 'pass', at the price of experiencing inner contradictions, denial and racism/anti-semitism. 'Passing' also happens to us when other people make assumptions that we are part of the white gentile mainstream culture and do not recognise us as Black or Jewish. Both sorts of experience are equally oppressive.

We tried to look at the differences between us as individuals not just as community members. We all shared the common experience of being seen as 'exotic' or 'foreign', of being objectified as a normal part of our lives. However the significance of this varied. For example, a Jewish woman had been beaten up in a playground as a child for being a Jew. An Iranian woman had been given a lot of approval in Poland for being 'dark'; in Britain she was seen as 'Black', in

Iran not. We agreed that race is defined by the dominant group with power and this dictates how we are treated. In this context it is important for us, as minority communities, to develop positive identities to deal with the racism that we experience. It is also important that we do not allow ourselves to be put into hierarchies, competing for scarce resources and status as oppressed. In positions of relative privilege, we need to be aware of the ways in which we can be paralysed by our 'guilt'.

The feminist press

In the discussions some of the hidden background to the debate became apparent.

Before *Outwrite* started production, and Black women joined the *Spare Rib* collective, there was no Black voice in the white feminist press. The whole issue of anti-semitism erupted at the same time that Black women joined the *Spare Rib* collective, when they wanted to have more space to air Black issues and struggles. So it got competitive.

In the group, Black women explained that they saw the space being given to the issues of anti-semitism/Zionism as taking away space to talk about anti-Black racism. There was anger at the long refusal of the WLM to deal with racism. Unfortunately some of this resentment led to the argument being conducted in inappropriate terms. For example, Jewish women were accused of being 'pushy', taking too much space when they demanded that some of the forty letters written in response to an article in *Spare Rib* on Zionism and the Palestinian people should be printed. The Jewish women resented the term because it fed into the anti-semitic stereotype of a 'pushy Jew'.

Spare Rib subsequently published an article called 'Sisterhood is Plain Sailing' in which each collective member responded to the non-publication of the letters and the ensuing debate. A confusing factor was that the Black women who wrote in 'Plain Sailing', had not been in the collective when the original articles on Zionism had been published and the letters in response had been received. Their contributions were seen as provocative statements: while some of the contributions of the white gentile women appeared less provocative. Some of us felt that the Black women, new to *Spare Rib*, had been pushed to the forefront of the debate,

while the white members of the collective did not appear to take responsibility for editorial decisions they had made.

Another hidden issue was that the members of the *Outwrite* collective had received physical threats because of their pro-Palestinian line. Speculation about where these threats were coming from added more fuel to the fire. The Jewish women felt sure that the physical threats were not coming from Jewish feminist groups. We wondered who actually was behind all this and speculated that some external groups or individuals had been provoking the conflict.

What we stated clearly to each other was that Jewish people can be racist, and Black people can be anti-semitic, that all kinds of racism are linked and seek to divide the oppressed. We agreed that we must never again let our own fears and defensiveness allow racism and anti-semitism to go unchallenged.



In retrospect

In retrospect, we feel that we learned a lot from participating in the group. We are proud that we managed to create a forum for discussion at a very difficult time. However, throughout we were aware of some of the limitations we were facing.

A major limitation was that there were no Palestinian or Israeli women in the group. We recognise that this affected the scope of the experiences and analysis of the issues that we had met to talk about.

Time was also a serious limitation. We met as often as we could for as long as we

could. Both in order to let trust build up, and to go deeper towards the understanding that we were reaching for within ourselves and of the issues surrounding the debate. However, we were all also involved in other activities. Our more fruitful discussions were perhaps towards the end of the two years.

We recognise that trust does not come automatically to any group of people who come together; especially to talk about issues that are close to their hearts. Defensiveness was inevitable at first but as we felt safer it became easier to discuss anti-semitism and anti-Black racism together.

The group allowed us to become more aware of our own and other women's misconceptions. All of us were vulnerable at various times and we all recognised that we would disagree on some things. Sometimes we had to unlearn the ways that we had been taught to debate, learn new words to describe our feelings and thoughts.

One of the things that we understood at the end of the day was that there was no hierarchy of oppression in the group – all of us had experienced oppression in different ways. The group gave us all a chance to understand some of this. The fact that we were committed to understanding rather than sloganising or scandalising was positive and refreshing. In the group we were not only concerned with looking at anti-semitism/anti-Black racism in the debate, but also in general and there were parallels between our experiences. This sort of understanding is possible where women from different identity groups can meet.

This piece has focused on the group's discussion of some issues, it would require a further article to expand on these themes. It is very difficult to put across in a short article like this, the nature of the changes that took place in all of us, the depth of our conversations and understanding. The fact that we met consistently and with respect for each other and the issues we were dealing with has added to all of our lives in different ways. This article is an attempt to share this with you who are reading it. We still hope that further discussions around these issues are possible.

This article was put together by four women from the group: Adi Cooper, Kris Black, Leili Arkani, Soreh Levy – in consultation with the other members of the group.

In December 1988, in Jerusalem, 400 Jewish, Israeli and Palestinian women came together under the banner "Occupation or Peace: A Feminist Response". Marsha Freedman reports on the conference.

Israeli feminists have devoted their energies and resources almost entirely to ending the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza since the start of the *intifadah*, the Palestinian uprising. This conference was the first national coming together of Israeli feminist peace workers and Palestinian women active in the *intifadah*.

"Occupation or Peace" marked the fruits of a year of bridge building between Jewish and Palestinian women and the occupied territories. Of the 400 women present, most were Jewish (Israelis and American Jews present in Jerusalem for an International Jewish Feminist Conference), with several dozen representatives of West Bank women's organisations as well as the Israeli feminist peace movement. All the women wore black, in preparation for the large Women in Black vigil in downtown Jerusalem that followed.

Four Palestinian women and five Jews were on the panel, chaired by Nabila Espanioli, a psychologist from Nazareth. The Palestinian women from the occupied territories spoke with the single, aggrieved voice of the oppressed. Theirs was the luxury of an uncomplicated response. By contrast, the Jewish women offered complex and sometimes contradictory reasons for their opposition to the war.

Hannah Saffran, an organiser for Women in Black and director of the Haifa women's centre Isha l'Isha (Woman to Woman), said that her opposition to the occupation was based on secular-humanist values. Leah Shakiel, an orthodox religious feminist, described her political conversion from a follower of the messianic nationalist settler movement, and explained her opposition to the occupation as the expression of traditional Jewish values which, she claimed, stand in contradiction to what she called an "elitist" tendency in Zionism to deny the existence of Arabs.

Carmel Shalev, an attorney and author of a study of human rights violations in the occupied territories, spoke of women's need in Israel to have their voices heard politically.

Dr. Lilian Moed, a recent American immigrant, and I, a recently departed American immigrant, spoke from a feminist perspective. Moed drew the parallels between women's liberation and national liberation. "The same ruling power that controls the Palestinians also controls us," she said. I spoke about the dangerous confluence of militarism, religious fundamentalism and messianic nationalism, the breeding ground for virulently anti-feminist and anti-woman fascism, that I believe is developing in Israel as a direct consequence of the occupation.

Three of the Palestinian women who spoke were from the occupied territories, two from within the occupier's territory, citizens of Israel. The women from the West Bank are active in the uprising. One, a young high-school girl, was arrested and held in administrative detention for several months but never charged with a crime. She had, she said, been singing the Palestinian national anthem with a group of friends, eight of them all together, when they were surrounded by twenty Israeli soldiers who ordered them to stop singing.



Reprinted from 'Women in Action', 2/89

When they refused, they were beaten and one arrested. The young woman telling this story also claimed that during her interrogations she was made to stand on one foot for hours and that she was sexually harassed. Depositions taken by the Women's Organization for Political Prisoners from Palestinian women held in Israeli prisons all mention sexual harassment, including the threat of rape.

Amal Aruri, a West Bank Palestinian, is an activist in a women's group fighting deportation. Since those arrested are never brought before a judge, their families often never have official confirmation that they are under arrest or knowledge of their whereabouts.

A third West Bank Palestinian woman was also a leader of the Palestinian women's movement and she came with a prepared statement.

We Palestinian women turn to you, women of Israel, and hold our hand in peace. We do this in the clearest possible way. There is much distrust in Israel of the recent declarations of the Palestinian National Council. We wish to say, through you to all Israelis, that there is nothing to fear. Stop the occupation. Give your support to peace.

The Palestinian National Council, she said, acknowledges that the conflict must be settled by negotiation and territorial compromise, and in doing so it has renounced its earlier claim to all of Palestine. She pointed out that UN resolutions 224 and 338 accepted by the PNC for the first time, explicitly recognise Israel's right to exist within secure borders. This is the position urged by the West Bank Palestinians, she said. In renouncing terrorism, the PNC has given political legitimacy to the resistance struggle of the people of the West Bank and Gaza. "We offer our hand in peace. Peace, peace is the daily prayer in every Palestinian home."

The Israeli Palestinians were a third perspective on the occupation. Samira Hourri, a long-time political activist from Nazareth, represented the public Israeli Arab stance – opposition to the occupation because it prolonged the state of war between the Jews and Arabs and because it claimed resources needed to deal with pressing internal social and economic problems. Like Hourri, most of the Israeli Palestinians at the conference were members of the Democratic Women's Movement associated with Israel's Communist Party, for a long time the only political party

in which power is shared equally between Jews and Arabs.

The conference ended with the following declaration:

We, Jewish and Arab Israeli women, Palestinian women from the occupied territories and American Jewish women, declare that as feminists we support the struggle of the Palestinian people for self determination and we understand the concern of Jewish people for security. As women and as feminists, we demand that the government of Israel declare its readiness to negotiate with the internationally recognised representatives of the Palestinian people – the Palestinian Liberation Organization – in order to reach a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of the peaceful coexistence of two independent states, Israel and Palestine.

The post-conference ended with a demonstration, 500 strong, of Women in Black. For the past year, Israeli Women in Black have been holding a weekly vigil in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa. They stand, silently, dressed in black, their signs white on black, calling for an end to the occupation. Though they are silent, hostile passersby, drivers showing support or denunciation and counter-demonstrations (mostly followers of Rabbi Meir Kahane) are not. Their numbers continue to grow, and the media continue to cover the demonstrations.

The women, Israeli and Palestinian, who organised the post-conference demonstration need the support of their Jewish and Palestinian allies in their respective dispersions. Here are some of the things that Israeli women would like to happen:

- Women in Black demonstrations in cities throughout the United States and Europe, at the doors of Israeli consulates, before major Jewish organisations, and outside government buildings. They want us to pressure the Israeli government, our own governments, and the Jewish people of the diaspora to accept the need for direct negotiations and a permanent peace settlement that respects the needs of both sides.
- Fundraising to support the expansion of women's peace activism in Israel.
- Expanded dialogue and co-operation between Jewish and Palestinian women.

Feminist peace workers in Israel stand doubly isolated and doubly embattled. They deserve, indeed require, our active support. □

ARTFUL ABUSE

Yet another male 'genius' is exposed as an abuser of women and children in his household. Jane Rondot reveals the tactics which the art and literary establishment use to excuse and conceal sexual abuse in the interests of art.

Eric Gill was an acclaimed calligrapher, engraver and sculptor who advocated radical social change through the integration of work-place and home; craft and industry; art, sex and Christianity. In pursuit of these ideas he presided over three rural, rigorously Roman Catholic craft-communities from 1913 until his death in 1940. A recent biography, *Eric Gill* by Fiona MacCarthy, reveals previously unpublished details of his life including that he sexually abused two of his daughters. This article was prompted by the biography and its review by John Carey which appeared in the *Sunday Times* in January this year.

Fiona MacCarthy is recognised by her publishers (Faber) as "an authority on British twentieth century visual art" about which she has written several books and regularly reviews for *The Times*. Critic John Carey is Professor of English at Oxford University. With these credentials both writers are likely to carry some weight with their readership; what they say, and how they say it, is

influential. It is therefore disturbing that in their writings about Gill, MacCarthy and Carey persistently side-step the reality of father-daughter abuse. My intention is to show how the biography and the review each work on two levels to protect the artist-abuser and his art at women's and children's expense. On one level the abuse is exposed and excused while, on a second level, the choice of language implicitly hides it again to offer a value laden, sanitised Gill package which appeals to bourgeois liberalism and ignores the implications of abuse for the abused.

The summary on the book jacket begins this process; Gill is presented as "a devoted family man" (conceal abuse and appeal to ideal of benevolent father) who believed in "complete sexual freedom . . . incest with his sisters and daughters was part of this pattern" (reveal incest but re-conceal it in a "pattern" of "sexual freedom", a suitably liberal term which evokes the concept that artists have an admirable ability to shun the sexual restraints

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of their era). It is apparent from the biography that Gill's "devotion" to his family amounted to domestic tyranny and that, in his personal life, he believed in "complete sexual freedom" only for himself. Abused daughters do not have freedom of sexual choice and Gill's possessiveness continued into their adulthood when he virulently opposed their relationships unless they were with men who accepted his dictates. Gill's concept of the fusion of Christianity and sex revolved around his idea that God created women as passive but eager recipients of sperm and he therefore condemned contraception and same sex relationships as blasphemous perversions.

This does not indicate a belief in "complete sexual freedom", or any sexual freedom for women and homosexual men, but a belief in complete male sexual domination. This misleading phrase is the first of many in the biography which seek to adapt sexual abuse to fit liberal notions of sexual freedom with apparent unawareness that abuse is the obverse of freedom for the abused.

MacCarthy's account of Gill's life is supported by extracts from his diaries which, despite numerous deletions, relate his on-going sexual engagements with his wife, two of his three teenaged daughters (Betty and Petra), maids, secretary, two of his sisters and various live-in and live-out lovers. Apart from catering to his sexual appetite, many of these women, including his daughters, served as models for Gill's stylised depictions of the female body as a passive object of male desire. They also undertook the domestic drudgery involved in running a pseudo-medieval commune while Gill expounded his "theories" to his male disciples. One theory was that women are not worth educating since they are intellectually inferior. A second: sexual intercourse is the ultimate in Christian worship — very convenient for Gill who was a lay brother of the order of St Dominic, although he did not attempt to Christianise the types of abuse he inflicted on his daughters. These theories meant that Gill's children did not go to school but were taught a mix of Roman Catholic dogma and their father's adjustments to it at home, a combination which suggests that the feelings of isolation, confusion, guilt and shame experienced by survivors of father-daughter abuse were intensified for Betty and Petra.

Liberalism for art's sake

Obviously, such an upbringing had crippling implications for the girls yet MacCarthy refuses to explore these. It is not difficult to see why. The selling point of her book is the exposure of Gill's sex life; this sets it apart from previous Gill biographies and ensures maximum publicity. But, having exposed the abuse, MacCarthy has to deal with it in a way which is palatable to her readers. Given the longstanding (if superficial) public abhorrence of incest, coupled with increasing knowledge of its consequences, she cannot unconditionally condone Gill's behaviour. However, because she is determined to praise his work she can hardly condemn the abuse by probing its implications for the abused and condemn the abuser's art which clearly reflects his attitude towards women/girls. MacCarthy solves this dilemma with a series of appeals to bourgeois liberal values which serve to encourage readers, who deplore abuse in other circumstances, to feel comfortable about this particular instance. As the following examples illustrate, this is effected by:

1. Priming the reader to accept the abuse.
2. Excusing the abuser by portraying him as a victim.
3. Implicitly re-concealing the abuse and its relation to the art.
4. Claiming that the victims were unharmed; that is, not victims.

1. Priming the liberal reader

In her introduction MacCarthy declares that there is "nothing so absolutely shocking" about Gill's records of his long "incestuous relationships" since "we are becoming conscious that incest was (and is) a great deal more common than was generally imagined". The fact that "we" are also becoming conscious of its acute and chronic injuries to survivors is unremarked. The inference is that because incest is common it is also acceptable and that to censure Gill smacks of Whitehouseish reaction, the antithesis of arty liberalism. Shock, in the sense of anxiety about the abused, has nothing to do with 'how absolutely shocking' prudery but, by using these words, MacCarthy indirectly urges her readers (liberal minded art buffs who have no

wish to identify with prudes) to quash their concern for the girls and accept the abuse because the abuser was a famous artist.

2. Making the abuser into a 'victim'

Having gently primed the reader, MacCarthy directs sympathy towards Gill with a less subtle dichotomy of prudery and liberalism. Gill is portrayed as a victim of 19th century repression, his "tragedy" being that he was "trapped" between two generations. Hence, his "radical view of the sexual relationship" (liberalism/indulgence) was "hampered" by Victorian inhibitions (prudery/denial) and he was therefore "unable to make the imaginative leap of say D H Lawrence". MacCarthy sets a flawed version of Victorianism, which was precisely the male hypocrisy of covert indulgence and overt denial practised by Gill, against an equally flawed idea of radical sexual freedom which, tragically, Gill was unable to fully enjoy. Early 20th century male versions of unfettered sexuality were as oppressive for women, and beneficial for men, as Victorian dictates, but MacCarthy taps liberal assumptions of Bohemian sexual freedom (epitomised by Lawrence) to transform Gill into a tragic figure. There is no mention of tragedy with regard to Betty and Petra, who were literally trapped with an abuser-father. Nor is there any accusation of hypocrisy. Gill did not appear to realise that abusing his daughters was incompatible with his role as a father but he did recognise that it contradicted his role as a Catholic zealot who wore a girdle of chastity. After one episode of abuse he wrote, "What does God think ... this must stop." There is nothing to suggest that it did stop but, according to MacCarthy, this does not indicate hypocrisy but the agonising of a "trapped" soul.

3. Re-concealing the abuse

MacCarthy's descriptions of Gill's ideals and practices creates an impression of avant garde sexual liberation — she calls it "sexual anarchy" — which pervades the book as the author fails to differentiate between Gill's activities with independent adults and with his daughters. Most of Gill's dealings with women were sexually exploitative, and I am not suggesting that his manipulation of any of them is irrelevant, but there is a difference

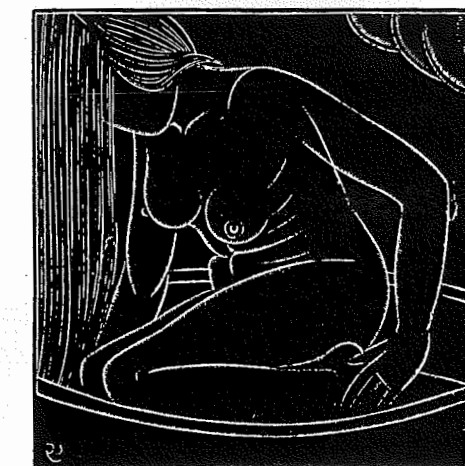
between the degrees of emotional and practical power he was able to exert over the various women and the types of pain this involved. By failing to separate father-daughter abuse from Gill's adult relationships MacCarthy effectively hides it again.

It is easy to overlook the abuse completely when MacCarthy authoritatively states:

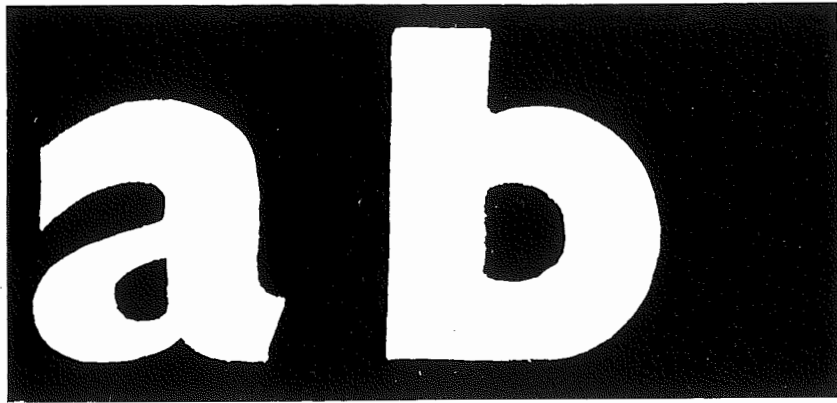
It is important to realise that Gill, whatever his current amorous pre-occupations . . . was very seldom fundamentally distracted from his domestic loyalties. The image of mother and children, home tenderness, home welcomes was almost an obsession, reflected in his art.

This poetic passage conceals the reality that Gill's "amorous preoccupations" included abusing Petra and Betty while "domestic loyalties/home tenderness" prods a deeply ingrained bourgeois ideal of harmonious family life which is reinforced by a later assertion that there were "profound advantages in growing up" in the Gill household. An abuser-father was clearly a severe disadvantage for the girls but this is veiled by MacCarthy's rose-tinted vision of the Gill home and hearth which colours her interpretation of Gill's work.

At the time he was abusing his daughters, Gill produced a series of portraits of them. One of these, "Girl in Bath", is an engraving of Petra in a slightly cowed, crouching position, closely encircled by a small bath. She has no facial features and only one partial foot and one hand are visible; the girl's breasts, being the only detailed part of her body, are the focal point. The pose and Gill's



"Girl in bath": portrait of his daughter Petra by Eric Gill.



treatment of the body combine to offer an image of passive, trapped, depersonalised, female vulnerability to the male gaze. To the feminist gaze this drawing reflects only Gill's assumption that all women existed to stoke and satisfy his sexual appetite. MacCarthy, however, doggedly pursues her comforting interpretation; the portraits are "exact yet sentimental" as "the artist-father" captures a "childhood almost vanished", concluding that the "iconography of child-bride and father-lover" (the drawings) express the "duality" (denial/indulgence?) of Gill's life. I am not sure what MacCarthy means by these confusing comments but she appears to be attempting to blend two incompatibles – her sentimental fantasy of the Gills' idyllic home life and the stark fact of father-daughter abuse. Having exposed the abuse via Gill's diary entries – "Put my p. in her a.hole." (his abbreviations) – I can only assume that MacCarthy's art expert's eye is also a blind eye when she sees fit to submerge it in a fantasy of "home tenderness" which disguises the abuser as a loyal father and the abused as happy, advantaged children.

4. *Incest is harmless*

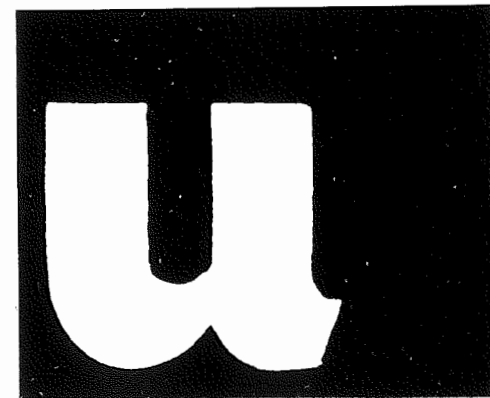
When MacCarthy does (briefly) consider the effects the abuse may have had on the girls she offers reassurance that their experiences didn't do them any harm by resorting to a patriarchal yardstick of "normality" – marriage: "the three Gill daughters grew up, so far as one can see, to be contented and well-adjusted married women" whose numerous children testified to their "normal" sexual development. Gill continued to dominate these "contented" women, and their

husbands and children, but MacCarthy again dredges up the home ideal by citing photographs of three generations of smiling Gill as evidence of extended family bliss. It is surely significant that she accepts these photographs at face value (smiling women have happy pasts and presents) but marginalises the face value of the drawings of the girls in favour of interpretations which promote the same home ideal.

Gill was best known for his calligraphy and typographical designs, to which MacCarthy pays close attention. However the biography's claim to fame is its revelation of his sexual habits and it is these, along with Gill's so called "erotic art", which John Carey considers in his review "Incest, Inspiration and Innocence". The title is apt: Carey acknowledges Incest, explicitly excuses it by claiming it was vital for Gill's art because it provided the Inspiration, and implicitly reconceals it so that Gill emerges as an Innocent victim.

Carey primes the liberal reader

Like MacCarthy, Carey uses soothing euphemisms for father-daughter abuse. He calls it "incestuous involvement/relationships", which suggests that the girls were equal partners in their father's "improprieties" – a word which connotes liberal-



approved rejection of out-moded notions of sexual propriety (compare MacCarthy's Victorian inhibition/sexual radicalism opposition), and which Carey uses to help present Gill as an incorrigible, basically harmless eccentric with "tiresome theories". As I have explained, some of these theories had

very serious implications for Gill's daughters but Carey trivialises them as "tiresome" and lumps them with equally ludicrous, but relatively innocuous, Gill theories about custard powder, trousers and bathrooms.

Carey transforms abuser into victim

Abuse is hidden, hypocrisy denied and the abuser turned into a victim during Carey's explanation of the discrepancy between Gill's surface monastic hankerings and his sexual "improprieties":

The idea of a bare white cell really appealed to him. It was just that he needed regular sex as well.

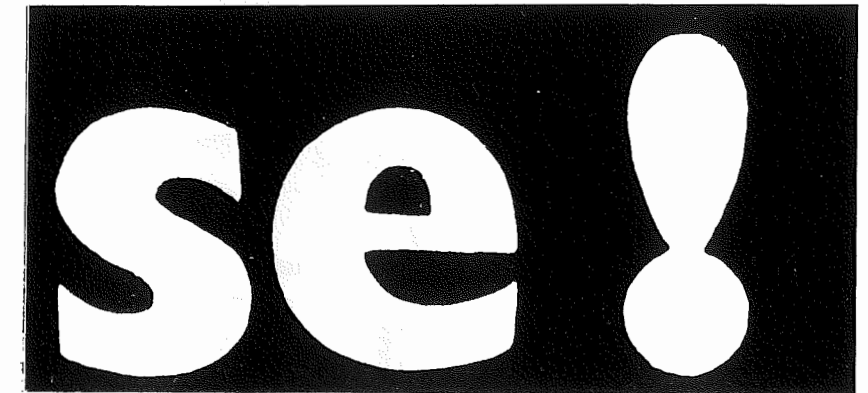
The latter sentence is loaded with connotations which lift responsibility from Gill by suggesting that he was merely (just) compelled by necessity – he *needed* regular sex. This is reminiscent of the quasi-biological "men need sex" argument which is trotted out in defence of sexually violent men by asserting that their actions are beyond their control. Furthermore, "regular sex", indicating conventional/straight as well as habitual, implicitly conceals the abuse since the expression is used as another yardstick of patriarchal "normality": heterosexual intercourse between unrelated adults. This may involve abuse – and did in Gill's case in, for example, his exploitation of young maids – but it is not culturally associated with it and is at the opposite end of the scale of "normality" to incest.

The overall impression is that Gill's "bare white cell ideal" was inevitably conquered by his hormones and he understandably had "normal" sexual relations. Carey concedes that "Most people would see this as inconsistent . . ." and is ready with the old standby ". . . but artists are not supposed to see things as most people do". MacCarthy clears Gill of hypocrisy because he was "trapped"; Carey clears him with a double, well-worn patriarchal defence, first because he was a man, second because he was an artist.

Sexual abuse for art's sake . . .

In contrast to MacCarthy, Carey prioritises the sexual content of Gill's pictures of his daughters and relates it to the abuse. He is then apparently prepared to argue that the end justifies the means – the art legitimates the abuse.

"No one surely should be much surprised" that wood engravings of his naked daughter were produced at a period when Gill was "incestuously involved" with her. But, Carey explains, if the incest had stopped, Gill's art would have stopped too and appreciative viewers would be deprived of the "exquisite art of Gill's nudes" which are "rightly applauded". So "there is not much point in deploring all this". In other words, father-daughter abuse is justified providing it inspires sexualised images of the abused which are unquestionably "great art". Carey adds to a critical tradition which repeatedly condones men's appalling treatment of women and children in the name of art. Art and literary history is loaded with sexually violent men, ranging from Byron to Picasso, who are explicitly excused by critics who either claim,



like Carey, that the violence inspired the art, or that it is a manifestation of the artistic male temperament, a sign of his genius. Whichever argument is pursued the abused are deemed a necessary sacrifice in the creation of male art and literature which insidiously perpetrates further violence by representing women as helpless, welcoming sex objects. It almost goes without saying that there is plenty of point for women in deploring artist-abusers' behaviour, theories and art and the "experts' complacency towards all three.

. . . And pornography for art's sake

In view of his attitudes to women and his absolute domestic power, I am not much surprised that Gill abused his daughters, nor is it surprising that this behaviour is exonerated by

the art establishment. Carey's remarks about some of Gill's work show that it is the male titillation value, rather than the artist's skill, which governs the assertion that they are "rightly applauded". Gill created images of female defencelessness and sexual availability by minimising, or excluding, body defences (eyes, mouth, hands, feet), thereby centring attention on undefended, sexually vulnerable torsos. According to Carey, it is the contrast of "clean hard lines and luscious female roundness" which provides "the key to the eroticism". His confidence that such images are erotic, rather than distressing and enraging, is an example of phallogocentrism as blatant as Gill's, particularly since he agrees that "the young women Gill depicts are reduced to sexual icons" and posed to "advertise their subjection".

Gill Sans Light

Gill Sans

Gill Sans Italic

Gill Sans Bold

Gill Sans Bold Italic

Gill Sans Bold Condensed

Gill Extra Bold

Gill Extra Bold Condensed

Gill Extra Bold Outline

From sexual icon to "classical anonymity"

Gill's "sexual icons" are elevated to "great art" while, predictably, his drawings of his penis in various stages of erection are not. There is not even a ripple of applause for these pictures, indicating that male voyeurism crucially affects the art world's clapometer. I assume that Gill's artistic talent did not evaporate when he switched from female to male anatomy yet the penis drawings are not termed "exquisite", nor are they reproduced in MacCarthy's book. Moreover, critics do not wax lyrical about their aesthetic qualities whereas Carey judges Gill's sculpture of a female torso, "Mankind in the Making" (!) to be "hardly sexual at all: flesh has given way to classical anonymity" (whatever that means). Devoid of head and arms and cut off at the knees, this statue surely remains as much a "sexual icon" as Gill's other incapacitated female forms despite its profound title? Gill certainly perceived it as such; he said "carving it was 'like undressing a girl'".

Both writers impose a familiar injunction of silence about the reality of father-daughter abuse; MacCarthy deflects questions by implying that shock is illiberal; Carey says to deplore it is pointless. "We" (art enthusiasts and *Sunday Times* readers) may be aware that incest is common, but "we" are likely to remain impervious to the ongoing pain of those who survive it if there is silent acquiescence when an "authority" and an influential critic evade the issue to accommodate art. The biography and review prolong the tradition of protecting 'great' artist-abusers and promoting their 'great' pornographic art with no consideration of the cost to individual women (those the artist abused) or the contribution of the art to furthering the sexual abuse of women in general.

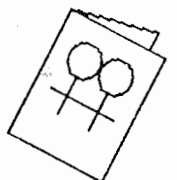
My aim has been to help break both the silence and the tradition by spotlighting the similar manipulative devices in the two texts and how they surreptitiously direct the reader to accept abuse in Gill's case. □

Fiona MacCarthy, *Eric Gill*, Faber & Faber, 1989.

John Carey, "Incest, Inspiration and Incest", *The Sunday Times*, January 1989.

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