Final Issue

Branching Out

canadian feminist quarterly

Volume VII, Number 2, 1980 $1.75

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAM

CENTRE FOR THE ARTS

The Women's Studies Program and the Centre for the Arts at Simon Fraser University expect to make a tenure-track joint appointment at the rank of assistant professor for January, 1981 or after.*

The candidate should have critical and theoretical interests in both Fine Art and Women's Studies. Areas of specialization may include History of Modern Art, Film History and Theory, or historical and critical interests in the performing arts. The candidates should also have ability and experience in teaching general lower-level courses as well as specialized upper-level courses in Women's Studies. The candidate would be expected to teach existing courses and contribute to curriculum development in both interdisciplinary programs.

Send application with a curriculum vitae and names of three referees to:

Co-ordinator,
Women's Studies Program,
Simon Fraser University,
Burnaby, B.C. V5A 1S6

by October 31, 1980.

* Appointment subject to budgetary approval.

WOMEN

LIB-ER—A—TION, WOMEN'S!!!!!

The **Women's Movement Archives** is now three years old. From 1972-1977, the feminist newspaper called *The Other Woman* received and actively collected much information on a growing women's movement. Unfortunately, the publication had priority over the archival project. It was not until the summer of 1977, after the demise of the newspaper, that all of the boxes were systematically filed.

The **Women's Movement Archives** possesses material from the earliest point of the current women's movement. It stretches from sea to sea and much of it is irreplaceable. Newspapers, newsletters and movement documents from both Western Canada and the Atlantic Provinces are on file and Québec (French and English) is also represented. There is a section for photographs and news clippings. As well, plans are being made to capture the experiences on a personal level of those individuals who were instrumental in the development of women's liberation during the late sixties, and the collective herstories of groups presently functioning.

Help yourselves — and the Archives. Send your old leaflets, notes, anything at all. Do not doubt its value. The history of our movement is built on many levels. Documents and theoretical essays will not do it alone. The past is with us now because many women saved or published their journals. Your letter to a friend will be our future. Everything speaking about and to feminism is precious to us all.

All those activists who wish to use the Archives, please do so. (A cross-reference of all material will be underway shortly, *i.e., ten years of abortion.*)

Pat Leslie
for **The Women's Movement Archives**
P.O. Box 928, Station Q
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Branching Out

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photo montage by Cathy Hobart

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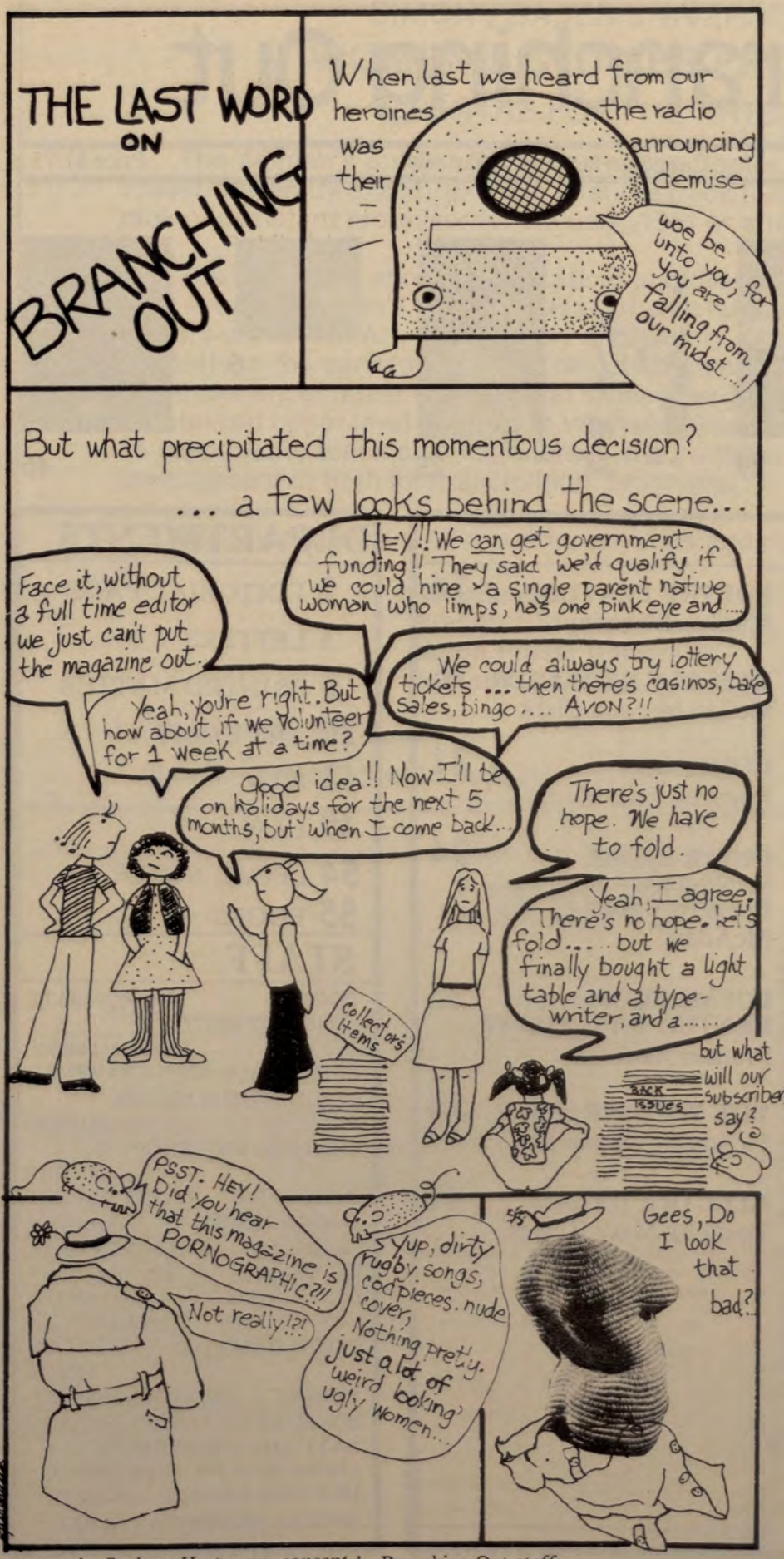

cartoon by Barbara Hartmann, concept by Branching Out *staff*

Dear Reader,

This is our thirtieth and final issue.

Branching Out has always been published entirely by volunteer staff. We were fortunate to have a full-time unpaid editor. Without that full-time person, *Branching Out* would never have survived as long as it did. It was our aim to produce a national feminist magazine and we did, the only remaining general interest feminist magazine in Canada.

We always hoped that we would be able to find funds to pay our editor and we believed this to be a realistic expectation. Our financial base consisted of subscriptions, advertising (what we could get), small grants from private foundations and government, donations and membership fees. Despite concerted attempts to raise more money, we have only been able to meet production costs and that just barely.

After six years without salary, our editor is getting thin and she has resigned to seek paid employment. The magazine needs a full-time person. No one else on our staff is able to work full-time without pay, so *Branching Out* is no longer able to continue.

We're proud of what *Branching Out* has done, and the rewards (other than financial) have been great. We don't regret the time and energy we've spent, and we truly appreciate the support we received over the years from contributors and subscribers.

Sincerely,

The *Branching Out* staff
July, 1980

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LETTERS

Women are in a bad way when the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) is considered "comparatively vigorous" (Legal Notes — Sweet Reason, *Branching Out,* No. 1, 1980). Many of us who have had contact with it consider it pitiful, with fewer than one case in 100 allowed a Board of Inquiry. For my own case against Wilfrid Laurier University re sexual discrimination in hiring, the Commission took two years and two months to decide I had no case, and another month to tell me this decision.

I have found the methods of procedure of the Commission so unfair that I asked for a Judicial Review of it in the Supreme Court of Ontario. The three judges ruled that a complainant in fact *has* no rights before the Commission. She can not find out what her opponent has said against her; she is not allowed to see or study any of the evidence (although some of it may be read to her); she is not allowed to confront her opponent about untrue statements that are part of its presentation; she is not allowed a lawyer. If a prisoner were denied these basic rights there would be great consternation. One wonders why the Commission chooses, and is allowed by law, to work in such a way that any injustice is possible because there are no safeguards. To be sure of a hearing in a case of discrimination in Ontario, one has to sue directly through the courts at a cost of perhaps $15,000 or more.

It is ironic that the OHRC which purports to seek Human Rights in general does not allow basic rights during its functioning.

Anne Innis Dagg, Waterloo

I have just finished Kathleen Braid's interesting article Zen Construction (No. 4, 1979). It brought back similar experiences I had in 1974 when I began my training as a ship's officer. I am now a certificated Watchkeeping Mate, and have been employed as third or second mate on Great Lakes freighters since 1976. Several women graduated from the marine college (Georgian College, Owen Sound, Ontario) before and after me. At least six of us are presently employed as navigation/deck officers. Some have left the Lakes for salt water. At least one is employed as a first mate, more are certificated as such. Another woman has pursued a solitary path to qualification as a marine engineer — most of us prefer the open deck to the closed in engine room.

Working in a predominantly male world was both frightening and fascinating. As a sheltered student I had never before so clearly seen men's discriminatory attitudes to women. Neither had I seen so clearly the harsher realities of life, dealing with pain, fatigue, physical fear and the emotional cannibalism of people confined to a small physical space.

Gradually I grew more comfortable in the environment. I saw who hated me, and avoided them. I learned that many of my male co-workers were considerate and helpful, that some were even pleased and proud that I was there. Many of our cooks and stewards are women and have been very supportive.

My growing physical strength gave me great pleasure. I revel in the fact that my biceps will no longer fit the conventional tight cut of women's blouses of the "proper" size. Thanks to felt insoles, a down vest and proper boots, I face the long hours which my profession frequently demands with confidence that I can endure. As a west coaster, I was totally unfamiliar with the eastern winter. Dressing for outside work is now a familiar task, and I can cope with 20 below zero and worse when my job takes me out on deck near the end of our shipping season.

The job itself sustains me against the continuing struggle of surviving in a male-dominated sphere. Some sailors accept me, some do not. Even so, there is much satisfaction in a neatly executed task of navigation, in seeing the fingers speed an appropriate knot to its place, in doing one's part in a good tie-up alongside, in carrying out one's duty in a seaman-like manner. And there are treasured moments that make the struggle well worthwhile: seeing the sun set into slate grey Lake Superior, watching the moon rise from Lake Huron's haze, picking out the north star from a brilliant sky and confirming by an ancient knowledge that the modern machines are still on course, watching the fog slide out from the river banks and the white whales sport off the Saguenay.

Also, the money is very good.

Frances Dearman, Third Mate
Steamer "John A. France"

* * * * *

WOMEN IN TRADES CONFERENCE

The first National Conference of Women in Trades will be held in Winnipeg, September 26 - 28, 1980. The intent of the conference is to share information and to develop strategies for increasing the opportunities for women entering the trades. For more information contact Dawna Pritchard, 400-303 Main Street, Winnipeg R3C 3G7.

Re Trudy Govier's article "Compromise: Feminist Dilemma for the 80's", and her statement "I sometimes ask for 'Ms.', as I should, but often don't." Instead of trying to impose Ms. as a title, it would be more sensible, dignified and gracious to do without titles entirely. When asked if "that's a Miss or Mrs." I say simply, "I prefer not to use any title."

Without titles, one's full name is the proper formal form of salutation or address. When using someone's name in conversation the full name may be used, or the first name in very informal situations.

By eliminating titles, the sex designation is eliminated entirely. One is addressed and referred to by the name that signifies one's humanity and individuality.

Cecilia Langdon Gadd, Calgary

Thank you for Trudy Govier's article "Compromise". I, too, am a feminist who shrinks from challenging every example of sexism, bias and inequality that I see. I shrink from it because I find that it takes a great deal of energy and anger to challenge every example found in every day life. I have determined that my energy is precious to me and that, although I do want things to change for women, I simply cannot do it all myself AND have the energy for the other parts of life which I enjoy.

So when the man (friend) at the film shop rages about "this stupid thing women have of wanting to be *chairpersons* I take him on, verbally, for a while. Then I realize that he is becoming angry and is not listening to my side of the argument. I don't want his hostility and so I compromise. Then withdraw. We remain friends.

Com from the Latin cum,"with", and *Promise* "the reasonable ground for hope or expectation" (Funk and Wagnell Standard College Dictionary): I have a gently optimistic view of attitude changes and can only agree to compromise with Trudy with reasonable expectation that things will continue to go forward without destroying me in the process.

Mufty Mathewson, Edmonton

I'm not sure whether to congratulate or commiserate. Reading *Branching Out* has become more painful than menstruation or childbirth. Your magazine is turning into one drawn-out scream of pain. You seem to specialize these days in psycho-sexual investigations designed to make a woman want to jump out of her skin. I must say I've never experienced anything quite like Connie Smith's "The Myth of Erotica": it leaves me feeling as if fifty rock stars had just jumped on my crotch with hobnailed platform shoes.

For sheer highpitched complaint nothing compares with a Canadian feminist, but you people deserve the prize. You have exposed the raw nerve endings underlying every imagined orgasm. You are treading bravely on the frontiers of Absolute Puritanism, disliking sex, but lo-oving money. Thank you for making it clear. Canadian women must join this weird death-cult and slowly turn into stone, like the Laurentian Shield from which we sprang. This is the price we'll all pay for embracing Atwood's freeze-dry vision of love-in-the-north. To an outsider it looks awfully strange: a collective suicide? mass heart failure?

Please don't cancel my subscription. I look forward to the next dose of poison. I guess I'm fascinated or something.

Anne McLean, Montreal

The principal purpose of this communication is to direct a copy of it to Alberta Culture, the Canada Council, and the Alberta Law Foundation to focus their attention on the way in which their money has been spent in Volume VI, Number 4, 1979 of *Branching Out*. In particular, I am concerned about the 700-word article on masturbation, of all things!

I should like to paraphrase the conclusion, viz:

> "Remember, the more exercise a joint gets, the less susceptible it is to arthritis."

As follows,

> "Remember, the more exercise the writers', the illustrator's and the editor's brains get, the less susceptible they'll be to writing, drawing and approving such garbage."

In conclusion, I should like to state that the article and the illustration are the antithesis — and a parody — of the title of your magazine. How can one "branch out" and advocate "Indeed, this is truly 'doing your own thing' "?

(Mrs.) D. Lynch, Winnipeg

Connie Smith's article on "The Myth of Erotica" is disappointing in its simplistic application of contemporary ideology to the rich and complex human heritage to which we may have access through the images of art and myth. It revives an old and undeserved stereotype of "primitive man" as insensitive brute. Smith's denigration of the Plains Indian sundance, a complex world renewal ceremony put on co-operatively by men and women, could have been lifted directly from the misinformed and moralistic writings of the missionaries and Indian agents who outlawed it in the 19th century. Her own distrust of males has apparently led to a more general misanthropy that scapegoats non-western and pre-industrial people for the contemporary injustices feminism rightly struggles against. For a more positive view of men and women in "primitive" society I celebrate the work of Apache anthropologist Ines Talamantez on the girls' puberty ceremonies of her people. The goddess here is shown shimmering with pollen, powerful in her own right and powerfully receiving her complement in the renewal of generations. The work of Talamantez reveals the power of native Indian women. By contrast, Smith's "Myth of Erotica" clouds such wisdom in a haze of unthinking anger and prejudice. Although such writing cannot discredit women in general, it certainly is a discredit to contemporary feminism.

Robin Ridington
Associate Professor of Anthropology
University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada.

I found Connie Smith's article provocative and I hope my disagreements will prove to be

equally so.

Her logic was faultless if you happen to be of European origin and interpret her anthropological data within a European framework. However, her interpretations become suspect outside such a framework. She sees North American Indian spiritual rites as masochistic: "(a zone of torture — or delight)". From within the culture, however, it turns out to be something quite other. Indians have had to live on this continent for many centuries under difficult and sometimes harsh conditions. It was necessary to learn how to deal with pain in ways that modern Europeans do not understand. The suffering that one undergoes in the sundance ceremony, the sweat lodge, or a fast, is simply preparation for dealing with one's life. Incidentally it is not just the "boys" who take part in ceremonies.

With regard to the statuette of a woman performing fellatio on a man, where else should he place his hands but on top her head? That may be a position of power and domination but, on the other hand, it may be a caress. Should he place his hands on his hips? or hold them up in the air? Who is to say that she doesn't also derive pleasure out of such an act? Many woman do.

Male warriors stabbing their "spears vigorously and repeatedly into the trench" can only mean one thing in her eyes, male violence and aggression. Aboriginal Australians, who have never read European textbooks, might simply be reenacting the natural drama that takes place between man and woman, the male and female dualities, which might just imply something healthy and not aggression against females.

Her quote from Virginia Woolf that "Obviously there is for (men) some glory, some necessity, some *satisfaction* in fighting which women have never felt or enjoyed" is supposed to be the clincher. I am not convinced that women do not enjoy being aggressive, at least some, sometimes. But were Virginia Woolf correct, that leaves men with a genetic predisposition towards violence which women do not share and our genetic imbalances make it further impossible to share an understanding. We (men) are guilty by the fact of being born men.

Her interpretation makes me feel that she, Connie Smith, is trying very hard to rationalize her dislike of those of the male species. Perhaps I could suggest another interpretation with reference to Marx and Engels: that development of a capitalist society has engendered class divisions and unequal power structures. If this is the case, then only a society with complete economic equality can be without domination of a psychological and physical nature: master-slave, employer-employee, male-female. However, she has stated her case powerfully, and there is at least a partial truth embedded within some very distorted thinking.

Robert Haymond, Lethbridge

Connie Smith replies: *Racist statements for the sake of controversy or argument would not be supported or given free press time, and certainly anti-feminist statements should be regarded similarly.*

We've been through these tired old arguments by men like Robert Haymond before and it serves no purpose to respond in like vein. It is time to transcend attacks like these in favour of intelligent discussion among women.

Meridel Le Sueur is a feminist of some 80 years of living and fighting for economic justice and democracy. In her books she creates the 30's in all its hunger, joy, and with the greatest dignity given to her characters. *The Girl*, a novel set in the 30's is timeless in its depiction of poor women, their relationships with each other and men. *Women on the Breadlines* is clearly a feminist analysis of the Depression, yet it reads like a contemporary story. Le Sueur invokes images of women's kitchens, bedrooms, shacks, and shows us their children, being born, dying, and their men, drunk, jobless, angry, loving, hard-working and trying to work together. She is ageless in her insights yet very rooted in the politics of social justice.

I urge readers to discover how a lifelong feminist saw the 30's. She is full of hope despite hard times. "Hard times ain't quit and we ain't quit," she says. Her books are available from West End Press, Box 697, Cambridge, Mass. 02139.

Ellen Larsen, Portland, Maine

I still think we need feminist theory, especially in the visual media where women get a beating. So I *am* impressed by the *negative pessimistic* language with which Judith Mirus institutionalizes Fassbinder as a women's director (*Branching Out*, No. 4, 1979). . . . If the definition of feminism is still to make the personal decisions of every woman political ones, I fail to understand Mirus' choice of subject (Fassbinder) and/or her apparent endorsement of his philosophy of victimization. ". . . it's the training which is flawed . . . not the trainee" baffles this reader for its illogical solipsism. Patriarchal modes of educating the young into oppressors or victims include, very powerfully, the cinema. Why give the medium its legitimacy instead of blasting it wide open by writing satires on such film scripts as The Marriage of Maria Braun — from her description it would appear to be fertile ground for feminist attack and ridicule.

Brig Anderson
Singida, Tanzania

Judith Mirus replies: *Perhaps the tenor of my article has been misread; certainly it has been misunderstood. I wasn't institutionalizing Fassbinder but explaining his view of the world. That I do not support his philosophy of victimization is explicit in the second paragraph: "His perspective seems to me not only limited but artistically limiting." Nevertheless, he is a major filmmaker, and that film is currently getting major exposure; to ignore these facts and join the dubious business of promoting* only *what we want to see is unrealistic and irresponsible, if not downright reactionary. It seems to me that good criticism involves considered analysis of what is as well as what should be.*

Alberta Nurse Loses Job Over Patient Care

An Alberta nurse with twenty years experience has been wondering since January 31, 1980 whether she will be able to work in her chosen profession again — and all because she was concerned about the treatment a young patient was receiving.

Audrey Sutton filed a complaint with her union because she felt one of her patients was getting inadequate care. She submitted the complaint form, called a disclaimer*, having already filled out the hospital “incident” report without result.

Sutton was fired four days later. In a press release from Edmonton General Hospital the personnel director explained that the nurse had broken a “fundamental rule of confidentiality.” Sutton denied this. “I was the first nurse that I know of to file this disclaimer, and I did use the patient’s name on the form. But the only ones to see it were the executive medical administrator and our union lawyer. There’s no way I broke any rule of confidentiality. As a matter of fact, administration at Edmonton General revealed more to the press about this case than I did.”

Sutton said that her union, the United Nurses of Alberta (U.N.A.), sent out a memo immediately after her firing warning its members not to use any names when filling out the disclaimer. “But my firing was certainly effective. There hasn’t been a single disclaimer handed in since.”

Although she has always had good references in the past, Sutton said that it’s unlikely she’ll find a nursing job now. In this, Joanne Munro, her union representative at Local 79, concurs. “There’s a kind of informal blacklist that goes on in the hospitals.” Munro agrees and Sutton fears that she has been labelled a “troublemaker”.

One consolation is the amount of support the nurse has received. The North Central District of U.N.A., which comprises approximately 3,000 members sent her a letter supporting Local 79 in their efforts to clear her name. In addition, all the nursing units at Edmonton General Hospital wrote letters of protest to administration condemning her dismissal.

Their support, however much appreciated, doesn’t pay Sutton’s bills. On unemployment benefits for the first time in her career, Sutton, who has worked in psychiatry the last 2½ years, said that she could appreciate better than ever what her depressed patients go through. “I don’t think anyone realizes what this has done to me. My job has always meant a great deal and I’ve always been proud of the way I did my job. Maybe I should be grateful for unemployment but I just feel degraded,” Sutton said.

It was during a province-wide nursing strike in mid-April that the Board of Industrial Relations first met to decide Sutton’s fate. The case was argued solely on the “breach of confidentiality” issue. Others are convinced that the real problem was the disclaimer. “A lot of nurses think that the new disclaimer was the real issue, that Audrey was made an example of,” Munro stated. Sutton conceded that there was a possibility her biggest mistake was using the doctor’s name on the form, and although she was quick to point out that she was on good terms with most of the doctors she worked with, she commented “this doctor is pretty powerful and he knows how to play the game . . . I don’t doubt he’ll do very well for himself.”

During April negotiations, Sutton was carefully optimistic about a quick return to work. She hopes she will be re-instated as well as given full back pay and wants the incident removed from her personnel file. However, Munro said that Sutton will be lucky if she gets that much. “We’ll be satisfied only if she is found innocent and re-instated, of course, but the back pay. . . .”

Alberta nurses have recently fought and won a 37.5% pay increase after defying a government back-to-work order. More importantly, they will now have written into their contract a “professional responsibility clause” giving them more control over the quality of patient care. This will be done by setting up nurse-management committees to rule on the safety of any given medical situation.

Whether this will help Sutton or not remains to be seen. The nurse, who picketed alongside her co-workers, now waits to hear if she can ever work beside them again. “I’m going to keep on fighting this. I’ve nothing left to lose. I can only hope it’ll be worth the fight.”

Maureen Bursey

*This disclaimer form had recently been amended to protect a nurse from possible court action for inadequate patient care beyond her control, and it also stated that she was performing a task against her best judgement.

Dawn Marchers Protest Daycare Cutbacks

The protest march to the Alberta Legislature May 20th won't go down in the annals of great demonstrations, but it finally made visible the smouldering resentment many Albertans feel towards a complacent, navel-gazing Conservative government. About 350 people, mostly women and children, marched at 7:30 in the morning to protest a provincial decision to stop deficit funding for municipal day-care centres. The demonstrator's chants of "We want Bogle" (Bob Bogle, Social Services Minister), and finally "We want Bogle — OUT!" didn't produce the minister, however a 1300 signature petition was presented to New Democratic leader Grant Notley.

Ironically, the rumble of heavy equipment nearly drowned out the protester's chants. To celebrate Alberta's 75th anniversary, Peter Lougheed's government is spending $43 million to re-landscape the legislative grounds where the protesters marched. Will a business-oriented government be able to hear what these people are saying?

Maureen Bursey

photo by Mufty Mathewson

photo by Judith Alldritt

above: The protest march on the Alberta legislature drew many users of Edmonton's threatened daycare centres.

left: A woman in the Prime Time sponsored conference on "Women and Aging" and her self-portrait.

Women in Mid-Life:
Looking for Change and Control

Participants in a conference on women and aging which took place in Victoria recently drew unique self-portraits in a workshop called "Creating New Images for Maturity". The women drew pictures incorporating their names with a personal symbol depicting mid-life, such as: a flowering tree with deep roots tapping into underground water, a sun and a face breaking through a brick wall, and large dark question marks depicting fear but willingness to look at problems.

This conference, jointly sponsored by Prime Time and the University of Victoria, enabled many women to meet informally and in workshop sessions to examine their lives and futures from different perspectives. The conference was concluded by Gertrude Stein, co-ordinator of Prime Time commenting that ". . . women in mid-years wish opportunities to do something constructive and useful with their lives, and opportunities towards changing and becoming more independant, more in control over our own lives."

— Mary Anne Ericksen

Of Agonizing and Organizing

by Dorothy O'Connell

Chiclet Gomes has two things in common with her friend Tillie: "a desire to make some money, and a distinct disinclination to attain this goal by making other people's bathrooms sparkle." Chiclet and Tillie live in a public housing project, along with Linda Cunningham, Georgia Wiseman, Mrs. Grocholski and a host of other characters, all created by Dorothy O'Connell. The author's wry commentary on life under the surveillance of the Housing Authority has been heard on the CBC and compiled in two books, Chiclet Gomez *and* Cockeyed Optimists, *both published by Deneau & Greenberg.*

In this story, reprinted from Chiclet Gomez, *Chiclet and her friends join a consciousness-raising group at the local Women's Centre.*

Chiclet wanted to have a meeting. It was the annual crack-down-on-the-tenants-and-show-them-who's-boss time of year, when the Housing Authority would decide we were getting uppity. Uppity was when you got a notice saying if you didn't pay off what you owed them in three days you'd be evicted, and instead of phoning them up like Chiclet would, and telling them off, you froze with fright and did nothing.

The trouble is, most of us are alone except for our children, and we aren't used to having traumatic decisions thrust on us like that. A lot of us don't even know what to do when our husbands desert us, even if we want them to. Lots of us sleep with a night light. We are the bold, bad, public housing tenants - the ones who, according to certain city officials, spend all our time breeding crime.

It was time, Chiclet thought, to show us that we were made of sterner stuff than we thought. So we sent a notice out to all the projects saying that we were going to have a meeting. We would form a group to raise our consciousness and give us confidence in ourselves as people, and then we could all help those neighbours who hadn't advanced that far yet. It sounded fine. Of course I have discovered during the years that I've been Chiclet's friend that just because something sounds good at the time, it doesn't mean an automatic success. You'd think I would have become cynical by this time, but Chiclet always could get me enthusiastic.

One drawback to our plan was that we didn't yet have a meeting place. Chiclet and I went to see Father Florian.

"If it's about bingo," he said, "we get half the profits, and a cut on the soft drinks and chip sales, and . . ."

"It's not about bingo, Father," Chiclet said coolly. I was reeling in shock. Having been brought up a devout agnostic, I naturally had an exaggerated respect for Men of the Cloth, and this secular viewpoint was an eye-opener.

"It's about your hall, Father. We want to have a meeting, and we'd like to use it."

"What kind of meeting? A bazaar? A rummage sale? Bake sale? Thirty dollars."

"Just a meeting, Father, and we don't have thirty dollars."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Gomez, but we're in debt for that hall, so we have to charge. And then there's cleaning, electricity, and so on. By the way, I haven't seen you in Church lately. In fact, I haven't seen you since I blessed your house last year."

"Thank you, Father."

Well, that was out.

"What did he mean, bless your house? If he did, it didn't work. Did you have to pay for it? Because if you did, maybe he could lend us the hall instead of refunding your money."

"It doesn't work that way, Tillie. Well, I guess we could try a school."

It seemed that the school also had to meet cleaning staff prices, and, by a strange coincidence, it would also cost thirty dollars. Now what?

The Community Centre seemed a logical place to try, but on the other hand, we had already had some run-ins with the recreation department of the city over what activities we felt they should offer. They tended to favour candlemaking for housewives, drum majorettes for girls, and floor hockey for boys. There were also courses in making birds out of paper — I forget what the Hell those are called.

We tended to favour asking people what they wanted before planning; sometimes the most popular programmes were strange ones, sometimes they were practical. We had had a home barbering course at the same time as our self-defence one, and both had done pretty well. We had also had a dance for the under-twelve group, because that's what they wanted. I myself had been dubious about this one, since I think Barbie dolls and that kind of crap are already trying to make our kids grow up too fast. But my doubts were resolved at the first dance. They didn't dance together — they just exploded into a furor of activity more or less in time with the music, from three years of age up until about eleven; once they hit twelve they wanted to go to the older dance. At one point we even had a group called the Twelve Year Old Committee petitioning for the right to attend the teen dances. They lost.

The Community Centre, they were sorry to report, was booked for the next six months.

It looked like an impasse.

There must be a place a group of women could go and have a meeting we thought. Then it hit us! Of course! The Women's Centre!

We had never been there, but we knew where it was, and after all, we were women. So we caught a bus, and went to see them. We entered a slightly darkened room, where a group of women were sitting around on the floor, listening in

hushed silence to a record. It was a record about Emily Pankhurst. We waited politely until it finished.

"Wasn't that wonderful," breathed one of them, "how she reached out to the poor!"

Suddenly I didn't want to stay and be reached out to. One of the big headaches in organizing was that, whenever we managed to get a group together, some social worker or do-gooder would decide God or somebody had decided that they should come down and tell us what we wanted. We prefer bigots to do-gooders.

However, Chiclet was already talking. She explained what we wanted.

"A consciousness-raising session. But of course, you can join one of ours."

"We'd rather have our own," Chiclet stated firmly.

"But, Mrs. Gomez, we're all women together. Your problems are our problems. To be frank, the Centre is so busy, there isn't any night right now when it's not being used, but there is room in one of the sessions for you and your group. And we'd love to have you."

It was done. I was worried. Most people don't realize that poor people are the most conservative people in the world. That's because to us, experience has shown that any change is likely to be for the worse. This doesn't stop Chiclet and me from trying to organize against the Housing Authority, but it sure doesn't help. I figure the Authority was very smart when they picked that name. Most of our neighbours feel that any Authority is to be instantly Obeyed. Including husbands. This was one reason we wanted to have the session. We are also very conservative about sex. Contrary to popular opinion, most of us are still pretty puritan in our views on this. The sexual revolution is in about the same stage in our neighbourhoods as any other revolution. The talking stage. Of course, part of this is because a young girl from our income group doesn't have much to offer — no diploma, no career, no family money, just herself. So she had better be damn sure the merchandise is all right. Chiclet and I don't agree with this opinion naturally, and we certainly don't believe that marriage to some schnook is a cure-all, but a surprising amount of our neighbours do, even if it didn't work for them.

So, when we arrived with our first group, I anticipated a little cultural shock. It started out quite well, in spite of the fact that the two groups had quite dissimilar views about what one wears to a meeting. Our people were mostly in dresses, having discarded their day-wear of jeans and dirty T-shirts, and sat on the chairs and couches. The Women's Centre group had discarded whatever they wear in the daytime for jeans and dirty T-shirts, and sat on the floor. I wore my pith helmet and sat on a cushion, and Chiclet paced around. The discussion began around the topic of husbands. That sounded fairly safe, and I cheered up. Our people weren't saying much, but they were listening.

"Well, when Neil and I got married, we agreed to each do our own thing. I wasn't going to give up my career, and he didn't have to give up his. Somehow, though, things haven't been the way I pictured them. He very rarely makes supper, and even when I remind him, he hardly ever remembers to put his dishes in the dishwasher. And he complains because I bring Stephanie to school in the morning, and he has to pick her up during rush hour. But he does agree that I need the car more than he does, because it's farther to where I work."

"It's very difficult for me to get across some of my ideas to Ben about how we could improve our relationship. He doesn't like the idea that I come down here and talk about our marriage in front of other people, although I'm sure he talks about it at the Squash Club."

Mrs. Grocholski stirred uncomfortably.

"Please participate, Sister."

"What do you do," she started out nervously, "if your husband hits you?"

"Yeah," said Georgia Wiseman, "and what if he starts yelling about clean floors right after he walks over them in his work boots?"

"If I had a husband like that, I'd leave," said one of the Centre ladies.

Linda Cunningham spoke up.

illustration by Heather Graham

"I did," she said. "After my husband choked me, I left. I went to see a psychiatrist, and he told me everything would be fine if I would just do what my husband told me. Then I went to Welfare, and they didn't want to give me any money. They told me if I would just do what my husband said, maybe he'd come back."

"What was it your husband wanted you to do?"

"I think he wanted me to be someone else. He choked me because he couldn't find his clean socks. They were right where I told him."

Everybody started to talk at once, but they were not communicating. It was like the two groups of women were speaking different languages.

The chairperson called us to order. She said we would discuss wages for housewives. "I think everyone here would agree on wages for housewives, wouldn't we?"

One of the other women said "Well, if they're poor. But I don't see why some middle class woman should get paid to sit on her fanny while I go out and work."

"Wait a minute," said Linda. "You mean everybody who would rather stay home and raise their kids should have to crawl to her husband for money?"

"But what do you care? I said you should get it anyway."

"Where do you think we come from? Lower Slobbovia? I had a choice — poverty or a bad marriage, and I chose poverty."

There were some red faces, and some muttering, and our ladies got up to go, murmuring about baby sitters, and how late it was getting. Chiclet and I decided to stay. We thought it might be interesting.

"I'm sorry the other ladies had to go, Ms. Gomez. But I think you'll enjoy the next topic — "Can lesbianism be a political weapon?"

We never did find out.

Next week we're meeting with the Housing Authority. We don't like them, and they don't like us, but that's all right. We know where we are.

Dorothy O'Connell helped to start the Ottawa Tenant's Council in 1968 and is currently its president.

Heather Graham is a Toronto artist.

illustration by Heather Graham

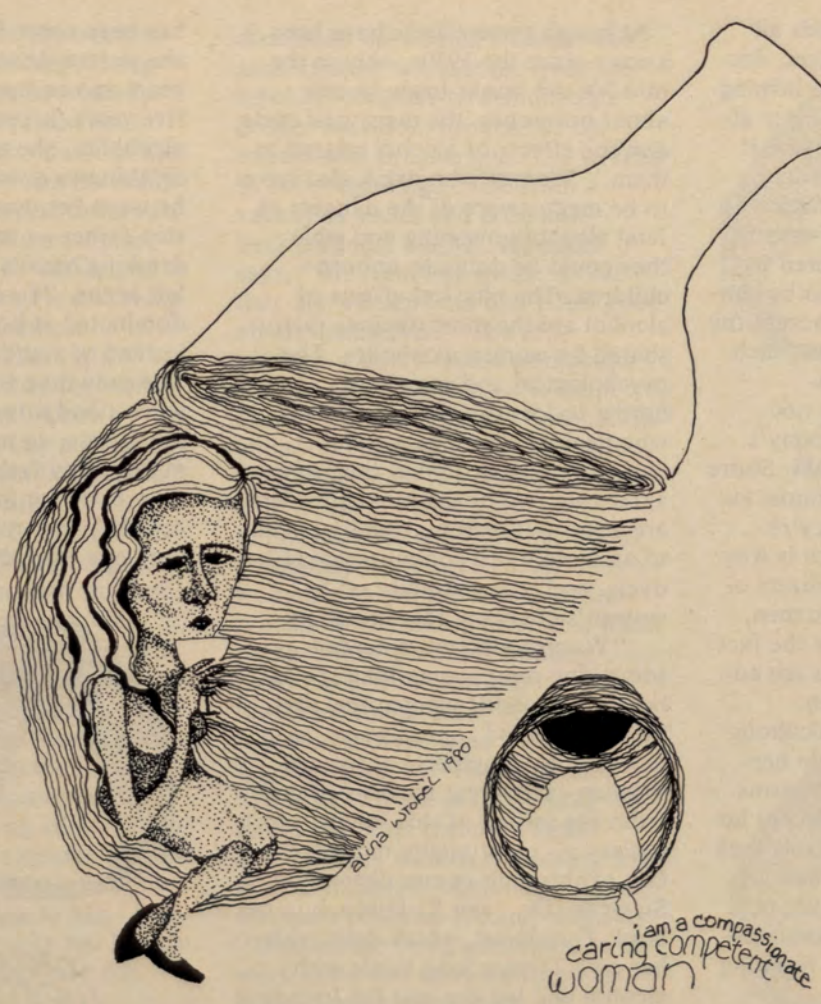


illustration by Alina Wrobel

Women for Sobriety:
Fighting the Secret Addiction

by Janet Bliss

She may be in her twenties, thirties or even sixties — a career woman, a single mother with small children or a housewife whose children have grown and left home. She may have found the pressures of the workplace too great, the demands of motherhood overpowering, or the loneliness too much to bear. Whatever her background or reasons, she is one of hundreds of thousands of Canadian women who have turned to the bottle to cope.

Estimating the actual number of women alcoholics in this country is difficult, since a woman's drinking may be protected by her family and a social system which cannot accept that a model wife or mother can also be an alcoholic. Experts working in the field of addictions generally agree that the number of women alcoholics is now about equal to that of men, whereas men alcoholics probably outnumbered women by at lease five to one fifteen years ago. "The number of women alcoholics is definitely increasing," says Doreen Shore, a consultant for the Community Extension Services Department of Alberta's Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (A.A.D.A.C.). "However, figures I have seen indicate that as many as 90% of the women are still left untreated."

Before treatment can begin, the drinking problem must be recognized. This recognition is made doubly difficult because so many women drink in isolation, therefore avoiding detection for a long period of time, and because society's image of women in general, and women who drink in particular, hinders identification of the problem. Ms. Shore said the word she hears most often related to a women who drinks is 'disgusting', often accompanied by the belief the woman is promiscuous. "I'd estimate that 40% of health care workers don't even ask women if they have an alcohol problem when they come in with a health complaint, because most people still think of the woman drunk as being a skid-row alcoholic, not a rising young executive or

somebody's mother, with kids all neat and clean. Social workers, doctors and the rest of us in the helping fields really have to examine our attitudes towards women, because it reflects in our treatment of them. "The outstanding characteristic of a woman alcoholic is low self-esteem. Again, I see this being fostered by our society. If a woman is to be considered healthy, she has to accept the behavioural norms of her sex, such as being emotional and non-aggressive, even if these are not really socially desirable in today's world." What this means, Ms. Shore added, is that women are almost expected not to cope when they're going through a crisis, which is why they are often given tranquilizers or other pills more readily than men, and which also accounts for the fact that more women alcoholics are addicted to drugs than are men.

Of course, the woman alcoholic also has an obligation to help herself. First, she must come to terms with the social stigma and accept her problem, then she must actively seek treatment. Unfortunately, most of the existing treatment facilities or programmes are geared predominantly to men, since alcoholism has long been considered a male disease. Although a few developments have occurred in the treatment of women alcoholics in Canada during the last few years — such as Women For Sobriety and Ottawa's Amethyst Women's Addiction Centre — the vast majority of women who drink are not getting the assistance they need. But why should women alcoholics warrant a special and separate treatment from that offered to men? For one thing, women actually have a different physical reaction to alcohol than men. Women weigh less and have a smaller percentage of body water than men, so alcohol is not as easily diluted and the same quantity of alcohol produces a greater effect on women. A woman's body also has more fatty tissue, and because fat does not absorb alcohol, a drink will enter her bloodstream and affect her nervous system far more quickly. Research has also shown that hormonal changes and the menstrual cycle play a significant role in determining a woman's response to alcohol. "It's a very new area," says Ms. Shore. "Although these effects have been known since the 1930s, only in the mid-70s did books begin to talk about hormones, the menstrual cycle and the effects of alcohol related to them." Women who drink also have to be made aware of the dangers of fetal alcohol poisoning and what they could be doing to unborn children. The physical effects of alcohol are the most obvious factor shared by women alcoholics. The psychological and social ones are harder to identify, but specialists who deal with women alcoholics, and reformed alcoholics themselves, agree that two of the most prevalent are a low self-esteem, usually linked to an inability to communicate effectively, and stress brought on by women's changing role in society.

"Women alcoholics needed something more, something special, because alcoholic women feel that they have failed . . . as wives, as mothers, as daughters, as women. Women carry great burdens of guilt from the feeling of this failure which society . . . continually reinforces. Out of this guilt comes depression." So writes Dr. Jean Kirkpatrick in her book *Turnabout*, which deals with her own 27-year long battle with alcohol and her reasons for founding Women For Sobriety (W.F.S.). This self-help organization and recovery programme for women alcoholics was founded in July, 1975, by Dr. Kirkpatrick and now has more than 300 groups in the United States. The organization spread to Canada in the fall of 1978, with the formation of groups in Toronto and St. Catharines, and there are now about 25 chapters in Canada. W.F.S. recognizes that women who drink have specific needs which are different than those of men, and that women can work together to solve their problems. The W.F.S. programme is comprised of 13 acceptance statements which are used to provide women with a new way of life through a new way of thinking. The emphasis is on positive thinking, taking responsibility for one's own life and capabilities, and offering help to other women who drink.

Louise (not her real name) is a bright, attractive and articulate middle-aged woman, who has been involved in helping a W.F.S. group get started in Edmonton. Although she has been sober for two years now, she started drinking heavily about 15 years ago and was an alcoholic for five years. Like many women alcoholics, she traces the start of her drinking to a single source — tension between her own children and their step-father — and she started drinking heavily when her children left home. "I was always very dominated at home, always said yes instead of standing up for myself. The only time I could let go was when I had a few drinks. I held so much hate, so much bitterness, so many guilty feelings, and I blamed everybody for my drinking but myself." Her road to recovery was a long one, including counselling at

A.A.D.A.C. after an arrest for impaired driving, an unsuccessful attempt at joining an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) group, a programme at a mixed treatment facility, and finally a six-month separation from her husband, who drinks heavily but is not an alcoholic. Louise is now a member of a large AA group and agrees with most proponents of W.F.S. that AA is complementary to the women's programme. She became involved in W.F.S. because she sees it offering something for women that AA does not. "I think it's a totally different outlet, a different approach to self-help." She said it can be of particular use to women who like a small group and who are deathly afraid of having to speak in front of large mixed groups. The faces and membership of the fledgling Edmonton W.F.S. group vary from meeting to meeting, but Louise said once the 13 statements of acceptance are read, there is always at least one that

is bothering several of the women, which sparks talk and helpful suggestions. W.F.S. stresses self-help through self-discovery, and encourages women not to dwell in the past but on what they can do today to improve their lives and develop a positive and self-confident image.

In Ottawa, W.F.S. was helped to get off the ground, and is still being promoted, by the Amethyst Women's Addiction Centre, a unique treatment facility for women alcoholics. "As far as I know, Amethyst is the only day treatment programme for women in Canada," says Amethyst Coordinator Nancy Huneault. Amethyst officially opened in April, 1979, although the first group of women went through in March of that same year. The idea for the centre, which is funded co-operatively through the federal government, donations, and a small grant from the regional municipality of Ottawa-Carleton, actually dates back to 1975, when a community committee representing all addiction services and various resource persons began looking at service gaps in the community. According to Ms. Huneault, it "didn't take too long to see there was absolutely zero for women alcoholics."

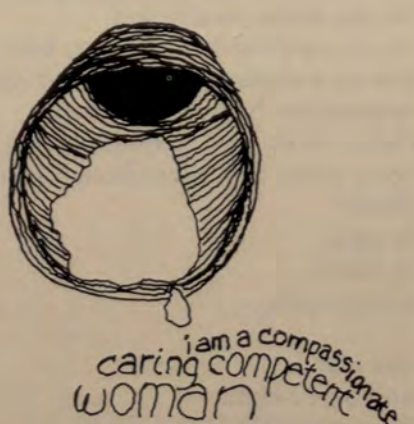
So far fifty-eight women, ranging in age from 20 to 70 years, have entered the year-long Amethyst programme. The first phase of the programme, involving only 10 women at one time, is a day treatment programme conducted in the centre three days a week for four weeks. The second phase involves follow up, a continuation of working on individual goals, and weekly visits for support and assessment. One unique aspect of the day treatment programme is that there is a child-care component for pre-schoolers. "We feel it is essential," said Ms. Huneault. "If a woman has a choice between taking care of herself and her child, she'll choose the child every time." The daily programme also includes a therapy group, usually working with self esteem; relaxation sessions, where the women are shown natural ways to relax without using alcohol; education sessions on issues such as stress and alcohol, the mental and social effects of alcohol, and making the best use of community resources; discussion on women's issues; and assertiveness workshops. Even the lunches, designed to demonstrate proper nutrition, are part of the educational programme. The women in the programme come from a variety of social and economic backgrounds, but Ms. Huneault says, "the recurring theme is that they are women who don't feel good about themselves." The programme's assertiveness workshops are one of the steps used to help change this poor image. "I think the ability to communicate effectively is very important. If a woman is not able to assert herself, and communicate what she is feeling, she is constantly being squelched. Many women also put themselves at the bottom of the list of priorities, when perhaps they should be putting themselves at the top and cutting a few other things off." Assertiveness is too often associated with aggressiveness, Ms. Huneault said, when the two are in fact totally different. Another common factor among many women alcoholics, she said, is the stress of coping with woman's position in today's society. "Women are being underpaid in the work place and unappreciated at home. Employed women are working at two full-time jobs — career woman and housewife — and it's not surprising they need a drink to be able to relax. Women expect a lot from themselves and society certainly corroborates that."

Much more needs to be done to help the woman alcoholic in Canada, because her drinking is often tied to even larger, more complex problems than those posed by the bottle. If more women are given the specific help they need to cope with their changing role in our society, maybe more of them will be able to live the Women For Sobriety credo: "I am a compassionate, caring, competent woman."

For more information on Women for Sobriety, write Rhia MacLeod, Women for Sobriety, 28 Lakehurst Drive, St. Catharines, Ontario.

Janet Bliss lives in Edmonton where she has worked in journalism and public relations.

Now entering her final year in Fine Arts at the University of Alberta, Alina Wrobel has contributed frequently to Branching Out *in the past few years.*



Poetry by Marilyn Bowering

Capturing the moments when dream impinges upon reality, Marilyn Bowering imbues her poetry with a haunting intensity. With a vision that is by turns painterly and dramatic, she has written four books of poetry. The latest of these, Sleeping with Lambs, *will be published in the fall by Press Porcepic. — H. P.*

BURNING THE HOLLY

Another change —
everything catches fire:
beard moss, found in the forest weeks ago,
dung,
earth, the stones set in the vases of holly
to hold water.
  Like a great twisted fish in a dream,
one hurt and turned intelligent
by evil deeds —
each red berry fires red to black.

At the cracks of the deep sea
shellfish make blood. Life at the edge
wants to get close:
the melting snow, the chickens trapped inside their house
by fear of snow,
the small hungry birds pecking down to rock.
  Again, the hot dream — swimming
at the bottom of a cliff. On top of the cliff
is this house, and outside a window,
a wooden vat holding the fish.
  His thick flanks glisten,
he has lungs, nearly feet,
has looked inside for weeks, born by accident.
His eyes change the most, red, clotted yellow,
somewhere between two suns.
Plants make food of him, feeding themselves more
alive, more red, more likely to die a real death
likely
to save
to shield
to surround

this night
and every night
oh every night.

ARTICULATING UNEASE

It is as easy as
going blind, mad, going
invisible.
It happens suddenly
after a long period of unease.
The long buried life, a major poison,
winds like Lethe through the core.
All in its path disappear —
relations, friends, all animals.
The world is peopled with self,
grows darker, more familiar and double.
You meet accomplices
of the same cloth:

it's a fact it is not words,
is any liquid streaming
from a tongueless boy.

WEATHER MOON

Now, while our bodies smell the same,
stunned to one shape,
I want to tell you the truth.
I want you to shut your eyes.

The rowan is bared and black,
blended east by wind;
its cast, yellow leaves
restless on earth or air.
The river rises,
breaking new pasture.
Animals mew together on high ground.

I want you to think of this —
a nun gathering her black skirts
as she climbs the gate.
Behind her the fence dips and drowns.
She is silent — that is the truth —
though she moves testing the depths
and bends her way like summer wheat.
Her breath stammers the moon wild and high,
burning the water skin.
The flooded fields blister.
    Weather moon.
  Nothing to do with ripeness
bred and dropped under the sun,
but a woman — black and chaste —
in flood.

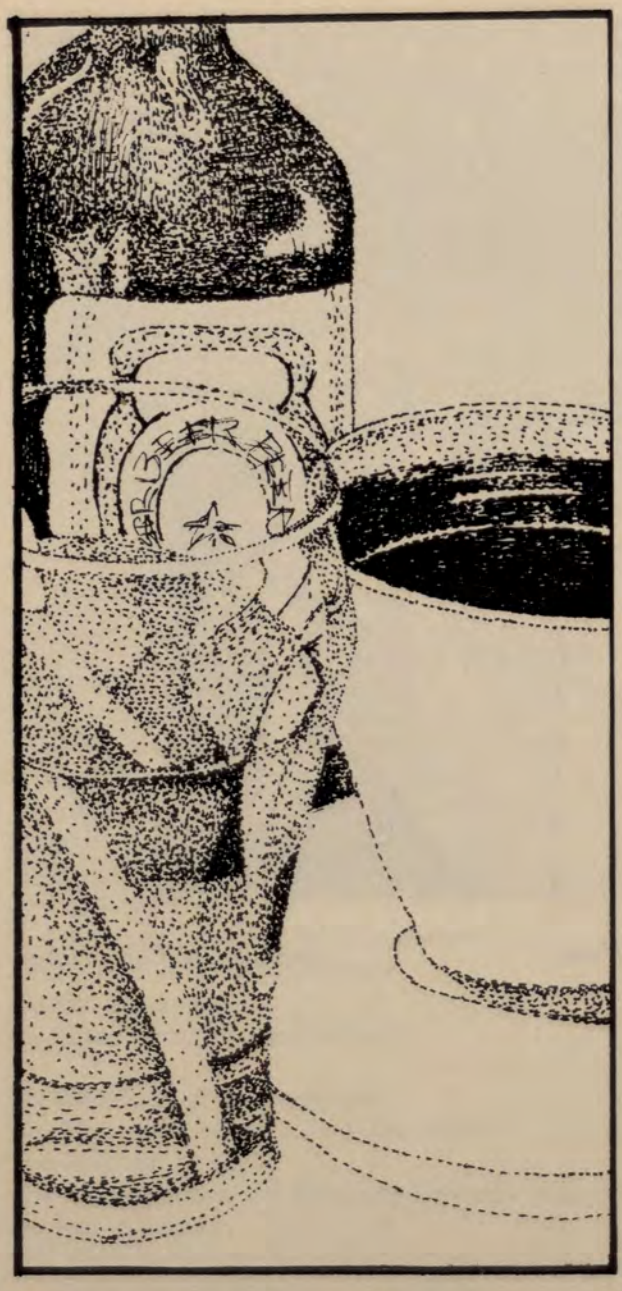
Weather Moon *illustration by Cathy Hobart*

CRYSTAL BALL

On the walnut table was a crystal ball
enclosing a red silk rose.
The rose paled in the sun,
the silk showed its ribs.

There was stemmed crystal on the shelf by the books,
and under the bookends
a white linen doily.
There, amidst the broken bindings, was *The Little Minister*
and Schoefield's commentaries —
these two were more beautiful than anything outdoors:
    the foxglove and stinging nettle,
the marigolds and pansies
which were continually uprooted
from the tanglebed of blackberries;
the currants shadowing the cedar fence.

Inside, there was a change of flowers,
the crystal, disturbed as water,
showing skinlike tones in its mirrors.



Passage by Water

fiction by Joan Clark

Doris didn't see the face of the night nurse, although the same woman came into her room three nights in a row and shone a flashlight at her. The round blinding arc swept through the dark, across the metal bed, a searchlight tracking a lone prisoner in a night compound.

The first time the night nurse came into her room Doris was hallucinating. Ten days before she'd had her bladder repaired, a necessity after child-bearing. Before the operation it had flopped down loosely, shapeless as a collapsed balloon which meant she spilled urine whenever she jumped, ran or sneezed. Now her bladder was sewn to her pubic bone, stitched into place so tightly it felt like an old leather shoe that has become wet, then left to dry stiff and hard in the sun. Its muscles had stopped working. Here she was, a thirty-seven year old housewife unable to pass water. She wanted to disown her body. She felt foolish, helpless, as if she were inhabiting a baby's body. Except that any baby was born being able to do what she couldn't. Babies came into the world screaming anger, wetting themselves freely. Doris could do neither.

Before Doris had gone to sleep, Mrs. Schoenburg, the afternoon nurse, a soft-spoken motherly woman, had brought Doris new pain killers, two round green pills. Doris took the pills eagerly. Her stitches were hurting and the tube the doctor had inserted through her stomach wall into her bladder was uncomfortable. The tube had a miniature white plastic tap on it as tiny as one on a dollhouse sink. The other end was connected to a plastic canteen, a Uripac, into which her bladder was emptied.

Mrs. Schoenburg emptied the afternoon's urine into the stainless steel kidney pan, poured it into a pitcher then wrote 800cc's on the record sheet.

"That's only 800 cc's for the day," she said. The frown between her eyes came and went so quickly Doris couldn't be sure there had actually been any relining of the skin. This was the way Doris remembered her mother's face: any censure, any displeasure was quickly concealed, wiped away; there was no certainty it had existed.

"But I drank five cups of tea, four glasses of juice and two cups of coffee and it was emptied this morning!"

"Ah well. Nevermind," Mrs. Schoenburg consoled her, "Perhaps the morning nurse forgot to put down her entry." She checked the record sheet. "Yes, that's right. There's nothing down for this morning. That accounts for it."

Mrs. Schoenburg reached over and switched off the light.

"Do you think I'll be able to go tomorrow?" Doris's voice was wistful.

Mrs. Schoenburg patted her arm. "It's early yet. Some women don't go until the second or third week. And then it's only a trickle that gradually increases. Other women are gushers: they just pass water all of a sudden. It's hard to say which you'll be. The important thing is to push fluids and relax. That's the secret. Now you get some sleep."

* * * * *

Doris's hallucination began with the night light, an orange cube recessed into the wall at the foot of her bed. When she came out of sleep, her eyes focussed on the orange cube. It glowed queerly in the dark. Doris blinked. The orange light sparked, flickered, became two. Doris closed her eyes. She heard a rush of whirling air near the door. She blinked again and saw something dark by the wall, something that whirled and spun like a top. An elongated top, a column, a pillar of black, mummy-bandaged. As it whirled closer the bandages unwrapped themselves, lengthening, snapping off the ceiling and walls. The mummy whirled around the foot of the bed, then veered toward the window, spinning. Suddenly it tilted itself and came straight toward Doris: there was

no mistaking its intent, its attack on her. Its orange eyes narrowed to glowing slits, its black bandages flapped across her feet, her legs, her chest, then up to her face, snapping at her nose, her mouth, smothering her. Doris's hands went up to tear them away. She opened her mouth to scream, to protest, to breathe. No sound came out.

The white arc of light swept across the bed, incurious, routine. Doris sat up in its glare, shaking her head to free herself, pawing the air. Her chest was heaving, sweat was running down her back. Thin strips of black snaked around her arms.

"A bad dream?" the night nurse asked from the doorway. Her voice was hollow like it was coming through a long metal tube.

"Not a bad dream. It was worse than that. It was an hallucination I think," Doris said slowly, "Something insidious."

The night nurse didn't ask for details but kept the flashlight trained on Doris's face. All Doris could see of her was a low stocky shape blocking the doorway.

"It must have been the green pills," Doris went on, "They must have caused it."

Still the night nurse stayed where she was; one of her hands holding the door open, the other the flashlight.

Doris wanted to shout, "Get that light off my face!"

But she couldn't say it just as she had been unable to scream.

"I'll make a note of it on your chart," the night nurse said and snapping off the flashlight, went out the door, leaving it ajar.

A corridor of yellow light, shining water, open sunny fields shone bright and warm beyond the door. Doris kept her eyes on the warm light, listening for sounds: the ringing phone, tapping oxfords, murmuring voices: the nursing station was right across from her room. Finally as she was sliding into sleep, gently this time, a narrow letter being eased into a wide envelope, she heard a voice. It seemed to be coming from a valley far away, past the fields and shining water.

"Miss-us," the voice called, plaintive, needing rescue, "Miss-us."

A hollow voice echoed down the valley, "It's all right, Gina. Go to sleep."

It was the old Italian lady two doors away in 310, six weeks in the hospital with a gall bladder operation. Doris heard her every night calling the nurses; she never used the buzzer. Sometimes she called for an hour before the night nurse finally went to her.

* * * * *

In the morning Doris drank a glass of juice, a glass of milk and two cups of coffee from her breakfast tray. After she had bathed and powdered herself, she pinned the offending Uripac to the inside of her nightgown where it didn't show except as an unnatural bulge on her hip. She imagined she resembled a diseased tree whose trunk was distended, the sort she saw in front of people's houses, varnished and hung with signs and lamps. Doris thought they made obscene use of deformity.

She went into the corridor, crossed to the kitchenette, opened the fridge and forced down two glasses of apple juice. Then the began to walk. Down one side of the wing, past bare walls painted buttercup yellow, across the end of the corridor where the colour changed to turquoise, then along the other wing where the walls were bubblegum pink. The colours were so determinedly cheerful, so garishly bright they looked like they had been chosen from a package of Easter egg dye. Although the floors were unblemished by scuffs or stains, a uniformed man was buffing the shining tiles with an electric polisher. He kept his head down, avoiding the string of women trailing past. One woman, a day out of a hysterectomy, staggered by, pale, unsteady, holding onto her metal intravenous stand for support. Clear fluid dripped down a tube into her arm; she looked like a prisoner of war surrendering to some ingenious method of water torture. Other women, three or four days out of surgery walked gingerly, one hand on the corridor railings, the other holding their stomachs. Some women managed to do this unobstrusively as if they were merely intent on keeping a hand pocketed: others were more careless, beyond modesty, boldly pushing their hands against their incisions.

Though her stitches pulled, Doris walked straight, hands at her sides. She walked and walked, stopping at the end of the corridor where there was a large picture window. Sealed behind the glass she heard no outside noises, saw no sign of movement except smoke from chimneys curling upward toward the low forehead of winter sky. The city was locked in white Siberian silence, in square straight bars of concrete, plate glass and pavement. Doris kept walking. Until she thought the morning fluids had worked themselves into her bladder. Until she felt the urge to have a bowel movement. That was important, Mrs. Schoenburg had said. Some women went by doing the two together.

* * * * *

Doris was sitting on the toilet with a magazine propped up on the top of the disposal can, reading, trying to keep her mind off going. The tap was carefully adjusted to simulate a gentle flow of water, a small brook falling over stones. In Doris's lap was a basin of warm water in which she held her hands. She couldn't figure out why keeping her hands in warm water should induce the urge to go but it did. She felt her bladder muscles pull in slightly. But the sensation to go was so weak that it had no effect. She tried to relax by forming a mental picture of herself as a sleek jet flying at cruising speed, moving effortlessly through the air. Coming in for a landing, coasting onto the runway, stopping, opening up the baggage compartment, the suitcases dropping out, one by one.

She had a bowel movement but no urine came with it. The bathroom had a rich fecund smell that was comforting. At home she used Pine Fresh to get rid of the odour but since being in the hospital she'd grown more appreciative of the powerful smell of her own feces. She was reassured by it, like a baby proudly filling its diapers.

The door burst open abruptly almost knocking the basin of water off Doris's knees. A fat arm reached in, jerked up the lid of the disposal tin, yanked out the white plastic liner and pulled the bag through the crack in the door. The magazine fell to the floor. Doris couldn't bend over to pick it up. There was no point anyway. The woman would be back again with a new plastic liner. There was also no point in resenting the intrusion. There

were no secrets in this ward: sanitary napkins hung in gunny sacks on doors, enema syringes and douches were thrown into the wastebasket for visitors to see, nurses and nurses's aides burst into the room without knocking, bringing in clean sheets, thermometers, catheters, medication, meal trays, water jugs. It was the same with the housekeepers. They started in the corridor at seven in the morning and kept coming into the room in erratic thrusts of energy: to dust, to mop, to clean the bathroom sink, disinfect the toilet bowl, empty the disposal cans.

Both the housekeeper's arms and legs came into the bathroom this time as a new plastic bag was inserted into the disposal can. Doris recognized the fat limbs as belonging to Jessie. It was Jessie's voice she heard every morning outside her door first and loudest. Grousing about the nurses. What they expected. It wasn't her job to pick up dirty laundry. It wasn't her job to carry out meal trays. Those nurses were always trying to get you to do their dirty work for them. You had to stand up to them; that's what you had to do.

Jessie disappeared again. Doris stood up, added more hot water to the basin, picked up the magazine, sat down and concentrated on choosing something to read. Most of the articles were about women who seemed freer than herself: Do-It-Yourself-Divorces, The Advantages of Being Bisexual, Adoption for Singles. Even the titles depressed her: she was so far behind the times, there seemed no hope of her catching up or even understanding what was going on.

The bathroom door was flung open again and there was Jessie in full glory, her fatness encased in a mint green uniform, her frizzy hair framing puttish, acne-scarred skin. Jessie shoved the mop between Doris's legs. Or tried to. Doris resisted. The least the woman could do was ask her to move her feet.

Jessie poked the mop under the sink whanging it roughly against the tiles.

"You still on the can?" she grinned raw friendliness at Doris showing a wide band of pinkish-purple gums above her dentures.

Doris nodded but kept her eyes on the magazine.

Jessie tilted her head to one side and leaned on the mop bunching up her heavy breasts.

"Tried beer yet?"

Doris looked up. "Why? Is beer supposed to work?"

"Work! I'll say it works! Some of them younger doctors prescribe it. Maybe your doctor don't know about it."

"You can't have beer in the hospital."

"Ha! That's what you think. I know two women down in chronic keep wine in their closets. You can bet your bottom dollar their doctors know about it. There was a woman here last month in the same fix as you. She had beer." Jessie leaned over conspiratorially, "Kept it in her shower."

That would be a good place to keep it all right. Doris wasn't allowed showers yet so the plastic curtain remained closed.

"See what's good about beer," Jessie went on, "is it goes right through you so fast. Works like a charm."

"Maybe I should try it. I've tried everything else."

"That's the spirit. You get your hubby to bring you some beer the next time he comes and you'll learn to pee all right." Jessie stabbed the corner with the mop then closed the bathroom door, satisfied. Doris could hear her in the bedroom banging the mop against the baseboards, the closet door, the waste can.

* * * * *

Lena Whynaught was a big bold girl who was Doris's seatmate in grade three back when there were two to a desk. That was when Doris's parents were teaching in Harbour Mines. It was only because her mother was the teacher that Doris was stuck with Lena who lived in a shack down by the mine with nine other kids and smelled stale, as if she ate, slept and played inside a breadbox. When Doris complained of the smell her mother dismissed her with: someone has to sit there and it might as well be you. Sooner or later you have to learn to live with the Lena's of this world. When she was doing arithmetic Lena picked her nose, balled up the boos and dropped them into the inkwell. Doris started biting her fingernails. Even so her mother wouldn't move her seat. Not until May when Lena came to school with impetigo, yellow, oozing crusted sores spotting her arms and legs.

Earlier in September when her mother was teaching the class manners, she had trouble with Lena. Both of Doris' parents attacked teaching in places like Harbour Mines with missionary zeal, regarding them as temporary outposts they would work in while they still had their strength and vigour.

Lena put up her hand.

"Please Mrs. I got to pee."

Doris's mother suspended the chalk in front of the blackboard and smiled encouragingly.

"That's not what we say, Lena."

Lena put her hand to her crotch.

"Please Mrs., I got to piss."

The smile remained fixed.

"What we say, Lena, is we have to go to the bathroom."

Even toilet wasn't good enough. The English language must not be corrupted with vulgarisms. It must be refined, exalted, made pure.

"But we have a privy, Mrs.!" Lena said, looking around the class, enjoying the audience.

Only then did the chalk touch the blackboard, the smile disappear. Had her mother forgotten she'd used an outhouse as a farm girl?

"All right, Lena, You may go. I'll see you after school."

The grade two teacher, Miss Fairweather, had made them hold up either one finger or two and say aloud number one or number two. Doris didn't know why it mattered for the whole class to know which you had to do until Squirt Layton told her. If you put up two fingers, Mrs. Fairweather didn't question how long you were gone from class whereas you were allowed only five minutes for one finger. Most of the boys said number two until Miss Fairweather caught on and questioned them closely in front of everybody threatening to write notes home to parents, making sure big jobs, as she called them, were done at home.

In grade one it was Nancy Stewart of all people who needed reeducating. She came to school the first day with long ringlets and a birthday party dress of blue velvet and

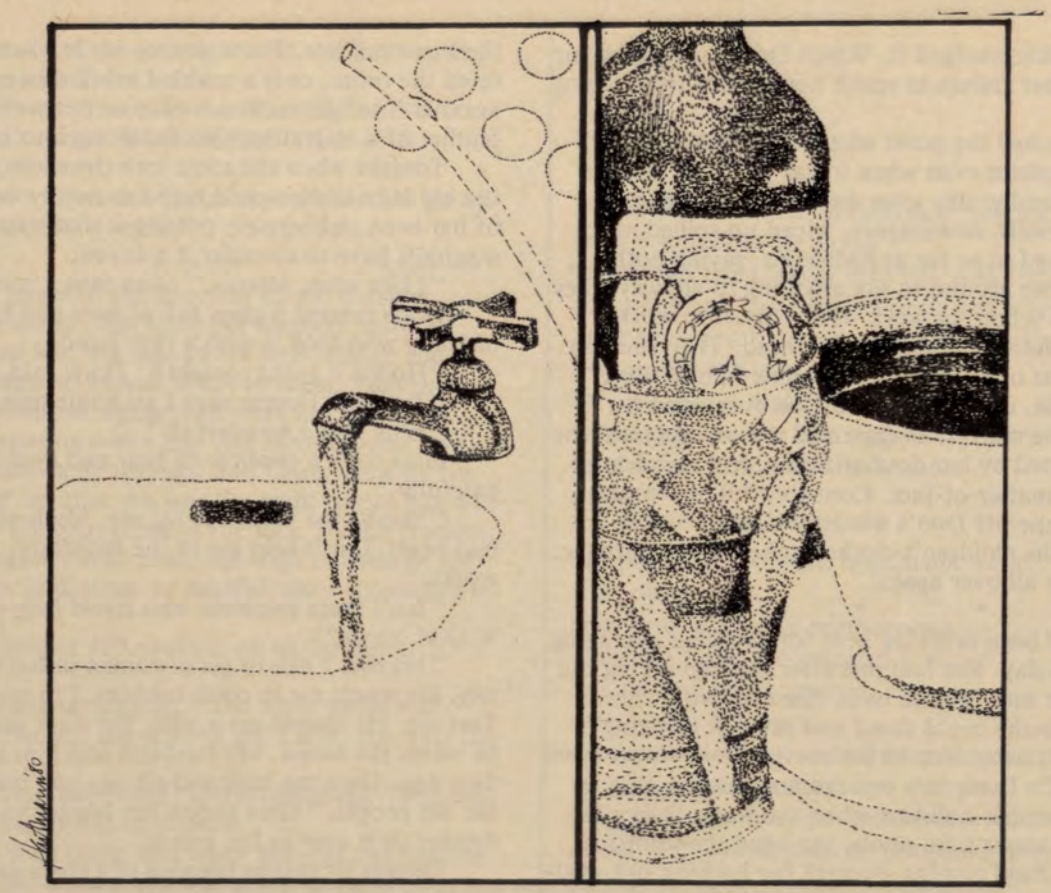


illustration by Barbara Hartmann

white lace. Before recess she put up her hand and asked to go tookies and big-unies. After that Squirt called her Tookies whenever he got the chance.

* * * * *

The nurses called it passing water: the doctor voiding. Doris's husband, Don, said having a leak and crap. When they were younger her children said wee-wee and poop; since then she had taught them to say urinate and bm. She was no longer sure of these words. Choosing the right word had become important to her. She had the idea that if she came upon a certain arrangement of words it would have the power of a chant and the muscles of her bladder would magically open up like the doors of Ali Baba's cave. She remembered how effective schoolground chants were in exorcising tale-tattlers.

Tattle-tale, tattle tale
Tie you on the bull's tale
When the bull begins to pee
You shall have a cup of tea

Jody Strom was a little girl who used to play with Doris's ten-year-old daughter, Amanda. Until Doris caught her with her pants down defecating under the spruce tree on the front lawn. When Doris asked her what she thought she was doing, Jody simply pulled up her pants and walked home leaving Doris staring down at the droppings lined up like a row of sausages in front of the tree. No dog would do that. The child must want attention. She'd better tell Marg Strom. Since the divorce Marg had gone back to university to study social work. She was away all day. Jody must be trying to tell her mother something.

Doris waited until she thought Jody would be in bed before she crossed the street. Through the window she could see books and papers spread over the kitchen table. Marg came to the door wearing reading glasses.

Doris tried to be brief.

"Look Marg, I hate to bother you but I think you should know that Jody's been defecating on our front lawn. Judging from the number of droppings it looks as if she's been doing it for a couple of weeks." Doris felt this was a reasonable beginning: a statement of fact.

Marg looked annoyed. "Come off it Doris. Did you come all the way over here to tell me about a few turds? I've got a term paper due tomorrow."

"Well, if it was *my* daughter doing it, *I'd* want to be told." Doris didn't know why she felt it necessary to explain this.

"You and I are different. I don't let details like that bother me. I've got better things to do with my time."

Doris was not about to let this pass.

"Perhaps you'd better spend more time with your daughter instead of at the university. I mean it is social work you're taking, isn't it? What better place to start than at home!" The bandages flew out of Doris's mouth like tongues of fire. "Maybe you should take the time to see what your daughter's done to our lawn. And when you come, bring a shovel!"

After she had stormed home, Doris felt terrible to have said so much, or to have said it the wrong way. There were two other children besides Jody. It must be hard raising them alone. The next morning she went to the florist and bought a white rose in a bud vase, getting Amanda to take it over, to show Marg she was sorry.

Marg never acknowledged it. Which Doris took to be further proof of her failure to speak her mind without going too far.

It had reached the point where she would avoid making a complaint even when it was justified. She did this with her family; day after day she picked up dirty clothes, wet towels, newspapers, wiped up spilled milk and mud tracked in as far as bedrooms, saying nothing; there was no one around to say anything to anyway, they were all off to school or work when she set to work cleaning up, muttering, shaking her head. Then one day she would burst open angrily: the whole family: Don, Bruce, Amanda, came under fire. She overstated her case, played the martyr, exaggerated the wrongs until she became disgusted by her dramatization, her inability to be casual and matter-of-fact. Contrite, full of remorse, she would scrape off Don's windshield, start his car for him, pick up the children's clothes, take out the garbage, begin the cycle all over again.

* * * * *

Doris had been drinking beer for two days averaging three bottles a day. She had one after her nap taking the bottle with her into the sitz bath. She ran two inches of water as hot as she could stand and sat in it drinking beer. The idea, according to the nurses, was to pass water in the water. To Doris this was tantamount to going in the sea. On summer holidays when she was a little girl playing in the warm tidal pools, she liked the squirting release of hot fluid coming through her bathing suit while she was in the water. Her mother, reading beside her father beneath a beach umbrella, would call out intermittently, not to forget to go to the bathroom although what she meant was squatting down in one of the shaded valleys between the sand dunes out of sight of the train tracks. Doris tried to recall those days, closing her eyes, leaning her head back, the beer making her light-headed, trying to hypnotize herself into thinking she was a fish, one that rested in the shallows, the fluids of its body moving outward with the tide. It didn't work.

She had another beer with Don during evening visiting hours. After he left she tried to squeeze in another: it was really too much. Her bladder must look like an engorged woodtic. One night, a Saturday after Don had gone home early, Doris took a bottle of beer with her into Gina's room. She'd taken to visiting the old lady in the evening thinking if she got more attention, she'd be less likely to call out during the night. Whenever she visited Gina, Doris took something with her: a flower, a chocolate bar, the newspaper.

The first time Doris went into Gina's room she'd been appalled by its starkness. When she walked past other rooms she saw bouquets of flowers lined up on windowsills: roses, mums, carnations, done up with ferns and bows. There were boxes of chocolates, books, magazines and always a new pastel coloured bathrobe folded across the foot of the bed. The old lady had nothing. Except for the empty water glass on the night table and the woman herself sitting in the corner chair with a blanket over her knees to cover up what the blue hospital gown did not, the room might have been unoccupied. Gina had the abundant white hair and sad brown eyes of a defeated matriarch. Even the sagging tea-coloured jowels couldn't disguise the strong cheekbones, the thrusting jaw. There was no smile whenever Doris entered the room, only a nodded acknowledgement that another brief distraction had come her way like the feather of a migrating bird fluttering into her lap.

Tonight when she came into the room, Doris asked the old lady if she would help her out by drinking some of her beer, deliberately putting it that way so Gina wouldn't have to consider it a favour.

"I like wine, Missus," Gina said, "but I take beer."

Doris poured a glass full of beer and handed it to the old lady who took it with a firm hand.

"How's it going tonight?" Doris said.

"Terrible. Doctor says I go home tomorrow."

"Why that's wonderful!"

Gina took a swallow of beer and eyed Doris balefully.

"Maybe for you. Not for me. My husband have a bad heart. Can't help me to the bathroom. My son works."

"Isn't there someone who could help you? A V.O.N. nurse?"

"Maybe. I like to get a woman in but my son won't pay. He wants me to cook for him. I'm no wife to him. Too old. He should get a wife. He stays with us because he wants the house. My husband and him build it long time ago. Once my husband go, my son put me in a place for old people," Gina shook her head, "in Italy my mother turn over in her grave."

Despite or maybe because of Gina's pessimism Doris couldn't resist the urge to patronize.

"I'm sure once you get home, things will work out for the best."

"Maybe Missus," Gina said sourly, "Maybe." She finished the beer and held the empty glass toward Doris. Doris took the glass to the bathroom, rinsed it out and brought it back three-quarters full of water. The old woman waved it away.

"Is there anything I can do for you before I go?"

"No, Missus, No," Gina said. "Nothing."

Her sad eyes dropped to her lap. Doris's visit was no more, no less than she had expected.

* * * * *

Doris had been in bed an hour staring into the dark. As usual her door had been left ajar. Through the crack she could hear wild whoops and word gusts coming from the nursing station. She remembered it was Saturday: the nurses must be having a party. She got up, unpinned her Uripac from the bed and padded across the bare floor to the door.

"Miss-us! Miss-us! I need you!" With all the commotion in the nursing station Gina's plaintive voice might have been coming from the bottom of a well. "Miss-us! Come quick! I need you!"

Obviously no one was going to help the old lady. Doris put her on slippers and padded down to 310. When she pushed open the door Gina whined, "Oh Missus, you came. I got to go bad," said assuming Doris was the night nurse said, "That lady, she gave me some beer."

"I'm not the nurse. I can't take you," Doris said, "But I'll ring for someone."

She went over to the bed and pushed the buzzer.

The old woman grabbed hold of Doris's arm. Doris

tried to pull away but the grip tightened as Gina began to lever herself up with Doris's arm.

"Please Missus. You take me. That night nurse is mean. She won't come. She hates me."

Doris jerked away.

"No! I can't lift you. I'll pull my stitches. I'll go up to the station and get a nurse."

* * * * *

When she stood in the doorway of the nursing station, simply stood there until the laughter subsided and they noticed her, she was aware how strange she must look, at least to herself if not to them. They were used to women whose nightgowns were hitched up by plastic tubes exposing white legs and shaved pubic hair. One of the nurses came forward and Doris knew by the stocky shape of her that she was the night nurse. She was unprepared by the youngness of the face, by the freckles, the childish Raggedy-Ann nose, the wide flatness of the eyes. She didn't look mean or hateful, only untouched by experience.

"The old lady in 310 needs to go to the toilet," Doris told her.

"She's always saying that," the night nurse said, "When we get her up, she doesn't go. Later, she wets the bed."

"I'm sure that happens," Doris conceded, "But the fact is, she definitely has to go now."

She didn't stop there. She knew she was patronizing again but she didn't care. She was going to say it anyway. She looked at the night nurse. "You know," she said, "it wouldn't hurt to remind yourself that you might be eighty-four someday and needing attention."

Doris crossed the hall, got into bed and immediately went to sleep.

Two hours later her bladder woke her up. The sensation to go was so strong she got up too quickly and was pulled back by the tube pinned to the bed. She bumped into the night table. It banged against the wall. Fumbling with the pin she tried to free herself. She couldn't manage it. She yanked the tube clear, disconnecting the Uripac from her bladder. Not bothering to turn on the light, she followed the well-worn path to the bathroom. As she was settling onto the toilet, she kicked over an empty beer bottle she'd forgotten to put back in the shower. It clattered into the corner.

The night nurse opened the bathroom door and shone the flashlight on Doris's face.

"I heard banging. Are you OK?"

"Of course I'm OK," Doris said, "And don't shine that light in my face."

The flashlight beam dropped to the floor and circled the beer bottle.

"It looks like you've been drinking."

"That's right," Doris said triumphantly, "And I'm peeing too."

"You're what?"

"I'm PEEING!," Doris shouted it out. Open Sesame. The proud rush of yellow fluid was coming warm between her legs.

There was no doubt about it. She was a gusher all right.

Joan Clark is co-editor of Dandelion magazine. She lives in Bragg Creek Alberta and has published several children's books.

CONFINES

In the slow confine of intimacy, tell us
how you stood up alone
& pushed the cleaver into the wall, right thru
the calendar, near mid-month just after pay-day,
after rent, the bank payment, & the forty
you owed to Don.
Or anyone; it makes no difference
when you look at the wall now, or try
to chop onions with the broken
edge

On pay-days you are like Jesus, only
a bit drunker,
later you are just a *bonhomme*
who can't pay the price of a taxi.
& I am the tall woman
who keeps a record,
who eats the food out of the refrigerator.
Who goes away, stubborn, carrying
your fists with her, your cleaver,
a loaf of bread & salami, chopped onion

Your intimacy wants
to have public dinners, make chrysanthemums grow
in a basement apartment, to save money
for a house or holiday, a car in ten years, a potato.
Instead I am the woman who
pleads insanity,
who sits in the park eating your sandwiches, who
won't listen, who doesn't want
anything to get better,
the woman who doesn't want to be driven in a car.

The look you had, sheepish, when
you turned around to me, showing
the cleaver you pulled out from the wall, the slashed
calendar.
After all that, the two of us laughing, tell them
How we stood then, arms
clasped knowingly —

by Erin Mouré

Erin Mouré lives in Vancouver and works for VIA Rail. Her first collection of poetry, Empire, York Street, *was published by Anansi.*

Shoring Up The Nuclear Family

the history of the Mothers' Allowance

by Veronica Strong-Boag

No one doubts today that sole-support mothers are poverty's chief victims in Canada. The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1970 and a host of similar studies regularly identify them as our most disadvantaged citizens. Their predicament is not new. The experience of such women and their children has been precarious and marginal throughout our history. Nor has their plight gone unnoticed. Both private and public benefactors have singled them out from all other distressed groups as especially deserving of relief. It was to assist these women that Canada initiated its first systematic income supplement programmes. Today's welfare mothers are the heirs of that experiment.

This financial assistance, most often referred to as mothers' allowances[1] provides prophetic insight into the state's view of women, especially the impoverished. Revealingly, mothers' allowances were directed primarily at the reconstruction of the nuclear family as the best environment for child development. Modern-minded state planners, particularly in the new profession of social work, rejected such substitutes as orphanages and set about to reaffirm the importance of the maternal role for women. When individual males failed, by reason of death or illness, to provide for their families, the public purse should pay the mother to play her essential role properly.

[1] The mothers' allowance is distinguished from the family allowance or baby bonus.

World War I made Canadians acutely conscious of the threat posed by family breakdown, juvenile delinquency and impoverished maternity, when the departure of Canada's forces overseas left many families without male direction. Stable successful families were the bedrock upon which a nation built for war or peace. Since women were believed to be preeminently the custodians of young citizens, female parents merited whatever assistance might be necessary to fulfill their essential function. Where before mother-led families had been ignored or assisted by private charities, patriotism now decreed that the home life of Canada's fighting men be more systematically safeguarded. Poorer families either temporarily or permanently bereft of male leadership had to be elevated to a semblance of middle-class respectability. This task was increasingly directed by pioneer social workers, usually female and middle-class, who found new jobs in the growth of social security services. These professionals accepted traditions which overwhelmingly allocated responsibilities according to sex.

The introduction of mothers' allowances' legislation between 1916 and 1920 was speeded by the precedent of wartime assistance to dependents of military pesonnel. The five provinces west of Quebec, beginning with Manitoba in 1916, Saskatchewan in 1917, Alberta in 1919, and British Columbia and Ontario in 1920 led their eastern counterparts in this as they did in woman suffrage. Two more offered allowances before World War Two — Nova Scotia beginning in 1930 and Quebec in 1937. New Brunswick had an act from 1930 but no funds were distributed until 1940.

Allowances varied in coverage and administration from province to province. Eligibility always included needy widows with two or more children but sometimes excluded the wives of the insane, the ill or the imprisoned. Unmarried mothers and divorcees did not meet great sympathy with only B.C. regularly considering their plight. For many years applicants with only one child were not considered unless in the most wretched circumstances. In a further effort to safeguard provincial budgets children's eligibility ended at school leaving age, usually 14. In all jurisdictions, whatever the number of dependents, rigorous means and residence tests screened out many applicants whose need was great. Finally, candidates who met all objective requirements had to show good moral character as defined by the provincial inspector or social worker.

All jurisdictions foresaw the new laws producing a secure basis for responsible mothering. Paid by the state to perform tasks within their own homes women would shore up the nuclear family among the poor. Such service was not to be left to chance. Inasmuch as possible it was to be guaranteed. Right from the beginning all biological mothers who appeared unworthy of the public trust were to be refused. The state through its social work agents assumed the right

to supervise and, if necessary, reshape dependent motherhood. Well-meaning as such intervention was, it transformed sole-support mothers into waged labourers within an institution which imposed standards set by government bureaucracies. Not surprisingly, independence, enterprise and experimentation by women who were first and foremostly employed as mothers was rarely envisioned or encouraged by state planners.

Once she had established her right to allowances, a woman discovered that her difficulties were by no means over. In no province was assistance sufficient to maintain decent standards of good health, not to mention comfort. In the majority of cases allowances were to be supplemented by earnings from mothers and their offspring. This too had strict limits. Too much success in adding to the family budget immediately reduced the government grant proportionately. Ironically, pitifully low levels of maintenance with strict restrictions on earnings, intended as they were to discourage application from any but the most desperate, also helped keep recipients down and out by discouraging a search for higher paying jobs. No doubt it also encouraged a certain amount of ingenuity on the part of many applicants who were determined to live above the meagre standards imposed by tight-fisted administrators.

Part-time jobs were the preferable way of supplementing allowances. According to social workers such employments should provide the basis for women's full-time work when allowances came to an end, but the immediate result was to affirm the traditional supplementary wage role for women. In the twentieth century, as they had so often in the past, working-class mothers formed a permanent pool of cheap and occasional labour.

Yet if women in the client category reaped mixed benefits from these income supplements, those in social work, itself largely a female occupational ghetto, prospered. Mothers' allowances covered thousands of families and required extensive supervisory personnel. Early volunteers, again overwhelmingly female, were soon rejected under the direction of such pioneer professionals as Charlotte Whitton who insisted that only trained investigators could ensure an acceptable level of service from applicants. As instruments of the middle-class state, social workers instructed their poorer sisters in the proper performance of their duties while implicitly reserving the right to withdraw funds or even remove childen if standards were not met. Class dictated the relationship of these two groups of women just as it set the terms of the roles assumed by their husbands in the marketplace.

Then as now some welfare mothers found supervision extremely irritating. Many after all had coped successfully as parents for years. What need had they for instruction from investigators whose class and ethnic background were frequently so different from their own? Other clients, however, welcomed social workers who might replace, at least in part, the support and interest they missed from husbands. Sometimes, too, one woman's sympathies for another transformed their essentially bureaucratic relationship into something warm and even affectionate.

Whatever their experience of welfare, women had few alternatives. Families were extremely vulnerable to the loss, for any reason, of the male bread-winner. The precarious income of labourers, small farmers, miners, clerks and small businessmen in particular often provided barely enough when men were alive and healthy. Disaster almost inevitably cast their families onto charity of some sort. Repercussions were all the greater when

illustration by Alina Wrobel

CIGAR STORE SUNDAYS

the sunday rows
of faceless men
are here alone
with the measured
swish of changing pages
    practiced eyes skim
    mark their patterns
    up-down-up-across or
    up-down
swish

here/they are
men not husbands
undisturbed/understood
part of the display

i long to reach
through the magic space
with feminine arm
seize a copy/join the line
to see their faces

by Rhona McAdam

Originally from Victoria, B.C., Rhona McAdam studied English at the University of Alberta where she just finished her B.A. This is her first published poem.

children were young and the wife least able to augment the family budget.

Before coming on to mothers' allowances women used every possible means of staying afloat. They turned regularly to other forms of public assistance, to relatives and adult children, to employment, to boarders and to savings and insurance for additional funds. Records from every province acknowledged what sacrifices mothers made to preserve their families. Ontario's report on 3,870 applicants in 1922-23, for instance, revealed 2,140 or 55.29% to be engaged in some type of paid remuneration: 924 charring, 450 taking roomers, 249 knitting or sewing, 182 in factory work, 135 in farm work, fruit picking and the like, 102 clerking, 26 nursing, 7 in professions and 65 in business. Desperation could produce highly unorthodox solutions as was the case with an Ontario woman who supported five children and a husband with terminal cancer by fishing, shooting, trapping and guiding. For all such heroism many mothers failed to keep their families together. A woman's income, usually one half of a man's for the same work, was rarely sufficient.

Not surprisingly, the impact of a regular source of additional income on these women could be tremendous. For some, at least, the guaranteed government allowance must have been a more certain source of comfort than wages which economic disaster or a husband's whim could withhold. The impact of receiving money, which was demonstrably their own, for their own allocation, albeit under some supervision, can only be imagined. Did the grants produce, as feminists hoped, an enhanced appreciation of the dignity and value of motherhood? In the beginning this may have been so. Prolonged contact with budget-conscious and moralizing provincial administrations and their agents, however, increasingly transformed such recognition into a badge of humiliation. Women today rarely find anything positive in the designation 'welfare mothers'.

The early shift in nomenclature from pensions to allowances reflected the quickly emerging focus on the needs of children rather than mothers. The singling out of youngsters insured that women's special predicament, with all the shortcomings it underlined in marriage law and economic opportunity went largely ignored. The fact that the primary object of allowances was the preservation of family life meant that once again women won redress, and that only partial, from society's unequal treatment, because they were mothers. In an ironic fulfillment of the feminist dogma which stressed women's distinctive maternal qualities, the most important reform legislation passed after the woman suffrage campaign in English Canada subsumed the cause of women under that of children.

By subsidizing impoverished mothers governments could claim to be progressive. At the same time allowances in no way challenged the powerful traditions which set men and women apart. Similarly, provinces' failure to offer girls equal education opportunities, to legislate equal wages for equal work, and to prohibit discrimination in hiring, assisted prevailing socialization practices in directing women to inferior positions both in the home and the workplace. Mothers' allowances like the newly funded home economics programmes in Canada's schools affirmed women's special responsibility for childcare and housework. This was hard enough, involving as it did the sacrifice of alternate and perhaps happier amibitions but in return the female clients of the new welfare state found at best uncertain authority and dignity as mothers. The intrusion of middle-class supervisors and the imposition of external standards undermined recipients' self-respect and self-confidence. As a result welfare mothers are no strangers to the crippling alienation which characterizes so many waged employments in modern society.

Veronica Strong-Boag taught in the Department of History at Concordia University in Montreal this year. She is now on the faculty at Simon Fraser University.

A Time of Harvest

interview with Jane Rule

by Sarah Kennedy

Jane Rule's first novel, Desert Of The Heart, *was published in 1964. As in her later novels, Rule portrayed lesbianism as a natural expression of human relationship, as an experience to be affirmed and celebrated. Many reviewers agreed Rule's treatment of lesbianism in* Desert Of The Heart *was perhaps too frank, and almost made lesbian love seem desirable. Over the next ten years, in response to the resurgence of the women's movement and gay liberation, publishers began to grant space to a greater, more positive range of views on the subject of lesbianism. By 1973, Doubleday had commissioned Rule to write* Lesbian Images, *a book intended to serve as a statement about the author's own "attitudes toward lesbian experience, as measured against the images made by other women writers in their work and/or life."*

Rule is currently writing essays, experimenting with some short autobiographical pieces, and awaiting publication of her most recent novel, Contract With The World. *I met with her in March at her home on Galiano Island, B.C. She discussed the climate and direction of the women's movement, the lesbian/feminist press, and her own writing since the publication of* Lesbian Images. *S.K.*

Sarah Kennedy: *How would you describe the present state of the women 's movement compared to seven or eight years ago?*

Jane Rule: While I've been away from what's going on, my sense of what has happened to a lot of people in the movement is that they've stopped talking so much and they've started doing a lot more. They're much more involved and visible in the creation of the women's movement, doing what expresses those values and that philosophy.

In what ways are you still involved in the women's movement?

Because I live here on the Island I'm not active, as I was when I was in Vancouver, meeting with consciousness-raising groups and doing seminars. So mostly I'm writing for feminist and gay magazines and papers and, very occasionally, I give a seminar, but it's centered on writing.

Do you still see that lesbians are considered a threat to the women's movement?

In the most conservative parts of the women's movement, yes. In the academic world, for instance, there's still a great deal of nervousness among women academics who are interested in women's literature, but feel that to introduce a lot of lesbian material would be dangerous or distorting. Generally, I think that lesbians are much more accepted than they were at the beginning.

Has there been a shift in tone in response to your work, critical or otherwise, over the last ten years?

Yes, in Canada there's a lot more response and a lot more hostility.

Why more hostility?

A first book is always fairly gently treated. *Desert Of The Heart* got a number of very shy reviews, but very few attacks. When I started writing about whole communities and letting lesbians and male homosexuals just wander around among other characters, that was a lot more threatening.

Does the women's movement react with hostility toward your work?

Both the women's movement and the lesbian movements want literature to be propagandistic, and mine is not. Therefore, there's a lot of complaint. There's also a lot of support. Lesbians want nothing but superwomen to be portrayed. If they have problems, those problems are coming all from the outside, and being surmounted, and that isn't the way the world works.

In Lesbian Images, *you said "The greatest question is still how free writers will be to express what they know, how much effect the women's movement will have, insisting that women's voices finally be heard . . . " Do you feel the writer's freedom has increased in this regard?*

Enormously. It still isn't possible to publish some kinds of radical statements in the major presses, but compared to ten years ago even the most staid establishment presses are accepting a great deal more material.

What kind of future do you see for the lesbian/feminist small press publishing movement?

I think it's very important. They've had a hard time. But, a press like Naiad* has made a great contribution and will go on doing so if they can stay financially afloat. The job they ought to do is to publish our younger writers. It's very difficult to get a first novel published now in the establishment presses. The other important thing that Naiad is doing is reissuing work like the Renee Vivien novel, material that has gone out of print and that is difficult to get in libraries. They can bring back our history in a way that makes it accessible to many more people. I think their third function is to print the most radical material that the established writers write so that that can get out to its audience too.

In 1978 the gay liberation journal The Body Politic *sponsored The Great Canadian Lesbian Fiction Contest, which both you and Marie-Claire Blais judged. What kind of response did you get?*

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* The Naiad Press Inc. is a lesbian-feminist publishing company, begun in 1973. Write 7800 Westside Drive, Weatherby Lake, M.O., U.S.A. 64152 for more information.

We got forty manuscripts; all of them were interesting.

Did the stories present any recurrent images and themes particular to the lesbian experience?

Lots of coming out stories. Lots of struggle with sexual identity. The question came up over and over again, "how am I to deal with this sexuality in terms of the world I find myself in?"

How about the writers seeing their characters as victim?

There was a lot of that. The least good of the stories, probably the most amateur, were more concerned with victimization. It may be that the people writing about victimization were not writers, but people who desperately needed to say that experience. I would guess they were more autobiographical statements.

Other than the victory of having been able to publish a positive statement about lesbian experiences in Lesbian Images, *what has been the book's overall, long term effect?*

It's just come out in Germany, so its life is continuing, and its audience is expanding all the time. I suspect that its greatest use is going to be as a reference work in libraries. I get letters from lesbians who are glad to have a book like that to put them in touch with more of their own literature. I am corresponding with a woman who is writing a biography of Willa Cather, and I feel as if other biographers who are dealing with those writers may deal in a more perceptive way because of the emphasis in *Lesbian Images* on their sexuality and the emotional climate of their lives. How long *Lesbian Images* will be needed is another question. It would be lovely if it outdated itself, if that kind of thing were common knowledge.

As an addendum to "Four Decades of Fiction," your next to last chapter in Lesbian Images, *how would you analyze the state of lesbian literature since* Lesbian Images' *publication?*

While I haven't kept up with the literature, I'd probably like to add a chapter on autobiography and include people like Kate Millett and Cady Vandeurs. There are simply new novels to be added; for instance, Marie-Claire Blais' *Nights Of the Underground,* and then probably a chapter on the more experimental writing that is coming out now, reaching back to Bertha Harris, and of course including Monique Wittig. It might be fun to take a look at the literary traditions out of which both the autobiographical and experimental forms come, something I didn't originally do in *Lesbian Images.*

How does the present state of lesbian literature, combined with your previous work, affect what you now choose to write about in terms of the lesbian experience?

I don't have to describe lesbian experience anymore. I don't have to write another book like *Desert Of The Heart,* although I know a number of people wish I would never write any other kind of book.

Why is that?

Because it's romantic. There weren't books describing that kind of experience when I wrote *Desert Of The Heart.* There are plenty of them now. I don't feel the general audience any longer needs basic descriptions of lesbian relationships. I feel freer to move out as I have done into concerns that have nothing to do with being lesbian or not. I can let that sensibility about lesbian experience float around in my work without having to focus on it anywhere near as much as I did in the first two novels. I don't mean that I would never ever write another romantic lesbian novel, but I don't feel required.

You have said you are interested in writing about voluntary relationships of people who, detached from the requirements of convention, are figuring out ways to build a human community satisfying and nourishing to them. For whom in our society does this process apply?

I should think nine-tenths of us. Even people who are in communication with their families live so far away, because the society is so mobile now, that the old extended family simply doesn't exist anymore, except in very unusual circumstances. The vast majority of people who live in this culture live in urban areas, live either alone or with one other person, or are locked into a nuclear family. That is not enough of a human support, and so people have got to invent something to take the place of the extended blood kin.

Jane Rule photo by Eleanor Wachtel

The problem in an urban community, particularly, is that people relate to each other in competitive groups, at work, at school, and that doesn't provide what the extended family provides, a kind of loyalty, sympathy and support. In the women's movement you see people reaching out, trying to create structures that will take the place of that sense of belonging that the extended family gave people. The extended family also restricted people. I don't mean to make it a kind of ideal that we've left behind. We have simply left it behind as a culture, and there are things in it that people need, and so I think people do in all sorts of ways invent their families.

We invent a family out of this neighbourhood. We take on the children. We take on the old people. They take on us. I think the health of a group of people who are not all the same age, not facing the same problems at the same time, is that people tend to be far less critical of each other. You see a group of women all with three-year-olds and it's just as competitive as it is in the work place. They feel vulnerable. They do help each other, but there's a terrible competition. If you take one woman with a three-year-old, a fifty-year-old novelist and an eighty-year-old woman up the road, you're much more apt to get a kind of reaching and imaginative sympathy, if you know that's what you want.

What kinds of problems do you see the people in this kind of community confronting or creating for themselves?

Living alone or isolated in the urban environment can give you an image of yourself as the centre of however small a universe. The kind of community I'm talking about requires people to think of themselves as part of a group a good deal more of the time than most people want to. So you get the age old problems of jealousy, envy and unfulfilled need. They're with us always. Again it's the city that sets up certain social institutions that make it very difficult to relate to people in uncompetitive circumstances. You meet as an academic with other academics, as a writer with other writers. You are in a social circumstance that is basically competitive, and you have to keep breaking set with that. You have to keep pushing against that atmosphere to create a supportive one.

Through your immense caring and respect for your characters, your work consistently affirms and celebrates any variety of human relationships. In terms of choosing characters, you've said, "I would be bored creating characters I felt condescending to" or "whose values I don't honour." Which characters would these be, or to use your music metaphor, which instruments would you not include in your orchestra?

That's a really baffling question. It's not the characters or the people you would exclude. It's not their nature. It's your own inability to understand that would make you both refuse a person in your life and refuse a person in a book. Certain kinds of attitudes are ones you just can't cope with. Some writers create villains to express a kind of hostility against that failure to care or failure to be approved of. My sense about that is to walk away. I am not interested in villains. I'm not interested in writing about my own failures, as if they were not my failures. I don't think it's as much a matter of a category of persons as it is my ability or my willingness to comprehend. I'm too easily impatient with people in power, with people self-righteous in ways I'm not, with people who are falsely self pitying, but if I needed to present a character with any of those traits I'd try to set aside my impatience and work for real insight. I don't think there are bad guys. I think there are bad relationships that simply don't go anywhere. It is the ability to understand that draws us together and limitations in understanding that shove us apart.

What do you see as your greatest strengths as a writer?

I back off from that question, because it isn't my business, in a sense, to evaluate myself. But I would hope that the strongest thing in my writing, in craft, is brevity and conciseness and that the deepest strength is understanding. Whether that's actually what is strong in my writing, that's what I work for.

What do you find most difficult in your life now, as writer and/or as person?

I really don't have very many problems at the moment. What has been difficult over the last few years is adjusting to arthritis because it's taken up an awful lot of time to change all my writing habits. I now have to write longhand, which I've never done in my life, and then simply transcribe it all at the end of each day onto the typewriter because, by the next morning, I can't read my own handwriting. That took a long time to do. I also have to limit my working day to usually no more than four hours. It's changed my lifestyle, not just in working, because it takes a lot of energy simply to deal with the discomfort. That's part of my impatience, part of a quicker temper. I can see my grandmother in myself. She got very sharp tongued, and I don't want to do that. It's a matter of learning new controls, new ways to solve a problem that seems a nuisance to have at all. But I've adjusted by now so that I'm much more comfortable and know much better how to deal with it.

You once said that your primary commitment to art was not a result of personal ambition, but rather a calling to be served first. Could you talk more about that?

If what you really want is attention and honour in the world, which I assume is what personal ambition basically is, almost anything else would be a wiser choice than writing. Very few writers achieve that kind of attention, and if they achieve it in their lifetime they do so by saying what other people want them to say, or by spending a great deal of time out in public persuading people that what they are saying is what people want to hear. Neither one of those things interests me in the slightest. Writing is far too hard work to say what someone else wants me to. Serving it as a craft, serving it as a way of growing in my own understanding seems to me a beautiful way to live. And if that product is shareable with other people, so much the better. That increases the joy of it.

Your choice of the word "calling" interests me.

Leonard Woolf, at the end of his volumes of his autobiography said that everything he had done in his life had failed, every cause that he'd worked for, every reform that he had hoped for — all had failed; and that he would have done exactly the same things he had done even if he knew that was the result, because it was his job to assure a quality of self that he found acceptable. For me, writing is a way of growing to make quality of myself, something I can accept as a valid and fruitful way to use the gift of life. So, I suppose "calling" comes closer than other words.

Do you feel any disappointment in terms of the way your work has been received?

I find it amazing that I'm published at all. I've never outgrown the sense of how extraordinary it is. I can feel angry at what I think is a system that obstructs my work, a system that keeps it from my readers who would enjoy it, because they don't ever find out that it exists. Never being reviewed in the New York Times for instance. There are a lot of places where my work is simply not introduced to the public and that can be frustrating.

Your latest novel, Contract With The World, *will be published this fall: what is it about, and how does it progress and/or diverge from your previous work?*

Like *Against The Season,* and *The Young In One Another's Arms,* it's about a group of people, but this time there are six main characters: each one of them has a section, and then has to drop to being a minor

character. It's different technical approach. It's also much more complex in theme than the other group novels. All of the characters are artists. They are all the same age, and being more competitive than supportive, they are pretty hard on each other. The book covers a period of five years in their lives, from 30 to 35, which is a crunch for everyone. Set in Vancouver, in a provincial city, in a small country, that has no certain culture, these artists face whether or not their work is a stupid bit of egotism that's ruining their lives, or a real calling, and then see who lasts the course and why. It deals with their concerns about relationship, about making a living, about what art means in a life and in a community, and about moral questions. There's a lot of erotic material, because this is a time in living when the sense of sexuality is urgent and still not easy.

How does the form work with six solos?

It's not simple. You're just getting to know Alma, and then you have to move on to Roxanne. You see someone from the inside, then you're thrown back again into watching that person from another person's eyes. You get multiple portraits. One of the characters is a portrait painter who paints portraits of all the characters and herself. Another is a writer who is writing about them, and her section is actually written by her. The others are from the third person point of view. There's also a photographer taking photographs of all of them, so that you've got metaphor after metaphor about multiple perception of personality.

Does it get confusing at all?

It doesn't get confusing, except in your loyalties. One character has to be last and by the time you get to Carlotta, who is the painter, you've had an awful lot of reaction to her. Some people really seem to like her, understand and relate to her, while other people can't stand her. The same with Alma: when you are in sympathy with one character you are furious with Alma. Then, suddenly, you are inside Alma's head and you think, "You know, I see how that is for her." But again, you are thrown back out of her world into the people who have to cope wih her, then you start getting angry again!

What are you presently exploring in your writing?

At the moment I'm working on an essay and a short autobiographical piece, because I'm doing a seminar on autobiographical writing. I've never done much autobiographical writing. Something about it pulls me at the moment. In just the one piece that I've done I find I can't stay with the facts. The chief problem is that I feel freer to say absolutely what I mean when I'm inventing. If I'm trying to deal with actual people, and you can't write autobiography without involving a great many other people, there's a kind of protection I want to offer to those I feel are close to me — and that limits in all kinds of ways what can be said in autobiographical writing.

Are there any other issues you would like to address in the area of lesbian writing and publishing, or in regard to your own writing?

Probably it's important to address myself to the criticism that many lesbian feminists have leveled at writers who don't publish always with feminist or lesbian presses. It doesn't seem that they are set up in distribution to handle the general kind of novel I write, nor would they want to. Naiad takes only lesbian novels. My job, as I see it, is to get my work out to the widest audience I can, within the limits of what I'm willing to do in publicity. That means choosing a publisher, if I have a choice, who has the capacity for distribution. And, when I can, to be supportive of feminist and lesbian presses by asking them to publish my more radical works. I've got a collection of short stories and essays that are all lesbian and I hope that one of the lesbian/feminist presses will take that book. If I could get an establishment press to do it, I would rather do that because it would get to more people. The criticism is then how can the lesbian presses make enough money to keep going if you take the most popular of your work away from them. It's been my experience they wouldn't make the money on it anyway. They don't have access to the wider audience; they have access to the feminist audience and that's fine. Other than asking them to publish my more radical work, I feel I want to support them by doing as much reviewing as I can. I have been able to review books for The Globe And Mail that I don't think they would have reviewed otherwise. Because people send me copies of books coming out of Sinister Ink and other small presses I have been able to write reviews for *Branching Out, Emergency Librarian* and *The Body Politic* in Canada, so that I can let Canadians know what's going on in the American range of publishing. I can help a lot as part of the grapevine and I think all of us should be doing that — probably doing a lot more of it.

One last question: What would you like to accomplish in say the next ten years?

My decades run from '71 to '81 because I was born in 1931. So, I'm out of sync with the decades of the world. I do tend to think of my life in ten year periods. I had always said to myself that 40 was the cut off point of my apprenticeship which may, for some people, sound like a very long one, but the novel as art is a middle-aged art. I was very frightened when I turned 40. I suddenly thought I ought to wake up and be speaking with the voice of God. I said that to my mother, and she said, "You've been speaking with the voice of God ever since you could talk! Don't worry about it!" And that made me feel much better! I have felt that the ten years between 40 and 50 were the harvest years and I will have, in my own decade, I hope, if the collection of essays and stories also comes out, published seven books in that period. I can't expect to produce that much in the next ten years, partly because I've had to slow up, partly because some of the important things I've wanted to do I've accomplished. There are things that tempt me. I am tempted to do a biography but I don't suppose the exact subject will ever come up. I certainly want to write another couple of novels and I'd like to write about half a dozen absolutely beautiful stories. If I can do some of those projects in the next ten years I'll have plenty of time to teach children to swim, walk on the beach, see my friends.

Do you still want to be a wise old woman?

Yes, I'm still working on that!

Sarah Kennedy lives in Vancouver.

photos by Les Leventhal

Ulu Women, 1976

The Tapestries of Marion Tuu'luq

by Marilyn Baker

Tapestries, drawings and prints by Marion Tuu'luq were featured in a January exhibition at the Upstairs Gallery in Winnipeg. A seventy-year-old Inuit woman, Marion Tuu'luq has become — in less than ten years and hardly by design — an artist in the western sense of the term.

She has lived in a nomadic existence most of her life, in accordance with age-old customs of the Caribou Inuit groups, Members of her Camp survived by mutual cooperation. More recently she was dependent on the hunting and fishing skills of her second husband, Luke Angosaglo. In winter, an igloo provided shelter for the family; in warmer months they lived in a tent. Old age and the threat of starvation forced her, with her family, to settle permanently in Baker Lake, N.W.T., a community one thousand miles north of Winnipeg. One result of this move could not have been anticipated: her emergence as an artist of international reputation.

At Baker Lake traditional sewing skills of Inuit women were potentially an important resource. The artistic component of this traditional art, however, was not given suitable nurturance until the arrival in Baker Lake of Sheila and Jack Butler as Craft Officers in 1969. It was with their guidance and under their benevolent direction that a unique combination of Inuit sewing techniques, personal creativity, traditional symbolism and creative needlework was given a fertile soil in which to grow. The work of Marion Tuu'luq is the flower in bloom.

Most fittingly, sewing, by which Inuit women were traditionally valued, has become a way of responding to the changing and

altered world of the new life in Baker Lake, not only for Marion Tuu'luq, but for Nanouq, Oonark, Yuusipik, Ityi, Avaaliquiaq, Martha Apsaq and many others. As mother taught daughter, so Tuu'luq's mother had instructed her in these old and remembered traditions. In a particularly barren and desolate part of the Arctic, these skills have provided new hope for the economic well-being of the entire community.

Tuu'luq's tapestries are done by hand, not by machine, in a manner similar to the way in which she applied decoration to clothing and constructed garments out of skin and hide. This new approach to survival coexists, Sheila Butler emphasizes, with the traditional making, cutting and decoration of such items. "Hunting is still very important and the hunters must have skin clothing in order to survive. Everyone in the north — white as well as Inuit, and especially children — wears homemade clothing." However, the making of clothing "is not the mainstay of physical survival" it once was. Thus, the production of cloth pictures, prints and drawings is an important result of the changing conditions of life in the Arctic.

Tuu'luq's palette is often quite surprising as startling yellows and vibrant reds bump up against pur-

ples, pinks and electric greens. Even when her use of colour is more restrained, there is a range of hues within a limited colour scheme that reveals an extraordinary discrimination and sophistication. The stitching itself should not be overlooked. Occasionally it assumes a purely decorative function. Sometimes it expresses movement when it flies in response to the wind as tassles on the skirt of a garment. Other times it captures the texture of a very woofy animal. Some of Tuu'luq's abstract stylized designs are perhaps her strongest. One of her most attractive pieces features units of birds, the texture of their feathers effectively communicated by the V-shaped stitching which covers their bodies. They are arranged in clusters, each cluster a different colour from its neighbour, in a repeating pattern that varies only slightly the disposition of birds in flight which is its theme.

Like other Inuit artists working in the Baker Lake Art Project, Tuu'luq's cloth pictures, prints and drawings portray the legends and beliefs of the Inuit people. Her emphasis is on scenes of everyday life: hunting, fishing, playing and enjoying. The fish, the caribou and the birds — traditional providers of food, clothing and shelter — exist in abundance on her brightly coloured, often incredibly crowded canvases. The brimming abundance of the Arctic that she portrays is in striking contrast to the real conditions that forced her to move off the land. For this reason, her most joyful and energetic compositions must be seen at least in part as recollections of a dream, rather than as depictions of reality. It is, however, her ability to provide convincing and economical graphic observations, both real and imagined, that gives her work its special authenticity.

Despite the energy and the tremendous optimism that her work exudes, the art of Marion Tuu'luq evokes a nostalgia similar to that inspired by my grandmother's patchwork quilts. The quilt stitching is very close to that which Tuu'luq uses to enliven her figures and the repetitive and slightly varied units of pattern in my grandmother's quilts are similar to Tuu'luq's abstract designs. Both women's art is a remnant of another age. Scenes of traditional Inuit life and the implements and objects of that life — the ulu knife, the igloo, the tent and traditional fishing gear — appear as subject matter in Tuu'luq's work.

Marion Tuu'luq is old, the Inuit way of life is old: the old ways are passing. In her cloth pictures, in her drawings, and through her prints, there is a fitting memorial to a way of life and to the traditionally female occupation of sewing. "Igloos are cold. Your hands are cold; the skins are tough and hard," observed Tuu'luq in an interview. But she survived. So will her art. For me, your grandmother's quilts and mine are a similar testament.

Marilyn Baker is an Assistant Professor at the School of Art, University of Manitoba in Winnipeg.

Poems from Rentee Bay: 1785-89

by Frances Itani

**Emma is a young Loyalist settler, arrived in Rentee Bay with her husband Mark and their servant Bett, in 1785.
The following are some of Emma's poems selected from the work, which has been written for three voices.
The idea for the work came from reading histories of the region but the characters and events have been fictionalized.**

EMMA:

Joy stifles all sound except
The noise of our new wilderness
We take the first steps
Of our refuge

that first summer we played in Rentee Bay; the fruit
grew wild to the edge of sand. Gooseberries
with the smooth skin, sand cherries; we filled
our caps, ate, filled our caps again
squirted one another with wild sweet juice

we ran along shore Bett and I
holding our skirts high above our knees
whooping and hollering, Mark said
like savages

never guessing how close
we were then
to joy

at night the roots of trees were our pillows
and we sang and we prayed for a future
bright as the wood and water round us

A short story writer as well as a poet, Frances Itani has published two books: No Other Lodgings *(Fiddlehead, 1978) and* Linger by the Sea *(Brunswick, 1979), a children's book, illustrated by Molly Lamb Bobak. She is currently living in Heidelberg, West Germany.*
illustration by Alina Wrobel

The White Ravine

fiction by Donna Rae
illustrations by Maureen Paxton

My God, there's something . . . something is out there, Dale thought. She was trying to look down into the ravine from the kitchen window. The kitchen jutted out over this deep gorge, held firmly in position by tall redwood piles, and seemed a mass of windows because only the east wall was free of them. On a clear day the view was magnificent, but it had been raining since the previous evening. Turbulent bursts of rain beat against the south side windows and then veered around to attack from the north. Dale paced from north to south in the narrow room and then she stood with her face pressed up against a pane on the west wall again. She peered down into the ravine trying to locate the row of lombardy poplars which signaled the limit of their property. The ravine itself was much deeper than the poplars. At its base Mill Stream Road closely followed the river in a northwesterly direction into the city. To her disappointment, Dale could see little except erratic bursts of rain, mist, and the creaking branches of an old crab apple tree which stood near the southwest corner of the house.

Dale thought of drawing the curtains to provide a more cosy breakfast for the children and Randy, but decided against it because she did not want her view obstructed. She felt again that something was out there in all the weather — something weird. She could smell it, sense it. Her throat was constricted and the hairs on the back of her neck seemed on end. A shiver ran down her spine as saliva poured into her mouth. If a figure materialized, if such a thing should happen, she did not want to be taken unawares by having the curtains drawn. But never before, she thought, had she been afraid of the figure of her mother and she wasn't exactly afraid now. But it had been a long time.

Without realizing she had made the decision, she knew she would not be going to work that day. Randy would be obliged to drive down through the mist and rain though, and then through the thick fog along Mill Stream Road. Well that was his affair. Dale was mildly

surprised that his probable discomfort did not arouse her sympathy as usual. As for herself, her eighth grade class could have a substitute for once.

She perched at the kitchen table facing the west windows and poured a cup of coffee. The rain was coming more gently now, thinner. She glimpsed far below the dense fog rising from the river, white and slate grey. Probably engulf this house soon, she surmised apprehensively, althought it would not be with vehemence like an ocean, but softly. And settle in for a good long while, she calculated.

And then she heard a chair scrape loudly against the bedroom floor upstairs. Must be Randy now she thought. If he's not more quiet he'll wake up Clyde. And Clyde had another half an hour or more of sleep.

"You're down early."

"Yeah."

She appraised him quizzically and decided he looked sullen, almost cornered. And then she told herself that this time she was not going to help him, at least not yet; she had to think of Beth and Clyde.

Randy reached for his jacket on a hook above the basement stairs.

"You're not going? What about breakfast?"

"I'll get something later. Have to finish a few things . . . electricians are coming."

"But can't you wait for Beth? She'll only be fifteen minutes or so. Have some coffee."

"I tell you I have to finish."

"But Randy, this is a strange morning to leave early. What'll Beth think?"

"What do you mean? What should she think?"

"Well my gosh . . . after what happened last night. I mean she'll be worried."

"Do you really believe that? Darn, can't a guy even have an accident around here. I just pushed a little . . . she broke her arm when she fell against the couch."

"I know . . . what I mean is . . . well she'll want to make sure everything's all right . . . you know, between you."

"Humph . . . oh, get off my back please Dale. Don't *interpret* anymore. I know 'em as well as you." Randy pulled on his rubbers and opened the back door.

"But what'll I tell her?"

"Will you just leave me alone." He shut the door.

Dale watched through the far north window as he rapidly descended the few stairs to the gravel path which led to the garage. She was impressed anew by how graceful he appeared for such a tall, broad man. His slowness of thought surprised people after seeing him move. Incongruous. Deft alacrity combined with a rare ponderousness. She had thought he was stupid when she first met him because her own mind was unusually quick. He was nineteen then; she was twenty-three and his teacher. It took her several months to realize the extent of her error.

Dale yearned for him briefly when she saw him, through the rain, fling open the garage door. He had not bothered to cover his head. She was rather discomfited by his atypical request. When had he asked her to leave him alone before?

Beth came into the kitchen rubbing her eyes with her one functioning hand.

"Did Daddy go already Mum? I heard something."

"He's working really hard now. The electricians are about finished. We want to be able to move into the new house at the end of school."

"I don't want to move again. It'll be a nice house but so is this."

"We won't any more. The next one is the last house. Then Randy'll design them for other people."

"I hope he doesn't feel bad about last night."

"Well, of course he does. How could he help but?"

"I wish I could've seen him before he left . . . let him know I don't blame him."

Dale brushed Beth's hair after she opened the seam of the child's blouse and fitted it over the cast on her left arm. It was a relief to be able to perform these little physical tasks, to touch her daughter who was too independent to allow herself to be hugged and soothed. Dale had not brushed Beth's hair for two years — long, straight, a rich brown darker than Randy's. Dale ached to rock her, to hold her close and rub her cheek against Beth's. But at least Dale thought, she could place her hand on Beth's head firmly and brush down the long length of her back. At thirteen Beth was taller than Dale, who was plump as well as short. But it had been a long time since Dale had been annoyed by her own size.

"Take the aspirins, but if your arm aches call, all right? Remember now. Someone will be here."

"Aren't you going to work?"

"No."

"But I told you Mum, it doesn't hurt. Well, okay then. Goodbye." And Beth raised her voice. "Goodbye Clyde Pied."

"Be careful at the bus stop and at lunch. Here me Beth Anne?"

It felt good to Dale to just sit and drink coffee. Her earlier apprehension was disintegrating. It occurred to her to sympathize with people who were exasperated by her constant bustle. If I were rushing around me now I would be infuriated, she thought.

"What's got into Beth?"

"What do you mean Clyde?"

"She never told me goodbye before."

"Maybe she's feeling extra gentle."

"I think Daddy's mean."

"Oh Clyde, be fair. He just pushed her a little to get out. How did he know she would fall against the chesterfield in that funny way. It was your skate she tripped over."

"He didn't need to push. He was mad."

"Beth doesn't blame him."

"Well she wouldn't."

"Plenty of people get mad. What if something happened when you get mad and stomp out . . . which you do all the time. Would you want me to blame you? How often does he get mad anyway?"

"Ah you're just trying to stick up for him."

"Hey, let's have a fire tonight, Clyde. I'll lay it and you can light it when you get home."

"Oh whowee, let's."

In a moment of inspiration Dale declared, "We'll have one every night until summer. Why not?"

"But you didn't want to before, except on weekends

. . . all the fuss."

"I do now though . . . I do now."

Clyde beamed, finished his breakfast without a nagging word, and brushed his teeth. Dale smoothed down his curly black hair so like her own. She saw that he had put on weight recently, but had not yet begun to increase in height. She knew that Randy would be disappointed if he remained short, which he no doubt would. He had her features and temperament, like her pugnacious little Dad. It wasn't fair. She did not mind that Beth would be tall. She loved her daughter's shape and size, the slow way Beth had of mulling over events. Randy should be glad he had a son who was inventive, energetic.

"Clydie, you should stick up for your Dad too, eh."

"Yeh Mum but he's so . . . oh well . . . okay."

"And we'll have a fire. So long Son."

Clyde would be in junior high too next year. Dale wished Randy and Clyde felt closer. She reached for more coffee but not biscuits. She did not feel like eating.

It felt odd to be by herself at home, although she knew Randy would return soon for his breakfast. He would be surprised to find her there no doubt, perhaps pleased. She glanced outside again and found that the fog bank was farther up the ravine than she had anticipated. Not that it mattered much she decided. Dale enjoyed most aspects of the weather, only today she was regretful. Her throat began to tighten again as her eyes sought to penetrate the out of doors. As she searched for the unusual, a profound stillness gradually settled over the room. And then almost imperceptibly a brownish shadow seemed to hover among the poplars. She arrested her breathing in order to concentrate and the skin of her back shivered slightly, but the shade was gone almost immediately. She could detect nothing.

Abruptly she stood up and strode into the living room. It would be a good time to lay the fire. One of Clyde's words had been nagging at her mind — mad, that was it. With a rush Dale's complaint since last night burst into her consciousness. You *were* angry, Randy, enraged . . . like you were only once before and in the whole seventeen years since we've been married. Darn you, why? What had I said? Only that it would be awkward in the new house if my study were upstairs . . . and that is *all*. Why didn't you tell me when you were designing it? Surprises like that never work, you should know that.

Soon after Randy graduated as an architect he began building houses and of necessity, the first one was very small with no study. They moved into the second house, which did contain an alcove with a work table, after the first one was sold. All of the houses since the third contained one study which was supposed to be for them both, but which of course was not, because by then Clyde was a toddler and Beth an agile three-year-old. It was imperative that Dale remain in the kitchen. She could not simply be accessible as was the case now, but must remain in the same room with them.

However, she reminded herself, she did at least have to be accessible now. Dale calculated that it might be as much as ten years before she could spend evening hours, on a regular basis, away from the centre of the house. She was puzzled that this fact was not as obvious to Randy as it was to her — that she had to be around, not behind a closed door, to be *there*.

And not, thought Dale, up those grand stairs in the new house and down that long hall. Beautiful as they might be Randy and they are. You have reached your apex this time. As an architect, you have finally sounded your own voice. The stairs are lovely, even majestic, as they rise from the entrance way and curve to merge with the narrow passage. And then the climax, the room itself, my study — the lines, the paneling, but why think of it.

Suddenly Dale railed in her mind against her husband. Isn't it enough that the children's bedrooms are both downstairs this time? I did not object to that, they're old enough. Clyde doesn't have nightmares any more; Beth will love her room in a few weeks . . . want her own privacy.

Dale returned to the kitchen and reached for an orange. She would eat something after all. Yes Beth, her beautiful daughter. When Dale first saw Beth she knew that the baby would grow up to resemble Randy — so long and red, not squat and brown the way she had been when she was born. But she did not know how the child's very being would lap itself into her heart's core.

Dale remembered her own mother — remembered her mother saying she had been teased for having an Indian lover when Dale was born. Her neighbours did not realize that the Welsh could be swarthy. Dale suddenly missed her mother, but restrained herself from going over again to the windows. She tried to decide how old she must have been when her mother told her that bit about having an Indian lover. If she were thirteen years old when her mother died, she must about been about nine, maybe ten, she decided.

A few months after Dale's mother died Dale was standing in her room alone. She had been crying in the loft of the barn, lying there in the hay and for the first time since the death, sobbing convulsively — wracking sobs which seemed as if they could split her body in the centre and slowly peel it back until she was turned inside out. Not that she had not cried before. She had cried daily since she had been told her mother was gone. But this time was different and the spell ended in dry hard hacks. Then she got up, brushed off her skirt and left the barn. Although it was a bright muggy June day, it seemed to Dale as if there were a brownish vapour between her and the trees, the air and the house. She felt hollow. She visualized a straw from the barn inserted into her head, floating slowly, unimpeded through her body to the ground, as if her feet were a long way from her head and her bare toes were unattached. She wandered into her room.

As she stood there she dully noted the vapour was in her room as well as the outside. But gradually it stirred and then she began to smell a fresh odour like spring, balmy, as if wafted from some mountain meadow. A mysterious ease accompanied the scent, and a profound waiting. The waiting continued, became more dense concentrated and then over by the bureau about eight feet away, stood Dale's mother. Dale was not surprised, certainly not frightened. The figure did not speak or move, but looked directly at her. Then Dale felt a firm pressure on the top of her head and understood the pressure was from the apparition. It was the pressure of a

hand like a benediction. Still her mother, who was dressed in the short-sleeved house dress she had often worn, remained immobile, her arms naturally at her sides. The pressure became more pronounced until Dale could distinctly feel the tips of five fingers. The pressure bore down through her head and entered her grief-paralyzed heart. Dale felt her shoulders droop and the back of her neck begin to relax. She shuddered with gratitude and relief, closed her eyes to allow the relief to penetrate completely, and then stumbled over to the bed exhausted. The figure was gone then as Dale knew it would be. And then she slept.

Dale's mother came to her again a few times but not many. Now Dale called out, "He broke her arm, Mother. Oh Mum, he swept out with his large one like a man newly blind and she crumpled with a funny cry against the sofa." Dale paced again and took another orange. She surmised that her mother must have loved her size and shape also, because of the way it felt when her mother brushed her hair. But she shook herself and tossed off these thoughts. She did not want to be distracted, to be weakened by a pining for her mother.

Dale decided to light the fire. It could be re-laid before Clyde returned. She took her orange and coffee into the living room and squatted before the fireplace. In the new house there would be an even larger one with a marble mantelpiece. Dale decided that she would place her Mexican figurine on it — a replica of an ancient statuette found in the Yucatan. She would place it a little to the left and there it would squat on its broad hips with its large left hand under one breast and its smaller right one over its pubic hair. The figure had prominent hands and breasts, a thick, bead-encased neck and protruding ears. Dale liked the figure's colour — reddish-brown merging into sandy with off-blue patches, terra-cotta. She decided to call the goddess Hertha, a name she had found in Borges, have candles on the mantelpiece light one a day.

And then she knew the solution. The pantry, of course. The pantry in the new house could be made into a study for herself. She could do her marking and preparation there and even read. Why should Randy object? He was only concerned that she have one at last to herself. She should be glad he was interested . . . was bothered by the fact that he had a study and she did not. Dale had been tickled at the thought of an old-fashioned pantry off the kitchen but they did not need it. There was ample room in the kitchen itself and shelves and space in the basement. With this change they would then have a spare bedroom upstairs for her father to use when he visited and for Randy's parents also.

Every year they came, Mr. and Mrs. Buckler. They looked enough alike to be brother and sister, tall, stocky, blond. They rarely talked but they came and a heaviness settled over the household; no ideas surfaced from their inertness. However, they had produced this one son who brooded impassively, brooded again and then methodically placed ruler to paper and drew a line.

Randy was nineteen when Dale met him. He had returned, from a couple of years of working up north, to high school determined to finish his last year. It was Dale's second year of teaching in the small town that was "home" for them both. She could not recall having seen

him before which was odd considering the size of the place, but then, as she was four years older, maybe she had simply overlooked him.

Dale impressed people then as being a cheerful, vivacious person, quick-tempered also. And on the whole their assessment was correct, only now and again when bringing the few milking cows back from pasture in the evening for her father, a chore she enjoyed after a day of teaching, she would be stopped by something resembling a chill, apprehension it might have been. She had had four years of college, was in her second teaching year, and still she had no prospects of marrying. The words "old maid" would creep into her mind.

It was not a bad life. Her father had hired a housekeeper twenty years his senior after her mother died, a Mrs. Thompson, and kept her on after Dale left for college. He continued with her services after Dale returned in order that Dale would not be overburdened with teaching and housekeeping both; and then also the three were comfortable together, always had been. Mrs. Thompson's husband and three children had died in a flu epidemic and her other four were grown or nearly so when she came into Dale's household. Mrs. Thompson was the one who taught Dale how to bake and sew and also how to withstand adversity. Soon after she entered the household she calmly asked Dale if her periods had

started yet. When Dale mumbled an affirmative Mrs. Thompson asked to see what brand of napkins Dale's mother had bought for her. It was as if she knew that under all the grief, Dale was worried. What would she do? Not ask her father surely? And certainly not buy them herself. Dale started to love Mrs. Thompson then with a slow, strong love, very different from what she felt for her mother. There was no rush of affection so intense and hot that it resembled pain

But it was not until Dale returned from college that she began calling Mrs. Thompson Sarah. The three of them had a happy life. Sarah was glad, she said, to have a daughter so different from what her own two would have been like had they lived. Dale suspected that her father was lonely sometimes and she knew Sarah was getting old, nevertheless they laughed together more than Dale did after, or than she had at college either. Dale's father would relate anecdotes from his life as sheriff and Dale would tell them about happenings at school. He rarely talked about the farm. When Dale's father paid his yearly visits it was the life with Sarah Thompson they reminisced over. "When the aching for your mother comes, you stand firm, mind," she had said. "Stand firm and beat the devil back; take up a job if it is only peeling a mess of potatoes." Dale never told Sarah about her mother's rare appearances. However Dale was usually obliged to stand firm and beat the devil back.

One day in the late fall of Dale's second teaching year when she was returning with the cows down the long hedge-enclosed lane from the northwest pasture, a peculiar peace fell over her. She chucked a small stone at the rump of a dawdling jersey and then stopped still herself. The evening was redolent of cow-pasture, dust and hedge row. She was suddenly filled with the knowledge that she had never been happier. The chill of incipient fear did not reach her heart that day. She forgot what her position in the small community would be like if her single status did not change, although she did remember Randolf Buckler. To her surprise, that day he had written a correct paragraph.

In a few months Dale had some notion of how Randy's mind worked. It was like a glacier, massive and slow, but thorough. When he finally rolled over a particular landscape, he had made it his own. He had planned to go back up North until he could save enough to begin university. Even then he knew he wanted to be an architect and a special kind of architect. He had not planned to marry but with Dale working, why not?

The fire burned steadily — beautiful. Dale returned to the kitchen; the fog bank was approaching the poplars now and the rain a drifting mizzle. She had always been attracted to white, not virginal, but to an eerie type of mad white with grey patches and blue — like snow on a May hillside. The new house was a half-mile farther up the mountain, but to reach it Randy was obliged to drive down through the ravine and then turn right and take the road which followed Rocky Creek. A short drive on a clear day. Only a few other houses were up there yet, but there would be more in a few years. Randy would build them probably. With their present house he had finally become known, and they had lived in it only one year; already it was sold. They would not sell the new house though, Dale reminded herself, there they would remain.

Dale heard the crunching of a car on the driveway and then Randy entering through the back door. He took off his rubbers and hung up his jacket before he realized she was home.

"Are you sick, Dale?"

"No."

"Well this is a surprise. When have you ever? . . . oh this is a surprise."

"How was the drive? I thought you might decide to eat on Mill Stream Road, the fog is so bad. It must be like soup down there."

"Yeh, it occurred to me, but there's work I want to do here . . . it's late but some adjustments . . . your study. Well this is a surprise. You here and Clyde and Beth both at school." He stood behind her chair, leaned over and cupped her breasts in his two hands, cold still from the outside.

"You didn't tell Clyde you'd be here, eh? He's not coming for lunch?" He gently massaged her nipples between his thumbs and forefingers and laid his cheek against her head. The old sweet sensation kindled in her groin.

"No hon, but I told Beth to call if her arm hurts too much." Dale lifted her chin and rubbed her cheek against his, but he was suddenly still. Then he straightened up and walked over to the cupboard for a cup.

"About the study Randy . . . we should settle it . . . I've been thinking."

"It is settled, months ago, years ago . . . since Clyde was born I've been working toward this house."

Dale looked at him in surprise. He was so rarely articulate that she forgot between times how clearly he could express himself. And then she hastened to explain. "It will be useless for me the way it is. I . . . don't you see? So far from the centre of the house. It's beautiful but . . . listen Randy, the pantry."

"They can do without you for awhile every day." His eyes were like stones. "I want you up near me. Give 'em jobs. They could do something around the house for a change."

"You don't know what you're saying . . . you're not fair." Dale burst out. She could not believe what she had heard. And then her heart went cold.

"Not fair, eh? Do you even remember when we worked together? During university? Those English papers, history papers." He then said implacably, "I'm going to bring that time back."

It flashed through Dale's mind that he must have been very disappointed last night about the study, usually his tone was amiable enough, but she brushed this thought aside and rose to defend her children. "Oh you are. Well we have kids now . . . you too. You should need to be downstairs as much as me. I'm going into the living room . . . by the fire."

"You've lit a fire? Why today?"

"I'm going to have one every day until summer. Even then, in the new house, on rainy days." Dale felt a surge of energy. "I'm going to keep that fire burning."

"Ya and I suppose you'll chop wood for it too."

"No, by God, but Clyde will or I'll pay for it." Suddenly their quarrel seemed ridiculous, excessive. "Oh this is silly . . . it's been years since . . . never about money. Look, I'll be in the living room. Go ahead . . . eat something. We'll talk about the study when we're calmer." She wanted to bring back a sense of closeness between them.

"I've been thinking . . . maybe you should quit work now, at the end of the school year. You could finally, we can afford it."

"Now? Now? When Beth will be fourteen, Clyde twelve?"

"Always those kids, God damn it, always, always."

Dale rushed in by the fire, not calmly as she had hoped but with her face burning in a fury. She thought she could kill him for that last remark about the kids . . . take a knife . . . stab him in his throat, abdomen. She grabbed a chunk of wood and threw it on the fire and then another. She remembered the bulging, engorged eyes of her father's jersey once when she had come too close to its newborn calf. She, whom the cow knew so well. Had she not scrambled over the high board fence, the jersey would have mashed her into it. "Steady now, steady," she told herself. "If you throw more wood on that fire you will burn this house down."

Randy brought Dale home from the hospital in a cab that hot July day. They had to sell their VW for material to finish up the second house, because the loan on the first one had not covered building expenses as they hoped. Dale's salary could have kept them comfortably, but it was little enough to start up a business with. Although Clyde was only five days old, he was squirming and howling in his blanket.

"Look Randy, look at him already. He'll set the world on fire, this one."

"Pretty snappy all right. But could you quiet him down a little?" Randy looked meaningfully at the cab driver's back. The skin over Randy's temples seemed thin and his nose pinched. Dale wondered if there were a problem with the new house.

"Baby's too hot, that's what."

Sarah and Bethie Anne were on the front porch. Dale had never seen Beth's grey eyes look so large. She shrank against Sarah and put her thumb in her mouth.

"Hey little one, don't you know me? Here Sarah take the baby. Sweet Bethie Anne." Dale sat in the porch rocker and took Beth on her lap. She held the child very close and rubbed her cheek against Beth's murmuring about how lonely she had been and how good it was to see her. Gradually Beth's tense figure relaxed and Dale's hunger to have her comfortable became appeased. In the house neither Randy nor Sarah had been able to quieten Clyde, but Dale let him cry. A few more minutes wouldn't hurt him. Just when she thought Beth had fallen asleep, the child began to squirm.

"Baby crying Mummy."

"Well, let's you and me go in and fix that." Dale stood and hoisted Beth up in her arms.

Beth went off to sleep that evening peacefully enough, but roused at Clyde's ten-thirty feeding. "Go get her Randy, okay? This one night let her come in."

"But Dale . . . " However he did as she suggested. He also brought in the rocker from the porch and turned out the living room lights, again as she requested. She rocked Beth and Clyde both for a long while. Beth's weight was against Dale's body, barely supported by her left elbow, while she held Clyde over her right shoulder.

Just as she was beginning to doze she thought to herself that everything, after all, would be all right. She did not understand until then that she was worried. They could manage well enough even if Sarah did have to go back in a few days. Dale felt peaceful rocking in the dark with both babies asleep like that. The moonlight did not reach her, although no one had remembered to draw the curtains.

Suddenly she realized that Randy was not working at the kitchen table — sometimes he worked there until two or three in the morning. She could see him through the open door and he was watching them steadily. He had been for some time.

"Are you going to put them to bed at last?"

Something in his tone made Dale jerk awake. "Why sure. Will you take Clyde? The bassinet's by our bed."

When Dale was certain Beth would sleep she returned to the living room. Randy had come back there also and was pacing. He turned to Dale and shouted, "Is this the way it's going to be?" The full moonlight was streaming in on him from the window. His shoulders were hunched and his arms dangled loose. "In another two years will there be another one? Will you rock three then while I'm scrambling to pay for it all . . . never building the way I could?"

"Randy, take it easy. Let's sleep and talk about it in the morning."

"Let's sleep huh . . . let's talk huh." He strode over to the window and then back across the room. Dale had never seen him move more rapidly.

"I wouldn't have a child unless you wanted one too. We planned these."

"Planned . . . who planned?" his voice was hoarse.

"Why after you got your degree . . . remember? Even before we married . . . decided then would be the time. And then brought it up again." Suddenly she was saying anything to keep him talking. His hands had formed into fists and as he paced he shook his head a little as if to stop a buzzing there. The cords on his neck protruded. Dale forgot herself entirely although her every corpuscle was alert. This wasn't a quarrel; she wasn't answering an accusation; something worse was wrong and she yearned to comfort him. "Randy, Randy . . . we'll do what you want. It'll be all right."

"Be all right, be all right," he echoed hoarsely. "Be all right." His face had formed itself into a grating sneer. "Ya, ya," he said slowly, explosively, taking one long step between each word. "Ya, ya, ya." And as he paced he pounded one fist into his other open palm — rhythmically, almost mechanically, but with fantastic force.

"I'll work . . . Sarah's too old but we'll find someone."

"Find someone . . . find someone."

A cold white horror filled Dale. She had no thought of going over to him now, realizing instinctively that it would be futile, even dangerous.

"I'll work and you'll work, go on with what you're doing. We'll both work."

"Oh we will eh?" The rhythm of his movements accelerated. "Will eh?"

Suddenly Dale surged with an energy to match his own. Mentally she leapt over the white abyss to join him. "We'll keep on talking, all night long if you want to. Keep talking . . . I'll work and you'll work and in the fall we'll move and I'll go back to school and you'll start a new house and Clyde will sleep, all night, he'll sleep." Her voice had become as rhythmic as his and inexhaustible it seemed.

"Ya, he'll sleep, sleep."

"And we'll be together you and I. Always together — just us two. You'll work and I'll work."

Gradually Randy's pace moderated and he stopped pounding with his fist. His arms swung loose.

"We'll keep on talking. I can talk as long as you need me to. No more children."

"I don't believe that, don't believe that, that is what I don't believe."

"But you will believe it, because I will keep on saying it and saying it and saying it."

All that night they talked. Randy paced around outside in the full moonlight when Dale fed Clyde at 3:00 a.m. No one had yet pulled the curtains. He went off for a few hours in the morning, but returned when Sarah and the children were napping. They talked and talked. "It'll be all right Randy. No more children." Dale had not yet slept. And all the next night they talked. "It'll be all right Randy. We'll be together, you and I. I will work as long as you need me to. I'll find a baby-sitter . . . it'll be all right." And the next day at noon. And the next night. They talked as Dale made formula and washed diapers. Neither of them slept much in two weeks. "It'll be all right." Dale made espresso coffee. He would go off for an hour or two when she was feeding the children and then return. After they took Sarah to the train depot, it was all day as well as all night. On each hour she would say to herself, "I will live through this one hour and only think of that. And she did live through that one hour and then she would say the same thing at the next hour, and she did live. And then again and she did. She made more coffee. She lost her milk the second night. The clouds would come thick and grey, and in the evening it would thunder. "It'll be all right."

One evening when Randy had just left and Beth was asleep, Dale placed Clyde's bassinet in the kitchen. He was gurgling and not yet hungry. She sat at the table and leaned her forehead on her hand. Maybe she dozed, if so she was awakened by a stillness in the air and then a gentle wind fanned her cheek. It smelled of wild flowers, like a mountain meadow breeze with pine and birch and Indian paintbrush. A soft mist collected in the centre of the room like a blur, a haze before her eyes, and then there was her mother. Dale looked at the apparition with breathless awe and felt a gratitude beyond expression. The shade's words came into the room, but they seemed to come from everywhere, and not from her figure. Slow, wonderful words. "It'll be all right Dale. Take your son up now, into the bedroom and sleep. Pick him up . . . take him into your bed. He belongs in your own bed." Dale felt a hand placed firmly on her head, although her mother was still standing before her. When the pressure from the hand was released Dale bent over for Clyde, turned her back on the figure and walked into the bedroom. Clyde slept through three feedings and so did Dale. She did not know when Randy returned, however he was asleep on her other side when she got up with Clyde in the morning. Clyde had soaked the bed through.

Randy's cup clinked in the kitchen, more dishes rattled into the sink and then he was standing in the doorway looking at Dale.

"Hey Randy come over . . . come sit by me. How often are we alone without the children?"

"There's some work . . . some adjustments."

"Not now . . . please . . . come sit with me by the fire."

He came, knelt by her and took her head between his two large hands. They kissed then — long — longer than they had bothered with in years. She held him there, drinking from him, drinking slowly as if in preparation for a drought. Slowly they fell into their established ritual, her breast was in his mouth. And finally they slept.

Dale awoke. The fire was burning steadily but Randy was gone.

"Randy," she called loudly. And then there he was at the head of the stairs. She felt a marvelous gratitude toward him, one she rarely stopped long enough to experience. For seventeen years they had been working together, depending on each other, rarely at odds.

"Oh Randy, it's good to be together like this. I should take a day off more often."

"It'll be even better, just you wait. I have another surprise. I'm putting a fireplace in your study."

"But Randy . . . I told you . . . "

"No more now . . . you'll see. You deserve that room. And time too. Now you can have time."

A sick heaviness gathered in her throat — there seemed to be a thickness in the air.

"Randy . . . don't make me fight with you. Oh please . . . not now. The pantry'll be fine. It has a window . . . overlooks the valley . . . shelves."

"Don't do this to me Dale. Don't, for God's sake, oppose me now. Do you know how long? . . . I've had this house in mind for years . . . years."

"Well you shouldn't have . . . don't you see? Did you ever notice how much time we spend talking, the kids and I? I must judge."

Then he shouted out, "I know they're spoiled . . . that I know . . . spoiled."

"Oh my God . . . unfair . . . Beth so willing to help, Clyde so busy."

"I want things good for you . . . and you only . . . only think of them. Never of me . . . never of *us*." And then he began to pace. His shoulders hunched and his arms dangled loose at his sides.

"I can't do it Randy. This time I can't promise you anything . . . not a thing. And I'll keep on working too. What if they need something you don't want to buy? What if I want something you don't see the need for?"

Randy looked at her, his eyes as dead as stones, and then he whirled around and left. He left, but Dale knew he would return and very soon probably.

I'll stand firm, Sarah, she told herself. When the aching for him becomes too strong I'll stand firm, take up a job. He is on the cold, rocky hillside now. I'll talk as much as I can but I'll be watching too. I won't be there with him. Clyde would never understand and Beth — my earnest Beth — for her to feel alone as I once did? Never. I'll build up the fire and never let it die. Maybe Randy will come back to warm himself with the rest of us and maybe he will not.

Dale stirred up the fire and then walked into the kitchen. The fog had subsided somewhat; it was down below the poplars now. She peered out, looking for the haze, the shadow she had glimpsed early in the morning, but there was nothing — nothing except the creaking crab apple tree. And then the feeling arose that the shadow would not come again. Perhaps she must be herself and her shade as well. She took the Mexican statuette from a drawer and placed it on the window sill. "It'll be very hard, Hertha, when I move my books into the pantry," she told it. "It will seem to him as if I'm jeering at his beautiful room . . . unless he can dislocate himself . . . get outside himself long enough to understand. But why should he? He can no more alter his nature than I can mine."

Donna Rae teaches English at Grant MacEwan Community College in Edmonton.

electra dream

i fly through the upstairs window
land beside my father on the bed
i thought you lived in edmonton he says
i came for a visit dad where's mom
i follow him downstairs
in the dining room against the sideboard
bulging sticky open
she's in the bags he says
the dog comes in to sniff
i shoo him out scolding
that's all we need dad
for the neighbours to see him
chewing on her bones

my father slumps in a chair by the window
yellow roses in his lap
have you called the police
i was too tired he says
i pick up the phone and try to dial
i try and try but i can't do it
my father snips stems
arranges roses in a vase
i sit down to watch
he is so good with flowers

Mary Howes

An ex-R.N. and antique dealer, Mary Howes is now a student at the University of Alberta. Her ambitions include meeting Sharon Riis. She is the mother of three and married to a professional football player.

FILM

Starting Over: Hollywood's Ode to the Semi-Liberated Woman

by Alice Larch

Ever since Hollywood began making movies, from the time of the Mary Pickford good little girls and the Theda Bara vamps, these movies have reflected prevalent attitudes toward and opinions about women. They have also helped mould these same attitudes and opinions.

At the beginning of the seventies there was a hue and cry about the disappearance of women from Hollywood films, about the repeated teaming of Robert Redford with Paul Newman.

In the last few years, women have reappeared. Who are these women? Or, what are the current female stereotypes, à la male Hollywood?

The "new woman," the woman with a career, independence, interests, opinions, intelligence, is cropping up all over the place. She is shown as desirable — provided she does not affront Hollywood by outshining her man. No woman developing outside this new stereotype measures up.

This presentation of women is all the more insidious because Hollywood either is, or wishes to appear, ignorant of its own stand. Though the elevation of the semi-liberated woman occurs at the expense of other women, the films put themselves forward as pro-liberation. They don't acknowledge the limits they place on liberation.

Starting Over (directed by Alan J. Pakula, screenplay by James L. Brooks, U.S.A. 1979) exemplifies the current Hollywood approach to women. In this film, the "good" new woman enjoys working as a kindergarten teacher. But her relationship with the man is what is most important to her. The "bad" new woman is willing to sacrifice her marriage for the chance of a career; she eventually gets ahead of the man career-wise. While happiness (Burt Reynolds) is reserved for the woman whose job is less challenging and less lucrative, and who values the man more than her work, *Starting Over* doesn't let on that the man's choice of partner is influenced by the women's careers.

The good new woman of *Starting Over* can be found in many other films. In *An Unmarried Woman,* she works part-time in an art gallery. The bad new woman also shows up frequently. In *Kramer vs. Kramer,* she is condemned for leaving her son in the custody of his loving father in order to go on a full-fledged search for herself. The bad new woman in *The Jerk* is physically stronger, more sexually experienced and more successful in her career than the man. (*The Jerk* so disapproves of the bad new woman that it has the quintessential dumb blond knock her out.) The nature of the unacknowledged need

for the woman to remain inferior to the man is in evidence in, among other films, *An Unmarried Woman*. The lover of the woman who works in a gallery is an established artist. The possible relevance of her lower career status to their relationship is not even hinted at. *A Little Romance* has the girl continually just a bit less informed than the boy. Far from being open about its importance to their relationship, the film never refers to this difference between the two. In the current crop of Hollywood films, the only really assertive woman to get the man of her choice is the Ali MacGraw character in *Just Tell Me What You Want* (written by a woman). But the woman is still significantly less powerful than the man — and the movie doesn't show that the relationship could have survived otherwise.

However, while a lot of other films have the same stance toward women as *Starting Over, Starting Over* stands out from the rest. *Starting Over* not only subscribes to the current Hollywood gospel about the proper role of women and doesn't let on it is doing this; it also bombards the audience with this gospel.

Starting Over claims to be about a man's starting over after his wife divorces him, dealing with the loneliness, finding someone else to love, and finally, choosing between the new and the old loves. it puts itself forward as a lightweight comedy, a modern love story. Underneath the candy coating, *Starting Over* is an old-fashioned get-even-with-uppity-women film, a morality play in which the "bad guy" — the bad new woman — loses out on love. At the core of the movie is a story about one woman who gets too big for her britches, gives up her man and learns his value too late, and about one man who gets the little woman he deserves and knows he is doubly loved. (His ex will be eternally panting for him in the shadows.)

Starting Over begins as Jessica potter (Candice Bergen) divorces her husband, Phil Potter (Burt Reynolds). She needs time for herself, time to launch a career as songwriter and singer. Why can't she do this with him around? "Aw, c'mon, it's only a phase. Like your photography and your painting," says her husband. As soon as she opens her mouth to sing, he cringes. (If he was the same way about her pictures, it's a wonder she didn't leave him earlier.) Notably, after nine years of marriage, Jessica succeeds professionally almost as soon as she breaks up with Phil.

Is Phil's treatment of his wife's career aspirations shown as a send-up of male chauvinism and as a justification for Jessica's desire for a

divorce? No. Though Phil is anything but supportive of Jessica's ambitions, it isn't his lack of supportiveness that's emphasized, but his correctness in being unsupportive. His negative reaction to Jessica's singing is presented as a natural aversion to a god-awful voice: when singing, Jessica contorts her face and gesticulates in a ridiculously amateurish fashion — and her weak voice doesn't help matters either.

But how is the audience supposed to believe that that voice is soon to make it onto the top singles chart? Not only once but repeatedly? (Jessica's first song is soon so popular that it's on the radio at the home of Phil's first date.) Does the whole world, with the exception of Phil Potter, have dreadful taste?

It's much easier to understand Jessica's success if the voice we hear is viewed as distorted by the filmmaker's (and the husband's) unconscious jealousy and resentment, first, of the possibility of her having any success, and later, of her actual success. What really matters to *Starting Over* is the presentation of the voice as awful. That Bergen's voice is weak is beside the point. Dylan, Cohen and Sinatra have managed on a lot less. Had the filmmakers wanted a good voice they could have dubbed one in (it isn't Bergen's voice that's heard over the titles).

The anti-careerwoman bias is made more evident in the contrast between the film's treatment of Jessica's poor singing and Phil's poor teaching. The film laughs *at* Jessica. When she sings, Phil retreats — with good reason. And not only is Jessica's voice patently inadequate, as is obvious from one line of her singing, the film audience is forced to sit through her destruction of an entire song. In a later scene, when Phil turns up at his first class with five minutes of lecture material for sixty minutes of class time, the audience isn't made to watch him make an ass of himself. Instead, his predicament is presented sympathetically, as a beginner's mistake, as something that could happen to anyone. He is much more laughed *with,* than *at*. It's also made clear that he will improve (Phil realizes his error), whereas Jessica shows no sign of altering her song delivery (and no awareness that it could be improved).

It can be argued that Jessica's voice is so horrible and yet successful because the filmmakers are parodying pop culture. Probably so. But they don't take similarly severe pot shots at other available targets — at academia, for instance. (The wife has her master's degree, the girlfriend is getting one, and the man, notably, teaches.) Also absent are snide quips about the airline magazine articles Phil writes and about the way Susan, his girlfriend, relates to the children she teaches. Or about their mania for bamboo curtains and colonial furniture. Why knock primarily Jessica's career except to belittle its worth? (If pop culture, as exemplified by Jessica's songs, is really so lousy, why is one of her songs the show's theme song?)

Another interpretation is that Jessica's voice is inadequate in order to permit the movie to mock her vapid search for a "career." But how much better is it to want to teach students to write — vapid magazine journalism, presumably — as Phil does? What makes his desire to teach (and the filmmakers' to make *Starting Over*) superior to her desire to sing? Nothing, except the filmmakers' presentation that this is so.

The put-down of pop culture and the send-up of the vapid career search, both based on the ridicule of Jessica's voice, allow the hostility toward her career-orientation to remain covert. They are part of the film's patina that helps obscure one section of the subtext, the denigration of the "bad" new woman.

Starting Over puts itself forward as dealing with male liberation from stereotypes: Phil is able to show hurt and sorrow; he doesn't care mainly for material success or status; he isn't a womanizer. But this male liberation co-exists with cheap digs at Jessica's attempts at self-realization. Why? A lot of these digs centre on her professional accomplishments, accomplishments which overshadow Phil's. It seems that *Starting Over's* male liberation isn't complete: there isn't any male characteristic more traditional than resentment at being outdone by a woman.

The smear campaign against Jessica doesn't end with the denigration of her talent. Phil is portrayed as B*L*A*M*E*L*E*S*S. Not only does Jessica stupidly want a career Phil correctly knows she doesn't have the talent for, but she has also had "an affair with his boss" (to further her career possibilities?), while Phil has "loved no one but her."

With good and bad so clearly marked out, there has to be righteous retribution. And there is. The wife gets "what she sure had coming to her." We never find out why her affair has ended — this isn't important to *Starting Over.* But we're told in no uncertain terms that the man wasn't much beside her husband: "How could you sleep with someone who signs his letters, 'Evermore'?" sneers Phil. (Later, Jessica doesn't ask Phil how he can sleep with someone who puts up a "Welcome Hot Stuff" sign.)

That Jessica's affair never amounts to much isn't the end of her "just desserts." After the divorce is finalized, when Phil is having his newfound girlfriend move in with him, Jessica comes back to him. She has discovered how much he means to her. She wants him desperately. He drives her back to her motel and stays. He excites her so much that his touch makes her heave and quiver. (Is she faking it? Not in this movie.) Then . . . she sings — and the possibility of sex is immediately cold-showered. She continues to quiver at his touch. He winces and goes. During the next session of his encounter group for divorced men, all of whom have been abandoned by their wives, it turns out that Phil has never wanted anyone as badly as he wanted Jessica then. That hardly comes across in his scene with her.

The laugh *at* versus the laugh *with* distinction applies to the portrayal of Jessica's versus Phil's handling of sex. Jessica is humiliated before the eyes of the audience. Phil, in another scene, is laughed *with*: when Susan first responds sexually to him, he says, "Hey, watch it. I'm not that good."

To whom does Phil go upon leaving his quivering ex-wife? He gets three Brownie points for not going to a Younger Woman. Susan Weintraub (Jill Clayburgh) is over thirty-

five, perhaps even older than Jessica. But age is the only way she isn't a Younger Woman. She wears cutesy clothes with puffed sleeves, has an adorable high voice, and is given to hysterical giggling and aimless arm-flapping. Yes, she does have a career: she teaches at a kindergarten. Wholesome and not very threatening for a man who writes for airline magazines. ("Oh, I love them. I read every single word in them," is the gist of her reaction to finding out how he earns his living.)

The first encounter between Phil and this woman is both typical of their relationship and repulsive in itself. Strangers, they have both been invited to the home of Phil's brother. It's a cold, dark night when they get off at the same bus stop, and on an otherwise deserted street, set off in the same direction, Phil behind Susan. A couple of blocks later, Susan (sensibly) suspects Phil may be a rapist. She tells him, "I've got a knife. Make one move toward me, and so help me god, I'll cut your balls off."

When they meet at his brother's place, she is overcome with embarrassment at what she said. Instead of being seen as correct under the circumstances, her behaviour is presented as the "cute" beginning of the relationship — because how could she ever have suspected someone tailing her, someone several inches taller and seventy pounds heavier, of unpleasant intentions? And, even "cuter", how could she have said what she said?

Most interesting in the film's presentation of Susan is that she is not only contrasted with the career-oriented Jessica, but with a third woman. This third woman (Mary Kay Place) is the scatter-brained flibbertygibbet of yesteryear — a few years and a couple of kids older. What's wrong with her? She's dumb and all she wants is a man — any man.

According to *Starting Over,* the days of the stereotypic dumb blond are over. She isn't worth more than a passing glance. The love of the "bad" new woman is a nice bonus. But it's the woman in the middle, the slightly-less-than-the-man woman, who is the ideal. She is the semi-liberated woman, a partner but not an equal, able to understand and communicate with — but still be admiring of — her man.

Phil does leave this girl-woman to return to Jessica, but only temporarily and honourably: he tells Susan he must return to Jessica to settle his doubts. (Chalk up another three Brownie points for him.) Why is departure necessary when the outcome is a foregone conclusion? It's necessary to show the durability of the women's love for him, not of his for either of them.

Jessica has, so she reports, a vaginal orgasm. (Apparently the moviemakers haven't heard that there is no such thing.) Is she lying? Not in this movie. Her claim, made just after she has sung another of her songs, can be read as a parody of the pseudo-liberated woman. Jessica's "phony" liberation, her concern with physical pleasure and her career, can be juxtaposed to Susan's "real" liberation. But Susan's "real" liberation, her "cute-feminist" outburst at her first meeting with Phil, is demonstrated in the scene in which she is most vulnerable and afraid. So much for "real" liberation, *Starting Over* style.

Parody or not, Jessica's claim to have had a vaginal orgasm is, more than anything else, her declaration of devotion to Phil. (It also testifies to his sexual prowess.) Once absolutely certain of her devotion, Phil realizes whom he really loves: he returns to Susan. After Phil left her, Susan has gone out with an adolescent basketball player of minimal vocabulary. As might be expected, he's no match for Phil. Phil, therefore, leaves Jessica loving him and has Susan dotingly happy to take him back. (Male wish fulfillment.)

Besides disapproving of *Starting Over's* thinly veiled adherence to the myths of male supremacy and of the need for male superiority in a successful female/male relationship, I object to the film because it pretends it doesn't believe in what it believes in. The filmmakers' (deliberately?) muddled thinking lets them present one thing (a male/female hierarchy in which the man is on top) as something else (a total liberation from sex-linked stereotypes).

It's not the portrayal of a career woman as a silly, unliberated person

vapidly searching for a "career" and unable to find a man when professionally successful that I'm criticizing. There are such women. It's not even that I mind that Phil doesn't turn away from Jessica because of her silliness — which he has loved for nine years — but because of her striving after and achieving success. It's that Phil's turning away from Jessica's career orientation is masked as his turning away from her silliness.

I'm criticizing a movie that makes fun of a woman's career aspirations and doesn't acknowledge it is doing so, that presents this as a parody of pop culture. That doesn't admit Jessica has to get out of her marriage before her career can go anywhere. That opts for the woman-on-a-lower-career-level-than-the-man relationship without admitting that the women's careers are the basis for Phil's choice. That has Jessica desperately wanting Phil back, and mainly for one reason — to make her suffer. That is, in short, a revenge fantasy and pretends to be a love story.

Starting Over is one man's dream, not of starting over, but of getting even.

Alice Larch lives in Montreal. One of her current interests is identifying trends in the depiction of women.

Robin Tyler

A Highly Political Act

by Lois Sweet
photos by Diana Palting

Robin Tyler was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She went to the Manitoba Theatre Centre and the Banff School of Fine Arts, completing her training at the American Musical and Dramatic Academy. For the next five years she was a singer in the New York and Miami Beach areas, but between songs she started to "rap her truths" onstage.

At a drag ball in Manhattan in 1960 she was arrested, along with forty-four men, as a female impersonator. For a number of years she played the famous female impersonator, Stacey Morgan, on stage.

With fashion model Pat Harrison she formed a comedy team, Harrison and Tyler. They invaded a Los Angeles Rams - Oakland Raiders football game — in front of 65,000 people — and demanded more sport scholarships for women. Their anti-war show, under the auspices of the United Service Organization (U.S.O.) was the only one ever to get into Vietnam.

Tyler staged counter Emmy Awards, giving one to Patricia Hearst for improving women's image in the media. She also helped to form the first National Organization for Women outside the U.S. by organizing two thousand women in New Zealand in a four-week tour.

Now she is a stand-up comic with a record out ("Always a Bridesmaid Never a Groom" Olivia Records 1979). She performed in Edmonton December 9, 1979.

The marquee at the Edmonton theatre read "Fellini's clowns!" and underneath was the name "Robin Tyler." Tyler came on stage like a powerhouse, wearing a three-piece suit which, she said, on Liza Minelli is called "cute" but on her is called drag.

While the reception inside the theatre was enthusiastic, the climate that precipitated her performance in Edmonton was tense. Shortly before Christmas 1979 Les Young, Alberta's Minister Responsible for Human Rights, declared that there was *no* need for the protection of gays under Alberta's Individual Rights Protection Act. Unlike native people, he claimed, gays *can* hide their difference and, the inference was, they should. The Minister even went so far as to say that declaring that one is homosexual constitutes sexual harassment of heterosexuals.

The Gay Alliance Towards Equality (G.A.T.E.) protested. They held a benefit concert featuring Robin Tyler, a lesbian stand-up comedian and radical feminist. For the majority of her audience, going to hear her was a highly political act. It was more than an afternoon of entertainment by a lesbian performer, it was a protest against the statements of Les Young.

Robin Tyler on stage:

Last summer I spoke at the Gay Liberation Parade in San Francisco. Now I am not gay. I'm not. I'm a lesbian — but I'm festive. (Come on guys, let's face it, we are two different cultures. We've got to realize the differences.) Anyway, I'm at the Gay Liberation Parade in San Francisco. 250,000 people marched in that parade. Now a lot of folks said, 'hey, they're "flaunting." '

Flaunting! Isn't that a funny word?

When a heterosexual shows us a picture of their family, it's called sharing. When we show them a picture of our lovers, it's called flaunting. So I felt it was time to share. I stood on the platform and I was actually able to see 100,000 people standing in front of me. And I thought about the woman who was responsible for my being there. . . .

No, not my mother.

Anita Bryant.

Yes, Anita Bryant. Anita Bryant who is to Christianity what paint-by-numbers is to art. The only people who hate Anita Bryant more than gays and lesbians are music lovers. They've just released an album of Anita's greatest hits. Of course, the record is blank.

Robin Tyler's politics are basic. She believes that people have the right to control their own lives. For the native Manitoban, now making her home in the U.S., that control begins by declaring who she is and it means writing her own material.

There was a time when Tyler was "owned" by the A.B.C. television network which had invested a million dollars in her for her own television programme. A week before the show was aired she spoke at a gay rally openly declaring she was a lesbian. Before she took that plunge, she couldn't talk about being a lesbian. Now she is outside the control of the network and of her own inhibitions; her lifestyle is balanced. Offstage, she is a political organizer, onstage she deals with her own life as well as wider political issues.

It's terrible what they do to you on T.V. I would like to become president of a major television network. I would then ban all commercials that make women look like imbeciles. That would leave 24 hours of uninterrupted programming.

"I think everybody is anti-big government" Robin says to me, a

few days after her performance in Edmonton, "everybody is anti-powerlessness-in-their-own-lives. People are upset that they can't buy food today, they can't afford heat, they can't afford reasonable shelter, they can't own their own land. They don't have any political clout with the government — they feel helpless."

Politics in America is a joke and Jimmy Carter is the punch line. Carter keeps calling for a 7% wage freeze. When the multinationals keep their profits to 7%, we'll keep our demands to 7%. That's why I think both the Democratic and the Republican parties should change their national emblems from a donkey and an elephant to a prophylactic . . . because it stands for inflation, halts production, protects a bunch of pricks and gives a false sense of security when one is being screwed.

Of her humour, Tyler says: it "is the vessel through which my politics flow. Humour is the razor-sharp edge of the truth. The state of comedy has changed. Women are now the subject and not the object or the butt of humour. I think humour can be very offensive to people because the basis of humour is anger, and you're really funny when you learn to make your anger funny. Anger is a healthy emotion. You repress anger and it becomes hostility. I think a lot of people do get offended. I usually end my act by saying, 'if I offended anybody at all — you needed it.' As Lenny Bruce said, 'you call me a sick comic but I'm holding up a mirror to this society and I'm reflecting what you think. So I'm just reflecting a sick society.' "

I do not wear a bra. I finally liberated myself to not wearing a bra which I was very self-conscious about at first because I am rather large. And some guy came over to me and said, "You should wear a bra." I said "why?" and he said, "Your breasts don't stand."

I said, "Honey, when your penis stands all the time, then my breasts will stand all the time."

Women have received discrimination for centuries and centuries. And why? Just because we can't stand up to pee.

"Mr. Jones, why am I earning 56% of what Mr. Smith is making when we do the same job?"

"Because you can't stand up to pee, Mary. That's worth 56%."

Lesbian and gay issues constitute only a small proportion of Tyler's act. I was most impressed by her effort to see through the lies around us — and that covers everything from corporate control of our lives to women's issues to the nuclear issue and, at the root of it all, to economic issues. For lesbians and gays, she sees the real issues as being equal rights and job opportunities, but obtaining those rights must begin with lesbians and gays themselves: "They've got to come out of the closet. If the 10% of the population in this country that is gay came out of the closet, they couldn't fire anybody, because if they did, in a city the size of Edmonton we'd be able to get 30,000 people out on the streets. But it's not enough to come out of the closet. When it's been fifty years in Canada since the Person's Case where women are supposed to be equal citizens and you are still earning 56% of what men are earning for the same jobs — where, in a province like Alberta with a huge Heritage Fund wages are kept at 7%, less than inflation, but M.L.A.'s vote themselves 50% wage increases — it is absolutely going to come down, in this country and in America, to the haves and the have nots. So gay people are coming out of the closet but I don't want to see a group of homocrats formed. Homocrats are people who are just concerned with the gay issue and don't care about other issues like rights of women and minorities, like world and economic issues. At the root of the affectional preference issue are the key issues — equal rights and job opportunities, the right to claim one's lover for income tax purposes — in short, all the concessions heterosexual couples take for granted."

Robin Tyler and Tory Osborn

Travelling with Robin Tyler is Tory Osborn, the woman she lives with. Osborn is also her political adviser and the person who introduces her at performances. "Tory is to me what Tom Hayden is to Jane Fonda," says Tyler. Osborn's analysis is obviously important to Tyler and their relationship is a generative force in her work. To Osborn, the issue is the right of a culture to have its own identity and creativity. "I don't know what it's like in this country," says Osborn," but the American dream is this white, middle-class, homogenized vision, which takes away the essence of an ethnic group or subculture. And gays are like a race or class except that we cut across all races and classes. Increasingly there are gay ghettos and

groups which have a distinct identity. We want to stamp out the melting pot theory that says people should all be the same."

Tyler says that she is confident about the eighties — confident that people will take hold of their lives. She points to the huge alternate women's network that's been built up in the States — to records by women performers distributed by women, art by women and performance space for women comics. Tyler states vehemently that women should *demand* 50% of the arts or culture budget in our provinces because we are 50% of the population. An alternative women's network is the answer they maintain. Tyler says that the black movement should teach women a lesson. "When that movement got off the streets and a few blacks were promoted, the movement was killed. You have to fight back. If we live by the melting pot myth we don't stand a chance. We have to work towards building a huge movement of people for progressive politics. I think the eighties is the time for that movement."

People don't understand that all oppression comes from an economic base and they don't understand the analogy between racism and sexism, which is the economic need for cheap labour. I usually sing this song for people — this commercial — and I ask them whether there's anything wrong with it. I sing:

"You've come a long way baby, to where you're going today, You've got your own cigarette now baby, you've come a long, long way. Promise her anything but give her Arpege!"

And I say to the guys, "Do you think there's anything wrong with those commercials?"

"Naw, there's nuthin wrong with those commercials. We're putting you chicks on a pedestal."

The women's liberation movement is a civil rights movement. Can you imagine doing that to black people?

"You've come a long way Negro, to get where you're going today, you've got your own hairspray Negro, you've come a long, long way. Promise them anything, but give them a watermelon!"

They'd KILL us!!!

The sobering question is whether the unity that is required for such a "progressive movement" will happen in time. Osborn says the media — and most of society — want us to believe that everyone is very self-centred. "But the social malaise people experience on an individual level, the powerlessness, is connected to the oppressiveness of people's daily lives and their inability to have any control. This is true of a lesbian who is insecure in her job, a woman who is a battered wife, and a middle-class person with a huge mortgage. The media like to make it seem as though their concerns are experienced outside a social context. At the same time that the 70's became the Me Decade, the feminist movement, the gay movement, and the anti-nuclear movement slowly — with none of the revolutionary rhetoric of the 60's — took hold, along with the right wing. The right wing is far better organized than what we call the left.

"Feminism is a household word now. It certainly wasn't ten years ago and the right wing is threatened by it, by gay rights, by abortion, all issues that centre around the role of women. In the Fifties and Sixties, the right-wing issues were international ones such as defense, budget, patriotism andd the U.S. role in the world. In the Seventies the right-wing issues have been domestic ones — drugs, prostitution, pornography, gay rights, abortion rights and the family. All the issues in the Seventies were domestic with the exception of the Panama Canal. That to me means feminism has shaken the foundations of this culture."

"The right wing responds to the movements that are most powerful" says Osborn. "The right understands that what they're fighting threatens their entire world view. In other words, they know that the same people who are anti-gay are anti-abortion. The same people who are anti-abortion are anti-E.R.A. In other words, they have made the connections that progressive people have not. We still have lesbians who are anti-gay men. We still have gay men who are racist. We have been unable to unite the way the right has. We have to learn from them, to organize and to understand how

Robin Tyler

those issues are connected."

And that is where Robin Tyler's strength lies. She not only understands how the issues are connected, she shares that understanding with others. Robin Tyler is emerging as a political spokesperson for the Eighties. She warns that increasingly, strong women are going to be called dykes, whether they associate with lesbians or not, that heterosexual women are going to have to learn to be aggressive and take power back from those who took it from them.

Tyler says the double burden lesbians have had to bear, the difficulty of existing as a lesbian in a heterosexual society and the fact of knowing they had to make their own living, has added up to a freedom and independence that many women are afraid of. Tyler hopes heterosexual women will support lesbian issues as strongly as lesbians have supported their issues: daycare and abortion. She would like to see heterosexual women accept lesbians' right to sexual preference and sexual choice. She points out that control of our bodies means not only the right to have an abortion but the right to determine our way of life.

"We're all on the same side" says Tyler. "We want to make things better for women. We're sisters working together and who we sleep with doesn't matter. It's who we are."

Lois Sweet is a radio producer and freelance writer in Edmonton.

LAW

The Truth About the Minimum Wage

by Louise Dulude

Did you know that:

- The first minimum wage laws adopted in Canada covered only female workers.
- Women account for more than two-thirds of minimum wage workers in this country.
- Canadian minimum wages held up moderately well against inflation until 1975, but since then only Saskatchewan has kept up with cost-of-living increases. The federal and B.C. rates have suffered most from this erosion, having diminished by almost a third in real value since then.
- There is a growing consensus among economists doing research in this area — almost all of them men — that minimum wages could advantageously be abolished and replaced by anti-poverty measures geared to a family's total income. According to some of these people, the minimum wage has outlived its usefulness and is now doing more harm than good. If their point of view prevails, most women working for a low wage will see their pay diminish but will not be entitled to any anti-poverty benefits.

Politicians and economists were not alone in the minimum wage debate of the last decade. Labour unions also took part, mostly to support both higher floor wages and a universal guaranteed income. Nor has business been absent: through its major organ, the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, it argued that minimum wages as well as anti-poverty proposals should be sent to the devil.

While all this was going on, women, the group most directly affected by minimum wage policies, have remained almost totally silent. The only recent representation they made was a laconic statement by the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) endorsing the labour union view. When I asked generally well-informed feminists what they thought of the issue, they told me they no longer knew what to believe following recent reports claiming that minimum wages cause unemployment and are therefore harmful to low-income workers in the long run.

This article tries to shed light on that problem. It also reviews the original reasons for implementing minimum wage laws and assesses their validity for today. Overall, it tackles the following questions: What are minimum wages for? Is it better to have them than not? If we keep them, who should they cover, at what level should they be set, and what mechanism should be used to increase them?

Rationale for Minimum Wages

"In 1919", reports Ontario expert Frank Whittingham, "the Royal Commission on Industrial Relations, established because of serious industrial unrest in the country, recommended that minimum wage laws be enacted to cover women, girls and unskilled labourers." Manitoba and B.C. had already adopted minimum wage laws for women the previous year. Saskatchewan and Quebec did the same in 1919, with Nova Scotia, Ontario and Alberta following suit in 1920. Male "unskilled labourers" didn't make it in that first round.

The purpose of these laws, as expressed in the first annual report of the Ontario Minimum Wage Board, was "to protect the physical, moral and intellectual well-being of female workers". This ambitious goal would be achieved "by ensuring that *single* female workers would be paid a living wage, thereby protecting these unorganized workers who had little bargaining power" (emphasis added). In Ontario and Quebec, and presumably elsewhere as well, this "living wage" was calculated by producing a budget showing the total amount without which an independent single woman could not achieve a minimum decent standard of living. In Toronto in 1922, this was found to be $12.50 a week.

As well as protecting female workers from exploitation, destitution (and prostitution too), it was said at the time that the new minimum wage would eliminate cut-throat competition between the poorest workers, would place a floor under workers' purchasing power and would increase productivity. These arguments became more prominent in the 1930's when minimum wages had to be extended to cover men as well. This was because competition for jobs had become so fierce during the Depression that women workers were being replaced by young men who were paid less than the female minimum wage.

The most recent justification for minimum wage laws was developed during the late '60s and early '70s, at the same time that the last differentials between rates for female and male employees were being abolished (P.E.I. lagged longest behind, with different floor wages for men and women until 1974). A spin-off from the war on poverty, this last rationale held that minimum wages are essential to provide low-paid workers with a "fair" share of the benefits accruing from general economic growth. Among other things, this means preventing the erosion of these wages by inflation or adjusting them automatically to reflect increases in average wage levels.

As the table on page 53 shows, the majority of provinces, and the federal government especially, have not shown much commitment to those principles. The table also demonstrates that a province (or rather a "jurisdiction", to include the federal level) with a relatively high minimum wage is not necessarily doing so well in terms of

the gap between its poorest and average-income earners. Quebec and Saskatchewan, which share the highest minimum wage in Canada, offer the best illustration of this. Their minimum wage rates are 48.2% and 49%, respectively, of their provincial average wages. By comparison, P.E.I.'s much lower minimum wage is almost 52% of its average wage. The federal minimum wage, which used to be among the very best at 55.7% of average earnings of federal employees in 1976, has since fallen by more than 15 points to 40.5%. So much for maintaining poor workers' "fair" share.

Minimum Wages and Unemployment

One of the reasons women are suspicious when told that minimum wages may be harmful to them in the long run is that they have often had to deal with supposedly well-intentioned men arguing that feminist demands were counter-productive. To cite only one recent example, women who wanted equal pay in the 1960's were often accused of being short-sighted. Couldn't they see that the small advantage they would gain in the short term would be vastly offset by the fact that no employer in his right mind would continue to hire women if he could get men for the same price?

But even if we were burned in the past, we must suppress our prejudices and examine the evidence on the unemployment effects of minimum wages as objectively as possible. This task is fortunately made easier by the fact that no less than three independent Canadian reviews of this research have been produced in the last five years.

Among the numerous studies conducted in the U.S. and Canada on this subject, these reviews report, two broad categories clearly emerge. The first, consisting of surveys carried out among employers (and sometimes, but less frequently, among employees too) before and after increases in the minimum wage, attempts to find out in the most direct possible way exactly how industries react to such hikes. Seven major surveys of this type took place in Canada between 1965 and 1978. (At the federal level in 1965-66, in New Brunswick in 1967, in Ontario in 1969-70, in Manitoba in 1972, in B.C. in 1972-73, in Ontario again in 1973, and in Quebec in 1976-78.)

Although these surveys varied greatly in scope and concentrated on different types of firms, all reported similar results. Increases in the minimum wage, they concluded, have on the whole "no significant unemployment effects" or "negligible impact on employment" or "very little impact", or "No noticeable impact." The very small adverse effects that appeared were greatest among teenagers.

Most frequently, it was found, employers reacted to increases in the minimum wage by simply raising their prices or absorbing the additional cost. Only two sectors showed any significant changes in employment policies. In the Ontario tourist industry, adult workers were replaced by youths, to whom a lower minimum wage applied. In some manufacturing industries subject to external competition, the new rates caused some reduction in employment. To put things in perspective, it is useful to know that only about 5% of minimum wage workers are in the manufacturing sector, compared with 30% in the trade (selling) business and 65% in services (mainly hotels and restaurants).

In spite of this near unanimity, all these studies were found to have yielded inconclusive results. This was because:

- Employers who answer questionnaires may bias their answers to further their interests.
- Often employers are unable to isolate the effect of a single factor such as an increase in wages in their decision making. (Typically, they would say they were raising their prices because the cost of everything, including supplies, rent, etcetera, as well as salaries, had gone up.)
- It was impossible to determine whether changes in employment had taken place — or failed to take place — because of the increase in the minimum wage or because of other factors such as an upturn or downturn in business conditions.

The second group of studies, almost all American, is made up of attempts to find answers about the effects of minimum wages on employment through the use of statistical models based on theoretical assumptions about the way in which firms and the labour market operate. At the risk of being stoned by economists, I will say that sceptics have been known to call these "garbage in — garbage out studies" because of their obvious weakness, which is that their conclusions are only as good as their basic assumptions.

One of the few points on which all these researchers agree — a very important one from women's point of view — is that increases in the minimum wage have no effect at all on employment when all they do is keep low-income workers in the same relative position compared to average-income employees. In other words, no increase in unemployment will result from adjusting minimum wages automatically to reflect increases in average wage levels.

Other than that, many of these "econometric" studies found significant unemployment effects because of the minimum wage among teenagers in the U.S. (especially black teenagers). However, critics warn against applying these results to the Canadian situation. For one thing, they point out, these studies are flawed because they use labour demand assumptions based on the manufacturing sector, while in fact (as we saw earlier) the overwhelming majority of minimum wage workers are in the trade and service industries. For another, unlike Canada, the U.S. has no special lower wage rate for young workers and students, thereby placing teenagers in direct competition with more experienced older workers. (Only New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Saskatchewan and the Yukon have no special rates for young workers or students.)

Only one major study, released in 1976 by Washington's prestigious Brookings Institution, assessed the global impact of changes in the minimum wage on adults as well as teenagers of both sexes. When minimum wages are increased in relation to average earnings, it concluded, teenagers lose through working less hours on the whole, while adult males benefit somewhat and adult females benefit most. As teenagers account for only 30% of low-wage workers in the U.S. (20% in Canada), the overall effect is that minimum wage workers are better off as a result of the increase. The situation might not be all bad for teenagers either, it was said. A tight job market might convince some to go back to school, while others who are already students might actually prefer part-time employment.

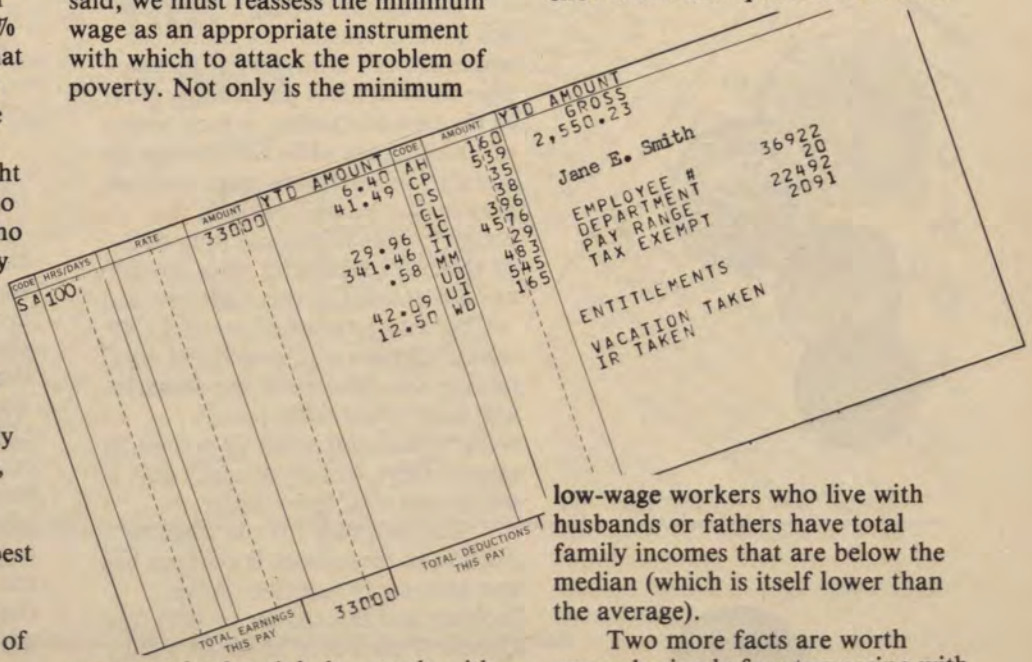
The only Canadian study to tackle these questions is unfortunately very flawed. Prepared by Pierre Fourtin in 1978 for the Quebec government, it is obviously biased against the minimum wage, using inflated estimates and studiously ignoring conflicting evidence. In spite of its author's best efforts, however, its figures still demonstrate that increases in the minimum wage benefit all groups of low-income workers except young men, and that women over the age of 25 benefit most of all. (It is an indication of the quality of this study that the author misrepresents his own findings in his conclusion.)

In summary, then, research indicates that the minimum wage is beneficial to low-income workers. American studies add that it might have adverse effects on teenagers, but no solid evidence has been uncovered to that effect in Canada. Should this happen in the future, the most intelligent response would be to lower minimum wage rates for young people, not to abolish all minimum wages and throw out the baby with the bath water.

Minimum Wages and Poverty

What has turned so many economists and bureaucrats against the minimum wage in the last few years is the realization, following the appearance of a series of provincial government studies, that the typical low-income worker is *not* a struggling, harassed middle-aged man doing his best to support a brave but tired wife and their brood of children. Instead, single people under the age of 25 make up the largest group of minimum wage workers (accounting for as many as 50% to 60%, including the 20% who are students), followed by married women (accounting for about 30%).

This being the case, it is now said, we must reassess the minimum wage as an appropriate instrument with which to attack the problem of poverty. Not only is the minimum



wage received mainly by people with no dependents, but a single minimum wage level cannot take into account the different needs of families of different sizes. It might therefore be preferable, these people contend, to abolish minimum wages and introduce instead a universal income supplementation programme for low-income families.

While most women are in favour of supplementing the incomes of the poor, they certainly stand to lose by the rest of that proposal. We don't know how many Canadian female workers earn the minimum wage, but U.S. data show that fully 19.5% of adult female workers in that country work for the minimum wage or less (compared with 5.7% of the men). There is no obvious reason why the situation should be markedly different in Canada. If minimum wages were abolished, all these women, as well as many more who earn salaries only slightly above the minimum, would eventually suffer reductions in real earnings. The gap between the incomes of men and women would be widened further, and there could even be a massive withdrawal of married women and young people from the labour force.

We also lack information about the total family incomes of Canadian minimum wage workers, although if some economists were to be believed, one might almost think that waitresses are all married to millionnaires. In fact, U.S. data show that three-quarters of female low-wage workers who live with husbands or fathers have total family incomes that are below the median (which is itself lower than the average).

Two more facts are worth remembering before tampering with married women's meager earnings. The first is that it is largely because of married women's wages that the relative economic position of Canada's middle and low income families has remained stable instead of deteriorating in the last 25 years. The second is that it is mainly because poor women took outside jobs that the poverty rate for families has dropped from 21% to 11% since 1969. If married women leave their jobs or their wages decline, an increase in disparities between richest and poorest families is bound to follow.

Another myth that needs debunking is that minimum wages are high in Canada. If Statistics Canada's 1980 poverty line for a single person living in a large city ($5,815) is added to a rock bottom $2,000 for minimal working expenses (including income tax, contributions to the CPP and U.I.C., clothes, transportation, etcetera), the total is equivalent to a minimum wage of

$3.76, higher than any level yet reached in Canada. Instead of joining labour unions' endless sterile debates about whether the minimum wage should support three people or four, women might do much better politically if they simply insisted on a decent inflation-proof wage for one.

Exemptions from the Minimum Wage

Exclusions or partial coverage are another reason why minimum wages are not always what they appear to be. This is particularly true in the case of Quebec, which boasts of its high rate while the average income of its minimum wage workers may in fact be the lowest in the country. This is because fully 40% of Quebec's minimum wage workers are not entitled to this high rate at all, but only to a lower one of $2.85 which applies to all employees who receive tips. Manitoba and Ontario also have lower rates for waiters/bartenders ($2.95 and $2.50 respectively), but these apply only to employees who serve liquor.

The rationale for the wage reduction in these cases is obvious but not necessarily justified. After looking into this matter in 1975, the Quebec Task Force on Wage Policy and Minimum Labour Standards concluded that the present practice is unfair and should be abolished, to be replaced by a system where the regular rate would apply and all tips would be shared among employees. This recommendation was based on findings that tips vary greatly from place to place and that the lower rate leads to an undesirable institutionalization of tipping. Another reason mentioned recently is that tips are failing to keep up with increases in the cost of living.

As well as young workers and students, whose special treatment has already been mentioned, another group which does not enjoy full coverage from minimum wage laws in Canada is domestic workers. P.E.I. is the only province that has not singled them out, while Newfoundland and Quebec include them, but in a special category. Everywhere else in Canada they are excluded from coverage (except in cases where they are hired by a third party).

The traditional reasons — excuses, rather — for exempting household workers are many:

- Their responsibilities and hours vary so greatly that they are hard to supervise.
- It is difficult to determine how long they actually worked.
- It would be impossible to implement a law covering them.
- Many domestics get payments in kind in the form of room, board, meals, etc. that are hard to evaluate.
- Maids are often "secondary workers".
- Most employers couldn't afford domestics at the minimum wage.
- Etcetera, Etcetera . . .

As if domestic workers didn't have enough problems trying to gain basic rights granted to others long ago, their situation is often complicated by the fact that many of them are immigrants on short-term work permits or illegal entrants to Canada who are in no position to complain about anything. One of the most difficult barriers domestics have to face is that their employers are often former housewives who can't shake their profound belief that housework isn't worth a decent pay.

Minimum Wages in Practice

It is all very well to understand minimum wages in theory, but the fact remains that the worst feature of our minimum wage system is its totally inadequate implementation. No information is available on the degree of compliance with these laws in Canada, but there is every indication that the U.S. findings of "very high" noncompliance are also valid in this country.

When the Quebec Task Force on Wage Policy held public hearings a few years ago, someone pointed out the irony of Statistics Canada's own "Employment, Earnings and Hours" publication listing numerous violations of minimum wage laws. Until women can force changes in the present ineffectual system of implementation based solely on employee complaints and penalties lower than the cost of respecting the law, the joke will continue to be mainly on us.

Kinesis July 1980

Nannies aren't going to take it any longer

By Joey Thompson

An estimated 10,000 nannies and housekeepers in B.C. are waiting to see if Labour Minister Jack Heinrich will remember to include domestic workers in labour standards legislation amendments due to announced this year.

They have reason to believe he won't.

A group of the newly-formed B.C. Dome Association met with Heinrich recentl the response was noncommital at best.

The minister mumbled something about standing their plight but when it ca time for a firm commitment on inclu mestic workers in basic rights legi he backed down.

The amendments will extend laws re workers' basic rights to annual an utory holidays, minimum wage, mate protection and an eight hour day workers.

For the first time in B.C.'s hist workers will have these basic ri apparently not domestic workers earning $350. a month plus room to care for several children, c (sometimes prepare Point Grey d ties) houseclean, wash clothes other housekeeping duties.

Granted, a few are invited alo or ski trips, perhaps they use the family Roll roast and Bava also en

6 Kinesis Novem.

Radio Shack is a turn-off

They're calling it an Tandy Electronics Ltd. Barrie, Ontario, the wor strike for their first The issues are right to b

Broadside

For Whom the Bell Toils

by Deena Rasky

When you get your monthly Bell Canada bill in the mail, you'll notice that the envelope cheerfully informs you the company is celebrating its 100th birthday. The image Bell would like to convey to its customers is of wise old Alexander Graham Bell creating his invention, of smiling operators and of phone users marvelling over modern technology.

But instead of celebrating, 7,400 operators and dining service attendants across Canada were on strike for two months without a contract. 100% of the Bell workers have been exploited, 95% are women. The top wage an operator in the major cities such as Toronto and Montreal could expect to make, regardless of how long she'd been working was $194.29 week- afeteria workers made only eigh- the Quebec minimum

Kinesis Sept/Oct '79

Pink collar workers see red

Ann Schaeffer

Women workers: Beware of Industrial Inquiry Commissions bearing settlements of 6 and 1%.

Local 2 of the Association and College Employees (AUC Fraser University recent stellar sums in a bindin covering two years.

To quote from the IIC November 22, 1978, al which expired on Mar ncreased by 6%. Ef 979, all rates sh rther 1%." In a years will be of annual v of servic ting in 9th yea sion s o y

ersity

Three out o of the poor i Canada are wo

Gus Long

The majority of Canadian women, wha their backgrounds, are very vulnerab to becoming poor overnight.

So opens the National Council of Welfare latest report, entitled "Women and Povert released October 2.

According to the Council, poverty is overwhelmingly a woman's problem: three of every five poor Canadians are wom and one of every six Canadian wom poor.

of three elderly widow the poverty line poorest grou Ype

Minimum Wage Comparisons in each Jurisdiction

	Adult minimum wage May 1, 1980	Increase in cost of living since the last increase	Minimum wage as a percentage of average earnings 1979
Federal	$ 2.90	35%	40.5%
British Columbia	3.00	34%	36.9%
Alberta	3.00	28%	36.9%
Saskatchewan	3.65	0%	49.0%
Manitoba	3.15	3%	46.4%
Ontario	3.00	12%	42.1%
Quebec	3.65	1%	48.2%
New Brunswick	2.80*	30%	44.5%
Nova Scotia	2.75	29%	45.5%
P.E.I.	2.75*	22%	51.8%
Newfoundland	2.80*	8%	40.0%
N.W.T.	3.00	34%	35.8%
Yukon	3.00	35%	30.4%

* On July 1, 1980, New Brunswick's minimum wage rose to $3.00, P.E.I's to $3.00 and Newfoundland's to $3.15.

SOURCES: *Rapid Reference Charts,* Library and Legislative Analysis Branch, Labour Canada; *The Consumer Price Index,* cat. no. 62-001, Statistics Canada; "Recent Minimum Wage Trends", *IR Research Reports,* Sept.-Oct. 1979, p. 2.

LEGAL NOTES

Abortion: U.S. Case Bodes Ill for Poor

by Linda Duncan

A recent decision of the New York courts has reversed a United States' government policy which restricted access to abortions for the poor. Judge John Dooling, in his 600-page judgement overruled the Hyde Amendment which had denied Medicaid (American medical assistance plan) for all abortions except those cases where rape or incest occurred or other extreme cases where in the opinion of doctors the woman's life would be in danger. While this case is open to reversal by an imminent decision of the American Supreme Court, the Landmark judgement has provided some reprieve to the desperate who for the last decade have been forced out the back door of hospitals.

What does this decision mean for Canadian women? While strictly speaking American court decisions are not applicable in this country, Judge Dooling's reasons for judgement are worthy of note and should be heeded by our own courts and lawmakers. At least the case provides hope for those who believe the rights of the poor should be the same as those on the other side of the fence.

The decision is timely in light of the recent brief by the Canadian anti-abortion contingent, Campaign Life, to the Hall Commission on Medicare in which they call for the removal of abortion payments from provincial medicare plans. Campaign Life has suggested that this can be done by the federal Minister of Health and Welfare in her capacity to declare which procedures are "medically required" and therefore eligible for coverage. The effect of such a move would clearly be restricted access to medically safe abortions for those who can not afford to pay for them out of their own pockets.

It is hard to comprehend why anyone would want to make life harder for the poor. The 1977 Badgley Committee report on abortion points out that even with Medicare coverage, low and middle income women do not face the same choices when an unwanted pregnancy occurs:

> Despite the extensive benefits provided by national and provincial programmes, sharp social and economic disparities persist. While the social meaning of poverty and the types of services mounted to serve low-income individuals and families change and reflect the social purpose of each era, the culture of poverty remains entrenched. It moulds a different way of life than that experienced by middle-income Canadians and in terms of the outcomes of pregnancy contributes to different social choices being taken between seeking an induced abortion and bringing to term an unwanted pregnancy. (p. 168)

It appears that if Campaign Life has its way the choice to abort will be prohibitive for the poor for economic as well as moral reasons.

While it is the poor who will be most affected if abortion payments are removed from medicare plans, statistics clearly show more abortions are sought by women whose financial situtation is less desperate. According to the Badgley Report, "among the married women with children who had had abortions, 15.4% had annual family incomes of $8,000.00 or less; 36.5% were between $8,000.00 and $12,000.00; and 48.1% had family incomes of $13,000.00 or more." The Commission also discovered that poor men and women tended to have far less knowledge and awareness of existing abortion laws and available medical services. Even if members of Campaign Life can justify to themselves the obvious discriminatory effect of their proposal, its success will do little to eliminate abortion.

In reaching his decision, Judge Dooling determined that to exclude abortion costs from Medicaid would result in a denial of the right to be, the right to privacy and the right to equal protection under the law. He further stated it would be a violation of religious freedom, since religious groups have differing views on abortion. Judge Dooling also added an important variable to the test of necessity of an abortion.

> Poverty is itself, and persistently, a medically relevant factor; it takes its toll on pregnant women's general health and the heightening of the health risks of pregnancy. (p. 160)

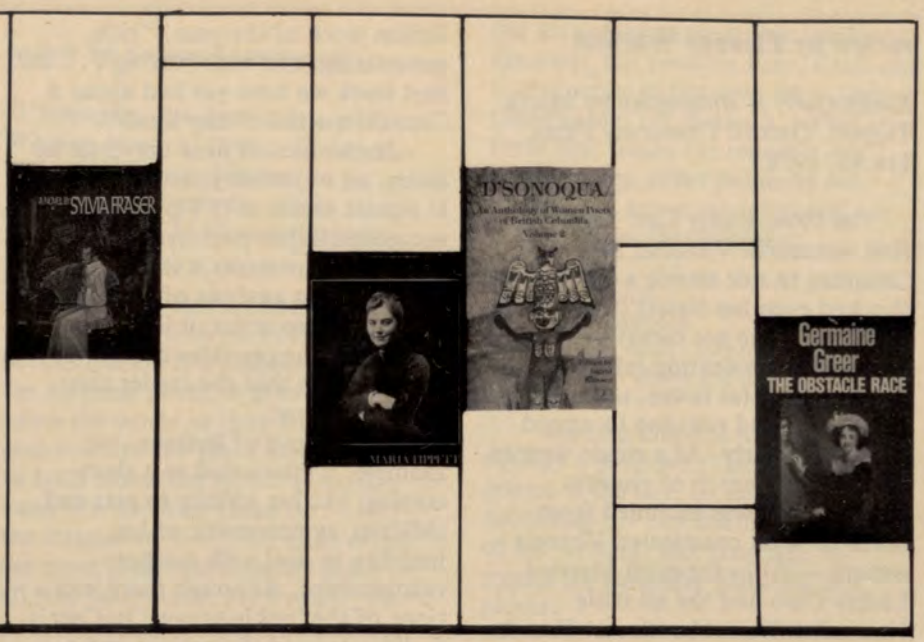
In the United States, pro-choice activists say Judge Dooling has not gone far enough. They argue that women should be able to elect abortion without a doctor's approval. Yet at least with this breakthrough the availability of an abortion will not be determined by a woman's income.

In Canada, our present abortion laws and policies are restrictive enough without making them more so. In most jurisdictions, no woman can obtain an abortion unless she first satisfies one or more physicians and in some cases psychiatrists that she is approaching death or mental breakdown (see Law Column, *Branching Out*, December 1977). An abortion should be paid for under existing medical plans, like any other medical service. If the Hall Commission agrees with the Campaign Life proposal the poor will again be sentenced to their own devices.

Note: Since this article was written, the Dooling judgement was reviewed by the American Supreme Court who, regrettably, determined that Medicaid can be denied for abortions.

Linda Duncan is an Edmonton lawyer and editor of the Law Column in Branching Out. *In preparing the above commentary she received invaluable assistance from Louise Dulude. Femmy Swytink of the U.S. Embassy in Ottawa provided a copy of the Dooling transcript.*

BOOK REVIEWS



review by Joanne Hedenstrom

The Emperor's Virgin, by Sylvia Fraser. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980. $14.95 cloth.

This is a novel written by a woman with a man's consciousness. Before concerned feminists gasp and draw back in horror from what might be considered a woman's attack on a woman writer, consider Mary Daly's statement in the book every woman should read, *Gyn/Ecology*: "The male likes death — it excites him sexually and, already dead inside, he wants to die." Death mingled with sexuality, especially female sexuality, has been a dominant theme in masculine literature for centuries, from Richardson to Hardy to Mailer. Lest you gasp again and say, "Does anyone write anything different?" I answer emphatically, yes, women Canadian novelists for the past two centuries have been writing something different. They have been writing about women who grow up, mature, stand on their own two feet; women who throw off the gentlewoman/angel/princess/doll image and become self-motivated, self-loving, strong. Any reader who cares for a list of such writers can write me and I will send her such a list — a voluminous one.

But, *The Emperor's Virgin* centres on death. All sexual liaisons, all moments of tenderness eventually end in death. Women are hopeless victims of violence seen only in a sexual role where they are usually abused. The plot, in fact, is about a virgin's rape by the emperor and — of course! — the betrayal of herself, (and thus her lover and her country), by momentarily — of course! — liking being raped. Her rape — of course! — ends finally in her death. I'm sorry, but this is not a novel written from a woman's consciousness. It is a male fantasy of a beautiful woman dying in tortured ecstasy because she is sexual.

It's not the recording of the public spectacle/slaughters of Rome I object to. This — allowing for poetic license — is history. I object to the fact that the plot is as trite as that of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Nana, Camille, Madame Bovary, Anna Karenina.* The woman who *dares*, dies. This is not a book about real people. It is myth, folk tale, beast fable — and not at its best but at its worst because imposed upon it is the ridiculous pathetic Puritan fallacy (phallusy) that a woman who dares open her legs (and heaven forbid her heart) must die.

Lest it be said that I'm judging Sylvia Fraser on one book alone, read the first chapter of *The Candy Factory* and see how a virgin ("this squishy fleshbag of unfulfilled hopes and dreams") loves being brutalized and raped with the long point of an umbrella, and how, while being strangled, she gasps out that she and her rapist were meant for each other.

Note, I have not complained of Ms. Fraser's writing ability. She is a brilliant writer, technically, and sometimes intuitively. But she sells her abilities short. *The Emperor's Virgin* is written for titillation, mixing the horrors of ancient Rome with the theme of Romeo and Juliet on the torture racks. It is soft porn, sexism, sadism — a compendium of the 2,500 things you *did not* want to know about the human race. It is also a fairy tale, for real women choose life over death, and survival over martyrdom.

I'm judging Sylvia Fraser's work on the basis of the words of Adrienne Rich in "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision":

> A radical critique of literature, feminist in impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been til now a male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name — and therefore live — afresh.

But all *The Emperor's Virgin* teaches us is how to be trapped afresh, fucked afresh, killed afresh. Period.

Joanne Hedenstrom is currently completing a book on Canadian women writers.

review by Eleanor Wachtel

Emily Carr: A Biography by Maria Tippett. Oxford University Press, $16.95, 1979.

In 1904, Emily Carr became the first woman in Victoria, British Columbia to ride astride a horse. She shocked even her sisters (she'd been orphaned since her teens) by, at age 33, smoking, swearing mildly, playing cards (at home, not in public of course), and refusing to attend church regularly. As a single woman who wasn't church or charity-oriented, she was excluded from much of what constituted Victoria society — from the prim Married Ladies Club and the all-male Naturalist Club. Her closest friends lived elsewhere, childhood friends who had long since left the town and fellow students met while in art school in London. So Carr kept a tame menagerie, ranging from Sally her pet cockatoo to the Javanese monkey Woo. More unusual still, she spent a lot of time visiting the Indians of coastal B.C. Dubbed "Klee Wyck" (Nootka for "one who laughs easily"), she travelled to remote outposts and recorded the monumental totem poles. Had she been uncommonly wealthy, Carr would have been passed off as an eccentric. That she was instead an artist of vision seems not to have been regarded as comparably acceptable either by her contemporaries or, more surprisingly, by her latest biographer.

Maria Tippett, author of *Emily Carr,* collected medals and $5000 prizes as the winner of both this year's Governor General's Award for English non-fiction and the John A. MacDonald Award (sponsored by the Canadian Historical Association and Manulife Insurance) for a historical work. The first edition of 7,500 copies was quickly sold out (before the end of '79) and a second printing initiated. The book was well-received by critics who praised its formidable research, lucid style, and detailed, well-rounded portrait. William French wrote in the *Globe & Mail* that Tippett had produced "an almost flawless book setting new standards for cultural biography." And in the *Toronto Star,* Robert Fulford deemed it the best non-fiction work of the year, "rich, penetrating, and trail-blazing . . . the best book we have yet had about a Canadian artist of any kind."

In the face of near universal acclaim, an objection must be raised. It almost seems as if Tippett has succeeded in her portrayal despite herself. She presents a stilted and unconvincing analysis of Carr as woman and as artist; it is to her credit that she provides enough information so that the reader can reject her view.

Carr's love of Indians, for example, is interpreted as a shortcoming; like her affinity to pets and children, symptomatic of her inability to deal with mature relationships. Although there was a tinge of the 'noble savage' in Carr's feelings toward the natives and a romanticization of their identification with the grand forces of nature that inspired her art, Carr's analysis of their situation was clear-headed. Indian culture was being destroyed through contact with the Europeans. They brought disease and liquor on the one hand, and depleted the natural resource base on the other. And the primary vehicle of 'socialization' was the missionary. Heretical thinking in a time when Indians were widely disdained as drunks, gamblers, and idlers. Tippett grants that the good Victoria burghers were "somewhat hostile toward native people," but the cultural historian shrinks from describing as racist these citizens who regarded Indians as "a nuisance and a trouble to the authorities."

More disturbing in this biography of a woman by a woman is Tippett's dedicated Freudianism. Both the treatment of sexuality and of the artist's commitment are distorted. Early in Emily Carr's adolescence, her close relationship with her father soured, presumably when he attempted to explain to her the facts of life. As Carr wrote of it: "I couldn't forgive Father I just couldn't for spoiling all the loveliness of life with that bestial brutalness of explanation filling me with horror instead of gently explaining the glorious beauty of reproduction the holiness and joy of it." Tippett speculates that Emily's "expression of revulsion makes one wonder whether it was caused by a misguided attempt to illustrate the explanation by some action." Despite the essential ambiguity of the event, it becomes the cornerstone of Tippett's precarious structure.

After studying art in Victoria and watching her friends leave for the mandatory training in England, Carr could afford to spend two and one-half years at the California School of Design in San Francisco. She returned to Victoria eager to paint, explore, exhibit, and save up enough money (though teaching) for further study in London. Then she met a sympathetic young ship's purser, William "Mayo" Paddon who began to court her. In describing Emily's subsequent departure for England, Tippett writes: "Mayo Paddon's attentions did not keep Emily from leaving the country once more." Is this fact or rebuke?

Mayo persevered and popped up in London the next year. But Emily was immersed in her work and consistently turned down Mayo's "five times a week" marriage proposals. For this, Emily is classed as "sexually frigid." Further, Tippett concludes, "possessing a low sex drive . . . she focused her attention on her art." This jaundiced view of artistic commitment is extraordinary in what purports to be the story of an artist's life. Freudian theory may hold that art is merely sublimated sexuality, but as personality analysis or art criticism this view is impoverished and irritating.

But the icing on the cake is Tippett's gloss on "hysteria" and its treatment. While in England, Carr became ill, suffering from a variety of perhaps psychosomatic symptoms. She was diagnosed as hysterical. Tippett concurs: "There can be no doubt that she had fallen victim to the classic form of hysteria . . ." Of what there can be no doubt is that Carr had fallen victim to the classic *diagnosis* of hysteria. From the Greek for uterus, it was a "woman's disease" whose sufferers were characterized by "sexual frigidity, revenge-seeking, insecurity, and attention-getting behaviour." As early as 400 B.C., Hippocrates wrote: "For hysterical maidens I prescribe marriage, for they are cured by pregnancy." Carr suffered at the hands of doctors who genuinely believed hysteria was a

palpable malady; her depiction suffers at the hands of a biographer who, amazingly, still accepts this.

The treatment for her hysteria included haphazard doses of electric shock therapy, an experimental technique at the turn of the century. Carr spent 15 months in a sanitorium. "But the characteristics of the hysterical personality . . . were to remain with her." What, one might better ask, about the long-term effects of zapping her brain?

If Tippett's insensitivity is disturbing, more pernicious still is the critical reaction. Carr's "sexual frigidity" becomes "sexual paranoia" in the *Vancouver Sun*. *Canadian Author and Bookman* has no patience for cautious interpretation. Carr's childhood "terminated abruptly when her father raped her." *Playboard* is coy: "With womanly wisdom Tippett has been able to rise to the female challenge of Emily Carr."

So little are these critics troubled by Tippett's regressive Freudianism that they delight in confirming their own prejudices about female sexuality. Carr "was also sexually frigid: the earnest young suitor who wanted desperately to marry her was turned down, and she never made any connection with a man . . ." (*Canadian Reader*). After faithfully recounting Tippett's analysis from "brutal telling" to "hysteria," the review continues: "Tippett brings to the discussion of Carr's career the same scrupulous care she devotes to her personality." Precisely.

Tippett can hardly be blamed for the excesses of her admirers. But her attitude toward the artist and creation are regrettable. As one reviewer does note (Patrick Watson in *Saturday Night*), the reader forms a curious alliance with Emily Carr — "A kind of conspiracy of hope in which the author appears to play no part."

Eleanor Wachtel is a Vancouver freelance writer and broadcaster. She is one of the editors of the feminist literary journal Room of One's Own.

review by Smaro Kamboureli

D'Sonoqua: An Anthology of Women Poets of British Columbia. Edited by Ingrid Klassen. Vancouver: Intermedia, 1979. Two Volumes, $7.95 each (paper).

Although this anthology was not compiled with particular themes in mind, there is a common ground for all these poets. It is twofold: to name the world as they see it and to give voice to the place they inhabit. In both cases, the world/place is local: it is the West Coast or the interior of B.C., or, quite often, the most local and intimate place of all, the body itself. As a result, the poems echo each other, containing an abundance of shared or complementary images: catalogues of fish, boats, harbours, rocks, woods, totems, towns. At the risk of being too sketchy, I would say they represent the four elements — water, earth, fire and air — plus a fifth, so prominent in these women's poems: blood.

Consider as an example Cathy Ford's poem "A Color":

> . . .
> red
> any blood
> any red
> blood is found in flowers
> in the center
> red flows
> natural

Ford's meditation on red is the vehicle through which she presents woman from inside:

> under the skin
> blood
> red sacs hidden

The locale here is the female body. Ford, however, makes female nature universal by presenting blood objectively through her language. Chopped sentences and frequent one-word. lines create a sense of immediacy as they force the eye to focus on single words/objects. To put it in Marilyn Bowering's words:

> We have to slay
> the images,
> keep watch
> and know our kind.

The temptation to talk about all the thirty-two poets represented in the anthology is great, but, unfortunately, not possible here. Each one is distinctive in her own way. Judy Copithorne, for instance, writes in a form that teases the reader's eye. Her language, either pointedly cut or flowing, has a precision and an evocativeness that surprise:

> crawl uphill
> lie in hammock
> swing in body rhythms
> high above the tide

Reading Daphne Marlatt is equally a pleasure. The locus of her poems is the city, or rather, what is becoming *her* city during the process of her writing. Her language recreates the particular place she explores:

> For what part: my city
> monotonous under cloudbank
> hums,
> throttle unseen, barge accidents, the
> fog. . . .

Her lines are long, like the streets she wanders through. In the excerpt from *Stevenston,* she *makes strange* by calling on us to "Imagine a town running / (smoothly? / a town running before a fire . . ."

Reading Maxine Gadd, on the other hand, is a disconcerting experience. Real and mythical places are confused, and the poem's allusions leap suddenly from shamanism to the Bible. Gadd, in spite of her crafted sense of line, seems to be carried away by the too ambitious quest she assigns to the woman of her "Part One of the Legend." In diametric opposition to Gadd, Leona Gom relates, in a nostalgic but not idealizing voice, her recollections of her past on her family farm. Yet the tameness of her forms and her tone is too restrictive even for poetry of reminiscence.

Stephanie Judy's poetry I find refreshing and challenging. Her poems are collages of particular occasions and impressions. Her language, narrative but extremely rhythmical, is an application of her own principle of writing: "*how to write* / imagine / nibble."

All the poets engage their readers through the idiosyncratic ways they affirm their identities. As Carolyn Borsman says in "A Dream for Sleeping," they write:

. . . as one
the circular pool, the lovers'
sweet mother tongue.

Their oneness is the female sensibility they share; their distinct voices, their individual identities as poets. Their difference ultimately consists of their use of language which reflects the self. As Carole Itter says in her "Selected Passage for Lewis Carroll," "When you're not yourself / you cannot explain yourself."

The title and the cover of the anthology illustrate fully the sameness and the difference of these poets. *D'Sonoqua* is a totem whose parts Emily Carr characterizes as "the Wild Woman," *D'Sonoqua* of "the pursed lips" and of "the speaking mouth." It is undoubtedly all these. But what is most important about this totem is that it portrays the reconciliation of the diversities of female nature.

In this archetypal image, the "Wild Woman" merges with the woman with "the speaking mouth," the recognizable one, if you prefer. The "Wild Woman's" bird-like body is covered with colourful designs and, although her face has a terrifying austere expression, her whole ambience is that of artistic creativity. In contrast, the woman with "the speaking mouth" has a body that bears marks of fertility: round belly, heavy breasts with nipples gazing at the earth, open inviting arms. Her circular mouth, almost framed within the emphasized pear-like cheeks, seems to be the womb the "Wild Woman" emerges from. She parallels the artistic creativity of the "Wild Woman" with her ability to give birth to human life.

The woman as terrible and good, as lover and mother; as maker. An image, a title, that evokes successfully the variety of theme, style and form that characterizes the poetry of this two-volume anthology.

Only one thing I find missing: biographical references to the poets which, I think, are necessary for an anthology like the one in hand.

Smaro Kamboureli, born in Greece, is currently living in Calgary. She is a translator and a graduate student of English at the University of Manitoba.

review by Trudy Grovier

The Sexism of Social and Political Theory, Edited by Lorenne M. G. Clark and Lynda Lange. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979. Cloth, $15.00, paper, $5.00.

This book is a collection of papers by Canadian academics on the topic of philosophers' accounts of women, reproduction, sexual roles, and the family. It includes papers on Plato, Locke, Hume, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche. An introduction provides a useful analysis explaining the author's perspective and the importance of the subject. A fundamental concept here is that of reproductive labour. Reproductive labour includes all the work that goes on from conception until the human embryo has developed into an independent social being. The editors claim that reproductive labour has never been taken seriously by political philosophers, this omission being because of their assumption that women will naturally stay home and do it, without pay. Clark and Lange believe that any acceptable political theory must guarantee equal status for the two sexes, at the same time providing a democratic account of reproductive labour. Boldly, they assert that "traditional political theory is bankrupt in the light of present perspectives." This claim has some plausibility, but cannot be fully convincing in the absence of an analysis of that most eloquent defender of women's rights, the utilitarian John Stuart Mill.

Many philosophers are inclined to 'read out' of the work of such greats as Aristotle and Kant references to women which are silly and insulting. It is easy to regard these as mere manifestations of a philosopher's personal difficulties or historical circumstances. For women philosophers such an attitude has been particularly tempting. It is demoralizing to think of Kant as having seriously believed that women could as well grow beards as learn Greek while, as a woman philosopher, paying serious attention to his arguments in epistemology. When we find sexism in a thinker of a past age, it is charitable to regard it as an incidental and excusable lapse, explicable in terms of cultural surroundings. The interest of 'find the sexism' analyses comes when we go behind the incidental and come to understand that a particular philosopher's sexism is so essential to his view of nature and society that it cannot be eliminated without undermining his entire theory. This claim is a philosophically interesting one; searching for sexism in contexts where it cannot plausibly be made strikes me as both uncharitable and masochistic.

Plato to Nietzsche is a long stretch, and this is a short review. Accordingly, I shall concentrate on several articles in which the authors explicitly argue for the theoretical ineliminability of the sexist claims they find. Prominent among these are Clark's paper on Locke, Marcil-Lacoste's paper on Hume, and Lange's paper on Rousseau.

Clark finds that Locke believed women to be naturally subordinate to men, because of their biological vulnerability in childbearing and their inferior physical power. Locke insisted on a man's right to bequeath his property to his children; this necessitates man's knowing which children are biologically his. Locke acquiesced to subordination for women while insisting on equality for men. Also he readily accepted the property laws of his own time, which accorded women virtually no power of ownership. These factors justify our calling him sexist. Clark argues that this sexism is ineliminable. Independent women with the ability to provide for themselves would not care whose children they had; men in such circumstances would not know which children were theirs. This ignorance would make inheritance meaningless. "In the final analysis, what point is there to a theory whose sole object is to ensure the individual right of men to appropriate, own, and control the future disposition of property if they cannot be sure of the paternity of their potential inheritors?" I doubt that the sole object of Locke's political theory is to guarantee property and its transfer. However, this is one very important object of the theory, and Clark's analysis shows that without sexist assumptions, male ownership of property as understood in Locke's England would have no point.

For Rousseau a woman's role in life is to maintain the home as a haven in a heartless world, tenderly caring for her husband and children. This role is essentially a private one; a participating citizen, however, must have the capacity to transcend particular interests and make judgements on behalf of the people as a whole. Lange maintains that women's role will make them incapable of this transcendence, and that, accordingly, Rousseau must conclude that women are incapable of citizenship. She regards this sexism in Rousseau as ineliminable. Lange believes that the private/public split in Rousseau is associated with mind/body dualism, which in turn accounts for the necessity of an inferior social group (women) as caretakers of lower needs. However, dualists regard all persons as having spiritual and physical aspects and, since this is so, I see no reason to think that Rousseau's account is incapable of amendment. Men and women could share private (reproductive and domestic) duties and public duties of citizenship, half and half. Lange's paper is less clear than Clark's and leaves me unconvinced.

Hume's political philosophy is different in character from that of Locke and Rousseau, for it is as much about how people reason in moral matters as it is about what principles should govern the state. This difference is reflected in Marcil-Lacoste's paper. She argues that Hume's method in moral reasoning, emphasizing as it does custom, the common opinion of mankind, and what is useful to society, will leave him no grounds for condemning derogatory and unequal treatment of women as unjust. "Hume makes it impossible to distinguish an experimental explanation of the inferior status of women from a philosophical justification of this inferiority as being morally just." Making this kind of distinction often poses problems for interpretors and critics of Hume's philosophy. The irony which is a prominent aspect of Hume's style only compounds the problem. In defence of Hume, we should note that what is useful for society depends on circumstances (a point Hume strongly emphasized), and that chastity, which Hume never regarded as a natural virtue, is rendered unnecessary by the availability of contraceptives.

The Sexism of Social and Political Theory is definitely worth reading, though its terminology and presupposition of a background in the history of philosophy may make it difficult for some readers. Persist. Then look back at Plato, Locke, Hume, Hegel, and company, and see what you think.

Trudy Govier teaches philosophy at Trent University in Peterborough.

review by Judith Doyle

The Obstacle Race by Germaine Greer. Secker & Warburg, London, 1979. Cloth, $32.95.

"Why have there been no great women artists?" — this question, as inevitable as grade school, has reappeared as a subject of investigation for feminists, artists and art historians. *The Obstacle Race,* Germaine Greer's exhaustive reply, attempts to fully document women's painting prior to about 1850. It is both an art history and a sociological study of art, inspecting works and examining the conditions under which art is produced and evaluated. In the end, it is a fearsome account, where political and circumstantial obstacles are to a greater or lesser extent internalized by the artists, psychically misshaping them and misshaping the products which they return to the world.

Not an art historian, Greer finds painting itself suspect, more an economic convenience than a preferred form of aesthetic expression. She writes ". . . portable paintings are, like rare postage stamps, small repositories of enormous value." For Greer, women painters are a test group, small enough to document fully. Her disinterest, both in painting and art history, equips her to objectively examine the failures, in a tone which borders on the scientific. One wishes she had continued her study further into the early twentieth century, when obstacles begin to blur, women's collectivity emerges, and there are increasing instances of success.

The book is subdivided into two categories — The Obstacles, which include "Family," "Love" and "Humiliation;" and "How They Ran," a rough chronology from the sixth century cloisters through to the mid-nineteenth century. Greer resists selecting artists, instead including them all; in obscure cases, she makes an effort to fully document their work and speculate about missing or falsely attributed paintings. There is also considerable emphasis on first-hand documentation of their lives. Such information provides clues to both the circumstances and temperament of these women.

Greer's analysis of the paintings and circumstances indicates the psychic results of oppression. The work (along with the lack of work, and prematurely stunted careers) is full of signs of self-censorship, hypocritical modesty, girlish pretense and uncertainty; and is physically flawed by poor materials, naive workmanship and inhibited

education. Even Greer's "magnificent exception," Artemisia Gentileschi, warrants only a few sentences in Wittkower's definitive *Art and Architecture in Italy*. Gentileschi's ability, thoroughly individual with translucent, Caravaggian tones and meticulous detail, was employed in depicting gruesome, monumentally violent subjects. Her masterpiece, *Judith Slaying Holofernes,* is fiercely sensational.

For the art historian, to whom this book will become a necessary reference, Greer's sociological emphasis will prove frustrating; her categories tend to isolate women from their male and female contemporaries, inadventently contributing to their freakishness. As a once-read-through, *The Obstacle Race* is bulky with detail; at worst, exhausting. This is purely the result of Greer's own obstacles: in order to be inclusive, she must incessantly and cautiously speculate about attributions, write around damages and lack of restoration, and exactingly analyze the the minor virtues in painting of little interest. Fortunately, Greer is a marvellous writer, with a wry, precise vocabulary and a fine sense of the delicious morsel, like Suor Plautilla. This sixteenth century nun became an object of gentle ridicule within her own convent because her depiction of Christ was modelled, by necessity, after a woman.

Attribution, which insures the value of art works and artists, has dominated art history. Greer attacks this monetary base. In the case of Judith Leyster, Greer suggests that the effect of weeding out her work would be enormous, devaluing thousands of Dutch paintings in a search for truth about an artist who will never earn as much money in sales rooms, or prestige on museum walls.

The Obstacle Race, long at times, is in the end too short. This is a book concerned with failure, but also with struggle; in that respect, it reveals many successes. Most of all, *The Obstacle Race* is a significant case for important scholarship in the arts by critics who come from other disciplines. The attribution and valuation of art proceeds from many, often vested, interests. By evaluating art from diverse social and political perspectives, its interpretation becomes individualized. As such, Greer's feminist examination of art is exemplary.

Judith Doyle is a Toronto writer and performance artist.

review by Linda Hatt

The Ms. Guide to a Woman's Health by Cynthia W. Cooke, M.D. and Susan Dworkin. New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1979. Paper, $10.95.

The biological function of the human female has been traditionally shrouded in myth and misunderstanding. The *Ms. Guide to a Woman's Health* is another recent attempt to dispel this myth by providing an accessible, easily understood source of information. This guide leads the reader through the developing stages and unique medical concerns of a woman's life.

The emphasis throughout the manual is on health rather than disease. Similarly, the processes of human female physiology are viewed as normal rather than a form of sickness. Women are encouraged to take an active role in their own health care by keeping up to date on current publications regarding such pertinent issues as birth control and breast cancer treatment. Further, it is strongly recommended that women seek a second opinion whenever serious medical or surgical intervention is indicated. The *Ms. Guide* supports the notion of the informed patient as an active participant in control of her own body, in any medical setting.

The guide is a comprehensive review of significant biological events for women. As with any review, some detail is sacrificed, but a reference section has been provided for further exploration of the subject matter. In addition, the paragraphs are numbered, increasing accessibility for later referral. The book's only drawback is the few illustrations which were offensive in appearance and conveyed little useful information. In an informative body like the *Ms. Guide to a Woman's Health* the illustrations were a superfluous appendage and could have been surgically removed without affecting the remaining organism.

Linda Hatt is presently Director of Physical Therapy at Dickensfield Extended Care Centre in Edmonton. She has has eight years of experience in the medical field and recently completed a Master's Thesis on the Perception of Assertive Women.

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