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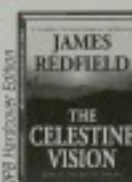
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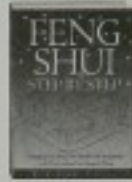
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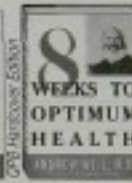
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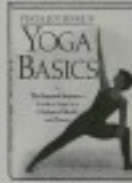
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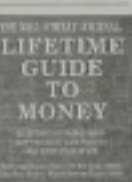
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This issue is dedicated to Bella Abzug

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Lack of Outrage

In "Hollywood Downsizes Women" (Spring 1998), Molly Haskell states that in 1997, with very few exceptions, film viewers saw countless instances of exploitation and abuse of women whisked past their eyes with "hardly a voice raised in protest."

It seems that with the right to make a film comes the right to strip women of their dignity, figuratively and literally. Women are generally depicted as weak, unstable, insecure, and submissive, and their lives almost always revolve around a particular man, or men in general. Where there is a so-called strong female character, her strength and/or independence are usually tempered by a major character flaw or life crisis: The successful, enterprising businesswoman is depicted as callous and unlikable; the free-thinker is plagued by loneliness and depression, because her independence prevents her from remaining in relationships with men.

There also seems to be a standard nudity clause in all female film contracts. Even during sex scenes, where nudity is entirely relevant, any naked bodies that are shown are female. Aside from the X-rating a film risks for a depiction of male nudity (for reasons I am unable to fathom), perhaps there is something else behind the lack of male nudity in films: If male actors appeared totally naked, Hollywood's "big" male stars wouldn't be so big after all.

In our society there is an established pattern and attitude in which women are often abused and exploited. This might explain the lack of outrage when women are treated this way in film: It is difficult to be angered by a wrong when you do not perceive it as being wrong.

Deborah Reedy - New York, NY

Woman-Friendly Corporations

Being a retired General Motors autoworker, I appreciated learning from your review of *The Feminist Dollar* (Spring 1998) that G.M. tops the "woman-friendly" list.

I can remember when women came into our workforce in the early 1970s. It was a monumental effort, which took a lawsuit and several courageous women to accomplish. G.M. would not have made the list, however, without the efforts of the U.A.W. Many of the benefits are union-negotiated, and most were won by strikes and tedious negotiations.

Tommy R. Gomez - Norman, OK

A Magazine for Women with Brains

As a women's studies graduate of U.C. Berkeley who just checked out your web site, I'm thrilled to have found you! It is wonderful to see some insightful, (usually) well-thought-out articles. While I don't agree with everything, the dialogue that has been established is rich and complex. Kudos for having

created a magazine for women with brains!
Jessica Caudwell - Sacramento, CA

Mary Daly not a "christian"

As I made clear in my interview ["Manifesting the Goddess," Spring 1998], I am not a christian. I was deeply offended to be identified as such in the opening paragraphs preceding the articles in the section titled "Should the Trinity Be a Quartet?"

I left the catholic church and christianity in the early seventies. I have spent the better part of the past 35 years exposing and analyzing gynocidal atrocities perpetrated and legitimated by christianity and other patriarchal religions.

Also, I am a Radical Elemental (not "Element") Feminist philosopher.

Mary Daly - Newton Centre, MA

Editor's Note: OTI apologizes for the typo, and for the mis-identification in the general introduction to the cover story. Daly was, of course, correctly identified in her article.

Early Returns from Reader Survey

Editor's Note: Following is a sampling of comments we've received in response to our Reader Survey (Spring 1998). If you haven't yet responded, you have until June 30 to do so.

My reasons for reading OTI: It covers more than white women's issues; isn't afraid to include women's spirituality; and goes beyond liberalism in advocating societal change.

—Michigan

I can't believe you didn't ask about sex/gender! Given the level of detail in the survey, I assume this was by design, but just in case—I'm male!

—Salt Lake City, UT

I am a white MBA/CPA, and a victim of domestic violence. While feminists say domestic violence strikes all classes, intervention services aren't set up for working women. I can't even get counseling at night; and I really need counseling. Crisis staffers asked me seven times if I received public assistance because they have trouble believing a professional like me can be a victim. But my economic status hasn't stopped the man from hurting me.

We need to destroy stereotypes about victims of domestic violence in order for working women to obtain help.

—Name withheld by request.

OTI welcomes letters and considers them for publication in the magazine and on its web site, unless otherwise specified. Letters may be edited for clarity and space. Send to OTI, 97-77 Queens Blvd., Suite 1120, Flushing, NY 11374, or e-mail: onissues@echonyc.com.

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THE PROGRESSIVE WOMAN'S QUARTERLY

Vol. VII • No. 3

Summer 1998

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ON THE ISSUES

The Progressive Woman's Quarterly

A feminist, humanist magazine of critical thinking, dedicated to fostering collective responsibility for positive social change.

ON THE ISSUES

The Progressive Woman's Quarterly (ISSN0895-6014) is published quarterly by Merle Hoffman Enterprises, Ltd., 97-77 Queens Blvd., Flushing, NY 11374-3517. Fax: (718) 997-1200.

World Wide Web

Home page: <http://www.echonyc.com/onissues>

or <http://www.igt.apc.org/onissues>

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1 year \$14.95; 2 years \$25; 3 years \$34.95. Institutional rate: Add \$10 first year, \$5 each additional year. Add \$4 per year for Canadian orders, \$7 per year foreign (surface mail) or \$20 per year foreign (air mail). Send to **On The Issues: The Progressive Woman's Quarterly**, PO Box 3000, Dept. OTI, Danville, NJ 07834. Periodicals postage paid at Flushing, NY, and additional mailing offices.

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on the issues

I have never liked Bill Clinton. I voted for him in 1992 primarily because of the abortion issue.

I remember my revulsion when I learned that, during the 1992 presidential campaign, Governor Clinton flew back to Arkansas to oversee the execution of Ricky Ray Rector, a man so brain-damaged from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head that he asked for his unfinished piece of cake to be left in his cell for him to eat when he returned from his execution. How Clinton handled Bosnia once he became President was another place we parted company—the way he refused to call the mass killings there genocide because that would require an official intervention. I could go on—to all the “reforms,” like health care, welfare, and campaign ethics—but suffice it to say that Bill Clinton is far from being a progressive or a feminist.

I am no naif. I know that politics is the art of compromise, and that, as one major liberal New York political operative told me long ago, “There are no issues, only elections.” And, yes, I have read Machiavelli and can recognize and admire Clinton’s brilliant political manipulations—his enormous strategic empathy and his obvious leadership talents at a *technical* level; but there is a vast difference between intelligence and wisdom, between intellectual agility and psychological depth. Personally, I cannot relate to his alleged charisma, or experience his legendary charm. While I recognize that many women find he has an erotic appeal (power being an aphrodisiac), I always experience him as transparently exploitive.

Clinton does deserve credit for his continuing support of abortion rights, particularly his two vetoes of “partial birth” abortion bills. The fact that he often acts like a 12-year-old boy, and is alleged to treat a number of individual women with profound disrespect, does not negate the above. What it does negate is any reason to respect him as an individual or as a moral leader.

True political leadership is about more than supporting the appropriate policies and legislative agenda. It is ultimately about defining a broader social meaning within the context of communal values. Moral and visionary leadership should inspire people to be more than the least of their abilities. It should represent courage, loyalty, fortitude, authenticity, honesty, and intellectual integrity.

Where does feminism fit into all this? That depends. Feminism as a vision, as a radical way of defining and redefining the world, depends on judgments, often critical ones. Feminism as realpolitik—as practiced in everyday reality—often has to suspend those judgments. The ideologist asks the question: “Is it good for women?” The politician asks: “Is this the best we can do for women now?” The visionary holds to a higher standard, and takes the longer view.

What’s a Feminist to Do?

By Merle Hoffman

Feminists may need to practice realpolitik to get the least bad candidate elected and the needed bills vetoed or passed, but feminism—even mainstream feminism—must continually articulate the transformative goals of the movement. To resist critiquing Clinton’s admitted and alleged bad behavior is to lose sight of the critical vision of feminism. And it misses the larger message: By my feminist standards, Bill Clinton has defined leadership down. Moreover, when we judge his actions in purely operational terms, by stretching the distance between the vision and the reality, we are in danger of defining feminism down.

In “Feminists and the Clinton Question,” a masterful display of realpolitik feminism published in *The New York Times*, Gloria Steinem writes that if all the sexual



allegations against Clinton are true, then he may be “a candidate for sex addiction.” She also cites polls that show many Americans believe Clinton is lying, but that there is sympathy for keeping “private behavior private.” Indeed, as of this writing, Clinton’s job approval ratings have never been higher.

This feminist defense of Clinton fails adequately to critique “alleged” egregious, immoral conduct because it is “private,” and/or “has not been proven in a court of law” (as if one can find absolute truth there!), and so should not be judged.

Yes, tolerance and non-judgmentalism are often positioned as the quintessential American virtues. But considering the nuanced definitions of sexual harassment that resulted in the recent dismissal of the Paula Jones suit, and the partisan contamination of the entire situation, it should not be the primary *feminist* virtue.

No passionate love letters

to kiss it—not even to kiss *me*.

I am not arguing for “traditional morality,” or for Presidents to be monks. But it is unrealistic at best, and utterly naive at worst, to think that in this era of media saturation, and given the litigious, adversarial culture of current electoral politics, anyone in a powerful political position can have an authentically private life. Indeed, if the personal is truly political, as the mantra goes, how can feminists of any ideological stripe ignore the issue of presidential “character,” which is the public manifestation of a personal value structure? This is a heavy price for anyone in public office to have to pay, but when one is the leader of the “free world,” I think it should be paid.

Clinton and the defenders of his privacy are like those celebrities whose very existence is dependent on media coverage, yet who rail at the “intrusion” of the press when it tarnishes their image. There is a wonderful scene in the movie *Primary Colors* where the candidate Jack Stanton, played by John Travolta, complains that “I just can’t catch a break,” after he’s accused of impregnating a teenage girl. It is classic Clinton: All the troubles, scandals, and difficulties that beset him are caused by others—his enemies, “right-wing conspiracies.” He is just misunderstood!

The Ultimate Bad Boy

Clinton is the golden child of Entitlement—the ultimate bad boy, the lovable rogue, someone who is not responsible for his behavior. *And what behavior!* There is not even a literary or romantic saving grace to these alleged encounters: No passionate love letters (copies of Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* notwithstanding), no dark night of the soul; just a demand to kiss it—not even to kiss *me*.

Comparing Clinton’s alleged singular “clumsy sexual pass” at Paula Jones with Bob Packwood’s “offensive behavior that was continued for years,” Steinem gives Clinton brownie points because, even after he dropped his pants and asked for oral sex, he accepted no for an answer. Steinem would medicalize Clinton’s problem. If the boy did it, then he must have an addiction. Ergo, he is a victim—unlike Bob Packwood, who, even with his own addiction (alcoholism), remains a predator.

As previously reported in these pages (Winter 1994), in an encounter with then-Senator Packwood, in the middle of Park Avenue, I was the recipient of one of his infamous unrequested and non-consensual tongue kisses. I wrote that, because Packwood had no direct power over me, I “felt no shame or amazement.” Even though I found the attempted kiss annoying, “I still respected the Senator in the morning.”

Realpolitik dictated that I differentiate between the public politician, who was one of the strongest supporters of women’s rights, and the private man, who was a bit of a nerd, somewhat of a boor, and an alcoholic (this last condition ultimately being his public rationale for his outrageous behavior).

But Packwood was a Republican, and although not

one woman accusing him of sexual harassment charged him with abusing his power or penalizing her, he was forced to resign his office. At the time, Patricia Ireland, president of the National Organization for Women (then as now), declared that whatever good Packwood had done for the women’s movement had to be viewed in the context of asking: “Can we be bought? And if so, how cheap?” (To her credit, Ireland has been one of the few mainstream feminists to speak out against Clinton’s conduct, though not until after the Kathleen Willey appearance on *60 Minutes*.)

The reaction to my article was fascinating. Because I asked the question: “How is it that any man could make us feel like a dog, something less than human, just by attempting a boorish pass?” I was castigated for being insensitive, classist, and not sufficiently “feminist.” When Clinton is the issue, however, liberal feminists seem far more willing to cut the man some slack.

Susan Faludi, writing in the *New York Observer*, sees the issue as a battle between two types of women—the girls and the grown-ups—both of which use the language of feminism, but to different ends. It is a “desperately important battle,” she explains, which will determine “far more than the sexual behavior of Mr. Clinton.”

Faludi separates the two this way: “On the one side we have feminism as channeled through the Spice Girls and Fiona Apple. This is ‘Girl Power,’ which is derived only by celebrating yourself, ideally via your injuries; gaining power by talking about what was done to you.” She defines Girl Power as enforcing the traditional female role of taking no responsibility for yourself. It is by definition a “destructive power aimed at bringing down the bogeyman, by having a sulk ‘n’ sob in front of adults,” she writes. Prime examples of this Girl Power mentality are Clinton’s accusers—Gennifer Flowers, Paula Jones and Monica Lewinsky.

On the other side, we have what Faludi calls exhibit A: a grown-up—Hillary Rodham Clinton. “If feminism is about anything,” she writes, “it is about women growing up, about becoming mature and equal players in public life.” Mrs. Clinton is an exemplar of the ability to see “what happened to you in proportion” and know “when the public good outweighs your having a temper tantrum in public over a personal offense.”

Mrs. Clinton, Faludi says, embodies the other defining trait of feminism, working for the “sisterhood” as opposed to working for oneself, the way Linda Tripp and Susan Carpenter-McMillan have. Tripp betrayed Lewinsky by taping her, and Carpenter-McMillan, Paula Jones’s former adviser, treated Jones “like some dress-up Barbie Doll.” Their crime is not “thinking about freeing women from the stereotyped boxes that traditional society has

Mrs., no dark night of the soul; just a demand

placed them in."

In my view, Hillary Clinton is the main actor in that traditional box: Good, dutiful, avenging wife standing by and speaking for her man at all costs, even to the point of emearing the women who have accused him. Her public display of dissociation equals that of Joan Kennedy and Les Mart.

For Faludi, Hillary Clinton is a grown-up because she refuses to acknowledge that her husband has very publicly and continually, if reports are to be believed, made a fool of her. But let's face it, Hillary acquired her power the old-fashioned way—she married it. What kind of non-traditional role is that?

The feminist movement always had a great stake in Hillary as a feminist icon, but what is she now? How can we hold her up as a "role model" of a woman who has made her own life, who has put herself on the line for her principles? Rather than doing anything for the sisters, she has transformed herself into that most traditional of women, the most Victorian of examples, the most enabling of partners.

Neither Gallant Gentleman nor Feminist

Bill Clinton has shown no public respect for his wife, and if we are to believe the many accusations still standing against him despite the dismissal of the Paula Jones case, none for individual women. Power partnerships aside, it is one thing to discreetly have a mistress; it is quite another to be unable to keep your pants up, or your hands off, young women who are working for you. This is no gallant gentleman, and certainly no "feminist." All women become the same woman, objectified into "that woman."

In a sense, Hillary has positioned herself as the ultimate victim—an intelligent, ambitious political woman who hitched her star to her husband's trajectory and suffers from his detours. Which makes her, and her marriage, particularly dicey for feminists to support. Her defense of her husband on the *Today* show—by positioning all charges as examples of a "right-wing conspiracy"—was a masterful performance, as Faludi points out; but was it a feminist one? Maybe in a larger sense it was: She was showing the world that marriage really is what radical feminists have long claimed it was—an economic and security (or power, in the case of Mrs. Clinton) bargain in which the woman is required to look the other way as her husband takes his pleasure outside the relationship. But neither feminists nor anyone else call her behavior dissociated, or see her as someone who has completely sold out, or essentially lives through the public role she has created. Instead, she is viewed as the prime example of responsible, adult feminism. Are fem-

inists grown-up only when they act like good middle-class housewives and ignore or deny infidelity and betrayal in emotionally inauthentic ways?

Faludi claims that "Girl Power is all about women staying in that most traditional of feminine roles: as enforcers of public morality whose power as social conscience derives directly from their political powerlessness." According to that definition, Hillary is a girl through and through, not a woman.

Let me make a disclosure here. Although currently living separately from my spouse, I am married, and I would absolutely agree with Mrs. Clinton when she says that "the only people who count in any marriage are the two that are in it." I know firsthand about loyalty, betrayal, jealousy, emotional bargaining, and personal compromise for the "good of the relationship."

But when a marriage involves two public figures, and when those two are the President and the First Lady, then the marriage counts for something more. It becomes a metaphor of the family, the First Family, a.k.a. the royal family, and it is through this couple and their relationship with each other and with the country that we come to define an idealized set of American values. Behavior within that marriage is not private. It spills out and affects everyone. Witness the orgy of public and media attention to events at the White House.

Americans yearn to have a royal family. In its place, we have created the "National Entertainment State" out of the Washington/Hollywood Celebrity Axis—though ironically, there may be more authenticity in the British aristocracy than in our first families. After all, Edward VIII gave up the throne to "marry the woman I love," and Princess Di walked out of the palace to find a more authentic existence.

I am not asking Bill to resign to marry the woman he loves. It appears he loves nothing but power and no one but himself. The constitution doesn't consider unregulated erections an impeachable crime. But feminists should call it as it is. If feminism is to count for anything beyond a mere interest group, we must vigilantly guard its vision. We cannot bend it to compromise, or change direction in response to popularity polls. Our standards should be raised even higher for those in public life who would carry our banner or espouse our principles. Acknowledging that some of Bill Clinton's policies have been good for some women does not require feminists to close their eyes, to become apologists, to find excuses for, or redefine, outrageous behavior.

Indeed, because the women's vote was instrumental in Clinton's victories, Clinton should be held to an even higher standard in both personal and political behavior.

Clinton owes women. He owes us big. And payment comes not only in vetoes, or in electoral or legislative coin. He must articulate the vision in his everyday life. He must understand that the personal is the political.

And that is the real realpolitik of feminism. ■

ZEN AND THE ART OF MOTHERHOOD

By Phyllis Chesler

Okay, I've had it: With all those perfectly nice people who remain indifferent to the poetics of motherhood, if not hostile to real mothers and children—their own, but strangers' too. I've had it with the contempt, both spoken and left unsaid, toward those of us who believe—dare I say it?—that the experience of motherhood, even under patriarchy, is an incomparable human rite of passage. A plague upon those feminists who were so angry at what motherhood had done to their own mothers (or the pain their mothers had passed along) that they remained hostile to biological motherhood in general—the mothers of boys in particular—and who were no friendlier to children underfoot than were most corporate executives. Two plagues upon those moralizing anti-feminists who felt (feel still) that mothers must marry both husbands and houses, and bury themselves alive, full-time, “for the sake of the children.”

Please understand: The sentimentalizing and commodification of motherhood that occurs once yearly, on Mother's Day, impresses me even less. Also, being told that God wants (married) women to procreate and that all who refuse His commandment are evil or crazy sits-naught but a fine pagan fury in me. And I admit it: I have no respect for governments that put profits first and people last, that do not provide paid maternity leave (the United Nations reported that the United States is one of six nations among 162 surveyed worldwide that fail to do so), guaranteed family income, and health care for their most productive citizens.

Make no mistake: I do not romanticize mothers or motherhood. The working conditions are inhumane, the choices to mother more forced than free. (No one offers girls a choice: Do you want to run a small country, study to be an astronaut, physician, musician, stockbroker? Or would you rather be an unpaid, overworked, probably impoverished, isolated, not-much-loved mother of one to four children who are completely dependent upon you?) The Forced Motherhood Experience does not transform every woman into a saint. Some blossom; others, martyred, shrivel.

Men can also nourish children. I have always been drawn to maternal men. Indeed, many daughters of my generation remember fathers, not mothers, as having nourished them into heroism.

Twenty-one years have passed since I was first pregnant, with Ariel, my only child. In the beginning, we were raw strangers to each other, mere possibilities; as he aged, we grew, miraculously, closer. We continue to defy the so-called normal course of “development,” in which young boys, girls too, are supposed to reject the

world of their mothers, in order to receive their father's or the world's blessing.

Now, in his 20th year, Ariel towers over me—not fair, I jest: I should be taller, since I've read more books than he has. I am, of course, proud of his height, in every sense. He's not merely pro-mother, he's pro his own mother! Quietly, he's changed his name to mine.

How have I managed to wrest a feminist son from this world? Was this destined, was it something I did, or something my son brought with him—his gift to me? Is he “mine,” philosophically, because his father abandoned him—and I was all he had? I doubt it; too often, this scenario leads other, similarly father-wounded sons and daughters into overly prizing the absent father, taking the omnipresent mother for granted.

I once thought that men could also do the work of mothering/parenting—that, like women, men too could go far beyond the obligations of economic support. And some do. But more don't.

My son's father took excellent, maternal care of him when he was an infant. He stayed home and kept the serial housekeepers company; took our son to his doctors' appointments, and to the park, daily; changed his diapers more expertly than I; was always calm in an emergency. When this man left, I was certain that he would not divorce our son, too.

I was wrong.

I wish we could raise young boys to be the kind of men who will never abandon a child, and who do not require wifely subordination in return for staying. In a sense, whether they are married or not, most mothers are single; that is, they shoulder the lioness's share of home and child-care responsibilities. It is, arguably, the hardest job on earth. Unmarried single motherhood is harder still. It means working 12 to 18 hours a day, seven days a week; enduring escalating expenses and a decline in both income and “prospects”; having little time to spend on adult-only social or sexual diversions.

On the other hand, the children of single mothers tend to develop a more balanced, human Self, embodying both “masculine” and “feminine” traits. Sons cook, do the family laundry; daughters repair toilets.

A good thing—but purchased by great maternal sacrifice.

Historically, most writers and thinkers, both women and men, have not been mothers—or have not written on the subject. This is a profound, collective, loss. “Mother-writers” (the phrase is Tillie Olsen's) have, in the past, often been condemned to long periods of “silence.” Instead of writing, they did the washing, darned the socks, mended the dresses, tended the vegetable garden, cooked, preserved, baby-tended, child-tended, husband-tended, entertained, attended church. . . . I am haunted by the accounts of great (not merely mediocre, but extraordinary) mother-

writers who had to put off writing entirely, or for almost half a lifetime, and who could never write full-time, or while in a rested state, because there never was anyone to replace them.

Most mother-writers had no wife, and no babysitters, either.

I often wonder if the "mad" Sylvia Plath might have lived a bit longer if only she'd had a live-in babysitter that last cold winter in London—a wifely husband, a male Muse willing to become the Angel in the House so that his wife, the great poet, could compose undisturbed.

Harriet Beecher Stowe had no room of her own; she lived for others—six children and a large extended family. Thus, she could only write sporadically, in the interstices between her endless other tasks. Like Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Rebecca Harding Davis, Stowe, too, finally had a "breakdown." I would too—wouldn't you, if you wanted to write a book that would "make this whole nation feel what an accursed thing slavery is," but your domestic duties would not allow you to get to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for nearly 16 years?

A mother-writer must become ruthless. As others (Sappho, Adrienne Rich, Toni Morrison, Mary Gordon, to mention just a few) have said: a child is, arguably, a woman's greatest love. On her offspring's behalf, she must sleep less; accept no social engagements; write quickly, and for only a few, precious, hours at a time, while her child is sleeping, or in school; above all, she must be able and willing to put her work aside when her young child needs her.

I was not this kind of mother-writer. I wrote at home, but my door was absolutely shut when I was writing. True, I always paid someone to be "on duty" in my place. Often, that woman judged me harshly for turning my back on my child. Sometimes, my son did, too.

Ariel has written an introduction to the 1998 edition of my book *With Child: A Diary of Motherhood*. He writes: "My mother's office door is shut, but that means nothing to me. . . . I knock calmly on her door and enter before she can reply. Her books surround her as usual and she sits with a pen in hand. 'I'm off-duty!' she informs me. I do not comprehend that phrase, and reply, 'You are not a taxi, Mom. I need to talk to you.'"

Touché—little brother, sister-writer.

Before I became a mother, my ego knew no bounds. I never lost "control." I thought I could overcome all obstacles through the force of my will, not by bending to circumstance, or trusting in forces

larger than myself.

For me, motherhood was something of a reverse Zen experience. In the beginning, I had no responsibilities other than to my ideas. I was a nun, a warrior. For me, having a child was a passage from detachment to attachment.

After Ariel—ah, how the earth pulled me down, grounded me, deepened my imaginative reach. I learned that I could not do everything for everyone, that certain limitations are not always transcendable: I could not be in two places at the same time; saying "yes" to one commitment meant saying "no" to another. Naïve? Perhaps, but nothing else ever taught me such simple life-lessons.

As I lifted up the unbearable burden of one small life, I felt like Atlas holding the world on his shoulders. I had to trust that I would keep my balance, even when I was losing it. Just as I discovered that "I" was not needed during labor, so I began to understand that there are forces at work in the universe beyond human consciousness.

It was upon becoming a mother that I started to comprehend that life does not stand still, that it is always changing, growing, dying, renewing. For years, when I looked in the mirror, I looked the "same" to myself. Time only became real for me when I began to measure it by my son's obvious, visible growth. Time became more finite. I comprehended, in my body, that I would die.

I learned to find ways to balance intellectual and revolutionary work with the work of mothering and earning money. This is hard to do. Balancing—shifting one's weight while juggling at least five balls in the air without falling down or dropping any of the balls—is both an art and a process. I am still learning how to do it. On any given day, I, like so many other mothers, had not only to earn my keep—which, in my case, took anywhere from nine to twelve hours—I also had to spend both quantity and quality time with Ariel, supervise the housekeeper/babysitter, attend one of Ariel's after-school activities, phone other parents about summer camps, pediatricians, clothing sales. . . . Within a single week, I might place five calls to arrange for paternal visitation, shopping for clothing, food, surprises; organize a museum visit, a baseball game, a birthday party, a holiday gathering. . . . There's much, much more.

Giving birth, becoming a new-born mother was, for me, both a humbling, and an empowering experience. For a long time afterward, when I met people I'd visualize them being born, or giving birth; hence, I was not much impressed by out-

—continued on page 87

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talking feminist

THE NOSE JOB

by Sherryl Kleinman

It's the start of a two-day workshop titled "Racism and Sexism on Campus." Enrolled along with me are my colleagues who teach undergraduate courses that satisfy the university's new cultural diversity requirement. Fifteen undergraduates—mostly African-American women—are also attending. Since the workshop leaders are psychologists, I assume we will be exploring the roots of our own racism.

I'm the white feminist who teaches courses on race, class and gender. I've been doing it for seven years. You'd think I'd be confident going into the first session of this workshop, but instead, I've got performance anxiety.

The workshop leader, Phil, asks us to sit in a circle. "Think back to the first time you met a person of a different race, ethnic group or religion," he begins. "Close your eyes if that feels comfortable."

An image of my family appears—mother, father, brother, sister. What are they doing here? I'm supposed to be thinking about others. I close my eyes tighter, but they won't go away. They are looking at my nose. I hear what they are thinking: Sherryl is ugly and it's all because of her big nose.

Another image: I'm in a dressing room with my mother, trying on what she calls "an outfit." "You're so skinny," she says. "Why don't you have a nice figure like your sister?" My sister is five years older and, like my mother, has a nice nose. My nose stands out all the more, I've been made to know, because it's glued to a skinny face on a boyish body.

"Never let anyone photograph you in profile," my mother says. "And lift your head when they take your picture; your nose will look smaller."

When did my nose become a family joke? My father has a big nose and no one makes fun of him. But when my brother announces, "You have a nose

like Daddy," I get the joke: Mine is a man's nose on a little girl's face.

It is 1965. I'm 13, sitting on my bed in the room I share with my sister, admiring the coeds in *Seventeen* magazine. My mother appears at our bedroom door, hesitates, then walks in slowly, as if the weight of her thoughts had sunk to her legs. She's going to tell me someone died.

"I've talked with your father," she says. "We're going to find the thousand dollars to get you a nose job."

Now I know the truth: If my parents are willing to go broke to change my nose, to make me look better, this nose is worse than I thought. "Is it that bad?" I ask. My eyes are stinging with tears, and I'm sure my nose is turning red and puffy, growing as wide as it is long, right before my mother's eyes.

"No, no. It's not terrible," she says. "Let me show you." Show me? "Just two things to fix. We take just a little off that," she says, lightly sweeping my bump with her index finger. Then she moves her finger to the tip of my nose and pushes it up, gently. "And just a little lift here, not much at all. Only a small nose job."

I know that they break your nose in order to fix it. I run from the room crying. I will not do this.

For years I wonder, did I chicken out or did I have principles?

Her Intent - A Good Husband

My mother doesn't mention surgery again, though I know her offer remains open. Only later did I grasp her intent. She was trying to help me get a good Jewish husband, a "professional man," by making me look less Jewish.

After I save my nose from the knife, I figure out how to save myself. I get funny. I make better jokes about my nose than anyone else, even my brother.

Phil's voice intrudes and pulls me back to the circle. "Open your eyes slowly." He pauses. "Would anyone like

to share what they saw?"

I'm not going to tell my story. My images don't fit the assignment. But that's not the only reason. Barry, a Jewish leftist and colleague, will think I'm either giving away tribal secrets or wallowing in personal trivia. And will my images unleash the anti-Semitism that my parents taught me lurks in the heart of every Gentile? "See, they can't even be good to their own children!"

I remain silent. Tracy, an African-American student, talks about touching her white teacher's hair and thinking it felt nice, unlike her own hair. Monica remembers having a crush on a white boy when she was six, and having him turn to her and say, "Why do you have such fat lips?" Then she shows us how she bit her lips for hours every day to try to make them thinner.

Phil asks Monica if she'd talked to her mother about it. She hadn't. "If you had," says Sybil, a colleague, "you know what she'd have said. 'You're beautiful just as you are.'"

Astonished, I look at Sybil. "I would never have heard that in my family," I blurt. "It's in my family where I felt ugly." I feel heat spread up my neck and across my face as I begin to tell the story of my nose.

When I'm done, I'm convinced my mother has overheard and that a telegram will arrive any minute: "Why did you have to tell? STOP Your hurt mother STOP"

Hoping to ward off the anti-Semitism I'm sure my story encourages, I jump to sociological analysis. "As I see it, this story is about internalized oppression—gender oppression as well as anti-Semitism. It was bad to have a Jewish nose even if you were a man, because, after all, it was a Jewish nose, not just a big nose. But the real tragedy was when a girl had that nose."

Phil says, "I'm glad you told that story. It shows that groups that have less power can take on the messages of the powerful group, and pass those along to insiders."

Barry adds, "Sherryl's story is powerful because it shows us the narrow range

of acceptable images out there." "Yes, a narrow range," I say, "whether it's lips, hair or noses. The three of us have suffered because of gendered images of beauty we couldn't live up to."

I'm worried about having put my story in the same league as Tracy's and Monica's.

"I can pass as non-Jewish and have most of the privileges of white people," I add. But knowing this doesn't dispel my anger as I think back to my near-surgery

30 years ago.

"Ancient history," my mother would say, as she always does, when I bring up done-me-wrongs from the past.

It is anti-Semitism that has led Jews to hate "Jewish noses," but not every Gentile is anti-Semitic. I learned this when I left my mostly Jewish high school and made friends with non-Jews at college. At first I thought they were being polite when they said they didn't get my "nose jokes," but I came to

believe them.

I discovered I could be beautiful only outside the Jewish community.

I linked up with Gentiles who didn't know what a Jew was. And for whom my nose was just a nose. ■

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LOVING LONG-DISTANCE

Notes from a Lesbian Mom

By Westry Green

My partner kissed me one morning last May and whispered, "Happy Mother's Day." This was a holiday I was "allowed" to celebrate, yet I didn't feel justified in claiming it as my own.

For the past two years, I have been only a part-time mom, a summertime guardian of my energetic and smartly-sarcastic seven-year-old who is now so tall that we joke he'll soon be able to give me piggyback rides. Although I am away from him for nine months of the year, we still manage to have an amazingly close bond. We're like two sides of one person—put us together and we are complete. But I keep wondering how long it will take for the separation to affect him, for our closeness to crumble?

I never wanted to be a part-time mother, but given the situation in my hometown, it was either that or no-time parenting. If you've read the news about custody disputes involving lesbian mothers, you'll understand. A man who is a convicted murderer has been deemed a better parent than the lesbian mother. In my state, Ohio, a judge granted custody of two children to their previously absent father because their bisexual mother moved in with her girl-

friend. And then there was the famous Sharon Bottoms case in which a grandmother won custody away from her lesbian daughter. It would have been naive for me to expect anything other than discrimination at the hands of the court, especially in my conservative Ohio community of 15,000 people. It's a town of almost as many churches as restaurants, a town that has elected an avowed racist to the U.S. House of Representatives, and where anti-abortion activism is the most dynamic political movement.

We had moved there when I was a depressed, anorexic 16-year-old. Shortly after, I met Chris, my first and only boyfriend, in my high school trigonometry class. As the new girl on the block I felt like an outsider, and the fact that I wasn't a big-haired cheerleader type, so popular there, only made me feel more alone. Chris was the one person who understood me, who was there for me when I was at my lowest.

He and I had an on-and-off relationship during my first semester at a local college. But something wasn't right between us.

Knowing nothing about lesbianism, I often felt confused and alone. And to compound my confusion, and despite using condoms, I became pregnant. I had just turned 18.

Calvin was born in November 1990. I naively assumed that nothing much would change after his birth, that Chris and I would continue to live apart and I would do most of the child-rearing. Our parents, however, reasoned that if I liked Chris enough to have his child, I must like him enough to want to marry him. And Chris himself thought marrying was the right thing to do. I resisted. I'd never really planned on marriage being part of my life, but finally, when Calvin was 13-months-old, and I was 20, I wearily agreed to get married.

I tried convincing myself of all the benefits of marriage: it would be better for Calvin, it would bring some financial assistance, and it would give me a little respect. The wedding was a somber affair; the ceremony was held in a judge's chamber, and the bride wore black.

Having declared a Gender Studies minor, I spent the next several years



studying such eye-openers as Simone de Beauvoir, Mary Wollstonecraft and the early matriarchies. I blossomed into a radical feminist and, as such, supported gay rights, which in our town was not a popular stand to take. When a literature professor assigned Lisa Alther's *Kinflicks*, a lesbian-themed book from the 1970s, there was a grumbling of negative comments from my classmates. The only openly gay student on campus transferred out after repeated harassment and beatings. This was the climate in which I was awakening to my sexuality.

For two years I tried to ignore my feelings for other women but the desire, anxiety, euphoria and heartbreak began to choke me. Eventually I let Chris in on my secret passion. At first it was just sexual-fantasy talk, which didn't threaten him—he bought me a lesbian romance novel and we rented lesbian porn videos, which he found as exciting as I did. Later, I was able to talk more openly about my sexuality. It was a turn-on for Chris to have a "bisexual" wife. It was kinky and fun and even improved our sex life. He never expected me to act out my desires.

Around the time of my graduation, I fell hard for a woman friend who was a few years older than me. Though I never told her how I felt, Chris suddenly realized that my interests were more than a sex game. "Would you leave me for her?" he asked. He knew my answer before I responded.

What followed was eight months of screaming and crying, with Chris flinging every homophobic slur at me that he could come up with. The fights left me so physically and emotionally drained it was almost impossible to be a caring parent. I knew I needed to make some major changes in my life, and, coincidentally, during the summer

of 1996 I was offered a terrific career opportunity in my field, journalism. The job was in New York City. Feeling that some distance might help me sort out my life, I accepted the offer.

Chris and I agreed that Calvin would stay with him for the time being, until I decided if it was the right move. I spent the first several months shuttling back and forth between New York and Ohio, torn between where I should live, and how. Every time I said goodbye to Calvin I cried the entire flight back to New York. I missed his first day of kindergarten and his first loose tooth. Seeing that a large part of his life no longer involved me was torture. Then one day Calvin told me he was glad I lived in New York: "Now you and Daddy don't fight," he explained. With that I knew for sure that I needed to make New York my permanent home. And I wanted my son with me.

Chris refused. "You'll never take Calvin away from me," he yelled. His parents sided with him, telling me I was unfit, as a lesbian, to be a mother. With this, Chris, and by extension, his family, became my enemy. His motivation in denying me custody was, in part, his rage over my being able to find happiness without him. But his jealousy wouldn't win him a custody battle. That would take outing me as a lesbian mother. If I tried to take Calvin, he threatened, he would use my sexuality against me in court. A yelling match ensued, during which Chris told our son that the reason I moved away was because I didn't like boys. Horrified, I tried to explain to Calvin the different types of love that adults feel. I am still not sure if he understood.

**Remarkably,
today
Calvin
is a
well-adjusted
first-grader
whose
favorite
New York
activity is
riding the
subway.**

On The Issues accepts personal-opinion essays for Talking Feminist of up to 1,000 words in length for which we pay \$125. Please send a self-addressed stamped envelope with submissions. Our editors cannot comment unless articles are accepted.

But during that fight it was made clear to me that if I fought a custody battle I would lose not only my son but also my strength, my self-esteem, and whatever stability Calvin had left. Caving in, compromising, would bring some tranquility to the insanity that was filling not just my life, but also Calvin's. I caved in: I was not willing to risk harming my child.

I am angry with myself for "giving up." I am angry at the people who act as if I must be some sort of monster to be denied my son. I want to explain that I gave him up because I couldn't bear seeing him sobbing, "STOP IT! MOMMY! STOP IT, DADDY!" when Chris and I were screaming at each other. I gave him up because I was not willing to place him in the middle of an interminable battle. I gave him up because I love him. What it cost me emotionally I hope he never knows.

Remarkably, today Calvin is a well-adjusted first-grader whose favorite New York activity is riding the subway. He likes my partner and enjoys playfully ganging up on her with me. He doesn't find it odd that she is a woman.

During the school year we have long telephone conversations every night. He tells me every meal and snack he ate that day. We talk about astronomy, he'll read me the local sports page, we'll plan our summer (we are going to the Library of Congress, his idea of heaven), I'll help him with his homework. To wind down our chats we send each other many air hugs and kisses, which can take a while. But the best part is when he says he wants to go now and play with his friend down the block, or get back to a video I sent him. This tells me that Calvin is healthy, Calvin is okay with the way his life is. I hang up and smile to myself, and try to believe that what I did was best for him. ■

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Westry Green lives in Brooklyn, New York and writes for national magazines.
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DESIGNING SEX

COVER STORY

PLAYING GOD, HAVE DOCTORS GONE TOO FAR?

by MAHIN HASSIBI, M.D.

My name is Michael Ross. I'm a condemned man on Connecticut's death row," began the unsolicited manuscript entitled "Reflections from Death Row" in *On The Issues'* mail. "I'm the worst of the worst, a serial killer and sexual sadist," it continued, "who is responsible for the rape and murder of eight women in three different states, who has assaulted several other women, and who has stalked and frightened many more. I have never denied what I did, and fully confessed to my crimes. The only issue in my case, from the beginning, has been my mental condition. For years I have been trying to prove that I am suffering from a mental illness that drove me to rape and kill, and that this mental illness made me physically unable to control my actions. I have met with little success."

Opinions were divided among the editorial staff at *OTI* who read the manuscript. There is something unusual, if not cynical, about a killer and sexual torturer of women expecting to be published in a feminist magazine. The publisher thought *OTI* readers should be allowed not only to share in the horror and brutality depicted in the story, but to witness the man's supposed redemptive striving. The editor was offended by the self-pitying tone of the manuscript, and considered his discussion of accepting "guilt" as convincing as Ted Bundy's, who said the same. She also questioned his meaning and intent. Was he arguing that he should not be executed, or receive a life sentence without possibility of parole, because he is "cured"?

From his writing, Ross comes across as a manipulative, self-centered, and grandiose individual. There is no sign of those emotions which characterize a socialized human being, or of an ability to grasp the depth of horror that his crimes engender. He writes: "I was plagued by repeated thoughts, urges, and fantasies of the degradation, rape, and murder of women. Having those unwanted thoughts, urges, and fantasies is a lot like living with an obnoxious roommate." Ostensibly, Ross's reason for submitting the article to *OTI* was to describe for an audience of women the "treatment" he is receiving while on the death row. He claims that monthly injections of Depo-Lupron, which blocks the production of testosterone, have diminished the "suffering" caused by his urges and thoughts. "One of the

most difficult things for me to deal with today is knowing that, had I begun receiving an injection of just 1 cc of Depo-Lupron once a month 20 years ago, those eight women would be alive today.

"For some reason, be it because of some abnormal biological hook-up in my brain, or some sort of chemical imbalance, testosterone affects my mind differently than it affects the mind of the average male. . . ."

In 1994, in Texas, Larry Don McQuay, a convicted child molester who was applying for parole after serving six of his eight-year sentence, demanded to be castrated, at the expense of taxpayers. The news media reported that he claimed he needed help in curbing his sexual appetite for small children, because, while he had not as yet killed any of his victims, he might do so in the future in order to prevent them from identifying him. The media, running with the story, enthused about castration as a new strategy for fighting sex crimes. The result was a rush by legislators across the country to introduce bills mandating chemical and/or surgical castration for a variety of repeat sex offenders as a condition of parole. In many states, the bills passed, and castration before parole is now law.

Criminologists, however, are extremely concerned by the fact that legislators apparently assumed that the problems of sex offenders strictly reside in their genitals, rather than their personality, and hence constitute an illness that is treatable. These experts point out that it is the rage and the emotional imbalance characterizing sex offenders that need to be suppressed, rather than their sexual drive per se. Testosterone, the so-called male sex hormone, which is produced in the testes, is only one (although a major one) of several hormones known to be involved, along with other chemical messengers essential to the body's functioning, in normal sexual drive, sexual arousal, and sexual performance. To name just two: the "brain chemicals" dopamine and phenylethylamine, which are neurotransmitters (substances that "carry" information from one nerve cell to another), play a role in sexual gratification. It is not yet known whether sex offenders produce more of any of these substances, including testosterone, than the rest of us.

Even more worrisome than this lack of scientific evidence: The effects of the two drugs commonly used in

Surgeons playing God : with ambiguous genitals, that is int without considering their underlying

chemical castration, Depo-Lupron and Depo-Provera, can be neutralized by other hormones, such as steroids, which are easy to obtain. Like athletes and body-builders, sex offenders are able to buy them on the street without a prescription.

Nor have follow-up studies shown that castrated sex offenders have a lower recidivism rate than those who have not been "treated." (It should be noted that the "recidivism rate" for a class of offenders is not the true rate at which they resume committing crimes after their release, but the rate at which they are rearrested. And that is subject to a multitude of factors, including the crime-fighting ability of a given police department.)

In fact, this is not surprising. Experts in all disciplines dealing with sex offenders agree that these individuals show defects and deficiencies in their emotional, psychological, and moral make-up. Hence mere castration, whether chemical or surgical, will not "cure" them. Indeed, it may make them more violent. In a number of cases, chemical castration has been shown to increase sex offenders' anger and aggression. There is also ample evidence demonstrating that the violence associated with sexual battery is not treatable by any form of castration.

Michael Ross writes: "The monster within [me] is still present, but the medication has rendered him impotent and banished him to the back of my mind." Fortunately, Ross is not free to roam the streets; but the fact that he has no contact with women also means that there is no way to assess how tightly this particular monster is bound.

Castration of sex offenders is a medical or surgical manipulation of sexuality in order to achieve society's ends. Such manipulation, and the medical profession's complicity in it, whether eagerly or reluctantly, is not new. Physicians of the Byzantine era were compelled by the rulers of the day to castrate male children of defeated enemies, thus ending any hope that their descendants might attempt to regain the power that was lost. During the Greco-Roman period, ambitious parents frequently had their sons castrated in childhood in an effort to prepare them for higher office. Eunuchs of the day held senior administrative positions in both the military and in government, because it was assumed that, unable to begin their own dynasty or blood line, they would have less motivation to betray their superiors.

In some societies, castration was the punishment

for those who had acted against the code of conduct or the implicit expectations of the community. Abelard, the 11th-century French intellectual and teacher, was castrated at the behest of the angry relatives of Heloise, his student, for having wed her in secret. In 18th-century Italy, young boys were castrated in order to maintain the purity of their voices; these *castrati* sang in operas in which women were forbidden to appear. And until this century, eunuchs were employed as the guardians of harems in order to prevent questions about the paternity of children born to the numerous wives and concubines of Middle Eastern and Asian potentates. In the West, also until this century, surgeons removed women's clitorises, and later their ovaries, to treat their "mental disorders," which were often considered to be the result of masturbation and lesbianism. Women were "treated" in this fashion whether they were depressed, suffering from anxiety—or refusing to toe the line dictated by society or their families. Many hospitals in the U.S. performed the operation long after the method had fallen into disrepute in Europe.

Historically, not all physicians have signed on to such programs. For example, the progressive Seventh-Century Byzantine physician Paul of Aegina, commenting on the practice of surgical castration, said that turning a normal body into an abnormal one was inconsistent with his religious beliefs and professional ethics. However, few such doubts about the morality of the procedure have been raised by the medical profession of today, even though the FDA has not approved either Depo-Provera or Depo-Lupron for this purpose—which means that neither the safety nor the effectiveness of these drugs for chemical castration, nor their long-term side effects, is reliably known.

Medical and/or surgical "treatment" for conditions that have been redefined as "illnesses" and/or "aberrations" by society and its agents in the medical profession (who, in fact, often lead the charge) is not confined to efforts to reduce crime. Indeed, especially in the U.S., physicians in several specialties have "invaded" many aspects of life that heretofore were not considered the province of medicine. Childbirth, for example, has been medicalized with the "justification" that in some cases

Also reassign the gender of infants born intersexual or hermaphroditic youngsters, biological sex.

are not considered. Shockingly, few voices have been raised in opposition to this practice in medical literature. One exception appeared in the March 1997, edition of *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*, Drs. Milton Diamond and H. Keith

delivery may require extraordinary measures. As a consequence, this country has the highest rate of cesareans in the world, and many births are induced here to suit an obstetrician's golf or social schedule. Similarly, doctors all too frequently consider menopause to be a disease in need of curing.

Physicians in the U.S. today are also decreeing what shape and size human genitalia should be. Based on little more than the medical profession's opinion on what is an acceptable size for a female clitoris, and with even less knowledge about the long-term effects of the surgical procedure, surgeons proceed to excise those that are "too big," and therefore offend. [See "The Tyranny of the Esthetic," page 16.] They also lie to their young patients about what, in fact, they are doing, and encourage the child's parents to do so as well. The result is to severely traumatize the child, causing lifelong physical and/or psychological problems, including sexual dysfunction, the inability to experience sexual pleasure, identity confusion, and major difficulties in interpersonal relations.

Surgeons playing God also reassign the gender of infants born with ambiguous genitals, that is intersexual or hermaphroditic youngsters, without considering their underlying biological sex. Children born with XY (male) chromosomes but with rudimentary penises are surgically turned into "girls" who are proclaimed "normal," though they will never menstruate or be able to bear children. Girls with normal XX (female) chromosomes but whose clitorises are declared "abnormally long" undergo clitorectomies—the same procedure that human rights activists have labeled "female genital mutilation" when it occurs in the developing world. In American hospitals such surgeries are carried out by American doctors on American children every day.

Another example: When young boys lose their penises as the result of trauma, such as a circumcision gone awry, they are assigned the gender most convenient for the surgeon carrying out the procedure—that is, they are made outwardly female, given a "functioning" vagina, instead of a new penis, because creating a "vagina" is easier. Conceptually, however, such a vagina is simply a receptacle for a penis. The distinct sensations and sexual feelings of the individual concerned

Sigmundson, discussing the long-term effects of such surgery on a boy who lost his penis at the age of three because of a surgical mishap, concluded that even in cases where genitals are not clearly defined at birth, immediate surgery and sex reassignment may not be the best course to follow.

It is interesting to contrast this quest for "normalcy"—read "perfection" of visible attributes—in the United States with the early Greeks' view of hermaphrodites (the combination of Hermes and Aphrodite) as people with special attributes of God and Goddess who deserve to be appreciated for their uniqueness. The Jewish Torah also recognizes hermaphrodites, as does modern day India, whose *Hijras* are accepted by society.

We are on a slippery slope, indeed, when the medical profession maintains, falsely, that newborns (and even young children) are psychosexually neutral and, therefore, can be medically assigned a sex, and then raised to accept a particular gender role. Yet leading physicians at some of our top medical institutes have tinkered with human anatomy and physiology by performing mutilating surgery and/or prescribing powerful hormones, on the basis of social biases masquerading as scientific findings. And advances in medical science and surgical technology continue to provide the medical profession with more, and better, tools with which to change, reassign, and regulate our bodies and our behavior. The collusion between some consumers seeking to change their own sex or their children's appearance and doctors motivated by financial gain, individual hubris, and professional arrogance, has increased the power of medicine. As treatment methodologies are discovered or invented, the search for diseases has intensified. The tyranny of esthetics, the dissatisfaction with the biological given and the desire to find quick-fix solutions for complex issues have found medicine willing to undertake costly and dangerous procedures based on little to no information, dubious research and a shocking lack of concern for the overall health and well-being of society. ■

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THE TYRANNY OF THE ESTHETIC SURGERY'S MOST INTIMATE VIOLATION

Sexual conformity at the point of a knife is being forced on women

whose genitals are declared not "normal" — with devastating results

BY MARTHA COVENTRY

Big clitorises aren't allowed in America. By big, I mean over three-eighths of an inch for newborns, about the size of a pencil eraser. Tiny penises, under one inch, aren't allowed either. A big clitoris is considered too capable of becoming alarmingly erect, and a tiny penis not quite capable enough. Such genitals are confounding to the strictly maintained and comforting social order in America today, which has everyone believing that bodies come in only two ways: perfectly female and perfectly male. But genitals are surprisingly ambiguous. One out of every 2,000 babies is born with genitals that don't elicit the automatic "It's a girl!" or "It's a boy!" Many more have genitals that are perceived as "masculinized" or "feminized," although the child's sex is not in doubt.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends surgically altering these children between the ages of six weeks and 15 months to fashion their bodies into something closer to perfection. Everyone can then breathe easier, except for the child, who may well spend the rest of her or his life trying to let the breath flow easy and full through the fear and shame created by such devastating surgery.

On a November night in 1958, I was playing in the bathtub in the cheery, country home of my childhood. I was six years old. My mother came in and sat on the edge of the tub, her kind face looking worried. I glanced up at her, wondering, "Time to get out so soon?" She told me that I had to go to the hospital the next day for an operation. I knew this was about something between my legs. My chest felt tight and there was a rushing sound in my ears. I begged not to go. Please. But my mother told me only that I must. Not a word was said about what was going to happen or why. The next day, it took the surgeon 30 minutes to make

a U-shaped incision around my half-inch clitoris, remove it, and put it in a specimen dish to send to the lab. He then closed the wound and stitched the skin up over the stump.

Take no comfort in the fact that this took place 40 years ago. Today, most parents and doctors in this country are still unable to see that a child has a right to her or his own sexual body, even if that body is deemed "abnormal" by their standards. If a parent is uncomfortable, a doctor can be found who will be willing to make irreversible changes in the child's body, in order to ease that discomfort. My gynecologist told me about a case in which he had been involved the year before: A woman brought her five-year-old daughter to his office in Minneapolis; the mother felt that the child's clitoris was too big. He examined the girl and assured the mother that her daughter would grow into her clitoris, which was no longer than the end of his little finger. The mother left. A few weeks later, he was called into an operating room to help another doctor who had run into trouble during a surgical procedure. On the table, he found the same little girl he had seen earlier. She was hemorrhaging from a clitorrectomy attempted by the second doctor, from instructions he had read in a medical text. My physician stopped the bleeding, and managed to keep the girl's clitoris mostly intact.

It is not new in our culture to remove or alter the clitoris. Not so long ago, such surgery was commonly practiced to prevent masturbation and "unnatural sexual appetites." Although such justifications still lurk in the minds of parents and doctors ("Won't she become a lesbian?" is a concern of many mothers whose daughters have big clitorises), clitorrectomies gained new status toward the end of the 1950s, as a



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Martha Coventry as a child, with her father (left), and today (below).



“legitimate” way to make a child with atypical genitals feel and appear more normal. Surgical techniques learned during World War II led to advances in the field of cosmetic genital surgery; at about the same time, a new medical discipline—endocrinology, the study of the hormonal system—was established at Johns Hopkins University Medical School. A child’s body could now be successfully altered by surgery and hormones to look just about any way you wanted it to look. And the controversial research into sex and gender roles by Johns Hopkins’ John Money, Ph.D., led doctors to believe

life became filled with fear and guilt. The secrecy surrounding my surgery began to undermine my entire sense of identity. I knew I had had something between my legs cut off, and I could imagine only that it was a penis. Girls were Barbie-doll smooth, so there wasn’t anything on a girl to cut off. Was I really a boy? Or perhaps the horrible thing I had somehow known about forever: hermaphrodite? The study of my father, a physician, was full of medical books, but I flipped through them quickly, drawn to the pictures of children with their eyes blacked out, knowing there was something we shared,

metic reasons some five times a day in the U.S. The rules of the game are still the same as they were 40 years ago: Erase any sign of difference, tidy things up, and don’t say another word.

After I had my clitorrectomy, my innocent

Just because your body may look “normal” is no guarantee that you will feel that way. The truth is that the very thing surgery claims to save us from—a sense of differentness and abnormality—it quite unequivocally creates.

that by changing that body, you could make the child into a “normal” male or female, both physically and psychologically. Children could be made “right” if they were born “wrong.” And American medicine, and our society at large, sees “imperfect” genitals as wrong.

That view is challenged by farsighted pediatric urologist Justine Schober, M.D., of Erie, Penn.: “Why should we say that, because this is a variation, that it is a wrong variation? If all their faculties work, their sexual sensitivities work, why should we presume that their body is wrong?” But by seeing a child’s body as wrong and by labeling such a child “intersexed,” we turn a simple variation on a theme into a problem that can and should be fixed. And fixed it usually is, by surgery that sacrifices healthy erotic tissue for cos-

yet terrified to find out what kind of freak I really was. Then, one night when I was 11 or 12, I found my parents, as they sat at the dining room table, looking at studio pictures of my sisters and me. My mother held up my photo and I heard her say the word “boy.” My gut heaved. I was a boy. It was true. I blurted out, “What was that operation I had?” My father turned to me and said, “Don’t be so self-examining.” I never had the heart to tell this man who loved me so dearly that, by keeping the truth from me that night, by trying to protect me from my own wondering mind and wandering hands, he had sentenced me to a life of almost crippling fear in relation to my sexuality, even to a profound doubt of my right to be alive.

It would be 25 years before I could begin to start

asking questions again. When I finally pressed my dying father as gently as I could for a reason why he and my mother wanted my clitoris removed, he said, "We didn't want you to be mistaken for a hermaphrodite." My father was a surgeon. No doctor had patronizingly spun to him tales of "improperly formed gonads," or lied to him about my medical condition, or told him I would become a lesbian if I had a big clitoris, or pretended that no other children like me existed. Just having a child with an abnormal body in Rochester, Minn., was bad enough for my parents. But doctors do lie—to parents and to children, in a gross insult to their intelligence and their right to the truth. Lying to children is a rule strictly adhered to, and enforced, by all but the most enlightened doctors. First the surgery steals your body from you, then lies confirm that there is so little respect for you as a human being that you don't even deserve the truth.

X Marks the . . .

Angela Moreno was a happy child growing up in the late seventies in Peoria, Ill. She was fairly sexually precocious with herself, and became very familiar with her clitoris: "I loved it, but had no name for it. I remember being amazed that there was a part of my body that was so intensely pleasurable. It felt wonderful under my hand. There was no fantasy, just pleasure—just me and my body." Life in the pleasure garden came to an abrupt end for Angela when, at age 12, her mother noticed her protruding clitoris while Angela was toweling off after a bath. After being examined by her family doctor, she was sent to an endocrinologist. The endocrinologist revealed to her parents that, instead of the two X chromosomes that characterize the female genotype, Angela had an X and a Y. She was "genetically male." She had the external genitalia of a female because the receptors for the "male" hormone testosterone did not function; that is, her body was unable to respond to the androgenizing or masculinizing hormones it produced. Her parents were assured that if surgeons removed Angela's internal testes, and shortened her clitoris,



Left: Angela at age twelve. Above: Angela today at 26, three years after she finally learned the truth about her surgery and her sexuality.

she would be a "very normal little girl," albeit one born without ovaries or a uterus. This was lie number one.

Just because your body may look "normal" is no guarantee that you will feel that way. The truth is that the very thing surgery claims to save us from—a sense of differentness and abnormality—it quite unequivocally creates.

Doctors then told Angela's parents that if she didn't have surgery she might kill herself when she found out that she was different from other girls. It had happened to another patient, the physicians said, and it could happen to Angela. Although such speculation is not a lie, it is also not the whole truth. In

my talks with scores of people with atypical genitals, it is those who have been surgically altered as children and left alone with their trauma who most often become suicidal. The isolation from others who have experienced what we are going through, the loneliness, is what kills us. Angela's parents were justifiably frightened and agreed to the surgery.

The final lie was to Angela herself, with her distraught parents' complicity. She was told, at her physicians' suggestion, that her nonexistent ovaries could become cancerous and that she would have to go into the hospital and have them removed.

In 1985, at a leading children's hospital in Chicago, doctors removed the testes from Angela's abdomen. The clitoris that had brought her so much joy was not merely shortened, it was all but destroyed. She woke up and discovered the extent of the deceit: "I put my hand down there and felt something like the crusty top of some horrible casserole, like dried caked blood where my clitoris was. I wondered why no one told me and I just figured it was the kind of thing decent people don't talk about."

Angela became depressed and severely bulimic. "I blamed my body. My body had betrayed me. Made me someone worthy of that kind of treatment. I just studied and puked." She was a straight-A student in high school, but otherwise, her adolescence was a nightmare. She avoided becoming close to other girls her age, afraid she would be asked questions about the menstrual period she knew she would never have. The uncomplicated sexuality she had reveled in before the clitorrectomy was gone, and she was desolated by the

loss of erotic sensation. In an attempt to find out the truth, she returned to her original endocrinologist, who told her that her gonads had not formed properly, and her clitoris had grown because of an abnormal level of hormones. She did not tell Angela about her XY status or her testes. Angela fell deeper into darkness, sensing that she had not been given the whole story. Finally, at 20, weakened by chronic and near-lethal bingeing and purging, and suicidal, she checked herself into a psychiatric unit.

After her release, she began seeing a therapist who finally hit on the connection between her bulimia and the control she lost over her body at the time of surgery. Angela knew she had to find out the mystery of her body in order to get well. By now she was 28 and could legally obtain her medical records, yet it took a year for her to find the courage to write for them. When she received them and read the truth about herself, she could begin at last to save her own life. "Although the doctors had claimed that knowing the truth would make me self-destructive, it was not knowing what had been done to me—and why—that made me want to die."

In my case, I have XX chromosomes, and my out-sized clitoris was the only part of my body that was

ly is "abnormal," and you separate us from each other and deny our right to find solace and strength in the sameness of our experience.

The doctor who was kind enough to help me begin to explore my early surgery did just that to me. I found the Intersex Society of North America on my own several months after my initial visit with him, and told him later how healing it had been to find others who knew intimately what my life had been like. He had known about ISNA all along, he said, but didn't pass the information on to me because I was not intersexed. I was a real woman. He had tried to save me from a pathologizing label, but ended up enforcing my isolation instead.

New and Improved?

When a baby is born today with genitals that are ambiguous, a team of surgeons, pediatric endocrinologists, and social workers scramble to relieve what is called a "psychosocial emergency." Tests are done and orifices explored to determine as nearly as possible the baby's "true sex." Then, in almost all cases, doctors perform surgery to make the child look more like a girl, because, they say, the surgery required is easier to perform than trying to make the child look like a boy.

The form this feminizing surgery most often takes

Doctors then told Angela's parents that if she didn't have surgery she might kill herself when she found out that she was different from other girls.

not like that of most other girls.

Do these facts make you want to differentiate me from Angela? To say, "Wait a minute. You were simply a girl born with a big clitoris, but Angela had a real pathological condition." But the doctors removed Angela's clitoris for exactly the same reason they removed mine—they thought it offensively large. Her chromosomes and her abdominal testes had no bearing on the decision.

If you rush to see Angela as fundamentally different from me, if you see her as a real intersexual and me as just a normal woman, you do two very damaging things: You may see it as justified to perform cosmetic surgery on her and not on me because she real-

is the dissection and removal of healthy clitoral tissue—a clitorotomy, also known as "clitoral recession," "clitoral reduction," and "clitoroplasty." Sensitive, erectile tissue is stripped from the shaft of the clitoris, and the glans is tucked away so expertly that all you see is the cute little love button that is the idealized clitoris. But the pleasure is almost gone, or gone completely, for the owner of that dainty new clit. If orgasms are possible, and they aren't for many women subjected to clitoral surgery, the intensity is greatly diminished. One woman whose clitoris was "recessed" writes: "If orgasms before the recession were a deep purple, now they are a pale, watery pink."

Doctors maintain that modern surgery retains

more clitoral sensation than the older forms of surgery, but they base their assurance on nerve impulses measured by machines—supposedly accurate and unbiased information—and not the real experience of thousands and thousands of women in this country. This is because no long-term post-surgical studies have been done. I, who had the old-style surgery, have clitoral sensation and orgasmic function, while those subjected to more modern surgeries often have neither. How much do doctors truly care about a child's sexual future if they decimate the one organ in the body designed solely for pleasure?

In 1966, Annie Green, then three years old, took a car trip with her father from the small town in Idaho where she lived to Spokane, Wash. She sat in the back seat with her stuffed animal, unaware that she was on her way to the hospital. The next day doctors removed

young girls in Africa to reconstructive surgery of a young baby is a giant, giant leap of misrepresentation." But neither Dr. Gearhart, nor anyone else, has ever bothered to ask those of us subjected to clitoral surgery as children if being taken to the hospital without explanation, having your healthy genitals cut and scarred, then left alone with the results feels like mutilation or "reconstructive surgery." Gearhart's mistake is to judge surgery only by the surgeon's intent, and not by the effect on the child. I spoke with a woman recently who is young enough to be my daughter. With great effort, she told me of her clitoral surgery as a child. She implored me, "Why do they have to cut so deep, Martha? Why do they do that?"

Of the notable feminist voices raised long and loud in outrage over traditional genital surgeries practiced in parts of Africa, which are now denounced as "female

I challenge them to pay attention to the fact that in hospitals just down the street in any big American city, five children a day are losing healthy, erotic parts of their bodies to satisfy a social demand for "normalcy."

her inch-long clitoris. She was never given any explanation of her surgery. As she got older, her attempts to find pleasure in masturbation failed, and she began to suspect that she was very different from other girls. Then, during a visit to her sister's house as a teenager, she found the book *Our Bodies, Ourselves*: "I studied the female anatomy and read about sex from that book. That was when I learned I didn't have a clitoris. I remember looking at the diagram, feeling myself, and reading what a clitoris was over and over. My God, I couldn't figure out why I didn't have one. I couldn't fathom anyone removing it if it was that important. I was stunned, and I held it all in. I was only 14. I became depressed. I was disgusted with my body, and I thought there was no hope that I would ever be loved by anyone. I became a little teenage alcoholic. I drank heavily every weekend. I really blew it because I had been a really good athlete and an honor student."

Clitoral surgery on children is brutal and illogical, and no matter what name you give it, it is a mutilation. When I use the word mutilation, I can hear doors slamming shut in the minds of doctors all over this country. John Gearhart, a pediatric urologist at Johns Hopkins, has said, "To compare genital mutilation of

genital mutilation" (FGM), not a single woman has said a word about the equally mutilating practice of surgically destroying the healthy genitals of children in their own country. Like Gearhart, they shrink when we describe our surgeries as mutilation. But do they believe that African mothers, any more than American surgeons, cut their children out of malicious intent? Could their silence be because they don't know what is happening in American hospitals? It's possible, but this issue has received media coverage in the past year, and many of them have had the facts explained to them in person or in writing.

I could speculate that these women don't want to take on a foe as formidable and familiar as the medical profession, and that it is simpler to point fingers at more barbaric countries. They may not want to dilute their cause with the sticky subjects of sex and gender that surround the issue of ambiguous genitalia. Or perhaps they don't want to be aligned with children they can only see as freaks of nature. Even the liberal-thinking Joycelyn Elders, the former Surgeon General, refers to children who blur gender lines in a less-than-humane way. When Elders, a professor of pediatric endocrinology who continues to promote "reconstructive" surgery —continued on page 60

The Poet

Language and Creative Imagination in Exile by Reza Baraheni

as Prisoner

For the person in exile there is only one country, the country of his birth, and only one language, his mother tongue. All other countries and languages seem fictitious in comparison. And those who undergo forced or voluntary exile will recognize what Salman Rushdie describes as “a dream of glorious return.”

Immediately after the Shah's departure from Iran in 1979, thousands of men and women who had lived in exile for many years, myself among them, were on their way home. Many of us were leaving behind things of great value. For me it was an American reputation as a writer, a tenured full professorship at a respected university, and many friends. But this was to be our glorious return. And it was, in a way. The dark city of Tehran enclosed us as we arrived. Suddenly, we saw the familiar faces behind the flowers; we heard the languages, the jokes, the poems, and the sharp, exquisite blossoming of recognition. We were home, the dangerous and familiar home.

I had left that home five years earlier because repression had turned it into a hell; I went back because I hoped that the revolution would turn it into a paradise. I left this last time, in October 1996, because years of the regime's brutality had turned Iran into something worse than hell. This was a country characterized by one turbulence after another, with its people, and its writers, rising and falling with the waves. It's very difficult to be a writer in such a State. It is dishonest to see women stoned and keep silent. Dishonest to see the languages of ethnic groups suppressed and keep silent. It is equally dishonest to keep your feelings of love, affection, and passion within the prescriptions of hypocritical legalities; dishonest not to write of what happens between two human beings when they are in bed. It is dishonest not to

fight for the freedom of human beings and for the freedom of expression in literature.

It was with this mood and mentality that I went through the Islamic Revolution of 1979, through prison two years later, and my ouster from the University of Tehran later in 1982. Stripped of all my rights as a human being and forced into exile in my own home, I began illegally teaching writers in the basement of my apartment. For many years, that basement was Iran's center of modern, postmodern, and feminist literature. It was the collective womb of creativity for a younger generation of men and women who read their works to one another, and studied Iranian and foreign literature. Exiled and oppressed by the authorities, we worked to eliminate the patriarchal structure and styles from the literary creations of the individual writer. The writing of those of us exiled at home became the voice for what was lacking in the society.

The Islamic Republic of Iran's attitude toward writers not affiliated with the government—whom they label spies for Western governments—has been one of utter brutality. Early in the revolution, a number of prominent writers either fled the country, or were arrested. In recent years, three have died in mysterious circumstances. One of them, Faraj Sarkouhi, the editor of the monthly *Adineh*, underwent atrocious tortures. Many others lived in fear and in hiding; several escaped abduction and attempts on their lives. I escaped two abductions, and was under unannounced house arrest; for years all my books have been banned. Invitations arrived from Sweden, Canada and the United States. Decisions had to be made.

I arrived in Canada in January 1997. It was the

longest winter of my life, as this new period of exile kept me, my wife, and two of our children both paralyzed and preoccupied. All my life, it seems, I have lived in exile.

Many people tend to view exile as a metaphor for misery and tragedy, or their metonymias. But it is more paradoxical than that. When I think of Canada, Iran doesn't appear in my memory and mind. Iran and Canada are completely irrelevant to each other. I am a displaced person or a writer, and my significance lies somewhere else. Within the context of Persian language and Iranian literature, particularly the language and literature of the last 45 years, my work has a particular meaning. I cannot explain this to even the most sympathetic writer or publisher in Canada. But I didn't have to explain anything to the members of my basement workshop. They *knew* what I was talking about; we have one another's blood in our veins. I don't exist in their eyes physically; I exist as language and literature. I am not a poet and novelist in their eyes; I am poetry and fiction. But in the eyes of my Canadian friends, I am a résumé, without any special significance.

I come from one of the ancient countries of the world. My city, Tabriz, is a place of fables and stories, a place reportedly rebuilt by Scheherazade. I am a story in several languages. I am what the French philosopher Michel Foucault called when, discussing a tale by Jorge Luis Borges, the Argentinean writer, a "non-place," which exists only in language. And that language is not readily available in a new home. I love the multicultural society of Canada, but I suffer from a kind of claustrophobia. With a language and a significance hidden in my chest and throat, I move around from one location to another, and from there to yet another place, truly a writer in exile, experiencing the eternal intermingling of memory, desire, hope, and language to such a degree that all places are left behind, and I find myself in my mouth, throat, and chest—in the actual seats of my poetic language. Then the language of dreams and desires begins to have another function. My entire notion of referentiality changes, and I don't trust my eyes anymore, because they are not equipped to put me in contact with the right things. The panoptic visual acuity, however new, beautiful and solidly structured, departs. I don't see the scene before me. Visions from another memory come to find me, to torture me with friends who are dead and gone, with the loved ones who keep disappearing, like Eurydice, who disappeared into the mists

of the underworld when her husband, the poet Orpheus, made a mistake and looked back. Then, the poet has nothing but a language, a voice, a mouth.

Little is more traumatic than the suppression of one's mother tongue. The suppression does not result in a total amnesia. You use it one way or another. Racial or ethnic suppression of the mother tongue can never be total, because you use it with your family, and friends. But the dominant language and its culture (in my case, Persian) are imposed on you, supplanting your mother tongue and culture (mine is Azari, a Turkic language), labeling it the language and culture of traitors. The imposition of Arabic, Turkish, and Persian on the Kurds in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran, and the imposition of Persian on all the Azari Turks in Iran, are glaring examples of cultural and linguistic suppression. Since this is done from early childhood, you look at the innocent faces of your parents, relatives and hometown people—in fact, the entire population of your province—and you wonder whether it can be true that the language and culture of such people is so treacherous. Your mother tongue becomes a criminal conspiracy against the great official culture of state. If you write anything in your own language, you automatically become a separatist and a traitor to the sovereignty of that state. So even in your childhood and youth in your own city you begin to live in exile, and you are told to hate your mother tongue. What happens to your own language? You simply swallow it. How?

In the winter of 1945, as a 10-year-old school kid in Tabriz, I wrote a school paper in colored inks in Azari, and hung it on the wall. The paper was in my mother tongue, the mother tongue of the entire province of Azarbaijan. In those days, a half-autonomous government was in charge of the affairs of the province. In a few months that government was overthrown and the central government of Iran regained the control of the city and the province. When I took my paper to school and hung it on the wall, I was forced by the school authorities, whose mother tongue was the same as mine and that of my paper, to lick the ink off the surface of the paper in front of all the teachers and the students. I swallowed my mother tongue. I never forgot the humiliation.

I had just begun to write petty, childish pieces of poetry in my mother tongue. That door was shut for good. The mother tongue, a female tongue, a language learned from the lips and the carcasses of one's mother, became a hidden thing. The Ithou connection to which the hierarchy of syntax had not yet been introduced,

the irregular and spontaneous rhythm of hands, ears, lips, and mouth—all disappeared in that humiliating licking of the ink.

Almost 50 years later, I saw a few sentences by the French feminist and philosopher Julia Kristeva that could have been written about the course my life took in the next few years after that ink-licking: "Writing is impossible without some kind of exile. Exile is already in itself a form of dissidence." You dissent from the norm, the conventional and the regular. The language that has been swallowed will turn into the actual fruit of language: poetry.

There are about 30 of us, all men, who sit or lie stretched on the floor of one of the upper wards of the prison. Since I have been here, I have been blindfolded, so I don't know that this is the prison in which I stayed in 1972 for more than a hundred days. This time, I am kept blindfolded in this corridor for 22 days. All the others are also blindfolded. We are anonymous. Without names. All the solitary-confinement cells are occupied by women. As I lie here, stretched out on the floor, I can see under the blindfold pressed on my eyes, through the crevice between my nose and cheeks, the solemn parade of the women as they are taken to the toilets at the end of the corridor. They look like ghosts borrowed by prison authorities from Shakespearean plays. Upright and dignified, they walk in chadors, or in scarves and long coats. Not a single tress of hair is allowed to escape. The scarves are pinned under the women's chins, and in spite of the blindfolds concealing their eyes, there is still something magnificent in the way they carry themselves. The covered hand of the first holds a truncheon extended to her by a guard, with the others following in an irregular line, each with her left hand placed on the shoulder of the woman ahead of her. I can see this through the crevice of my blindfold. The guard has already warned me: If I loosen my blindfold, he will beat me severely. But when he told me this, he also accidentally mentioned my name. Tonight, one of the women passing, whispered to me: "Sir...Sir...are you...the poet, Reza...are you?"

Some of the men in the corridor are snoring. Beyond the blindfold, it is bright, but hazy, as if an overwhelming light has been muffled behind a cloud. The snoring of the men is a great help, but I am afraid her soft voice will be detected.

"Who are you?" I whisper to the void behind the blindfold, and then keep silent, fearing that my voice might have been heard by the guard or even by the

other prisoners close to me. Nothing comes from behind the door. I think that perhaps she doesn't want to tell me who she is, that she was simply curious about me. Then she speaks.

I am stunned by what she says: "All four of us are pregnant. We're going to be shot."

Afraid to make any move that will betray this conversation to the guards, I wait. She, too, waits. After almost half an hour, she suddenly breathes heavily, and says:

"It moved."

"What?" I ask involuntarily.

"Here. In me. Joy...The baby...It's here...Reza."

I don't know what to say.

"My butterfly," she murmurs. "Here, Reza...Here...My butterfly...Moving...Here...Palm...Under my..."

"Be careful. They might hear your voice," I say. Then, after a moment, I ask, "Where's your husband?"

"Shot."

"When?"

"Three weeks ago."

I don't know what to say. Nothing has prepared me to speak to this woman whose husband has been shot, and who keeps repeating "butterfly," and seems to be inviting me to touch and feel her child's movements through skin. How can an Iranian woman say these things to a man, to a mere stranger? Is there something wrong with her mind?

"It's every day...My butterfly...Every day now..."

"Ask them to take you to the hospital...Tell them to send you."

"They'll come...No need...No asking...They come when the pain comes."

And after a moment's silence, she asks: "What's your crime?"

"I don't know," I whisper; I am not able to think about my crime.

"You think they'll let you go?"

At first I cannot hear her very well—or I don't want to believe what I hear. How can any woman be put in this position? Then I hear a few simple sentences from her. And nothing else. The next day, she is removed from her cell. The women are crying, all of them. After this, no one talks to me anymore from behind the door; there are three of them now going to the toilets. A few days later, I am removed to another floor, and another exile. Her irregular sentences from behind the door ring in my ears:

"They'll shoot...I have no —continued on page 67

THE FIRE

WHEN "PRO-LIFE

By Mary Lou Greenberg

As I held in my hand the sharp slivers of glass that were now the only remains of the shattered windows, my eye was drawn to a metal object in the debris. It was a nail, a small, sharp spike two inches long. I shuddered. Hundreds of these projectiles intended to shred human flesh had been propelled outward by the blast when the bomb went off, just a few feet from the main entrance. I could still see some of the nails embedded in the building's masonry facade, between the now boarded-up door and bits of what had been an awning. A crater, a foot deep, marked where the bomb had been planted. The trajectory of the nails and shrapnel was toward the front door and windows, and the reception area just inside. If the bomb had gone off minutes later, women coming to the clinic for abortions would have been among its victims. As it was, security guard Robert D. Sanderson was killed in the explosion, and nurse Emily Lyons was severely injured. The bomb was not meant to destroy the building—the New Woman All Women Health Care clinic in Birmingham, Ala., sustained no structural damage—but the walls of the reception area were torn by the nails.

Just as this anti-personnel bomb at the clinic was intended to rip apart bodies, so too was it meant to penetrate people's minds and emotions with a chilling message: If you provide abortions, if you work at clinics or go to them as clients, you will be a target! This is the stark reality behind the statistics on clinic violence: In the last five years, six people have been assassinated at five clinics. They included two doctors, two clinic workers, one clinic escort, and the security guard in Birmingham. Seven others were wounded in these attacks. During the same period, two more doctors were seriously injured—one was shot, the other slashed with a knife—outside their clinics. And three physicians were shot and wounded by a sniper or snipers in Canada. In 1997, there were a total of 12 bombings or arsons at U.S. clinics, the highest annual rate since 1984.

I have traveled to the sites of all the fatal anti-abortion assaults to help organize pro-choice demonstrations against the attacks and to support the clinics. Now, in Birmingham, these bomb shards brought home to me once again, with vivid, gut-wrenching

intensity, the seriousness and viciousness of this war.

But as soon as the yellow crime-scene tape came down, and clinic staff were allowed to enter the building, an outpouring of support and assistance both locally and across the country turned the intended message of intimidation on its head. It was hard for some of the local people to approach the building; images of their absent colleagues, recurring in news photos, were vivid in their minds. But as volunteers began to sweep up the glass inside and out, and the clinic's owner, Diane Derzis, and its administrator, Michelle Farley made plans for repairs, the work at hand propelled all of us forward. Workers were soon filling the holes and repainting the walls, and installing new glass. A shredded sofa was removed from the reception room, and chairs from an inside room which had not been damaged were brought out to replace it. New plants were delivered. And the phone began ringing with calls from women who wanted to make appointments.

"This Clinic Stays Open!"

At an outdoor press conference exactly one week after the bombing, Jeff Lyons, the 41-year-old husband of the injured nurse, spoke for us all. "I just want to tell whoever did this," he said defiantly, pointing to the clinic, "it didn't work!" Diane Derzis announced proudly that the clinic was open again, and with a full staff—there had not been one resignation, and another nurse had come forward to fill in for Emily Lyons. A sign in the window boldly proclaimed: "This clinic stays open!"

In the weeks to come, Emily's continuing recovery and courage would be an inspiration to everyone. The nurse lost her left eye and sustained serious injuries to her right one; she had multiple shrapnel wounds in her face and torso, a broken left leg, and damage to the muscle in her right leg and to both shins. She was forced to undergo numerous surgical procedures, and received intensive physical therapy. Yet this mother of two teenage daughters by a previous marriage is hopeful of walking, even jogging, again. In a statement read by her husband at a press conference on March 2, she said the bombing had not swayed her from her strong belief that women should have the right to an abortion if they choose. "Abortion is a legal and legiti-

THIS TIME " MEANS DEATH



PHOTO: DEBRA SWEET

mate form of health care, and I offer no apologies for being employed there," she said.

I arrived in Birmingham on Friday, January 30, the day after the bombing. On Saturday morning, I and other out-of-town activists from Refuse & Resist! (an organization formed in 1988 to oppose today's repressive political agenda) went to Summit Medical Center, another abortion clinic just a block away, to join local volunteers in escorting clients to the clinic. When we arrived, there was a small crowd at the entrance to the driveway. Some wore neon-orange vests with "clinic escort" printed on the front in bold, black letters, and were waving cars into the parking lot. But local anti-abortion activists were present, too. Showing no remorse about the fatal bombing the day before, they thrust signs with anti-abortion slogans at the occupants of the cars and yelled, "Don't murder your baby!" The demonstration was being orchestrated by the national leader of Operation Rescue National, Flip Benham. Well-tanned, and with a TV evangelist's perpetual smile, Benham, like a military commander, could be heard urging his troops to give their all.

One man, who had driven a woman to her appointment at the clinic, stormed across the sidewalk to confront the protesters, with their photos of what they claimed were bloody aborted fetuses. "The bombing was terrible. Why are you out here?" he demanded. A protester wearing a clerical collar pointed to the poster of a fetus and began to speak, but the challenger cut him off: "This is about a woman's life," he said, gesturing toward the clinic door. "It's her choice. Not yours!" A woman holding anti-abortion pamphlets tried to elbow me away from the clinic driveway. I

At a rally to protest the bombing and support abortion clinics, Birmingham, Jan. 31, 1998

asked her how she felt about the death and injuries caused by the bombing. She muttered that she was "sorry" about the security guard, but sorer about "the babies being murdered." Other anti-abortion protesters echoed this sentiment. One man, who had been at the bomb scene shortly after the explosion, told the *Birmingham News*: "I don't like to see any-

body die, but they're in a business of death. . . . You live by the sword, you die by the sword. We've told them that they're in a grisly business—the flesh trade. You never know what's going to happen to you. . . . There are 200 to 300 people [sic] killed a week in those clinics. That's a much more tragic loss of life."

Such rhetoric encourages attacks on clinics and staff, says David Gunn Jr., son of Dr. David Gunn, who was murdered outside a Pensacola, Fla., clinic in 1993—the first physician killed by an anti-abortion gunman. As long as anti-abortion demonstrators continue to call clinic workers "murderers," he said, "you can't be surprised" by such attacks.

Justifying the "pro-life" activists' kill-people campaign, Rev. Donald Spitz, director of Pro-Life Virginia, sent an e-mail to a columnist for the *Birmingham Post-Herald*, stating: "Robert Sanderson [the security guard] was the protector of the baby killers and was an accessory to murder. He was paid with blood money from the babies that were slaughtered. He reaped what he sowed. He was not a hero or a good person. He was a killer, an accessory to murder. He deserved exactly what he received."

Spitz also intruded on the web site Emily Lyons' husband set up (www.net800.com/emily) to enable people to send their get-well wishes to Emily and to publish updates on the progress of her —continued on page 59

AFGHAN WOMEN UNDER THE TALIBAN

FEBRUARY 27, 1998—Thirty-thousand men and boys poured into the dilapidated Olympic sports stadium in Kabul, capital of Afghanistan. Street hawkers peddled nuts, biscuits and tea to the waiting crowd. The scheduled entertainment? They were there to see a young woman, Sohaila, receive 100 lashes, and to watch two thieves have their right hands amputated. Sohaila had been arrested walking with a man who was not a relative, a sufficient crime for her to be found guilty of adultery. Since she was single, it was punishable by flogging; had she been married, she would have been publicly stoned to death.

As Sohaila, completely covered in the shroud-like *burqa* veil, was forced to kneel and then flogged, Taliban "cheerleaders" had the stadium ringing with the chants of onlookers. Among those present there were just three women: the young prisoner, and two female relatives who had accompanied her. The crowd fell silent only when the luckless thieves were driven into the arena and pushed to the ground. Physicians using surgical scalpels promptly carried out the amputations. Holding the severed hands aloft by the index fingers, a grinning Taliban fighter warned the huge crowd, "These are the chopped-off hands of thieves, the punishment for any of you caught stealing." Then, to restore the party atmosphere, the thieves were driven in a jeep once around the stadium, a flourish that brought the crowd to their feet, as was intended.

These Friday circuses, at which Rome's Caligula would doubtless have felt at home, are to become

weekly fixtures for the entertainment-starved male residents of Kabul. Now that "weak officials" have been purged from key ministries, says the city's governor, Manan Niazi, who like many of the regime's officials is also a mullah, the way has been cleared for such displays. "We have a lot of such unpunished cases, but the previous civil servants didn't have the courage to do what we are doing. These people have now been replaced, and these events will continue." In fact, the next scheduled program, as announced, would be one stoning to death and three amputations.

Earlier that same week, three men accused of "buggery" had been sentenced to death by being partially buried in the ground and then having a wall pushed over on them by a bulldozer, a bizarre and labor-intensive form of execution dreamed up by the supreme leader of the Taliban, the 36-year-old Mullah Mohammad Omar. After another man, a saboteur, was hanged, his corpse was driven around the city, swinging from a crane. Clearly, there is nothing covert about the regime's punitive measures. In fact, the Taliban insure they are as widely publicized as possible. Last March, for example, the regime's radio station, the only one permitted to operate, broadcast to the nation that a young woman caught trying to flee Afghanistan with a man who was not her relative had been stoned to death. On another occasion, it was announced over the airwaves that 225 women had been rounded up and sentenced to a lashing for violating the dress code. One woman had the top of her thumb amputated for the crime of wearing nail polish. And when the

Talibs, like these boys, are authorized to shoot or whip women if they decide any are breaking the Taliban's repressive laws.



Taliban castrated and then hanged the former communist president and his brother in 1996, they left their bloodied bodies dangling from lampposts in busy downtown Kabul for three days. Photographs of the corpses appeared in news magazines and newspapers around the world.

The Taliban now control between 65 and 85 percent of Afghanistan, a country where statistics are anyone's guess. (Even the population size of Afghanistan is uncertain: possibly 15, maybe 22 million. The U.S. Department of State's figure on war fatalities—1.5 million—has not changed since 1985, although the armed conflict there is now in its 19th year.) For the last two years, the Taliban have been trying to win both a seat at the United Nations and international recognition. Thus far, only three countries have recognized the regime: Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. And even Pakistan is becoming embarrassed by its neighbor.

Until the Taliban came to power, Saudi Arabia was the most oppressive country on earth for women, and many of the Taliban's restrictions are rooted in that hardline Gulf state's gender apartheid. Saudi Arabia has also been financially supportive of the Taliban and the religious schools in which they are indoctrinated. "We have long regarded the Saudi kingdom as our right hand," says the head of the Taliban governing council.

The Taliban regime claim they are restoring Afghanistan to the "purity of Islam," and the Western press invariably parrots them. But authorities in a number of Muslim countries insist that few of the regime's dictates have a basis in Islam. And just as the U.N. has denied the Taliban a seat in the General Assembly, so too, the Organization of Islamic

BY JAN GOODWIN

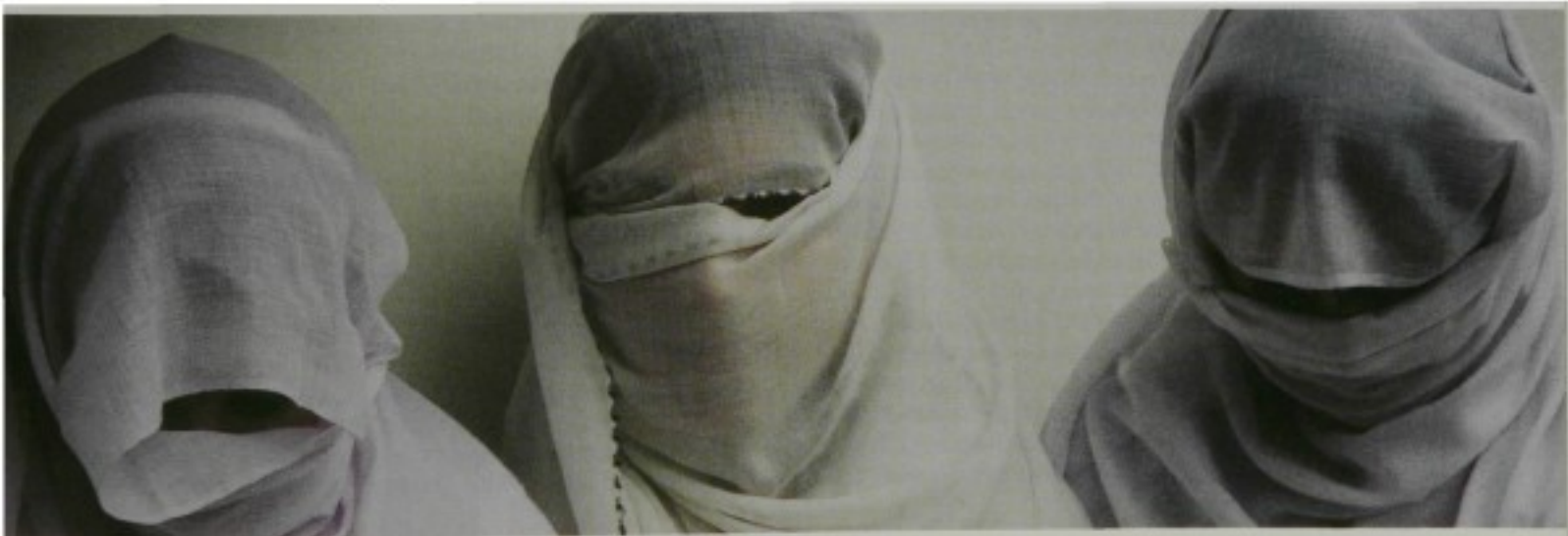
Conference, a 55-country body, has withheld both a seat and recognition from the regime. "The Taliban is not the image the Islamic world wants to project," says one Muslim diplomat. And with good reason.

Now in its fourth year of existence, the pariah regime has expunged all leisure activities. Their list of what is illegal grows daily: music, movies and television, picnics, wedding parties, New Year celebrations, any kind of mixed-sex gathering. They've also banned children's toys, including dolls and kites; card and board games; cameras; photographs and paintings of people and animals; pet parakeets; cigarettes and alcohol; magazines and newspapers, and most books. They've even forbidden applause—a moot point, since there's nothing left to applaud.

"Whatever we are doing in our country, it is not in order for the world to be happy with us," Sher Abbas Stanakzai, who until recently was the Taliban's 36-year-old deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, told me during my visit. Explaining why his regime has banned virtually all forms of entertainment, he says, "Time should be spent serving the country and praying to God. Nothing else. Everything else is a waste of time, and people are not allowed to waste their time."

For women, the restrictions are even harsher. Female education, from kindergarten through graduate school, banned. Employment for women, banned. It's now illegal to wear makeup, nail polish, jewelry, pluck your eyebrows, cut your hair short, wear colorful or stylish clothes, sheer stockings, white socks and shoes, high-heel shoes, walk loudly, talk loudly or

Afraid of the Taliban's long reach, these Afghan schoolgirls cover their faces to avoid recognition, even in a refugee camp in Pakistan.



laugh in public. In fact, the government doesn't believe women should go out at all: "Women, you should not step outside your residence" reads one of the Taliban dictates.

If women do venture out, it must be for an essential, government-sanctioned purpose, and they must wear the all-enveloping *burqa*. Even then they risk their lives. Not so long ago, a young mother, Torpeka, was shot repeatedly by the Taliban while rushing her seriously ill toddler to a doctor. Veiled as the law requires, she was spotted by a teenage Taliban guard, who tried to stop her because she shouldn't have left her home. Afraid her child might die if she were delayed, Torpeka kept going. The guard aimed his Kalashnikov machine-gun and fired several rounds directly at her. She was hit, but didn't die on the spot, as she could have. Instead, Afghans watching the inci-

which are rarely available, and have all windows, except the driver's, covered with thick blankets.

It is now illegal for women to talk to any men except close relatives, which precludes them from visiting male physicians, no matter how sick. At the time of my recent visit, the evening curfew began at 7:30 p.m., after which no one, except government troops, was allowed out, even for medical emergencies. Even women in labor and needing hospital care must remain at home until morning.

It would probably be quicker to list what the Taliban haven't banned. The regime has even outlawed paper bags. Like many of their edicts, this would be laughable if the penalties for infractions weren't so severe. Break the Taliban's law and you risk imprisonment, flogging, or worse. And to insure their dictates are followed, religious police, part of the

After 19 years of conflict, Kabul, once Afghanistan's symbol of modernity, is now the most war-damaged and landmined capital in the world.



dent in the crowded marketplace intervened, and Torpeka and her child received prompt medical attention. When her family later complained to the Taliban authorities, they were informed that it was the injured woman's fault. She had no right being out in public in the first place.

The *burqa* is a garment that covers women from head to toe, the heavy gauze patch across the eyes makes it hard to see, and completely blocks peripheral vision. Since enforced veiling, a growing number of women have been hit by vehicles because the *burqa* leaves them unable to walk fast, or see where they are going. Recently in Kabul, a Taliban tank rolled right over a veiled woman. Fortunately, she fell between the tracks. Instead of being crushed to death, she was not seriously hurt, but was severely traumatized.

To insure women are effaced as effectively as if they never existed, the government ordered all exterior windows of homes to be painted black. The only public transport permitted women are special buses,

"Department for the Propagation of Virtue and the Suppression of Vice," constantly roam the streets. Often teenage boys armed with automatic weapons, they also carry broken-off car aerials or electrical cabling to whip women they decide are not properly observing the regulations.

Despite its disastrous and very public record on human rights, when the Taliban was petitioning the United Nations for a seat in the General Assembly last May, its then New York representative, Abdul Hakeem Mujahid, claimed his government was "protecting human rights and liberties in Afghanistan." He also stated that, having put a stop to the "miserable living conditions under which our women were living," they had "restored women's safety, dignity and freedom." He then went on to justify the Taliban's ban on women's education: Afghanistan lacks the resources to educate them, he said, adding that the Taliban also do not trust the values that became part of the education system under previous governments. Those reserva-

tions, however, only apply to women, since the regime continues to educate boys.

Mujahid omitted to mention a personal detail—how he circumvents the ban for his own daughter by sending her to an English-language school in Pakistan. But this kind of hypocrisy is common in Afghanistan today. Under the regime, cigarette smoking is severely punished, yet in every Taliban office I entered in Kabul, even that of the head of the department of Virtue and Vice, Mullah Qalam-ad-Din, from whom most of the restrictions originate, used ashtrays were always in evidence. A senior official in the foreign ministry chain-smoked throughout our hour-long conversation. "Isn't that illegal?" I asked. "I can't help it, I'm addicted," he replied with a smile.

While touting to the U.N. the Taliban's "improved" living conditions for women, Mujahid didn't mention

competition to build gas and oil pipelines from landlocked Turkmenistan to Pakistan through war-torn Afghanistan. In testimony to the U.S. Congress this February, John Maresca, vice-president in charge of Unocal's international relations, referred to the \$4.5 billion, some 790-mile project as the "new Silk Road...a commercial corridor that can link Central Asia supply with the demand, once again making Central Asia the crossroads between Europe and Asia."

Iran offers an alternative pipeline route, but because of U.S. sanctions legislation, American companies would not be able to participate in its construction—or, as a result, gain any benefit from what are considered the largest untapped oil and gas reserves outside the Middle East. And while Unocal says it cannot sign any deal with the Taliban until they are formally recognized, this hasn't stopped them

Not so long ago, this avenue was a major, international shopping center. Today, these ruins reflect conditions in the rest of the country.



the regime's banning of women's employment, or any of their myriad other restrictions, which have so constrained women's lives that half the population of the country is now effectively confined to house arrest.

Amnesty International calls Afghanistan under the Taliban "a human rights catastrophe." Afghan women, struggling to survive in what has become a police state claiming to be a theocracy, describe themselves as the "living dead."

It is hardly surprising, then, that the U.N. has not seated the Taliban delegation; or, indeed, that the credentials committee has refused even to meet with the regime's representative in New York, and most officials prefer to duck his phone calls. But the U.N. has seated the representatives of some pretty brutal regimes in the past, and the ostracism is unlikely to last forever—especially with lobbyists for American oil concerns entering the picture.

Unocal, a California-based global energy company, heads up one of two consortiums engaged in fierce

from wining and dining Taliban officials, and arranging shopping trips for them to purchase luxury items on their visits to the oil company in the U.S. Unocal already has a \$900,000 training program underway, in collaboration with the University of Nebraska at Omaha, for pipeline construction personnel, a program limited to Afghan males. Additionally, the duo has established two technician training centers in Afghanistan, also benefitting men only.

Unocal's main partner in the consortium is Delta Oil Co., a Saudi-owned company, in whose behalf former White House legislative assistant Paul Behrends and Delta's American vice-president Charles Santos, a recent U.N. peace negotiator in Afghanistan, are busy lobbying in Washington.

The pipeline would bring the Taliban some \$100 million annually in transit fees, in addition to providing thousands of jobs and improving infrastructure—building roads, supplying electricity, telephones, etc.—in the war-devastated country. The Clinton adminis-

tration reportedly supports the Afghan pipeline, which would free the new nations of Central Asia from dependence on Russia, avoid the Iranian route, and bring needed energy to the Indian subcontinent.

Competing with Unocal to build the pipeline is Bidas International of Argentina, whose managing director, Mario Lopez Olacireegui, has gone on record saying he is not concerned about the Taliban's human rights violations. "We are just an oil and gas company," he says. "We are not bothered by human rights or politics." The Taliban, for their part, say they will award the pipeline contract to the consortium that is first able to start construction. Unocal's deadline to begin is this coming December.

HOW YOU CAN AID THE WOMEN OF AFGHANISTAN

Clearly, the Feminist Majority and NOW campaign is having an effect on Unocal. But this is just a beginning. To help restore human rights to women in Afghanistan, add your name to a petition the Feminist Majority is sending to the U.S. government and the United Nations. Call 703-522-2214 or to transmit instant e-mail via the Feminist Majority's "Take Action" center, log on to <http://www.feminist.org>.

astrous public relations record. None of which has affected the Taliban, however, who have since clamped down harder on women, this time ordering that all foreign Muslim women working with the U.N. or NGOs be accompanied by male chaperones, which in effect will halt their employment in Afghanistan.

While it may be some time before Taliban coffers are swollen by petrodollars, one of the mainstays of the regime's economy is heroin production, which they use in part to supply their war

machine. Afghanistan now produces more of the narcotic than any other country—and much of it ends up on the streets of the U.S. Despite promises by the Taliban to eradicate the industry, according to a report released last February by the U.N. Inter-national



Left: Afghan women begging to survive. Right: Banned from college, women students continue their education in an underground school.

A number of American women's organizations, headed by the Feminist Majority and the National Organization for Women, have mobilized to prevent the Clinton administration from recognizing the Taliban government unless it radically changes its treatment of women. They are also campaigning for Unocal to include women in their training programs. As we went to press, sources within Unocal admitted this campaign is beginning to have an effect. A split has occurred within the oil company—those who want to press ahead, and those who do not want a politically embarrassing "rogue operation." As the U.S. women's campaign gains momentum, Unocal is also finding foreign investors suddenly unenthusiastic about being affiliated with a regime with such a dis-

Narcotics Control Board, the harvest of opium poppy, from which heroin is derived, increased by 25 percent in Afghanistan during 1997. The Taliban control 96 percent of Afghanistan's total opium output, this country's only real remaining cash crop.

Though it was always impoverished, before the Soviet invasion Afghanistan was able to feed its people. Today, after almost 20 years of war, this is no longer true. Afghan women, in the rural areas, have always worked alongside men in the fields. In the capital, until the Taliban took over, they often wore Western dress, served in parliament, and worked in a variety of professions, including medicine, engineering, architecture, the media and law. During the long years of fighting, as men were killed, went missing, or

became disabled, the survival of many families came to depend on women's income.

Before the Taliban ban on female employment, 70 percent of the teachers in Kabul were women, as were 50 percent of the civil servants and university students, and 40 percent of the doctors.

Why does the regime insist that women be confined at home? Reducing women to mere objects, the minister of education says, "It's like having a flower, or a rose. You water it and keep it at home for yourself, to look at it and smell it. It [a woman] is not supposed to be taken out of the house to be smelled." Another Taliban leader is less poetic: "There are only two places for Afghan women—in her husband's house, and in the graveyard."

I have been visiting and reporting on Afghanistan since 1984, and have traveled extensively throughout the country, but it was only during my visit last fall that I saw for the first time legions of women and children reduced to beggary, the result of the Taliban's ban on women's employment. Many families, having

still receiving one. Most cannot afford to buy the garment, and whole neighborhoods must share one. It can take several days for a woman's turn to come round; even if she has money to shop for food, she can't go out until then.

In Kabul, the number of street children has risen from an estimated 28,000 to 60,000 in the last year. This city, once a symbol of modernity for Afghanistan, is now in ruins—the most bomb-damaged capital in the world. It is also the most land-mined. Mines maim and/or kill an average of 25 people a day in Afghanistan. Two-thirds of them are children. It is predominantly children who herd animals, or search for fuel or for scrap metal to sell to help support their families. Scrap metal merchants will only purchase unexploded bombs or shells if the children disarm them first. Kids doing this highly risky work earn on average enough to buy just two or three pieces of bread per day.

Despite the terrible toll mines are taking, the Taliban have interfered with programs to teach



Veiled women at a supplementary feeding center for children. Forty percent of Kabul is now reduced to living on food handouts.

sold all their household items, even blankets, are surviving on bread and sugarless tea. Supplementary feeding centers, funded by foreign agencies, are dotted across the capital. Here, malnourished children—four-year-olds weighing 16 pounds, 18-month-old toddlers weighing 9 pounds—are fed. Their mothers are not, even though they, too, are malnourished. Women often eat once every two or three days, preferring instead to give whatever food they have to their children. According to new U.N. figures, some 40 percent of the Kabul population now exists on food handouts, either from humanitarian agencies or from begging.

The legally mandated *burqa* has also become a severe financial hardship. The veil now costs the equivalent of five months salary—if any women were

women and children how to locate and stay clear of mines. Board games used by foreign humanitarian agencies to instruct a mostly illiterate population in mine-awareness have been disallowed because they use now-banned pictures of humans or animals coming too close to a mine; an alternative, flash cards, has also been outlawed—as gambling.

Conditions are so deplorable for women under the Taliban that many are now severely depressed. Without the resources to leave the country, an increasing number are now choosing suicide, once rare there, as a means of escape. A European physician working in the city told me, "Doctors are seeing a lot of esophageal burns. Women are swallowing battery acid, or poisonous household cleansers, —continued on page 57



To Be Male or To Be Female— That Is the Question

Gender, Sex and Politics in Shakespeare

by Marilyn Stasio

When Sarah Bernhardt played Hamlet in 1899, two French critics disagreed so violently about her performance that they marched over to the Seine and onto the Isle de la Grande Jatte, where they fought a duel in which Bernhardt's champion was seriously wounded. All Paris and, indeed, most of the literary world, took sides in this rancorous dispute, which turned on the ludicrous question of whether Bernhardt, a theatrically towering but physically diminutive actress, could lay legitimate claim to a character described in Shakespeare's text as "fat and scant of breath."

As theatrical brouhahas go, the fatty fracas was not as murderous as, say, the 1849 Astor Place Opera House riot in New York, in which 31 lives were lost when a gang of admirers of the American actor Edwin Forrest attacked partisans of his English rival William Charles Macready, who was performing *Macbeth*. All the same, the vitriolic rhetoric unleashed by the appearance of a great female actress in a great male role was genuinely fierce—and awfully silly.

"You always get into silly issues when a woman plays a man's role," says the actress Kathleen Chalfant, who was nominated for a Tony Award in 1993 for the three male roles she took in the Broadway production of *Angels in America*, and who also won acclaim in the role of Clov in Samuel Beckett's

Endgame. Like Hamlet's girth, the matter of how a man crosses his knees qualifies as one of those silly issues, says Chalfant, who had problems with the movement herself. "I finally had my husband sit in a chair, with no clothes on, and cross his knees, so I could see where his balls go."

As Gerda Taranow points out in her exhaustive scholarly study *The*

Bernhardt Hamlet: Culture and Context, "in opera, in ballet, and in theatre, the female *travesti* role had by the 19th century become a standard convention." The ballet was so "saturated" with female performers in male roles that, "outside of Russia and Denmark, male dancing was seriously impaired in the 19th century." And stage companies in France, England, and America were so hospitable to women in classical male parts that by the time Bernhardt undertook Hamlet, more than 50 actresses had already had a crack at the role.

Now, a century later, with actresses taking to the practice again, you'd think that the sight of women in male trousers or tights would be familiar enough not to stampede the livestock or send the men dashing out to duel. But, however lofty the role or ambitious the performance, any woman who takes the part of a man still finds herself being judged on the silly issues. (She's too fat or too slender or too soft or too supple or simply too graceful when she crosses her knees to be entirely convincing as a "real" man.) How come? Because criticism formulated on physical principles is still the safest, sneakiest way of saying (without losing one's credibility as a critic) that women can't play men.

"I had no idea that I was about to be convinced that women cannot 'do' men's parts," the American actress Elizabeth Robins said in 1900, in a commentary on Bernhardt's Hamlet she wrote for *The North American Review*. Refusing to weigh in on the avoirdupois controversy, Robins instead attacked Bernhardt for playing Hamlet as "a scampish schoolboy." Daring and irreverent, it was an interpretation that deliberately undermined the Romantic tradition of that sexy, brooding, mercurial prince of melancholia who was for 19th-century audiences "a symbol," as Taranow puts it, "of the spiritually embattled hero: sensitive, creative, philosophic, irresolute, pessimistic, cosmic, and doomed."

Unlike the popular, contemporary Hamlet of

Sarah Bernhardt (left, in an undated photograph, as Hamlet) was accused of playing the brooding Dane as "a scampish schoolboy."

Another technique for landing a dirty critical punch is to accuse an actress of over-acting in a manner specifically “womanly,” rather than simply human.

Edwin Booth (“Hamlet with all his sensitiveness, profundity and subtilized passion emphasized”), Bernhardt’s impetuous young prince was too “crude” and “frankly comic” for Robins’ romantic taste. “It was not the gentle prince, the melancholy Dane, that we were seeing, nor any man of any sort,” she wrote, “but an amazingly good imitation of a high spirited, somewhat malicious boy.”

Calling an actress “boyish” is no compliment in the lexicon of theatrical criticism. It is a snide way of ridiculing her performance and diminishing her person—and it is still widely practiced by critical pundits. Writing in *New York* magazine in 1982, John Simon termed Diane Venora “a runt of a prince” in the role of Hamlet at the New York Shakespeare Festival. “She does not for a moment pass for a man,” Simon said, eerily echoing Elizabeth Hobins’ criticism of Bernhardt. “A twelve-year-old boy, yes, though a rather small one—with all manner of little-boyish tricks and mannerisms—and, as a colleague remarked on the way out, a very creditable Peter Pan.”

Another technique for landing a dirty critical punch is to accuse an actress of over-acting in a manner presumed to be specifically “womanly,” rather than simply human. When the Irish-born actress Fiona Shaw gave her striking interpretation of Richard II last year, the British press hit her in a hundred places for being too wild, too emotional, too intense, too frenzied, too flaming—language suggestive of a Victorian physician diagnosing a case of uterine hysteria.

Probably the most cutting criticism of women playing men’s roles is the feminist charge that women shouldn’t be playing men in the first place.

“This is a very conflicting issue for a feminist in a post-feminist period,” says Barbara Scofield, formerly director of undergraduate theater at the University of Missouri in Kansas City. “If you believe that women should be offered as broad an opportunity as men to express their experience of life as human beings, then you have a dilemma with women in male roles. Part of you believes that women in theater should be promoting the work of women.”

The conflict is even more acute when women take on Shakespearean roles, according to Scofield, who is writing her doctoral dissertation on the two pre-eminent women’s Shakespearean acting companies in this country, the Boston-based Company of Women and the Los Angeles Women’s Shakespeare Company. “Shakespeare is the King of the Dead White Male cultural icons, just like Elvis is the King of Rock and Roll,” she says, “so there is tremendous criticism from feminists about doing the work of a playwright who embodies the white male patriarchal culture of the western world.”

Sarah Bernhardt weathered the critical storm in Paris in 1899 and took her production of *Hamlet* to Austria, Switzerland, Hungary, South America, the United States, and England. Today, all-women Shakespearean companies continue to explore the classical canon and, in the process, to inspire other female theater professionals to follow their lead. A little criticism isn’t about to make this phenomenon go away, because women of vision have something to teach western civilization about its dramatic literature.

One of these visionaries is Kristin Linklater, the artistic director and cofounder (with feminist psychologist Carol Gilligan) of the Company of Women. “Our mission,” as she defined it in 1990, “is to bring the voices of women and girls into the mainstream of live theater in order to add fresh resonance to the ancient power of theater to illuminate and heal its community.”

The vision part, drawn from her seminal work on vocal theory and technique, *Freeing the Natural Voice*, has to do with Linklater’s belief that the human body can be transformed—“on a molecular level, as well as on an imaginative level”—when the “natural voice” is freed. “Freeing the natural voice means removing the conditioned defenses and limitations of expression that manifest vocally in muscular tension,” explains Linklater, who currently teaches in the graduate theater department of Columbia University in New York City. “Once you release those conditioned habits, you free a voice that has a range of three to four octaves.”

These “expanded female voices” are able to accom-

ling a dirty critical punch er presumed to be specif-

modate male characters of great size, Linklater says. "It was never our intention to interpret Shakespeare's male characters from a narrow female perspective," she points out, but to "absorb" them into the enriched psychic and emotional resources of the freed voice. Through the process, the performer finds a source of "dormant energy" that, when activated, can generate "a sense of being possessed."

Linklater experienced that feeling of possession herself, when she played King Lear and multiple male roles in *Henry V*. "I found that, in entering these male worlds, I had tapped a source of psychic and physical power that was intoxicating," she says, "so much so, that when I stepped out of the role and back into my woman's life, the question was: Now, where did that energy go?"

This is the kind of talk that can make a feminist queasy, with its implication that women must assume male roles in order to access these hidden pools of psychic and physical energy. But, as Barbara Scofield points out, the theory is entirely consistent with Carol Gilligan's groundbreaking studies in the psychology of young girls. "Freeing the natural voice," says Scofield, "means freeing the original female voice. . . the female voice before it came into conflict with the stifling patriarchal culture and was silenced."

Other actresses who have played classical male roles confirm the sense of transformation that made Kristin Linklater feel "possessed" when she played King Lear. "It changed me," says Lisa Wolpe, of her experience in the role of Richard III. "I think it made me a better person because I explored a dark side of myself and, having brought it to light, I was able to choose whether to be a relentless force or a collaborative force in my own life."

Wolpe, the founder and artistic director of the Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare Company, says she was not seduced by the predatory king's evil soul—but she was exhilarated by the opportunity to plunge into its blackness. "As a woman, I am always pressing myself to be nurturing, collaborative, and peaceful in the world," she says, "so it was liberat-

Right: Lisa Wolpe as Angelo, and Karole Foreman as Isabella in the Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare Company's production of *Measure for Measure*, May 1997. Kathryn Chalfont (second from top) plays Cleo in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*.



Above and right: Scenes from Kristin Linklater's Company of Women's production of *King Lear* in 1996.



Text is transformed when women especially when they play them in the act of making

ing to be able to explore, through this character, my voracious, ambitious side." She adds that it was also "strengthening to break through those constricting rules of order that govern the behavior of women, pressing them to be invisible and supportive of the status quo."

This intoxication that women experience when they play men's roles seems to derive, in large part, from the innate political power that masculinity confers. Although critics like John Simon imply that women take male roles out of gender envy, it seems to be the power, not the masculinity, that women find irresistible.

According to Kathleen Chalfant, "What men have is natural authority in the world, and you don't realize that until you play a man." She was forever getting the directorial note that she was "not regal enough" when playing queens and other female figures of authority. "You think you're being very regal. You stand up straight, walk with dignity, and you think you are being very firm and authoritative. But what you're really doing is *insisting* on your strength from a position of *weakness*," she says. "Playing a man made me feel *entitled*, so that I didn't have to insist on my authority."

Clearly, actresses have much to gain, on an artistic and technical level, from taking male roles. To Barbara Scofield's way of thinking, that alone should justify the practice of playing against gender, especially in the monumental Shakespearean roles. "So many actresses just have this longing to do the work," she says, "to speak those words, to feel those feelings, to be that enormous. Women are not often given the opportunity to be *enormous*. It's a tremendous feeling for an artist."

At the same time, there is something to be said for the fresh insights that women bring to the male roles they play and the illumination that these insights cast on familiar texts. Kathleen Chalfant speaks of the profound sense of desolation that struck her when Clov leaves Hamm at the end of *Endgame*. "Although Clov is an androgynous figure and is always played by a

man, the relationship between Hamm and Clov has often been taken to be the relationship between Beckett and his wife," says Chalfant. "When you see it as a marriage, in which Clov is in the apparently subservient position, you really *feel* it when he walks out on someone who is absolutely helpless."

To Lisa Wolpe, the misogyny of characters like Henry V, Richard III, and Angelo in *Measure for Measure* leaps from the text when the lines are spoken by a woman. "Our audiences love the seduction scenes," she says. "The misogynist lines always get huge laughs, because you really *hear* them when a woman is the seducer."

"The huge revelation for me," says Barbara Scofield, "was how audiences learn about themselves when they are confronted by their own stereotypes. Time after time, people said to me, 'I came in with prejudices. I came in expecting a freak show.' And always, after the first 15 minutes or so, they get caught up in it and they are able to see through their own prejudices."

It is by illuminating the core issues of a text, however, that gender bending really wins its suit to be taken seriously. Maureen Shea, who has directed for both the Company of Women and the Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare Company, offers example after example of how text is transformed when women play men—especially when they play them in the act of making war.

"A different thing happens with the violence, because a woman's experience with violence is completely different from a man's," says Shea, who is director of theater of Emerson Stage in the division of performing arts at Emerson College in Boston, where she also teaches. "Men's childhood playing at war games skews their sense of violence, because they come to the stage still 'playing' soldiers and cowboys. But women don't play at violence as children. We don't have that experience with war. So, when you put a sword in a woman's hand there's much more danger, because a woman takes it more seriously. You never feel, as you do with the guys, uh-oh, here comes the fight scene. When it's women with swords in their hands, it's not a

men play men — war.

fight scene—it's a scene of violence."

Kristin Linklater was angered when she heard critic John Simon say, as he watched a woman play a traditional male role in *Henry V*, that, "it was ridiculous seeing women trying to play soldiers," since the whole point was to show that war is itself an unnatural act. "If women aren't supposed to make war," she says, "then why are human beings doing it?"

Another area to which female performers bring special insight is the domestic front. Over and over, theater professionals say that Shakespearean scenes between marriage partners or parents and children take on more emotional depth with women in the roles.

For Maureen Shea, one such revealing moment came when Frances West, playing Essex in *Henry V* and telling of the death of Suffolk spoke the line: "And all my mother came into mine eyes and gave me up to tears." The connection the actress made, according to Shea, was the connection with her own mother, and the reading became profoundly moving. "The relationship between a woman and her mother is totally different from the one between a man and his mother," says Shea, "and when Frances West spoke that line, in that way, I heard it for the first time. I heard the whole text differently."

A hundred years ago, Elizabeth Robins conceded that Bernhardt's Hamlet had the same emotional force. "It does, perhaps, take a French tongue to utter the word 'father' with such an effect," she wrote, "but certainly, having seen a good many Hamlets, I never got so vivid an impression of the warm, personal relationship between the buried Majesty of Denmark and his son as Madame Bernhardt gave me."

Perhaps, to steal a line from Hamlet, "Though this be madness, yet there is method in it." ■

Marilyn Stasio is a columnist for *The New York Times* and frequently writes on theater for national publications.

Like women today who play men's roles, Sarah Bernhardt, seen here in *L'Alphonse*, was judged on appearance, not performance.





Meditations on Aging a

by Kate Millett

Another season at the farm, not that bad, but not that good either: the tedium of a small community, shearing trees, so exhausted afterward that I did nothing but read. A season without writing or silk screening or drawing. Back to the Bowery and another emptiness. I cannot spend the whole day reading, so I write, or try to. A pure if pointless exercise. My books are out of print, even *Sexual Politics*, and the manuscript about my mother cannot find a publisher.

Trying also to get a job. At first the academic voices were kind and welcoming, imagining I am rich and am doing this for amusement, slightly embarrassed as they offer the usual new slave wages of \$1,200 or \$1,800 per course. Things have gotten worse since I was a young lecturer at Barnard College in New York, earning \$308 a month (they didn't pay during the summer months). Now a far more evil system has been inaugurated, not just affecting teaching assistants in graduate school, but graduates and Ph.D.'s. A two-tier system, where the fortunate have "lines" and "positions" and the other 50 percent of college faculty, the "adjuncts," have nothing. No benefits, no assurances, no future. As "temps" they are paid piece-work by the course, tiny sums that are an insult to them as well as their students, who pay plenty and have no idea this is going on. This is now a scandal all over the country. Saving the new corporate university a bundle in salary and benefits, dividing the faculty, and enforcing quiet and obedience and social and political conformity throughout our society. I hate the new American university for outdoing industry in "cutting back" to temporary and part-time teaching. Peonizing learning this way, and so devaluing the learned; the faculty reduced to mere employees of the administrators who now rule the academy according to the harshest corporate model. This in a time when Columbia and New York University are two of the leading real estate powers in my city: landlords. Less universities than businesses making a profit with endowments in the billions.

I hear the guilty little catch in the administrative voice, forced maybe to make a big concession of \$3,000 in my case. But I couldn't live on that, I demur. "Of course, no one does," they chuckle from their own

\$50,000 to \$80,000 "positions." A real faculty appointment, or "line," seems an impossibility, in my case as in so many others now. I have friends with doctorates earning as little as \$12,000 a year on these measly courses, eking out an existence at five different schools, their lives lived in cars and on the economic edge. I'm too old for that and must do better. "Oh, but our budget," they moan, "we really have no funds at all, much as we would love to have you." Times are so difficult; the bureaucracy or the legislature so obdurate. "Surely I'm qualified?" I ask, not as a "celebrity" but as a credentialed scholar with years of teaching and a doctorate with distinction from Columbia, an Oxford First, eight published books. Nor am I asking for anything fancy, no hotshot professorship. How about half-time in honor of my age, two courses a semester and a modest living wage, I scream silently, embarrassed to put reality into words. This would put me in a different category, a category which does not exist and can only be created through long, complex negotiations with higher-ups, not the department chair, but the dean or the provost. They'll get back to me.

But they never do. One woman promised to call me next week, and when she hadn't phoned for three weeks I called her. She "hasn't had a chance" to talk with the dean and is incapable of hiring me herself, even though she is the department head. More time passes. When five months have passed from our first conversation in June (it is now October), and she still hasn't "put this idea" before the dean (their offices are in the same building), I begin to realize that, for all her charm, this may never happen. We have even had a drink with the two other women who teach in this vast English department, nice women, but I begin to realize that 25 years after we started proving that women were either not hired or kept at the bottom of the heap in Academia, nothing really has changed. They seem so vulnerable, so powerless, so hunted.

At another school, the man in charge of the English department was charming but he too has to consult, this time with the new head of women's studies, since a joint appointment might be a possibility. Then, through an entire summer, he just can't seem to make contact.



and Being Unemployable

By fall, he has become dubious about her too—she’s a dim mysterious figure, but all my other informants know her, say she’s wonderful, yet now it seems she too “has no money.” Nor does he. Long ago he had seemed to offer me one class for young writers of promise, but now that job has gone out to a committee who will take months to decide and are very unlikely to decide on me.

I begin to wonder what is wrong with me. Am I “too far out,” or too old? Is it age? I’m 63. Or am I “old hat” in the view of the “new feminist scholarship”? Or is it something worse? How much of this rejection may be due to hearsay about my “mental health,” even rumors that I’m crazy? I wrote an entire book, *The Loony Bin Trip*, to prove that I wasn’t, and even debunk psychiatry, but these folk have never read it. In fact they may never have read me at all, or are depending on vague memories of *Sexual Politics* being a “bestseller.” They have also never read *Flying* and *Sita*, since they were “queer” books; *The Basement* and *The Politics of Cruelty* were “depressing.” The effect of *The Loony Bin Trip* was a perception that I had “emotional troubles”; maybe what is left unsaid is that I’m unreliable, “shaky.” But no one will come out and say it. Meanwhile, the professor on the telephone drones on for 45 minutes about the lack of funds, the lateness of the state legislature in passing the university’s budget. He hired his wage-slave adjuncts three days before fall classes began. He didn’t offer to hire me.

I was hoping for something for spring semester, but next spring’s catalog is already at the printer. He won’t know till December. He’ll call me as soon as he knows. He was supposed to know months ago. I sweat at the phone, humiliated, furious, listening to his long-winded, impenetrable language. What’s wrong with me? Why won’t you give me a job, offer me something, anything, a dog bone, damn it? At least tell me the truth. Have I been denounced or bad-mouthed? By whom? What is the matter with me, for God’s sake? Has my feminism made me “abrasive”? Surely my polite, St. Paul manner should be reassuring. God knows I’m deferential enough to these people.

The atmosphere is patronizing in the extreme. These people are doing me the most elaborate and dif-

ficult favor, going out on a limb, exercising the most reckless courage in merely making a phone call on my behalf. When I check back, having allowed them months to do this, they have never even done it. They are all “so busy.” The present semester races by, my chances for the next disappear.

And now my last hope, the night school, the unfashionable extension in college, where a merciless young woman laughed at the idea of paying me anything above the usual peon wage they pay everyone, and then gave way to the princely young scholar Assistant Dean who pledged me double that rate, slips from my hands as well. This was my fall-back position, if nothing better turned up. It was all settled last August, just before the Dean’s vacation trip to France. He would guarantee my somewhat higher wage; I had only to meet with the head of curricula and choose course names with her—after her vacation. But when I finally reach this lady, in late September, the deal is on the rocks. She’ll get back to me after consulting again with the Dean, no point in outlining courses they may have no money to pay for. When she never gets back, I call the Dean again, five times. Secretaries now intervene and protect him for two weeks. He doesn’t get back. October passes.

I begin to realize there isn’t a job. I cannot get employment. I cannot earn money. Except by selling Christmas trees, one by one, in the cold in Poughkeepsie. I cannot teach, and have nothing but farming now. And when physically I can no longer farm, what then? As for publishing, I cannot even publish reprints; my editor quit the business and I have no prospects for a new editor, even though the book about my mother has been finished for three years. Nothing I write now has any prospect of seeing print. I cannot earn money in any way, and the idea terrifies me. I have no saleable skill, for all my supposed accomplishments, qualifications and training.

I begin to understand that I have invested a great deal of “self-esteem” in the prospect of teaching. Age and identity have entered in. If I’m not able to publish and have thereby lost my profession and must find another to survive, I imagined I might age better as an academic than as a Christmas-tree farmer wringing out a liv-

ing on the trees we planted to support the women's art colony at the farm. Surely it's more dignified to be a paid intellectual with the status of a professor, even if only an adjunct? My friends thought so, and have followed the job search with baited breath, wishing me every sort of good luck; a few of them, well-placed in academe, were perhaps vaguely embarrassed that their friend the writer is really that strange marginal figure, the seasonal peddler of spruce trees.

Some days I think about "any job," even forgetting the specter of age and a seductive appearance, "good clothes." At this age, toward what is becoming the end of my life, I am unemployable. Frightening, this future. What poverty ahead, what mortification, what distant bag-lady horrors when my savings are gone and I am supported by \$350 a month of social security?

And why did I imagine it would be any different, imagine my books would give me some slender living, or that I could at least teach at the moment in life when every other teacher retires, having served dutifully all those long years when I was enjoying the freedom of writer and artist, unsalaried but able to survive on the little I'd always been used to, and still able to invest in a farm and build it into a self-sufficient woman's art colony and even put a bit by in savings. The savings might last me as much 10 years, more like seven. So in seven years I should die. But I probably won't; women in my family live forever.

Much as I tire of a life without purpose or the meaningful work which alone would make it bearable, I can't die because the moment I do, all my sculpture, drawings, negatives and silkscreen prints will be carted off to the dump.

The Feminist Press, in its first offer last fall (it took them 12 months to come up with this), suggested only \$500 to reprint the entire text of *Sexual Politics*. Moreover, they couldn't get around to it till the year 2000, since they'd need to commission one or two fancy prefaces by younger, more wonderful women's studies scholars. My agent and I were happy to refuse this offer, and the next one, too, for \$1,000.

The book also fails to attract sufficient interest from the powers that be at Doubleday, who have refused to reprint it, even though another division of the company is celebrating *Sexual Politics* with a long excerpt in an anthology of the

10 most important books the house has published in the 100 years of their existence. A young female editor at Doubleday gave my agent to understand in a letter, which she was kind enough not to forward, that the work of more recent feminist scholarship had somehow rendered my book obsolete in the "current climate."

So I am out of fashion in the new academic cottage industry of feminism, unable to find even the most negligible teaching assignment in a field now seething with practitioners, and unworthy of publication as well, however spurious and underpaid.

Recently a book inquired *Who Stole Feminism?* I sure didn't. Nor did Ti-Grace Atkinson. Nor Jill Johnston. We're all out of print. A few years ago, feminists gave a rent party for Ti-Grace in a loft downtown (she was too broke to pay her own). And another one for Cindy Cisler, who came from rural Kentucky poverty through Yale University's school of architecture and sacrificed an architect's career to get abortion legalized in New York State.

We haven't helped each other much, haven't been able to build solidly enough to have created community or safety. Some women in this generation disappeared to struggle alone in makeshift oblivion. Or vanished into asylums and have yet to return to tell the tale, as has Shula Firestone (see page 50). Our fragile cohort, unable to be effective against the real circumstances of our discouragement, were also too timid to address them and could only stand by and murmur the formulae of "mental health" as if it were an individual's personal "problem" with the world. These "depressions" lasted decades, as our hopes faded—depressions that were rooted in professional frustration and were solid obstacles to self-realization. Frustrations we not only could not resolve, but could not even succor, until they finally became disease: we could rally round disease. Too late: there were despairs that could only end in death. A few had the courage of direct action: Maria del Drago chose suicide, so did Ellen Frankfurt, and Elizabeth Fischer, the founder of *Aphra*, the first feminist literary journal.

Elizabeth and I used to run into each other at a comfortable old hippie cafe in Greenwich Village that I visited in the afternoons, writing some of the darker passages of *The Loony Bin Trip* in public to avoid the dangers of suicidal privacy at home.

Recently
a book
inquired *Who
Stole
Feminism?*
I sure didn't.
Nor did
Ti-Grace
Atkinson.
Nor Jill
Johnston.
We're all out
of print.

There's no retirement, no safety in age; you work till you die.

She'd just finished a book that was her life's work. Probably it wasn't getting the reception she'd hoped for in the already crowded new market of "women's studies" texts written by sudden specialists in this field. Elizabeth and I would eat an afternoon breakfast and chat, carefully and successfully disguising our misery from each other. Feminists didn't complain to one another then; each imagined the loneliness and sense of failure was unique and personal. Consciousness-raising groups were over by then. One had no colleagues: New York is not a cozy town.

Elizabeth is dead, and I must live to tell the tale, hoping to tell another generation something I'd like them to know of the long struggle for women's liberation, something about history and America and censorship. I might also hope to explain that social change does not come easy, that pioneers pay dearly and in unnecessary solitude for what their successors take for granted. Why do women seem particularly unable to observe and revere their own history? What secret shame makes us so obtuse? We did not create the community necessary to support each other through institutions, against the coming of age. And now we have a lacuna between one generation's understanding and that of the next, and have lost much of our sense of continuity and comradeship.

But I have also spent 40 years as a downtown artist habituated to the existential edge, and even as I proclaim all is lost, I am surreptitiously planning a comeback, if only in fantasy... imagining a sinecure in human rights for extreme old age, matched editions of my collected works, and final glory. And just last week, after a good dinner and a good play (Arthur Miller's *American Clock*), I lay awake scheming till the early hours, adding up the farm rents and seeing the way to a summer of restoration, figuring to replace the slate roof on the back of the farmhouse, which is full of serious leaks that all who patch it claim are beyond further repair, then going on to paint every building, the lavender house, the blue barn. Bundling my sums together, ecstatic that I have finally paid off my credit cards, scribbling at three in the morning that I will plant roses again, the ultimate gesture of success; the place will glisten. I will have won out after all. Living well is the best revenge.

And then a trip to see my elder sister, the banker/lawyer, caps my determination. The Elder has a computer program that guarantees you survival on your savings at five-percent interest if your withdrawal rate does not exceed seven percent—a vista of no less than 30 years. My savings plus my rat's turd of social security: The two figures together would give me a rock-

bottom, survival existence. Thanks to the magic of programmed arithmetic, I am, at one stroke, spared the humiliations of searching for regular employment, institutional obedience, discretion or regimentation. Looks like I can stay forever footloose and bohemian, a busy artist-writer free of gainful employment. Free at last—provided I live real close to the ground.

There's subsistence living. And the trees: hard physical work. There's no retirement, no safety in age; you work till you die. On return from Elder's

bucolic life in retirement, where at a sporty 68 she no longer practices much law because it "interferes with traveling" (she's not only fond of Italy but has five grandchildren in various parts of the United States), I found a letter full of pieties, but no cigar. It begins by saluting me as Professor and spells my name wrong.

"I regret to inform you that you are not among the finalists chosen for the senior feminist theorist/critic position open in our department. I regret, too, that it has taken us longer than promised to arrive at a decision. But the response to the search was astonishing both in the number and distinction of the applicants. Members of the committee commented again and again on the difficulty of selecting individuals from a pool that contained so many women like you, whose thinking and writing have shaped and reshaped feminist inquiry for two decades." Hard to believe there were so many fish in the tank from my age group. And the lucky "finalists" get to give a "major address" at this university for free, after which the ultimate winner of the contest actually gets a job with four courses and committee work thrown in. Just to consider it wearies me. What good fortune to have flunked out.

As for the other jobs, they still don't call back. The two courses at the night school have dwindled to one for less money, but anything else might interfere with my own travels. The trees will keep me alive for the year, and an old flame beckons me to New Orleans to try out her hospitality and the better restaurants; it might be time at last to see Paris again on a cheap ticket, since a friend there has offered me the use of a studio for a while. And in May, the German crazies are having a Bertrand Russell type trial in absentia to condemn psychiatry for its abuses; Thomas Szasz will be there, and Jacques Derrida. They want me to play juror and psychiatric survivor. Sweet revenge and a free ticket to Berlin. Why not? ■

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*Kate Millett, Ph.D., is a sculptor and author. Her books include the groundbreaking *Sexual Politics*, which she wrote in 1970. She divides her time between New York City and Poughkeepsie, New York, where she founded an art colony for women.*

PAINTED LIKE A MAN, DISAPPEARED LIKE A WOMAN

LUISA VIDAL, THE DAUGHTER OF MODERNISM

BY MARCY RUDO



Two revolutionary Spanish artists first exhibited their work at Els Quatre Gats Cafe in Barcelona during the 1897-1898 season. One of them would redefine pictorial space and the centuries-old European way of portraying the human form. The other would become the quintessential Modernist, producing authoritative allegorical and genre paintings and portraits. Both won the recognition, praise and respect of their peers. One would become mythic; the other, by virtue of her gender, would remain obscure, rarely indexed in the art and/or history texts of our era.

When Pablo Picasso, educated at art schools in which female enrollment was forbidden, exhibited his work to a circle of other artists at a bohemian cafe, he was doing what was expected of a young talent. When 21-year-old Luisa Vidal (1876-1918) did the same, it was considered a transgression of monumental proportions because, although of enormous talent, Vidal was a woman. In 19th-century Spain, the idea that a woman might have a profession—let alone a career—was unthinkable.

Despite attempts by devoutly Catholic Spain to obstruct the advancement of women, which included forbidding them any formal education (80 percent of Spanish women then were illiterate), Luisa Vidal received excellent instruction in foreign languages, literature, music and art. Nurtured in an exceptional family environment, where artistic creativity, with professional aspirations, was not just tolerated but actively encouraged, she also had the good fortune of being raised in the rarified cultural atmosphere of turn-of-the-century Barcelona, the chief city of Catalonia, in northeast Spain, and the epicenter of all things modern on the notoriously

backward and patriarchal Iberian Peninsula.

Vidal's progressive father, Francesco, was a Catalan William Morris. A talented cabinetmaker, he was an innovative designer of furniture, and a great promoter of the Modernist movement (the Catalan version of Art Nouveau). A regular collaborator with another Catalan eccentric, architect Antonio Gaudi, Francesco Vidal had an international clientele that was aristocratic and culturally sophisticated. His wife, Mercedes Puig, came from a family of musicians, and was herself an accomplished pianist.

The couple had nine daughters (and three sons), and encouraged all the girls to pursue professional artistic careers. They employed as their children's at-home music teachers such promising young talents as cellist Pablo Casals. Luisa, who was the second daughter but the most driven, received instruction in her father's workshop from his most talented employees, among them artist Joan Gonzalez (older brother of the sculptor Julio Gonzalez) and luminist painter Arcadi Mas i Fondevila. And from an early age, she often accompanied her father to Madrid, to the Prado Museum, where she copied the works of Velazquez and other masters, learning directly from the best of Spanish painting.

Though all the sisters were highly accomplished—among them were a violinist, a cellist, a sculptor, a composer and a poet—it was only Luisa who, while acknowledging early on the sacrifices implicit in an artistic career, nevertheless took advantage of the opportunity to pursue a life in art. At a time when women were supposed to be the "Angel of the House" (a term the Spanish then used to refer to a wife and perfect domesticated servant), Vidal



Opposite page: Luisa Vidal and her sisters, photographed in 1904. Left to right, Marta, Frasquita, Carlotta, Luisa and Rosima. Above: *Girl with Roses*, oil on canvas circa 1903. Right: *The Housewives*, oil on canvas, 1905.



Above: Teresa Vidal, pastel on paper, circa 1903. Right: Sketch of a Woman, charcoal and pastel on paper, circa 1908.





Left: Carlota Vidal, oil on canvas, circa 1905.
Below: *Among the Flowers*, oil on canvas, 1905.



strove to step outside this life without options. Raised almost as a boy; inculcated with such "masculine" traits as independence of thought, aesthetic adventurousness, a great capacity for work, and competitiveness, the young painter began her career, perhaps without realizing that as a professional female artist she would forever be battling the social current—more aptly, riptide—of her times.

After attending the Universal Exposition in Paris in 1900, Vidal was determined to return there to further her artistic education. Her desire to study in Paris was characteristic of all aspiring turn-of-the-century artists. For Vidal actually to do so, however, was scandalous—women simply did not go anywhere unescorted—and required a remarkable amount of courage and conviction. Nevertheless, in 1901, at the age of 25, Vidal left for Paris, accompanied only by her family's blessing. She is the only female Spanish painter of the era who is known to have studied there.

Vidal took classes at the famed art schools of Paris. She studied *plein-air* painting (impressionist theories of color and light were still an innovation). Her teachers, who included Eugene Carriere, Georges Picard and Joan Gonzalez, having broken with traditionalism themselves, offered her new ways of seeing—and a new way of being seen: they viewed her as an artist, not a female who dab-

bled in painting; she painted nudes, not the flowers that were the commonly accepted theme for female painters. And it was in Paris that Vidal came in contact with the European feminist movement, largely through her friendship with the managing editor of *La Fronde*, an "advanced" French journal written and printed exclusively by women—professionals like herself.

Vidal's return to Barcelona, in 1902, coincided with a noisy, incipient feminist movement, which she enthusiastically joined. Although history has made it appear that women were excluded from, and uninvolved in, the Modernist movement, in fact, female activists were often at the forefront. The work of writer Caterina Albert (her 1905 novel, *Solitude*, written under a male pseudonym) addressed female sexual awakening before D. H. Lawrence gave it a shot. And in 1907 Catalan journalist Carmen Karr founded *Feminal*, a feminist magazine for which Vidal illustrated the monthly short story. Many other women also organized to fight for women's rights, albeit within the constraints of a conservative, Catholic, machismo society that ridiculed and tried to thwart their efforts.

A prolific and driven painter, Vidal continued to exhibit her work, as she had done since that first show in



Left: Frasquita Vidal, oil on canvas, undated.

Right: Marta Vidal, oil on canvas, circa 1911.



Above center:
Self-portrait, oil on wood,
circa 1899.



Els Quatre Gats Cafe. She participated in group and individual art exhibitions in Barcelona, and showed her work at international exhibitions in Spain, Mexico, and South America. Everywhere, she exhibited bold, dynamic portraits rather than the insipid still lifes expected of “ladies.” Critics, all of whom were male, were awed as well as stumped, using words such as “virile” to describe her talent. In surprised admiration, they would write: “She paints so well . . . she paints like a man!”

This narrow appraisal haunted her entire career. But it was the price levied by society when a woman of Vidal’s genius rejected the circumscribed, domestic world of women to embrace the public life of the artist. Vidal took such praise of her “masculine art” in stride, and went on perfecting her skills and garnering portrait commissions and exposition awards. A renowned and sought-after portraitist, she painted not only her family and friends, but members of the Catalan aristocracy and men in public life. Her depictions of children are exceptional, both in her formal portraits and in her genre paintings, which present a unique record of intimate family life in that time and place.

Although it appears she had several opportunities to marry, Vidal clung to her independent status, occasionally

referring humorously to herself as a hard-working spinster.

She was also an astute businesswoman, managing her own income from her work as portraitist and illustrator. After the death of her sister Carlota in 1905, which was followed by her father’s nervous breakdown, she was successful enough to take over the economic support of her family. Friends and colleagues also counted on her for financial, emotional, and critical support, which she was able to provide. In 1911, she founded her own art academy, which she ran until her death in 1918. She participated in cultural and social events, primarily those involving women’s rights; at the beginning of World War I she helped found the women’s pacifist movement.

Luisa Vidal’s energetic artistic and social endeavors were abruptly halted by her untimely death, from influenza, at the age of 43. By this time, after 20 years of assiduous work and of facing down obstacles of every kind, she was a popular, and highly regarded, public figure. It was only afterwards that she and her work fell—or were nudged—into near oblivion by the writers of art history, as is the case with so many women artists. Somehow we must rewrite those chronicles. ■

American author Marcy Rudo is the biographer of artist Luisa Vidal. She makes her home in Barcelona, Spain.



PASSING

LIFE IN BLACK AND

I'm sure most people don't go around all the time thinking about what race they are. When you look like what you are, the external world mirrors back to you an identity consistent with your idea of yourself. However, for someone like me, who does not look like what I am, the mirrors are broken, and my consciousness, or lack of consciousness, takes on serious implications. Am I mentally "passing"?

All my life I have passed invisibly into the white world, and all my life I have experienced that sudden and alarming moment of consciousness when I remember I am black. It may feel like I'm emerging too quickly from deep in the ocean, or touching an electric fence; or like a deer stuck in the headlights of an oncoming car. Sometimes in conversation with a white person who doesn't know I'm black, suddenly a feeling comes over me, a precursor—though nothing at all has been said about race—and I either wait helplessly for the other shoe to drop, or try desperately to steer the conversation in another direction, or prepare myself for painful distinctions. My desire to escape is indistinguishable from my "blackness," my race, and I am filled with shame and fury.

People have asked why my parents, my grandmother and I never "passed" over into the white world. It was unthinkable. With my dark grandfather driving, my grandmother and I would ride in the backseat of my grandfather's Cadillac as if we were being chauffeured. We'd shop the aisles at Saks Fifth Avenue when there wasn't even a black elevator operator. On the one hand, there was always a feeling of anxiety that something would betray what we really were; on the other, I think we were really quite self-possessed, almost arrogant. We saw ourselves, with all our struggles and complexities, as rich in culture and history, fierce, determined, strong, and even beautiful. While we wanted the privileges white

people had, we had contempt for what we saw as their pale lives.

I truly cannot remember when I first learned I was black. It is as if every experience I have had of realizing I am black, all the way back to grade school and before, is tainted with that fear of discovery, of being recognized as black. Now I realize that the depression that made me begin the work of this book was really a first re-memory of "killing" voices from my childhood. It was like feeling returning in a limb that has been asleep.

House Hunting - September

Last month, I called a real estate agent. "There is a house I think you'd be interested in," she said. "It's on an estate on Highland Avenue, and the people are very particular about who buys it."

My heart shriveled. Should I find out whom they are "particular about"? Should I let her think I'm white and go without Bruce to see it? When I take Bruce we are shown entirely different neighborhoods, all-black or integrated.

I decided to act dumb: "Oh, really? Why isn't it a multiple listing? What are they so careful about?"

"Well, you know, some people like to do it this way. Let me have your phone number; I'll call you back." But she never called back. I wonder if our name is known: "That black couple looking for a house in town, and the wife looks white."

This week I called another agent and played a game. "We'd like to look at the house you're describing, but we'd also like to see a house we heard about on an estate."

"I'll see if I can get the owners on the phone and we'll go see it."

When Bruce and I got to her office, of course she hadn't gotten hold of them. "The man works at night. No one is at home."

"I'd still like to see it. Drive by on the way to the other house."

WHITE BY TOI DERRICOTTE

She got lost! Imagine a real estate dealer getting lost in her own town! "That's all right," I reassured her. "We can go past it on the way back."

The house she showed us, in the integrated part of town, was expensive and run-down. On the way to the "particular" house, once again she got lost. We had to direct her. Bruce said, "There it is! There it is!" It was all lit up. And she kept driving. Finally, half a mile down the road (I was waiting to see if she would ever stop), I said, "Why didn't you stop at the house?"

"Oh," she stammered. "Did we pass it?"

I felt a hopelessness descend. No matter how clever and determined I am, they can always find a way to stop me. I decide to look for a house in another community, one where we are not yet known, and this time I'll go to the real estate agent's alone.

October

It's the overriding reality I must get through. Each time I drive down the streets and see only whites, each time I notice there are no blacks in the supermarket or walking past, I think, *I'm not supposed to be here.*

Some part of me doesn't give a fuck about boundaries—in fact, sees the boundaries and is determined to dance over them, no matter what the consequences are.

March

We finally decided on Upper Montclair, New Jersey. The neighborhood isn't integrated but the schools are, since busing is in effect. Many afternoons, instead of asking—not wanting to arouse the suspicion of the real estate agents—I would sit outside one of the neighborhood schools at lunch hour like a pedophile, counting the number of black faces. Though sometimes I'd be brave and ask. I didn't only want information; I wanted to commit a small revolutionary act—to leave the impression that the world is full of liberal white parents who want change.

Last week the people across the street

gave us a cocktail party. I felt grateful, but out of place. I couldn't get over the feeling that I had to prove myself different from what I was sure almost all of them took for granted—that Bruce and I didn't know anything about wine or art and had never seen an Oriental carpet in our lives—yet at the same time, I had to be absolutely "myself"; *that* was the only way I could earn their respect. Suddenly, right in the middle of my urgent desire to belong, came my hatred of them and everything they stood for.

April

This morning I put my car in the shop. The neighborhood shop. When I went to pick it up I had a conversation with the man who had worked on it. I told him I'd been afraid to leave the car there at night with the keys in it. "Don't worry," he said. "You don't have to worry about stealing as long as the niggers don't move in." I couldn't believe it. I hoped I had heard him wrong. "What did you say?" I asked. He repeated the same thing without hesitation.

In the past, my anger would have swelled quickly, I would have blurted out something, hotly demanded that he take my car down off the rack immediately, though he had not finished working on it, and driven off in a blaze. I love that reaction. The only feeling of power one can possibly have in a situation in which there is such a sudden feeling of powerlessness is to "do" something. When you "do" something, everything is clear. But this is the only repair shop in the city. Might I have to come back here someday in an emergency?

Blowing off steam is supposed to make you feel better. But in this situation it doesn't! After responding in anger, I often feel sad, guilty, frightened, and confused. Perhaps my anger isn't just about race. Perhaps it's like those rapid-fire responses to Bruce—a way of dulling the edge of feelings that lie even deeper.



I asked Bruce and he admitted that, partly, it was true. He was allow him to be seen in a different way.

I let the tension stay in my body. I go home and sit with myself for an hour, trying to grasp the feeling—the odor of self-hatred, the biting stench of shame.

The Club - July

Last week a young woman who lives down the street came over for dinner. We got into a conversation about Tall Oaks Country Club, where she is the swimming instructor. I asked her, hesitantly, but unwilling not to get this information, if blacks were allowed to join. (Everybody on our block belongs; all had been told about "the club" and asked to join as soon as they moved in. We had never been told, or asked to join.)

"No," she said.

"You mean the people on this block who have had us over for dinner, whom I have invited to my home for dinner—I can't swim in a pool with them?"

"That's the rule," she said, as if she were stating a mathematical fact.

Four days ago Ann, the woman down the street, called to ask if my son could baby-sit. I like this woman. Easy to talk to. She and her husband are members of the club, and I couldn't resist telling her the story.

She said, "Oh, Tai, John and I wanted to invite you and Bruce to be our guests at a dinner party. Several of us said we would turn in our resignations unless you could come. But the majority felt it wouldn't be a good idea, because you would see all the good things and want to join, and since you couldn't join, it would just hurt you and be frustrating. John and I wanted to quit. I feel very ashamed of myself, but the next summer, when I'm stuck in the house with the kids and nothing to do, we'd start going again."

August

When I'm with Bruce, I feel black, feel as if I'm taken in by his blackness, as if his blackness falls on me, as if it casts a powerful shadow. Perhaps I assume we become the things we love, and I assume everyone else can see.

Whatever is tainted of Bruce is also tainted of me; whatever is beloved of him is also beloved of me. I become what he is in restaurants, in real estate offices—at times reluctantly, but without question.

Do I, given my place of trembling identity, slip over and become the thing I am closest to? If so, no wonder I married a black man! To have married a white man would have been terrifying, to love a white man would have made me feel constantly adrift from my most primitive cells. How frightening to be awash without constructs! To be placed outside the walls of the city! To lose kinship, memory, and begin again with nothing, a

liquid self, as I do again and again each day.

Knowing whom we love and hate holds reality in place. His body protects me, stands between me and a kind of annihilation.

April

I see them going out together on Friday nights. I peek through the shutters when I hear their voices in the street. They come out, all at the same time: the Baldwins walk across the street and get into the Lloyds' car, the Stevenses wave at them as they pull out of their drive. They're all going to the club for dinner or a party. And they make noise out there, the noise of happiness, as if they want me to hear and be sad.

August

Saturday morning Bruce and I spend a couple of hours talking about the club. I want to try and join, to see them, but I just don't have the energy and guts to do it without him. He says he's tired of talking about it. He claims I'm taking this hard because it's the first time I've directly felt the results of racism, the first time I've been refused because I'm black. I don't get the constant reminders that people with dark skin grow so accustomed to that they are often not bothered. He says my color has given me a kind of mobility. The pain I feel now is the pain most black people experience when they are children, when they realize they cannot escape from their skin.

When I finally talked to Ann again—she never did invite us to the club—she invited us to their home for dinner, and we went, sick with anger but wanting to be forgiving. She poached salmon with crème fraîche and served it on her grandmother's china, with sterling, and damask from Holland. I sat in the living room as sick as if I had eaten feces, my lips pulled back like a frightened dog's.

That night my heart touched self-hatred. It was as white as white light. It burned my eyes like a holocaust. I had to enter and be one with it before I could forgive myself.

December

I asked Bruce if he had married me because of my light skin, and he admitted that, partly, it was true. He was aware that my color, especially in business, would allow him to be seen in a different way.

I had always thought that Bruce was the one person in the world who loved me for myself. We have been married for twenty years and never talked about color. Now I see that I am partly a shield he is holding up for protection. He, too, has a secret in the corner of his



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if he had married me because of my light skin, aware that my color, especially in business, would

heart that stands between us like a mirror we don't want to look into.

I want to tell him how, when we pull up in front of a hotel, I want to rush out of the car door, to go in before him just in case he will be given an inferior room. Often I don't because I don't want him to be "emasculated," not to have the normal power of a male to get a hotel room, but I distrust what women are supposed to trust in their men—the power of acquisition. I often feel I could do better alone.

Thinking White

At a recent dinner party for my mother, my black friends astonished me by saying that I look whiter than she does. But I had always thought that she looked whiter than I. Was that my way of rejecting her, of not wanting to be like her? Or was it my way of "ennobling" what I came from? Someone said I'd better have a good, clear picture on my book; she said that, in a way, it is brave of me to say I look white, because saying you look white, at least to some black people, is a red flag of presumption, arrogance, and perhaps even insanity.

"She think she white" was one of the worst insults that could be hurled during childhood, rasped nearly out of the subject's hearing.

"She think she white" might indicate, not that you wore a pretty dress, but that you wore it in a certain way, as if you were proud of it as a fact of your being, as if you deserved it, took it as a personal accomplishment, as if in some way it created a hardness around you, set you apart, gave you not only an identity of your own but one that separated you from the others and shut them out.

"She think she white" is not the same as "She wants to be white." It means, she thinks she is white. It aims not only to make the hearer think that she has done something wrong, but to assault the very idea of the self, to deal a shattering blow to the center of all thought. Isn't that racism's greatest injury?

What Makes You Black?

It is always a question asked by whites who, I suppose, think, looking at me, that the necessary attributes—color, features, hair, or perhaps something more subtle: speech, some giveaway inflection of being—are missing. Some have said, shocked: But nothing about you is black! This expresses a puzzlement, a curiosity, but it can also be an accusation, as if they were saying: Look, now, black is one thing that I am absolutely sure of—you owe me an explanation!

Black people never ask. We understand that black-

ness is both real and unreal, that it can't be explained, nailed down, or verified. That it is an attribute of the body, slightly, like a halo.

"You bright?" a young girl asked me as she passed by on a street in the small town in Louisiana that was my mother's childhood home. I had never heard it said that way before. "Bright?" I asked.

Was it something in my body that gave me away? That girl, with her Southern X-ray eyes, having peered more deeply and concertedly into miscegenation? She looked proud of herself, as if she had caught me hiding. Or perhaps she was smiling because it made her happy to find me kin. Or perhaps, like those girls who combed and brushed my "good" hair, she saw me as an example of what could in fact burst out of any one of us girls—not the "throwback" our mothers warned us about, making us worry through all our pregnancies, and check first, before fingers and toes, our baby's care—but a "bright" child, like me.

Face to Face

Can whites begin to understand and take in the pain of this racist society? So often white people, when a deep pain with regard to racism is uncovered, want it to be immediately addressed, healed, released. Black people have had to live with the wounds of racism for generations. Even goodwill and hard work won't make the personal hurts cease. Perhaps awareness can insure that we do not pass the damage on to others.

Things don't change. *Newsweek*, October 1994—blacks have inferior intelligence, re: *The Bell Curve*. It's as if, no matter how much I heal myself, the world keeps breaking my image into shards and sticking them into my heart. I am supposed to distrust and hate myself. How can I explain to you that, at the same time, I do distrust myself, the world has succeeded; I won't let this happen. I will not think what the world wants me to think. And that, in some way, my confession is a kind of subterfuge, a tactic, a way of overturning the damage. It is the silence that I fear more than anything, the pretense, the way it seems that, in the silence, suddenly some violence springs out that is unconnected. Is it better to keep things looking neat? ■

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Excerpted from The Black Notebooks by Thi Derricotte (W.W. Norton & Company, New York). Derricotte is an award-winning writer and the recipient of two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts. She is an associate professor of English at the University of Pittsburgh.

AIRLESS SPACES

By Shulamith Firestone

Semiotext(e), New York, 160 pages

Shulamith Firestone's *Airless Spaces* is a poignant, poetic, but stark account of her years spent in and out of psychiatric hospitals. Feminist-activist Firestone is also the author of the brilliant and influential *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970). I have been haunted, and saddened, by her long silence. I now understand it.

Many women writers, feminists included (Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catharine Beecher, Frances Farmer, Valerie Solanas, Kate Millett), have written about their severe psychological distress, and/or forced, often dangerous, psychiatric hospitalizations. Firestone is clear: She was unable to manage her life; she needed help. She writes: "I

Excerpted from
AIRLESS SPACES
by Shulamith Firestone

The Forced Shower

Corinne was waiting for the Environmental Control Board to send in a water inspection team. In fact, she knew they had already been in the hospital, and the word was to bring those water levels up to normal. In the meantime, she had been without a shower so long a few more days would hardly make any difference. The thing is, you see, she actually wanted a shower, just not one with 40 percent formaldehyde in it. She had waited many months because the water in her apartment had 116 different poisons in it, all listed in the CIA manual, which is how you knew they were hard poisons and not just the "medication" that was pretended. She narrowly escaped seizure at mealtime by double-guessing them and hastily rinsing under her arms, though she was

dreamed I was on a sinking ship . . . here and there I saw strange goings-on, like in a Grosz cartoon. . . . I woke

from this dream in a panic that this disaster was real, and that I was picking all this up by e.s.p. I even called UPI to ask if there was any recent news of a sinking liner, and they said yes, but it was in the Bermuda Triangle, so no attempt would be made to find it."

Like so many, Firestone found no help in the hospital. With telling detail, she describes the forced medication and the forced showers, the dull food, the complete lack of privacy, the failed attempts at friendship, the utter absence of family support, the difficulty of relating to someone who has "sunk"; that is, someone who is no longer able to "pass" for normal.

sure she had long since stopped sweating. Still, one of the aides nosed into her room and said, "Get ready for your shower, girl, one way or the other." It was about 8:30 at night and shower times were usually in the mornings. She guessed they had missed her at dinner. Now she willed them with all her strength to go away and forget about her. She was genuinely surprised when this didn't work. The whole team appeared at her door about 15 minutes after the warning, security cops and all. She went limp. Someone took each of her four limbs and someone else cradled her head. "But I agreed to take a shower as soon as the water levels pass inspection," she protested to no one in particular. Her limp body practically brushed the floor, only the stiff limbs held up.

They took her to one of the showers

Firestone writes of times gone by, of people rendered anonymous by the Kafkaesque routines of institutional life; of unnecessarily brutal attendants and strife among patients; of death—by suicide or "natural causes." She reminds me of Nathalie Sarraute in *Tropisms*.

Firestone captures the moment, its interstices, with a dreadful clarity and honesty. She does not spare herself. She is without self-pity. Her compassion lies in her rendering of each painful, but relevant, detail into word-portraits of people, both as inmates and as "real" people. She writes obituaries of both Valerie Solanas and Allen Ginsberg, and of less-well-known people, who were dearer to her.

I look forward to
Firestone's next work. ■

Reviewed by Phyllis
Chesler



off the private rooms, one of which was inhabited by the ancient Chinese crone who needed a 24-hour attendant. A stool filled most of the small shower. They forced her down on this even though she was still going limp

for the cameras, so much so that her torso hung limp from the waist all the way to the floor, her arms flapping. Then they got brutal, all with merriment. (She had always noticed that the more security cops were on the job, the more of a good time they had. Maybe they were posing for some candid camera too.) One soaped between her legs and another got her hair worked into a stiff lather. She was beyond yelling that the soap was worse than the water, being about 89 percent chemicals. How did she know all this? It was simple. Read the label of the shampoo body wash. Didn't a hospital the size of Beth Abraham have even some leftover Ivory Soap from ten years ago? Was the

WHAT ARE WE FIGHTING FOR?

SEX, RACE, CLASS, AND THE FUTURE OF FEMINISM

by Joanna Russ

St. Martin's Press, New York, 476 pages

Joanna Russ, best known for *The Female Man* (1975) and other works of feminist/New Wave science fiction, is wonderfully and accurately described on her unofficial home page as a "lesbian feminist science fiction fantasy utopia horror postmodernist author with a wicked sense of humor." With this as a backdrop, I eagerly awaited the opportunity to read her third nonfiction book ever, in the works for 13 years: *What Are We Fighting For? Sex, Race, Class, and the Future of Feminism*.

I don't think I've ever had such a mixed reaction to a book. On the one hand, it's very slow reading, often tedious. After putting it aside, I sometimes had to force myself to pick it up again. Absent the fact that I was reading it with the intention of writing a review, I doubt I'd have persevered. On

budget so weak you had to wash with what amounted to a glorified paper towel full of medication and pure chemicals?

"She's anorexic too. She hasn't been eating, she's lost even more weight since she got in here."

"How would you know? You've never even seen me undressed before or taken my weight," Corinne shot back. They had her standing naked up against the small mob of attendants crowded into the bathroom.

"Evelyn Eldred," Corinne read her name off her badge, actually jabbing her with her index finger in the throat area, "you are fired!" Evelyn's face contorted, and she pulled out of her pocket a couple of needles. "Hold her down," she said, and with maximum impact they jabbed her in each naked buttock as she stood there leaning up against them.

"You forgot to wash the soap out of my hair" was her last attempt before they dragged her out limp again and dumped her on her bed. Someone

the other hand, there was always a gem to be found, a reward for my efforts. In the end, I was pleased I had read every word, and with some reservations and suggestions, I can recommend it to others.

First, the problems. Chief is that Russ tries too hard to say *everything* she thinks, feels, or opines. I found myself actually laughing at the copious notes at the end of each chapter. A few chapters even had their own appendices. And then, at the very end, there are four more chapters, which Russ calls "leftovers." It was as if she'd had one more thought, and into the manuscript it went. In some ways the book reads as if it were a stream of consciousness, an unexpurgated collection

grabbed her long tangled soapy hair and pulled it to the top of her head on the side under a rubber band. The lights were glaring and she managed through the sedative from the shot to ask someone to turn off the light. "Turn it off yourself," said a big black woman, one of the guards.

Corinne lay there for hours in a daze. Not exactly the shower she had dreamed of. She doubted she was even clean. But that she would have to conquer her fears and take showers herself from now on there could be no doubt. She wasn't going to let herself be put through this again. And why did they sedate her at the end, when it was all over, rather than at first? Because she dared to wave a finger at the head aide. They treated you as a leper, they were scared of patient aggression, the smallest infraction brought out the whole battery.

Corinne went to mealtimes like a wounded creature for some days. Her dreadlock served only to remind the staff of what she had just been through.



of everything that went through Russ' mind, every sentence she ever read that held meaning for her.

A related difficulty is the lack of a clear organizational scheme. Because there was so much material, and the sentences were so long and full, it was difficult to figure out how one

chapter related to another, or the point of the whole. The book jacket states the book's intention is to connect "the feminist movement to struggles for racial and class equality," arguing "against the shift in contemporary feminist theory—from the direct political struggle of the 1960s and 70s to a depoliticized focus on women's psychology and personal relations," charting the "scapegoating of separatists and lesbians," and introducing the need to "accept the leadership of women of color." I, however, was unable to formu-

—Russ continued on page 52

It was matted and stiff with chemicals but she had already tried to get a brush with no luck. All she had was a semi-brush for pocket or purse, so it was this or nothing. It took hours to comb it out strand by strand, and in some places it was so clumped she feared she would just have to cut into it and leave a gaping hole.

Finally, very proud of herself, she managed a modest braid, but she noted that her hair was no longer thick and luxurious but thin and wispy as if the chemicals had burned away whole strands. From here dates Corinne's haircut, which turned out to be a bowl-on-the-head sort of job, what with the exigencies of hospital passes, the money required to visit a professional stylist, and other problems. From this time on Corinne began to look like a mental patient, not an attractive woman who just happened to be thrown into a mental hospital. ■

.....
Shulamith Firestone is a feminist theorist and early activist living in New York City.

Russ continued from page 51—late any such description of overarching purpose and intention while reading the book. Frankly, I got lost in the details.

Finally, the outdated references are very disappointing, heavy as they are. Perhaps it would have been better if Russ had framed the book as a review of, and reflection on, the classic works of second-wave feminist theory; as such it would have made more sense. At the beginning, the reader is eager to learn something new, to be taken down a new path, to expand her consciousness and awareness and her list of things-to-do-about-all-that. Having just finished hearing Jim Nantz, the sportscaster who ran the show for CBS at the 1998 Winter Olympics, describe the "global community of man," even as the U.S. women's hockey team won the gold medal, I looked to Russ for "ammunition." What I found instead were many references from the feminist glory days of the 1970s and '80s, and nothing written since. Valuable as many of these ideas still are, we already know about the importance of coalition-building across lines of color, class, and physical ability/disability. A more serious consequence of using references from the past is that some of Russ' conclusions are simply no longer valid. For example,

it is no longer true that lesbians are invisible. Maybe in some places, of course, but there are too many counterexamples for Russ to make this statement so categorically. And in my own field of psychology, it has been many years since psychoanalysis was the theory against which all others were measured. I recently heard a speaker say that the only mental health practitioners who still subscribe to Freudian theory are a few male psychoanalysts who live on Park Avenue in New York City. Outside the arts and humanities, psychoanalysis is just not very important these days.

But then there are the gems. From the very beginning, even in the acknowledgments, I cheered out loud when Russ announces that it is okay to steal her ideas, and that she approves of the tendency of women writers to use exclamation points and italics for emphasis. And in every subsequent chapter, I underlined something that I loved. Examples abound. I share Russ' contention that feminism as political action has been abandoned in favor of introspection: an emphasis on the uniqueness of women's issues and problems, on the "interior" life. I applaud her invitation to return to activism. On a more subtle plane, I loved her speculation on

the reasons that heterosexual women, even feminists, find it frightening to question the "naturalness" of women's attraction to men. I particularly appreciated the quotes from feminists of color, describing their alienation from the women's movement. Although the quotes were not current, the collection Russ pulls together is still exciting, an inspiring reminder, perhaps especially to white women, but also to feminists of every hue and persuasion, that we had better realize "we will lose any possibility of developing an accurate map of the world . . . [unless we have] the ability to understand the interconnections between different kinds of oppression."

While this is not the book for someone who is looking for new material, it is an excellent study to dip into. It's difficult to read cover to cover, even in many sittings, but it is a rich resource, including many of the best quotes ever compiled in one place, a reminder of the basic principles, the raw roots, of feminist theory and practice. ■

Reviewed by Ellen Cole, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Alaska Pacific University in Anchorage and former editor of *Women & Therapy* and the *Haworth Press* series, *Innovations in Feminist Studies*.

FREUD'S PARANOID QUEST: PSYCHOANALYSIS AND MODERN SUSPICION

By John Farrell

New York University Press, New York, 275 pages

A suspicious, megalomaniacal philosopher demands total submission from his pupils. He tolerates no dissent; they submit. They are inducted into their role as devotees through furtive, cultic rituals, and don rings on which are mounted Greek intaglios, in imitation of the emblem worn by the classical god Jupiter. The students swear unswerving loyalty to their master and his precepts and commit themselves to absolute secrecy. Their teacher proclaims himself "the conquistador," "the giant," and identifies himself with history's conquering heroes: Moses, Caesar, Hannibal, Columbus, William the Conqueror, Napoleon. Obsessed with control of both

the precepts and the personalities of his movement, the leader denounces its renegades. Those who display independent thought are excommunicated; those who question their teacher are branded weak, mentally ill, or both. The followers' relationships with their leader exhibit an identical pattern: worshipful devotion gives way to tension, followed by estrangement and bitter accusation by the master. He goes so far as to gloat when a too-gifted student returns traumatized from World War I, and commits suicide.

This is not the leader of a lunatic fringe group, but the progenitor of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, whose imprimatur is stamped indelibly on the field of mental health, whose vocabulary has become popular parlance, and

whose influence continues to grow in academic circles. John Farrell's original, penetrating study, *Freud's Paranoid Quest*, demonstrates how problematic the legacy of Freud's genius is, calling into question many of the most cherished precepts of psychoanalysis. While providing a chilling chronicle of Freud's formation of the esoteric Psychoanalytic Committee in 1913, Farrell contests such proverbial Freudian beliefs as the centrality of dreams to human psychology, the hidden significance of minor errors such as slips of the tongue (those so-called Freudian slips), and the role of sexual desire and aggression as primary motivators. These assumptions, Farrell argues, emerged from a darkly skeptical mode of thought which assumes that each banal impulse cloaks a vicious secret. According to Freud, the

physician's desire to heal masks deeply rooted sadism, just as the social activist's promotion of equality disguises fundamental hostility to others. "And for the psychoanalyst, of course," writes Farrell, "everything we do is worthy of suspicion, except for those actions that are overtly selfish, violent, or libidinally driven. These things alone can be trusted to present their true aspect to the world."

In Freud's personal and professional life, in his theoretical vocabulary and his clinical method, suspiciousness reinforced by grandiosity and the desire for control reached the level of full-blown paranoia. Freudian paradigms, Farrell claims, could never have emerged in a normal research environment.

Farrell's study aims to uncover the intellectual background of Freudian theory in order to solve the riddle of the high regard for psychoanalysis among clinicians, scholars, and lay people. Farrell places Freud at the end of a line of thinkers—principally, Bacon, Locke, Hobbes, and Hume—who, from the 17th century on, raised doubts about the reliability of the mind. Freud's contribution to the field of epistemology was that of a systematizer: he found consistency in human psychology "by the banishing of all motives but those of a total and systemic lustfulness and selfishness to the realm of mere appearances...."

Perhaps it was this confident gauging of human behavior that insured Freud's popularity throughout much of the 20th century. According to the movement's own, self-heroizing history, the turn-of-the-century medical community was outraged at Freud's revolutionary findings and punished the master. But in fact, according to Farrell, psychoanalysis elicited no such violent outcries: "For, contrary to psychoanalytic dogma, the movement has commanded a depth of commitment among its adherents, and a level of acceptance among intellectuals, which exceed what is justified by the scientific validation of the theory... It seems to be, for many people, a compelling, almost irresistible body of doctrine."

Farrell explains the cult of Freud in terms of the satisfaction that reductionist theories offer by condensing human

experience into symbolic codes. By aggressively negating the thoughts of his analysands, many of whom were female, and discrediting their accounts of their own experiences, Freud established himself as a figure of heroic authority. According to the double standard that he set, only the analyst, whose diagnoses are simply "correct," is free from suspicious investigation: "Making a withdrawal from all intellectual commitment, he establishes illusion and error as universal structures.... But when it comes to the certitude of his own claim, the reductionist makes an exception." The highly charged dynamics of dominance and submission inform psychoanalytic theory and practice.

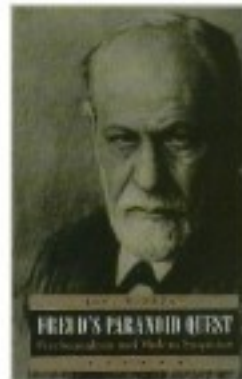
By 1933, Sigmund Freud had become a cultural icon. In that year, he brought together his previous, scattered writings on the subject of women in the seminal essay, "Femininity." Here, Freud argued that the turning point in female psychological development occurs when a young girl perceives that her clitoris is inferior to the male penis. Acceptance of femininity entails living with one's status as a "castrated" being, although the wish to be male lives on in the unconscious, asserting itself in many sublimated forms. According to Freud, the secret lurking within the female mind is anatomical jealousy: "The fact that women must be regarded as having little sense of justice is no doubt related to the predominance of envy in their mental life, for the demand for justice is a modification of envy and lays down the condition subject to which one can put envy aside." Freud's ideas about women's innate passivity and hysteria permeated medical discourse throughout most of our century, and his paternalism set the tone for relationships between psychiatrists and their patients. His hostile, sweeping claims about female psychology have been attacked by contemporary scholars, but those scholars too often rely on Freud's own terminology, accusing him of unconscious rage or hysteria.

By putting aside Freudian rhetoric and operating outside psychoanalytic categories, Farrell shows the extent to which Freud's conclusions are without foundation. While he does not deal extensively with the subject of gender, his critique of Freud's pathological authoritarianism has profound implications for feminist scholars of psychoanalysis and for all mental health professionals who retain aspects of Freud's program.

Farrell's most imaginative connection is his equation of Freud with the delusional protagonist in Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, a character with whom Freud had a lifelong fascination. Convinced that he is persecuted by invisible, all-powerful sorcerers, Quixote tilts at the windmills that he believes are giants: he is an impoverished gentleman who, though the Age of Chivalry is long past, poses as a medieval knight in service to "Dulcinea," the great lady who may or may not exist.

Freud, an anonymous researcher hoping to be hailed, one day, as "a genius," a Jew in an increasingly anti-Semitic Austria, and a man beset by cocaine addiction, cast himself in the role of modernity's most determined knight. Convinced of the antagonism of his colleagues, he plumbed the depths of human consciousness in a quest as farcical as Quixote's and as teleological as that of any medieval pilgrimage. Each foray could yield only one result: a hidden violent or sexual urge. If we accept John Farrell's premise that Freudian logic is contaminated by its own suspicion, then we must conclude that the women of Freud's corpus—the "castrated female," the "hysteric"—are, like Quixote's Dulcinea, the product of a deluded vision. They are the creations of a misogynistic philosopher posing as a scientist. ■

Reviewed by Jaclyn Geller, a Ph.D. candidate in English literature at New York University and an instructor in its writing program.



WOMEN OF A CERTAIN AGE THE BIG 3-0, 4-0, AND 5-0 by Molly Haskell

A woman who, just past 50, reviews her entire life on the eve of a party, and wonders if she married the right man.

A woman who, just turned 40, falls convulsively into an affair with a much younger man, threatening her marriage and her sanity.

A woman who, just reaching 30, has



the choice of two men, one representing dull security, the other a dangerous unknown.

A whole life hangs in the balance, and a move this way or that will alter the rest of her existence. The

moment of reckoning doesn't have to occur at one of the crucial ages—30, 40, or 50—but it so often does. At the "big five-oh" or the "big four-oh," time stops; it's as if you've emerged from the woods into a clearing at the top of a hill, and you're obliged to look both backward and forward. The present has to be faced: Is it all that you expected and so blindly pursued, or is it arid and pointless? You might continue treading water, but some unexpected event or eruption

of the unconscious forces the issue. What comes to seem in retrospect as a resolved "turning point" is, at the time, a flurry of terror, panic, and possibility.

Three new movies pay riveting attention to a woman's twists and turns at moments of crisis—as it happens, those three critical ages noted above. Such attentiveness to grown-up women and their rites of passage isn't exactly a staple of movies today, which, reflecting the youth culture around them, prefer their women as mistresses and ingenues—at the blossoming point rather than in full flower. That's why these ventures into the labyrinths of female psychology, two directed by women and one by a man, are themselves milestones, and not to be missed.

Who would have thought that anyone would even dare to adapt Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, much less do it successfully? With its non-linear, stream-of-consciousness style and fragmented narrative, the slender, groundbreaking

1925 novel would seem impossible to transfer to the screen. Yet the script by Eileen Atkins, who has come to "inhabit" Virginia Woolf in theater pieces like *A Room of One's Own* and *Vita and Virginia* (with Vanessa Redgrave as Vita Sackville-West) is a masterpiece of fine-tuned sympathy. The director is Marleen Gorris, the Dutch filmmaker of, most recently, *Antonia's Line*, but more memorably of the explosive feminist parable *A Question of Silence*, in which a group of women in a boutique turn on a salesman in homicidal laughter and rage.

With clarity and grace, the movie slides back and forth between past and present, between Natascha McElhone as the young Clarissa and Vanessa Redgrave as her ruefully retrospective older self. Without the least effect of distortion or special pleading, Woolf's feminism seeps into every crack of the film.

"Marriage is a catastrophe for women," the young Clarissa and her adored friend Sally Seton agree. Yet what choice have they? Certainly not to run off with each other, though the passionate kiss they exchange may be the erotic high point of their lives. And so, for the rest of her life, Clarissa has oscillated emotionally between two men: the one she married, the kind, conventional Richard Dalloway, and the one she spurned, the charming "failure" Peter Walsh, who will turn up on this day of days.

It is 1923, a beautiful June day, and Clarissa is planning one of her parties, walking through London, returning home, seeing to the flowers, silver, clothes. As Big Ben tolls the hours, with the gardens of Westminster in full bloom, modernity intrudes: planes, "autocars," advertising in the form of skywriting, and reverberations of the Great War, only recently ended. One disturbance on the horizon of Clarissa's clear sailing is a young man she sees but never meets, Septimus Warren Smith (Rupert Graves), a shell-shocked war veteran whose madness and suicide—an uncanny projection of Woolf's own depression and death—come to intrude on Clarissa's party.

We meet the two men who represent the poles of her existence: Richard Dalloway (John Standing), a politician who never quite made it into the Cabinet (because Clarissa didn't devote herself sufficiently to his career? Or because of his own inadequacies?), and who would really rather live in the country and hunt. Peter Walsh (Michael Kitchen) lives in India and manages (barely) to stay afloat, while continually falling in love. Legal problems with his latest paramour have sent him to London, where he drops by to see the woman who broke his heart, and confirm in his own mind that she's thrown her life away.

Etched no less vividly than the men is the daughter, Elizabeth, who's



Far left: a youthful and more mature Mrs. Dalloway, played by Vanessa Redgrave. Above and right: Actress-producer Brigitte Rouan becomes hot for a younger man in *Post Coitum, Animal Triste*



at war with her mother, and has fallen into the company of a religious fanatic. This funny, pitiable woman despises Clarissa—her class, her frivolity—but wilts before her social confidence.

What an extraordinary array of characters, of social layering, of insight into lives so distant from Woolf's own! The interlocking subjectivities, and the free-association technique once thought exasperatingly difficult and avant-garde, now seem to reflect the way we live and breathe. The novel even anticipated cinematic conventions like interior monologue, jumps in time, and intersecting or parallel story lines. Moreover what was regarded as sectarian, as "feminine" and narrow in its focus (as if Mrs. Dalloway's life-or-death concern with the success of her party had been Woolf's point of view) when it was published, now proves to be the early-20th-century novel with the widest grasp of modernity, of the social issues and tensions that would come to haunt us. (And after all, isn't giving a party an existential moment fraught with peril, no less terrifying—and perhaps less senseless—than going into battle?)

Atkins has wisely streamlined the book by restricting the interior monologues to one voice, Mrs. Dalloway's. Vanessa Redgrave gives yet another great performance as a well-heeled socialite, musing on her past, wondering just what she and the world are made of. Her Mrs. Dalloway, silly and majestic by turns, wise and giddy, dominates the film, but remains richly ambiguous. Neither "good" nor "bad," neither a complete failure nor a resounding success (though her party is), she has accepted her life and her limitations, itself a sign of breadth of sensibility—of higher aspirations acknowledged and retained at least as an ideal.

Unable to include everything, Gorris, Atkins, and their first-rate cast have nevertheless done an amazing job

of suggesting and implying most of what's in the book. For example, the screenplay doesn't include Walsh's wonderful observation on Clarissa and Richard: "With twice his wits she had to see life through his eyes: one of the tragedies of married life." But Walsh's thinking is transparent in Michael Kitchen's superb performance, the way he conveys the intellectual arrogance of the superior outsider, and it's also clear that this is the view of a still-embittered rival who can only see marriage as a state of possession. He will never understand that the reason Clarissa turned him down was that, for all his cleverness, he would have allowed her no room for maneuver, no "room of her own" in the claustrophobic chamber of his too-intense love.

In *Post Coitum, Animal Triste* Brigitte Rouan directs herself as a 40-ish married publisher who, despite an enviably charming husband and children, becomes crazily besotted with a much younger man.

The film opens on a shrilly ambiguous note: a cat claws the air and mews, presumably in sexual frenzy, but is it agony or ecstasy? We are forewarned: this love story will not be a tidily detached chronicle of an *amour fou*, but a descent into the bowels of passion, of nature raw in tooth and claw.

Rouan's Diane Clovier arrives at the apartment of one of her authors at an hour when many Parisians, the writer, François, and his girlfriend included, are still in post-coital sleep. Unperturbed, Diane ousts him from his bed, urges him to the writing table (he is suffering from second-book block), and while standing guard, looks up to see François' roommate, Emilio, a dark Apollo with black curly hair, emerging from the shower. He brushes past, gives her a lingering, curious look, and the die is cast.

Never far from caricature, Rouan boldly depicts the arc of this consuming passion, whose early charm and humor gradually degenerate into nastiness and fury. Diane's husband, a lawyer played by Patrick Chesnais, is never less than sympathetic as he tries to maintain his dignity and that of the marriage. In a funny and scary counterpoint to Diane's story, he takes on the defense of a woman who, after years of suffering her husband's adultery, finally murders him.

One of the saving graces of Diane's life is the delight she takes in successfully nurturing her writers, and Rouan keeps that side of her in view while audaciously recounting the nasty, brutish side of the end of the affair, sparing nothing in her self-exposure. She drinks, she lets herself go, she fumes at Emilio, displaying (as one so often and self-destructively does) precisely the behavior she knows will drive him away. And, in one of the most remarkable scenes ever filmed, she stands nude in front of the mirror, picking apart her aging body. "Am I still in the game?" she wonders as she examines her breasts, her skin, her flabby underarms. With this openness and generosity, Rouan makes it easier for all of us—women on the screen, women everywhere—to look at ourselves more honestly and forgivingly . . . and, let us hope, for movies to confront and take in stride the desires and inhibitions of women — *continued on page 56*

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Haskell continued from page 55—

as they grow older but no less passionate.

The young and precocious Edward Burns (*The Brothers McMullen* and *She's the One*) sets his new film, *No Looking Back*, in a working-class Rockaway Beach, New York, community, and takes us deep into the heart and dilemma of a pretty young woman who works as a waitress in a diner. Claudia persists in postponing the date of her marriage to a local boy, and is then propelled into a terrible quandary when her old boyfriend Charlie, a charming ne'er-do-well, returns to claim her.

Lauren Holly is marvelous as Claudia, one of those women who falls into the cracks between feminism and old-fashioned housewifery, between the examined and the unexamined life. She's thoroughly dissatisfied with small-town existence but has no idea where to go or what to do, and no conception of herself as a whole person, with a destiny outside marriage. Michael (Jon Bon Jovi) is good-looking and sweet, but dull and barely making ends meet, while Charlie (Ed Burns), though no more of a success, nevertheless represents the lure of escape. The problem is, he's not a good guy—a bit like her father, who's cut out for Las Vegas, leaving her mother (Blythe Danner) bitter and depressed. And in fact Charlie has left Claudia once before—right after she'd aborted his child. The slow progress of Claudia's move toward awakening and independence magically mirrors the baby steps, the hesitations, of real life.

One is not surprised at the degree to which women directors stay with their female leads through ups and downs, but it is rare for a male director—even one who has already shown a real liking for women—to give such leisurely attention to a female protagonist. Here, as in the films of Gorris and Roüan, a camera is so unhurriedly at home with its central character that it can live with her, trace the very progress of awareness in her face, and allow her to expose her vulnerability when she feels rejected, frightened, off her game.

No less interesting is Burns' treatment of the character he himself plays: Charlie, though charming, is more than just feckless; he's a bit of a swine, mean with his buddies, and nasty to a college girl who won't put out—a guy that even

his mother, as we see in a brilliant scene that opens the film, doesn't want at home. As writer-director Burns carefully locates his film, painting a bleak picture of the way climate and the economy work together to erode hopes: salt air and wintry despair seep into everything—the paint peeling from houses, the cars rusting on the streets. And the consolation—sitting around the local bar guzzling beer with the same people night after night—really isn't one.

Also in the must-see category are: *Clockwatchers*, a brilliantly sly first film by Jill Sprecher, working with her co-scenarist and sister Karen, about four "temps" in a sterile workplace who become friends and are then torn apart by suspicion. Both black comedy and surreal melodrama, the corporate setting is a malignant character in its own right, and the four actresses—Parker Posey, Toni Collette, Lisa Kudrow, and Alanna Ubach—show why they are some of the hottest new talents around.

And *Wilde*, an immensely moving and beautifully acted story of the great dandy, his marriage, his emerging homosexuality, the trial and its aftermath. It seems that the great Oscar has had more films made about him than Jesus, but this endlessly fascinating and prophetic gender bender is given perhaps a definitive turn in Stephen Fry's gentle, sad, not-entirely-sympathetic performance, in the company of Jude Law's no less definitive rendering of the selfish but gorgeous Lord Alfred Douglas. In his passion for the younger man (for youth, beauty and aristocracy), Wilde throws himself headlong into a masochistic folly whereby he harms and loses everyone he loves.

Director Brian Gilbert makes what I think is a major miscalculation in featuring scene after scene of male nudity and lovemaking, an excess presumably intended to push the envelope for homosexuality and steer clear of Merchant-Ivory refinements, but it adds nothing to the story and will scare off moviegoers who are either uninterested in or made uneasy by acres of in-your-face male flesh. ■

Film critic Molly Haskell is author of *Holding My Own* in *No Man's Land* (Oxford University Press) and *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (University of Chicago Press).

Chester continued from page 8—

ward pomp, by uniforms of any sort. All the Emperors were naked . . . newborn. This vivid, visual appreciation of human connectedness did not last forever, but from time to time it returns, and when it does, I recognize it. These feelings put me in touch with longings for Nature and for solitude, for all that which is cyclical, seasonal, sacred.

I became aware, as I had not been before, of the importance of rituals, family life, community—and their aching absence in so many lives. For many young parents, blood relatives stopped living around the corner sometime after World War II. In my time, few divorced mothers-and-children were invited to be part of the social life of married couples. Single mothers drowned alone; we didn't live collectively. There was, as yet, no lesbian baby boom or single-parent adoption movement. Today, even grandmothers and grandfathers have careers, or they are too old, or too ill, or temperamentally unsuited to parent a grandchild for more than a few hours a month. They need care themselves—and daughters, not sons, tend to do this work.

Therefore, most single mothers who want a family life within a community must create and maintain them on their own. The creation of family and community are fairly labor-intensive, daunting tasks in late-20th-century American cities.

On Mother's Day, sentimental Americans spend over \$300 million on greeting cards. Amazingly, one-quarter of all flowers given in a year are purchased on this commercially-created holiday. My suggestion? Use that money to elect politicians whose priority is raising the standard of living and improving the at-home working conditions of primary caretakers, year round. By the way: Only someone who has learned how to socialize a child without breaking his or her spirit is worthy of being elected to public office.

Start voting feminist Mothers into office. They probably won't abuse their power in sexual ways for at least 50 years. After that—look out! ■

Phyllis Chester, Ph.D., first published *With Child: A Diary of Motherhood in 1979*. It is currently being reissued by *Four Walls Eight Windows* press.

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because they are easy to find. But it's a very painful way to die."

Spoghmai, a 24-year-old former teacher, refers to herself as being "buried alive." The young woman lost her right arm up to the shoulder, and her right leg to the thigh, in a shelling attack three years ago. After her injury, when she spent weeks in a poorly equipped hospital, Spoghmai was, not surprisingly, so depressed she wanted to die. A lifesaver, literally, was a job she found with a Western relief agency that enabled her to work with the disabled. But four months later, when the Taliban took Kabul in September 1995, she was forced to stop working.

Today, she wears a badly fitted, and painful, prosthesis—badly fitted because, in Afghanistan now, false limbs come in only three sizes. Disabled as she is, walking is difficult, and is impossible if she is wearing a burqa veil. Since she cannot go out without one, she hasn't left the house in two years. "There are so many days when I am too depressed to get out of bed. Why should I? There is nothing for me to do. So many times I ask, Why didn't I die when I was injured?"

I offered to take Spoghmai out for a short excursion in my jeep. She refused. "I am afraid. It is too dangerous, for you and me. Afghans are not allowed to be with foreigners, or talk with journalists. If we are caught, the Taliban will beat us, maybe worse. And anyway, to go out briefly would be too painful. It will remind me of what I have lost. One day of freedom will make this prison so much worse."

International Complicity

A major concern today is how most of the international community operating in Afghanistan is going along with the Taliban's restrictions on women out of fear of having their agencies forced to close. Complicating this issue is the fact that a number of UN officials posted there in senior positions are from developing countries where women are traditionally second class. Consequently, they consider the Taliban's restrictions on women unimportant, or choose to look the other way. One such head of a U.N. agency in Kabul has often told colleagues, "the gender issue is too dangerous, I don't plan to risk my career over it."

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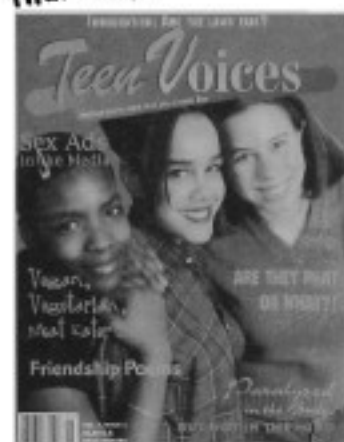
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The director of a major American humanitarian agency in Kabul, who asked that his name not be used for security reasons, admitted he found it "personally abhorrent," but felt he had no choice when he had to tell his female employees first to wear the burqa, and then to stay home. "I felt awful that I was forcing them to veil. When you only see women in burqas, you realize the power of covering a woman like that. You don't treat them like people anymore, just bits of cloth moving down the street. But on a pragmatic level, that's what had to happen to keep everybody safe, and to keep our program moving.

"When the Taliban started threatening and then beating our guards and drivers, we had no choice. When I realized that no one, no authority, was going to stop the Taliban from beating women if they worked, it became an issue of protecting the staff I know that is a rationalization, but they have demonstrated what the consequences are of not complying with their edicts. And so you compromise."

He admits that there is an "incredible" —continued on page 58

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drift in the international community here with regard to the gender issue. Women are told: 'Stay home, suffer your fate, it's easier for everyone.' It's a slippery slope we're on."

One agency in Kabul, Oxfam, which is headed by a retired American professor, Nancy Smith, chose to make a stand against the regime, and closed down her multimillion-dollar program until such time as the Taliban remove the restrictions on women. With her agency charged with restoring 40 percent of the water supply system to Kabul, a project that would also benefit the Taliban, Smith, a wiry 65-year-old, told the regime her agency's mandate was to relieve poverty, distress and suffering, and that included women's. "We concluded that our core principles are not negotiable," she says. "Oxfam will work with women in Kabul, or not at all."

Afghan women also defy the Taliban. I visited several underground schools that women were running for girls out of their homes. Operating one-room school houses accommodating students aged six to 24, these dedicated women were breaking the Taliban law on a number of counts, including the one forbidding gatherings of unrelated people. In a city where paper and pencils are now hard to acquire, the teaching aids were handmade from scraps of whatever they could find, including stones and twigs.

While these women risk their safety to keep teaching, much of the regime that threatens them are either illiterate or nearly so. Even the Taliban's Ministers of Education and Higher Education have little schooling. Most Talibs (the name means religious student) are young zealots, graduates of the regime's *madrassas*, so-called religious schools that are based, for the most part, in Pakistan, and funded in part by the Saudis. In these cloister-like environments, boys grow up totally segregated from any women, including those in their own families. The highest honor they can earn there is that of *qari*, a Muslim honorific given to those who memorize and can recite the entire Koran, and a number do. Sadly, however, they learn to do so in Arabic, a language they do not understand, and is not taught to them. Consequently, they have no idea of the rights given to women in Islam.

"Islam dictates that education is mandatory for both males and females," says Zieba Shorish-Shamley, Ph.D., chair of the Women's Alliance for Peace and Human Rights in Afghanistan, based in Washington, D.C. Hassan Hathout, M.D., Ph.D., the director of the outreach program at the Islamic Center of Southern California, agrees: "At the time of the Prophet, Muslim women attained such scholarship they became teachers to prominent men." They also worked. In fact, the Prophet met his first wife because she was his employer. "The medical corps of the Prophet's army was an all-woman corps, and in some battles, women took up swords and joined active combat. Women participated in public affairs, were involved in negotiating treaties, were even judges. Islam declared gender equality through the Prophet's words, 'Women are the siblings of men.'"

Islamic scriptures are very clear on the veil: Only the prophet's wives were required to cover their faces. In fact, when women undertake the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, the Hajj, they are required to do so with their faces uncovered. They also mingle with men not related to them.

"Obviously, the Taliban's military prowess far exceeds their knowledge of Islam," says Dr. Hathout. Perhaps the regime's most important oversight is the Prophet Mohammad's teaching: "There is no compulsion in Islam."

When I raised these issues with the chief mullah of the Department of Virtue and Vice, and asked him why, if such things were good enough for the Prophet, they weren't good enough for the Taliban, he grinned and changed the subject. The regime's Sher Abbas Stanakzai was more honest when he admitted, "Our current restrictions are necessary in order to bring the Afghan people under control. We need these restrictions until people learn to obey the government." ■

Jan Goodwin, editor of On The Issues, is an award-winning journalist and human rights activist. She is the author of Caught in the Crossfire (E.P. Dutton), a book on the conflict in Afghanistan, and Price of Honor (Plume-Penguin Books), which examines how Islamic extremism is affecting the lives of Muslim women.

Birmingham continued from page 35—
recovery. Addressing himself to the wounded nurse, Spitz wrote: "Emily, there are many, many people who believe you reaped what you sowed. I am one of them. I hope you get out of the BABYKILLING business. Your husband is going around showing your picture for sympathy. He doesn't show any pictures of the babies you helped murder. Why not?"

The national media gave a platform to others to promote the same message. Michael Bray, who served four years in jail for a string of clinic bombings in the Washington, D.C., area, told a nationwide audience on ABC-TV's *Nightline* that he had no misgivings about the clinic bombing, "given the benefit that comes from it and the issues at stake." Bray also praised the Army of God, which had claimed credit for the 1997 bombings of an abortion clinic and a lesbian-owned nightclub in Atlanta, as well as the Birmingham bombing.

On the surface, claiming to be "pro-life" yet approving cold-blooded murder reflects either twisted logic or rank hypocrisy. But such words provide moral justification and encouragement for those who plant the bombs and pull the triggers.

Such justification also indicates that the movement's real agenda is not the protection of so-called unborn "people," but a political campaign bent on denying women, at any cost, the right to decide how their lives will be lived.

Anti-abortion campaigners' comments to the media cannot be dismissed as the rantings of lone crazies. They must be seen for what they are: rallying cries for the brutal, storm-trooper wing of the anti-abortion movement, a movement that is funded and sustained by powerful, well-organized, well-connected forces hiding behind professedly moral motivations.

A number of the Birmingham-based anti-abortion protesters are part of a committed national movement that has harassed abortion providers and clinic clients across the country. I had seen their faces in Dayton, Ohio in July 1997, when they helped Operation Rescue blockade and close clinics there. Outside the clinics, OK leaders preached and testified about the "glories" of women submitting to men. And this past January 22, the 25th Anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, these same people were present in front of the Supreme Court, where they participated

in a large anti-abortion march. They were the thugs who bullied and shoved pro-choice demonstrators on the steps of the Court, as we held up a large banner that read: "They can't have our day, or our lives." The Rev. Spitz was there, too, holding a sign reading: "Free Paul Hill—Execute Abortioists." Hill is the man convicted of killing Dr. James Bayard Britton and clinic escort James Barrett, in Pensacola, in 1994.

Such zealots are unyielding in their determination to intimidate women and abortion providers and, ultimately, to halt abortion entirely. "If you don't want to be pregnant, keep your legs closed!" snarled one man to a young pro-choice woman at the Supreme Court.

But there is committed determination on the pro-choice side, too, as exemplified by the courage and dedication of the clinic employees and escorts in Birmingham. They had been seasoned over a period of a dozen years, dealing with anti-abortion protesters who have continually targeted both the Summit and the New Woman clinics. Many clinic employees and escorts live near the clinic, so when the bomb exploded they knew immediately what had happened. People promptly began mobilizing, and grief quickly turned to resolve as volunteers started calling the Birmingham Clinic Defense Team's hotline to see what they could do. Some local people who had not been involved before offered to be escorts. Others stepped up their activism because, as one said, "Women can't be truly equal until they can control their bodies. I've decided that this fight is mine as long as it takes."

No Access Means No "Choice"

In major urban areas where there are relatively few restrictive laws, the availability of abortion is easy to take for granted. But for women who live in states with no Medicaid funding, waiting periods between the time they first visit a clinic and when they can get the abortion, parent consent and notification laws, and other restrictions, obtaining an abortion requires major resources and extensive planning, or, because of this, may not be an option at all. Consequently, for millions of women who are poor, under 18, or live in the 84 percent of U.S. counties that have no abortion provider, "choice" effectively does not exist. From 1978 to 1992 access to abortion decreased with an 18 percent drop in the number of providers

nationwide. Rural areas are hardest hit, with at least 15 percent of women in many states—including Alabama, Kansas, Kentucky, Iowa, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee, and the Dakotas—having to travel more than 100 miles to get an abortion. The cost of transportation and overnight accommodation can be prohibitive for those on low incomes.

Drawing the Line in Birmingham

The Birmingham bombing was part of a many-pronged attack on abortion rights and access. The response to the attack, however, indicates that we may be moving toward a new level of national unity and support for the providers who make "choice" possible. National organizations, including the Feminist Majority, National Organization for Women, National Abortion Federation, Planned Parenthood, and Refuse & Resist!, immediately sent representatives to Birmingham. And three days after the bombing, the Birmingham Emergency Coalition for Choice organized a protest rally.

Then, on March 14, well-known feminists and leaders of many Washington, D.C.-based organizations came together with the staffs of Birmingham clinics and local and national activists at the historic 16th Street Baptist Church in an encouraging show of national unity and resolve. (The church was the scene of the racist bombing that killed four little girls in 1963.) The theme of the gathering was in the proclamation: "We're drawing the line in Birmingham!"

Today, new sod has replaced the shards of glass which covered the lawn of the Birmingham clinic after the bombing. A new maroon awning with crisp white lettering shades the doorway. And a new level of energy and determination to defend abortion access and women's lives is coming out of the horror of that early morning in January. ■

Mary Lou Greenberg is an activist and writer who has defended clinics and worked with abortion providers around the country.

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Violation continued from page 20

for girls with big clitorises, was asked about the wisdom of genital surgery on such children, she responded with, "Well you just can't have an it!"

Each woman has her own reasons for turning away from this issue. But I challenge them to pay attention to the fact that in hospitals just down the street in any big American city, five children a day are losing healthy, erotic parts of their bodies to satisfy a social demand for "normalcy." There is no Federal ban to save them. The surgery is left out of the law against FGM because it is deemed "necessary to the health of the child on whom it is performed." But as social psychologist Suzanne Kessler at the State University of New York at Purchase points out, "Genital ambiguity is corrected not because it is threatening to the infant's life, but because it is threatening to the infant's culture."

Doctors and parents believe society will reject a child with atypical genitals, and the child is made to pay with her or his body for this shortcoming of our culture. What is happening in American hospitals to healthy children is just as mutilating to the bodies—no matter how exquisite the surgical craftsmanship—and violating to the souls of these children as FGM. And frequently, the surgical craftsmanship falls far short of exquisite.

The strict sexual agenda for bodies in America extends to little boys as well. To grow up to be a real man, a boy will have to be able to do two things—pee standing up and penetrate a vagina with his penis. If a little boy has to sit like a girl to urinate because his urethra exits somewhere along the shaft of his penis rather than the tip (a condition that can occur in as many as 8 out of 1,000), he may be subjected to many disheartening surgeries over the course of his childhood to correct this "defect," and be left with a lifetime of chronic infections and emotional trauma. And if the baby is born with a "too-small" penis that doctors decide will never be big enough to "successfully" penetrate a woman, physicians will probably make him into a "girl" through surgery and hormone treatments, because, in the words of one surgeon, "It's easier to poke a hole

than to build a pole."

In the 40 years since surgical intervention to "correct" genitals that are viewed as abnormal was first prescribed, treatment protocols have rarely been questioned. After all, it is much more comfortable for doctors to assume all is well than to start digging around to find out if it's really true. Until recently, all discussions of what is done to people's sexual bodies have been hidden safely away in the pages of medical texts, where real lives are only "interesting cases," and pictures of genitals are disembodied curiosities or teaching tools. Many doctors would like to keep things that way. For example, Dr. Kenneth Glassberg, a pediatric urologist associated with the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), insists that people who speak up and tell their stories are doing a disservice by "scaring patients away."

In a blatant disregard for patient feedback not seen in any other medical field, the AAP still advocates early surgery and insists that the "management" of children with atypical genitals has improved over the past several decades. Their refusal to consider the reality of the lives of people who have been treated by this protocol can be likened to an astronomer gazing at Mars through his telescope while ignoring the real live Martian tugging at his sleeve. The messy truth of what happens to children treated with surgery and hormones is simply ignored by the AAP, as they stubbornly cling to a treatment paradigm that has never been anything but experimental.

Cosmetic genital surgery on children is out of control. As the practice has careened along unexamined for decades, illustrious careers and reputations have been swallowed, and terrific damage has been done. For a doctor even to hesitate before operating takes tremendous effort and self-reflection. The need for babies to have genitals that look typical has been perceived as so unquestionable that surgeons travel all over the world to perform surgery on children free of charge as a "humanitarian gesture."

Dr. Justine Schober challenges her fellow surgeons to realize that "when you do [this kind of] surgery on someone, you are responsible for them for the rest of their lives." In less than two

hours in a sterile operating room, a child's personal and sexual destiny can be changed forever. The stakes are excruciatingly high for the sake of appearances. Angela's story, Annie's story, and my own tell only the smallest fraction of the terrible fallout from these surgeries. No one is naive enough to say that a life in a body seen as abnormal is a ticket to bliss. But it is not the bodies of these children that are wrong, it is the way people see them. And if these children grow up and want to change their bodies one day, that will be their right. Nobody, but nobody, no matter how loving, no matter how well-intentioned, should have the power to steal precious parts of a body from a child before she or he even gets started in life. ■

.....
Martha Coventry is currently writing a book about childhood genital surgery in America. She lives and works in Minneapolis.

WHERE TO GO FOR INFORMATION

Parents of babies born with atypical genitals feel overwhelmed and afraid. They need to talk with other parents who have shared the same situation, and they need to talk to grown children like their own who can give them some perspective. There are several organizations that can give them that help, and can also help their child as she or he grows up:

1. Intersex Society of North America, PO Box 31791, San Francisco, CA 94131. e-mail: info@isna.org, web: www.isna.org. ISNA is a peer- support and advocacy group operated by and for individuals born with anatomy or physiology that differs from cultural ideals of male and female.

2. HELP (Hermaphrodite Education and Listening Post), PO Box 26292, Jacksonville, FL 32226 e-mail: help@jaxnet.com. Founded by a mother frustrated by the lack of available information about her child's condition, HELP is a support group for parents, family, friends, and persons affected by sex differentiation disorders, and a source of medical information, literature, and personal experiences.

3. Ambiguous Genitalia Support Network, PO Box 313, Clements, CA 95227. A parents' support group.

Poet continued from page 23

doubt. . . They'll shoot me for sure . . . At childbirth . . . My butterfly is born and immediately after that, I am taken out and shot."

These sentences were spoken to me in Persian. I am writing them in English. Neither of these languages is my mother tongue. This is exile, what Julia Kristeva, a fellow writer in exile, called "a way of surviving." How did this process of my survival take place? At home, in the factory, in the marketplace, even at school among the students and the teachers, the mother tongue was used. But the written form of all schooling, the written form of all business, police, law courts, movies, were in Persian. The language of literature and poetry was also Persian. The mother tongue deserved only humiliation and subjugation, like my mother herself in relation to my father, who always dominated her. Linguistic exile is the linguistic schizophrenia of all individuals and peoples who are subjected to language domination.

The process of love and hatred begins. It is something that was always there in relation to my father, but never in relation to my mother. The love of the mother is total. Without my mother, I would not have been the person I am: poet and novelist. In order to appreciate something, I had to look for the motherly element in it. Imagination means the discovery of the mother in everything we touch. But more than anything else in the world, it is language that is motherly. The mother played at language with us. It was through her that generous love became the poetic capacity of language. Poetry is a language in which words fall in love with each other; they stop having external, non-affectionate use. A poet writing poetry in a chosen language will not be a great poet unless he discovers the mother-child relationship in that language.

Exile in literature takes different forms. It was Samuel Beckett's own choice that he wrote most of his plays and fiction in French. It would have been impossible for me to write my poetry and fiction in Azari Turkish. It was Vladimir Nabokov's choice that he wrote most of his later fiction in English. Looking for the other in language, tradition and the poetics of fiction, James Joyce experimented with the devices of

writing itself. His self-exile from Ireland was one of the greatest things that happened to world literature. To be sure, there are great moments in the history of every nation when a writer feels fortunate that he can stay with his people and be enriched by the experience and write about it. But exile is also an adventure, an experience in another world that gets one's imagination going in directions unknown, both technically and spiritually. Joyce's letters and his first novel show that he intentionally threw himself out of Ireland to embrace the experience of not only the Continent, but also continents of artistic adventure. An imagined territory was created in the works of these writers that had nothing to do with their periods in history, or even the countries in which they lived.

This kind of exile goes beyond ideological, philosophical, and political boundaries. In exile, you exit the norms and conventions of thinking and imagining. It is the desire to see beyond, to go "on exile," as Dante did when he traveled through the imagined stages of imagination itself.

While I was learning Persian, I also began studying English, my window to Shakespeare, Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein. When my mother was dying of Alzheimer's disease in a retirement home in Tehran in 1995, I had already begun writing a novel in English, which in my mind I planned to call "Our Lady of Scribes." It was a poet sharing his food with others. An hour before her death, I took the seed out of a date and raised it to my mother's lips. She lifted her frail arm, took the date, divided it into two halves, and handed me one half. She raised the second half to her lips, slowly kissed it, but did not eat it. She died half an hour later, with her half of the date held between her fingers. My novel was banned from publication in Iran. In the third month of my most recent journey into exile, it was published in Sweden. I am writing now from Canada, of continents past rising to claim the future. ■

.....
Reza Baraheni is the author of 45 books of poetry, fiction, theory, and literary criticism. For the last 35 years, he has been in the forefront of the struggle for democracy and human rights in Iran, and was jailed under both the Shah's regime and Islamic Republic of Iran. Today he lives in Toronto, Canada.

BELLA ABZUG 1920 - 1998



PHOTOS: TOP, BETTY LANE; BOTTOM, COURTESY OF ON THE ISSUES

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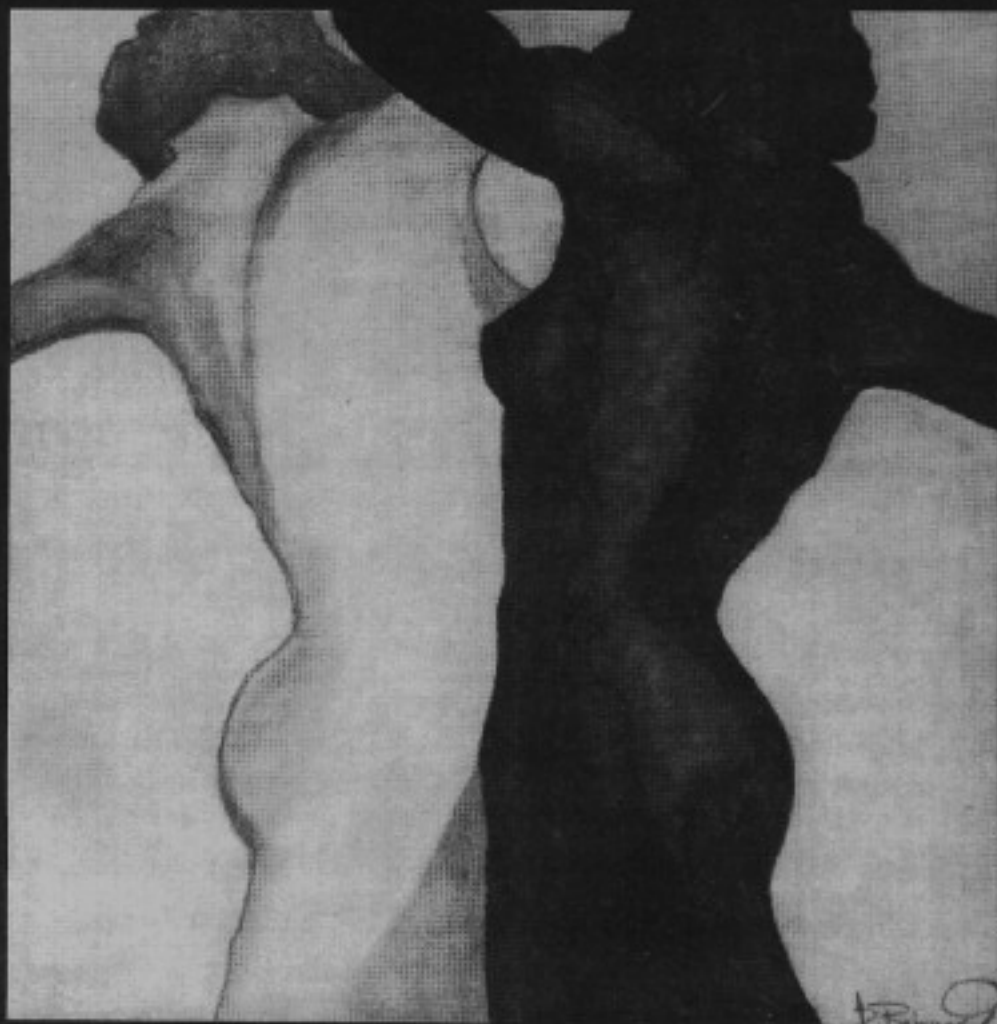
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