

[Oct 1982]

PORTLAND WOMEN'S COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

75¢

WISE

Issue 23

WOMEN, WITCHES, HEALERS

AUTO-DA-FÉ ①

after The Colonel

"Something for your poetry, no? he said."

-Carolyn Forché, The Colonel

I

Always
after, your captain
barks his command
gather the slain
collect their ears their fingers
their entrails....

spill them in public arenas or across
your own banquet table
a confession extracted or no
still results in this

vacant spool of sobs and bleeding
thousands fill forgotten closets
the cutting edge fell heavy
on draped years of Europe's
mothers ②
drownings beheadings
blood bathed the earth
fires burned
we scarcely
know to look inside
that dim
vestibule

the grossly silenced
the subtly silenced
is there no echo for wordlessness?

II

you have cut out tongues
across centuries of others
who pointed
fingers at you
and laced you in their honest words
tongues keep wagging

and you swing
round with your machete
(even in your home at night)
and lop at empty air

a fat cigar burns idly on a silver coaster,
its ash lingers smoke lifts and sways
attendant onto nothing

vessels rest on the shelf
quietly they sigh, not even
their swollen bellies move
they sit, clean and still,
so well-contained
not a stare
fills the space that you turn to;
so well sealed no ears
can prick the tension.
the tick at your nostril
occupies your upper lip.
you pace your friendless room.

you disdain flowers in vases
but they are less suspect
than empty containers
emptied pockets
wordless mouths
you look past these however:
your collection of teeth jumble
awkward grins across a platter
tongues keep wagging

wildly in your dreams,
twisting over each other
copulating
sharing violent lovers' secrets
you push at them in your sleep
and air licks your hand
you find yourself in a twilight room
where the floor dips
the walls coolly expand

dreams have never concerned you
you say

III

your wife comes near
she sits again
waiting
vessel cunt concubine
a city of ladies³ has been
unearthed in Europe
tongues wag across centuries and
you fence with the matter of how
you will cut
them all down
corpses already
but all that's with you
now is your woman your baggage
your piece of ass vessels
a souvenir finger
hangs from your belt

mosquitos circle within earshot
absently you pass your hand
a wasp inches between your shirt
and flesh
you gasp you swat
you slap your wife
her eyes fasten onto you
and then retreat
deeper than a submarine
one moment longer her body
watches something settles
her shoulders ease

briefly you trace the mouth of one
round vase
tap abstractions into it
with your careful nail
you peruse the vase
turn it in your hand
: prize apple
specter of vessels
discovered in China centuries old
tug at your attention
provocative for all their age
rows upon rows of larger-than-life
ceramic figures
devoted to one
ruler despot colonel god
devoted to one

as if they were your own creation....
power beckons with its horny
hand
you set the vessel down
your lip curls past its tick

IV

dust in blood thickens
dried to concrete
hosed until the cells flood
vessels cunts volumes
sluiced together
you pour yourself a drink
in streets blood scarcely
moves at all blood
lays on the earth
she takes the dust leaving us
stained
blood and dust
mingle in the fibres of your holy scrolls
Malleus Mallificarum ④
righteous righteous
carry us to pyres
buyers and sellers
march us there
in sacrilegious times
a promenade to silence
your wife glides off to bed

low moans slip off the lips of victims
lovers alike
vessels sigh
shards of urns
amulets
come to us
chiselled free of walls
dug from packings of a tomb
volumes dusted from musty cases
the earth is womb to her
buried wares

a parthenogenesis
immaculate concept

V

we are born
again to tell the stories
we name ourselves and others
when no one sits to type
confessions
names resound as accusations
shards of urns can slice your fingers

vessels sing forgotten runes
earth herself rolls over

a wife could easily slice
your neck in bed
after one last kiss
your tongues unlock
she raises up
and coolly severs your head
Salome's
forgotten kin
discards her robes and
entering black vaults of night
resurrects high mass to her
silver dish
the moon

vessels she calls
she draws strands from her fingers
vessels she cries
she moans an ancient sound
crouching close to soft earth
vessels she shrieks in steady labor

the cunt is red with bloods of history
earth will guard
her litter well
amulets shards vessels
held forever
earth is humming their stories

vessels
speak to us

VI

WE ARE A STUBBORN BIRTH WE STAND
 LEGLESS
 WE STAND:
 VESSELS
 REFUSALS TO LIMB OURSELVES
 WE STAND
 CAVERNS
 RECEPTACLES
 GATHERING AND BURGEONING
 ARMLESS HEADLESS WITNESS
 DO YOU HEAR?

VII

a vessel sealed coffin-tight
 bobs on water
 she clings to the surface
 like a point on a line
 she cannot be drowned
 she holds our
 imaginations like a Pandora's box
 filigree cracks span her surface
 all breath and life in her
 fullness
 she stands without legs
 gatherer of stories
 elegy
 to the songs of those
 who are not heard
 the vessel survives
 round fecund form
 she is pregnant with endurance

① Auto-da-fé translates from spanish as "act of faith." It is also the name of the ceremony of burning witches.

② Some scholars estimate as many as 9 million women were killed as witches in the Middle Ages.

③ The Book of the City of Ladies is a book written in 1405 by Christine de Pizan, a scholar who despaired of the anti-woman sentiments of contemporary and earlier philosophers and describes her visit by 3 womenspirits (Reason, Rectitude and Justice), who are moved to help her construct an allegorical City of Ladies made up of the overlooked and notable women of her time and history. The book is brilliant and centuries old and, though it had one translation in 1521 (to Middle English), only in 1982 is it finally accessible to the modern english-speaking world.

④ Malleus Mallificarum is a book written by 2 dominican monks in (1484 or) 1486 and describes the bizarre activities of those who consort with the devil -- as well as suggested means of detecting this, as well as suggested means of exorcism or remedy. Auto-da-fé (burning) was one remedy.

⑤ To the church of 1310, a 'ride with Herodias or Diana' was a synonym for witchcraft. Herodias was a woman condemned by John the Baptist. Her daughter, who traded a dance for John's head on a platter, was named Herodiana, better known as Salome.

False Hope

Minister/Father
you speak of angel breath
and heavenly relief
while I stare
straight forward
-unblinking-
toward the miniscule
casket,
mother-of-pearl
laden with tiny blossoms.

Jesus the Savior,
Father God,
you pray,
while my own unborn child
presses,
pokes,
kicks
unhesitantly, resolutely
within my uterus.

I lean right
to find my sister's
solid flesh,
hear her muffled tears.
Mother denied,
her newborn
-untimely born-
lies still,
unmoving,
beneath miniature carnations
while our
minister/father
speaks to the silence
we live in.

Toni Buzzeo Cyll

IMPROVISATIONAL

That witch is mad as a scare-
crow dancin
arms flappin sky

crows cawling
reels no one else
attends to, she
bats them, crazy
lady, broomsticks
stilt
quick careens
thumping round a circle
strawbent arms
compulsing toward me
elbows flocking overhead

her witch's skirt near
sweeps the ground
sprays of dirt
raised under foot
deliver me from careful
rows of vegetables and weeds
calling me to dance
my turn to chase the sky

silken shawl
spins a cosmos, every cast
creating galaxies
cloaking midnight swirls to day
rhythm pounds, driving
home belief
a common heartbeat
belief in magic gamb'ling heels

believing a same energy
courses through the world
since darkness was
that silken spell

cast across my mind.

Martha Lunney

Lacking the necessary precautions
we nevertheless plow heads first into the wave
of our long-surviving connection.
Too many months ashore
leave us ravenous for the intensity
of the surge and drag inherent in our love.
Thus made children by our naivete,
we surrender to unsafe desire
plunging under the surface of that raging water.

Toni Buzzeo Cyll

A NEW MAP ; A NEW JOURNEY

"It's in every one of us
To be wise.
Find your heart
Open up all your eyes.
We can all know everything
Without ever knowing why
It's in every one of us
Bye and bye."

Woman's chant

I have begun a journey to become a healer. I affirm that power and wisdom in each of us. Last September I got sick. According to traditional medicine, I had a systemic virus. What that meant was that every two weeks I would collapse, rest, then resume my normal schedule and collapse again. Throughout the cycle I had low energy and a mild fever. This lasted nearly 9 months. The transition from dis-ease to wellness during this period had clear stages: Fix Me Right Now, Fear, Acceptance, Self-healing and New Growth. The stages often overlapped and I'm still working on aspects of fear.

First of all, it took me awhile to take the sickness seriously. I'd say, "It's the flu," one week, then a cold, then a cold, then the flus again. Painfully, I let go of all my political, social and artistic involvements. It took 4 months of sickness to admit I needed a doctor. I was so used to strength and health. When I made the decision to go for the miracle of modern medicine, I also took the first step as my own healer. I did a ritual for myself and, as part of the ritual, made a small herb bag to wear around my neck. I put in all the symbols of wellness and folk remedies I could think of. With my doctor, after lots of tests and pills, we found the virus and began antibiotics. Afterwards, I was still sick. I think now that reality has many levels and that I had much more to learn, so dis-ease stayed with me. My fear was most intense at this point. Being too cold, too wet, too tired, anything could bring on the next collapse.

Looking at all the work women in the community were doing to learn healing, I began to take the healing powers of women very seriously. I was sustained many a week by the healing circles at Spiritual Community, and I was able to ask for them when they were not planned as part of the evening. I also went on an intense vitamin program. I also was able to ask other friends to do a healing evening for me. Asking for help is hard for me, another big step.

Finally, I stopped fighting the dis-ease and started to look more deeply into my life and at my fear. I began daily meditation. Spring sun was coming by then and I would sit in a sunny, warm room and let healing warm sun flow through my body. I also "cleaned my chakras " as often as possible. That is an exercise in "Mother Wit". It involves serious looking at fears and old pain. Another meditation was looking at the healing powers of darkness. Visualizing my body as a small seed germinating; receiving nutrition, power of growth and everything I needed from the rich soils of darkness. Empowered by the strength of women healers, I began to heal myself.

The last stages were a fast and a sweat. I went to a doctor skilled in many kinds of medicine. She affirmed the work I was doing and suggested a fast. It felt wonderful to be encouraged to take responsibility for my own healing. Despite my MacDonalds and chocolate addiction, I looked at food in my life and did a 14 day juice fast. It cleared my system entirely and for the first time I felt healed and strong. It was a wonderful experience in itself, bringing new lightness and clarity both mentally and physically. With my body healed, I then turned to my fear. In a sweat lodge with the Women's Spiritual Community, I faced much of my fear of dis-ease. Sweats are spiritual and physical "saunas"

with visions and chanting, a very special experience. In the sweat lodge with chanting women, I felt the fear pouring out of me like my own sweat. I knew for the first time that I was healed. The next day, I passed my herb bag, that I had clung to like a life preserver, to another woman in hopes that it would begin a journey of looking at dis-ease and healing for her. This article is another way of doing that for all of us. I invite you to look at dis-ease in a new way. I invite you to find the healer in yourself and other women. "It's in every one of us to be wise..."

Gina Kelley

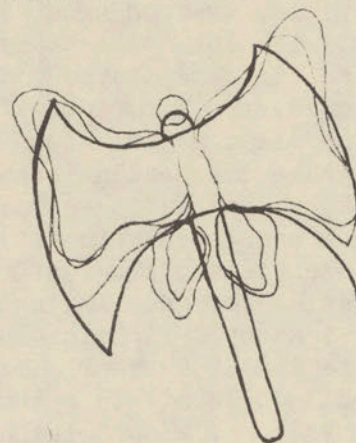
I would like to suggest a focus for a Hallowmas ritual. It is an auspicious time to ask Hecate to add her energies to ours to attain our visions. We can visualize the communities we want to create. We can sing, dance, draw pictures of our dreams. We can read our own and other wombin's visions. We can draw up detailed descriptions and plans of how we want to live. We can figure out what we need to have to realize our plans. We must name the forces that prevent us from living the lives we choose. We must look at that which is within us and name it. We must look at and name those people, ideas and institutions that keep us enslaved. We must pledge ourselves to the preservation of the earth and all her daughters. We must pledge ourselves to the struggle against all who would rape us or our mother. Hecate is there with her wisdom and her strength. We need only ask.

Anna Kissed.

Anonymity/Familiarity

Again I return from an extended trip
through my classical core
of silence, private aches
and slow, slow renewal.
Again I present my face
amongst those who recognize
it
and some or most of what registers there.
I flop out of my cluttered old tank
into the warmest of channels
opening and curling around
my sweet
flannel shirted companions.
In our huddled moments
we expose and soothe,
expose and soothe.
But only when I can,
only when they will.

Sparky



Newsletter Task Force
Bunny Mills
Diane Elze
Avis Loring
Nicole d'Entremont
Jennifer Tarling
Sparky
Martha Lunney

Dance at Cornerstones, the Laver-
der Caucus of the Sara Orne Jewett
Society is sponsoring a dance on
Oct. 16th at 8:00pm, 54 Cumberland
st., Brunswick.



Four white female kittens with a cute
little black spot on their head and
tail need a warm, loving home. Well-
adjusted, warm and cuddly. Call their
purrson at 283-0044, Saco. Ask for Mary.

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one acre. Reasonable rent plus share
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to Augusta, Lewiston, Brunswick. Call
Carol at 737-8161.

The Fun & Bonding Task Force is spon-
soring an outing to the White Mountains
in Dalton, N.H. the weekend of October
8-10. We will be staying in a cozy
farmhouse on lots of gorgeous land.
For more information on a totally re-
laxing weekend, call Ann, 772-3093.

ATTENTION WOMEN'S PUBLICATIONS
with whom we exchange newsletters.
Please note our change of address,
and correct it on your mailing list.
The Post Office does not forward mail
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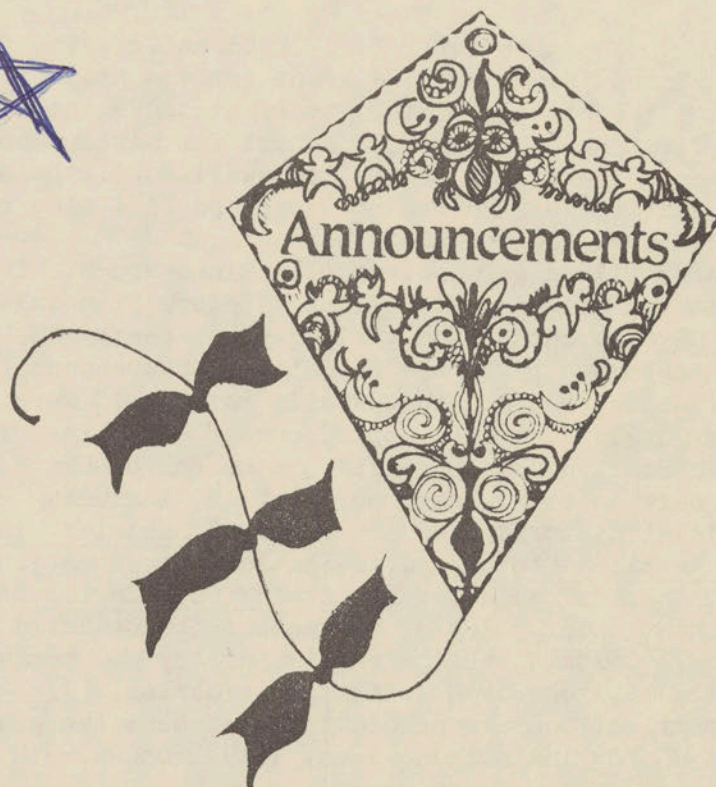
IF YOU ARE MOVING, please-please-please
let us know your change of address. Every
newsletter that comes back to us costs us
25¢ and we cannot afford that. The news-
letters are not forwarded in a bulk mailing.

In February 1982, an organization was formed in Maine to work against the Human
Life Amendment (HLA) and other similar amendments and bills. The Alliance to
Preserve Reproductive Choice is a coalition of individuals and organizations
determined to protect women's rights to reproductive freedom. The Alliance vows
to stop any proposed legislation or amendment to the federal or state constitution
that would deny women reproductive choice. The Alliance will work in three ways:

- 1) We will educate the public so that citizens are aware of the threats to
their rights.
- 2) We will try to persuade public officials to uphold constitutional rights
to reproductive choice.
- 3) We will work in elections in Maine to elect candidates to Congress and state
offices who will protect our constitutional rights.

Regional coordinators for the Alliance are: York - Paula France, 967-4043;
Cumberland - Merrie Allen, 774-7789; Bath/Brunswick - Ruth Irwin, 729-1413; Central
Maine - Kathy Martin, 293-2698; Eastern Maine - Marty Williams, 288-5343. The
Alliance can also be reached by writing P.O. Box 7512 DTS, Portland, Maine 04112.

The Alliance and the Mount Desert Island Chapter of NOW are sponsoring an Educa-
tional Symposium on Reproductive Rights at the Bar Harbor Congregational Church,
October 2, 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. The plans call for several guest speakers, a film,
and a fund raising luncheon.



The Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the funding arm for national public television, has awarded a grant for the production of a documentary film on the hidden history of the gay rights movement prior to the 1970s. This marks the first major public TV support for a film concerned with Lesbian and gay issues. The film, "Before Stonewall," will be offered for presentation over the stations of the PBS network, and will also be available for theatrical, educational and community screenings.

Using filmed personal recollections and archival materials culled from the media and private collections, "Before Stonewall" will delve into the origins and development of the early gay movement. The project was initiated almost two years ago by Robbie Rosenberg, independent filmmaker and coproducer of the anti-sexist music album, "Walls to Roses," working in conjunction with filmmaker Greta Schiller, coproducer of "Greetings from Washington, D.C.," and gay historian John D'Emilio. A number of historians and humanities scholars are serving as advisers to the film, including Michelle Cliff, Third World feminist historian and co-editor of Sinister Wisdom; Jonathan Katz, author of Gay American History; Joan Nestle of the Lesbian Herstory Archives; Julia Penelope, co-editor of The Coming Out Stories; Mirtha Quintanales, Latina feminist anthropologist and member of the Third World Women's Archives; and Beverly Smith, lesbian-feminist writer and activist and founder/director of Boston's Black Women Artists Film Series.

Contributions are needed to supplement the grant. The project can be contacted c/o Middlemarch Films, 1619 Broadway 9th Floor, New York, N.Y. 10019.

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ON HIS-STORY

A fifteenth-century volume on the activities of witches offered reasons why women were more likely than men to become servants of the devil:

"Women are more gullible, women are more impressionable, women are feebler in both mind and body, women are insatiable in their carnal lust and, of course, women have slippery tongues." A century later, England had both a legal definition of a witch - "a person who hath conference with the Devil, to consult with him or to do some act" - and a strict death penalty.

Alice Samuel lived in Warboys, England, where local children accused various townspeople of witchcraft. Samuel, a poverty-stricken old woman of 76, was one of their special targets. At her trial she claimed to be pregnant - but the judges were not moved. She, her husband, and her daughter, were all sentenced to the gallows; she died in 1593.

Elizabeth Demdike, it was alleged, headed a coven of thirteen like-minded souls and "brought up her owne Children (and) instructed her Graundchildren ...to bring them to be Witches." Demdike, eighty years old and blind, died in prison; ten of her alleged followers were executed, after a trial that lasted two days in Lancashire, England, in 1612.

Alison Balfour, believed to be a "notorious witch" in Scotland, was burned at the stake around 1596. Her husband and daughter were also tortured, the seven-year-old with thumbscrews.

"The figures of scholars estimating the number of witches put to death vary enormously, from 30,000 to several million, and it is really impossible to know, given the records of the times, but it is clear that substantial numbers were put to death." Matilda Joslyn Gage, Woman, Church and State.

Hetti Lezbi Comes Home

Hetti-Lezbi is back, after an extended vacation in which she travelled around the world to various het-lez-bi communities, where she was subsequently kicked out of all. Now, back in the bosom of Portland, she will resume her involvements with the Newsletter Task Force members, the nature of which we won't reveal.

DEAR HETTI-LEZBI:

I'm going to the doctor's next week for the first time since I've "come out." I'm afraid she's going to ask me all kinds of questions, like - what method of birth control I'm using, and whether or not I have pain during intercourse. I feel I should tell her that I'm a Lesbian, but I am afraid of how she'll react. What should I do????

Scared in Scarborough

Dear Scared:

It's important for you to share your sexual preference with your doctor, both for your own self and to raise your doctor's consciousness. However, timing is very important. Don't do it while she's inserting the speculum. Good luck.

Hetti

DEAR HETTI:

I'm so glad you're back. I've been waiting over a year to ask you this question. There's been no one else to talk to about this. I've been lovers with a woman for about a year. She's one of those back-to-the-land, natural types, and I'm into high-tech. I love my vibrator and I haven't dared incorporate it into our lovemaking. I'm afraid she'll be turned off if I turn it on. But, I'm really getting bored with our sex life. What should I do?

Vibrating in Vinalhaven



Dear Vibe:

You can reach me at 888-6969.

With anticipation,

Hetti

OCTOBER

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|--|---|--|---------------------------|----------|---|--|
| | | | | | 1  | 2 |
| | | | | | Judy Sloan 7:30 pm State Street Church | Reprod. Rights Symp Bar Harbor See announcements |
| 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| | 7pm Fem. Spiritual Community St. St. Church Volleyball 7:30-9 YWCA | | Volleyball 7:30-9 YWCA | | Dalton N.H. Outing - Fun! Fun! ← call Ann 772-3093 | |
| 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 |
| Holly Near Concert Lewiston, ME call 784-2361 Outing → | 7pm. Fem. Spiritual Community St. St. Church | | Volleyball 7:30-9 YWCA | | NEWSLETTER DEADLINE Editorial mtg. 772-3457 | Dance at Cornerstones 8pm - see announcements |
| 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 |
| | 7pm. Fem. Spiritual Community St. St. Church Volleyball 7:30-9 YWCA | | Volleyball 7:30-9 YWCA | | | |
| 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |
|  Halloween Party call 772-3457 000000... 31 | 7pm Fem. Spiritual Community St. St. Church Volleyball 7:30-9 YWCA | Gr. Pt. H. NOW 7pm. People's Bldg. | Volleyball 7:30-9 YWCA | | | |

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explains the
nature of reality



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Friday, October 1

7:30 p.m.

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doesn't care

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The deadline for the November issue is October 15. No particular theme.

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