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Leathersex World Under the Microscope

Urban Aboriginals: A Celebration of Leathersexuality

Geoff Mains
Gay Sunshine Press, San Francisco, 1984
187 pp. Illustrated, \$8.95

Reviewed by Michael Bronski

Urban Aboriginals is an important new book which attempts to survey, analyze and understand what is commonly called sadomasochism (s/m). Although there have been more and more magazine articles — usually from a very personal perspective — on the topic, this is perhaps one of the only books which attempts a wide scale, in-depth discussion of the topic. (Michael Grumley's 1977 *Hard Corps* is a fine survey of the scene, if somewhat cursory and anecdotal, but it attempts none of the breadth or depth of Mains' book.) Ambitious in scope, full of detail and information, *Urban Aboriginals* presents us with such a wealth of material that it feels weightier and more full than its scant 200 pages.

The very topic of leather, sexuality, s/m (and all of the attendant topics such as piss, fisting, bondage, scat, whipping, domination/submission and role-playing) is likely to raise both eyebrows and hackles. Mains has gone even further and has filled the book with postulations, suppositions and theories which will engender even more controversy. No mere "apology" for this radical sexual behavior to the more vanilla sex world, Mains has fit together a closely argued, elaborately constructed scheme which places this behavior in a biological and cultural context. There is much to disagree with here, but there is also much that informs, provokes and enlightens.

Before I get to the disagreements, there is certainly call for praise. Mains has approached his topic from an anthropological stance and views this sub-culture — which he called "leather," rather than the more common term "s/m" — as a community which has its own institutions, customs, laws, affect, and philosophy/spirituality. Within this community of radical sexuality, people play out games, relationships, scenes and experiences which totally engage their minds, bodies and very beings. By mixing explicit sexual descriptions — some of which function as great pornography — and analysis, Mains has managed to bring to life and examine the very core of the leather community. His basic theory is that all of the many aspects of leather sex have profound meaning and effect upon their practitioners. He discusses pain/pleasure in complex medical/biological terms and explains how and why bodies respond to extreme stimuli. He approaches role-playing in terms of ritual psychodrama, and examines bondage as a method of meditation. But beneath all of these discussions there is a call for people to discover the expansiveness of human feeling and behavior; to try and find the animal nature which is hidden, repressed, in all humanity.

But leather (and all that it entails) is not just a way to have fun. Mains carefully details the psychological and even spiritual effects it produces. It can be a way of dealing with the stress of everyday life, it can force you to examine and re-evaluate the concerns and priorities of your life, it can also lead to a state of transcendence usually associated with Eastern religions or the more mystical aspects of Western religion. Leather is not just what you do on a Saturday night, but a lifestyle, a way of looking at and dealing with the world.

Most of Mains' arguments are persuasive and overall the work is a good, solid approach to

understanding and delineating a generally unspoken area of sexuality. He never falls into the trap of trying to play down or make acceptable the harder-to-deal-with aspects of the sex-play (piercing, shit-eating, whippings which draw blood). He is always respectful of the sexuality and the role it plays in his life and in the lives of the men he speaks about. In fact, if the book did nothing else it would be a fine account of the place of sexuality in people's lives. But along with all of this there are also some arguments and suppositions with which I am uncomfortable.

Mains' view of the leather world as a close knit (although filled with vast differences) community begins as a good metaphor for his discussion, but I'm uncertain if this hypothetical community exists with such clear boundaries in the real world. Towards the end of the book some of the men that Mains has spoken to complain of the number of amateurs who are drawn to their world: "people who wallow in its opportunities for pleasure but know little of its feeling, for limits, its attitudes, and its perspectives." Viewed this way the leather world begins to sound like a closed club. While there is a clear need for any outlaw sexuality to have its own defined space, there also has to be room in that space for newcomers, acolytes, and people who may eventually decide they do not want to stay. To define yourself so tightly as to discourage all but those whom you decide to let in is to discourage growth. And if what Mains calls "leather space" has any radical social potential, it is to be a vanguard, a cutting edge, for new approaches to both sexuality and life.

There are many approaches that could be taken in discussing leather. Mains has chosen to explain himself, and the world, in biological terms. He discusses in detail the effect pain has upon the body and the mind, how the body is able to change pain into pleasure and

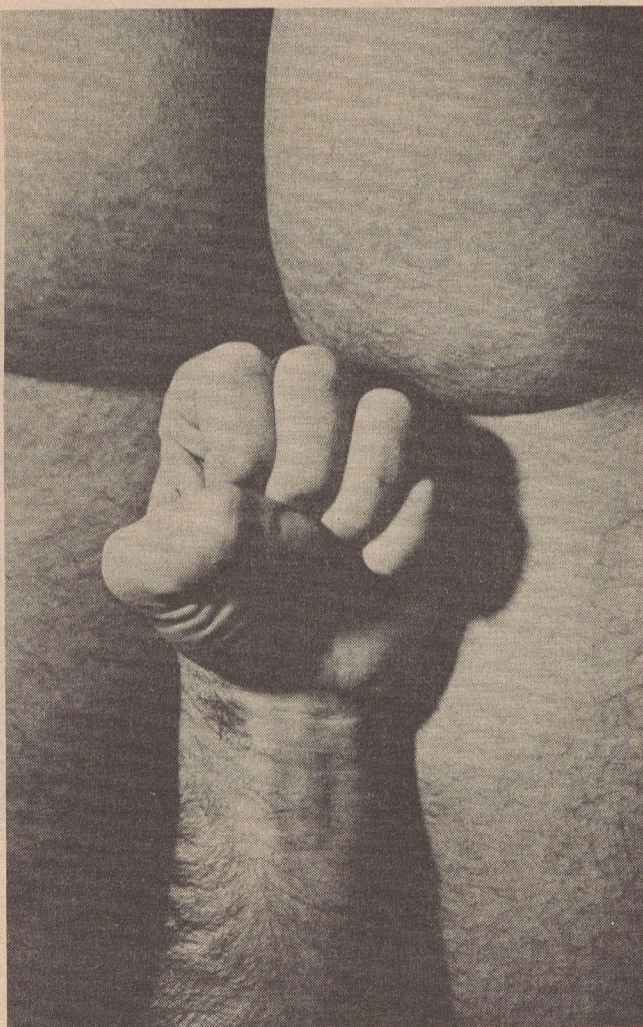
how the brain is able to expand — chemically and electrically — and move itself and the body to new vistas. Much of this material is fascinating (although some is so thorough it was tough going for someone like myself who barely passed biology and failed chemistry in high school). It is also important because there is so little written about how sexuality physically affects our bodies and how we can use and control that. But as a scientist Mains leans a little too heavily, for my thinking, to sociobiology. Although he never denies the effect of politics, culture or social structures upon the individual, he places the greatest weight, with some reservations, on biological and genetic factors determining behavior: "... I argue for the existence of animal-derived motivations within human nature that vary genetically from individual to individual ... Thus a person can inherit a combination of genes that create a strong urge to dominate." While it is true that Mains has proper qualms about the potential misuse of scientific evidence and cites S.J. Gould's excellent *The Mismeasurement of Man*, his strong sociobiological bias comes through. And although all of the scientific data he presents is very interesting, many times it feels out of proportion to the other, more cultural, data he might present.

This tangentially approaches another problem with the book. Mains states again and again that one of the main reasons to engage in leathersex is because it is pleasurable. But much of his analysis, and evidence, is concretely presented as a scientific study of opioids, sensors, and nerve fibers. Pleasure is conceived of as a purely physical entity, physically induced and experienced. There is very little discussion of the imagination and of the expanding capabilities of the mind to create and re-create pleasure. Concurrent with this are several statements which imply, indirectly, that Mains is somewhat suspicious of unbounded pleasure. After the discussion of the novices who "wallow in [s/m's] opportunities for pleasure," Mains then goes on to comment: "The transition to uncontrolled indulgence within leather is reflective of a similar trend within the Gay community over the past decade of its liberation." Perhaps caught up with the joys of created tensions, Mains has taken a dimmer view of unalloyed, outright, unbounded pleasure. His urging that the body be better understood in order to experience it within wider boundaries is well taken, but the same is also true of the mind and the imagination. By relying primarily on scientific data, Mains has ignored the other aspects of human existence and capabilities for pleasure.

There are other smaller quibbles with some aspects of the book. I think Mains underestimates the use of drugs among leatherpeople, possibly because they are not really essential to the sheer physical highs the body itself can produce. And at times I think he has a love/hate relationship with certain aspects of Western religions, admiring the discipline they encourage to promote transcendence, while at the same time distrusting their basic, repressive tenets. And finally, there is an attitude which pervades sections of the book and seems to indicate that he views leather activity as more therapeutic than fun. "Leather is another form of the human potential movement," states one of the men he speaks with. And while Mains does argue with him, this is a boldly stated view of a theme which does run deeply through Mains' examples and analysis.

There is so little written about sexuality, and about radical forms of sexuality, that it is a joy to have a book as well-informed and provocative as *Urban Aboriginals*. I do not agree with everything Mains writes, but these

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Barnard Conference Revisited

The Discourse and the Action

Pleasure and Danger: exploring female sexuality

Carole S. Vance, editor
 Routledge & Kegan Paul, Boston, 1984
 \$11.95, 462 pages

Reviewed by Janice Irvine and Sue Hyde

Two and a half years later, the infamous Barnard sex conference still marks time for us, like a Woodstock/watershed in our community. Lesbians interested in issues of sexuality ask each other, "Were you there?" Many women outside of New York City had little sense of its happening, much less what would happen there. Even out in the rural boondocks, lesbians lusted for it, but only after the fact.

In 1982, one of us had just begun a dissertation on sexuality and so, hopped an obscenely early bus to New York. Staggering toward the conference site, she saw women leafletting conference-goers and headed toward a table with nice-looking T-shirts that read "For a Feminist Sexuality" on the front. "I'm for that," she thought and pulled out some money to buy one. She stopped in mid-purchase when she noticed the shirt's backside: "Against S/M." She hustled off, only to be swept up in what turned out to be one of the most contentious meetings the feminist movement would see. For an unsuspecting out-of-towner, it was an often confusing, but never boring, day.

For example, a speaker at an afternoon workshop put aside her prepared speech to deliver an impassioned monologue on her sexual proclivities, as though the audience opposed her. Our conference-goer was prompted to think, "I don't care what this woman does in bed. Why is she so mad at me about it?" In retrospect the speaker's level of anger and defensiveness made sense, given the attacks by Women Against Pornography on her sexuality. But at the time, our conference-goer had been looking forward to the presentation, and wanted a more detailed and reasoned explanation of why she wouldn't be hearing it.

Much of the information about the conference that filtered out to those who weren't there had to do with the controversies that arose over porn, S/M and correct sex. Although a significant amount of criticism in the book and at the conference was directed toward WAP's analysis of pornography and sex, *Pleasure and Danger* reveals a much richer conference agenda and addresses many more topics than pornography and sado-masochism.

The book reflects the spark of radical thinking about sex in a self-consciously feminist context, which at the conference was juxtaposed with conference protesters clamoring for censorship in the name of feminism. The polarization so evident at that conference is visible two and a half years later in the anti-porn/anti-censorship skirmishes over pornography legislation. And many "alums" of the Barnard conference are still engaged in a vigorous struggle over definitions of appropriate sexuality.

Recent sex dialogues that have been distilled into SM or pornography have short-circuited our earlier discussions that included butch/femme, body image, teen-aged sexuality and disability. The publication of *Pleasure and Danger* shatters such narrow conceptualizations. It also contributes to the creation of a more precise sexual vocabulary, described by Esther Newton and Shirley Walton in "The Misunderstanding," which takes into account the difference between the persons we must be to function in the world and what pleases and excites us in sex.

A recurring theme of the possibilities for both pleasure and danger in sex unifies the book. Amber Hollibaugh sums this up in her closing address:

Our collective fear of the dangers of sexuality has forced us into a position where we have created a theory from the body of damage done us. We have marked out a smaller and smaller space for feminists to be sexual in and few or actual ways for physical feelings to be considered "correct."... We have accepted a diminished set of alternatives and become paralyzed by the fear.

But there is another way that's more difficult and demands we take a riskier stance to define and act on our desires. We can begin to claim our right to fight, to experiment, to demand knowledge and education about sex. We can begin in another spot, saying that there is too much we don't know yet to close any doors that a woman enters to try and capture her sexual feelings. We can say that our sexuality is more complex than the things that have been done to us and that we gain power through our refusal to accept less than we deserve. We



from Bette Gordon's film *Variety*

can dare to create outrageous visions. [pages 406-407]
 The power of this book comes with its acknowledgement of the real and potential damage women have experienced in sex while it legitimizes the compelling visceral, and kinky, sex many of us like. It encourages further exploration.

In her introductory essay, editor Carole Vance acknowledges the problem of women's status as an "understudied group." She invites both careful and far-flung conversation about sex and difference, and urges us to resist making generalizations based on an incomplete dialogue.

Presenters at the conference and contributors to the book are predominantly sex radicals and socialist feminists, with academics outnumbering artists and writers. Roughly half of the women in the book may be familiar to readers who keep up with current feminist and gay periodicals as well as the latest discourse on sex and sexuality. But by no means is the book limited to academic papers; artists and poets get down and dirty with aesthetic visions of the erotic frontier.

A few essays in this book are too much rooted in the academy. Both Hortense J. Spillers and Kaja Silverman employ an abstract and philosophical style of writing and thinking that may obscure their message for some readers. Ironically, Spillers' thesis that Black

women are the missing persons in the sexual discussion is put forth in a long esoteric piece that does little to rectify the problem she so rightly identifies. Dorothy Allison, in "Public Silence, Private Terror," provides a refreshing antidote:

In all questions about sex, it is the everyday life that interests me most. All the impassioned rhetoric serves no purpose but greater obscurity, if it does not originate and flow from an examination of the specific — how we all actually live out our sexuality [p. 108]

Pleasure and Danger reads like a chorus rather than a series of solos. Again and again, the writers call for an end to our silence on the subject of sex, more experimentation and less judgment, more tolerance and less prescription. They support the notion that sexuality is socially constructed and weave this theme throughout the book, whether the specific subject is body image, adolescent sexual behavior, butch/femme roles, SM or abortion rights activism.

The importance of this constructivist perspective, as opposed to a theory of sexual essentialism which posits sexuality as biologically determined, is that it allows us to think about sex within a social, historical and cultural context. We can ask questions which recognize the importance of our sexual preference, our class, our race

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Blacks & Jews: Vulnerability & Values

Yours in Struggle
Three Feminist Perspectives On Anti-Semitism and Racism

Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Barbara Smith

Long Haul Press, Brooklyn, New York
1984, 233 pages, \$7.95

Reviewed by Malkah Barrsey Feldman

Yours in Struggle brings us three feminist essays on racism and anti-Semitism. Minnie Bruce Pratt, Barbara Smith and Elly Bulkin take us on an in-depth journey towards connections and possibilities. All three essays are moving in their levels of honesty, vulnerability and pain. This is a provocative book that reflects the feminist movement's search to become a force capable of moving society forward. While laying out a path for us, the book also reflects how far we still must go. And while the essays push open new progressive territory for us, they also leave closed certain other areas. All in all, the book is so very important, needing only for the movement to take up these issues more deeply, more thoroughly.

In the first essay, Minnie Bruce Pratt, a white woman, describes growing up in the South where "...Laura Cates, a Black and a servant, was responsible for me; that I had walks with my father because the woods were 'ours' by systematic economic exploitation, instigated at that time, by his White Citizens Council." In coming to understand her family, her father who was "in the grip of racial, sexual and cultural fears," Pratt realizes she must examine racist ideology within herself. Embarking on a journey to learn the truth about her history, she uncovers the "voices of Black men and women who come out of their graves to tell me...[of] the beatings, rapes, murders...[in their attempt] to secure redistribution of the land and freedom."

This essay, "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," is an account of her struggle to wrench herself free from the all-encompassing racist indoctrination that white people in North America are taught. Her work points out to us all what white people must be doing if we are ever to break

free from racist ideology. Dealing with internalized racism and anti-Semitism is difficult for us because we often don't realize how much it has consumed us. I could relate closely with Pratt's stories. When I became honest about my racism, I was shocked by the impact it has had and continues to have on my life — shocked at how this un-noticed racism had rendered me incapable of being a full human being and had taken me so far from the progressive person I had sought to be.

One of the things that bothered me about this essay is the way it sometimes obscured class issues. By stating, "...Today the economic foundation of this country is resting on the backs of women of color...and in the Third World countries..." she overlooks the reality that men of color are in a similar position economically as well. In fact, it is people of color who together form the cornerstone of the most exploited labor, along with many poor whites. Without understanding this reality, Pratt fails to see the similarity in struggle and our movement's potential allies.

While the Middle East is discussed, not enough attention is paid to the overwhelming forces of anti-Arab racism. Anti-Semitism is used in relation to Jewish people only. In looking at the Middle East, Pratt describes a "theology-shaped U.S. foreign policy" and doesn't discuss the imperialist nature of the Israeli role in that area. The fact that the Palestinians have been stripped of their land and denied the most basic human rights is not discussed. Can any serious discussion of racism and anti-Semitism afford this kind of silence?

Her section on fears is so true. I know how scary it is to stand up to the men of our culture and demand that they "do not do...violence in our names." How many of us get held back due to this well-taught fear? Her writing on white privilege or "gains" was quite good too. How much do we lose if we dare to remove ourselves, at a deep level, from the frameworks of this system? While Minnie Bruce Pratt lost her children because of her lesbianism, all white people stand to lose the material security and protection of white society if we stand in solidarity with people of color.

Barbara Smith opens her essay with honesty and vulnerability. She exposes the internalized effects of anti-Jewish racism, so prevalent in our society. She also opens this section with her pain and ambivalence about

writing this kind of an essay, of putting herself in the position where "...by racist tradition...Black people repeatedly have to teach white people about the meaning of oppression." She exposes the fear and the potential of losing political support and understanding from other women of color for participating in writing with white women about racism.

In "Love-Hate Relationship," Barbara Smith explores the Black/Jewish women relationship, our similarities and our differences. In our similarities, Smith describes how our two groups are culturally outside the mainstream and how neither of us fit into prevailing standards of what is considered beautiful in this society. While what Smith describes here is true and can easily be felt between us, it is rarely experienced. For the most part, the majority of Black and Jewish women are totally divided by the effects of classism and racism in our society.

Also discussed are our differences. Barbara Smith brings out the fact that while racism has locked Black people (and all people of color) into the bottom rung of our society, anti-Semitism has not interfered with Jewish people's ability to move from the poorer sectors to the middle classes. The effects of racism upon people of color in our society are so quantitatively different from the effects of anti-Semitism upon white Jews.

Why have many white Jewish women tried to make these two oppressions so similar? And why have many white Jewish women focused on the anti-Semitic remarks of women of color in ways that are out of proportion to the anti-Semitism being displayed by white women? In thinking about these issues, I could not help recognizing the similarity of responses between the feminist community and the mainstream community. I'm reminded of the Jesse Jackson presidential campaign and the way he was hounded and smeared by the media because of one anti-Semitic comment. Even after Jackson apologized and called for a coming together of the Black and Jewish communities, the attacks against him raged on. Meanwhile we had such racist and anti-Semitic folks around like Ernest Hollings (past segregationist) and Ronald Reagan whose vicious and ignorant comments have never been condemned by the general main-

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Archetypes of Age and Youth

The Smile of Eros

John Coriolan

Gay Sunshine Press, San Francisco, 1984
191 pp., \$7.95

The Heart of a Distant Forest

Philip Lee Williams

W.W. Norton, New York, 1984
221 pp., \$12.95

Reviewed by Donald Stone

Despite a certain surface similarity — each work relates the story of an older man's intense and turbulent involvement with a much younger male — these books could not be more different. Williams offers the diary of a retired history teacher, now in his seventies and dying of cancer. He has refused chemotherapy and retreated instead to a country cabin with the intention of reflecting on nature and preparing his end. Yet steadily he finds himself drawn into the lives of both an old sweetheart with whom a romance occurs, is consummated, and a wedding planned, and a young orphan named Willie, who becomes the protagonist's ward. With each, the diary records a stormy relationship as Andrew Lachlan only very gradually confesses to himself that in the past he has not loved well or many, and that in Willie he has found both the son he lost and himself as child: vital, healthy, allowed to expect a future. None of these admissions is easy and Lachlan often inflicts upon Willie and his fiancée the frustrations he experiences within himself.

The Smile of Eros portrays a younger adult (Gunnar is 42), successful in business, but more and more distanced from his wife and children and, worse still, overcome by a sense of "desolation." He submits to various homosexual encounters, always feeling detached and superior, always finding more "desolation" awaiting at the end of the physical high. Jed, an adolescent pizza parlor attendant, changes all that. From their first sexual adventure, Gunnar is smitten, only to discover that while he envisaged a total blending of souls, Jed appears awakened primarily to

the glories of Gunnar's gigantic cock.

If these two works prove to be so different, it is not just because one portrays a paternal relationship between man and boy; the other a gay romance. The works diverge because one attempts to explore the recesses of human emotion whereas the other is content to exploit stereotypical gay fantasies. To be fair, on occasion Coriolan seems concerned that the reader sense a tug in Gunnar between puritanical distaste for gay activity and distinct enjoyment of its pleasures. There is even a dramatic moment in which Gunnar determines to seek some understanding of gay men's fascination with large cocks. But when he approaches his intended informant, a well-known college professor, the event ends in a three-way, all questions forgotten, just as every other serious issue raised by the book eventually fades before renewed depiction of homosexual fun and games. From cover to cover, cock size defines what every gay man lives for and, given that Gunnar's predominant quality is his tool, no one is left unsatisfied. Moreover, in the tradition of *Coming Out* and *Kevin*, Jed proves to be remarkably talented, adapting with relative ease to Gunnar's world and possessing a better sense of the reality of interpersonal relationships than can be found in his adult lover.

Williams spares us such simple portraits. Willie's initial interest in schooling is not sustained. He will be himself, not the fulfillment of his teacher's aspirations. Lachlan is obliged to admit that he cannot change Willie, quite as the reader is forced to recognize that although Lachlan achieves greater self-awareness before he dies, his mortality constitutes a blunt reminder of the limits placed on human desire. We may be able to know more about ourselves, but such knowledge is not necessarily power. Coriolan leaves us with the lovers entwined, age, marriage, responsibilities effaced as if they had never existed. Neither of these books has startling revelations to offer, but it is interesting to see how by shifting his focus away from the crotch for most of his 200 pages, Williams has succeeded in telling us more about why we seek love and how it can be found than do any of Coriolan's contrived scenes of coupling.

But no matter. *The Smile of Eros* is a pseudo-serious piece of porn, complete with the requisite number of typos. (Italian is particularly ill-treated.

Imagine being told that Butterfly sang the famous aria "Un bel dei vedramo"! All is insubstantial escape to the land of the hung and the happy and it could be argued that we go too far to expect revelation or proofreading to accompany such titillation. Yet this is 1985 and further aspects of Coriolan's book merit a final comment.

At one moment Gunnar, about to spy on his beloved Jed Tadze, insists that his adventure is not a retelling of *Death in Venice*, a remark not without its ironic side. Aschenbach dies because his passion brings him to linger too long where the plague has broken out. In Gunnar's story, passion draws him into a world where everyone swallows cum, rubbers are unmentioned, and AIDS has yet to happen. Whatever Gunnar means by his disclaimer, death among his company cannot be long in coming. Or is the absence of AIDS here intended to be the ultimate new gay fiction? If Coriolan believes that gay men want to forget or pretend as well as fantasize, his rush to abet has taken escapist literature beyond the merely erotic. The excitement and the pleasure he so fully portrays can no longer be separated from certain risks of which he must be well aware. This fact is unsettling enough, but as we peruse *The Smile of Eros*, we discover that Coriolan has received support for his writing from no less a source than the federal government.

Just above the Library of Congress data, this sentence appears: "Publication of this book was made possible in part by 'a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.'" One would like to know on what basis this grant was made. It cannot have been for the profundity of the book's insights; it certainly cannot have been for the brilliance of its style which revels in multilingual pretension ("the normal let-down, the old tristesse"), the archaic ("athwart Gunnar's groin and belly"), and campy cutesh ("one hand on a swinging hip, Carmen-wise"). Whatever the reason, in an era when gays have had to fight to see that AIDS research is adequately funded, how disturbing to learn that another branch of the government has willingly underwritten publication of a book glorifying the insouciant performance of that act in which so many of our number have found their death.

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Hindoo Holiday, *An Indian Journal*

J.R. Ackerley
Penguin Books,
New York
1983 (1932)

J.R. Ackerley, although not well known to many Americans, is one of England's most respected writers. The author of only one novel, *We Think the World of You*, published in 1960, Ackerley was a prolific writer of autobiographies, journals and memoirs. Christopher Isherwood described Ackerley's *My Dog Tulip* as "one of the greatest masterpieces of animal literature."

Ackerley says of his own friendship with E.M. Forster: "the longest, closest and most influential of my life." So influential, in fact, that Forster encouraged Ackerley to take a position as private secretary and companion to the Maharajah of Chhattrpur in India. Thus begins *Hindoo Holiday*: a six-month journal of insights into the customs of India in the early 1920s. Ackerley's observations, simply and tenderly told in diary form, are of a gay maharajah and his secluded world. Ackerley records with intimacy and humor a man longing to be more than he is, wanting to be as great as the Roman kings he so admires. Well-read and educated, the maharajah tries to reach outside India for the recognition, honor and royalty he thinks he deserves.

Through Ackerley's sympathetic and affectionate recording, we see the limitations placed on the maharajah by duty and religion. Unable to travel, he tries to bring the outside world into his restrict domain, trying to "wine and dine" the western friendships he so much wants.

Taking Ackerley into his confidence, the maharajah reveals another part of himself by allowing him attendance into his world of young boys. The youngsters, dressed as Hindu gods, dance for their two-man audience the ancient stories of the god Siva, and even give an interpretation of the emperor Napoleon, while their ruler eagerly awaits the praise of his English guest. The maharajah ever seeks Ackerley's approval of a youngster's beauty, or advice on bringing a new boy into the household. Ackerley's observations are sometimes startling in their understanding.

Although the least known of his works (his most famous being: *My Father and Myself*, 1968), *Hindoo Holiday* is a fascinating, richly drawn tapestry, a "peep-hole" into a time and way of life now forgotten, and of a man Ackerley says only... "wanted someone to love him — His highness, I mean; that was the real need, I think."

— Thomas Hopkinson

Triangles

Ruth Geller
Crossing Press, 1984.

Of all the Jewish lesbian novels I have read, *Triangles* by Ruth Geller best portrays the complexities of this dual identity. It succeeds admirably on several themes: a loving, yet critical, presentation of the Jewish family; the realities of maintaining a long-term lesbian relationship; the effect of denial on people's lives; and the experience of anti-Semitism for American Jews. This is a lot for one novel to do, but it works.

Triangles is the story of Sonya "Sunny" Rosenthal, a working-class, Ashkenazi Jewish woman in her thirties who is having her first lesbian relationship. She has been denying her past, which includes a failed marriage and a child who drowned. In the course of the book, she is caught up in struggles with her family over her lesbianism, particularly when her straight brother gets involved with her lover.

Denial is a major theme of this novel. Truth between family members is denied in both the past and present. Sunny's relationship with her lover almost falls apart because of concealed truths. And, on a larger scale, the effect of the Holocaust on the family is denied, so that the pain of family members whose siblings and parents perished is ignored. At the end of *Triangles*, Sunny's family is just beginning to admit to their denial of family secrets in the United States, and perhaps from there they will go on to accepting more of their past. And Geller skillfully shows how honesty saves a lesbian relationship which has almost been poisoned by lies and denial.

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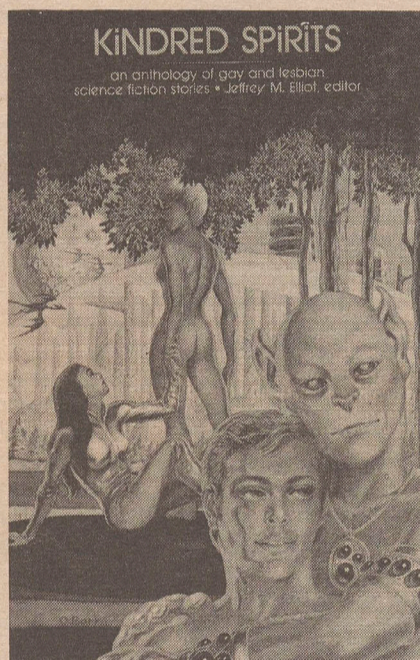
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The presentation of Sunny's working-class, New York Jewish family is wonderfully and excruciatingly familiar. There's a hilarious scene when Sunny's sister tries to tell the family about her protest vigil at the Seneca Army Depot. Her father interrupts with, "Do we have to talk about this now?" Sunny's sister replies, "Maybe if your generation had educated themselves and tried to understand and maybe stop all this when it began, I wouldn't have to be doing it now." But her father responds, "No one's telling you to do it." I know I've lived this scene many times, and Geller captures the tone and dialogue perfectly. She's also great at presenting the Yiddish dialect of her grandmother, a character so well-drawn — well, as my own grandmother would put it, "Soch a ker-ek-tuh, oy!"

Because it captures so well the mixture of love and judgment we feel for our families, I believe this novel will have universal appeal to all types of people, Jewish, non-Jewish, lesbian/gay and straight. I think it will be a very special experience for Jews who have been disgusted by the self-hating, anti-woman novels that have been touted as "the Great Jewish Novel in America." My dream is that *Triangles* will find as widespread a readership as another lesbian novel, *The Color Purple*, has found among Blacks and the general population. I hate to speak in such clichés, but *Triangles* is the Jewish lesbian novel I've been waiting for.

— Maida Tilchen



Kindred Spirits

Jeffrey M. Elliot, editor
Alyson Publications, Boston, 1984
\$6.95, 261 pages

In the so-called "golden era" of science fiction, gay/lesbian characters were treated as misfits, sociopaths, villains and "unnaturals" to be pitied and scorned. Gay characters were virtually all weak, effeminate snivelers out to harm the heroes of the story. Lesbians were invariably portrayed as massive, muscular Amazons with sadistic tendencies. As the world evolved, so too did the depictions of lesbians and gay men. They became "human," less stereotypical. At present great changes are taking place in the portrayal of same-sex love; however, there's still a long, long way to go. For every far-seeing author who writes about homosexuality in a realistic and sympathetic way, there's still one who unleashes homophobia upon the public through the stereotyped and hateful characterizations in his/her work.

Kindred Spirits explores the subject of same-sex love through the medium of science fiction-fantasy. This anthology is the first to deal exclusively with gay/lesbian subject matter. As a means of exploring alternatives of every sort, science fiction-fantasy has often been far ahead of other literary forms. The main premise of science fiction is to permit the exploration of areas beyond the so-called "norm" (if there actually is such a thing as a "norm"). The stories presented in *Kindred Spirits* convey varied expressions of homosexual love.

In "Vamp," author Mike Connor first states "perhaps not all art corrupts, but absolute art corrupts absolutely." "Vamp" relates the experiences of Dieter, a young, talented artist, as he begins work for K. Kinchon, an artist of worldwide repute. In this future North America, where the elite live and play in

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domed enclosures separate from the working classes, Dieter begins to study the art form of "beading." The "bead" is a tiny three-dimensional transmitter that can be put anywhere. In Dieter's first attempt, Kinchon places it on a man from the working classes, Coe. While studying the images of Coe produced by the "bead," Dieter slowly falls in love with him. The story explores the conflict Dieter feels. Should he stay with Kinchon and a virtually guaranteed life as a rich, glorified artist he has always yearned to be, or leave it all for a life of hardship, poverty and, perhaps, love? The author explores the gap between the degenerate, elitist society of the domes and the working population. He criticizes the world of luxury and ease that easily ignores the sufferings of the majority. Connors evokes images of apathy among the people of the domes, of an absence of any true feeling for life, for soul perhaps. His concern for the growing trend towards elitism in our own society is quite apparent. The parallels between the present high-technology society of the western hemisphere and his future world are many. His visions of a growing void between the haves and the have-nots also seems to grow closer and closer to fulfillment in our own time.

"Black Rose, White Rose," by Rachel Pollack, is a classic story of a love that perseveres despite all. White Rose is a beautiful young woman with "skin so white, whiter and softer than a flower, that everyone called her White Rose." White Rose's parents try to marry her off to a wealthy suitor but she is not interested. Her parents sell her as a kitchen maid. At a carnival she sees a woman with "skin blacker than the black between the stars. To watch her dance is to watch the darkness beyond the earth flicker into life." She is the Black Rose. The two become lovers until an evil magician sends Black Rose back to her far-off land. The rest of the story concerns the arduous journey of White Rose to find her.

All these stories are based upon the classic structure of the faerie tale and are highly enjoyable (and, yes, they end "happily ever after"). But they can provide much more than that. How many gay men and lesbians could have used these stories in their youth as a stepping stone to an understanding of themselves and their emerging sexuality? I for one know that identification with any positive homosexual role model would have spared at least a bit of the pain and guilt I always felt.

The other stories in this anthology run the gamut of homosexual experiences: a man faced with the question of who there is to love when you're the last human alive on earth, a future North America where lifestyle variations of all sorts are expected, a world of women waiting for the impending arrival of the first men on the planet in centuries, and an analysis of the unrealized sexual yearnings in all of us.

Kindred Spirits contains a grab-bag of stories concerning homosexuality. The variety of the stories is a sign of the diversity within the gay/lesbian experience. Some of the stories are pure fantasy; others explore plausible futures of humankind. The cohesive point of the entire collection is the relevance each has to today's society, gay and straight.

— Tim Broadbent

Hot Off The Presses

In literature, history and psychology, women's lives and concepts of women's lives, have become a major interest in the publishing world. Here are a few more titles to complete last month's note on new books about women.

In *Taking It Like A Woman* (Random, \$14.95) historian, socialist and feminist, Ann Oakley, takes a vigorous look at her own life and choices, and writes about what made her a feminist and a self-sustaining woman. The book is subtitled "A Personal History" but Oakley transcends that label and makes clear connections between the life and the mind, the politics and the feelings.

Adrienne Rich has a new volume of poetry, *The Fact of a Doorframe* (Norton, \$9.95). Except for 16 pages at the end, the rest of the 334 pages are reprints from earlier books: some of her best work, but all available in other editions.

In the critical, rather than creative, vein is Felicity A. Nussbaum's *The Brink of All We Hate: English Satires on Women 1660-1750* (University Press of Kentucky, \$15.00). Having the outward appearance of a dry academic tome, the book is actually a very readable, en-

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joyable examination of a brief section of English literature. Certainly not for those without any interest, but for anyone with a literary/historical bent, this book is well worth the time to read.

Less so is William H. Schurr's *The Marriage of Emily Dickinson* (University of Kentucky Press, \$22.00). As with almost all Dickinson studies, this one seems to be more about the author or the current political/academic climate than the "belle of Amherst" herself. By rearranging the poems in their (alleged) correct order, Shurr infers that Dickinson had a male lover and that they had a spiritual marriage which she documented in her poems. True or not, there are a lot more interesting Dickinson studies in existence. This one is only for Dickinsonophiles who have to read everything.

And if you are one of those people who have to read everything, there is *The Letters of Jean Rhys* (Viking, \$22.50). Rhys' novels are perfect expressions of a certain emotional attitude and detailed recreations of a historical time and place. Reading them creates the urge to want to know more about their author. *The Letters*, alas, are nowhere near as interesting as the novels. We do get to see another side of Rhys, which is nowhere evident in the fiction — a dreary, work-like attitude which belies the faded, expiring tone of the novels. But the contrast is not enough to make the whole volume interesting.

Jean Rhys was "rediscovered" several years ago. Now may be Elizabeth Stoddard's turn. *The Morgesons and Other Writings Published and Unpublished* has just been collected and published (University of Pennsylvania Press, \$10.95). Stoddard was a well-known, Victorian-American novelist. Praised in her day, she has fallen into the critical abyss. Her writing is striking and original; it must have seemed quite out of place in nineteenth century New England. Her concerns are social life and interpersonal relationships with a decidedly anti-establishment and pro-feminist slant. There is also a wealth of critical and bibliographic material in the volume to satisfy the scholar.

Scholars will also be interested in Juliet Mitchell's collected essays *Women: The Longest Revolution* (Pantheon, \$9.95). Writing on feminism, psychoanalysis and literature, Mitchell has her own special blend of traditional academic thought and radical new insights into her subjects. While some of her psychoanalytic theory may border on the staid and somewhat revisionist, her writings on political theory and especially on literature are incisive and commanding.

Mitchell's net looks particularly widespread next to Jack Zip's *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* (Bergin and Garvey, \$12.95). Tracing the fairy tale from its earliest sources to the present, Zips analyzes it as a tool for the socialization of female sexuality and the place of women in a male-centered (and violent) world. Never didactic and always readable, the book has a certain European marxist leaning which is perfectly palatable.

From analyzing fairy tales to fairy tale analysis, we get to *The Wendy Dilemma: When Women Stop Mothering Their Men* by Dan Kiley (Arbor House, \$15.95). A sequel to *The Peter Pan Syndrome* (about men who refuse to grow up), this book is filled with information for women who find that they are compulsive motherers. Simplistic, yet devoid of most psycho-babble, the book does make some good points. It is pop psychology with more than the usual basis in reality.

On a more serious note, although a lot less entertaining, is Edwin M. Schur's *Labeling Women Deviant: Gender, Stigma and Social Control* (Temple University Press, \$24.95). Very academic, this book provides a good spelling out of what most people who have thought about the topic already know — although now it is footnoted and cross-referenced.

The four essays in *Georg Simmel: On Women, Sexuality and Love* (Yale, \$20.00) are certainly provocative. Simmel, a turn-of-the-century German philosopher and socialist, tried to find the conditions that govern the contributions to culture along gender lines. Never falling into the commonplace assumptions which generally rule such discussions, Simmel broadened the discourse with theories, assertions and presumptions, many of which are not on target, but all of which are original and thought-producing.

— Michael Bronski

Lust, Guilt and Authentic Lesbian Lives

That's How It Was

Maureen Duffy
Hutchinson, Great Britain, 1962
reprint, Dial Press, 1983.

The Shelf

Kay Dick
Hamish Hamilton, Great Britain, 1984
distributed by David & Charles, Inc.

Born of Woman

Wendy Perriam
Michael Joseph Ltd, Great Britain, 1983
Saint Martin's Press, New York, 1983.

Reviewed by Andrea Freud Loewenstein

These three new or newly available novels by British women writers have in common a high level of craft. One doesn't wince or wish that an editor had stepped in. All three writers also deal with lesbianism. This is where the similarity stops.

Wendy Perriam's *Born of Woman*, a large, fat book by one of Britain's established novelists, is the story of the producing and selling of a best-selling novel and the impact this event has on the lives of the various people involved. Simple, plump, earth mother Jennifer is married to thin, sensitive and unstable Lyn, who is still under the cloud of his dominating mother (Hester) and aggressive half-brother (Matthew), an avaricious publisher. When Hester dies in her ancestral home in the symbolic north country, Jennifer unearths her diaries in the cellar. These juicy documents, which cover the personal and historical events of a century and are chock-full of recipes and household hints, are quickly spotted by Matthew as a money-maker. Jennifer, who desires nothing more than to move into the ancestral home, have babies, and can vegetables, is picked to be the straw author of the book, the one who will appear on television and at publicity tours, acting simple and feminine and making everyone concerned a lot of money. Needless to say, there are all sorts of repercussions.

The lesbianism comes in when Jennifer, frustrated by Lyn's refusal to make love and/or babies, gets it on with the 17-year-old, working-class au-pair girl, Susie, a nouveau-feminist who likes women as well as men. Poor irresponsible Susie, with her wimpy ways, synthetic food and clothing, rampant sexuality, and non-existent emotions, is an insult to both lesbians and the working class. Jennifer doesn't seem to like Susie that much — but she's turned on by the fact that she's pregnant, and by Susie's stories of making it with three men.

Jennifer traced the tiny bluish veins throbbing under Susie's skin. The nipples were hard and stiffening like her own. She was only excited because of Susie's baby — the fact and closeness of it, the thought of the man who had

put it there. One out of three — that made it more exciting... She wanted all of them — Oz and Lyn as well — all shooting sperm inside her, giving *her* a baby. [p. 209]

In the end, after helping Susie produce a baby she really wanted to abort, Jennifer predictably takes the baby and rejoins her husband. After a bout as a tramp in cold weather, he has discovered his manhood and is able to satisfy her once more. Long before that, anyway, Jennifer and the pregnant Susie had stopped making love.

"Well, I fell it's...bad for the baby. Not physically, but...you know — as if we're sort of...perverting it. [p. 247]

In her effort to understand "the whole awkward business of what she did with Susie" (p. 248), Jennifer figures out what lesbianism is really all about.

That was all they wanted really — comfort and affection — another body to cuddle up against, block out the anxieties. [p. 248]

The only thing I can find to praise about *Born of Woman* is that Perriam's female characters really enjoy sex. She isn't afraid to describe Jennifer's prolonged orgasms, copious bodily fluids, and generally flourishing sexuality, whether Jennifer is getting it on with a man, a woman, or herself. This may seem like a minor point, but it's actually quite rare, even in liberated modern novels.

Cass, the narrator of Kay Dick's thin, elegant novel, *The Shelf*, also enjoys good sex, but happily, the similarity ends there. *The Shelf* is a mildly epistolary novel in the form of a letter written by Cass to her friend Francis to explain the three love letters addressed to her found under the pillow of Anne, who has committed suicide. Cass, Francis and Anne are all upper-class British Catholics who, when they are in emotional difficulty, tend to go to a retreat — "our common shorthand for the rather luxurious establishment to which many 'creative' — in quotes, dear — Catholics go." (p. 6) Cass's tone throughout is controlled, witty and cynical.

Her lesbianism, despite her assertion that even as an adolescent she was "already perfectly in control of my emotional *ambiance*, able, quite spontaneously, to focus on either sex" (p. 15) is a given in this novel. Lesbian relationships are gracefully assumed, rather than being treated as either positive movements toward growth or negative aberrations. I found this (all too rare) assumption a real relief. The assumption, which frees Kay Dick from the necessity of having to establish that lesbians are really and truly capable of happy, long-term, and consistent relationships, also allows her to reflect in an unusually subtle manner on the state of lesbian love and its trappings. Thus Cass thinks about the experience of being fallen in love with by someone "not unattractive":

Even if one has no intention of responding, one is far too human not to feel rather pleased. Horrid to admit this; it's a gratification to know that one could if one wanted. I

believe Americans call it "taking a rain check". Rather exciting to have such a counter in one's pocket, rather like a gambler with a last lucky jeton. [p. 20]

When Anne falls in love with her, Cass's ironic disillusionment keeps her at a safe distance emotionally for some time. She objects to Anne's promiscuity, especially with men, and to Anne's passivity. "Had she ever chosen, I wondered. And now, it looked as though she had chosen me, if the intensity of her letters could be taken as valid." (p. 17) Anne tells Cass that none of the men have ever meant anything to her, that she has never loved before. Cass immerses herself in the sexuality of the love affair, but retains her distrust.

I was astonished at my surprise. I had not expected this exultant sensuality, nor had I expected I would feel so much pleasure in her. As I write there comes to me that anticipatory *frisson* which she always roused.... And the habit she had of suddenly opening her eyes and smothering me in their brilliant aura. Her memorable line of MacNeice comes to mind: *I shall remember you in bed with bright eyes.* [p. 23]

Cass's refusal to trust is not a happy one, and the distant upper-class tone of the book becomes an effective counterpart to its painful ending. It's as if the very restraint turned inward makes us more conscious of the pain and passion underneath.

The Shelf isn't a happy book, but in its elegant, finely wrought way, it does give a picture of lesbian love in some of its complexity, and certainly its physical passion. Cass tells Francis:

I think you will agree that it is right and renewing to remember acts of love because, in the relative brevity of our lives, there is not time enough for loving.... One should be less mean with one's memory of love, bring it out now and then, let it glow inside one as a positive element of experience to be cherished and grateful for.... [p. 23].

I couldn't agree more.

Unlike the other two books, Maureen Duffy's *That's How it Was*, an autobiographical first novel printed originally in 1962, doesn't contain scenes of overt sexuality, though it does share the easy, wonderful lesbian assumption of *The Shelf*. It is also a story of a passion, although a much happier one, between Paddy and her mother, Louie. This life-giving passion is lived out in physical conditions of extreme poverty and hardship, before, during, and after the Second World War. The world of Paddy and her mother could not be further from the luxurious world of the characters in *The Shelf*.

Louie, Paddy's mother, comes from a working-class East End of London family in which all the children die off, one by one, of tuberculosis. As Paddy describes it: "It was an enemy [Louie] kept at bay, with her only weapon, the will to live...." (p. 36)

Louie manages to stay alive in order to bring up her daughter and see that she will have a better life. In and out of the hospital, she is regarded as something of

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Discourse and Action

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a much broader range of issues. Two separate essays, "Fat and the Fantasy of Perfection" by Carol Munter and "The Myth of the Perfect Body" by Robert Galler, for example, speak to the salient issue for women of body image and the ways our own bodies can become our enemies rather than our instruments for living. Munter says:

I think that fat women — or all women — are always on the way from an awareness of limitation and imperfection, an awareness of many different needs and feelings which have been impossible to come to terms with in our positions as women. The impossibility derives from the fact that women are not given an arena in which to struggle and learn. We're taught to shape our bodies and not the world. If one feels powerless, imperfections and limitations loom enormous. Needs in search of fulfillment must be renounced. [p. 229]

Galler's essay on disabled women speaks further about the desexualization of women with physical differences, and by inference, all women whose bodies simply defy cultural expectations of "womanhood." She notes, "...the lack of 'perfection' is equated with the lack of entitlement to sexual life." (p. 168)

In effect, this book challenges the feminist movement to surrender definitions of politically correct and politically incorrect sex and sexuality. Muriel Dimen, in "Politically Correct? Politically Incorrect?" incisively examines the evolution and danger of moral judgments in the feminist movement. She peppers her piece with entertaining and candid anecdotes about women in various sexual and sensual situations and follows these with elucidating commentary. We recognized ourselves

when we explore what we want and how we want it. A theory of sexual constructionism points up the malleability of sexual desire and behavior and enables us to understand change and fluidity in our sexual lives.

Although uneven in quality, the book contains a handful of remarkable essays, nourishing and provocative to the reader. Carole Vance's introduction and epilogue, like a camera held up in front of the photographer's eye, draw into distant foci the theories and analysis expanded by the other contributors. And, like the Barnard conference itself, Vance constructs a framework, posing illuminating questions, leading reader and writer into previously unexplored territory. She notes:

Social movements, feminism included, more toward a vision; they cannot operate solely on fear. It is not enough to move women away from danger and oppression; it is necessary to move toward something: toward pleasure, agency, self-definition. Feminism must increase women's pleasure and joy, not just decrease our misery. It is difficult for political movements to speak for an extended time to the ambiguities, ambivalences, and complexities that underscore human experience. Yet movements remain vital and vigorous to the extent that they are able to tap this wellspring of human experience. Without it, they become dogmatic, dry, compulsive and ineffective. To persist amid frustrations and obstacles, feminists must reach deeply into women's pleasure and draw on this energy. [p. 24]

One of the most valuable functions of this book — as opposed to newspaper accounts of the conference — is its redistribution of the terms of sexual debate to include

in a hilarious description of crotch-watching, a habitual and private expression of sexual curiosity that neither of us had ever confided to the other. Dimen expresses her suspicion of sexual judgments, preferring to leave doors opened and unturned stones turnable.

The book leaves us, then, with its most important message: feminism must participate in and contribute to a broadening sexual agenda, a pyramid effect rather than a funnel effect. It is significant to us that some younger women of our acquaintance identify themselves as sexual radicals and sexual liberationists before they identify as feminists, as though feminism cannot accommodate their sexuality and pursuits of pleasure. If feminist theory can broaden the parameters of appropriate sexual dialogue and behavior, it will touch the lives of women currently shut out by a movement that simply does not help to answer their questions about sex.

In "Search for Tomorrow," Sharon Thompson poignantly describes the inadequacy of feminism for teenaged girls, struggling with the age-old heterosexual dilemmas of romance, sexuality and love. She says that as feminists, "we leave adolescence for girls...in perhaps a worse condition than we found it when we were ourselves taken with the fervor of feminism, and that is a grave betrayal, not only of feminism, but of women." The limits of sexual debate within the feminist movement are broadening. *Pleasure and Danger* provides both primary source material in the history of this debate and a powerful development of these crucial issues.

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Making Female Experience Sacred

Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy

Mary Daly
Beacon Press
1984

Reviewed by Sandra Karp

Pure Lust is the latest work by feminist philosopher Mary Daly. This new work advances the quest for a meaningful spiritual tradition rooted in woman-identified experience. Daly's intellectual journey continues a "coming out process" begun in *The Church and The Second Sex*, where she confronted the ideological and institutional discrimination toward women within Roman Catholicism. In *Beyond God the Father*, she challenged the very premise of male-identified religious tradition. In *Gyn/Ecology*, she began the preliminary task of describing the need and tools for creating a woman-identified spiritual tradition.

While utilizing the experiences and vocabulary of Catholic tradition, Daly's recognition of the redundancy of all patriarchal ideology makes her critique applicable to the totality of patriarchal culture. In *Pure Lust*, Daly utilizes the vocabulary of medieval Catholic theology as a starting point for the construction of a new spiritual system. The book echoes another medieval literary journey, that of Dante, in its description of the hellish sadostate of patriarchy, the purging use of intuitive virtues and vices, and the beatific vision of feminist belonging, befriending and bewitching.

Daly's style in *Pure Lust* deserves attention because it is an integral part of her technique of philosophical exposition. Daly deliberately uses language to challenge our perceptions and calls into question the very symbol system we use to define our experience. She begins an exposition by drawing upon a common patriarchal understanding of a word. She then broadens this understanding by drawing upon archaic and alternative usages of the term. The expanded comprehension arising from this process provides us with a recognition of the polarization of words implicit in patriarchal language. This process of exploring language follows the rhythm of the spiral. This rhythm begins with the common definition and expands in a circular direction, arriving at a new and deeper point of comprehension.

Daly's technique depends upon the appreciation of the definitional and connotative quality of language. She uses language both to limit and engender associations. Daly's spiraling technique is difficult. I often found it layered rather than spiraling, inhibiting her presentation rather than facilitating it. The variety of

new and rehabilitated vocabulary often seemed arbitrary, without internal logic. Her rehabilitation of the word "virtue" derived from the Latin *vir* for man seemed a disingenuous way to incorporate the medieval philosophical vocabulary. Nonetheless, Daly's style does give her work an unmistakable identity challenging the traditional academic presentation of philosophical exposition. Her search for an adequate vocabulary of female experience is both necessary and courageous.

Pure Lust is a double-edged analysis of the evolution of feminist spiritual system. In *Pure Lust* Daly attempts to pare away the accretions of patriarchal ideology and reveal the fundamental elements of emerging feminist philosophy. This work is not an academic exercise but rather a strategy in the struggle between feminism and patriarchy. Daly views patriarchy as the source of social evil, defined in the oppression of women. All specific experiences of oppression derive from the denial of women's autonomy, volition and self-sufficiency. The stakes of this struggle are apocalyptic, resulting in the armageddon of patriarchy or of the global social system.

The antidote to patriarchy is the continued evolution of a feminist philosophical vision. Daly sees this emerging in the "Race of Lusty Women" who are participating in the "ancestral memories" of biophilic be-ing (life-loving transcendence). This race utilizes the fury engendered by patriarchal atrocities to cut through patriarchal ideology in order to name the sensory, social and institutional experiences of women. Armed with this new vision, the possibility of the unfolding of a unified spiritual-material sense of self engenders a new connection with other women and nature.

Daly believes that patriarchy has reified (objectified), displaced, plasticized, and rehabilitated women's experience in order to legitimize patriarchal philosophy and institutions. This has resulted in the detachment of women from their own "homeland, customs and traditions," leaving them homeless and disoriented. Patriarchy has robbed women of their ability to name, communicate and bond on the basis of their experience. *Pure Lust* is an attempt to do just this: name, communicate and bond in female experience.

In the first section of *Pure Lust*, Daly identifies the "prevailing and legitimizing ideology" of patriarchy as that of sado-masochism. This ideology engenders sensory distortions in the practices of asceticism and lying. Through such practices, sense distortions acquire a reality that legitimizes pornography and the defilement of nature. The process of sensory distortion focuses obsessively on purity, obscuring accountability and rendering women scapegoats and tokens. In this manner, there is a distraction from the actual atrocities, which are reinterpreted through lofty scholarly rationalizations. Women experience this

sensory distortion in their "inability to feel rage against the perpetrators of atrocities against women."

The distortion of sense experience and the substitution of archetypes homogenize female experience. Patriarchy guides this process through the use of confessionalism, robbing a woman of her private thoughts and feelings. In the absence of a self-identified female experience, women's psychic void is filled with the mediation of male presence which becomes institutionalized. Daly believes that only in woman-identified self-identification can the male presence in women's life be banished.

In the second section of *Pure Lust*, Daly is concerned with specific dislocation imposed by patriarchy and alternatives for understanding and changing behavior. Initially she focuses on the disjunction between intuitive and logical reasoning. This disjunction results in the substitution of goals and objectives for causality. In shifting the locus of understanding to ends, patriarchy rejects the ethics of means. The result of this disjunction is the logic of blaming the victim. Only in the unity of intuitive and cognitive knowledge is it possible to comprehend the experience of women's lives.

Another dislocation caused by patriarchy is the corruption of intuitive knowledge. Intuitive knowledge is supplied by passions (emotions) which have causality and direct action. Under patriarchy the passions become plasticized, that is, deprived of causality and action (depression, guilt, anxiety, etc.), and potted, that is, dwarfed and expressed in horizontal violence. Daly recommends the cultivation of virtuous passions (good habits) and the rejections of vices (bad habits), which are both defined in the struggle against patriarchy.

The operation of this new moral order is an inversion of the patriarchal rules. This inversion has occurred because under patriarchy women are a "touchable caste" forbidden to "touch" — sexually, emotionally and socially — with each other. Women take on this attribution of sin, feeling polluted by their own status. Daly believes that only in rejecting the fundamental taboo against female touching can women transform caste into an allegiance to our own kind.

Daly proposes that feminists acquire the sin of self-love that leads to the contempt of God. She recommends a list of old virtues transformed by new definitions. These virtues become the building blocks of a new self-conscious desire for social change.

In the final two chapters, Daly focuses her concern on action within the web of social relationships. She rejects the patriarchal notion of belonging which confers a prefabricated collective identity upon women. The patriarchal devaluation of female experience has narrowed the scope of women's lives, forcing many to exchange autonomous creativity for social inclusion.

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Authentic Lesbian Lives

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a medical miracle by condescending authorities who never think of giving any more help than that needed for survival. Though Louie must literally work herself to death, she sees that her daughter is safe and well educated, and fills her growing-up years with the knowledge of being loved and deeply valued that Paddy will always keep. In turn, Paddy is her mother's lover, her nurse, and her fierce protector. Together they survive a bombing which buries them both in rubble and kills their nearest relative, the intrusion of a stepfather and his family, and Paddy's steady climb, through success in school, up the ladder of Britain's class system.

Many writers have written about their relationships with their mothers, and in most cases the relationship portrayed is a predominantly painful one. In the rare cases where the mother and daughter relationship is described as close and at least partially positive, this closeness is shown to be psychologically unhealthy, or is described in a cloying, sentimental way. The relationship in *That's How it Was* is never subject to a condescending psychologizing. It is what has kept both mother and daughter going, and Duffy is never for a moment ashamed of it. Duffy also manages to completely avoid sentimentality, maybe because the world in which her characters live doesn't allow much softness. Both mother and daughter have a hard-edged survival mentality, but both are able to preserve a deep ability to love.

Like the mother-daughter relationship, the realities of class are described in a way that is neither self-pitying nor sentimental. The uneducated stepfather becomes Paddy's enemy and rival.

At night, feigning bad dreams, I crept into the bottom of their bed or even beside her. I no longer cared what I said

to him and delighted in goading him like a terrier at a chained blind bear, picking on his ignorance, his mispronunciation of even the simplest words. [p. 171]

Some writers who have managed to change their social position in society feel a necessity to deny the crushing nature of the system; if I could make it, they reason, so could everyone else. Duffy never falls into this trap.

I thought how it was like a long-distance run I'd started on, with people dropping out all along the way at the higher and higher examination hurdles, until out of the sixty-odd children who'd started with me in the infants maybe only two would ever get all the way to university. And what happened after that? I didn't know. Perhaps you wouldn't know til you got there, or was it an end in itself to have run that far? I was far too busy running to decide. [p. 210]

Duffy never condescendingly glorifies "the lower classes," and she never makes the mistake of equating knowledge with intelligence, or privilege with natural taste and sensibility. In one of the last scenes in the book, mother and daughter attend a small exhibit of Van Gogh prints together. Paddy, who has been to school and learned to appreciate art, has a moment of fear. "What would she think of them? Suppose she didn't like them?" (p. 211) But Louie looks at the paintings with an appreciation for their beauty and uniqueness, and a sense of feeling behind them which would have moved the painter as it does her daughter.

Paddy's lament after her mother's death is that of a heart-broken lover.

But what I really want to know is, what do I do now, what the hell can I do now? I love her but I can't go on loving her, yet what else can I do? [p. 221]

It is clear that she will survive the loss, and that one

of the many things she will go on to become a lesbian. Outside of her passion for her mother, Paddy's one deep attachment during her adolescence is to her cultured, warm, and sympathetic English teacher. Her love for Miss Tyson is not an easy feeling for Paddy, challenging as it must, her love for her mother. Adolescent "crushes" are another hard subject in literature, teated so often with condescending cuteness, or barely disguised shame, as if the feeling in question couldn't possibly have been "the real thing." Here again, Duffy writes about Paddy's love and her awakening sexuality with both pride and dignity.

"If it gets too rough you'll have to stay the night," she said, when the evening was over. What could I say? Desire was so great it became a pain that brought fear....

"She isn't even beautiful," I told myself, but my hand longed to go out and trace the curve of cheek and lips." [p. 187]

In Paddy's life it is women who have been important — the strong passionate ones who count. Men have been at best a distraction, at worst an unpleasant interference. Paddy's lesbianism, the natural longing and mutual desire of woman for woman, is logical and inevitable. Desire, like love, is present in its complexity and possibility of both pain and joy. Like everything else in this book, it's not easy, but it's real.

That's How it Was is not an easy read. I was in tears during much of the book. But at the same time, I was applauding the courage and spirit of the characters and experiencing their love for each other. *That's How it Was* made me feel proud to be a lesbian, a woman — even, at moments, proud to be a human being.

Sacred Female Experience

Continued from Book Review page 6

Daly envisions belonging in the context of the choice to be *for* women. "Woman-bonding, be-ing, then, is the opening of Pandora's box, which is filled with the richest treasures." (p. 358)

Pure Lust is also a book very much concerned with the issues relevant to feminists in the 1980s. Daly believes this is a period of extreme danger from "nuclear holocaust, chemical contamination, escalated ordinary violence, man-made hunger and disease and mind-rot." She addresses herself throughout the book to the on-going dialogue within the feminist community.

Daly is most hopeful of the development of a tradition of women-centered spirituality. She is supportive of the continuing struggle for reproductive choice. And she views as daring the feminist anti-pornography campaign.

She is, however, rageful about other aspects of feminist culture. She opposes S&M, believing proponents of such activities "neither speak as feminists, nor for feminists," and are inherently anti-feminists. (p. 66) She chides those who identify as "gay" rather than "feminist" for remaining libidinally bound to the institutionalized fathers. (p. 253) She believes that the use of self-identification in discussing issues is less inherently political than generalized discussions. (pp 205-206)

Daly is critical of bonding on the basis of oppression because it increases the difficulties arising from the diversity of female experience. (p. 381) She deplors single-focus struggles because they inhibit the broader struggle. (p. 323) She denies that equal pay or the ERA will achieve equal rights, though she supports the efforts to achieve both. (p. 221) She views the use of a purely economic analysis shallow and uninspiring. (p. 372) She deplors male mentorship and all those who utilize such networking. (p. 384) And she is critical of most women's studies programs as bland and boring, continually reduced to consciousness-raising groups by the inclusion of males in the programs. (p. 324)

At the core of Daly's critique of modern feminism is the unstated and continual polarizing debate between the dominant ideologies of radical feminist separatism and marxist/socialist feminism (often buttressed by psychoanalytical feminism). Daly has staked out her position maintaining fidelity to radical separatism. She begins with the generally accepted view that under patriarchy "all men by institutional sexual definition are in authority over certain women" (p. 70), concluding that this coercive asymmetry makes females and males different species. (p. 351)

Daly rejects the premise of marxist/socialist feminists that this asymmetry is primarily rooted in economic conditions. She denies that economic explanations define the complexity of female psychological experience. In rejecting this view, Daly also rejects collaboration with males defined by economic criterion as oppressed.

The focus of both these dominant movement ideologies remains centered on male experience. Daly expends a disproportionate amount of time and energy in defining the disjunction of female and male experience. The marxist/socialist feminists continue to rehabilitate worn-out nineteenth century patriarchal



Mary Daly

ideological adjustments. Each is primarily dependent on sources derived from male experience. Daly is uncomfortably conscious of her reliance on Tillich and the male-authored Catholic tradition. Marxist/socialist feminists are still convinced that the dead nineteenth century patriarchs have more to offer than the living experience of contemporary women. As such, each of these "schools" lose sight of the problems of contemporary women. Daly cannot offer solutions to the mothers of male children, because she has consigned their sons to patriarchy. The marxist/socialist feminist cannot offer an analysis which validates female autonomy, volition and self-sufficiency. This ideological polarization within the feminist movement has outlived its usefulness. It distracts us from the important work of exploring women-identified experience.

Pure Lust is an important work in describing the processes of the patriarchy and in describing the elements for creating a new feminist vision. It is, however, a work flawed in a number of ways. First, Daly's separatism creates the notion of a "Race of Women" which presents both terminological and psychological difficulties. The rise of the doctrine of racialism, which legitimized the slavery of people of color and the holocaust of the Hitler era, is too recent in memory for the word "race" to be a clean edge in cutting away the accretions of patriarchy. Psychologically, women do not need to call upon "ancestral memories" to create an imaginative reconstruction of pre-patriarchal times. Our pre-patriarchal experience is rooted in the rhythms of our sensory, intuitive and cognitive appreciation of our own value and the value of women in our lives. Finally, the idea that females and males are psychologically unique holds in place the sexist theory that those differences make female oppression necessary.

Secondly, Daly's philosophical approach to the central issue of female oppression renders invisible the historical experience of women, robbing Daly's analysis of its own internal causality. In treating the history of patriarchy as one unbroken saga of female oppression, Daly cannot focus on our successes, which might well

reveal a women-centered methodology for change. Philosophy which is not rooted in historical context can only describe disjunctive phenomena, often becoming an inverse mirror of the oppressive experience. Daly's reliance on medieval philosophical tradition is an example of the limitations of this approach.

Finally, Daly's exposition of the central nature of reality is confusingly presented. On the one hand, Daly seems to embrace the traditional Catholic view of a transcendental reality, that is, an external reality possessing more "realness" than human experience. Individuals have an inherent directional system (the soul) which unfolds in a preordained pattern permitting the embracing of this reality. Good habits precondition the individual for the acceptance of this preordained goal of human existence.

This exposition, even dressed in the cloth of modern feminism, still retains the old assumption that human experience is deficient in and of itself. Yet, Daly also presents another view of reality, one which has received considerable attention within the developing feminist spiritual tradition. She presents the idea of being, an active metaphor for indwelling spirituality, which functions to identify, give meaning and communicate connection with human life and nature. By fighting the medieval battle of realism and nominalism, Daly has obscured her own important work in legitimizing the spiritual value of immanent reality.

Even with these flaws, Daly's *Pure Lust* is a brave and daring book. It provides a wide-ranging examination of feminism in the 1980s through a challenging conceptual system. It summarizes much of the current critique against patriarchy. It breaks new ground in the use of language, creating a new comprehension of the language and ideas that shape our experience. *Pure Lust* moves us along on the journey to envisioning a women-centered spiritual tradition. It is an important work in changing values and making female experience sacred. *Pure Lust* offers an intelligent alternative to necrophilic patriarchal culture.

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Vulnerability & Values

Continued from Book Review page 3

stream, the press or the Jewish community. Instead, many of us, including feminists, chose to continue attacking the one candidate who advocated Black empowerment along with a progressive agenda to reshape this country. If we dig deeply into why it was so important for mainstream USA (and the rest that followed) to smear Jackson, we may fall upon the same reasons why more attention has been paid to Black women making anti-Semitic remarks than white women.

In her essay Barbara Smith noted, "Black feminists...could not help but notice how Jewish feminism arose just at the point when Third World feminist issues were getting minimal recognition from the movement as a whole...." Have we Jewish feminists participated in an attempt to stifle Black empowerment? And if these things ring true, how can we stop this? As Jewish women we need to learn how to stand in solidarity with people of color, not in competition. Only then we will all become capable of clearing out prevailing personal racisms and anti-Semitic stereotypes.

In writing on the subject of racism and anti-Semitism, I would have liked to have seen a more expanded section on the Black American/Palestinian connection that Smith mentioned just briefly, a discussion of how that is taking place and why, and generally more of her own feelings concerning the Middle East situation. I would have also liked to have read her opinion of how this is affecting Black/Jewish relations. This point could not be emphasized enough given that this is precisely the subject that has been and will continue to be used to divide us. Our talking about these issues will make any such manipulations less effective. My problems with Barbara Smith's essay lie not with what was said but with what was not discussed enough.

Elly Bulkin's in-depth essay, "Hard Ground: Jewish Identity, Racism, and Anti-Semitism," looks into the wide-ranging issues related to this topic. In her first section, "Origins," she examines her roots as a white Ashkenazi Jew growing up in the Bronx. She describes how as a Jewish person she felt connected to the struggle against racism. As Bulkin moved into progressive movements, she began to think, "...the greater the concern among Jews about anti-Semitism, the less concern about racism." Later she found that illogical thinking quite difficult to undo.

While she carried this problem with her into the feminist movement, it was there that she broke free from this false thinking. She describes being challenged by the workshops and conferences (1978-80) on issues of anti-Semitism and racism. She identifies role models, who helped her immensely. Also out of this wave of the feminist movement, Bulkin had the "impetus to explore" her Jewishness and to begin a historical search for the Jewish anti-racist tradition.

In "Extensions" Bulkin looks at the development of identity politics that Jewish women began to explore following such exploration by women of color. She also posits the growth of the Jewish feminist movement as related to rising levels of anti-Jewishness in the United States. What I found missing from the "Extensions" section was a more critical analysis of the Jewish feminist identity movement. She does not mention that many of the workshops and conferences that helped form our Jewish identity also helped shape our more thoroughly Zionist perspectives. We need to under-

stand, myself included, that it is our racist upbringing, of being white and North American, that has helped us to ignore, as well as support, the oppressions of the Palestinian people.

In "Threads" Bulkin looks at how anti-Semitism and racism are related. She discusses the Klan/Nazi mentality of white supremacy. In "Separations" she discusses the differences between anti-Jewishness and racism. She provides us with excellent information concerning the European origin of anti-Jewishness. In this section she also discusses white privilege and the ensuing class mobility of the Jewish American experience. There is also a statistical profile of the actual economic position of Jewish people which will make holes in anyone's idea that all Jews are rich.

Bulkin delves into the Jewish anti-racist tradition in the United States in "Left-Leanings." She discusses different periods of history and reveals impressive Jewish history. For example, during the 1930s, 40 to 50 percent of the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) had Jewish participation. While the Jewish community as a whole does have quite a larger degree of anti-racist history (as compared to other white groups), we must of course realize that there is no connection inherent between Jewish people and progressive politics. As with any group, we need to understand their particular situation. In the 1930s, most Jewish people were very poor and had just immigrated to the United States because of very oppressive conditions in other countries. Today, the Jewish community has gone considerably to the conservative camp in its defense of the state of Israel, and many Jews have moved squarely into the middle class.

In "Male Enemy/Left Enemy" Bulkin discusses the left-baiting and male-baiting tactics used to silence women in the feminist movement. She also discusses how these tactics cut the feminist movement off from progressive/revolutionary movements. She examines authors Mary Daly and Andrea Dworkin and criticizes the analysis that centralizes all our oppression in sexism. She reminds us that only white women can afford to separate oppressions or claim "...sexism is more painful, more damaging...." Any person of color or anti-racist person who has spent some time in the feminist community knows, as Audre Lorde has stated, "...and beyond sisterhood, we still have racism."

While this section examines the way the feminist movement reflects a "knee-jerk anti-leftism," I experienced much anti-communism in the section itself. Her references to the Soviet Union's anti-Semitism are examples. In Birobidzhan, the Jewish Autonomous Region of the Soviet Union, Jewish (in particular Yiddish) culture is preserved and widely celebrated. In addition, many Soviet Jews deny the anti-Semitic charges so often discussed in the West. ("People of the Soviet Union Celebrate 50th Anniversary of Birobidzhan," *Jewish Affairs*, March/April 1984, pg. 16; and "An Update on Jews in the USSR," *Jewish Affairs*, Nov./Dec. 1984, pg. 10.) Upon closer look at the situation of Soviet Jews, it can be uncovered that much that passes as anti-Semitism has to do with the sympathy and support the Soviet Union gives to Arabs, Palestinians in particular.

In the later sections of Elly Bulkin's essay we have an in-depth look at the Middle East conflict, as well as a good deal of information on anti-Arab racism. She presents the many different points of view by quoting

various groups and well-known people. Her own position on Israel is discussed: a two-state solution, with Israel returning to its pre-1967 borders. She does not discuss what this plan would mean concretely in terms of the Palestinians who would want to return to their homes in the pre-1967 area. She also does not discuss Israel being also required to give equal rights to those Palestinians who now live in Israel.

While reading this section I had many feelings about the ways the material was presented. For one thing, she wrote it in a very individual/personal way which took away much of the political nature and consequences of the situation. Often I felt that she tried hard to make Jewish racism towards Arabs and Arab racism towards Jews the same thing. But the situation is one of power — who has it, who doesn't. The situation is a very political one, with certain people having access to land and human rights and others not. A United States-backed Israeli government is the power bloc in the Middle East that is attempting to annihilate all liberation struggles in the area. In addition, the Israeli government goes to the beck and call of the United States government in helping to prevent liberation struggles throughout Africa and Central America. These facts are ugly, but nonetheless true. The United States and Israel are in a right-wing camp, where Israel, playing the middle-man, is doing much of the U.S.'s dirty work. Elly Bulkin somehow misses these most important factors.

This book was a difficult one for me to review. It spoke to issues important to me, as well as to those that are most painful. Both politically and emotionally, unraveling illusions about Zionism has been so long and hard.

The essays reflect our problems in discussions of this kind: problems that result from the fact that many of us in the feminist movement are cut off from the more general progressive/revolutionary movements alive in our country today; problems like our inability to discuss clear strategy and organizational issues; problems also of invisibility, like anti-Arab racism, which pervades our society. Without dealing with these issues, our feminist movement will never become a mass, multi-racial movement capable of seriously altering our present condition. Too much in the movement is individualized and personalized, rather than politicized. As Barbara Smith writes, "...I don't live in the women's movement, I live in the streets of North America."

In *Yours in Struggle* we have three lesbian women who have bravely shared their honesty and process in trying to break out of the racist and anti-Semitic molds of our society. This book is important. It can serve as a foundation for us.

Leathersex World

Continued from Book Review page 1

are not so much disagreements as separate ways of viewing the same topic. It is difficult to write about sexuality. To describe without analyzing is easy; to analyze without describing or drawing upon your own experience is idle and false. To combine the two is to be both true to yourself and to your subject. Geoff Mains has written both from the mind and from the body, and thus has expanded our notions of what we can imagine and experience.

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