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LESBIAN VOICES

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 2



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR

SJSU WOMEN'S WEEK

MARCH 1975

RETURN TO:

R. NICHOLS

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THIRD CLASS

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Lesbian Voices is published by

Sisters of Sappha

LESBIAN-FEMINIST ALLIANCE OF SANTA CLARA CO.

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Manuscripts, poems, short stories, graphics, letters to the editor, subscriptions, etc. should be addressed to:

R. Nichols
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Please enclose a stamped envelope if original is to be returned. Also please specify what name you wish to use for by-line. Contributors will receive five free copies of issue in which work appears. Deadline for the next issue is May 1st.

Subscription Rate: \$4.00 per year (four issues) within the United States. If mailed in plain wrapper or outside the United States, \$5.00.

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LESBIAN VOICES is published quarterly in March, June, Sept. and December. This is the March 1975 issue. All rights are reserved to the individual contributor, and no part of this magazine may be reproduced without written consent.

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Cover drawing by Janice.

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SAPPHA



SPEAKS

You may forget but

Let me tell you
this: someone in
some future time
will think of us

-- Sappha

Atthis: I have seen a vision of a time
to come -- a great Nation will be born.
Oh! Atthis, my joy is overwhelming, for
this place I saw is called Lesbian Nation.
Some of our sisters there remember me --
they call themselves Sisters of Sappha --
they are strong - proud and ambitious for
their nation -- working - living - loving
women, dedicated to their culture.

There is much I cannot understand, for their
environment greatly differs from ours -- but
that is where I wish to be.

If one can truly be reborn at some distant
time and place -- then I have envisioned
a time and place for me.

Come, Atthis - here at my side. . .
share this vision, dream with me. . .

My Utopia: Lesbian Nation

By NIKKI DARK



Lesbian Nation! What an exciting idea! And how grateful I am to Jill
Johnston for suggesting it!

Lesbian Nation! Women living, working, loving, rejoicing -- freed from
the shackles of male-dominated, heterosexist society!

Lesbian Nation! Women of all shapes and sizes, all races from all places -
moody women, happy women, musical women, tall women, quiet women,
sociable women, short women, common women, tender women, tough women --
extraordinary women!

Lesbian Nation! Do I dare? Do I dare to believe in it? Do I dare to
work for it? Do I dare to invest my hope in it? Can it come true?
Will I be there when it does? Will it be what I want it to be?

Imagine, a place where every woman is free to be herself: No. . .
free to become herself. . . free to become her best self. . . free to
become the self that she always has been in her wildest, highest dreams. .
free to rediscover and to pursue her own sense of destiny!

Imagine, a place where every woman's dignity, worth, and individuality
are respected absolutely: Yes -- where the unfolding and expression of
her personal uniqueness are actually encouraged and appreciated and
rewarded!

From this respect for the individual naturally derive non-sacrificial,
non-exploitative, non-oppressive relationships -- but that sounds so
negative! -- what I mean, of course, is that in Lesbian Nation, relation-
ships are joyous and cooperative.

In Lesbian Nation, each woman's individual rights are respected --
because how can she live in freedom and dignity without human rights?
With each woman secure in her rights and freedom, she is free to develop
and use her abilities, talents, and energies in whatever pursuits she
deems to be valuable and interesting. She is more productive and feels
better, because she is not wasting her life feeling oppressed, depressed,
frustrated, and futile. Women are discovering for the first time just
how much energy they really do have!

Women's interests naturally vary, and this leads to a division of
labor based on individual differences rather than on sex, race, class,
or any other irrelevant factors. Women recognize that all productive
work is valuable, and workers are appreciated and respected at any level
of ability.

In Lesbian Nation, there is no City Hall and there is no Union Hall.
So women are free to go into any business or occupation they choose,

without paying for a license or a union card and without having to get anyone's permission or pay kickbacks from their earnings in the form of taxes, tithes, or dues. What they earn is theirs to keep -- every cent of it.

Some women choose to go into business and industry. Others prefer the trades and professions. Some women have one-woman shops. Others work in large, complicated enterprises. But wherever they work, the terms "employer" and "employee" have lost their meaning -- because every woman is an independent contractor and has no "boss" except herself and her desire to achieve.

In Lesbian Nation, there is competition -- in the sense that a variety of goods and services are available to be chosen among by consumers. No one can keep a monopoly by force, since all are free to enter any field. Women are even free to start their own telephone or postal service without going to jail!

There is not, however, competitiveness -- in the sense that anyone tries to undermine another's efforts, or that anyone's ego hangs on comparison with the success of others. Women basically "compete" with themselves in developing their skills and producing their works. They do not regard another woman's accomplishment as a threat -- but rather as an inspiration. There is a spirit of mutual respect and admiration among those engaged in the same kinds of activity, much as a good sportswoman can respect and enjoy her own ability and still be excited to admiration at another woman's performance. Women work in a spirit of camaraderie and tend to share their knowledge freely, since there is no ugly, stunting competitiveness.

Money, in Lesbian Nation, is a medium of exchange, nothing more and nothing less. Anything can be used for money that can be used as a means of exchange. Lesbian Nation does not print worthless, inflated paper currency and force women to accept it as "legal tender." Much face-to-face trade is done by bartering -- women trading services and goods with each other.

Money is not an instrument of power and social status in Lesbian Nation. Rather, women are responded to and admired for their own personal qualities -- for talent and ability, for honesty and depth of understanding, for their liveliness, enthusiasm, sense of humor, compassion, creativity, sense of justice, warmth, grace, spirituality, or whatever attractive qualities might characterize and express each individual's essence as a person. Anyone who tries to trade on ostentation or social power is regarded with pity and contempt.

Inevitably, some women are more able, more intelligent, more talented, or more attractive than others. These women are liked and admired. Intelligence, achievement, and beauty are not persecuted. Scholars and artists are not scorned, ridiculed, and socially ostracized. The cult of the Personable Moron is over.

Education is highly valued, sought after, and respected in Lesbian Nation -- both for the sake of personal growth and also because knowledge

and wisdom are the means of making life more comfortable and enjoyable. Every piece of knowledge opens up new possibilities, and thus, life progresses. Education in Lesbian Nation, however, is not separated off, institutionalized, compartmentalized, fragmented, ritualized, mysticized, monopolized, pedanticized, and drained of all relationship to reality. Lesbian Nation does not grant degrees for sitting through x-number of hours of lectures. Recognition is given only to real learning, not to fortitude at tolerating boredom. In Lesbian Nation, we choose our own teachers. We seek those who have the knowledge and the skills we wish to acquire. We read, we listen, we watch, we experiment, we discuss -- we learn. We, in turn, share our knowledge and experience with others.

Women have a friendly and trustful attitude toward Mother Nature. They recognize that all good things come from Nature and from the things that they can make from Nature. They recognize and understand that "Nature to be commanded, must be obeyed." So they study Nature and seek to understand how natural processes operate and can be used to good ends, rather than bully their way into Nature with an attitude of Conquest. This does not mean that women in Lesbian Nation live a primitive, rustic, or ascetic existence. It means that they have a sense of reverence and affinity with Nature, which is the source of their own life and of all things which support their life and make it more pleasurable. They keep a long-range view of Nature and its resources. Since they value life more than ever, they want to preserve its source and not lay waste their environment.

This reverence for life is the closest thing to a "religion" in Lesbian Nation. Lesbian Nation has no State Religion. There is no dogma, because dogma can survive only by institutionalized force and brainwashing. Each woman is free to believe or not believe in any specific creed, value system, or view of the universe. Atheists are not persecuted, and the religion of reason is free to thrive. Therefore, religion is no longer understood as belief in the supernatural, prostration before a superbeing, adherence to an organized church, moral authoritarianism, institutionalized charity, absolution of sins, salvation, and holier-than-thou-ness. Rather, religion is understood in the broad, true sense as an expression of woman's relationship to reality (the universe, cosmos, life), of her attempt to grasp the meaning of her life, and of her reverence for her own highest aspirations and values. Religious feeling becomes recognized and greeted in many experiences of life and not confined to formalized, dogmatized ritual.

The only Law in Lesbian Nation must be respect for the integrity of the individual. This includes the specific rights to life, liberty, property, pursuit of happiness, and all other derivatives which apply to specific situations. New books are being written to deal with and interpret specific issues, and laws may even be codified, but reference is always made back to the individual, so that nothing is accepted as a law which violates the rights of any individual.

Law is enforced, primarily by reverence for life, desire for right-living, and by the mutual respect which exists among women in Lesbian Nation. Inevitably, however, there are some women who, through lack of

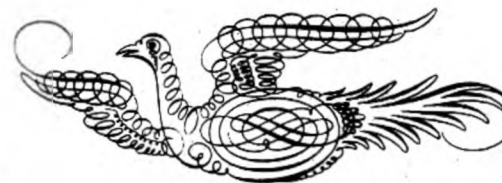
understanding, carelessness, greed, spite, weakness, lack of self-respect, wrong ideas, or emotional stress, trespass against their sisters by stealing, assault, slander, fraud, vandalism, or other wrongdoing. When this happens, our first concern is always for the victim. We try to keep the damage done her to a minimum by offering her our aid and support. We let her know that we care about the wrong that has been done to her and want to see it corrected. We show her that we understand that any physical loss or violence that she has incurred may be far outweighed by the emotional and psychological damage she has suffered and that more than material or financial restitution must be made. Her joy in life and her confidence in womankind must be restored. If the wrongdoer is amenable to it, she can be dealt with by discussion, reason, and gentle persuasion toward seeing the wrongness of her actions and making restitution to the victim. If she is reasonable, she can be shown that her behavior is not only harmful to others, but self-defeating and self-destructive. The wrongdoer must experience genuine remorse and make atonement to the victim; then harmony is restored. But if the wrongdoer cannot be brought to feel remorse and make voluntary restitution, no alternative is left but to use punitive or retaliative measures against her. In effect, this is what she herself chooses when she uses force or deceit against a sister, and she must suffer the consequences of her own philosophy. When this happens, when wrongdoers must actually be punished, it is not "revenge" that motivates us -- but the knowledge that we must never be indifferent to an injustice, we must never leave a victim to suffer in anguish while we sit motionless and impervious to her pain -- and we must never, by inaction and indifference, give a wrongdoer the license to commit further wrongs.

Because the women in Lesbian Nation recognize that nothing good can ever be gained by initiating brute force against another, few wrongs are ever committed intentionally. Women live together cooperatively. By cooperatively, I do not mean collectively -- although those who wish to live in collectives are free to do so. By cooperatively, I mean that the things that women do together are done by mutual consent -- no one has the institutionalized power to force another, as is done in heterosexist society with its might-makes-right, majority-rule, sacrifice-for-the-common-good government. Lesbian Nation has no government, as such.

Women are free to associate or not associate, as each chooses. Women can form whatever groups, relationships, liaisons, organizations, covens, communes, tribes, collectives, corporations, clubs they want to. But the lone wolverine is also respected. No one is pressured into belonging to anything. Least of all, is anyone ever pressured into belonging to Lesbian Nation.

The women who are in Lesbian Nation are there because they want to be. They are there because they believe in its ideals and want to bring them to full fruition and live in their beauty forever. They are there because they love women and want to see every woman strong, healthy, and growing. They are there because they love each other. And they are there because they love themselves.

This is my Utopia. Won't you tell me yours?



your voice
echoes through my desires
laid empty by reality

your words
rebound off my disappointment

"There will be other times..."

I do not wish
to imprison you in my time and space
nor to become the self
who is you

I merely humor time
quietly awaiting
a space for two



-- Maureen Kennedy

"Someday,"
my embryo being whispered,
"someday Love
will ease through your defenses
to nurture my maturing."

Moments, days and years have passed
with mutual touchings -
always true
but partial.
Accept and give as feelings will allow
I've told myself.
And always in response
my embryo being whispered,
"Someday - "

Then
She
enfolded me with specialness,
touched with hand and heart my essence,
completing what she presenced.

And now,
with embryo whisperings silenced,
my being smiles
at someday's dream
Today.



-- Gay Fay



Lovers sigh as one,
catching waves to smell coolness...
scattering the moon.

*

Mountain climber pant
your Herculean ascent...
atop sings a bird.

*

Amused by the
passing wind-borne wayfarers...
a still callalily.

*

Elusive waves
tantalize thirsting sands...
thoughts of a love.

*

The warning whisper
of stars in rippling coolness...
don't get burned.



-- Gay Fay

You are always on my mind...
sometimes
hidden,
sometimes
not.

I can smell your body,
feel your warmth enclosing me...
candle
light,
moon
light.

You are beautiful, your light
in me is never extinguished...
sometimes
risen
sometimes
set.

I love you. Yes in the most
simplest of ways, I love you.

Hopefully peace will be with you,
all your days...and love will
be your guiding star.



-- Holly

for Max

I sat down
in front of the furnace to write you
and ended up writing a poem about
sitting in front of the furnace staring at my hat
and knapsack stroking my oily hair

I sat down
not quite knowing how to start a letter
In the corner I began with noncalendar words
that put themselves in a poem
and left me here
fumbling in verbiage
to say I enjoyed meeting you



moe

to dance
how free
and alive.
to laugh
so natural
so warm.

the night that just passed, I danced away
aware of the differences between us all.
but really, we were the same.
color was not setting us apart

for we were alive just for the beat
to move
to move
to be alive:



-- Holly

In the frustrations
of creating one
singular
expression
worlds are born
relived
exhausted

Stirring within my consciousness
a world
whose life stream
comes the full circle
in the first word
of a poem
is touching me with
truth
because
ponies aren't baby horses
and they
only grow up
to be
ponies



-- Maureen Kennedy

The Little Amazons' Dilemma

B. TERRY

Eventually, it happened to all my friends.

Bonnie, the girl who lived "kitty-corner" from me, was the third to go. One warm Saturday morning, I darted excitedly across the street, as usual, pounded on Bonnie's door, and waited for her to pop out donned in her rolled-up levis, her brother's big Tee-shirt, her holey tennis shoes, and her, by now, infamous chain wrapped securely around her waist and tucked through the left-front belt loop. When boys from the 7th grade whistled at her, called her names, or threw tomatoes from old Mr. Santos' garden, Bonnie unhooked that chain, started it spinning over her head, and charged full force straight at her challengers. No one, not even an 8th grader, could withstand the blows from this quarter-inch metal. Kids cried, mothers complained, and fathers threatened, but to no avail. Bonnie was tough, and we were proud to walk at her side.

The door opened slowly. I waited. Immediately I knew; it had happened just like this to Robin and Denise. No rolled-up levis, no brother's shirt, and no heavy chain. Bonnie had been replaced by a short cotton skirt and a tucked-in matching blouse.

I felt funny just like the time I chipped my front tooth. My stomach felt sick and my head light. Bonnie faded into a blur of lace. Becky was the only one left, and I dashed for our fort where she would be waiting.

Once safely surrounded by the dirt walls, I could admit to Becky and to myself that we had lost Bonnie. Strategy was the answer. Steve and Ralph, the neighborhood's Big Jim and G.I. Joe, never did convert to ruffles. We planned our attack! Within five minutes we had leaped into their fortress, demolished their airplane hangar, their four motor-powered model planes, and their two plastic German lugers that they claimed their uncle brought back from the Big One. But that was not enough. We both leaped for Ralph. Becky went for his stomach, and I smashed away at his face.

Our group had attacked these two before, but never to this extreme, never to do real harm. But something felt different today. As we scurried out of the wreckage, I glanced back at Steve. He was madly trying to fit together the pieces of his plastic gun. Ralph yelled wildly about how we would pay for this. Somehow I knew he was right.

Becky was next and finally my turn came. I lasted the longest.

I was a freshman in high school. It was fall, and I felt sick on this particular Saturday. My mother suggested that I go rake the leaves. That should have given it away because usually when I felt ill, Mother helped me to bed, took my temperature, and made the usual welcomed fuss.

When about a quarter of the front lawn was free of leaves, I began to feel worse. Little did I know what this trip to the bathroom would mean. I screamed for help, and Mother came in with a knowing smile. How I instantaneously hated that smile. She explained the garb of the future, and I complained unrelentingly. I buttoned my levis, pulled my size extra-large Tee-shirt down, and made the long trek to the living room. My mother's eyes were on me as I plopped into the green rocker and crossed my legs Indian-style. She sat in her well-learned graceful pose. I sensed disaster. There was that smile again. Her words echoed off every wall and finally hit hard, "You know, darling, you should not be wearing levis any longer. You are now a young lady."



Epilogue to Hamlet

by Katie Nichols



Scene: The afterworld. Stage is decorated with white curtains of a sheer white material.

Characters: Ghosts of: Hamlet the Elder, Prince Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Polonius, Ophelia, Laertes, Gertrude, Claudius.

King Hamlet is alone on stage.

King.- Hah, I am avenged - through my dutiful son. Now my troubled soul, rest in peace.

Enter Polonius.- I have been stabbed through the arras, by Hamlet, who mistook me for King Claudius. My daughter, gentle Ophelia, in an insane moment, did take her own life.

Enter Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.- Her Majesty of England did receive a Lettre De Cachet, asking that the bearer be executed, so we are here. Hamlet, thy son, did treacherously misuse us.

Enter Ophelia.- (Goes to Polonius) Father, I am here!

Polonius.- Tis, Tis well my good daughter. Though unseen, I witnessed thy burial.

Enter Laertes.- (To King) Greeting, sire, Most Royal Dane. I was hoisted on mine own petard, as was Haman who of Old did construct a gallows for Mordecai.

Enter Gertrude.- My erstwhile King, kindest of men, I implore thy pardon on a weak woman.

King Hamlet.- I did commit thee to Heaven's judgment. Ask its pardon, if thou thinkst thyself deserving of it. The almighty may season justice with mercy.

Enter Hamlet.- Sire, I have avenged thee as thou didst bid me, at the price of several lives, including my love Ophelia. Flights of Angels have conducted me here, at the behest of Horatio, my true friend, who mourns me on earth.

Enter Claudius.- I have sorely repented my crime, and implored Heaven's grace and boon. Wilt thou intercede for me, or ask it of Our Lady of Mercy?

King Hamlet.- If thou hadst a fatal mole in thy being, ambition, I also had mine own mole, which was revenge. I did command Prince Hamlet to avenge my death, albeit the scripture bids us forgive those who trespass against us. Tis written "Justice is mine, I will repay."

(Asbestos Curtain)

(Editor's Note: The above is a Senior Feminist's commentary on male revenge. I had sent her a copy of the first issue of Lesbian Voices, and, while she is not a lesbian, she liked the magazine, so sat down and wrote this short piece for it. The author is a Native American and an artist, and among her contributions to feminism is: me. She's my ideological and biological mother. - RN.)



Trust in God!
She will provide!

NOW

 **We are entering
a New ERA!**

YEAR

1975



Rita Mae Brown

SJSU Women's Week: Rita Mae Brown

by Rosalie Nichols

March 3 - 8th is women's week at San Jose State University, and for San Jose's lesbian population, the highlight of the week will undoubtedly be the appearance of Rita Mae Brown. Ms. Brown will be the main speaker on Thursday, March 6th, when the theme for the day will be "Women Together."

Rita Mae Brown is probably best known now for her witty, sensitive, and irreverent book RUBYFRUIT JUNGLE. RUBYFRUIT is one of those rare books written in such a captivating style that the reader is carried along so

effortlessly and enjoyably as to want to finish the book in one sitting. It is being appreciated by a wide audience, both gay and straight.

In the morning before Ms. Brown's speech, which is scheduled for 12:00 noon, there will be panel discussions on women in religious life and women in the military, from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. Ms. Brown's noon-time speech will be followed by a panel discussion on lesbianism with representatives from local lesbian groups.

The afternoon will be devoted to the topic of women in prison and will feature poet Norma Stafford, a warm, tender woman who reads her poetry powerfully. Ms. Stafford's poetry book DEAR SOMEBODY has just recently been published by the Academy of Arts and Humanities through a grant from the Unitarian-Universalist Service Committee and contains a collection of her poems written during her confinement at the California Institution for Women. I found it to be well worth the few dollars I paid for it.

A final speaker for the day will be a representative from Coyote, the San Francisco based prostitutes union.

To wrap up "Women Together" day, Chris Williamson and Margaret Adams will entertain at the Joint Effort Coffeehouse.

Women's Week will run from Monday through Saturday, and there will be a whole range of speakers and topics of potential interest to gay women. Angela Davis will speak on Monday noon, and some alert lesbian may want to ask her about allegedly anti-lesbian comments in her recent autobiography. Kathie Cutshall, Bonnie Lockhart and Ruthie Gordon will be entertaining Monday night at the Joint Effort Coffeehouse. There will be gymnastics on Saturday, and after everyone is warmed up from that -- a WOMEN'S DANCE Saturday night featuring an all-women group "Sweet Chariot." See you there!

Petition for Sanity

Note: The following petition appeared in MS. magazine February 1975 issue and is reprinted by permission.



e, the undersigned, wish to state publicly our opposition to an archaic practice that is still alive in this country: the attempt by government to interfere in the sexual lives of consenting adults, and the failure by government to protect the civil rights of people who suffer such interference from others.

We believe all people to have common cause in eliminating this practice, though laws and regulations governing private sexual behavior tend to be selectively enforced against lesbians and male homosexuals -- particularly from poor, minority, and politically unpopular groups -- they potentially affect every person, regardless of personal power or sexual orientation. Not only do these laws and regulations leave privacy and individual freedom to the whim of employers and legislators, landlords and judges, but their enforcement results in a tragic waste of human talent. Even when not enforced, their existence serves to inhibit the free choice of lifestyle.

Therefore, we urge every person, regardless of race, age, class, sex, or sexual orientation, to join us in establishing this fundamental right to privacy and individual freedom.

As feminists, we sign this petition for one additional reason. In the history of women's struggle for self-determination, it has been a painful fact that almost any woman who did not choose to play a traditional or secondary role might find herself labeled a lesbian, and restricted in her efforts for fear of the effects of that label. Indeed, even the Women's Movement itself has sometimes been divided and weakened by this fear. Therefore, we must unite on the issue of all women's right to a free choice of lifestyle, regardless of sexual orientation. Only when the word lesbian has lost its power to intimidate and oppress, when it is as positive as other human choices, can each individual woman be fearless and free.

As women and as feminists, we pledge to work toward the following goals which we believe will benefit all citizens:

1. The repeal of all regulations and the elimination of institutional practices that limit access to employment, housing, public accommodations, credit, government or military service and child custody because of sexual orientation.
2. The repeal of all laws that make sexual acts between consenting adults criminal.
3. The passage of legislation that will guarantee each individual's rights, regardless of sexual orientation, so that those who suffer discrimination for that reason will have the same access to redress as

do the victims of discrimination because of race, sex, religion, or national origin.

4. The creation of a social climate in which lifestyles may be freely chosen.

THIS STATEMENT AND ITS LIST OF SIGNERS WILL BE SENT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS, STATE LEGISLATURES, AND THE WHITE HOUSE; TO NATIONAL GROUPS ALREADY FIGHTING FOR SUCH CHANGES; AND TO WOMEN'S GROUPS IN OTHER COUNTRIES THAT MAY BE ORGANIZING SIMILAR CAMPAIGNS. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE INCLUDED, PLEASE FILL IN THE SPACE BELOW AND SEND TO WOMEN'S PETITION FOR SANITY, MS. MAGAZINE, 370 LEXINGTON AVENUE, NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10017.

Signature: _____
Name (Please Print): _____
Occupation/Organization: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ State and Zip: _____

The above petition was prepared with the help of Kathleen Peratis, Director of the Women's Rights Project of the American Civil Liberties Union; Jean O'Leary, board member of the National Gay Task Force and former chairwoman of Lesbian Feminist Liberation; Dolores Alexander, former executive director of the National Organization for Women; and Ivy Bottini, former board member of NOW and Consciousness-Raising Organizer for its Los Angeles chapter. The project was coordinated by Elissa Krauss and Gloria Steinem of the MS. staff. It was suggested by Jan Crawford, convener of the New York City Feminist Community Coalition.

Among those who have already signed the petition are the following: Bella S. Abzug, Ti-Grace Atkinson, Carol Bellamy, Caroline Bird, Rita Mae Brown, Karen Burstein, Phyllis Chesler, Shirley Chisholm, Karen DeCrow, Carol Downer, Jo Freeman, Aileen Hernandez, Jill Johnston, Erica Jong, Florynce Kennedy, Viveca Lindfors, Patricia Loud, Marya Mannes, Margaret Mead, Kate Millett, Anais Nin, Yoko Ono, Helen Reddy, Malvina Reynolds, Lily Tomlin, Joanne Woodward, and many, many others.

You do not have to be a Lesbian to sign this petition. LESBIAN VOICES wishes to join MS. magazine in urging all women to sign the petition. Get your mother to sign it! Get your aunts and cousins and co-workers and neighbors and teachers and students and all the women you know to sign it.

Sex as Ideology

By ROSALIE NICHOLS

(Continued from Dec issue)

Females and males are different. If males were not different from females in some respect, we would have no need for the terms "female" and "male." Obviously, when we use these terms, we are making some sort of distinction between two classes of entities.

Even the humanists and the bisexualists, who base their theories on the fundamental identity of the sexes, seldom go so far as to claim that no differences exist.

At the other extreme are the heterosexualists, who view female and male as not only different, but opposite. They view female and male as complementary halves of a whole. As Father Lester recently put it in a newspaper column:

In a wonderful manner the differences between men and women complement each other. Women are superior to men in some aspects, men to women in others. Together they find their completeness. By nature, man is the defender, provider, head of the family; woman, in turn, the heart of the family and its civilizing softness. Any effort to blot out those and the other natural differences between men and women struggles against nature and can only lead to useless confusion and sorrow.
(San Jose News, Jan 4, 1975)

I believe that is a fairly typical expression of the heterosexual viewpoint, and it is against such dichotomization of the human race that humanists and bisexualists are reacting when they attempt to minimize or obliterate sexual differences.

But the question should be, not whether the sexes are different, but how different are they -- and of what relevance is this to human life and to the value choices of the basic unit of humanity, which is the individual?

Before we can begin to answer this question, however, we need to establish some sort of philosophical context for our observations. In particular, we need to examine the phenomena of anthropomorphism, anthropocentrism, and teleology.

Anthropomorphism is "the ascription of human form or characteristics to a deity, or to any being or thing not human."* The commonest form of

*Definitions quoted in this article, unless otherwise noted, are taken from The Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1966.

anthropomorphism in "Western culture" is probably the positing by man of a God in human form, who is then attributed with having created humans in His form.* Historically, philosophers, in elaborating their systems of metaphysics, have repeatedly fallen back on the concept of God as a first cause, final cause, or regulator of the universe.

Anthropocentrism is the attitude of "regarding man as the central fact or final aim of the universe, or of any system." In religion, this is manifested as the belief that man is God's supreme creation, deserving of His special attention, and the attitude that everything else in the universe was created either to serve man's needs or as a stage for man's drama. (This is just as prevalent in "2001" as in the Bible.) A subcategory of anthropocentrism could be dubbed "androcentrism" -- this is the male's feeling that woman was created for his pleasure, to be his helpmate and to serve his needs, and to be the spectator of his drama -- to him, she has no existence or purpose of her own. Finally, it can be seen as ego-centrism -- the generalized feeling of an individual that everything revolves around him and must relate to his needs and serve his purpose. (Note of caution: Do not confuse egocentrism with healthy egoism.)

Teleology is "the explanation of nature in terms of utility or purpose, especially divine purpose." An example of teleological thinking would be to say that because an acorn grows into an oak tree, it is the purpose of acorns to grow into oak trees. Another example would be to say that because animals reproduce, it is the purpose of animals to reproduce. Or, since some animals which we call birds, in the course of events, evolved wings and can fly, birds grew wings in order to fly. If we were to pursue teleology to its extreme, we could cite Voltaire's unsinkable Dr. Pangloss, who exclaimed on how wonderful it is that the nose was made just so to hold spectacles, thus demonstrating that everything is for the best in this best of all possible worlds.

Putting anthropomorphism, anthropocentrism, and teleology all together, we might derive an explanation of the universe such as the following:

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.

(Genesis 1:26-29)

*At this point, some perceptive reader should point out that I refer to "Mother Nature" at times. 'Tis true -- I like the image of the basic femaleness of life -- but please don't take it literally.

The foregoing Biblical explanation is diametrically opposed to the philosophical approach I wish to take in this article.

The universe exists. It is, and always was. To posit a beginning or a creation of the universe is to assume that something can come out of nothing -- which is contrary to everything we know. Life began as an accident -- that is, an unplanned event -- because there was no one there to plan it or make it occur. To posit a Creator simply complicates the question, as it introduces one more thing to be explained and violates the law of parsimony.* All present life came from previously existing life through natural processes of reproduction (biogenesis). Living things tend to change their nature (genetically) through processes which are as yet incompletely understood but are termed mutation. Some of the changes enhanced the survival of the individual organism, which reproduced and passed the changes on to its descendants; these changes are said to have had survival value. Other changes interfered with survival or reproduction of the organism and so were not passed on. This is known as natural selection, and the whole process is known as evolution.

There is nothing mystical in the theory of evolution. It does not require a Creator, it does not make man the center of the universe, and it does not assume any purpose, divine or otherwise. As a scientific theory, it makes no moral judgments and advocates no moral standards or goals. It simply describes and explains the proliferation of species. Whether any of those species, or any of the inheritable characteristics of those species, "ought" to survive and be perpetuated is a question for the field of ethics, not biology.

Nonetheless, there are those who, while regarding themselves as non-mystics, have made of the theory of evolution a new kind of religion -- that is, they have re-introduced teleology in another form. They have done this by equating evolution with "progress" and glorifying "success." Historian Richard Hofstadter has described the development of "Social Darwinism" as follows:

The ideas of the age were tailored to fit the rich barons. Economists, journalists, educators, and writers who rushed to do them honor found a strikingly plausible rationale in Darwinian biology and Spencerian philosophy, which were growing every year more popular. Since the publication of Darwin's Origin of Species in 1859, educated Americans had been learning eagerly of the new biological theory and constructing new cosmologies for themselves. From Darwin and his popularizers they learned that life is a fierce and constant struggle which only the fittest survive. Confusing evolution with progress, as was natural to optimistic spokesmen of a rising class and a rising nation, they concluded that the bitter strife of competitive industry, which seemed to mirror so perfectly Darwin's natural world, was producing a slow but inevitable upward movement of civilization. Those who emerged at the top were manifestly the fittest to survive and carry on. Herbert Spencer, whose evolutionary philosophy glorified automatic progress,

*Law of parsimony, or Occam's razor, states that "entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity," meaning in practice that we should not suppose more forces or causes than are necessary to account for the phenomena observed.

who threw all his authority into support of the thesis that natural economic processes must be allowed to go on without hindrance from reformers,* was idolized in the United States as has been no other philosopher before or since. His visit in 1882 was practically an occasion of state; the intellectual and social leadership of the East turned out to do him honor, and reporters eagerly recounted how he hailed his great patron, Andrew Carnegie, as one of his closest friends.

It was natural, then, for a Rockefeller to say that "the growth of a large business is merely a survival of the fittest," and that the splendor of the American Beauty rose could be produced only by sacrificing the early buds that grow up around it. Or for James J. Hill to assert that "the fortunes of railroad companies are determined by the law of the survival of the fittest." Or for George Hearst, entering a Senate so filled with business magnates that it was popularly called "the Millionaire's Club," to declare:

I do not know much about books; I have not read very much; but I have travelled a good deal and observed men and things and I have made up my mind after all my experience that the members of the Senate are the survivors of the fittest.

. . . From the business of industry the business of politics took its style. . . overflowing into politics, it multiplied among politicians opportunities for pecuniary enrichment. Standards of success in politics changed. It was not merely self-expression or public service or glory that the typical politician sought -- it was money. Lord Bryce found that the cohesive force in American politics was "the desire for office and for office as a means of gain." The spoilsmen looked upon political power as a means of participating in the general riches, of becoming wealthy in their smaller ways and by their lesser standards, as did the captains of industry. Never before had the motive been so strong; never before had temptations been so abundant. (1)

Looking back on this description of late 19th-century politics from the vantage point of the Age of Richard Nixon, it seems strikingly contemporary -- but that should not be surprising, for it is all part of the Era of Male Domination. Which should answer the question you may have been asking while reading the foregoing lengthy quotation: What does all this have to do with biology and sex differences, which are supposed to be the subject of this article? The answer is, plenty! For one thing, I could show you an article by a popular anarchist economist in which he maintains that the fact that society has been dominated by males for thousands of years proves male superiority. Or I could show you a letter from an erstwhile colleague in which he maintains that "the species that has survived is the species that has produced children and any purely physical attraction has been passed genetically" therefore "there is a slight natural preference for the opposite sex when everything else is equal." From this, I suppose, one is supposed to infer the superiority of heterosexuality. If I could allow myself to be rash, I would flatly state that Social

*Note of caution: Don't assume that because Social Darwinism is wrong that economic freedom is wrong. Also, don't assume that economic freedom existed in 19th-century America. It didn't.

Darwinism is the typical and predominant philosophy of the male. I would point to the popularity of the back-to-the-apes writers (Ardrey, Morris, et al) and make a comment to the effect that the reason they are so popular is that they give males a chance to beat their chests and play Tarzan. Then I would lump in Nietzsche, Stirner, and a few other every-man-for-himself, might-makes-right philosophers. But this is intended to be a scholarly article, not political rhetoric, so I can't do that until such time as I can afford to spend the resources researching it.

What I do want to emphasize is that the fact of survival does not imply superiority or "success" by any ethical standard. To say that a thing has survived does not say that it is good. And, in particular, it does not mean that it is good in some divine or cosmic sense. The "cosmos" has no ethics; it merely is.

What Social Darwinists overlook is the fact that survival takes place in a context, in an environment -- and the environment (not some divine purpose or social goal) determines the requirements for survival. Thus, the self-congratulations of the Social Darwinists, their crowning of themselves as "rugged individualists" and successful members of the species, their approbation of themselves and their heroes as "self-made men" and the "fittest" to survive may be overturned by a simple biological fact: Evolution does not always proceed toward greater complexity and independence of the organism. Organisms can evolve toward parasitism:

A parasite is an organism that lives on or in another species, the host, obtaining food and shelter at the latter's expense. . . . Different parasites evidently arose separately in various phyla from free-living ancestors and have become variously specialized or degenerate for the parasitic mode of existence. Many have hooks or suckers for holding to their hosts; the gut is simplified (absent in tapeworms) because their fluid food is obtained directly by pumping or absorption from the host; and the reproductive organs are usually elaborated to produce enormous numbers of eggs or larvae to overcome successfully the hazards of reaching new hosts. . . . Parasitism is the mode of life for many species; for survival as a species the parasite should not unduly injure its host. . . . (2)

In biological terms, "any individual animal is 'successful' in the struggle for existence if it survives long enough to reproduce." (3)

If we wish to play Social Darwinism, there are obvious parallels to the above in human society.

So much for philosophy. My next task will be to survey sex differences as they exist in nature. This will involve a brief overview of comparative anatomy.

(To be continued.)

¹Hofstadter: American Political Tradition, Vintage Book, 1948, pp 167-9

²Tracy I. Storer and Robert L. Usinger: General Zoology. NY: McGraw-Hill Co., 1965, pp 217-8

³Ibid., p 255.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE AWAKENING

by Kate Chopin. Avon Books, 1972. 190 pages. Paperback 95¢.

Contemporary criticism of Kate Chopin's 1899 novel, The Awakening, resulted in her dismissal from the St. Louis Fine Arts Club. While The Nation agreed to the novel's "fine workmanship and pellucid style," it strongly claimed, "We cannot see that literature or the criticism of life is helped by the detailed history of the manifold and contemporary love affairs of a wife and mother." Numerous critics, however, have done her justice in acclaiming her sound ability and courage to deal with life. Many have equated The Awakening to Madame Bovary. . . American style.

The tragic heroine Edna is a woman moved by an innate desire to live. While trapped in a middle-class marriage with businessman Leonce Pontellier, she comes to know herself as a feeling, sensuous being.

The reader is introduced to Edna through her admiration of the mother-women (husband-worshippers and idolizers of children) surrounding her. Though gladly removed from the role, she sees such women as "delicious." Their descriptions are intense, but their depth is never explored. Perhaps such individuals have never ventured into themselves.

At the age of twenty-eight, Edna begins to identify her importance in this vast universe. She recalls her understanding as a child of life's polarities: the struggle of the conforming exterior existence and the questioning inward life. The reader is reminded of how few survive the tumult.

Mr. Pontellier is merely a supporting character. It suffices to say that he is almost too average to be considered the epitome of a middle-class businessman. He greatly values his possessions for the pleasure he feels in contemplating them. His marriage with Edna, an accident of fate, is hardly a union of love. He has created quite a safe, acceptable image for her to fulfill. And she, in time, has developed an acceptable fondness for him. The children, she loves not as a mother "should," but "in an uneven, impulsive way." Edna's actions, then, bear no reference to her husband or children as individuals.

The sea reveals its sensuous and seductive self to Edna. She returns often in body and fantasy in pursuit of her soul. Piano music serves as a catalyst for her passions which she takes to the sea "reaching out for the unlimited in which to lose herself." The sea forces Edna to discover her own standards and allow her actions to be judged by no other standards. She accepts responsibility for her own life.

In a period of vacillation between the commonplace and her feelings, Edna grows to love a family friend. Human passion fades. . . but the sea is forever sensuous, embracing, uncompromising. It is freedom. Edna gives her passion to the sea: "How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky! How delicious! She felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had known."

-- reviewed by Maureen Kennedy

THE FEMALE MAN

by Joanna Russ. Bantam Books, 1975.


Possibly the most savagely brilliant denunciation of sexism since The S.C.U.M. Manifesto is this latest work of well-known science-fiction writer Joanna Russ. It is also one beautiful piece of writing. Calling on the experience of all women in sexist societies, Russ interweaves the familiar lives of two women, Joanna (guess who) whose world is ours, or much like it, and Jeannine, in whose parallel time stream World War II never took place and the Great Depression continues, with that of a third, Janet, who mysteriously appears from a world where all the men have been dead of plague for centuries. And the women are doing just fine, thank you! Through Janet we are able to picture an Earth where children roam in bands, unafraid and unharmed, exploring their world as part of their schooling; where rape and war are unknown; where women have flowered and expanded unhindered, developed their own unique government and culture, their own philosophies, arts, and sciences. Not a utopia -- women fight personal duels, and anarchists do not fare well -- but a believable, stable society.

The interactions of these three, Janet's amusement and anger at the situations thrust on her by men, Joanna's wary curiosity, Jeannine's desperate strivings for "femininity," form the basis of the story -- that is, until we meet Jael, who has, it turns out, caused these three to meet for purposes of her own. In Jael's world, the haves and the have-nots have finally split into warring factions, she explains; the haves being the men, the have-nots the women.


If the plot were the essence of this book, we would have absorbing, but in no way unusual, s-f (except that all the main characters are women). But Joanna Russ has lavished care and artistry, honesty and wit, and the stores of years of female pain and anger on The Female Man, and the result is a masterpiece. Samuel R. Delaney, known as "the best science-fiction writer in the world" and a long-time feminist, calls the work "stunning." "Intricate, witty, furious," says Marge Piercy, author of Small Changes. The writing is intensely, almost painfully, personal, as the author (Joanna? or is it Janet?) describes her love for a young girl; as Jeannine, the "strictly female female," is confronted with Manland, the male half of Jael's world; as all of them come to suspect ("Someone is collecting J's," Russ remarks) their essential identity. Again and again the story is augmented with passages of universal feminist experience, such as a delightful sheaf of critical-reviewisms, a collection of pseudo-cool put-downs of women writers which should take quite a lot of wind out of quite a few critical sails.

The book peaks in exquisitely directed fury as Jael proposes her plan, demonstrates her way of dealing with Manland, and asks, at last, "Do we do business?" Each woman is deciding for her whole world, and each one's decision is the result of the uncompromising logic of her situation. Reading this book I laughed, I swore, I felt tears in my eyes, and I gritted my teeth a lot. It's that way when you read something that speaks to you. The Female Man speaks, loud and clear, to all feminists, and, I think, to those women teetering on the brink. It is a book that, in Janet's world, would sweep the 1975 s-f prize tables clean; it will be interesting to see how it fares here, in Joanna's world. But with so fine a work the real awards are not bestowed by the men (mostly) of S.F.W.A., but by the women everywhere who read it and cheer; and, finally, by time itself.

-- reviewed by Mog Duff



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****CORRECTION****

The listing for UNION W.A.G.E. in the December issue of LESBIAN VOICES was out-of-date. Corrected information which we have received from UNION W.A.G.E. is as follows:

UNION W.A.G.E. P. O. Box 462, Berkeley, CA 94701. \$3/yr. individual, \$7.50 institutions, 35¢ single copy. Bi-monthly newspaper of Union Women's Alliance to Gain Equality.

open daily 2pm-2am
SAVOY
Friday & Saturday
afterhours 2am-4:30am brunch & dancing
Sunday-brunch-noon till 4pm
Monday-spaghetti or lasagne-all you can eat \$1.00
Tues. thru Sat. Dinners 6-9:30
Cocktail hours -
Tues-Wed-Thurs

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LESBIAN-SEPARATIST would like to hear from other lesbians on subject of separatism versus humanism. Please write to: Lari D'arc c/o R. Nichols, P. O. Box 3122, San Jose, CA 95116.

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