

# TRIVIA: Voices of Feminism

Lise Weil MeLissa Gabriels	Editorial	i-vii
Louky Bersianik Trans. by Lise Weil	<i>Lovesick</i>	1-2
Harriet Ellenberger	<i>Guerrilla Girl Ponders the Situation</i>	3-5
Barbara Mor	<i>the secret pornographies of republicans</i> <i>What's Left?</i> <i>Preferably Knot</i>	6-9 10-13 14-16
Sara Wright	<i>Communing With Bears</i>	17-23
Elissa Jones	TRIVIAL LIVES: <i>Division Street</i>	24-27
Rhonda Patzia	After Reading: <i>Les Guérillères</i>	28-30
Notes on Contributors		31-32

# TRIVIA

## Voices of Feminism

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### Acknowledgment:

Thank you to Rebecca Kidder for taking the time to create templates and having the patience to answer endless computer questions.

## Dedication:

This issue is dedicated to the memory of Monique Wittig.

Wittig was born in 1935 and died January 2003. She was a pioneer in feminist literature. Some of her well known texts include: *Les Guérillères*, *The Lesbian Body*, *Across the Acheron*, and *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*.

The theme of this issue is “the body” and was, in part, inspired by Wittig and the effect she has had on us.

# Editorial

## Why *Trivia: Voices of Feminism*? Why now?

It's exactly 22 years since the fall of 1982 when *Trivia: A Journal of Ideas* first came out. That was a time of conservative retrenchment in the US. Reagan was riding a wave of popularity that would soon sweep him into a second term in office and the religious right was beginning to make itself felt as a political presence. At the same time, in part thanks to readily available federal and state grant monies for alternative publications, relatively low printing costs, and thousands of independent bookstores, the country was also home to a highly politicized counter-culture. *Trivia* was one of several dozen radical feminist magazines already in existence or about to spring up, among them *Sinister Wisdom*, *Conditions*, *off our backs*, *Heresies*, *Ikon*, *Lesbian Ethics* and *Woman of Power*. Uncompromising feminist voices could be heard not just in journals like these but on the radio, in films, and occasionally even on TV and in the mainstream press. And all across the country a wealth of women's bookstores, presses, performance spaces, art galleries, conferences, book fairs and music festivals testified to a vibrant feminist culture, one that was becoming increasingly diverse along lines of color, class and fashion preferences.

Obviously, *Trivia: Voices of Feminism* is being born into a very different world. We have put this first issue together in the shadow of the US elections. Literally so: our one face-to-face meeting as editors took place in October in an apartment in a house in Saratoga Springs on which the landlord had nailed a big BUSH/CHENEY sign. Since the election—and as I write this it has been just over a month—I along with most women I know in the US (I've lived in Montreal since 1990) exist in an ongoing state of disbelief and dread. We are all bracing ourselves for the worst: not just a rollback of many of our own hardwon rights and a steep rise in poverty, but a renewed assault on the 36 million other species we share this earth with, along with the earth itself. Not just the mounting casualties in Iraq, but the escalating threat of massive attacks on human life around the world due in large part to the policies of this administration. In the face of such prospects, what purpose could possibly be served by the reappearance of a radical feminist rag?

On the day of Bush's "re-election," I found out the *Women's Review of Books*, which was born two years after *Trivia* and has held out valiantly ever since, was about to fold, in part because its subscription base has shrunk. Some would argue interest in feminism has dwindled as well. Our bookstores have disappeared, in part due to lack of clientele, and almost all the institutions that sustained that flourishing women's culture of the 70's and 80's are gone. Of the radical women's publications that sprouted in those years only *off our backs* is still publishing. If it seems to be getting a lot harder to believe that radical voices matter, maybe that's because today they are so rarely heard.

“Suddenly men were everywhere, reminding us how the lives of everyone alive today are held in their hands. Not just heads of state, generals, press secretaries, but also the white anchormen in their suits and ties controlling our minds at home. No women’s voices to be heard anywhere, not on TV, not in the streets, certainly not in the halls of government.” I wrote these words in my very last editorial for *Trivia*; the occasion was the launching of Bush senior’s Gulf War. How much more depressingly a propos they are now in these post-election weeks as everyone hunkers down for another four years of US sabre-rattling and Christian fundamentalism.

“It’s in your head you hear them always the droning cicadas of patriarchy.”

I stumbled upon Louky Bersianik’s “*Maladie d’Amour*” (“Lovesick”) on the internet three weeks after the election. I dropped everything I was doing to translate it. It was the first piece of writing I’d read in those weeks that spoke directly to my broken heart: “The chirring noise of the males which the females imitate. . . which thrusts its noisy presence between you and whatever you love, which makes you lovesick. . .” In those weeks no encounter or conversation with any of the beings in my life—not even my cat—produced a sliver of joy or lightness. And I was unable to so much as look at my own writing.

I had felt this way before, in the period after 9/11. The droning cicadas of patriarchy had never seemed louder than in those weeks and months. I remember at that time wondering how my voice, or any feminist voice, could possibly matter. And then I read Robin Morgan’s series of stirring, visionary reports from Ground Zero, “Ghosts and Echoes.” I read Starhawk’s accounts from around the world of the protest actions of the Global Justice Movement, all of them inspired by ancient Goddess wisdom. I began rereading Morgan’s decade-old book *The Demon Lover: the Sexuality of Terrorism*. And the old knowing, and along with it, the light, began to flood back in.

“Only in the feminist press,” I continued in that 1991 editorial (at the time there still *was* a feminist press) “did I find rage commensurate with the atrocities being flashed before us on the TV screen every day, complex and passionate analysis that went to the root of the problem and so was able to make the most vital connections. There is no other way of seeing the world, I realized all over again, that goes down so deep and spreads out so far.” Today, as post- 9/11 horrors continue to mount, these words ring truer than ever.

For there is also no other way of seeing the world that can adequately address the plague that is threatening our planet—which itself goes down so deep and spreads out so far. “Virocracy,” Harriet Ellenberger calls it, in her report in this issue, borrowing the term from Michèle Causse. “Patriarchy is way too tame a word to describe what’s been going on for the last 5000 years,” she writes. Indeed.

In one of her reports from the protest actions of 2002, Starhawk wrote, with reference to the fearlessness of the suicide bombers, “How much trickier it is to become fearless while seeking life. And yet that is what I believe we are called to do.” Though there is no feminist press to speak of today, lately I’ve been hearing quite a few such fearless voices out in the public domain. These voices—mostly all of them women’s—remind me that the root of the word courage is “heart.”

There is the great Australian anti-nuclear activist Helen Caldicott, who has been touring the US trying to raise awareness of the danger to the planet posed by the Bush administration. In a documentary made about the tour, she is seen shouting out at each stop, “These men all belong in jail! Either that or in a mental ward.” When asked by her own staff to tone it down for fear she’ll alienate her audience, she explodes: “Tone it down! Do you realize that what is at stake is all of creation?”

In Canada there is MP Carolyn Parrish who has repeatedly referred to Bush as “dangerous” and “warlike” and dared to publicly characterize the architects of the missile defense shield plan as “a coalition of idiots.” Who was finally booted out of the Liberal Party by the Prime Minister after she ground her heel into a George Bush doll on a television comedy show.

Right here in Quebec we have the great actress and *raconteuse* Pol Pelletier, whose one-woman show in November traced the tragic arc of the human species from Homo Sapiens to Homo Demens, and reminded us how relentlessly that history has been based on the erasure of female accomplishment. At the end of the performance, Pelletier mourned the fourteen young women engineering students who were gunned down in 1989 by a man who hated feminists, and raged at the way this event, like so many other crimes against women, has been muted and buried in the years since. On the night I attended, she received four standing ovations.

And now there are the passionate voices of the writers in this first issue of *Trivia: Voices of Feminism*. Voices of rage. Grief. Outrage. Where else, I have to ask myself again, is there to be found emotion—and urgency—commensurate with the atrocities of our time?

This past October I attended The Global Women’s Gathering in the Catskills: a meeting of western women leaders with indigenous women elders from around the world. For four days the native women, almost all of them healers, shared their stories, their wisdom and their prayers. On the second day, elders from Central and South America stood up one after another to say that according to the prophecies of their people, this was a time in which women would lead the nations. In another time and place, these statements might have brought out the jeering cynic in me. Yet the part of my mind that had been listening in awe all day to these women, and the western women who had come to meet with them, took them in as deep and irrefutable truth.

Reading the writers in this issue, I find myself doing so all over again.

For we must not underestimate the power of our grief, our rage, our outrage. As Sara Wright suggests, this is a time in which we are all being called upon to bear witness, with all the presence we can muster, to violations and desecrations both around the globe and in our own back yards that have reached new heights of insanity. Our embodied presence alone is powerful, and healing.

In a breakout session at the Global Women's Gathering on "Oppression: The Damage and the Healing," Alice Walker, one of the western women in attendance, reminded us that "to be woman is to be magic." If this is so, no doubt it's because throughout history we have been so conversant with the magic around us. With this in mind, Walker urged us all to "petition the natural world" in our pursuit of justice, to enlist all the powers of creation—trees, plants, animals, the earth herself, and all four elements—in our struggle to wrest this world back from those who have fashioned it in their own image of greed and fragmentation.

This first issue of *Trivia: Voices of Feminism* is dedicated to Monique Wittig, whose sudden death in 2003 meant the loss of one of our literary geniuses and most radical voices. May this reborn *Trivia* be guided by her example: her fierce feminist vision, her linguistic daring, and her lesbian soul. In the spirit of her *guérillères*, who, "the integrity of the body their first principle, advance marching together into another world," may we all keep courage in these difficult times.

*Trivia: A Journal of Ideas* was launched in Western Massachusetts. That fact mattered 22 years ago. In this age of virtual reality, geographic bases are not so easy to identify, and maybe not so important. Yet it matters to us that *Trivia: Voices of Feminism* in terms of its identity and its base be seen not as a US publication but a North American venue, a forum for women on both sides of the border. We also hope that *Trivia: VoF* will do a better job of embracing the realities of women of color and truly marginalized women than her foresister did.

22 is a mystical number. In numerological terms, it's the number of the master builder. *Trivia: a Journal of Ideas* appeared 22 times. Now, 22 years since that fall of 1982 when *Trivia* first came out, it seems a most propitious moment to launch her twenty-first century sister.

*Lise Weil*

## **We Carry On**

Two years ago I came alive reading women's words – powerful, inspiring words spiraling within my body, telling stories of reality and imagination. I explored feminists from the '70s and '80s whose words possessed a *we will not stop writing until the subjugation of women has ended* energy, women writers from Quebec who inspired me to write my own words, my own story. And I read a bagful of old *Trivia* issues I borrowed from Lise Weil one summer day in 2003.

“We desire a world which will simultaneously express and encourage the real-ization of our fullest potential as intelligent and creative beings,” Anne Dellenbaugh wrote in the very first *Trivia* back in '82. When I read women writers from the '70s and '80s, women writers from Quebec and writers from those old *Trivia* issues, I felt their passion. They were writing to create a world where they could exist as themselves – as whole bodies.

*i can feel the bodies of writing breathing, feel myself alive – feel. these women's voices lead somewhere, a movement toward possibility, hope, change. deep inside my belly a longing to be part of something greater, a movement – maybe just motion. as if those words were written for my eyes. as if my words, my voice, my Self could be significant too.*

I was halfway through working on my Master's degree and began to center my studies around my own ideas, to write about the literature I loved most and to give weight to my own intuitions and instincts – even when they went against what I knew was acceptable in traditional academe. My thoughts, ideas, passions, dreams became something to be expressed rather than denied, became significant and energizing.

*building friendships with other women i meet at school. talking about our lives, politics, literature – everything. yes, everything. i begin to move into myself, a woman body talking writing breathing ... dreaming.*

*Trivia: Voices of Feminism* began with a dream – literally. I sent Lise an e-mail, summer 2003 not long after I read those old issues, to tell about a dream that we re-started *Trivia* along with Elizabeth (Waller, whom I had met briefly that same week). I don't recall the details of that first dream, except Lise's response: *wouldn't that be something?*

*wouldn't that be something? me, a catalyst for creating a space for women's words – radical, strong, powerful, significant, beautiful and inspiring words representing a myriad of voices. me, artist writer poet ... editor? awake: this is not something i let myself believe possible.*



I continued to dream, my dreams increasing in detail throughout the year. From time to time I would share new versions: there would be five of us, “voices of feminism” would be the title, we brainstormed at a cabin (our first “meeting” was a phone conference where Liz and Lise called me from a cabin). And in my dreams the journal is always in hard-copy – something we all dream will someday be possible.

It was almost a year after the first dream that my own dreams began to transform into our collective dream. We discovered that an on-line venue would be feasible, and soon after Layla (Holguin-Messner) and Elissa (Jones) joined the collective.

*dreams are so easy: resting on my pillow, my puppy nearby, drifting off, floating away. no conflict, no outside interference, no doubts – events unfold before morning and the journal, issues, appear. in dream-moments intuition is the only force that exists – guiding, moving, knowing.*  
*awake: i distance myself, feel like i'm sure of less.*

My mind, despite the accuracy of many of my dreams, causes me to doubt my intuitions. And the November 2004 U.S. elections made me wonder if it was even possible to resurrect the passion, energy and power I sensed from feminists from decades ago. What could be the point of creating a journal for radical women’s writing at this time -- when the political climate is so anti-woman, when this election ensured that we would lose more rights to make decisions about our own bodies, when morality is being defined by old white men and their religious propaganda, when silence and censorship is increasing? What could be the point when all these things made me feel so hopeless it weighed down in the pit of my belly?

And then I read Louky Bersianik’s poem, her words: “The strident cry of the world in the present state of the world which kills you without killing you ...”

*knowledge weighing down in my body, killing me without killing me. unable to channel my rage, losing sight along the way, bogged down by every oppression i hear about, feeling powerless hopeless silent. without reading/writing, passively accepting a world killing me without killing me.*

I need my awareness of what’s happening in the world to ground me, to motivate me. But this knowledge is only useful if it leads to action. And writing is a form of action, standing up for our bodies, fighting to exist as ourSelves. In the most beautiful line from one of my favorite Nicole Brossard texts, she writes:

... we are always like water and mirror, fire and matrix, like that which

conquers even the principle of conquest, that is, what captivates our senses and suggests the poem which makes me say that *the chest holds the meaning of the breath we find there*, as if each time it were a matter of writing: I carry on.

[“The Aerial Letter,” 87, italics mine]

*the chest holds the meaning of the breath we find there – words i return to, read over and over again to re-energize myself. the reality of our bodies, our experiences, our voices gives rise to movements of women. all movement is important; every voice every book every poem every word written uncensored is liberation – creating spaces of freedom where awake we are able to imagine something more is possible.*

Our words matter individually and collectively. Women’s words inspiring, energizing, reaching out to other women is what *Trivia: Voices of Feminism* is about. We are creating a space untouched, uncensored, unsilenced by the agenda of the political right.

We write because it is a way we can carry on.

*MeLissa Gabriels*

22 years ago there was no such thing as the internet. We are blessed to have access to this technology that permits us to launch *Trivia* around the world without having to pay a printing bill or worry about distributors and bookstores. Our endless thanks to Rebecca Kidder, who donated a hosting service to us.

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At the same time, our dream is for *Trivia* to morph back into a print journal before too long. If any of our readers has ideas for how we might gain institutional support to make this possible, we would appreciate hearing from you.

# Maladie d'amour\*

par Louky Bersianik

*Tout finit par mourir  
excepté la conscience  
qui témoigne pour la vie.*  
René Char

C'est dans la tête qu'on les entend parfois les cigales  
monocordes du patriarcat.

Le son aigu de l'épée flamboyante d'Achille qui vous tue  
sans vous toucher parce qu'elle est suspendue au-dessus  
de vos têtes, parce qu'elle insiste à se tenir sans cesse à  
vos côtés, parce qu'elle fait de l'ombre à votre ombre et  
couche entre vous et ce que vous aimez, ce qui vous rend  
malade d'amour ; et parce que c'est pour cette maladie  
d'amour que l'on vous soigne au fond de la terre,  
aveuglément, au centre des ténèbres.

C'est dans la tête qu'on les entend presque toujours les  
cigales monocordes du patriarcat.

Le bruit stridulant des mâles qu'imitent les femelles aux  
quatre ailes membraneuses, qui vous tue sans vous toucher  
parce qu'il vous projette sous la coupole métallique d'un  
soleil impitoyable à vos quatre petites vérités, parce qu'il  
vous pénètre jusqu'à l'os de sa terrible fiction déguisée en  
lumière universelle, parce qu'il vous assène sa présence  
tapageuse entre vous et ce que vous aimez, ce qui vous  
rend malade d'amour; et parce que c'est pour cette maladie  
d'amour que l'on vous soigne à l'aveuglette au centre des  
ténèbres.

C'est dans la tête toujours qu'on les entend les cigales  
monocordes du patriarcat.

Le cri strident du monde en l'état présent du monde qui  
vous tue sans vous tuer parce qu'il vous transperce l'oreille  
gauche d'un espoir aigu toujours déçu, parce qu'il publie à  
grand fracas d'éclatantes métamorphoses qu'avec votre  
complicité il n'accomplit jamais, parce qu'il tient votre vie en  
suspens sur cette note assourdissante, parce qu'il  
s'interpose violemment entre vous et qui vous aimez, ce qui  
vous rend malade d'amour; et parce que cette maladie  
incurable s'est logée dans votre tête au centre des ténèbres.

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\*Mis en ligne sur Sisyphes, le 14 novembre 2004.

# Lovesick\*

By Louky Bersianik

Translated by Lise Weil

*Everything dies in the end  
except consciousness  
which bears witness to life*

René Char

It's in your head you hear them sometimes the droning cicadas of patriarchy.

The shrill sound of Achilles' blazing sword which kills you without touching you because it hangs over your heads, because it insists on staying ceaselessly beside you, because it shadows your shadow and lies down between you and whatever you love, which makes you lovesick; and because it's this lovesickness for which you are being treated in the depths of the earth, blindly, at the center of darkness.

It's in your head you hear them almost always the droning cicadas of patriarchy.

The chirring noise of the males which the females imitate with their four membranous wings, which kills you without touching you because it flings you under the metallic dome of a sun with no pity for your four little truths, because it penetrates you to the bone of its terrible fiction disguised as universal light, because it thrusts its noisy presence between you and whatever you love, which makes you lovesick; and because it is for this lovesickness you are being treated, gropingly, at the center of darkness.

It's in your head you always hear them the droning cicadas of patriarchy.

The strident cry of the world in the present state of the world which kills you without killing you because it pierces your left ear with a shrill hope always dashed, because it advertises with great fanfare dazzling metamorphoses which with your complicity it never accomplishes, because it holds your life in suspense over this deafening note, because it interposes itself violently between you and whomever you love, which makes you lovesick; and because this incurable sickness has lodged itself in your head at the center of darkness.

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\* The original appeared on-line in *Sisyphé*, November 14, 2004.

# Guerrilla Girl Ponders The Situation

report submitted by Harriet Ellenberger, 8 November 2004

## Wily Fox's Time-tested Advice

When confronted by overwhelming forces bent on your submission and/or extermination, do not fight them head-on. Rather, *go around them*. Send in your scouts; gather intelligence. Probe their defenses, exploit their weaknesses, withdraw only to return again and again. In other words, nibble the edges of the cookie until the cookie crumbles.

## Definition of Terms and Preliminary Situation-Assessment

- 1) The term *virioracy* shall signify the machineries and ideology of male hegemony, following the usage of Michèle Causse, who rightly notes that *patriarchy* (father-rule) is way too tame a word to describe what's been going on for the last 5000 years.
- 2) The term *Americanist fascism* shall refer both to the U.S. Republican party as a movement and to the U.S. government and military, which it now controls.
- 3) Americanist fascism may be analyzed as a late and culminating manifestation of virioracy, with some features specific to the U.S.A. and to the early 21st century.
- 4) This scout regards Americanist fascism as our primary species-emergency, currently the chief enemy of human survival.

## Weaknesses of Americanist Fascism: Initial Survey

- 1) Well, the first one is easy: they're nuts. What makes them dangerous also makes them vulnerable. Reality always comes as a surprise, since they don't make a practice of staying in touch with it.
- 2) The national economy they "manage" is headed into the toilet. And they can't begin to fix it without violating their own ideology and alienating their corporate backers.
- 3) They have no plan to cope with climate change nor catastrophic weather, regarding the former as a plot by Commie scientists and the latter as one more opportunity for insurance companies to hike their rates. Mother Nature, unimpressed, continues to brew up her increasingly impressive displays of displeasure.
- 4) Iraq. Requires huge infusions of blood and money to maintain this famously depraved occupation. Eventual ouster guaranteed.

5) Peak oil. Their strategy for controlling the world's decreasing oil supplies is coming apart at the seams. The plan was to attack and occupy prime pipeline locations (Afghanistan) as well as oil-producing countries themselves (see previous entry on Iraq). The attacking and occupying military, however, runs on oil. So far, the U.S. has used up more oil invading and occupying Iraq than it has gained from stealing her oil wells. During the day of Bush's "re-election" and the day after, Iraqi resistance fighters shut off oil production once again, blowing up sections of three pipelines.

6) Finally, and most importantly, Americanist fascism -- a movement and a government intent on overt and brutal world domination -- inevitably generates worldwide resistance, resistance within every sector of every society.

***Long live the resistance.***

**Afterword**, 28 November 2004

For me, the saddest and most ironic thing about my country of origin being taken over by a recycled version of fascism is this: the hard-right developed in the U.S. in imitation of and reaction to the civil rights and anti-war and, above all, the feminist movements. It's the backlash to everything I poured my heart into. And it's more monstrously lethal than what we were fighting in the 60s and 70s. Also, of course, the destruction of the planet by humans is remarkably more advanced and visible than it was thirty or forty years ago. Watching the television news, I have the odd sensation of time running backwards and time running out.

Thirty years ago I held to a flickering hope that we (but who was this "we"?) could turn around the funeral procession of the human species which was male dominance -- just in time, at the cliff's edge. Now that hope may have guttered out, but I'm left with something more solid. Free females do not submit to tyranny. Period. To do so would be a breach of honour, a surrender of principle, a soul-extinction. Not permissible, not even thinkable.

I decide to resist mindless killers with my own mind, for as much time as I have left, and with the only weapons I know how to use, plain old words. I urge every free-thinking, free-spirited female to find her own forms of resistance and to exercise them, daily. We may be up against what can seem at times hopeless odds, but no one can make us less than we are.

***Long live the resistance.***

**Note on Sources**

For a full elaboration of her theoretical work, see Michèle Causse, *Contre le sexage* (Paris: Éditions Balland, 2000).

My survey of “weaknesses of Americanist fascism” is based on conversations with my partner, a retired Canadian military-intelligence officer, and on far too much Internet reading over the past three years. A few of the sites I check frequently: “Centre for Research on Globalization” [www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) and “From the Wilderness Publications” [www.fromthewilderness.com](http://www.fromthewilderness.com)

**WORKING NOTE:**

15 November 2004

*“Guerrilla Girl” might have been entitled “Post-Cassandra.” When I look back at my writing attempts since the early ‘70s, they’re Cassandra-ish, full of warnings and portents in the sky, “patriarchy is the funeral procession of the human species,” etc. But that was yesterday. When the expiry date for warnings has passed, what choice does a girl have? Mutter darkly “we told you so” before retiring into meditative silence? Evidently, I prefer to go on the warpath, with the only weapons I know how to use: plain old words.*

*One picky little note on why I use the term “Americanist fascism” instead of “American fascism”:*

*a) People in the USA do not get to claim the adjective “American” to describe anything about themselves, including their worst excesses. “American” describes beings and events in North America, Central America and South America.*

*b) Americanism is a de facto, if intellectually disreputable, ideology, rampant among the U.S. populace of elementary-school age and above, which may be roughly summarized as “Rah, rah, rah, sis-boom-bah, we’s the only humans, the rest of you is dogs.” Americanism as ideology gets played out real-time in places like Abu Ghraib and Fallujah.*

# the secret pornographies of republicans

by Barbara Mor

another century, Albuquerque BagNSave parkinglot a man  
bent over newspaperbox fixt on a headline, little man  
balding paunchy sweaty exactly what you think headline  
bold letters Women Learn Self-Abortion Techniques, the  
story describes detaild method Menstrual Extraction 5-6000  
people line Central Ave Rte 66 3 miles away simultaneously  
men women white shirts,blouses dark blue pants,skirts Gods  
uniform, all hold identical signs preprinted Abortion is Murder  
Abortar es Matar and every fetus in the womb is Jesus if a  
boy and Mary Mother of Jesus if a girl and the woman on Albq  
Journals frontpage poses naked & obscene, 29 years old he  
imagines thick legs open facing the world of course she wears  
lipstick, tongue pusht thru bloody mouth long scarlet purple  
fingernails insert vacuum into wet vagina squeeze bulb whirr  
blender suck out yr brains the little man stares, sweaty, dizzy  
into lurid Hole, his whole life flashes before his eyes like a  
newsstrip, not much but his so it is HisLife getting suckt out  
because Women can do it, story that made illegal again they  
will do it anyway, learn criminal techniques, hide in cars  
apartments YWCA locker rooms subvert the Law abort fetuses  
again and again which is always Him and theyd better stop  
before Women destroy the World as Bible sd if not controlld  
they will because That's What They Are: Evil, out to kill  
men, suck him in then suck him out, how he always knew  
God warned about the daughters of Earth & Eden, he stares  
into the Pit imagines what he never saw, hidden & evil organ  
the Cervix of Life given power to say Yes No You Not You a  
Satanic Power the Whore writes one name Book of Life another  
name suckt out, his, this is Gods arbitrary power not Hers why  
nobody ever gives an inch they'll take a mile spread the Cunt 3  
miles wide suction out every man on the planet, w/sweat  
dripping rancid drops from his forehead cheeks palms it hits  
the asphalt sizzles & burns

some are religious wounds some Cervixes of war, some  
scream ecstatic labor some shrapnel annihilation the music  
is the same always some machine penetrates flesh w/Glory  
one-way street of martyrs you have no choice but to fuck  
Inflicted Pain. the Inquisition is Alive & loves you, O fix  
yr body for the fire.the Pear steel heatd in fire insertd mouth  
anus vagina opend like scissors wide w/screaming yr words  
will be recorded against you.fire placed on chosen flesh  
spots, breast belly loins pretty face the molten portion



turnd gangrenous scoopt out w/silver spoon blessd by Our priest, or you may undergo disjoint of every bone. torture is a concept, torture is a song, our Lord Christ on Cross sang these lyrics for yr destroyd mouth they are too good for you crouchd in cell dissolvd into wall the bulldozer takes yr body like a lover, you may be crushd, burst as rubble, between a toilet & a bed yr lifespan yr crime being born of a toilet & a bed thus Motherhood condemns its spawn, placenta of urine feces & blood wraps yr head, a penitents hood & electric wires fuse mortal nerve & shame to our God, this is the birth of Orgasm as our finger enters yr virgin brain & explodes he stuffd frogs w/firecrackers as a kid he liked to explode things from the inside our boy at Yale he'd brand fraternity pledges w/hot clotheshangers w/a cigarette burn chuckle dreamd to do abortions w/hot clotheshangers in his alcohol dreams some men inherit powers of life or death, godlike, pull levers release the gas then laugh, the woman pleaded dont kill me please dont kill me please dont and he laughd people are poor because theyre lazy & frogs explode because theyre frogs the difference between criminal & rich is me, you got a problem w/this? a cruel mean boy our george & his daddys war & his grandpas war all the family friends & bankers unloading historys most lethal arsenal on nations of dust, wretches crawling in dust, radiant dust a planet crawling in its own rubble thats tradition no problem if you worship Creator above Creation, our boy blows up frogs for God, explodes anything he wants for Jesus they plead dont destroy us please dont please stop & he laughs, like God, if you work for the Creator not Creation the humiliation of Nature is a Church & all yr friends attend, & none in this crowd suffers consequences of Armageddon because God so loves the rich & all rich people live beyond, in heaven surely this is what it looks like w/Christ on our side surely this is what we get in Our Man he talks to God his Daddy who is bigger than yr daddy & says Bring it on, boomboom this is My Boy George give him a world to fuck over raw Texas bluff & venal character, rancid barbecue brains w/donator ants carrying off the good parts all the pious sadists all the brothel lobbies all singing whore choirs of offshore guns & oil & tax shelters a planet torturd by sour vengeance & flaccid wet dreams of middleaged men & their incorporeal wives Good Old Boys w/their mooing Cows, smoking cigars

in the Cowboy Church this is America shut up

4 year old boy Fallujah UK newsphoto left hand gone left leg at thigh 'a horrible groin wound' in a hospital bed naked inside bandages his left arm gangrenous, w/out surgery ('what remains of groin') he will die his name is Ali gone inside his body exploded from inside his country so many war wounds like sex organs kept from human eyes we see not only women bleed men bleed everywhere day&night, & animals & children, those w/faces gone eyes nose mouth ears hair laughter future but still alive as a country 10,000 years old is shattered like God wants to destroy yr memory palaces museums mosques palm trees & crescent moon on burnt horizon, heads float w/out bodies in the river, bodies w/out heads the annihilation of a culture is what precision thinking is all about

a dear small girl sleeps, perfect face, top of skull exploded & emptied out, as if her black hair grows from plaster shards where her dreams blew out, 6 year old spasmed on dirtfloor naked torso from nipple to crotch exploded, jagged stitches close her like a child's stitching, she is crying, a young boy w/2 charred arms, bones & tendons exposed like frayed wires & pipes in some unfinished house, a torso of lurid colors, a young woman w/no arms, bandaged stubs extend from her chest, entire nude torso a wild tattoo of burnt flesh, no breasts no navel no pubic sex, napalm exploding time a kind of bridal skin, metal rods overarching for sheets to cover her modesty w/out touching. or recall 1991 El Amariya 2 misfired Bunker Busters the 2-story public shelter boiling water 1000 degrees poured in fetuses boiled alive inside their mothers 403 people burned boiled exploded from inside buried alive inside dead mother earth buried alive inside a war, as reported this was not hell but the residue of hell, 1 inch boiled human fat floated as cream on top of the waters as boiling water rose fingernail marks on walls crazed & visible as people tried to escape, their screams linger 13 years, the outline of mother & child scorched into a plaster wall, one of many, this is not a video game by god weve kickd th'Vietnam syndrome once & for all by god weve revengd

BabylonianCaptivityChristsCrucifixionWW2 9/11  
 the expulsion from Eden thanks to evil women  
 there is something Divine about certain wounds  
 we demonstrate mortality Gods wrath & grace  
 you are nothing to Him but this greasy smear on  
 an ancient wall, bits of mother&child skull, yr  
 pitiful wail, a little girl curled up as if awaiting  
 birth, head back mouth open gasping her last  
 breath in a huge placenta of inpoured sand

some men too religious for abortion strangely  
 aroused by war & its wounds their scrotums &  
 wattles vibrate together in an obscene harmonics  
 beyond the hearing of dogs this mutilation they  
 call God this sacred horror they call War now  
 now these people know how vulnerable they are  
 imagine iraq like a human body what happens if  
 you sever their spinal cord they cant walk, right?  
 said the military man & the mice the rabbits the  
 old men soldiers women all crawl whimpering  
 piteously in their 10,000 years of sand *Inanna*  
*wails we cannot answer there can be no answer*  
*to her desolate calling grass will grow from*  
*this dead land waters rise I cannot come to her*  
*calling I am not shoots of grass in a dead land*  
*we are not water to come for her wailing*  
 nothing we are as it was meant pornographies  
 of simple flesh become our country so many  
 wounds like sex organs we are not meant to see

#### Notes on sources

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 and a Guide to the Language of Mass Media Propaganda*. CD Adasam Ltd., UK, 2002.  
<http://www.firethistime.org> A sound montage of American, British, Middle East voices (historic narrative, news  
 reports, statements of participants and opponents) surrounding Gulf War 1. "By God, we've kicked the Vietnam  
 syndrome once and for all" are the words of then-president George H.W. Bush. "Imagine Iraq like a human body,  
 what happens if you sever their spinal cord, they can't walk, right?" is from an unattributed montage of field  
 recordings. Description of the El Amariya shelter bombing is taken from media sources and Iraqi field recordings  
 included on this CD.

## What's Left?\*

What's Left, literally, is The Sinister: the Body's Left Side (Dark Side of the Mother, the Flesh & the Heart): the *nagual*. This realm which hyperrational males, positioned along all points of the ideological spectrum, have Dextrously (righteously) marked off as profane, errant, forbidden; or have worked to subordinate to some auxiliary category (Index under Politics: & Women). The patriarchal mind, from Bible to Bacon, Marx to Freud, Bookchin to – yes, sorry – Nader, does not escape its Inquisitional fascination with strict daylight dogmatism, which quickly collapses into anal-obsessiveness over correct practice and procedure, ritual observance, the absolute length of beard-hair or number of whip-strokes per minute per breath of Crime: the exact size shape & weight of stones collected fervidly to be used to stone the radical body to its Deserved Death.

Man's Law, that is, which is always Right, i.e. in definitive control of Pain Distribution. The failure of the Left has always been its Fear of its own Dark Side. The 'inchoate' Energies, described as Freudian Id, Jungian Unconscious, just general Funk & Fate, are the miasmatic orgasms of the Female historically misnamed, misdiagnosed & bungled by the Good Doctors of social design. Western Patriarchy enters the Dark always in a missionary spirit, to "help" or "manage" or "cure" those parts of town assigned to crime, sex, poverty, intoxication, all the Transgressive Neighborhoods defined as problematic to the achievement of Paradise.

Artists & Poets know, or have known, that this DarkTurf exists primally, and exists Necessarily as urgent Medicine for a Sick Paradisial Ideal. It is not "the Dark" that needs help or cure, that is; rather: Doctor, Fix Yrself.

Think of a Tapestry: perfect clarity on the daylight side, as disciplined threads appear to compose the picture. Turn it over, however, and you see what MAKES the picture: the strings of creation as crazy Technicolor snakes squirming, twisting, intercouring around the terrain of the darkside. The power of Biology grows from Inside Darkness; the Seed and the Brain express their Interior Dark; 6 billion years of Earth manifested gorgeously *before* the Human Eye. This is the Mad Method which performs the Illusion of the Composition, and it Performs on & of the Dark Side.

The Side of Light functions righteously to Control and Commodify this primal reality. The historic "Left" has always used Female Energy to fuel its "Revolutions": against the Father, the Church, the State. French women started the bread riots, stormed the Bastille, killed and were killed; victorious, however, their brothers-in-arms wrote laws to return French women to their skirts and their kitchens, and legally took away their guns, lest "feminine & domestic charms" be threatened by "empowerment." It's an old story.

E.g., today's Left disdains a politics of "population control," arguing correctly that it is the Industrialized West, of low population growth, which consumes a huge majority of earth's resources, and exudes a huge percentage of earth's pollution. Ignoring, or dismissing, the fact that "population control" is a major factor and function of Female Liberation from our traditional abuse as cultural breed cows. Without female sexual autonomy, fascism is inevitable: the control of the female reproductive body by the male state is the Origin of Fascism. But "women's issues" define, for Leftist males, subordinate issues. Ralph

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\*This essay originally appeared in *The Dissident Voice*.

Nader tells us once again: “There is no difference between Democrats and Republicans.” No woman in desperate need of an abortion would say that; Nader will never of course be in this or any other desperate need; and the next time he mouths this priestly drivel I hope a flock of grrrl crows and vultures attacks him and aborts his fetal words. I hope some tough & fertile bitch jumps up on stage and Punches Out His Lights. Because this is all that’s usefully Left:

Bar sinister: sons of the Lawless Side  
 Bat sinister: feral, crazy bat daughters.

Eschewing the Dark Side, the Left has no Vision. Left politics are mostly reactive, rarely creative. In Europe, e.g., in opposition to the American-Israeli alliance of holy contempt for the world, the Left moves to embrace the Muslim cause – the Palestinians, yes, but also the French Muslim fundamentalist campaign to retain girls’ headscarves in the public schools. “The enemy of my enemy is my friend,” sez the Leftie, and even goes so far as to believe this constitutes a chic, radical position. It is not radical but merely reactive. It establishes no principle or position, but merely a formula of alliances. Here is the place to quote that Dissident Voice epigraph from Thoreau: “There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root.” There’s really no time left for any act but a strike at the Root, but most hackers on the Left have no clue as to its location.

Last year I saw a frontpage newsphoto showing an Israeli teen and her brother walking behind a Palestinian girl: the Israeli girl is reaching out to yank off the Muslim girl’s headscarf. It’s an act of religious & political harassment, yes. I despise Israel’s behavior; I despise the American-Israeli collusion against the world; even so, looking at that photo, I have the same impulse as that Israeli teen. It’s not a Jewish vs. Muslim impulse – I’m Irish Pagan – it is the Fist of the New against the Old, the Naked Mind against the Uniform, most of all the ShitKicking Reichian West against the Puritanic Repressive Religions. It is Knowledge versus Fear. Europe worked 500 years to crawl out of the God-Pit of the Inquisition, Europeans and the colonized globally have suffered millennia of religious, bible-based persecution and sectarian warfare, American women are still involved in essential struggle against “God” for autonomy of our bodies & our brains: this is the Root position. We must refuse to be dragged backward into that abyss. If Muslim women want to enjoy the relative “freedoms” of the West, they must know these freedoms are hard won, and always fragile. If you fear being “debauched by modernity,” go home to the desert. Women in burqas whose men carry rocketlaunchers is more than a surreal anachronism: it is the utmost in spiritual & intellectual hypocrisy. (A PoMo thesis that “the Enlightenment led to Auschwitz” by undermining the Western belief in “God” is equally fraudulent; i.e., what then led to the preEnlightenment “God-ordained” Inquisition, all 500 sadistic years of it?? The Enlightenment was Europe’s attempt to overcome the Inquisition: to the extent it failed we got the 20<sup>th</sup> c. Hells-on-Earth; to the extent it succeeded, we got us.)

The Left, long contemptuous of “religion,” ineptly confronts the giant psychophysical social surges and erotic convulsions of Jihad & Holy War. Liberals & Leftists are afraid to confront “God” – except with the dry disdain that characterizes believers in secular rather than metaphysical Solutions. Turning chickenshit into formula, PC became a strategy for avoiding Root confrontation: a way to parade as Radical while not “offending” anyone.

A generation of earnest young politicians was educated to think you can solve a problem by correctly labeling it: That's racist! That's sexist! That's religiously intolerant!

Well yeh, duh, so what else is AT THE ROOT???

Christian America, Zionist Israel and the Muslim Fundamentalist regimes *together* are The 4<sup>th</sup> Reich; these bulldozer bullies for "God" will happily flatten every contradiction into rubble and upon this bloody plot build tacky Theme Parks of Pious Democracy in the place of indigenous sensual global variety; these actual snuff games are being played out before our eyes and we do not accurately name them, or holistically denounce them, lest we Hurt Someone's Feelings – i.e., everyone involved is a Victim of Historic Hurt, ergo beyond Critique. Mel Gibson's sacred S/M flick, *The Passion of the Christ*, appears right now to remind us that the biblical religions, all 3, are based on the sadistic manipulation of guilt: You disobeyed God, You are Sinful, You killed Jesus, You are Filth & Dust Born of Woman – yaddayaddayadda – the continuous manipulation of ONTOLOGICAL GUILT for the Ontological FACT of Being Alive on Earth. The Left does not usefully exist unless it denies/defies this Business of Guilt and embraces the Poetry of this Fact. But to do so, the Left must become open to the suffusion of FemaleErotic Darkness (which is The Female Mind) to a degree it has never accepted, insofar as the male-determined Left is in itself a familial disciple of that same Guilt-Trip Business. Thus the Left has managed to turn off the world, revealing itself systemically as the DreamKillCopTwin of the tyrant Right.

This rabid Right "frames the Big Picture." E.g., O'Reilly & Savage analogize 1) "The Anarchy on Our Borders, immigrants swamping our culture & sucking off our welfare" with 2) "Anarchy in Our Morality, gay rights, abortion, media hedonism, bastard babies sucking on Janet's exposed tit" – they can do this because, being breathtakingly simple-minded, they construct without compunction simple-minded Pictures. (I.e., blaming these "anarchies" on Liberalism, when every issue depicted is a function of cutthroat capitalist systems, re employers seeking low-wage labor and media seeking profits, as mere human beings struggle & drown in the resultant floods of dislocation.)

The Left can't frame "a Big Picture," or finds "a Big Picture" too Scary. It is unable or not willing to Challenge GOD, the BibleBoys, Yahweh Moses Jesus and Allah with their combined global BankAccounts. Leftist discourse has never addressed Religion as a power equal to Economics in the *movement* of human beings: the movement of passions as well as massed bodies. Only a witchy few 2<sup>nd</sup> wave feminists, a few brave citizens mounting 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment law suits, have stood up on their revolutionary hindlegs to refute the tv preachers and radio bigmouths on their own turf, i.e. Faux Holy Ground. These God Salesmen, in the bizness of vampirizing our human energies for 2000 years, can rely on Liberal Fear & Leftist Discomfort to join in avoidance of ontological battle over "sacred things: who defines them?" Liberals pander, Leftists shrug and run. Meanwhile, next time a state judge installs his customized 10 ton version of the Biblical Ten Commandments in the middle of your downtown courthouse, here's the argument: The First Amendment precludes the government from the establishment of a religion. The First Commandment is: "I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt have no other gods before me." And *that* is the establishment of a specific religion: an exclusive monotheism. The First Commandment directly contradicts and countermands the First Amendment. So every politician should be publicly challenged to choose between them: your Constitution or your Bible? They can't both rule this country.

Europe, unlike America, has been the arena of historic disembowelment over issues of Holy War, Roman invasion and forced conversion of pagan tribes, Crusades & Inquisitions, the Catholic-Protestant mutual massacres called sectarian war, plus WW1, WW2, Nazi death

camps and Stalinist gulags, all “secular” extensions of the original FanaticVision. Europe is tired of it, we hope, and thereby wiser. Americans must look harder to find an authentic political position (the Archimedean leverage point) *outside* the mechanical Left-Right dualisms which decorate & twist our Tree’s dialectic branches but are *not* The Root. The Root of America is that it was once pagan, wild and various. Jefferson, Madison and Franklin, Marx & Engels learned from American Indians, not the reverse. Despite the Holy Liars, our Constitution is *not* “based on the Judeo-Christian Bible” but on the Iroquois Confederacy, with help from pagan European tribal systems, the Magna Carta, John Locke & Voltaire. To be reminded of this, Leftists should reread Thomas Paine, and revisit Thomas Morton & his Maypole. (Plus check out Jim Goad’s The Redneck Manifesto.)

One European friend and intellectual comrade to Paine was Mary Wollstonecraft. Ring any bells? The Leftist dismissal of “women’s issues” as secondary forces of change has robbed us of a potent(ial) Holism of Energies vis-à-vis the extant networks of Oppression: Church, State, Economic systems. Those feminists who attacked Patriarchy were not simply being “women”(i.e., complainants within the system), but expressors of a bloody *Outside* Position: outside Taliban and AlQaeda, outside Israel and Palestine, outside America and Israel, *Outside the Holy War*, which by definition is waged by & for the glory of the Hole-Stuffing Male, whose claims of GodHead subordinate all Nature and natural life&death to this WhollyDelusion: MonoText&Gun. Before being brainwashed into HandMaidens, all females are Born Rebels. Females are the Original Left, and it would’ve been nice to acknowledge this, and to grow upon this primal ground the alliance of Earth, Women, Children, Animals, Air Water Seed & Imagination AGAINST the Agony of Abrahamic Alienation.

## Preferably Knot\*

Streetliving Tucson, 1987-88, I'd search out quiet weekend places to do personal hygiene. Washed-out shirts, underwear etc. qwik-dri in desert air. The usual public buildings were closed, and the usual BurgerKing, Carl's Jr. tiny restrooms – one toilet, one sink – were noisy with weekend families; little boys in womens' bathrooms w/their mothers tend to get down on their hands & knees to peek under the stall, it's a compulsion to view The Strange Other at Her Worst. And if you're washing your shorts in the sink, they freak. I chewed raw garlicbulbs to boost my immune system, this created a vampyre-free-zone aura around me that was strategically useful, but socially offputting in close quarters. So I hung out at the U of A, the student center building had a big 2<sup>nd</sup> floor lounge with rows of sinks & stalls, coolly uninhabited on Sunday mornings. The University, I felt, was sort of "home" – because, duh, my book was in the U of A library, it would be used in Women's Studies classes; and hey, I'd applied (unsuccessfully) for work as library clerk, summer press copy editor and, through the Maintenance Dept., as lounge matron & general toiletbowl cleanser. On Sundays, when others were in Church, it felt luxurious to wash undies & armpits in the big unoccupied 2<sup>nd</sup> floor lounge, real soap & hot water....a Mental Retreat, where homeless American feminist writers might feel "at home" ("misery hides aloof" sez Melville).

Then, one morning, spongebathing & footwashing, my shirt unbuttoned (no bra, no shoes), the matron suddenly stuck her head around the door, I looked up to see a look of horror on her face, whereupon she turned and ran down the empty hall squealing "She's bathing in there! She's bathing in there!"

I got out quick, nothing happened. Except I never went back. The maid's shock notified me that, of course, UA was *not* "home" to my body, even though its Library might house my book. The maid didn't see "a writer" but "a public nuisance" – and her perception was, of course, the operative view.

Thirteen months of this, let's call it Bartleby's mix of Pride & Despair. Pride, i.e., "I knew who I was." But who was that, really? A street bum, using taxpayer-funded state intellectual facilities for personal hygiene. If not illegal, shameful. Scum of the earth. Despair, because regardless of what I might have written, or thought, or done, it didn't matter: I was existential Pariah. Books, poetry, radical politics, feminism, a list of self-delusions I carried in my levi pocket. Nothing matters in America but Money, and we all know that. Who You Are Is Yr Bank Account, Not Yr Mind.

This knowledge, this truth, this fact, is Crushing. The literal weight of it on your chest stops the heart, pushes air from the lungs. As if the whole megaquadrillion ton weight of Wall St falls on you: but it doesn't even have to fall on you, it crushes virtually, effectively, by just Being There: the Wall of Money. Before which all your fellow citizens kneel, trembling, in obeisance. If this is America, if this is Reality, then this is Home: something you have to pay for.

Thus Bartleby: the Soul w/out a Home in America.

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\* This essay originally appeared in *The Dissident Voice*.



He is the homeless soul the West has *built*.

Melville, most American of writers, dreaming Kafka's 20<sup>th</sup> c. in his shortstories, in Bartleby creates the Dickensian doppelganger, London's financial, legal & penal architecture transported from Victorian England into 19<sup>th</sup> c. America (supposedly "a new world") – Wall St, The Tombs, the same gaunt gloomy buildings of biophobic power shutting out light & health, mocking human happiness, rendering worklives of multitudes – 12 hour days, 6 days a week – "deficient in what landscape painters call 'life.'" And these were the good jobs. No way to catch or grow your own food. No place to sleep or shit or piss or die or give birth w/out paying the designated fee. The generation & preservation of absolute Law & Wealth, contingent upon the brutal constriction & infliction of the ephemeral Human Being.

The Soul's confrontation w/soulless Machinery: which is America.

A New World for you, Mr.Bartleby.

He'd prefer not. In the Dead Letter office, his previous employment, he'd heard God's answer to mortal hope: Silence. He'd tossed these little prayers into the fire, this was his job. Over the edge of banal despair, he'd looked: there is Nothing. With or without money, that is, the same vision as The American Dream, in the End. It is all illusion, a flatline trying to escape the cosmic mobius.

Maybe he was born a Zero Man. He's kind of a Zen Legal Secretary.

Facing the Wall (which is the word NO) he insisted on his terms. Bartleby knew who he was, unfortunately unbacked by money, but nonetheless. He knew his intrinsic worth, *qua* human; and he knew he was not wanted unless he rendered this intangible self USABLE - and he preferred not. He took up minimal space or air: let his sheer existence as Life Datum be honored, allow him to simply sit or stand or sleep in that tiny corner behind his screen, facing his wall – in India, perhaps a Holy Man; in America, a problem of Flesh. A body nonconforming to its designated space. But couldn't the Boss care enough about HIM, in all else impeccable, to allow this? But of course not, No, we all know the Answer: Harrumph harrumph, suppose everyone made such a request? If you allow one, you open the door to everyone. Barbarism! Anarchy! Thus Bartleby threatens the End of Civilization as we know it.

(And no, I don't want to share my apartment with any of the homeless people who hang out, drinking & bullshitting, on my backporch. I'm tired of cleaning up the cigarette butts & bottles & occasional diarrhea piles they leave behind – I would prefer not! –and when I was homeless I knew such a request was hopeless, also. The "hopelessness of remedying excessive & organic ill.")

Only the Usable are Useful. Despair tells us: Be a Gear, or Die.

Maybe he was a Poet – like "the mettlesome Byron" - a Romantic w/out Byron's wealth or social rank, or even talent! Doomed!

"Because he will NOT be a vagrant." Ironically noted, Bartleby clung *within* the walls of Human Culture, a Law Office at any rate; descent into the streets, he "preferred not." Not a genuine Bum, that is, not even the alleycat hole of the outcast was his home. He stood aloof, elite, impassively superior; unlike us multitudes of pliable confusion: He knew who he was.

And in The Tombs, end of the line, visited by the Boss, he stood in the small prison yard, stared at the high wall.

- -- "Look there is the sky, and here is the grass."
- -- "I know where I am."

An American writer, Joe Napora, sent me some Dickens' quotes from G.K. Chesterton's Charles Dickens: The Last of the Great Men. On America, Dickens said:

“I do fear that the heaviest blow ever dealt at liberty will be dealt by this country, in the failure of its example on the earth.”

On NPR's March 3 Wait, Wait Don't Tell Me quiz show, the host read from a Knight-Ridder news release on that week's reopening of the Statue of Liberty, closed to the Public since 9/11; the monument was described as “a big green woman who invites you to climb to the top of her head,” from the earth of her bare feet to her airy brain via a spinal staircase.

Is this not breathtaking? Is this not heartbreaking?

What America was supposed to be. What Life on our Planet was supposed to be.

What happened? What have We done to Her, what have They done to Us, what went so unbearably WRONG?

Bartleby – Melville, of course, who killed the Whale; or Coleridge, who killed the Albatross – deep inside their eyes, the Vision of the Black Hole behind America's commercial optimism, our global Boosterism: the Wall of Wealth is built with the bodies of Earth made *usable*, but then they die, and then they rot. Power rots, and it really stinks. They tell us that stink is the price of our survival.

And some of us will go into the bizness of Perfume.

And some of us will prefer not.

### **WORKING NOTE:**

*Our visual pages – regularized spelling punctuation margins syntax – do not carry the audio burden of our time. Bodies & cultures explode, everything stunned or screaming in horror, the deranged newstrip of our day speeds by at the speed of digital light, or suddenly drops off the screen, disappeared, bulldozed away. All is disconnected, all is lost.*

*Language fractures under extreme conditions – rage terror ecstasy – and I sense all life on earth now is experienced in extremis.*

*We are “shattered...by damage to life” as Lise Weil translated the words of German feminist Christian Thurmer-Rohr in Vagabonding: Feminist Thinking Cut Loose (Beacon 1991).*

*How can our sentences our paragraphs our denotes connotes & referents remain cerebrally abstracted, unshattered by our wounded life?*

*Image a box of type, set in the predictable page. Then drop the box on the floor, and print that. It will say (to paraphrase Heidegger) the awe-ful has just happened.*

# Communing With Bears

by Sara Wright

One evening last May I meandered down to the brook that flows through my property, the one whose song I hear each night before I sleep. As I started up the hill I heard the sharp crackling of forest debris just behind me. Startled, I turned, only to be stunned almost out of my senses. Not ten feet behind me in front of Trillium rock stood a large black bear. During the brief moment when we gazed into each other's eyes, I had the uncanny feeling that this bear knew me. He was moving towards me. He was huge and must have weighed 250 lbs. As this latter fact registered my heart started to pound, and I hastily walked around the garden and into the house to get out of his way.

Once indoors, I went quickly to the windows that overlook the brook to see if I could still see the bear. I immediately located him at my bird feeding station at the crest of the hill with his paws clamped around one of my bird feeders. With amazement I watched as he slowly emptied the cylinder, sucking the seed into his mouth like a vacuum cleaner without damaging the feeder. The moments I spent at the window catapulted me into another dimension. I call this place the crack between worlds because it is within this space that time ceases to exist and the present becomes All There Is. Here, animals, plants, and people converse and cross each others' paths as a matter of course. I remembered other bears I had loved. Was it possible that this bear was the same one that came to me as a young cub a couple of years ago? I didn't know, but when the bear looked up and stared at me through the window, it no longer mattered, for I was electrified by a physical force so powerful it collapsed all the physical and psychic boundaries between us. I felt chills racing up my spine even as the fierce heat permeated every cell of my body.

I had experienced such visceral "visitations" before on countless occasions with other animals, but only a few times in recent years with a black bear. And never with such fiery intensity. I gasped. Suddenly I recalled the stone bear fetishes that were part of the sculpture I had shown that afternoon at a local art show. I had watched the expressions on people's faces when they stopped in front of her, touching the turkey and hawk feathers, the Zuni carved stone bears that were attached to the feathered quills. With a kind of wonder I recalled that many people seemed to be drawn back to the numinous presence of this moon goddess and her bears. Like many indigenous folk I believe bears to be a powerful and nurturing animal aspect of the moon goddess.

That night I watched the wild bear until it was too dark to see him anymore. Although I couldn't be certain of his sex, he acted like other male bears I had observed, and I knew that male bears were on the prowl this time of year searching for food and new territories. By nightfall he had emptied every feeder on the place, and I had moved to every window as he made his circular route around the house. He was such a gorgeous creature with shiny black fur, beads of coal for

eyes, and long needled crescent-curved claws that he extended as he raked the ground for fallen seed. Every few minutes he would raise his massive head and pierce the air with his brown nose. I remembered reading somewhere that bears could smell 500 times better than humans, and I couldn't help wonder what information and stories his nose was bringing him.

The following morning I wrote in my journal that I had fallen in love with a bear. Oh how I hoped he'd return. That evening just after dark I heard a terrific racket. The clanking and drumming of tin cans reverberated across the valley. The bear had found my seed barrels. I was ecstatic! As I listened to the cacophony, and then a muffled chewing sound that I couldn't quite identify, I thought up a plan. Because I wanted the bear to keep coming I did nothing to disturb him that night. But the next morning I brought my overturned barrels in the house and filled a small ten-gallon can with sunflower seed. I also filled a smaller bowl with seed and left both of them within easy reach on the porch. In the future I hoped to feed the bear myself.

Two nights later the bear came again, materializing for the second time from behind me. Although initially startled by his sudden appearance, this time I felt no fear. Turning around to face him, I heard myself call him my "Sweetie Bear." I asked him to wait there while I brought him the bowl of sunflower seeds that I had ready for him. Although appearing to listen to my words, he still followed me like a dog to the side of the house and then stopped at the door. "I'll be right back" I told him a little nervously. Would he try to follow me into the house? 50 million years ago bears and dogs emerged from the same ancestor, and in that moment I saw the family resemblance. When I came out with the bowl and put it down in front of him, he immediately dropped to the ground, stretched out his great furry bulk, curled himself around my feet in a crescent and started inhaling the seed. I grabbed a nearby wooden bench and sat down in front of him. We were only separated by a couple of feet as I felt my body merging with the bear. I fell over the edge and through the crack.

Now I felt rather than saw him as he chewed his way through the seed: the great curved claws, the lush black fur, a mole brown nose and large white canines. Involuntarily I shivered. I didn't move until the bear's bowl was empty. When I picked it up the bear followed me to the porch door for the second time and waited patiently until I re-appeared with more seed, this time in the 10-gallon can. I talked to him about his seed can as I carried it around the house with the bear swinging his head from side to side as he walked a few feet behind me. I placed the can on the ground a couple of feet from my bedroom window and took the cover off. I watched him gently knock the can over with one massive paw, and listened to him sigh as he slid to the ground nosing the seed with obvious pleasure before starting to snack in earnest. After breathing in the bear's musky scent for what seemed like an eternity, I said goodnight and came into the house and got into bed. I fell asleep to the soothing sound of my Sweetie Bear munching down his seed.

We soon settled into a daily routine. Every night around dusk I would settle myself into the rocker on the little back porch that overlooks the brook. It never ceased to amaze me how this bear materialized out of the forest like sea smoke. Even after I learned just where he would

appear, for an instant he was a part of the dark forest, and then, eerily, he wasn't. It was as if a curtain or veil parted to let him through. As the bear lumbered towards the porch with his nose sifting the air for scents I would welcome him calling him by name "Oh Sweetie Bear I'm so glad to see you..." I would begin this litany as I stood up to get him his bowl of seeds. Each night he would follow me to the porch and wait until I returned with his food. Then as he ate I would sit down and talk to him. I soon realized that he liked the sound of my voice, and it seemed to me that he understood my words. Most of the time he certainly behaved as if he did. After a while I would fall silent and then the night sounds would take over. The woodcock's staccato peeping, the toads' trilling, and the occasional whooo of the barred owl seemed to stretch time out like an elastic band. I felt as if the bear and I communed on some feeling level that hovered deep beneath time. I felt loved. After finishing the first bowls of seeds, Sweetie Bear would wait until I brought out his can and deposited it a couple of feet from my bedroom window. Then I would fall asleep to the muffled sounds of him munching his seed. I no longer left my house at night. I couldn't stand the thought of being away from my bear.

One hot cicada-filled June evening about a month later, I was sitting with Sweetie Bear when he stopped eating and raised his head to meet my hungry gaze. His eyes were positioned close together frontally on his black furry face and they sparkled like ebony beads even in the dusky light. Was it my imagination that he seemed to be sniffing for my scent in particular? Very slowly I put out my right hand and he brushed my fingers with his wet nose before turning away with a little huff. A fierce joy exploded within my body concentrating in the region of my heart. I had longed for him to touch me, but I had always respected his right to keep whatever distance he needed between us. Although he let me sit down about one or two feet away from him while he snacked, until this moment he had never shown the slightest interest in actually making physical contact with me. I felt doubly honored.

As I got to know him better I realized that Sweetie Bear had a trickster aspect to him. Often now he would appear at odd times during the day and deliberately creep up on me as I bent over working in my garden. When I jumped or shrieked in response to these sudden apparitions, he remained calm and implacable. He never backed away from me on these occasions but steadily nosed me towards the porch where he knew a snack lay waiting. During these trickster visits his beady eyes seemed to twinkle with a peculiar light. I think he found my behavior comical.

As comfortable as he appeared to be around me, I noticed that Sweetie Bear did not like the company of other humans. One day a stranger walked down the driveway unexpectedly when he was hanging around. He immediately bounded away, and I literally felt the earth move beneath my feet as he crashed into the woods huffing and snorting. After the visitor left he refused to come out even when I called him. I was delighted to see this behavior because I knew that by the end of the summer his life would be in danger from human predation.

Here in Maine hunters are allowed to bait bears with sweet sticky foods like old donuts,

and then once the bears have become acclimated to the free food, the hunters shoot them while they feed. A second hunting practice involves radio-collaring dogs that then chase the bear into exhaustion, treeing it, where it stays trapped until it is shot. Yet another is outlawed everywhere but in Maine. It involves setting iron leg traps that will break the animal's bones as it's caught, and force the bear to wait in agony for the hunter's bullet or its own untimely end. Because I was increasingly haunted by these images of bear carnage, intercessory bear prayers became a daily part of my meditation life. How I hoped the bear referendum bill that could bring an end to these practices would pass in November.\*

By early July word must have traveled through the forest. One night as I was dozing off to the sounds of Sweetie Bear's seed crunching, I heard angry snorts and huffs followed by the clickety-clack of bear claws ripping into the bark of a nearby tree. Getting up I grabbed my flashlight on my way out the door and shone it up the gnarled white pine that stands about twenty five feet from my bedroom window. Sure enough, hooked to side of the tree about twenty feet up was a young bear weighing about 100 lbs. Shining light in the direction of the can I saw that Sweetie Bear was lying down and munching seed from the can as if nothing unusual had occurred. I had to laugh even when he huffed at me in annoyance as I shone the light into his face to identify him.

This youngster's visit turned out to be just the first of many. To this day I am not certain how many bears actually came through here last summer, but I identified six by their original markings or size over a period of about four weeks. Scarbottom had a bare spot on her rump the result of a human gunshot. I suspected this bear was female because females are usually more timid and she raced into the woods the second she caught sight of me. Scarface and Crescent Moon Bear also had scars on their faces, and these two accidentally destroyed three of my bird feeders at different times as they meandered through my property during the daylight hours. The mother and her cub were persistent night-time visitors, waiting until well after dark and until Sweetie Bear took his first evening break from feeding. In his absence they took turns at the can. The hundred- pound yearling that I also believed to be a young male prowled around the edge of the forest but always kept his distance. Often this bear would appear as I sat with Sweetie Bear early in the evening, but like the mother and her cub, the yearling always waited until my bear wandered down to the brook for a drink or disappeared for a while before he would come to eat. It amazed me how well these bears coordinated their visits so as not to impinge upon one another. Most nights no matter when I looked out I could see the shape of a furry black hump just outside my window. Needless to say I lost a lot of sleep during this period due to nighttime bear-watching.

To help satisfy the hunger of my bears and to reduce possible conflicts, I began leaving piles of sunflower seeds in different places around the house. A prodigious amount of sunflower seed disappeared around here during the month of July. I knew that I couldn't afford to keep

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\*ed. note: the referendum bill did not pass

these bears in food much longer, but I figured that berry season would call most of the bears away in August, which is exactly what happened.

Early one night in August Sweetie Bear didn't come. I waited for him on the back porch feeling miserable. I had been dreading this day ever since I first fell in love with my bear. I tried to comfort myself with thoughts of him raking his claws through the ripe lush berries, sleeping under white stars on a mossy green hill. With fervent prayers for his continued safety I put my trust in Nature, and tried to let go. When he showed up again about a week later he acted as if he hadn't been gone at all, materializing as usual from just behind me as I watered my garden one evening. Joyfully we communed as he snacked at my feet. This time he stayed around for a few days and then disappeared again.

Bear hunting season had been underway for three weeks when I heard the characteristic clanking of empty tin cans being overturned. Racing outdoors in my bare feet I was startled to see Sweetie Bear towering over me as he stood upright on his two back feet! After I flashed the light briefly across his face he ran from me, something he'd never done before. I knew instantly that he'd met up with human hostility somewhere. I coaxed him back by talking to him in a low voice, and when he finally emerged from the brush I came inside, filled his seed can and took it out to him. He reappeared for the next two nights, although he no longer wanted me near him. Each night I left the can on the ground and came inside before he would eat. The last night he was here I wept. I watched my great black hump of a bear lie down to eat beneath my window under a white moon, even as I was gnawed by ancient fears for his safety.

70,000 years ago bears were worshipped in caves as animal divinity and after this experience I understand why. When I was with this bear I felt graced by the presence of the spirit-body of Nature which was embodied in his flesh. I think certain animals, plants, and trees have embodied the sacred body-mind of Nature for millennia, and that in this time of planetary emergency these animal and plant divinities are trying desperately to contact humans through our bodies. For many of us it is through these personal encounters with Nature (always mediated through our bodies) that an experience of meaning occurs. If we continue to destroy the Earth, then we will also destroy the possibility of participating in Nature's divinity.

It was after the bear's last visit that I began this story and a circle closed. Sweetie Bear graced my life for five months and I believe he came this last time to encourage me to tell the story of our mutual joy-filled communion in order to help save the Earth. And to let me know that for now, at least, he's well.

**WORKING NOTE:**

Last night I dreamed that someone gave me three ways to work with the three kinds of holes within my body and then instructed me how to teach others. *When I awoke and untangled the meaning of this dream I felt gratitude because I understood: that “someone” is Nature, who continues to speak to me through the holes of patriarchy’s lost daughter and mother, and now grandmother. She instructs me frequently through my dreams, the language of my body. It is only recently that I’ve come to accept that it is through my personal suffering, through the chasm of fifty-nine years of family abandonment and betrayal, through the ache where community isn’t, through the hole of corrupt American politics, that her gift becomes a reality.*

*As an indigenous woman, I also believe that I have developed this relationship with Nature as a result of being in love with her, being able to feel her suffering through my body, and not being able to separate it from my own. She comes through my heartbreak for her over and over. I would not have chosen a path with stones of such sorrow. How many times have I wept as I witnessed the mountain I love being raped? How many times have I keened as I witnessed her trees—leaf, root and trunk—severed one from the other? How many times have I stood by helplessly watching the hunter stalk these forests for bear and deer with his gun? How many times have I felt like dying? Yet, it has been through this process that I have come to feel her embodied presence through animals and trees and stones. My body mediates our connection.*

*I have many names for Nature – who first manifested to me as the fierce but loving energy of the mountain against which I eventually built my home. Over the years I’ve noticed that her presence has become more personalized. She frequently appears to me in one of her animal forms as she did last summer through my bear. I don’t have words for these visitations. I only know that when she is manifesting I feel a fierce heat slamming through my body. Sometimes I feel as if my body has been pierced by a thunderbolt. Often I am breathless, even gasping, and during these times I sometimes hear a curious ringing in my ears. I always sense that an invisible crack has opened between this world and another in which creatures and trees and people are part of one pulsing body of light, and that all are manifestations of the same divine energy. During a visitation, time always seems to dissolve into an endless now.*

*Sometimes Nature (for me she is always female even when she appears as a male) materializes out of my art. Art-making helps me move into another dimension, one where all animals and people communicate with each other directly. For the last ten months I have learned—from my art process, dreams, and my day life—that I am moving over a critical threshold into the third and final stage of my life. This journey has not been easy and I have tried to make it as consciously as I can. Last spring I found myself mired in a pit of blackness, trapped in the deep shadow side of what I would call the dangerous old woman archetype. I was riddled with so much physical anguish and plunged into such a chasm of psychic and*



*bodily misery that I didn't know how much longer I could hang on. In my desperation, hoping to call up the positive side of this old woman as Counselor Healer and Wisdom Keeper, I created a sculpture I called the "River of Light." I included stone bear fetishes in this sculpture—in part because indigenous people like myself believe that the Bear Goddess is an aspect of wild Nature associated with nurturing, help, and protection*

*I believe that Nature creates all physical and psychic patterns on earth and in the universe and that humans, animals, trees, stones, and plants are needed to embody this energy and live their lives through it. I also believe that Nature will make herself known to anyone who is willing to engage with any of her aspects on a feeling level. Animals and plants communicate with humans on a feeling level, and so it is only through living in our bodies that we can experience the presence of Nature as divine. The terrifying aspect of my visceral understanding that all life is so sacred is my body-mind knowledge that the earth is running out of time. Her fragile eco-system cannot withstand the continued rape and pillaging by patriarchal man at war with himself and Nature. Perhaps the reason we cannot hear earth screaming is because we have lost our connection to our bodies and to our earth body.*

*Communing with Bears is the story of a joyful encounter between one woman and a black bear. It is the story of Nature personalizing herself as a bear to one woman in dire need of assistance. It is also the story of a woman who continues to be healed in a bodily way through Nature's Grace. I have come to understand that it is through my bodily wounding that I have been given this gift of visceral feeling-- and stories that I must live to tell.*

**TRIVIAL LIVES****Division Street**

by Elissa Jones

Father O'Sullivan says it shouldn't be this way. He says there aren't any class divisions at St. Clement's Primary School. He says all the children are treated equally in Mrs. Collins' first grade class. But Rita knows that Father O'Sullivan is wrong. She knows he is wrong every time she gets a phone call at home. *Rita?* he says, *we had another small incident with Sadie, we know you're having a hard time but we just can't work with her.* Rita knows her child is singled out. Rita knows her child is different. They live across town on Division Street, where no one comes to play. Sadie doesn't get invited to many birthday parties. Sadie doesn't go on play dates. In first grade and already having a reputation, Sadie often spends her weekends playing by herself in her room and she hates going to school. *It's her mother, they say. Did you know? Alcoholic. Dead father. Illegitimate Psssssst. Did you know?*

*Douchebags*, Rita says between gritted teeth when we go to pick up Sadie. She looks at them. The other mothers. PTA and Girl Scout cookies and DVDs in the SUVs and ballet classes and swim lessons. Rita has to spend their extra money on Sadie's play therapy. Those other mothers. They look at Rita and look away. *They are not my kind*, Rita says and she is sure because she has felt them look her over like she is a piece of shit. *Fucking douchebags*, she says. It reminds her that she lives on Division Street. Rita smells like smoke because she is addicted to cigarettes. She wears spiked heels and her skirts are short. She has the blown veins of a junkie. The heroin evaporated from her body three years ago in a jail cell, her back on the floor, legs up against the cold walls to ease the pain of kicking. Rita whored to feed the needs and with it she pimped her soul.

Now Rita is a sober mother, bewildered by the serene life. Instead of waking up to grinding for a fix she braids her daughter's hair and puts her on the yellow bus. Instead of going out into the black night to cop a bundle, she checks her horoscope online while Sadie sings in the bathtub. She lives on Division Street because she is poor, on food stamps, working two jobs under the table. She can't cook well. The patches on Sadie's Brownie uniform are sewn on with long crooked stitches and she cannot remember when she last mopped the floor. But she squeezes her girl-child close to her heart when her baby can't sleep. She shows up for every school play, she whispers, *Sleep With The Angels Baby* into Sadie's tiny ears every night before she goes to bed. *You are not a bad girl*, she tells her every day, especially on the days when Father O'Sullivan calls home to tell Rita that Sadie hip-checked another kid while waiting to go into Mass or punched another boy on the playground for not letting her on the swings. *And I will never leave you again*, she tells her.

*And you are just as good as those kids at school*, Rita reminds her. *It doesn't matter if we can't go to Disneyworld this year or afford a car*. Sadie doesn't even know they are poor when she gives her outgrown clothes away to children less fortunate than herself. She doesn't know that living on Division Street means she is different from the kids at school, that she is not a part of the chandelier club. She doesn't know that being in subsidized housing is something shameful, because Rita tells her, *they are not better than you*.

Today Rita is volunteering at the class bake sale. She's excited because Sadie's excited to have her mom at school. I am dropping her off but I'm early to pick her up. Rita's four-inch heels march across the linoleum floor so she can let me in. *Who is it?* she barks. It's me, I say. She unfastens the bolt and opens the door holding a cigarette, a long ash threatening to fall on the carpet. *Hey Liss*, she says, *how are ya?* She is wearing a miniskirt with black tights and when she sits I can almost see the garters. Her shirt edges down towards her breasts and inches up her belly. Is that what you're wearing? I ask her. *Don't I look okay?* she asks and seems genuinely worried that she looks bad. Actually what she looks is hot. It's a delicate moment. Is it right for me to tell her that she can't dress this way for the St. Clements bake sale? Is it condescending to tell her she looks like a trick? She drags hard on her cigarette. *I can't believe I passed the background check*, she says, exhaling. *You have to pass a background check to volunteer at schools now*, she says. I remember the day Rita was stunned she passed the background check to get a checking account. She has a felony record for grand theft auto, forgery, grand larceny, and possession of a forged instrument. She served minimum time in a county jail and then was offered a drug court program. She took the opportunity to get clean, but her record was not expunged. She considers her arrest and conviction part of her saving grace, but knows in her heart that her past is a bleeding scar on the whitewash of her daughter's life. In a way Rita will always live on Division Street but she has higher hopes for Sadie. She prays that Sadie's seven-year-old defiance will evolve to constructive confidence, perseverance, and strength of constitution, placing her out of the stranglehold of her mother's demons.

Finally I suggest another outfit might be more practical if she's going to be selling cookies and pies for the field trip fundraiser. This time she comes out with a mini dress and bare legs revealing her calf-length tattoo. *Is this do-able?* she asks me. I shake my head. Father O'Sullivan will love it, I tell her. She will never be like them and for this am I grateful. Rita is Rita.

When Sadie turned seven the children took turns beating a stubborn piñata with a wooden bat in my backyard. When it wouldn't break, Rita's old man whipped out a six inch switch blade and hacked it open with one graceful stab. The kids stared at his tattoos as he slipped the blade into his back pocket then suddenly remembered they were in competition to get the most candy off the ground. We called it a ghetto birthday. As the party wound down each child got a goodie bag. The kids were eager to play with the cheap plastic toys inside. Suddenly one little girl spoke up. *There's an old cigarette in mine!* she announced and held it up between her fingers. Rita jumped up and both apologizing and swearing she got rid of it. Now she knows

it isn't a good idea to keep the overflowing ashtray next to goodie bags.

On the way to school I let Rita drive because she is working towards getting her license. Her cellphone rings from inside her purse. *Fuck*, she says, *can you get that?* I unzip her leather purse and say, Hello? Rita's cellphone! *Can I please speak with Rita?* says a male voice at the other end of the line. She's driving right now, I say, can I take a message? *Yes, this is Father O'Sullivan*, says the man. I cover the phone with my hand and say, Rita it's Father O'Sullivan. *Hi, Father*, Rita shouts into the air, *how are ya?* Did you hear that Father? I ask him. *Yes*, he says, *It's about Sadie and I need to her to call me back when she can.* He says to call him back when you can, I tell Rita. *Father*, Rita says, anything you have to say my good friend can hear. Did you hear that Father? I ask him. *Yes*, he says, *Sadie said the F-word today in the library.* I look at Rita and say, Sadie said the F-word today in the library. *Oh Fuck*, says Rita. *Sorry Father*, she corrects herself. Father O'Sullivan is quiet and then says, *why don't you stop by when you come for the bake sale?* *OK Father, thank you*, shouts Rita, into the silence of the car. Bye Father, I say and hang up the phone. *MotherFUCKER*, says Rita, *what am I going to do with that child of mine?* Well maybe if you didn't have a mouth like a truck driver, I start. *Yeah yeah I know*, Rita says.

We arrive at St. Clements. Lets park away from the other cars, I suggest since she still can't park straight. Rita pulls the car in over the yellow line. *Oh shit I fucked it up*, she says. Don't worry about it just leave it--no big deal, I tell her. We sit for a minute before she gets out. She lights a cigarette. *I just want better for her, Liss*, she says. *I don't want her down the path I went, selling pussy at 4 AM for a bundle of dope. I don't want her to know how to rig a syringe or to have Hep C at twenty-five.* I ask her, So do you want her to grow up to be one of those douchebags? *Nah*, she says reapplying her purple lipstick, *I just want her off Division Street.*

**WORKING NOTE:**

*When I wrote the first drafts of Division Street, my aim was to expose the prejudice and adversity a typical single mother and her child go through as they navigate a hard life. Most people don't realize that the majority of single mothers are living on or below the poverty level. They face stigmatization, have a higher risk of health problems, often struggle with substance abuse, and have a higher incidence of mental illness. But the woman in Division Street is not a statistic. Rita is a dear friend. As I shaped the subsequent drafts, the piece became less about exposing social problems, and more about telling the human story. Division Street challenges the reader to accept that a recovering junkie who dresses like a prostitute and swears like a truck driver happens to be a good mother. I have a great love for the woman who lives with great hardship yet still manages to love others. I have great respect for the woman who walks the line a little differently, holds her head up even when others ask her to drop it low, and never apologizes for loving herself. Rita is just that woman.*

*I wrote Division Street in honor of the brave fight she puts up every day raising her daughter alone, sometimes on the brink of poverty, while battling a substance abuse in remission, and without an education to provide income. I hope this is a story that asks each reader to look inside herself and wonder, 'Can I accept this woman? Do I hold myself above her? Does her style make me question her fitness for motherhood?' These are important questions for feminist thinkers, especially as we head into times where the poverty rate is alarmingly high, women's voices are increasingly silenced, and right-wingers continue to promote "the perfect wife and mother" model.*

## After Reading: *Les Guérillères*

Monique Wittig, trans. by David Le Vay. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1971.

by Rhonda Patzia

I was once a physical powerhouse, loving to feel in my body the precision and coordination of movement. I felt most myself when playing in trees, shooting a basket, cliff jumping into water, marathon running, skiing, sprinting through the forest, and uniting with nature in the moonlight. Considering my physical past, how ironic that I should read *Les Guérillères* on a day that I could hardly move my body.

How ironic that while propped-up limp on the couch with mega-doses of steroids running through my veins, hoping they would jump-start my body after a multiple sclerosis exacerbation, I read of a band of strong women who play and hunt through the countryside and wage war on the old ways of seeing and doing. Paradoxically, even though my limbs were immobile as I read, I felt powerful. Not because I was being offered an escape from my body, but because as an entire body I felt included.

An early passage describes the living women bringing out a mummy to dry in the sun and returning her inside when rain approaches:

*The dead woman is clothed in a long tunic of green velvet, covered with white embroidery and gilded ornaments. They have hung little bells on her neck, on her sleeves. They have put medallions in her hair. When they take hold of the box to bring it out the dead woman begins to tinkle everywhere.*

I read the passage. I couldn't move my legs. I cried. I had to use a pillow to hold up the book so I could read more about this circle of women, who were so connected to one another that they attentively put bells on their dead (I like to imagine them all with bells as they take care of one another). The living women in *Les Guérillères* connect to the dead as if all are part of the same continuum. Death is not a negation or ending. I went tinkling with bells through the rest of the book, better able to imagine my inclusion in such a powerful tribe. My legs wouldn't move. I tinkled on. My arms were numb. I tinkled on... I read and imagined on...

*Les Guérillères* moved me to imagine how I now connect with all women. The tribal women seemed to reach through the pages of the book to touch and hold me ardently, tenderly. They pulled me from my stagnation on the couch into their ring, even though I could hardly stand on my legs. I felt that strong women everywhere, ever bonding and banding-together for change, were grabbing my hands and including me in their circle of female bodies, whether broken or intact: dancing bodies, moving bodies, fighting bodies, safe bodies, strong bodies. I felt myself joining a powerful community, despite the way my legs fell inertly to the floor.

The circle is the recurring symbol that Monique Wittig uses to depict the power of unified women in *Les Guérillères*. The warriors create the "O" symbol from their own circular vulvas,

which reflect the world like a mirror. They use it as a compass to “navigate from sunrise to sunset” “O” is their war cry. Their battle shields are round.

The circle has always appealed to my imagination as a metaphor for community. Monique Wittig’s writing invited me to enter and participate in the circle of women. Within this circle, I have realized a depth of community, of joining, that has utterly transformed me.

Without truly knowing our bodies and how they join with other female bodies, I’m convinced that in an important sense we women remain blind and paralyzed. For example, because I was once alienated from women (didn’t want to be fully associated with the gender because I perceived it as weak), I didn’t respect and understand my own intelligence. I would make decisions according to intuition, then apologize for them because they weren’t rational. By seeing how I connect with women and by learning to value the nuances of women’s intelligence, I have come to have confidence in my own ideas-- and in my own movement.

*Beware of dispersal. Remain united like the characters in a book. Do not abandon the collectivity. The women are seated on the piles of leaves holding hands watching the clouds that pass outside.*

*Les Guérillères* allowed me to imagine holding hands in circles of women even when I am dying. Injury and death were such givens for Wittig’s warriors (and I could feel their fear and bravery when facing their own mortality) that the maimed, ill and dead among them were respected, even revered – and never disconnected from the rest. As I lay limp on the couch, my body leapt to imagine the same for myself.

I want my body to speak to other female bodies about rightful inclusion. I want us each to feel a part of an amazing female community...circling...and tinkling everywhere.

I am still a physical powerhouse...I just can’t move my legs sometimes.

**WORKING NOTE:**

*Writing an after-reading is more than analyzing and critiquing a book. I think of it as a timeless and spaceless dialogue between bodies, sitting down with an author and entreating, "Tell me about the world. Tell me about myself." Many of the feminist authors I have read wrote from their entire body. I can tell. I can feel it through my own body. I think of their books as gifts to me. In an important way, they offer their bodies to my body, and consequently, I have a deeper sense of my own.*

*Sometimes after bringing a book profoundly into my body, I cry.*



## Notes on Contributors

**Louky Bersianik** is the author of *L'Enguélionne* (1976), considered the first great feminist novel of Quebec. An English translation, *The Enguélionne*, appeared in 1982. In 1979, she spent a year in Crete to write *Le Pique-nique sur l'Acropole* (*Picnic on the Acropolis*). Her latest novel, *Permafrost*, appeared in 1997. She has written several books of poetry and published numerous essays, including "Les Agénésies du vieux monde" (1982) ("Agenesias of the Old World," a translation, appeared in *Trivia* 7). "For me," she has written, "the question of political engagement overlaps with the question of writing. One is always engaged in one's own consciousness."

**Harriet Ellenberger** was a founding member of the Charlotte (North Carolina, USA) Women's Center (1971), co-founded the lesbian feminist journal *Sinister Wisdom* with Catherine Nicholson in 1976, and was a founding member of L'Essentielle, a bilingual feminist bookstore in Montreal (1987), and published a small feminist journal on the web called *She Is Still Burning* (2000-3). She now lives in Saint John, New Brunswick.

**Elissa Jones** lives and writes in Saratoga Springs, NY. She is an avid listener and observer of women's stories and life experiences. Her current project is finishing a novel that questions women's use of violence as a means of reclaiming power. In a climate of right-wing fundamentalism, she tries to be a dedicated liberator of feminist voices.

**Barbara Mor** author of *The Great Cosmic Mother*, has published poetry, essays & experimental fiction in *Sulfur*, *BullHead*, *Orpheus Grid*, *Studia Mystica*, Brit journals *Intimacy* and *Ecorche*, *The New MS* and *Trivia* (1990-94), and online *Dissident Voice*. Since the demise of the original *Trivia* she has not appeared in any feminist venue, and longs for the Old Days of feminist political/cultural feral thought, before everyone got afraid to say what was not Certified OK by the various sisterhood clubs. "Women writers must utter the most verboten things, root truths sublime & terrible, and not have them censored as unPC, 'too angry,' 'too violent,' or (ye Goddess!) 'too explicit.'"

**Rhonda Patzia** has worked as a professional portrait photographer for many years and also has earned a Master of Arts degree in Embodiment Studies and Transformative Language Arts from Goddard College. In addition to her photography work, she facilitates writing workshops, most often for women with multiple sclerosis. Her current project, *Bodies in Focus*, is a photography exhibit of women in various stages of nakedness, accompanied by the writing of individual subjects. The project's combination of words and images offers her portrait subjects a new and intense experience of themselves as bodies and also offers other females, as well as culture in general, the gift of realistic images of women. Rhonda lives in Pella, Iowa with her partner, Mike.

**Sara Wright** is a teacher, a naturalist, an artist and a writer who lives with an assortment of animals, both wild and tame, in a small log cabin perched over a brook at the edge of a vanishing wilderness in western Maine. She is also a nature mystic, a woman who experiences the divine through daily encounters with Nature's trees, creatures, and landscape in her own back yard. She teaches Women's Studies at two local colleges and writes to tell stories and to stay sane.

**Lise Weil** lives in Montreal and teaches in Goddard College's IMA program. She was editor of *Trivia: A Journal of Ideas* from 1982 to 1991. Her reviews, translations and short fiction have appeared in journals in both Canada and the US. She is currently at work on a memoir about the 70's and 80's titled "In Search of Pure Lust."

