



Women in Libraries

Volume 25, Number 4

The Feminist Task Force—25 Years

July 1996

Feminist Breakfast Set for New York *Poets Clarke and Pratt, author Barbara Smith to speak*

Cheryl Clarke, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Barbara Smith are featured at the Feminist Task Force's annual Feminist Authors' Breakfast, speaking on the topic, "Feminist Perspectives on Racism." Pratt and Smith, with Elly Bulkin, collaborated on a book dealing with this issue, *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism* (Firebrand, 1988). The topic pervades much of the three authors' work.

Clarke's perspective

Clarke has published four books of poetry. Though her first, *Narratives: Poems in the Tradition of Black Women* (Kitchen Table—Women of Color Press, 1983) is no longer in print, her three other volumes remain available.



Cheryl Clarke, feminist poet, will appear at the FTF breakfast Sunday, July 7. See page 10 for ticket information. Photo by George Ganges.

When reading about the experiences of African-American lesbians, one might expect a primer covering themes of racism, homophobia, double marginality, identity formation, and desperate loving. Cheryl Clarke's next three works—*experimental love*, 1993, *Humid Pitch: Narrative Poetry*, 1989, and *Living as a Lesbian*, 1986—each give some attention to these common themes.

In a recent interview, Clarke says that "I'm committed in my poetry to speaking from perspectives that have been marginalized: the African-American or black, the lesbian, the feminist, the woman."

Many facets of Clarke's life seem to be dedicated to multicultural awareness and teaching. When not writing, she spends her seemingly limitless energy as the Director of the Office of Diverse Community Affairs and Lesbian-Gay Concerns at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey. She's also pursuing a doctorate in African-American Literature. And if that weren't enough, Clarke also holds educational programs on multicultural awareness, lesbian-gay issues, and issues of disability for Rutgers students, staff, and faculty.

Clarke, born in Washington, DC in 1947, has been published widely. *experimental love* (Firebrand) is her fourth book. Her poems and essays have appeared in numerous feminist, lesbian, gay, and African-American publications including *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, *Conditions*, *Feminist Studies*, *The Black Scholar*, *Belle Lettres*, and *Outweek*, to name just a few. She has participated as a lecturer and panelist in many literary and political conferences, and has been featured at poetry readings all over the country.

Clarke started writing as a junior in college when she attended a writing seminar. She received some encouragement and kept on writing, "but it took me a while to figure out my medium, or form." She

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Bibliography: Feminist Authors' Breakfast Story, pages 1-7

Bulkin, Elly, Minnie Bruce Pratt and Barbara Smith. *Yours in struggle: three feminist perspectives on anti-Semitism and racism*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1984. Paper, ISBN 0-932379-53-2, \$9.95.

Clarke, Cheryl. *experimental love*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1993. Cloth, ISBN 1-56341-036-2, \$18.95; paper, ISBN 1-56341-035-4, \$8.95.

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—. *Living as a lesbian*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1986. Cloth, ISBN 0-932379-13-3, \$16.95; paper, ISBN 0-932379-12-5, \$7.95.

—. *Narratives: poems in the tradition of black women*. New York: Kitchen Table—Women of Color Press, 1983. Out of print.

Pratt, Minnie Bruce. *Rebellion: essays 1980-91*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1991. Cloth, ISBN 1-56341-007-9, \$24.95; paper, ISBN 1-56341-006-0, \$24.95.

—. *Crime against nature*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1989. Cloth, ISBN 0-932379-73-7, \$18.95; paper, ISBN 0-932379-72-9, \$8.95.

Smith, Barbara, ed. *Home girls: a black feminist anthology*. New York: Kitchen Table—Women of Color Press, 1983. Paper, ISBN 0-913175-02-1, \$15.95.

Women's Studies: call for papers

Abstract proposals should be submitted by September 1 for the 10th Annual Women in Higher Education International Conference. Topics most likely to be considered are mentoring, equity issues, women in their disciplines, non-traditional students, support systems, career mobility, minority women, and others. The conference "provides a forum for discussion of issues relevant to women in higher education."

The conference meets at the University of Texas at El Paso, January 4-7, 1997. For information or to submit a proposal, write Nancy Wacker, Conference Coordinator, Professional and Continuing Education, UTEP, 500 West University Avenue, El Paso, TX 79968-0602; or call her at 915-747-5142. Her e-mail address is nwacker@mail.utep.edu.

WILPF announces triennial conference

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom will hold its triennial congress in Greeley, Colorado, July 24-28, 1996. In conjunction with the conference, a leadership institute is scheduled with the theme, "Some Leaders are Born Women." The goal of the group is "to create the great day when racism, violence against women, militarism, intervention and economic injustice are ended."

For more information, write or call WILPF, 1213 Race Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107-1691; phone 215-563-7110.

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Emily," Meehan tells of empty words of comfort when she is told that she can bear more children, of the pain of those who turned from her in silence, placing the blame for the death on her shoulders. She illustrates the theme of community with a ritual circle of women claiming their own losses: "Here in this woman circle, at last, I speak your name aloud, and claim you."

She concludes with a chronicle of losing her beloved husband, Acer, and the struggle through the funeral and beyond, coming to terms with widowhood. She does not pass over lightly this part of her journey; she shows her scars, how

Such simple things
a scarf, a scent, a shirt,
to open wounds that spill
not blood, but poems.

—P. Crossland



Women in Libraries

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Send articles, comments, or materials for review, but not subscription questions, to: Madeleine Tainton, Media Services Librarian, West Texas A&M University, WTAMU Box 736, Canyon, TX 79016-0736. Phone: 806-656-2407; Fax 806-656-2213; e-mail: mtainton@wtamu.edu.

Contributors: Pamela Crossland, West Texas A&M University; Laurel Duda, University of Rhode Island; Rose Schlegl, University of Alberta; Deborah Turner, University of California, Santa Cruz; Madeleine Tainton, WTAMU.

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turned exclusively to poetry as a creative form in the late 1970s. She first published in a journal in 1980, and by 1982 Kitchen Table Press agreed to publish her first book.

She says her work is not autobiographical, except that "it's autobiographical in a sense they're my ideas . . . I do use some of my emotional experiences."

Though Clarke's first book is not in print, her more recent three volumes of poetry contain captivating stories, infectious off-beat humor, and moving lyrical references, in addition to anticipated themes. Clarke reveals hard truths in an affirming and genuine manner. And those revelations will keep readers quoting Clarke for years to come.

Clarke invites readers not only to examine history but also to consider herstory in *Pitch*. It's an exclusive opportunity to read about different eras with the dominant culture's filter removed. One poem, "Bulletin," gives voice to a defiant and determined attitude of a runaway slave girl. "I'm wearing

so we recommend you read it aloud. This is true of other poems in the three works. Clarke eloquently laces her verses with music and lyrics:

"dreaming the encounter intense as engines
first me then you oh what a night
of rapture and risk and dolphin
acrobatics . . ."

—"great expectations," *Living*

Clarke occasionally compensates for this with print cues like indentations and italics:

Who saw what happened here?
Who saw what happened
here?
Who saw what happened
here, people?
How can anybody
fall
out of a window?

—"fall journal entry: 1983," *Living*

Yet, the written word cannot completely convey the texture of a performance. Fortunate indeed are those who get to see Clarke read her work.

"speaking from perspectives that have been marginalized"

a westcoat and pants, /left the petticoat in a cornfield." A two-hundred-year-old image suddenly looks different. This monologue poem bestows just enough of the runaway's viewpoint that the reader can begin to entertain the idea that there were lesbian slaves.

The centerpiece of the work, "Epic of Song," tells the herstory of Star Blue and the Eagle Rockers—an all-black band. Clarke quickly sets the stage for the epic: a white farmer silences his sharecroppers' child, the young, fame-bound Star. The black church nurtures her voice. The narrative winds through the trials and tribulations that rock the band after Star joins it.

But, Clarke doesn't linger long where most historical accounts of all-black bands do, in descriptions of segregated South. Instead, she enraptures readers with:

Some device. Some history.
Some mystery. Some misery.

We get a rare—and sorrowfully short—glimpse of love, lust, jealousy, remembrance, and resolve through the eyes of black lesbian vocalists:

As her ears healed, Star's longing
for Evalena ran like a river downstream.
She was humid as Mississippi in late July.
Her nights spent at the shore of Candy,
an ocean.
Her afternoons full of wet talk
with Evalena.

And Evalena's playing began to smile.
Foley learned their secret and kept it.

"Epic of Song" has been staged; it is a long, narrative poem. The printed word, with its limitations, doesn't convey its full richness and subtext,

Like a poet trickster, Clarke illicitly laughter in surprising places. One lover in "Vicki and Daphne," in *Living*, discovers her dear one has strayed. She reacts with a biting revenge tactic only a woman could maneuver. Vicki ". . . awaking at 6 a.m. . . . without Daphne . . . / . . . pulls top sheet and comforter over passion and menses/stained sheets smoothes her wrinkles brushes the lint."

Clarke asserts issues of homophobia as cunningly as her community buries them. A young black lesbian's mother barely tolerates her "tomboyish" girl when she starts hanging out with a lesbian neighbor.

Mama disapproved of movies,
bright colors,
and Saturday nights.
But it was easier not to meddle.

—"The Day Sam Cooke Died," *Pitch*

Support or endurance?

Such passive, hands-off "support"—which more closely resembles endurance—robs black lesbians of opportunities to grow and develop while receiving mentoring, exchanging experiences, and accepting support.

A few of Clarke's poems spell out how doubly-marginalized folks—estranged from heterosexual blacks and non-black lesbians—manage their lives, work, and intimacy. "Nothing," in *Living*, boldly chronicles the lengths to which some lesbians have gone for fulfillment. "Nothing I wouldn't do for the woman I sleep with/when nobody satisfy me the way she do." Such lengths include sharing that intimacy with other lovers, missing important family events, and experimenting with choice intoxicants, from

Continued from page 3

illegal contraband to leather attire.

The three works also contain blunt, yet moving depictions of weakened coping mechanisms. "Marijuana isn't what it used to be in this/era of the nuclear renaissance white boy"—"the layoff," *Living*. Besides describing survival tools, Clarke effectively reminds readers of the cultural climate that presents exhausting obstacles folks labor to "get over."

"Committed Sex" puts into question the values harbored by that climate. Life-affirming struggles of homosexuals and sex industry workers are bravely aligned with those of political protesters. Clarke suggests that, in a world that values the existence of unethical politics, warmongers, and meaningless consumerism, actively exploring good sex also undermines traditional power structures:

Steal a camcorder, make my own videos to be
sexually aroused
to get my mind off star wars
To get my mind off CIAs, contras, and other wars
in Beirut, Belfast, Sharpeville, Philly
to sleep with my own kind naked under the stars
—"Committed Sex," *experimental love*

Clarke continues to erode traditional systems with investigations of gender identity. In "Passing," a woman declares, "I'll pass as a man today and take up public space with my urges" and "read my/newspapers spread-eagled across a whole row of seats"—*love*. Other poems in *love* focus keenly on ways of loving oneself and others.

Like Audre Lorde and June Jordan, Cheryl Clarke offers young black writers like myself a literacy legacy. Her works read like a treasured photo album discovered in a forgotten attic. Each snapshot poem candidly frames many complexities—triumphs and hardships alike—of black lesbian life.

Pratt: Lesbian in a hostile universe

Minnie Bruce Pratt became well known when, as a result of her coming out as a lesbian, her husband fought for custody of their two sons. Though she lost the court battle, she wrote a prize-winning collection of poems, *Crime against Nature* (Firebrand, 1989). She says now that though the struggle "was so wounding to all of us," she has remained close to her sons. Her sons, now 27 and 28, "relate to me in this very full way. . . They're completely part of my life." She loves being asked about them and describes their accomplishments with pride, saying "we just are a great family."

She grew up in rural Alabama, near Selma, where she had a first-hand look at searing rural poverty,

a poverty that was and is mostly women and children, Black women and children, or Latinas, Native American women, and their children, women of color and their children. . . So the first oppression I understood was not abstract words—*racism, class inequities, sexism*. What

I saw with my own eyes were people, mostly Black women and children, caught in crushing poverty . . .

—"My mother's question," in *Rebellion: Essays 1980-1991*, Firebrand, 1991)

A sensitive and introspective child, Pratt read a great deal. She wrote some poetry in college but stopped for a ten-year period when she married and bore her two children.

She describes her development as a lesbian poet in "When the words open," included in *Rebellion*. When she was about 30, she fell in love with a woman, and she began to write again. At first she wrote about "my husband trying to kill me in various ways," because of his anger or jealousy and her own fear. With her first woman lover, she attended a poetry reading by Audre Lorde. Pratt wrote, "she was the first writer and the first poet I heard speak publicly as a lesbian." Lorde guided her "through the compelling uneasy landscape that had opened before me with the words, *I am a lesbian*." Pratt began to read the works of other lesbian poets and came to see her own task as "the splitting open of the self over and over, the telling of the story, the risk of condemnation, the risk of loss." In the essay, she describes her work, *Crime against Nature*:

the book of poems I've just finished, the poems where I tell over and over the story of my life, my love for another woman, the loss of my two boys to their father: anger, injustice, grief, almost unendurable pain, isolation, joy, reconciliation, defiant laughter, poem after poem.

Such writing serves "to center me in a hostile and chaotic universe," Pratt wrote, adding, "unless I write explicitly of how I am a lesbian, I will be denied my identity, my reality." The cost, however, is great. Also in the essay, she describes a conversation with her mother:

My mother, sitting at the kitchen table, . . . said of my work: "I can't be proud of you; I want to be, but I can't." My acceptance of that statement as both rejection and love, in my reply: "I know, but I'm proud of what I do." Admitting the moment as a flash of truth between us, painful, intense, my mother's honesty traveling with me into my work.

Currently she is working on two books. One, a short non-fiction book, covers ideas on the power of imagination in social change. The other, *Walking Back up Depot Street*, "is a book of poetry that is a series of long narrative pieces. It is an epic," she says, about retelling the history of the south from the point of view of one character . . . dealing with all the issues that I usually deal with: sexuality, class, race, relation to place, and how to move out of the past into the future."

In addition to writing, she is part-time faculty at The Union Institute, where she teaches women's studies, lesbian and gay studies, and creative writing in the school's non-residential Ph.D. program.

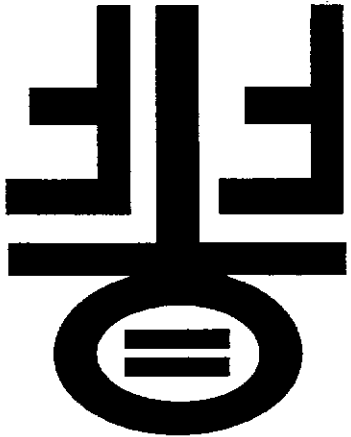
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Pocket Guide

ALA Conference, 1996

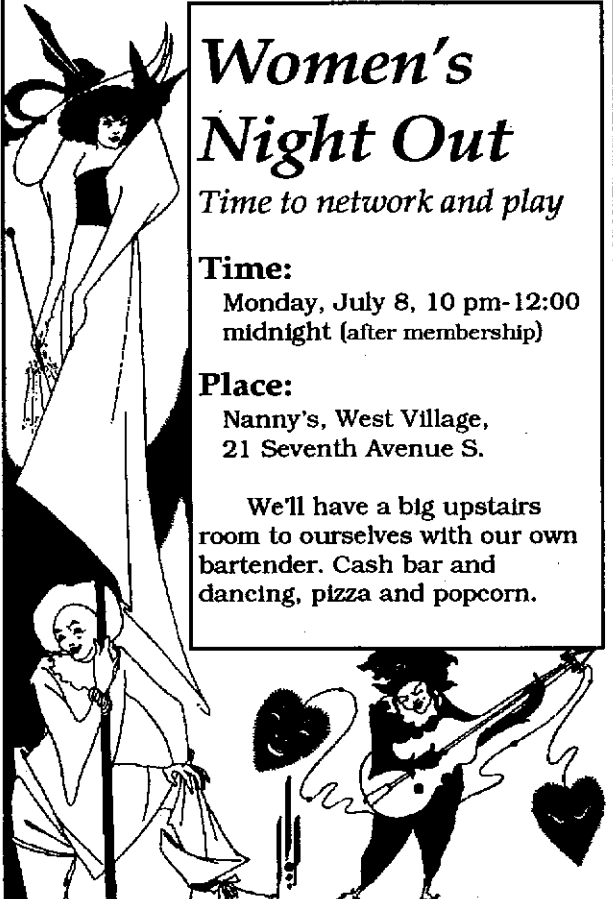
The Feminist Task Force—25 Years
FEMINIST
TASK FORCE



Join us for breakfast, Sunday, July 7, 8:30 to 11:00 am. We'll pour the coffee; you just sit back and listen to presentations by three activist poets and authors, Cheryl Clarke, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Barbara Smith. At the conference, get your tickets at the ALA meal ticket counter. Or order early with the form on page 10 of *Women in Libraries*, July 1996.



1st fold



Women's Night Out
Time to network and play

Time:
Monday, July 8, 10 pm-12:00 midnight (after membership)

Place:
Nanny's, West Village,
21 Seventh Avenue S.

We'll have a big upstairs room to ourselves with our own bartender. Cash bar and dancing, pizza and popcorn.

2nd fold

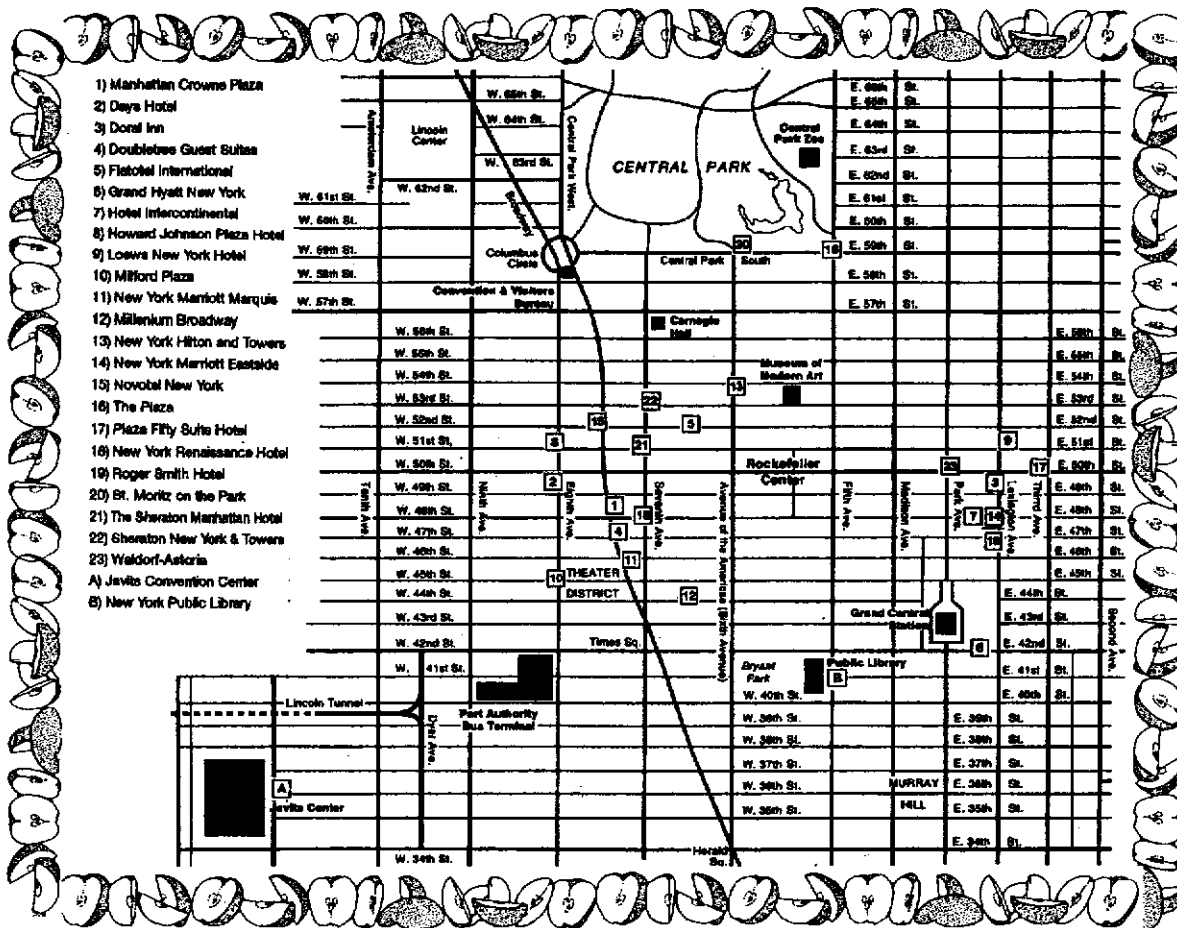
Lesbian archives tour

Join a group to tour the Lesbian Herstory Archives in Brooklyn. We meet at 5:00 pm, Sunday, July 7, for a tour from 6—7:30 pm. The group will meet at the ALA Book Store at the convention center. Rosemary McAndrew will serve as our guide.

Directions if you're going on your own: From Manhattan, take A train (subway) to J Street, Borough Hall exit; then the F train to 15th St. Head to Park and turn left on 14th St. at the movie theater. 484 14th Street, between Eighth Ave. and Prospect Park West, wheelchair ramp in front.

The Lesbian Herstory Archives house more than 10,000 volumes, 1400 periodical titles and 12,000 photographs. Among them:

- Every issue of *The Ladder*, the first nationally distributed lesbian publication (1956-1972)
- A 1934 letter in which Radclyffe Hall explains why she wrote *The Well of Loneliness*
- At least 500 pulp novels including Valerie Taylor's *Return to Lesbos* (1963) and Diana Fredericks's *Diana* (1939)
- Original manuscripts, letters and photographs donated by Audre Lorde
- An 1831 issue of *The London Gazetteer*, the oldest original item in the archives, which documents a reporter's visit to the home of the "Ladies of Llangollen," a lesbian couple who had taken up residence in the hills of Wales.



- 1) Manhattan Crowne Plaza
 - 2) Days Hotel
 - 3) Doral Inn
 - 4) Doubletree Guest Suites
 - 5) Flatotel International
 - 6) Grand Hyatt New York
 - 7) Hotel Intercontinental
 - 8) Howard Johnson Plaza Hotel
 - 9) Loews New York Hotel
 - 10) Milford Plaza
 - 11) New York Marriott Marquis
 - 12) Millenkum Broadway
 - 13) New York Hilton and Towers
 - 14) New York Marriott Eastside
 - 15) Novotel New York
 - 16) The Plaza
 - 17) Plaza Fifty Suite Hotel
 - 18) New York Renaissance Hotel
 - 19) Roger Smith Hotel
 - 20) Rt. Moritz on the Park
 - 21) The Sheraton Manhattan Hotel
 - 22) Sheraton New York & Towers
 - 23) Waldorf-Astoria
- A) Javits Convention Center
B) New York Public Library

Meetings and Programs

Saturday, July 6

11:30 am—12:30 pm. Women's Groups in ALA
Doubletree (4), Vaudeville I and II

2—4 pm. FTF Meeting

Hotel Intercontinental (7), Drawing Room

Sunday, July 7

8:30-11 am. **FTF Program: Feminist Authors' Breakfast,**

Loews New York Hotel (9), Embassy D

9:30 am—12:30 pm. Library History Round Table Program, FTF cosponsor: Women in Influence:
Implications of Feminist Leadership, Resources for Library Historians

5:00 pm. **Lesbian Herstory Archives Tour.** See overleaf.

Monday, July 8

8—9 am. FTF Meeting:

Hotel Intercontinental (7), Astor I

9—11 am. WSS Program, FTF cosponsor: Leadership & Collaboration: Librarians Develop Women's
Studies Electronic Resources

11:00 am—12:30 pm. GLBTF Program, REFORMA, Black Caucus cosponsors: What About the Side
Streets: Reaching Underserved Populations. A panel will discuss marketing outreach programs to
Spanish speakers, black youth, and lesbians, and describe an academic multicultural program.
Loews New York Hotel (9), Embassy C and D

9:00 pm—midnight. **Women's Night Out.** See overleaf.

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In her book of essays, *Rebellion*, she describes a life of intense political activism. Now that she has moved to New York, "I haven't found my political home yet." She says she is "not actively organizing right now, but I'm looking." She is able to spend "much more of my time writing, but I am missing the political work." Having developed a new interest in class and economic analysis, she has been studying these in order to bring a deeper understanding of these issues to her work and life.

A current hot political issue, same-sex marriages, concerns her because of how it is being used. "I certainly believe same sex marriages deserve the same recognition and benefits" as heterosexual ones, she says, but "there are certainly limitations for it as a focus" for the gay, lesbian and bisexual movement. She thinks "the right wing is using it to deflect attention away from the economy and life and death issues," like AIDS, breast cancer, and poverty. Having access to the benefits and social security of a partner is not as important as her belief that "every-one ha[ve] access to security whoever they are, married or not."

In the meantime, she remains true to her goals to live life truthfully, as she wrote in the essay, "Books in the closet, in the attic, boxes, secrets,"

I still struggle to live and to write the open-ended, ever-changing story, a prose and a poetry that is merely, simply, true to the complexity of my own life.

Smith: unity in diversity

Barbara Smith's writing reflects a concern for unity. A Black feminist organizer since 1973, when she joined the National Black Feminist Organization, she co-founded, with Audre Lorde, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press. One of the press's most successful works is Smith's collection, *Home Girls: a Black Feminist Anthology*, published in 1983.

Smith grew up in Cleveland, in an old house with two aunts, an uncle, her grandmother and her mother. It was in this house, she wrote in the introduction to *Home Girls*, "that I learned the rudiments of Black feminism, although no such term even existed then." She was "surrounded by women who appeared able to do everything." Since her family came from Georgia, she had "an essentially Southern upbringing, rooting us solidly in the past and at the same time preparing us to face the unknowable future."

While she learned about strength from the women in her family, she also learned, she writes, "fear and shame . . . These conflicting feelings about being a Black woman still do battle inside of me. It is this conflict, my constantly . . . seeing and touching/Both sides of things' that makes my commitment real."

She is committed to the possibilities that lie in unity and speaks against both Black and feminist separatism. She says that "whereas autonomy comes from a position of strength, separatism comes

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from a position of fear. . . The worst effect of separatism is not upon whomever we define as 'enemy,' but upon ourselves as it isolates us from each other."

She wants to break away from stereotypes, somehow finding connections among all feminist groups. In 1983, she wrote, "I know very little about the lives of other Third World women. I want to know more and I also want to put myself in situations where I *have* to learn," forcing herself to face deeply ingrained prejudices and perceptions about people different from herself:

The gulfs between us hurt and they are deeply rooted in the facts of difference. Class and color differences between Black women have divided us since slavery. We have yet to explore how riddled we are by this pain. . . Color, class, age, sexual identity, religion, politics, and the fact that sometimes we plain do not agree, result in undeniable differences. The question is whether we will let these differences kill our movement.

While working on *Home Girls*, Smith said in an interview that the book emerged from her political activism. Smith recognizes that there is a surprising breadth in "the range of issues we deal with under the name of feminism and Black feminism." She goes on to give us her idea of what we can do about oppression:

My vision of Black feminism or Third World feminism is that those of us who have a skill use that skill for liberation of our people, however we define our people.

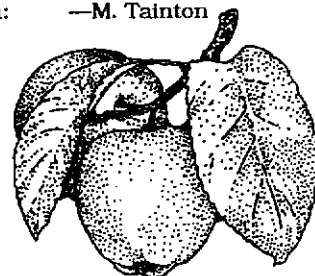
A rock and a hard place

In a later essay, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Relationships between Black and Jewish Women," published in *Yours in Struggle*, Smith discusses the tensions between women of different backgrounds in the women's movement: "Classism, racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, and sexism float in the air, are embedded in the very soil" of the land where we grow up. "The bottom line," she writes, "has got to be a fundamental opposition to oppression, period." She calls upon us to use "that first-hand knowledge of oppression . . . to recognize each other, to do what work we can together."

Smith was not available to interview at press time, so we do not know how her ideas have evolved. Come to the Feminist Authors' Breakfast (see page 10 to get a ticket), and find out about her current views and activities.

Credits: Cheryl Clarke: —D. Turner, reviews
—M. Tainton, interview
Minnie Bruce Pratt: —M. Tainton
Barbara Smith: —M. Tainton

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Poetry Review Section



Poetry and the natural world

Braid, Kate. *To This Cedar Fountain*. Vancouver, British Columbia: Polestar, 1995. Paper, ISBN 1-896095-08-9, \$16.95 Canada, \$13.95 U.S.

Kate Braid is not only an accomplished poet but also a carpenter. This joyful celebration of trees led to her admiration of the painting of Emily Carr. Studying the exhibition in a local gallery moved Braid to search out Carr's journal, *Hundreds and Thousands: The Journal of an Artist*. She combines selections from this work and color reproductions of Carr's surrealist paintings of trees with her poems "creating a dialogue with Emily by pairing my descriptions of the impact of 'meeting' her through her painting..." In this manner the reader is gifted with the work of two artists.

Never achieving success during her lifetime, Carr writes, "So, artist, you too from the depths of your soul, down among dark and silence, let your roots creep forth, gaining strength . . . Draw deeply from the good nourishment of the earth but rise into the glory of the light and air and sunshine" sitting on a camp stool deep in the forests of British Columbia. In her work, *British Columbia Forest*, Braid replies,

Emily, I could taste you,
the salad of your palate,
bitter chocolate of tree trunks
and totem poles climbing into skies drenched
with green and blue and light.

And down below,
when green ran like smoke through the forest,
ripe with the smell of feasts coming,

what did you do then, hungry
on your little camp stool, in your caravan,
with only the poles and the trees and the paint?

Braid's work is vivid, reflecting not only on Carr's work painting trees and totem poles, but reflecting on the hardship she endured and overcame. Carr's work was often compared with Van Gogh's, her boldness demonstrated in a painting titled *The Red Cedar*, echoed in Braid's poem of the same title:

Saucy as a sadist, she whirls
her whips around,
seeking contact that promises
naughty or else.

Her great green skirts
swirl faster than any cancan
can flip a forest.

A copper red penny
for your partner.
Join in! Join in!
Already the dance moves on
without you.

Through her poetry, Braid connects the emotion and joy of life that Carr felt through her painting and communion with trees, and feeds it to her readers.

—P. Crossland

In your face and out on the streets

Roy, Camille. *The Rosy Medallions: Selected Work*. Berkeley, CA: Kelsey St. Press, 1995. Paper, ISBN 0-932716-35-0, \$10.

Camille Roy's essays are blunt, sometimes grotesquely so; they make *The Rosy Medallions* a book for a specific taste. Her uninhibited style, likened to that of Grace Paley and Jayne Anne Phillips, dramatic and magnetic, leads the reader through unspoken accounts of life on the dark side. Bursts of street life and the sexual desires of a young lesbian blast through the pages in text and form that remains "in your face" long after reading. This search for oneself in an unkempt world of salacious and violent experiences may express the suppressed voice of women, and more specifically lesbians, in their struggle to be heard; yet, one is left wanting to be assured that the voice will mature and gain perspective. Roy has a great talent for bringing the reader into the message. Profound and disturbing, this powerful work reveals a stage in the development of that talent.

—L. Duda

Poetry Review Section

Duet: Poetry and photographs

From *May Sarton's Well: Writings of May Sarton*. Selection and photographs by Edith Royce Schade. Watsonville, CA: Papier-Mache Press, 1994. Cloth, ISBN 0-918949-52-1, \$20.00; paper, ISBN 0-918949-51-3, \$12.00.

In 1971 Edith Schade was given a volume of poetry by May Sarton and from that time has been a great admirer of the poet. In 1983 the two met and discussed the pairing of their work. Schade began her collection of quotes and a friendship that supported her own exhibitions of her photographs.

The theme of this book is taken from a quote that Sarton often used in her poetry readings: "The delights of the poet as I jotted them down turned out to be light, solitude, the natural world, love, time, creation itself." Schade seeks out images from the poems, acting as "a piano to a lyric singer." Her photographs are crisp, without clutter, a wonderful reflection of the prose and poetry she harmonizes with so well.

Sarton's prose often reads as well as her poetry. In the chapter, "The Natural World," she writes: "We are aware of God only when we cease to be aware of ourselves, not in the negative sense of denying the self, but in the sense of losing self in the admiration and joy." Schade illustrates this point with a deceptively simple photograph of a thin branch with two leaves, one attached and one falling to the ground. Flowers, Sarton says, keep her attached to the continuity of life, as they change before her eyes. "They live and die in a few days; they keep me closely in touch with process, with growth, and with dying." She reminds us that nature is the symphony of life in "Mozart Again"

I learn this loving fresh, in ancient style
(Lightly time flows).
And mine a green world for pure joy awhile.
Listen, a rose!

This book, and the lives and work of both artists, passionately demonstrates that we are receptacles for life to flow through. We must keep our channels open to pain at the same time we appreciate the joys of life. Sarton concludes "civilization depends on true joys, all those that have nothing to do with money or influence—nature, the arts, human love."

—P. Crossland

Screams of a French surrealist poet

Mansour, Joyce. *Screams*. Translated from the French by Serge Gavronsky. Sausalito, CA: Post-Apollo Press, 1995. Paper, ISBN 0-942996-25-9, \$10.00.

This slim book of poetry is a translation of Mansour's first book, originally published in French in 1953. The volume includes a short introduction to Mansour—"Eater of Man-Words"—by the translator.
July 1996

Born in England and raised in Cairo, Mansour wrote in Paris where her work was embraced by the French Surrealists. Her poetry has largely been ignored in American collections of surrealist and/or French poetry to date; hopefully, this new translation will go some distance towards changing that. The collection comprises a number of short, untitled poems or staccato "screams" containing sharp images of the body, blood, madness, violence, and nightmarish dreams. There are also many sensual images to be found in lines like "On the silvered beach of suspected sighs / Near crucified pines on an absent sky / I wait." The first person voice and direct address of many of the poems adds to their powerful impact. Anyone familiar with the work of French feminist theorists like Helene Cixous or Julia Kristeva will find much of interest in Mansour's poetry. Recommended for university and college collections of women's writing.

—R. Schlegl, University of Alberta

Seventy-five years of living

Meehan, Maude. *Washing the Stones: Selected Poem 1975-1995*. Watsonville, CA: Papier-Mache, 1996. Paper, ISBN 0-918949-85-8, \$13.00.

Maude Meehan takes us on the journey of her seventy-five years as a poet, activist, wife of fifty-seven years, daughter, mother, and grandmother. She reminds us that we are connected to each other in the roles we share, the battles we fight, and the people we love.

She begins this volume by confronting her mother's mortality, and through that her own. She relates how her daughter lectured her on the proper care of her ninety-year-old mother after an operation. Absorbing the instructions, she cannot help but remember the old woman, in an earlier time, coaching her on the care of her newborn daughter. She concludes,

Here in this room, invisible, yet strong
I sense our lifelines joined, and pulsing still.

Perhaps because of this continuity from one generation to another, she is an activist against nuclear power. In "A Question of Time," dedicated to Rachel Carson, she declares,

We are told there are levels of mercury
of nitrate, of radiation, that are *acceptable*,
that in war there are *acceptable* casualty rates...

We must relinquish the illusion of safety,
form a shield for the old and the innocent,
the helpless ones. Cry out
in our rage, in our passion for life,
"None of these are *acceptable*."

She also shares the loss of a daughter born prematurely and grieved privately. In "Reclaiming

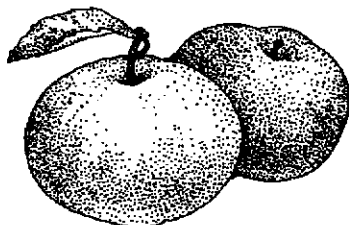
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ALA Annual Issue

- *We're ready . . .
 Are you? Authors' Breakfast feature
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- *Our pullout pocket schedule,
 with city map, page 5*
- *Featured meetings and programs,
 page 6*
- *Special Poetry Review section:
 pages 7-9*



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 Pacific Oaks College
 5 Westmoreland Place
 Pasadena, CA 91103.

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