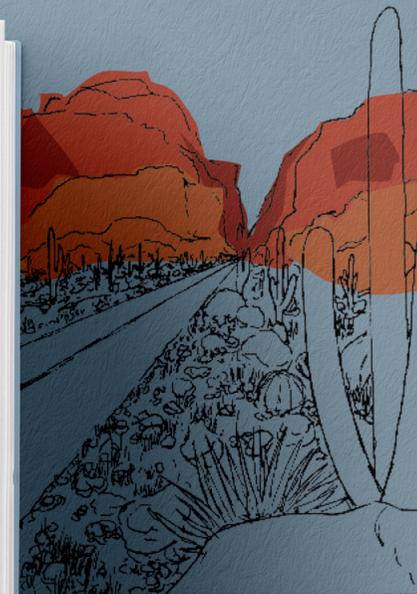


Conditions

By Various Authors



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know how to deal well with any of them. Nancy said the place should not make such a difference, I should have it inside. I had it inside the bus. I need a shell. But I know that is not good. Shells crack. I looked in the mirror when we got here and saw myself, outside, not bad. It pays to look in the mirror every once in a while. It reminds me that I am a person, then there is a little vanity, and then I give up. The glimpse is fleeting. Too long and I would begin to see.

This morning we are fresh. We have slept and washed and been warm. It is windy outside and the tide is high.

Sunday March 28, a.m.

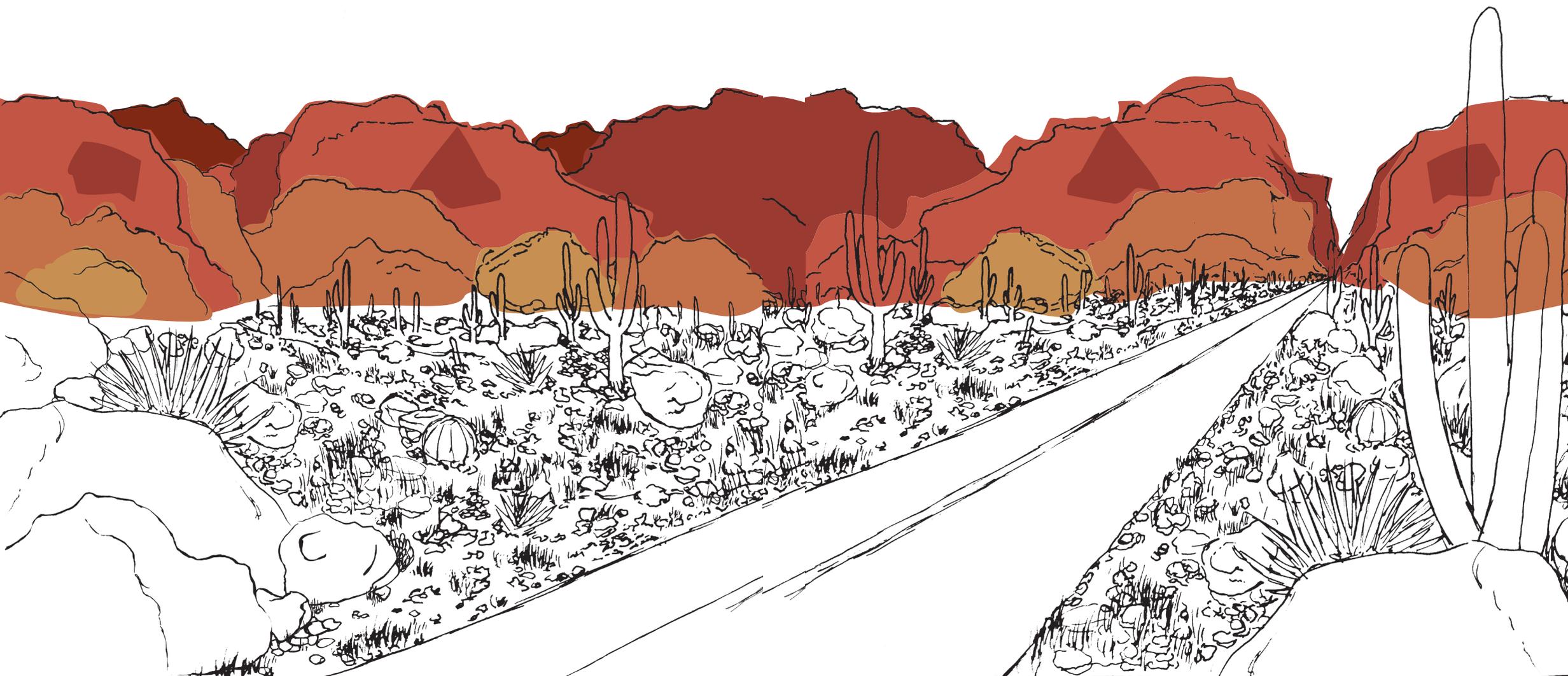
Today we are home. We got here last night. It is cloudy out but the trees are delicate with new leaves and the house is as we left it. Yesterday we came up the coast on Route 1 in a windstorm. The surf was wild, the waves were whipped back on themselves, the ocean was the color of jade. The cliffs above had flowers, the mountains behind them were soft and green. Nancy had to drive the bus into the wind to keep on the road. I found the scenery spectacular but frightening. Nancy found it beautiful.

In the morning we walked on a beach at Pismo Beach. There was wind and surf but it felt calm. There were people: children playing with the waves and sand, an old man with a cane who walked briskly past us. We felt good in the morning and leisurely about driving up. We were going to stay in a campground in Cambria. But when we got there it was windy and full of trailers and boy scouts with orange tents. So we came on up and stopped in a few campgrounds in Big Sur. One at Plasket Creek was protected but full. A later one in the redwoods had some empty places but I really wanted to come home. Nancy said it was all right with her either way. We came home. The last two days had a lot of driving in them. Nancy drove but I felt we did it together. I kept my eyes open, held hands and gave kisses, and paid attention to the hillsides. I said I would like us to take other trips.



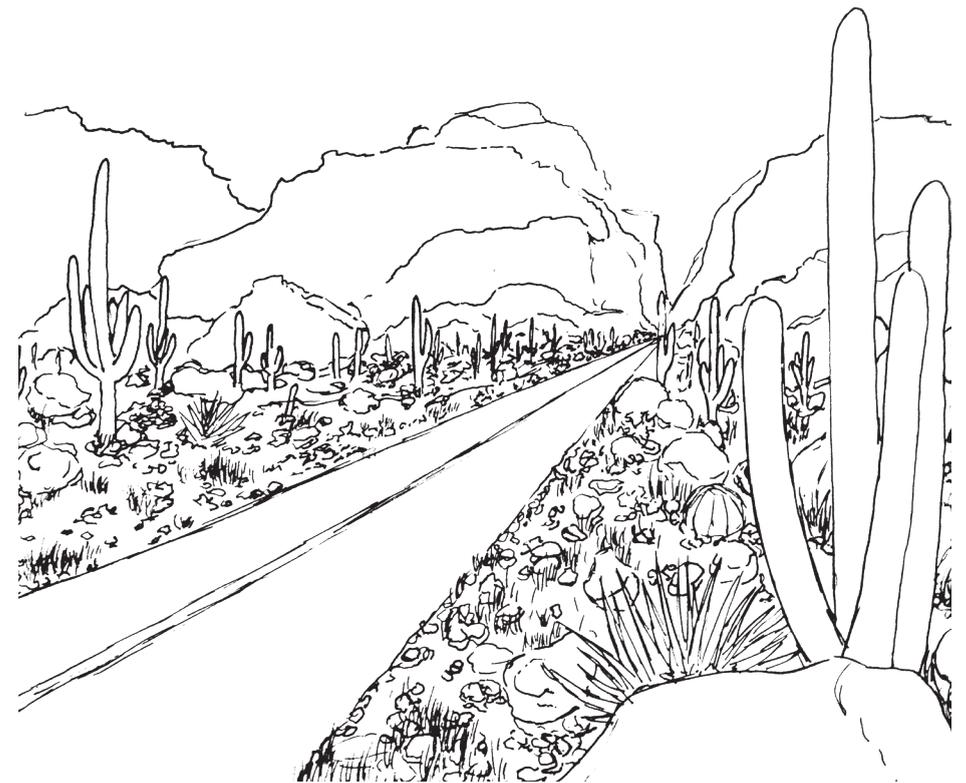
Conditions

By Various Authors



Conditions

By various authors,
with an emphasis on writing by lesbians.



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Conditions is edited by Elly Bulkin, Jan Clausen, Irena Klepfisz, and Rima Shore. We work collectively to select and edit material which will reflect women's perceptions of themselves, each other, the conditions of their lives, and of the world around them.

This collective process is a difficult one. We have found that the four of us do not always agree or identify with viewpoints expressed by the women we publish, or with each other.

Because we do not proceed from a single conception of what Conditions should be, we feel it is especially important to receive critical and personal reactions to the writing we publish.

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The Moon Is No Muse

Enid Dame

The moon
is no muse.
She's got enough to do
hauling
oceans back
and forth
across the world.

Once,
young and intense,
I called her sister, lover;
prayed her
fertilize
my poems.

Now
I don't waste her time.
I have no muse.
Only two parents and
a sense of history
I drag around with me
under New York,
on bridges, over highways
to Baltimore, to Jersey.

No muse,
only a bus, a subway
to joggle poems
inside my mind.

Bushpaths

Wilmette Brown

the road is strewn with fallen wings
and the stench of mangled dogs
follows frightened barefoot travelers on the sidetracks
cattle scatter on burning hoofs
to escape the blast of horns
and faded women sell subsistence cobs
and watermelons along the highway

africa
who scratched these roads
in pitch
across your face
new scars
to mark the new maturity
the knowledge of imperial evil
for surely
these are the paths of plunder
that violate the sacred forests
to race for hidden treasures
leaving us
a continent of open secrets

they are not our roads
that trample through the maize field
and cramp the lion in her kingdom
that steal across whole villages
and parcel out the continent
into national thoroughfares
to deliver the goods
to europe

Grinning Underneath

Maureen Brandy

School wasn't even out yet and already it was so damn hot and muggy the new flypaper over the kitchen table had curled up. Folly sat in front of the fan in the old wicker rocker. She could feel the small, broken pieces of wood pushing into her legs below her bermuda shorts. She stared at a page of her new mystery story that Martha had just finished and loaned her but she couldn't read. She thought maybe after the summer she'd start on a new budget and try again to get them out of the rotten trailer and into a house. They were all tripping over each other, all the time, tripping over each other. Especially with that Mary Lou getting hotsy-totsy. It was no good. Mary Lou in there bungling around. She'd leave the bedroom in shambles. How could you read a mystery with such a disrespectful kid in the next room and that wall between you so thin if you put a tack in one side, it'd come out the other.

Skeeter was out mowing lawns. Now that was a good kid for you. He wanted some money of his own and he wasn't scared of working a little. Mary Lou'd drop her allowance on the first thing that came along and then hitch from town when she didn't have change for the bus. Worries about that girl were as regular as clothes gettin' dirty. With Tiny, it was too early to tell. He still minded. He was only ten. She remembered nursing them all in the wicker rocker. Seemed like Mary Lou'd been born with a mean bite. The other two'd taken more easily to it.

Mary Lou came out in her cut offs that she'd sat fringing for two hours the night before. She wore a skimpy T-shirt and an Aunt Jemima scarf tied around the crown of her head like she was going out to sweat in

the fields. "Did you sleep some today, momma?" she asked.

"Not much. Too hot." Folly worked the night shift at the factory putting zippers in polyester pants. She looked back down at her page.

"Yuck. Do we have to have that stupid flypaper right over the table?"

"Mind your business, sister. I don't see y'all working out with the fly swatter, ever. That's the reason we need it."

Mary Lou stood sneering at the yellow strip and didn't answer. She had to admire the way her daughter's body had grown so nice and tall and lean. Graceful too. Mary Lou did a sort of reverse curtsy, going up on her toes and putting her hands behind her back. Then said, "See ya later."

"Where are you goin'?"

"Out."

"Out where?"

"To town."

"You stay away from that A&P, you hear, child?"

Mary Lou didn't answer.

"I don't want you hangin' around with that Lenore. She's too old for you."

"Mom, she's only nineteen," Mary Lou said, exasperation puckering the corners of her mouth.

"That's too old. You're sixteen."

"You don't have to tell me how old I am."

"Who told you she was nineteen, anyhow?" Folly asked. "She's been around that store at least four years now."

"I know. That's cause she dropped out of school in tenth grade."

"That's what I mean. I don't want you runnin' with that sort. She'll be givin' you ideas about droppin' outa school."

"But mom, she's smart. She's so smart she can study on her own. That's why she dropped out of school. She had to work anyway so she figured if she worked all day she could get her some books and study what she wants to at night. She does, too. You should see all the books she's got."

"I don't care how many books she's got, she ain't smart," Folly said,

her voice rising. "People don't drop outa school from being too smart... and I don't want you around her. I want you goin' to school and lookin' for a job for the summer." Folly placed her book face down to keep the place, leaned forward so the chair was still and tried to penetrate Mary Lou with her eyes as if to stamp the statement into her. It was too hot to fight if you could help it.

Mary Lou held on to the back of the dinette chair and matched her stare. She was thinking of what to say. Finally she said, "School's stupid. There's no way I can explain to you how stupid school is."

Folly rolled her eyes up in her head to dismiss the point. "You're goin' to school, that's all. You get you a job for summer and then you'll know how easy you got it. I oughta send you to the factory a couple nights. Let you sit in front of that damn sewing machine for eight hours." She wiped the sweat from her forehead. Jesus, she didn't want to fight. She tried to lower her voice and it came out all scratchy. "Look," she said, "I'm working my ass off to try to get us out of this damn trailer. I run off with Barney when I was sixteen cause I thought he was hot shit with his tight pants and his greased back hair and his always having change to buy me a coke at the drug store. They kicked me outa school cause I was pregnant but I figured sweet shit on them, I already knew everything. Then I had to work cause Barney kept on goin' out with the boys and gettin' drunk and losin' his job, then I was pregnant again.... Then, you know the rest."

Folly looked at the flies stuck on the flypaper instead of at her daughter. She felt embarrassed. That wasn't what she had meant to say.

"Ma. It ain't my fault you married a motherfucker," Mary Lou said.

"You watch your mouth. You watch how you talk about your father."

"Well, he was." Mary Lou kept her mouth in a straight line though both mother and daughter were aware that she was probably grinning underneath. She'd always had a grin to go with her defiance. Folly had pretty much slapped it off her face by the time she was twelve and now she was sorry. She'd rather Mary Lou would just grin and then she'd know for sure it was there. Instead she picked up her shoulder bag and made a

sort of waving gesture out of the way she hiked it up on her shoulder.

"Anyways, Lenore's trying to get me on at the A&P for the summer, she said at the door. Then she was gone.

Mary Lou was gone and Folly was left with a picture of Lenore standing behind her meat counter, quartering the chickens, her strokes swift and clean. She had always kind of liked the girl. She got up from her rocker and moved the fly paper to an old nail stuck in the wall by the kitchen window.

She took the wash off the line out back and called across to Martha to come on over. The two women sat at the table on the concrete slab they called a porch and Folly folded the laundry into two piles. She folded neatly, trying to keep the ironing pile low. On the other hand, she didn't want the kids going to school looking sloppy poor.

"How's your ma?" Folly asked.

"Oh, she's getting back to her old crabby self. She woke me up at noon to make sure I wasn't hungry... you know, in my sleep I'm gonna be hungry and not feeding myself. Then all afternoon it's, 'Go lie down, you didn't get near enough sleep.' I couldn't go back, though, with her bungling around with the cane. She's not near as steady on her feet as she was before the pneumonia. I can't help myself from peeping out at her, waiting for her to fall down. Lotta good it's gonna be if she does, me lying there peeping."

Martha had brought her mother there to her little two-room trailer after she'd had her second stroke. Folly had a lot of respect for what she'd put up with but whenever she said anything like that Martha would say, "Look at your own load, Fol, and the way you take care of it." Once she'd even said, "I swear you were born a solid rock."

Folly thought about how Martha always seemed like the rock to her. She kept her awake at work making jokes about the boss. She'd touch her shoulder when Folly was really nodding out and say, "I wish I could just give you a pillow but you know old fartblossom'll be making his rounds soon." Coming home in the early mornings they always came back to life

for the fifteen-minute drive and concocted tricks they would do on fartblossom once they were ready to quit the factory. That was Folly's favorite time of day. Once you'd come out into the sun and sneezed the lint out of your nose, the air always seemed so sweet and fresh. She often wished they lived a little further from the factory so the drive wouldn't be over so fast.

"Did you finish that mystery yet?" Martha asked.

"No... Hardly got started on it. I been tryin' to figure that Mary Lou again."

"Yea. What's she been up to?"

"I don't know if it's anything or not. You know that girl behind the meat counter at the A&P? Short, dirty-blond hair brushed back, kind of small and tough?"

"Lenore? Is that who you mean?"

"Yea, you know her?"

"Not much. Only from going in the store."

"She's queer. Least that's what the guidance counselor down at the school says. She called me in to tell me that Mary Lou's been hanging out with her."

"I didn't think Lenore went to school."

"She don't. The guidance counselor says she comes by in her car when school lets out and picks my Mary Lou up every now and then. What do you think?"

"I don't know, Fol. Did you talk to Mary Lou?"

"I told her I didn't want her hangin' out with no one that much older. She's a smart ass kid, got an answer for everything. She ended up callin' Barney a motherfucker."

"What's he got to do with it?" Martha asked.

"Good question." Folly shook out a pair of jeans, then placed one leg over the other and smoothed them with her hand. She could hardly remember how Barney got into it. "He sure was a motherfucking bastard," she said. "Serve him right if his daughter turned out queer. Him runnin' back, just stayin' long enough to knock me up with Tiny." Her face felt

hot. The anger always rushed to her head when she thought of him.

"I sure have to agree with you," Martha said. "It never sounds like he done you any favors."

"I was pretty stupid," Folly said. She tried to get back to thinking about Mary Lou. She didn't want her mind wasting time on that bastard. The thought struck her that at least if Mary Lou was messin' around with that girl she wouldn't be gettin' herself knocked up. She didn't say that to Martha, though. It was a weird way for a mother to think.

Martha sat quiet and patient, waiting for Folly to get back on the track. She ran her fingers through her hair. It was then that Folly realized Martha's hair was cut just about the same as Lenore's. It was the same color too except for the temple parts where she had most of her grey. Folly looked away and tried to pretend she was immersed in her laundry. Ever so strange, the feeling that had crept up on her. How could it be that you live next door to this woman, you know exactly how she looks, you know she came up to North Carolina from Florida seven years ago when her ma first took sick. She works all night in the same room with you, she sleeps mornings in the next trailer, she knows every bit of trouble you ever had with the kids. They mind her like they never minded you. She loves them. She's like family. Folly was realizing that Martha never had talked about sex. Never. She'd never talked about any man. She'd never talked about not having children. She'd talked about her girlfriend in Florida when she'd first come up, about working citrus groves with her; then Folly'd become her best friend.

This all slipped furtively through her mind in a few seconds and she could only glance sideways at Martha. She was husky. She flicked her cigarette ashes with a manly gesture. "For Christ's sake," Folly said to herself, "so do I." Then it hit her that she never talked about sex to Martha either. Except to bitch about Barney. But that was because she didn't have any. She didn't want no man within a clothesline length of her. No thanks. She did just fine living without.

Folly stooped forward and fished around in the laundry basket for

more clothes but she was down to the sheets. She sat back again and scrutinized the ironing pile just to make sure she hadn't put anything in it that could go right on over to the other pile and be done with but she didn't find any mistakes. Then she searched out two corners of a sheet and Martha came around and took the other corners just as she would always do if she were around when the wash was taken in. They stretched it between them.

"Listen here. I just don't want no trouble for Mary Lou," Folly said. "You know, she seems cut out for gettin' herself into things."

"Yea, but she's pretty smart about getting herself out of trouble too. Least she don't come crying to you most times. I bet she didn't go to that guidance counselor on account of wanting guidance."

"Uhn't uh. Matter of fact if you ask me I think that counselor is a snoopy bitch. She'd probably like to have somethin' on Mary Lou. Said Mary Lou is a rebellious girl, that's what she told me."

"What of it?" Martha said. "Ain't nothing wrong with that. I bet this counselor don't like any kid that don't run around with a runny nose and a whiny voice asking for guidance." Martha shook her end of the sheet vigorously as she spoke. "That's a fine girl you got there. Reminds me of someone I know real well."

"What you mean?" Folly said.

"You know what I mean. I mean you. Remember when you ran around getting us all ready for presenting that thing with our working conditions to fartblossom's boss. They tried to give you some guidance. Remember that? You saying, 'Piss on them, they'll never get me outa here till I'm ready to go.'"

Folly tried to keep her mouth down to a flat line but the grin was there anyway. You could see it if you knew her as well as Martha did.

Assumption in the Algarve: 1974

Jacqueline Lapidus

i.

off to a late start
we had a flat tire in Setubal

ugly industrial suburb
five women struggling to
change the tire while
groups of grubby tourists
straggle sweating back from the beach
and an old man watches
from the garden of an abandoned villa
suspicious
silent

and reached the Alentejo
hungry the car panted,
climbing the purple hills

black-shawled women hover in the twilight
branches claw at the windshield
like beggars' hands
and an old man sits on a wall
puffing his pipe mysterious
guardian of the mounds
suspicious
silent

abruptly we stopped singing
revolutionary songs
and rolled up the windows
shivering hugging our sleeping bags

ii.

midnight in Albufeira nobody
home at Teresa's the beach
has disappeared into the sea

exhausted, we stumble into an olive grove
and pitch our tent in the dark next
morning we wake up black and blue
on a building site: another luxury hotel

not a drop of fresh milk
in Albufeira

and we haven't seen any old men

heat shimmers off parked cars like ovens
as we limp past miles of burning flesh
looking for Teresa

iii.

hiding behind dark glasses
thick hair spread like honey
over her face Teresa

her words come hesitantly through her fingers

frail as seaweed at the water's edge
she speaks to me of passion
and of poetry

her husband drying on her skin like salt

iv.

today is the fifteenth of August, sacred
to Artemis and Diana the huntress
and Hecate of the Night Sky
and Bridget the triple goddess

and Astarte, many-breasted Mother of All

the Blessed Virgin
escapes to heaven

we five remain on the beach
breasts bared to the sun, and swim
naked at night forgetting the revolution

a scorpion crawls across the sand

v.

*Grandola, vila morena
terra da fraternidade*

the sky woke up startled
and blushed when we strolled
yawning into the café
asking for breakfast incredulous men
lowered their newspapers
the radio jammed

*former secret police agents
stage prison strike leftist:
demonstrators arrested*

we bundled into the car and drove
back to Lisbon like Erinyes

by the time we arrived, rumors
were spreading all over Portugal
that a high-level international feminist conference
had been held, secretly, in the Algarve



Waiting For Release

Sukey Durham

It keeps being summer again.
I imagine your face
behind a wall of mountains
waiting for release.

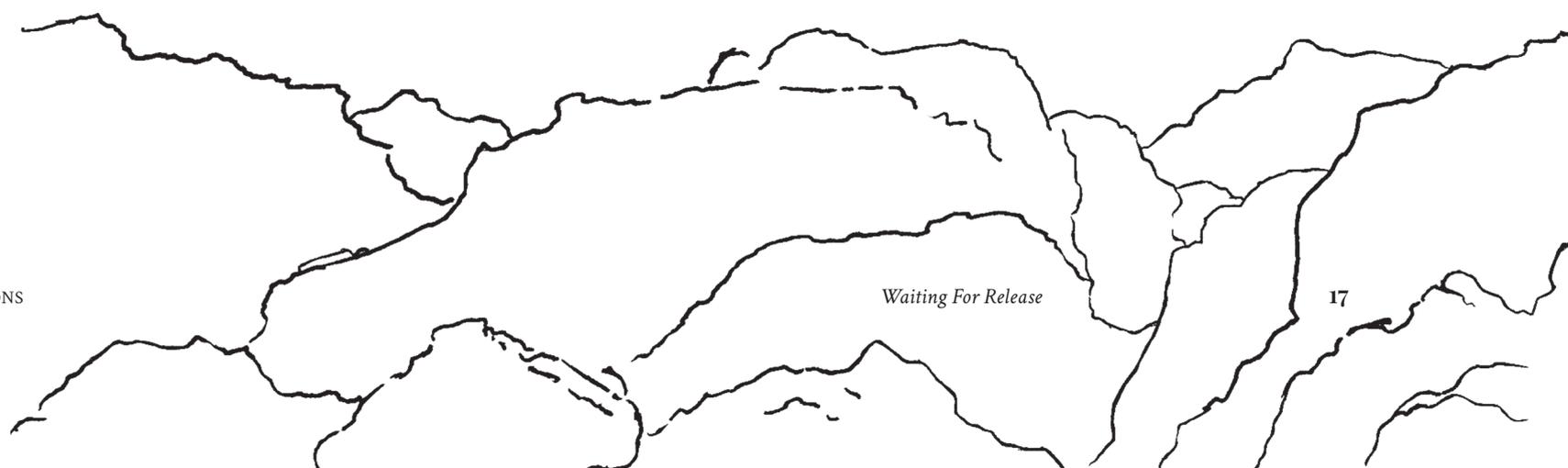
Today clouds scrape
the arid mountain tops.
I swim on my back
watching the dry storm
pass overhead.

Here, you can have my body
I don't want it.
All week, looking in the mirror
I turn away from these
large bones planted
on sturdy feet.
The ruddy face is yours,
not mine.
You can have it back.

Doing dishes I
suddenly remember your eyes,
sunken and red-rimmed,
your skin refusing
to heal,
your ankles no larger
than my wrists.
And always the effort
at speech,

the way I must press
the flat of my hand
to your chest
trying to understand.

When I said your will
grew stronger,
it was my own strength
I wished for.



Trip to the Anza-Borrego Desert

March 19-28, 1976

Susan Krieger

Saturday March 20, p.m.

We are parked at the end of a sandy road at the south fork of the Indian Valley. We came through the Indian Gorge to get here. We looked at flowers on the ground, they were pretty and the plants are all strange. There is something called a smoke tree that I like and we came through a miniature forest of them. We saw jackrabbits and one road-runner. The animals scramble around here. There are no people near us. We are a few miles off from a paved road and up on a hill so we see down and out over a large stretch of desert. Up to the sides of us are stony ridges with cactus and bushes between the rocks. One purpose of coming here was to be in another place with Nancy and have it be good for each of us.

This is a very physical place. Nancy likes that. She tells me to look at the rocks and plants, forget where I was, be here in the desert. We kissed for a while this afternoon, then I stopped. I looked into her eyes and got afraid, that I had seen youth while I was teaching and might leave her, leave the comfort of age for an energy I sometimes lack. I thought I would not tell her until I had to.

Sunday March 21, a.m.

I told Nancy last night about thinking of leaving her, and that it was anger because here I was in the desert depressed and she would not be a fantasy person and solve it all for me by making love passionately in the back of the bus. She said if I had asked her to take off her boots maybe something different would have happened. I said I was afraid to ask. She said she

felt unlovable and the implication was I should do something about that. This morning it seems maybe I can do something, but that will depend on keeping myself out of trouble, filling my time here and letting her fill hers.

I have started reading an Anza-Borrego Desert guidebook to see if I can learn to appreciate this environment for what it is. According to the book, what I thought was a roadrunner yesterday was more likely a quail, what I thought was a giant spider may have been a desert bird cage, or a plant. The view from here out over the Pinyon Mountains and Harpers and Hapaha Flats changes in different lights of day. Descriptions of scenery seem to me usually dull, but in this case they indicate I do not know what I am seeing. The Pinyon Mountains and the Harpers and Hapaha Flats are not there at all. Nancy just took out a compass and said the direction we are looking in is due east, so the mountains are the Coyote Mountains. In the distance is the Imperial Valley. I have yet to figure out what is in between.

Sunday March 21, p.m.

We changed gorges at noon, moved to the north fork of the Indian Valley, stopped on the way, saw jackrabbits, walked around, looked at tiny flowers on the desert floor, 1-2" above the ground, yellow, white, lavender, and red. I thought about writing this diary and how I keep expecting that being on vacation means I should not think about ordinary things, like what happened last week or will happen when I get back, or whether to eat or to shit. I should just be still and that will be peace and the patterns that get me into emotional trouble will go away. I forget that my improvisations may be my life and a vacation does not have to mean the end of it.

I get hard on myself for writing. I am not yet ready to say I enjoy it and that is enough. Diary writing is a problem in a way poetry is not. The justification for the poetry is art as well as personal feelings. The justification for letters or notes for a class is immediate relationship with other people. But a diary is simply: I thought this, I felt this, I wanted to write it down. And I want to be able to read it later without cringing. I want to

be able to show it to Nancy and anyone who might be interested and say, yes, my life is like that, and worth it.

Nancy said about my class one part of the problem is what happens to me in groups: "She becomes defensive." I wrote it down Friday night and had her sign it. Nancy will not write. She will only give a comment now and then. This afternoon we walked up a wash and passed a group of rocks she later happened to mention was a dam. I had not seen it. I had seen the rocks and some cement but not a dam.

I have new arms to get used to on this trip. They have freckles on them, small brown spots, my mother taught me to call them beauty marks. Nancy's mother taught her to call them moles. For me I think they should be beauty marks. My arms used to be plain with one mark midway down each one and one on top of the left shoulder. Now there are about twenty dots sprinkled unevenly on the left arm and about twenty-five on the right. I think it may have to do with hormone change, going off the pill and having my body re-establish itself. The thought of that is good. I am now supposedly more my own person. But the sight of it is frightening. I want my old arms back. I am afraid of these, afraid they mean growth into something cancerous and awful. But they are my arms. I have to love them.

Monday March 22, mid-afternoon

We moved again and are now in Bow Willow Canyon. In front of us are mountains and in back are small green gray willows bent in odd shapes. The air is still and the sky grayish white. It feels like it might rain. The Harpers and Hapaha Flats I thought I saw yesterday in the distance were not that but some nameless badlands, according to the map. I am writing now in the back of the bus. This is where I wrote yesterday afternoon. Nancy sits outside in the mornings and when we stop. I make a nest up here and lie down. For Nancy, the out of doors is a way she can feel self-reliant and be in country she likes. For me it is mostly, can I find a way to make it nice?

Last night I got sick. From now on I hope to feel better. It is very

warm and still now. I keep thinking about problems from home. Cleo is here. So are the students from the class, especially the two who knew I was coming here. So is the Welfare office when I get back, and the problem of how to find work and whether it is a joke to think I can do it apart from a university. I have read most of the guidebook now and looked at the maps. This morning began grumpy but turned out well. When we left the cactus garden and all the flowers on the ground I felt delicate and quiet. I thought if this is what happens in the desert, it will be all right. But now it is mid-afternoon and I worry about the night.

Monday March 22, late-afternoon

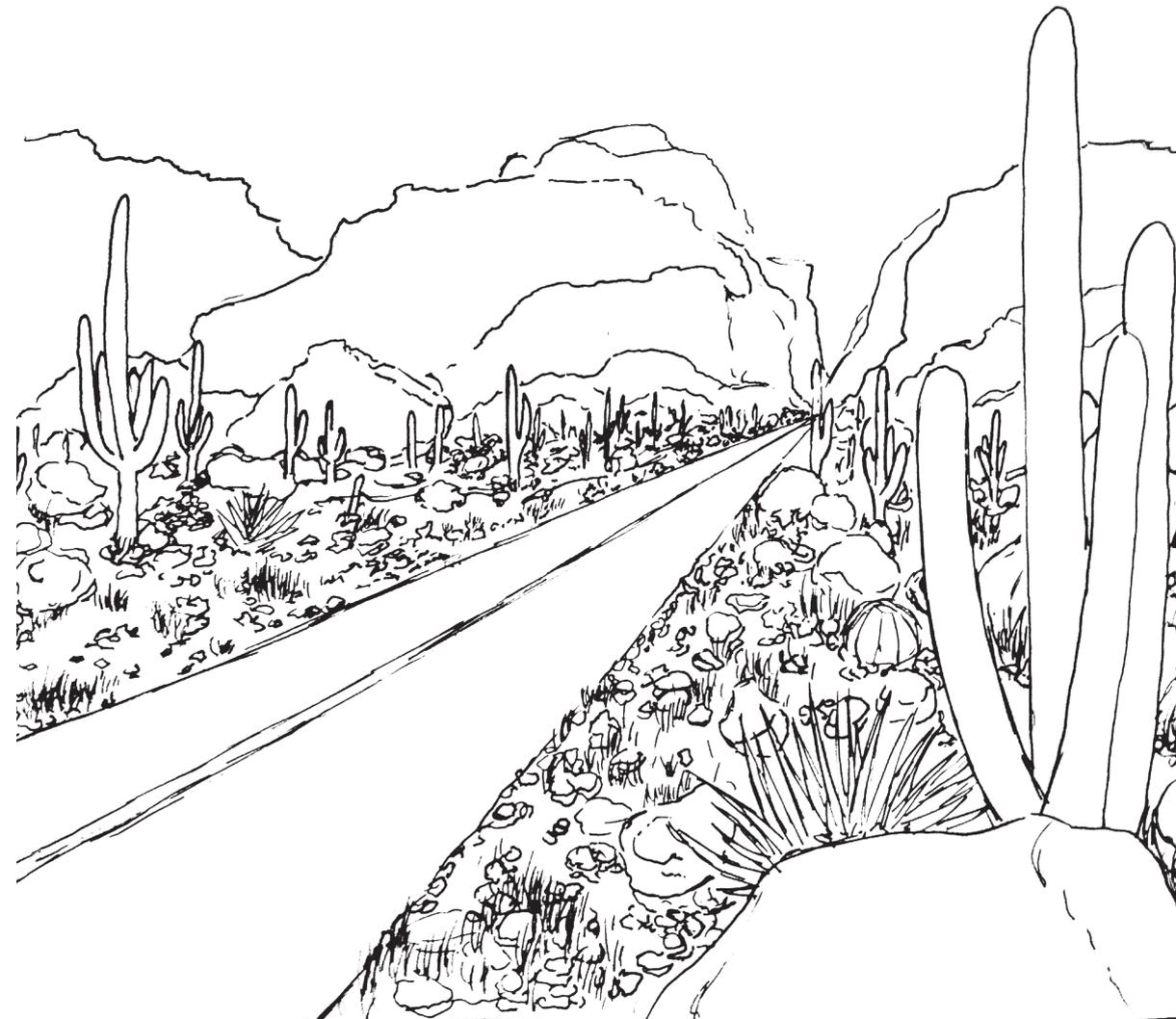
Poem:

I would like my days of craziness to be over
and on this vacation to learn to feel peace.
Then I would not hurt so much inside, or worry
so much about hurting.
But that has not happened.
The quiet of the desert is not my own.
I try. I make recoveries throughout the day.
But by evening I am tired.
I fear dinner. I fear sleep. I fear bursting my load.
It is not nice to say it.

Tuesday March 23, late-afternoon

I talked with Nancy after writing the poem yesterday, before I was about to cry, and then during dinner and I felt better. It is hard for me to know how much of the solving I can do myself and how much might as well come through talking with her. We talked about how I want everything to be better all at once and when that does not happen I give up. Nancy thinks I need not give up. I think sometimes I have to. But I need to suppose more of the time that I do not have to fight all the battles to win the war. Or maybe I need to forget about the war.

We had a calming dinner and I told Nancy about my last class, how the two male students did not want to think my being a woman and acting the way I did had anything to do with their anger and frustration, and how two of the women were sure it did, also how I answered the question of one of the men: what difference did it make for him to have taken this class rather than to have sat on a streetcorner? I told him one of the things I noted to myself was I did not have to answer all questions, I could say I did not know. So I said I did not know. That was defensive, at the same time to the point. And he could not score.



Last night I slept well until the morning when I woke with a dream about a broken contact lens I had to wear behind my glasses in order to see. It was orientation anxiety. I thought I might have gotten over that by talking with Nancy yesterday about what we might do in the next few days, so as to have things to look forward to, places on the map and in mind. But the prospect of new places did its bad work anyway. This morning I decided I would try to ignore it after 9 a.m. and pump water and drive and drink beer and talk about our mothers, how they ask questions and how we have learned to answer. Nancy said her mother asks but does not care about the answer, it is her way to make conversation. My mother asks to find out what she needs to know. In both cases the daughter gets denied. Nancy's answers did not matter. Mine mattered if they were what my mother wanted. So I learned not to answer Other people's questions, for fear they would manipulate me for their ends, which I assumed would be bad for mine. Nancy has tried to get me to change that and I think it has worked a little. But the process is slow.

We saw violet flowers along the roadway and made it over to Tamarisk Grove Campground to take hot showers. Then we read and had lunch. It was cool. I have started to read *Up and Down California in 1860-1864: The Journal of William H. Brewer*. He was a member of the State Geological Survey, the botanist. The book is from letters he sent back East about his travels. He kept climbing mountains and discovering things and writing them down, precisely. If there are four fruits in a fruit basket, he tells you what each one is. If he has traveled some number of miles in a year, he tells you what number were by foot, what by horse or muleback, and what by public conveyance. He tells you he has sewn on a button and also that his hands get rheumatic if it is too cold when he writes. He tells you the view from the mountains he has climbed early in the day was magnificent and that he went up while Ashburner fell to the wayside. But he says nothing of fear or anxiety, and I had assumed he would have some. Maybe it was not manly to talk about.

Nancy says no, just because I have fear and anxiety looking at moun-

tains and new sights does not mean he has it. He may have liked to adventure and felt that routine ways of climbing and handling whatever he came upon would get him through, and maybe mostly they did. Nancy likes that I am interested in reading Brewer even though he does not talk about fear and anxiety. She brought the book to take along for herself, but she is willing if I am interested to read Virginia Woolf, which I brought.

After lunch we drove to Split Mountain, through much hot desert, and got discouraged by the sand. There is a story there, mostly Nancy's, of how she drove her bus like it was a bucking bronco and finally in mutual good judgment we decided to turn back. It was stressful on her and seasick on me. But I do not have a history like hers. She has felt she wanted to go new places and it has been the other person who was afraid and demanded a turning back. This trip seems to be a lot about differences between Nancy and me. Like the country and geology, I see they are there, where previously, or much of the time, I have assumed they were me. I do not know why otherness should be so frightening.

Now we are back in the Tamarisk Grove Campground. There are people close by but the trees are large and have willowy leaves, the wind is rushing, it is cool. I have my place in the back of the bus with a pillow, curtains can be drawn, and sleeping bags are near. There is fruit juice and graham crackers and we have wine. I have pen and paper and books. The desert is outside and I am in it, but not really. Geological time and plant time are not mine. I will outlive the ocotillo and go other places than the mountains. I am something aside from them. It sounds ridiculous but the temptation is great to think I am a mountain or a plant.

Thursday March 25, late-morning

We are now in the Joshua Tree National Monument parked in a campground full of "jumbo rocks" which Nancy likes because they are rounded by the wind and seem organic. We came here yesterday after giving up on the Anza-Borrego Desert. I think we did the best part first and then ran out of places Nancy knew and felt I would like, which we could get to

with the bus. As soon as we got to this Joshua Tree park I wished to be back in the cactus gardens with the very small flowers we went to first in the Anza-Borrego. I am much less at home with large rocks, vast mountainous vistas, and coarse brown sand. The Anza-Borrego was more like a beach with lots of little finds. This is more like a western desert and the national monument designation is overwhelming. The Anza-Borrego was a state park and had an air of playground about it. This is more serious. Last night I had a dream about Hitler taking over San Francisco, I think brought on by coming here.

Before we left the Anza-Borrego, we saw fields of lavender and yellow flowers and looked at badlands. When we got here I was depressed lying in the back of the bus and felt suicidal and like a complete failure for adjusting so badly to this trip. The new is frightening to me more often than it is wonderful, and as soon as it gets monumental or religious, like these Joshua Trees with their arms up to God, I cower. Although I keep telling myself there is no need. So I cried after we got here. Nancy was nice to me. I think she feels more comfortable now than she did at the start. She likes this park. She likes the rocks and the trees and the Indian legacy of the desert. This morning we took a walk and my tiredness in the face of it showed.

Friday March 26, early-morning

Yesterday midday we went for a ride down into a valley to look at rocks and washes, Joshua Trees and shrubs. The Joshua Trees are ornamental on the landscape and unusual. I think it was worth coming here to see them. But the rocks do not move me, nor do the shrubs—the dry low life without flowers that lives on this plain. The scale of the trees and the rocks so far apart is not friendly for me. But for Nancy it is not a problem, it is an environment she likes.

Last night I got sick and upset and depressed and went to bed early. This morning I have resolved to try, or at least be resigned to being here. Nancy, I think, will not be convinced that is good enough.

Saturday March 27, a.m.

Now we are at the ocean. Yesterday morning, we decided to leave Joshua Tree, after I had become resigned and changed my clothes to bright colors as a step toward doing something about feeling better. Nancy said what did that mean, was I going to hitch into town, and where was my lipstick? I then felt terrible about the clothes. My way out was to stay in, the bus and myself, underneath colors. She said she wanted me to really be there, out among the cactus, with her. Then we decided to change environments, on the chance I would like the ocean better and because for her the desert was too cold and windy and beginning to be too full of weekend campers.

We drove down out of the desert and across to the ocean above Santa Barbara, to three state parks, two of which were full and the third of which was ugly. I was feeling guilty for taking us out of the desert in the mountains and feeling appreciative of how the desert was far away, with fewer people per square inch. Nancy said I should not feel guilty, coming to the ocean was also her choice. We took out a map at the third campground to figure out where to go next, either up in the hills behind for the night, or to a motel room around Pismo Beach and take showers and spend the next two days meandering up the coast. I thought we might yet have a happy ending.

This morning we woke and took showers. Last night I checked us into a motel. It is the first time I have done that for two people. In the past it has been a man who has done it. I think it makes a difference traveling as two women. With no male protector, you have to do it for yourself. In the long run you should feel better protected. But it is new to me. In the short run I feel mostly naive.

Immediately after we got into this motel room last night I got scared, of the room. I missed the bus, Glattisante, questing beast, Nancy named her. I missed the waves. I thought that shows it, changing environments makes no difference, I am equally afraid in all. It is the changes, the new and the different, and the descent of night that are the trouble. I do not

know how to deal well with any of them. Nancy said the place should not make such a difference, I should have it inside. I had it inside the bus. I need a shell. But I know that is not good. Shells crack. I looked in the mirror when we got here and saw myself, outside, not bad. It pays to look in the mirror every once in a while. It reminds me that I am a person, then there is a little vanity, and then I give up. The glimpse is fleeting. Too long and I would begin to see.

This morning we are fresh. We have slept and washed and been warm. It is windy outside and the tide is high.

Sunday March 28, a.m.

Today we are home. We got here last night. It is cloudy out but the trees are delicate with new leaves and the house is as we left it. Yesterday we came up the coast on Route 1 in a windstorm. The surf was wild, the waves were whipped back on themselves, the ocean was the color of jade. The cliffs above had flowers, the mountains behind them were soft and green. Nancy had to drive the bus into the wind to keep on the road. I found the scenery spectacular but frightening. Nancy found it beautiful.

In the morning we walked on a beach at Pismo Beach. There was wind and surf but it felt calm. There were people: children playing with the waves and sand, an old man with a cane who walked briskly past us. We felt good in the morning and leisurely about driving up. We were going to stay in a campground in Cambria. But when we got there it was windy and full of trailers and boyscouts with orange tents. So we came on up and stopped in a few campgrounds in Big Sur. One at Plasket Creek was protected but full. A later one in the redwoods had some empty places but I really wanted to come home. Nancy said it was all right with her either way. We came home. The last two days had a lot of driving in them. Nancy drove but I felt we did it together. I kept my eyes open, held hands and gave kisses, and paid attention to the hillsides. I said I would like us to take other trips.



Dead Heat

Lorraine Sutton

for my brother Henry
1953-1976

i thought the sun would never
find you.

i was wrong

it took strength
to reach out with love
awkward clumsy
still
you kept coming
toward me
toward us
never letting us forget
even for a moment
that
the pain grew with each pint
of blood
that
the burning went on
and on and on and on
this time for me for us
as well as for you

brother

i thought the sun would never
find you.

i was wrong

An Interview With Adrienne Rich

Elly Bulkin

*Adrienne Rich has written eight books of poems and a prose book, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976). She was born in 1929 and has three sons, all born in the 1950's. The following is Part One of an edited transcript of interviews taped on October 19 and 27, 1976. Part Two will appear in the second issue of *Conditions*.*

EB: I'd like to start by looking at the change in your critical reception by establishment critics over the past few years, particularly since the publication of *Of Woman Born*.

AR: I think it's been changing for a while. I don't think it's just all of a sudden happened. It really goes very far back, because when I began writing in the Fifties on what I now see were women's themes I ran up against tremendous resistance. The first "feminist" poem I ever wrote was around 1958, 1959: "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law." Friends, poet friends, women friends, said to me: "You mustn't call the book by that title; it'll sound as if it's only about women." But I did call the book by that title because I *knew* in my guts that that poem was the central poem of the book. I'd always gotten good reviews on the basis of being a dutiful daughter, doing my craft right, and—

EB: Randall Jarrell said you were "sweet."

AR: And when I began to write as a woman I suddenly became "bitter," and that was the word that was used. It's interesting that you cite that word "sweet" because then I was seen as "bitter" and "personal," and to be personal was to be disqualified, and that was very shaking to me because I

had really gone out on a limb in that poem. I would never have called myself a feminist at that point; it was only reading *The Second Sex* that gave me the courage to write “Snapshots” or even to think about writing it. I realized I’d gotten slapped over the wrists and I didn’t attempt that kind of thing for a long time again. I wrote a lot of poems about death and that was my next book, but I think I sensed even then that if there’s material you’re not supposed to explore, it can be the most central material in the world to you but it’s going to be trivialized as personal, it’s going to be reduced critically, you’re going to be told that you’re ranting or hysterical or emotional. The reception of *Snapshots* did make a deep impression and in some way deepened my sense that these were important themes, that I had to deal with them. But it certainly didn’t encourage me to go on with them at that point; I had no sense that there was going to be an audience for them.

EB: What changed that let you go back to them?

AR: My life. I mean, I didn’t have anything else to use. I had a sense very early on, you read the writers that you need and in the Fifties I was reading Mary Wollstonecraft, de Beauvoir, I was reading the Brontes, Mrs. Gaskell’s life of Charlotte Bronte, and it was clear that women’s lives were a problem, there was a real problem there, it wasn’t just me and my neurosis, that was very clear to me. It wasn’t clear in any sense that I could explore except inside myself, but I knew that there was something wrong. I was very tired, caught up in the daily routine and children and that kind of thing and I knew that. My poetry had always been a means of surviving, finding out what I thought and what was true for me, one place where I was really honest with myself. I was very much striving for male approval and people’s approval in general in those years. I was trying to do it *all* right, be a good wife, good mother, good poet, good girl, but I couldn’t *really* just seek approval in my poetry, I couldn’t, and it was a fortunate thing for me that I had the poetry.

EB: As an expression of that.

AR: Yes. And then increasingly journals, where I put a lot—about my

life as a mother—that I couldn’t put into poetry at the time, largely because by the male standards which were all I knew, motherhood was not a “major theme” for poetry. In the mid-Sixties, a lot of poets became politicized, yet there was always a critical canon that said, political poetry cannot be good art. Of course, poets have always and everywhere been political. By the time of the women’s movement I already had a body of work, more or less recognized by the establishment. But the women’s movement connected for me with the conflicts and concerns I’d been feeling when I wrote *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*, as well as with the intense rapid politicization of the 1960’s New Left. It opened up possibilities, freed me from taboos and silences, as nothing had ever done; without a feminist movement I don’t see how I could have gone on growing as a writer.

Yet reviewers, critics, tended to say: “Here she was, this skilled craftsman, this fine poet, but then she went off the rails and became political and polemical, and we can only hold our breath and hope she’ll get back on the rails again, write the kind of poems she was writing in the 1950’s.” There’s no sense in pretending that critical opinion doesn’t affect you, it does affect you. Even when you are determined to go on with what you have to do. In a sense it can make you more tenacious of what you are about, it makes you know what you will and will not do, in a clearer way. But I know that I could not have gone on writing without a feminist movement, a community to support what I felt were my own intuitions.

EB: How do you think the reviews do affect you, both immediately and perhaps in a long-range way?

AR: You mean the reviews of *Of Woman Born*?

EB: Specifically of this book, but even going back. I was looking at the *New York Times* review of *Poems: Selected and New* which was written by a man who said that at your “least convincing” you write “poetic journalism, free-form expostulations on Vietnam, Women’s Lib and ‘patriarchal politics,’” yet he ends up talking about what a “spell-spinner” you are, what a “story-teller.” Then he quotes from “From an Old House in America,” and the last lines he quotes are: “My power is brief and local/but I

know my power..." Yet the two lines that follow these in the poem are: "I have lived in isolation/from other women, so much..." But he doesn't quote them. He just ends his review with a selected fragment of a poem.

AR: That strikes me as a kind of dishonesty and the dishonesty begins within the person. It's like saying: "I recognize the charge in this poetry, I recognize that in some way it moves me, but I will not accept what the poet is saying, I will not deal with what she is asking me to deal with as a poet. I will read this poem selectively, I will take the lines out of it that please me and call the rest polemical or unconvincing and I will not read this work as a whole."

In one sense, the critic has to deal with me respectfully because I was certified by W.H. Auden when I was twenty-one years old. But more than that I see what has happened with *Of Woman Born* as symptomatic of how what is disturbing—what might cause you to think, what might cause you to feel, to an extent that you would have to re-examine something—gets rejected in this kind of critical establishment and the critic then has to say, "OK, she's one of our finest poets, but we will not trust what she has to say about experience." If you don't trust what the poet has to say about experience, then what is the point of talking about her as a poet? Why not say, "She is a skillful manipulator of words," or, "She is one of our finest advertisers," or something like that? Why talk about poetry at all? It does seem to me that if you are going to respect the poet, you have to respect everything that she is saying. Not necessarily to praise everything, but to take it as a whole, deal with it as a whole, not deal with it selectively.

EB: I thought about that earlier review because it seems to me to represent the first of two stages, although obviously they're very closely connected: the earlier review of *Poems: Selected and New* seems to dismiss you as a feminist, a "women's lib nut"; and the more recent establishment reviews, which are really savage and totally distorting, come a lot out of dismissing you as a lesbian. So I sense that as a sort of movement.

AR: First of all to dismiss as polemical anything that can be described as feminist. That's point number one. Then I write a book in which I sim-

ply take it for granted that I am a lesbian, that a lesbian can be a mother and a mother a lesbian, which is heresy because it destroys the stereotypes of both mother and lesbian. I write a book in which I take for granted that heterosexuality is institutionalized, that it is not necessarily the one natural order, that institutionalized heterosexuality and institutionalized motherhood deserve a great deal of scrutiny in terms of whose interests they serve. I think it would have been much more acceptable if I had written a special chapter on lesbian mothering, which at one point I thought about doing. But I felt that it ought to be possible to write from the center, from where I exist, as if that was natural, which I think it to be.

EB: How did people at Norton feel about it?

AR: I had many struggles with my male editor over the text of this book, but I was left to do what I decided to do. I'm sure it was disturbing to some people at Norton and gratifying to others. I didn't get any kind of pressure to deal with it differently or to stay in the closet with this book.

EB: Do you see any future problems with them in terms of publishing?

AR: I see a problem on my side. I've never had that sort of problem with a book of poems, obviously. I feel that I wouldn't go through that process again with a male editor, even though I felt that our relationship was very decent and I knew I was not going to be pressured into doing anything I did not want to do. But I feel that the book could have been stronger in some ways if I had had an editor who was not threatened as a male by the issues I was raising.

EB: In terms of things that were cut?

AR: I didn't cut out anything substantive. One thing I didn't do was compromise with that book. If I'd taken the kind of advice I received, I could have turned out a book that was much more acceptable to the *New York Times*. But I didn't compromise with it.

EB: Do you feel that they understood the impact the book was going to have?

AR: To the extent that anybody reading that manuscript was not themselves able to deal with the full implications of what I was saying they

were probably not prepared for the violence of some of the reviews. I was prepared for it. Not in terms of what my own response would be—I mean, it was very, very painful and I thought I was ready for it. But I thought that a great deal of what I was saying was obvious, a synthesis of ideas that have been floating around in the women's movement for a long time. Much of that book is not original—it simply makes connections among ideas that women have been discussing and writing in all sorts of places.

But even something as elementary as the concept of patriarchy, the idea that women have essentially been the property of men for centuries, still goes down very hard. It still is an extremely painful idea to accept, especially painful for a woman who can recognize the patriarchal system but has no further to go at that point because it looks like a total negation of her. I think that for men it is extremely painful to acknowledge that they've built their identities, their egos, their culture, on the denial and diminishment of the identity and egos of women. One can prove it historically, politically, psychologically; we can erect all of the scholarship in the world and it is so unacceptable still. It meets with incredible resistance.

The homophobia evinced in some reviews of my book was something that I hadn't expected. I had seen the book as being controversial on a lot of levels, but maybe I had assumed a kind of sophistication on the part of the kind of people who would review that book for the *New York Times*, for the *New York Review of Books*, that a homophobic response would try to disguise itself. The fact that there was a very evident freezing at the notion of the discussion of lesbian motherhood, the general assumption that lesbians are mothers and mothers are lesbians, gave me a great deal of thought. I thought I had thought this through when I was writing the book; I had made a very clear decision in my own mind not to have a chapter on "the lesbian mother" but to have that as a thread throughout the whole book, just as I chose not to have a chapter on "the black mother" but to have references to and to extrapolate from black experience wherever I could—although I feel in both cases that a lot more could have been said. But not to specialize, not to group mothers according to race or

sexual preference, but really to talk in terms of chapter heading and topics about things that seem to be common to all women who have children.

But although it wasn't precisely said that I had disqualified myself from writing a book about motherhood because I came out in the book as a lesbian mother, the assumption was clear that as a lesbian I was a man-hater. As a feminist I was a man-hater first of all—that was the first and most primitive vituperation thrown at feminists. That particular charge is so clearly a way of dealing with the book by relegating it to a realm of fringe mentality, insanity, or polemics—I suppose in all innocence that had not occurred to me, I had some sort of naive notion that reviewers would attack the book but more or less on the terms that the book had set itself up for.

That's one thing that has struck me very much and I think that that has to do with homophobia in women—quite apart from the fear of the lesbian in the patriarchy. It also has to do with the patriarchal need to polarize women between mothering women and deviants. Anyone who's not a mothering woman is thereby a deviant, any woman who will not give over her energies to men, let alone children, is a bitch, a dyke, what have you. So to say that these two polarities can co-exist in the same person, that the loving, tender, nurturing mother can also be a lesbian, is terribly threatening. It is one of the fundamental fragmentations that has worked to keep women antagonistic to each other.

But homophobia can also take the form of total denial that the lesbian exists. Coming out in the classroom I've been realizing the extent to which my preference would be to include the fact that I am a lesbian among any other group of facts I include about myself when I present myself as a person. But it's less a question of that being seized upon than that the fact I am a lesbian will be resisted, denied, except by students who are lesbians and may relate to that. Where people do not wish to deal with information they will absolutely not deal with it. A friend of mine recently was raped in Central Park and she said: "You know, one of the most painful things I've had to go through about this whole thing is

that most of the people I talk to don't want to hear about it. They think it is shameful that I should want to talk about it myself and I am, in a sense, forcing this information on them." There are SO many examples of the kind of phobia that produces blindness and deafness to facts that people don't want to deal with. The problem of dealing with something that people conceive of as deviant or unnatural—which is their problem; they, themselves, psychically cannot handle this and they have shrunk away from it, they have shrunk away from their own knowledge and even their own experience.

I went through a very large part of my earlier life in that kind of homophobic denial, and the phenomenon of denial seems very important to me—very important in the world at large. Some of the polarization between women has been a result of the fact that neither—lesbian or straight women as they define themselves—want to really explore that phenomenon. What happens in the classroom, for instance, women's studies classrooms, what happens in a book like *Our Bodies, Ourselves* where there is a special chapter devoted to lesbianism but the gist of the book is that women have sex only with men? And that is a best seller, it is describing to enormous numbers of women who have access to no other source what the "feminist" view of sexuality is.

I've seen really very little that attempted to bridge this gap, and that's one of the reasons I wanted to raise it here, because it seems to me that this is something that could begin to be talked about in *Conditions*; not simply in political terms such as the relation of lesbian-feminism to feminism or how lesbianism relates to class or race, but also in more subjective terms; what is really going on here? Those of us who thought we were straight and got married and had children, what changed us? What made it possible for certain other women from the age of eight to know they were lesbians? There's no simple pattern that I can see, certainly not the pattern of some specific family constellation, certainly not the pattern of flight from men, not necessarily the pattern of a movement toward women, because there are still many lesbians who don't have strong feelings for women in

general, who identify in many ways much more with men.

The whole issue of homophobia in women, not just "out there" in the patriarchal world, has got to be confronted and talked about, dealt with as the real problem. The question is going to have to begin to be asked much more forcefully: what is this fear and panic about? What is it making people do and how is it making people react? Ranging from literally not being able to hear what is said because it is said by a lesbian to literally not being able to hear a woman say that she is a lesbian. In my own case I know there are people who don't want to deal with me as a lesbian because they have an image of me that they would like to keep intact and they don't want to associate me with their image of a lesbian. As a teacher you encounter that to a certain extent. Have you run into this?

EB: Not so much when I was teaching. I haven't taught in a couple of years. Certainly one of the single most important things to me about my job now is that in terms of the large group of women I work with, I don't have to pretend to be straight.

AR: At the Women's Center?

EB: Yes. It's very hard for me to think about ever being again in a work situation where it's not possible to get support for being out. But at the same time we get a tremendous number of women coming in to work who aren't feminists, who are sometimes very hostile to feminism and lesbianism, and who bring with them all of the prejudices and myths and fears that run through the general population. I still find it a chore to come out, to do staff training with new people and to have to really deal with it, and part of me just feels very angry. Why do I have to explain this? Why does it have to take all this energy?

AR: Well, I felt that last spring when I lectured—I was using *Amazon Poetry* in a course, and I gave a lecture on lesbian poetry. I'd talked about a number of the poets we'd been reading as lesbians, and again, sort of taking it for granted; that Amy Lowell and Ada Russell lived together for years and Amy wrote love poems to her friend, a woman who absolutely supported her, gave her a kind of support that she never got from men. I

talked about Gertrude Stein, I talked about H.D., and so forth, and then I gave a whole lecture on lesbian poetry, sort of why *Amazon Poetry*? why does such an anthology need to exist, why do we need to have this lecture, and so on.

And I have the same feelings—why do we have to spend all this energy explaining, what is the justification for this? But I thought it was extremely important. Throughout the course I was talking about encoded feelings in women’s poetry, and feelings that are censored even before they get to the page, poems that are censored by editors, the Emily Dickinson phenomenon, and so on. If we have come to a point where it begins to be possible for women to write out of their feelings for other women in a freer way and be published, and for that work to be available to other women, this is a kind of milestone, a literary phenomenon.

I come back to this phenomenon of silence, that we grew up in a certain kind of silence, literary silence, again; that literary silence is beginning to be broken for certain people and in certain places. Most young women growing up in this country do not have access to Daughters, Inc. and Out & Out Books and *Amazon Poetry* and Diana Press and so on. They have little enough access to any women’s work in school, and if they read poems by lesbians they’re never told that this is the work of a lesbian; the question is never asked, is this different in any way, is this a sensibility that is in any way affected by the fact of having to live as a “different” person in a heterosexist culture?

Even in women’s studies programs, the whole question is very much muted; there is a fear of dealing with the subject, and there, particularly in academia, the fear gets very complicated. It’s like the old lesbian-feminist split in the women’s movement: If you’re struggling to set up a women’s studies program and make it respectable and appealing to a larger number of people, how horrible to have it labelled a dyke department. That fear I sense very strongly. The desire to appear respectable. I also think that a lot of straight women are just not sure how they can or should teach lesbian literature, and that is a very complex thing, because it would

really mean asking themselves a lot of serious questions about their own feelings about it, and their own relationship to women.

EB: Most departments aren’t set up to deal with those issues. There’s very rarely any mechanism for having women in a women’s studies program or women in an English department sit down and have some dialogue about how to teach lesbian literature. How can women who don’t define themselves as lesbians teach it most effectively? What are their feelings about it, not just their ideas? Part of the problem is that most people are unable even to hear the questions when they’re raised.

About four years ago, when I was teaching at Manhattan Community College, I rather naively suggested a new course for the syllabus called “The Outsider in Twentieth-Century American Literature,” which dealt with the writing of homosexuals and of people who were or had been in prisons and mental hospitals. When it was brought up at the English Department meeting, I was totally taken aback because everybody discussed it—with much laughter and side comments—as if I had suggested a course about homosexuality and literature. Most of the faculty dismissed it by saying, “Well, that’s not so important, I don’t see why that has any more influence on a writer than a thousand other things.”

AR: People will not deal with the fact that the homosexual, like the prisoner or the mental patient, is treated as the scapegoat, the carrier of what others refuse to acknowledge in themselves. This is a societal problem, it becomes our problem because it is a problem of the society.

EB: Also the question, I think, for all three groups, of who can you tell and when and how can you tell them. People don’t want to say that they’ve been in prison, or that they’ve been institutionalized for a while because they don’t know what the response will be, and because certain rights—jobs, housing, child custody—can be placed in jeopardy if the listener chooses. What assumptions and stereotypes are immediately going to come up if you stand in front of a group of people who don’t know anything about you and start with this information as a simple fact?

AR: That you will be invalidated, that it will somehow be taken as the

word of a crazy person or deviant or criminal.

EB: On some level they all merge.

AR: In terms of validation, the grouping makes a great deal of sense. It was interesting; I got a book in the mail, an anthology of “voices from the outside” or “voices of the powerless” and it included blacks and other minorities; but women and homosexuals were not included. There was absolutely no essay dealing with power and powerlessness where gender is concerned, where sexual preference is concerned. It seems to me that if there’s one thing that the feminist movement has been trying to say over and over and over again which has been successfully blotted out, it is that there is a power issue here, a very concrete power issue.

Feminism constantly gets translated into terms of equal pay for equal work, or some kind of pseudo-sexual liberation, you know, women should have the right to initiate acts of intercourse with men, trivialization down the line, an inability to see sexism as a root political problem. The most successful way of dealing with the issue of power is to pretend that it doesn’t exist, and to divide it into other issues that then get trivialized, and the lesbian issue even more so, because either they decide that it doesn’t exist, that lesbians are such a tiny fringe, a minority, of the population, it’s unimportant, or that lesbians are so sick, so full of hatred for men, that their view of anything has got to be totally pathological and warped and that they are incapable of ordinary good human relationships with people.

I remember reading *The Golden Notebook*, Doris Lessing, in 1962 when it first came out, and again I keep associating things that I’ve read with periods in my life. It was a period in my life when I was very much in love with a woman and not calling it by that name and *The Golden Notebook* at that time seemed like a very radical book. It doesn’t anymore, but it was a radical book because it did focus on women, even if on women who, although they were writers or professionals in some way, seemed to have no real center to their lives apart from trying to relate to men and to male politics. But it talked about things that had not been talked

about in literature before, you know, what happens when you’re having your period and your lover’s coming to sleep over, what happens if you’re a single woman with a child and there’s a conflict between your loyalty to the child and your loyalty to your lover.

So it seemed like a very radical, very feminist book, and I remember distinctly, at one point in that book, the woman is getting fed up with her relationships with men, none of them have come off well, and then she begins to worry and she thinks, women like me become “man-haters or bitter or lesbian.” The implication of course was that it’s only from being jaded with too many unsuccessful encounters with men that you would ever turn to women, and that stereotype too still holds. Lessing has been enormously important as a quasi-feminist writer, a writer centering on women’s lives, and the failure of her novels, because in many ways she’s a very brilliant political novelist, but the failure of *The Four-Gated City* and of what has come after is a real failure to envisage any kind of political bonding of women and any kind of really powerful central bonding of women, even though individual women get together in her novels and go through intense things together. In some ways I feel it goes back to that notion which she evidently has, that women become lesbians—bitter and full of hatred— not because there is a fulfillment in loving women, but because there is this terrible battle of the sexes going on and men just get to be too much to deal with.

The interesting thing is that even where there is a veneer of sophistication and liberalism about other kinds of controversial “differences,” that veneer breaks down very quickly over this particular issue, and I don’t mean just homosexuality, I mean lesbianism specifically. Lesbians are far more threatening to patriarchy, obviously, than male homosexuals.

EB: I just read a posthumously published article by Howard Brown that makes that very clear. It starts off with a description of the day he’s going to be sworn in as chief health officer in New York City and doesn’t quite know what to do with his lover, whom he would like to have at the ceremony with him, sitting in the chairs reserved for family. Then Brown

speaks of “men, whose careers would dramatically illustrate how socially useful homosexuals can be...,” how all we need is for “several mature, respected homosexuals” to come out publicly and people’s attitudes would change drastically. The issue of societal values in relation to everything but homosexuality isn’t mentioned. Working for the government or being a high-paid professional is fine, as long as a man can have sexual and affectional relationships with other men.

AR: What was more patriarchal than fifth-century Greece? The leaders of the patriarchy had male lovers, that’s nothing new. But women directing their energies toward all women is threatening, partly for the reasons that I try to talk about in my book, in the chapter on mothers and sons, but partly because men know that their one real weapon, apart from infinite and incessant motherhood, enforced, indentured motherhood, has been this fragmentation of women from one another, this vampirization of women’s energies, the use of female emotion by males, as if they had no sources of their own.

But it’s also very complex how that gets internalized in women, I don’t think it’s merely that women are indoctrinated to pour their energies toward men, I think that whole mother-daughter thing is very intense and profound, that longing for and dread of total identification with the woman whose body one came out of, the woman who gave us our first nurture, sensuality, warmth, affection, security, and disappointment that we ever knew, is tremendous.

EB: And very different from the relationships between mothers and their sons which you write about, which seem inevitably shaped by the existing power relationship between women and men. You pick that theme up when you say in that chapter that the so-called liberated man wants the freedom to cry but wants to hang onto all the other benefits which accrue to being a man in this society.

AR: It’s like the idea of androgyny which is so seductive somehow as a liberal solution. It’s essentially the notion that the male will somehow incorporate into himself female attributes—tenderness, gentleness,

ability to cry, to feel, to express, not to be rigid. But what does it mean for women? The “androgyny people” have not faced what it would mean in and for society for women to feel themselves and be seen as full human beings. I don’t think of androgyny as progress anymore, I think it’s a useless term, but I think of it as associated with the idea of “liberating” men, giving males the desirable attributes that females have had without having to pay the dues. I think there are very, very few men who want to come to grips with this, because for them, it not only looks like loss of privilege, but, as for many women, it also involves a very negative view of their history.

EB: What’s been happening to your poetry during this period when a prose book has been the focus of your attention?

AR: I wrote a lot of poetry during the four years I’ve been working on this book and the poetry is very intermingled and involved with the themes of the book. They’re coming out of the same places. I haven’t sorted out for myself what it is that leads me into prose and what it is that makes me turn to poetry. I’m very much interested in writing more long prose pieces because I am concerned with certain ideas that need to be spelled out, explicated, as you can’t in poetry; poetry is a kind of condensation, it is very much the flash, the leap, the swift association— and there are some things that I want to say in a way that no one can resist as “she’s a poet, etc.” At the same time, I can’t imagine not writing poetry. It is just in me and of me, it is a survival tool that I have to have.

I have been writing a great deal of poetry out of women’s relationships, both consummated and unconsummated, and in a way the poems about the unconsummated relationships, the relationships which should have gone somewhere but couldn’t because of times, customs, morals, all kinds of elements, interest me the most. I’ve written a couple of personal poems out of that and a couple of *persona* poems. I’m interested in the blockage of those relationships, and what was able to be felt in spite of the blockage.

I think there’s a whole history there, in and of itself. What women have felt for each other who never heard the word “lesbian,” who nev-

er thought of their connection as an erotic connection, who thought of themselves as wives, mothers, etc., but who knew in some way that there was this intense connection with another woman or women, in community and in individual relationships. We need a lot more documentation about what actually happened; I think we can also imagine it, because we know it happened—we know it out of our own lives.

EB: It sounds to me like transmuting history into poetry. I think of it as using Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's documentation from nineteenth-century American journals and letters that showed amazingly close relationships between women who never would have thought about having a sexual relationship with another woman and felt stuck with their husbands. But many of these women communicated intimately with each other over distance and over periods of fifty years till one of them died.

AR: I was thinking of that. There's this new documentary history by Gerda Lerner, *The Female Experience in America*, nineteenth and twentieth-century documents from women's lives, many women who were utterly unknown and others who made a name for themselves but the names have been forgotten, like Jane Swisshelm. Reading these documents it's so clear that marriage was an economic necessity for women; it wasn't even a question of who you were attracted to or who you wanted to spend your life with, the fact was that you were not going to survive economically unless you were attached to a man. That economic fact is a pillar of the whole institution of heterosexuality.

EB: What makes you find relationships you describe as "unconsummated" more interesting in terms of writing poetry?

AR: I don't mean that they're necessarily, in and of themselves, more interesting than consummated relationships. But they're very interesting to me at this point, maybe because there were so many such relationships in my own life which I'm still trying to work through. But also because I think that lesbian history is going to have to be written about not just in terms of known lesbian couples or known women who were visible as lesbians, but in terms of all these other women—not just the ones Car-

oll Smith-Rosenberg has documented but a connection which had to describe itself in terms which were even less overt than the way those women wrote to each other, saying, "My darling, I can't wait till you're coming and I can press you against me," or, "We can sleep together," or whatever.

What are we going to be looking for when we look at lesbian history? We can't afford to look only at the lives of those women who were financially independent and so strong in certain ways, whether by good fortune or innate character, that they could afford to be self-proclaimed lesbians or live in homosexual enclaves, because we would be touching only the barest top of the iceberg. One of the reasons why I got involved with the figures of Paula Becker and Clara Westhoff was that here is truly a relationship that had the potentiality for being a full relationship in every sense, a working relationship, not just an erotic relationship; there was the most intense feeling there, also shared motivations and aims, creative ambitions—and both married male artists and had marriages which ended quite soon. That's the kind of thing that's happened over and over.

EB: It seems to be reflected in "To Judith, Taking Leave," which I was fascinated to discover was a 1962 poem.

AR: When I wrote that, I didn't think of it as a lesbian poem. This is what I have to keep reminding myself—that at that time I did not recognize, I did not name the intensity of those feelings as I would name them today, we did not name them. When I first chose not to publish that poem I thought, this is just a very personal poem, an occasional poem, it doesn't carry the same weight or interest as other poems I would publish. But my dismissing of it was akin to my dismissing of the relationship, although in some ways I did not dismiss it—it was very much with me for a very long time. In 1962 there was precious little around to support the notion of the centrality of a relationship between two women. I was amazed when I went back to look for those poems and found them again—the kinds of truth they told.

I have a much, much earlier poem that deals with a relationship with a woman. It was written while I was in college and it's in my first book.

It's called "Stepping Backward." It's about acknowledging one's true feelings to another person; it's a very guarded, carefully-wrought poem. It's in the form of a farewell, but a farewell which was taken in order to step backward and look at the person more clearly, which makes it safer to look at the relationship, because it's as if you were saying good-bye. That poem is addressed to a woman whom I was close to in my late 'teens, and whom I really fled from—I fled from my feelings about her. But that poem does remain and it was unquestionably addressed to her. It's very intellectualized, but it's really the first poem in which I was striving to come to terms with feelings for women.

EB: Did the fact that it was intellectualized make it easier to think about printing it?

AR: Yes, it could have been written to anybody. I showed it to her at some point and she said she thought it was written to a man. But I knew where that poem came from, I knew to whom it was addressed.

The major influence in my life in many ways was poetry, was literature. I was always looking to poetry and to literature to find out what was possible, what could be, how it was possible to feel, what kinds of things one could or could not do. And the silence about loving women was so incredible. I met someone the other day who teaches in a very conservative, middle-class, protected sort of college environment. In the humanities freshman course there they have a unit called "Innocence and Experience" and they're reading Blake and *Rubyfruit Jungle*. I don't think anyone raised in this kind of an era— even with all of its prohibitions and homophobia—can realize what that earlier silence was like to many of us.

My history is a very different history from the woman who knew from the age of 12 that she was a dyke, that was her life, and she had to come to terms with what that meant in terms of who she could know and not know, where she could be and not be, what she could allow herself to show and what she couldn't. Women like me were totally in the closet to ourselves and I blame that silence very much. It's one reason why I feel so strongly, not just that more lesbian literature should be written and

more lesbian experience expressed, but also that lesbian writing should be taught in colleges, that it should be available not just for women who know that this is what they're looking for but for women who don't know what they're looking for. There's got to be an increased consciousness on the part of women, whether they consider themselves straight or not, who are teaching literature, to deal with this.

Following is a list of some of the material referred to in this interview:

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Contributors' Notes

MAUREEN BRADY is a feminist, writer, physical therapist, and teacher. Excerpts from her novel *Edges*, which is still in search of a publisher, have appeared in *So's Your Old Lady*, *Sibyl-Child*, and *Letters*.

WILMETTE BROWN is an Afro-American housewife and teacher who lived and worked in Africa for several years. During the Sixties she was active in the Black movement on campus and in the community. Today she is continuing in that movement by organizing independently with other women through the Brooklyn-based Black Women for Wages for Housework group, which is part of the International Wages for Housework campaign. She has written a pamphlet on forced sterilization of Third World women.

ELLY BULKIN is co-editor of *Amazon Poetry: An Anthology of lesbian poetry* (Out & Out Books). She has written about women's poetry for *Majority Report*, *Big Mama Rag*, and other women's periodicals. She works at the Women's Center of Brooklyn College.

ENID DAME has published poems in such little magazines as *13th Moon*, *Light*, *WomanSpirit*, and *Response*. She lives in Brooklyn, and belongs to a women's poetry workshop. A chapbook of her poems, *Between Revolutions*, will soon be published.

SUKEY DURHAM recently graduated from the M.A. Writing Program at San Francisco State University. She has published in *Amazon Poetry*, *Hair Raising*, *Poetry from Violence*, and *Off Our Backs*. Her anthology of women's poems about work will be published by Freedom Socialist Publications sometime in 1977. She works as a groundsperson for the Bay Area Rapid Transit District. At three she reportedly declared to her mother: "McCarthy is a brat!"

SUSAN KRIEGER is 31 years old, lives in Los Altos Hills, California, works in a bookstore, has a Ph.D. in Communications, did an 800-page dissertation on the cooptation of a rock music station, and has academic and personal interests in how people make sense of themselves and create livable worlds in writing.

JACQUELINE LAPIDUS comes from New York. She taught English in Greece for several years, and since 1967 has been living in Paris where she survives by literary prostitution. She has published poems in various little magazines. A radical lesbian feminist, she is active in the movement. Her two books of poems are *Ready to Survive* (Hanging Loose, 1975) and *Starting Over* (Out & Out Books, 1977).

LORRAINE SUTTON was born in Puerto Rico and raised in New York City. She now lives in Ohio. She has published in *Ms.*, *Best Friends*, *Latin N.Y.*, and elsewhere. Her first book of poems is *SA Ycred LA Ydy* (Sunbury Press). Her new poems will appear in a Third-World anthology, *The Next World* (Crossing Press).

Conditions Design Rationale

DESN317 | Keira Zanbak

Conditions is a collection of written works by women, their experiences in life, and their thoughts and views on the world. It features six poems, two short stories, and an interview with author Adrienne Rich. The book is illustrated with imagery of mountains, hot weather, and desserts, settings that are often referenced in the stories. On a deeper level, a theme that runs through the book is that of rejection of traditional expectations of women and femininity. For this reason, motifs like flowers and the colour pink were avoided purposely. The typefaces Playfair Display and Crimson Text were chosen to match the overall feel of beauty that is communicated in this collection, as well as the elegance and quality of the written pieces. The layout was kept traditional to accommodate a wide variety of different types of work included in the collection; large headings and ample white space was used to separate each writing.