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7-13-1981

### E. M. Broner: 07-13-1981

Esther M. Broner

Stan Sanvel Rubin

Mary Elsie Robertson

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#### Repository Citation

Broner, Esther M.; Rubin, Stan Sanvel; and Robertson, Mary Elsie, "E. M. Broner: 07-13-1981" (1981). *Writers Forum Videos*. Video 16.

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7/13/1981

WRITERS FORUM PRESENTS

ESTHER BRONER

Broner: The women must avenge themselves against the one who has stoned D. D. They have vengeance rights and they prepare themselves to fight the enemy. Their weapons are the evil eye, the purified stone, blood, sounds which shatter the air, and the weapons of home. They prepare the evil eye, they paint it on the palm of the hand and shine it into the face of the enemy. They paint it on dishes to throw and on the insides of cups. The stones are carefully prepared by boiling in agitated boiling water. Selected stones are placed in the pot in the house and on the stove at the wayward house one hears the knock against each other for hours. Blood is scattered from the trough of the ritual slaughter, other bloods are added, that draining from D. D.'s wounds. The blood caught in a menstrual cup or churn. The women practice songs, snarls, howls, grunts, snorts, squeaks, neighs, braise, coying, quacking, cackling, barn yard sounds as well whaling and shouting, discord and pandemonium. They carry certain equipment to fight the enemy. The musical instruments of the kitchen, pots and lids, iron pans and metal ladels, wooden spoons and kegs. They prepare the ingredients for the ten curses. These are womens curses: 1. A name compared to another name to erase the first name. 2. A moan that echoes when hands cover ears. 3. A memory nailed to the heart with hammer blows. 4. May your burial stone be erected without name or date. 5. A word so genital it rapes. 6. A word that plucks at eyes and pierces ears. 7. A whisper so insidious that dogs and villains quake. 8. A future so bleak you hide in the past. 9. A promise your biography will be writ by your enemy. And 10. There will be erasure of ancestry and prodiginy so women are prepared.

Rubin: I would like to begin by asking you about the ten womens curses. I noted in there ah, several of the curses involved words, whispers and towards the end promise. Are these particular womens ways of cursing?

Broner: I was thinking about ah, usually ah, women are cursed against, and we are cursed against our body. Sometimes the curses include our mothers. So that which is against our body and our mothers can not be the way women curse. If women for instance were to, ah, we use ah, curses of doing with menstruation. Shall we say for instance, ah, may you bleed forever and never find, ah, and never find napkins. Or I mean ah, we, we can't curse against our bodies. It has to be a more descriptive way. And our cursing has become so boring, so uninteresting. It's all four letter words. I like three lines of cursing. I also think of Yiddish curses which are very descriptive. Ah, May you lose all of your teeth and, except for one and that one have a tooth ache. So I don't know. You've got a much more poetic interpretation and I, I enjoyed immensely. And I'm sure your absolutely right.

Rubin: . . . It was also reminiscing of the ten commandments at some time.

Broner: Yes. I think a lot about tens and I have written a womens set of ten commandments. I, I did it for Bella Upson when Carter fired her and I wanted her to know that she was really somebody. So, I, I wrote a set of womens commandments. So, I, I do aim high.

Robertson: Well all of the way of women is concerned with making womens rituals. as opposed, I mean men have always had rituals. (?), coming of age, and various things. I mean in the society and I suppose in nearly every other, it's ah, we deal with mens rituals, but you are conciously and deliberately trying to make womens rituals which you obviously thought a great need of. Um, how did you come to, to start the womens ritual. How did this idea come?

Broner? I'm a regular person, with regular habits. And ritual is really out of the word arithmetic. Things add up. Things have regularity and write, rhythm, all of this is out of ritual. I, I think of women as being you know very organic, earthy as well as ah, you know a lunar. O.K. A. B. ah, religeous training. Now what do we do with religeous training if even our own religeon and whatever it is I'm sure that this applies to ah, all of us who are poriferal

, you're excluded from. Ah, you can say ah, well, you know, the hell <sup>with</sup> ~~with~~ everybody or you can say ah, I want in, in to ecstasy and I'll do it on my own terms. Well so, I think my birthday and New Years Eve are not enough for me. I have to have other things, and I have to have ways of celebrating and I found celebration in a group is powerful and lasts forever. Initiations ah, last forever. And ah, I started with a passover. I mean you really want a long answer to this question? But I started with passover which is ah,,exodus, and it's a very metaphoric interesting time. At last and you sing songs. We have your freedom. Except I'm busy changing dishes, cleaning the house, getting rid of crumbs, cooking all kinds of exotic foods, and I do not have my freedom. My mother is weeping and perspiring, she does not have her freedom. Passover is the time of enslavement of women. Ah, so I, in Isreal began researching with a \_\_\_\_\_ and ah, we reseraced into ah, women in biblical tradition and decided to put women back into exodus and we decided to make a holiday for all women who wanted to leave the house of bondage. And that was my first extended ritual.

Rubin: YOU're talking about ah, publishing the passover \_\_\_\_\_ for women which appeared in MS. in March '77. What kind of ah, response did you get to that?

Broner: Huge. And, and I, Lady Poker and another \_\_\_\_\_ told me that, next to an article on, on cellibasy which is very interesting, I had had the highest ah, number of requests oflreprint. So I see I have to do a Cellibasy ritual next time.

Rubin: Did you get any angry mail?

Broner: Well yes. Last year I did ah, I read it during over passover on WBAI. A program that goes on at midnight, which I think is wonderful because it's our withhing hour, ah, called more than half the world, and a three of us, ah, read it and afterwards, I didn't really (?) she just stayed out, but afterwards people called in and said things like "Esther, what does your mother have

to say to you? Isn't she ashamed?" I said "No, my mother feels pretty good."  
 "But your father?" "My fathers gotten used to it." and then somebody called up  
 and said "You know what you are Esther, you're a piece of bacon." Well, they  
 don't know I don't eat bacon.

Robertson: Well it seems to me that you're a, you're a . . . I don't  
 think you object to being called a femminist writer. Am I right? All right,  
 because it's become a term that many women even though they consider themselves  
 femminists they don't like to be called a femminist writer. Felling that this  
 limits in somewhat. But clearly this. . .

Broner: I'm an extended femminist.

Robertson: Right. But what, what to you does that mean? I mean, ah, what  
 is, what you know, O.K., I say "You're a femminist writer um, how you know, how  
 do you see the femminist writer, how do you. . ."

Broner: All right. I think of it as an explorer. I think I go into a dessert  
 and name the kinds of stones. I think of it as somebody who's, who was it used to  
 go down, B. B., William Bebe, that wonderful man who would take a bathasphere  
 down, and we're all going into this bathasphere looking into our pasç. Um, I  
 think of it as a new search for ceremony and dignity and ofor a search both into  
 our history established and making new history. So ah, if femminism means  
 dignity, experimentation, ah, documentation, I hope all of us are femminist  
 writers.

Rubin: I have to a, ah, throw a quote at you, at this point. I see that  
 studies in short fiction evidently said E. M. Broner ah, is doing for the womens  
 voice in fiction what Hemmingway did for the man. I'm not sure but I think . . .  
 on how you feel about that.

Broner: Well it's a little peculiar because what I think of the role of  
 the woman and E.M. Hemin; yah, and Hemingway, shows you how I feel about every-  
 thing. Right, she's the nurse scratching his back, and, and you know and making  
 love to him when he's got his leg in traction and all of that. Do I do the same

with men? Hmm, ah, in "Weave of Women" ah, the men were not ah, so totally essential to the plot, many of them didn't have names. Ah, on the other hand ah, there's a lot of hot loving and, and good stuff. I think the men are dealt with certainly much more compassion than Hemingway would deal with for women. I do, I do worry about their feelings. I worry about whether or not they're aware of ah, their souls and what they're doing when they pinch them by hurting women. So I have a sense of morality. Um, but when I wrote "Weave" I, it seemed to me that I could write a book about women in which women did not sit and talk only about men. And I remembered Claire Booth Luce's play and, and film from my childhood, or before called "The Women" in which all the women did \_\_\_\_\_, Joan Crawford, the whole crowd with wide shoulders went and talked about men. Um, when I'm with women, if it's ah, lunch, if it's drinking, if it's sitting on the front steps, if it's in the faculty apartment, women don't talk about men. We have, we talk about things like "what are your ambitions, what are your life plans, how is your work going?" I could talk about men, I'm connected to men, I'm on a familiar set-up, I'm married to one, I birth men, well they were boys when I birthed them or children. I raise men so men are a part of my life ah, and they are a necessary part of my life. But, ah, it's the unknown about women that ah, is the subject of my art.

Robertson: I think something that sort of interests me here is that at least as I read Hemingway, I think that Hemingway was not probably consciously aware of what he was really saying about women and doing to women. You know, it was an unconscious thing, and possibly has a kind of power in a way, women may disagree with it but it never the less it's, it's his vision you know which is, was an unconscious thing I believe. Ah, seems to me that many women including probably myself that, that sort of unconscious thing is now no longer quite possible. I mean we are consciously aware that we are writing um, about and for women very often. Not that we do this wholly, but never the less. Ah, do you feel that, that, that, um, maybe that there's any sense of power lost because it

becomes conscious, We are aware of what we are doing in the way that Hemingway probably was not aware.

Broner: No, sweetheart. I, I feel quite the opposite. Um, we are aware of cliches. If my writing students are writing every \_\_\_\_\_ and they are after the one man and all of that I say "Oh Lord, this has been done four million times." I mean what is a new subject. Here I am the nurse taking care of you, sickie boy in the bed. Is there not another way? Istthere not another theme? So I think what is happening is not limitation but expansion into other subjects. Um, we don't have to write always "Oh now I'm going to the race tracks, here I am sitting at the bar, now I'm going to war." That's why I had my women go to war. I don't do I think of my writng as being limited to women. I don't like the word limited. Women buy most of the books. I don't know if people realize that women do most of the reading, buy most of the books, take most of the writing courses. Ah, we surely have to be aware of them as audience. Now who do I address myself to? I guess the strongest of myself. The strongest of the people I know. Ah, when I, I, I try very hard not to denigrate. If I declare an enemy I respect that enemy if the enemy is a, You know, who ever it is you deal with an enemy very respectfully. I, I try very hard not to um, ah, belittle or limit. If my women are living in Jerusalem it is the land of all the people living there. The Arab women, the Arab men, the Orthodox, the Aetheist, the Marxist, I, I think of people as people. On the other hand I'm very aware of ah, the fact that the accordion has been closed on women and no music has ah, has come out of that instrument in a long time so when you first open it those funny windy sounds \_\_\_\_\_ to give voice to women. That's, I'm aware of that. That's <sup>like</sup> songs that have not been sung.

Robertson: Well of course you know Tillie Olsens book "Silences" and she makes the point there among other things that ah, you pick up any anthology of short stories or something and it's usually one in twelve of those will be a story by a woman. Um. it's also true that most editors are men, not wholly

ut most. Um, do you have a feeling that there is you know, some sort of ah, you know, well, excluding of women in any deliberate way. Or is this too one of those unconscious things that men just ah, tend to be more interested maybe in those subjects that men write about and therefore will prefer that story.

Broner: Well, you know, you're an intellectual and complex person so of course you ask the most difficult of questions. But I think I can answer it fairly simply. There is the \_\_\_\_\_ of exclusion Mary. There's the \_\_\_\_\_ of declaring what's more important than something else. I see when I go to a writing work shop of the writing work shop or I'm invited besides this wonderful one at Brockport. Sometimes though women have written on their little margins of their papers domestic literature. Does that mean that anything dealing with relationship between women is domestic. Mother and daughter, daughter and father, sisters, is domestic. So if you denigrate one whole subject and you don't have to publish anything by that. Women invented the novel right? It was a domestic form. As soon as it began to make money when began taking off and publishing? Who were the heads of all of the major reviews? The Times book review, the Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times, who reviews us? Who wants to make money out of it? If you review more men they make money. If you don't review <sup>wo</sup>men they don't make money. The lesson is very clear, deprive women of a living. If you anthologize women you're increasing their chances of being heard. If you silence them the voice of men soars and thunders. I think it's political and conscious. I think everything you do is very conscious in that realm. And a lot of it has to do with economics.

Rubin: A lot of the, ah, well certainly her mother had something to do with generations and the notion of connecting. Do you see yourself as coming very particularly out of a generation of women?

Broner: I see myself as coming out of generations of women.

Rubin: Generations.

Broner: I'm ah, connected to my grandmothers, intensely to my mother, I



have just risen from their laps.

Rubin: At the end of the, at the end of the book you got ah, you thank ah, mothers. It's ah, you say your knowledge of the following young girls and women who loved and sustained me. And it goes from mothers under ten to mothers in their seventies. Touching all the bases along the way. Would you say something about the process of putting this book together.

Broner: Oh it was, it was a hard book to write. It took me a long time and Mary Elsie and I were talking about it yesterday. The process of writing the book ah, and, and generations is that what O.K. Aside from the personal. and ah, many mothers ah, my age ah, and older who have daughters have a troubled relationship. Hopefully not so much now but ah, we were taught to be traffic cops. Ah, you don't stay out after dark, you don't ah, aim too high, you don't dress gaudily, you don't show your breasts, you don't ah, all, all kinds of things, you don't run away from home, you have to ah, we weren't taught to say to our ah, daughters "Go on a wonderful adventure. Have a put the lantern on the, in the window for you. When you climb over the mountain and you return you will see the lantern is still shining for you. Go forth with my blessing on your pilgrimage." Well that makes a very different relationship. We have bound our daughters feet. The Chinese mother is the binder. Ah, the Arab, the African woman is the one who performs the \_\_\_\_\_dectomy, the genital mutilation on her daughter. They don't, they don't need men to do that. We have learned to mutilate in their ah, stead. So there have been disturbed, a angry and painful relationships. Think of Maxine Kingstons wonderful "Women Warrior" the personal eppiche I call it. We terrify our daughters by telling them what will befall them in the world of for Maxine Kingston. World of the white American, ah, in my land it was the \_\_\_\_\_. But they, they close-est it's going to get you if you go to the corner and stay out there. If you go to the you know corner lot and watch the boys play, playing baseball the \_\_\_\_\_ is going to carry him away on his horse. O.K., so we fill our

daughters full of fears and then, well they don't take our word for it we are so angry with them. Some of that had to do with this. How can we love our mothers, how can we search for them because if we cut ourselves from them we are mutilating ourselves. We, we become stumps. We are out of their bodies, we replicate them. Hopefully we try not to duplicate their experiences. I, if we don't make our connection with our mothers and we only make it with the men in our past we fool ourselves. We are not the men in our past, we are not going to be presidents, supreme court judges, we aren't, we don't have that net work. We have to out of necessity and safety and joy and love make the \_\_\_\_\_ with each other and strengthen it to go forth as a band. Some of that had to do with why. And also the fact that we don't read our mothers works. When our mothers valliantly with huge \_\_\_\_\_ following arise, leave the kitchen, unbind their feet, go into the desert or climb a mountain. Fight the book as, as \_\_\_\_\_ and, and Mary Elsie have said the, the work is not anthologized. How do we, how do we follow his footsteps when they are earased instantly in the sand. So my character had to go in a, a search for herself and searching through her mothers in experiences that paralleled ours. I, we're so lonely, I don't know ah, maybe you don't feel this way. I bften have a sense of great loneliness. Not that the writer is lonely, which is true, but you know it's a cliché. I think "where am I and what am I doing and where is anybody else and why, why aren't they doing these things. Why am I doing these koo-koo ceremonies. \_Whats happened, nobodys there. Why am I going on this trip to the nineteenth century to look for a Margaret Fuller? Why is everybody going with me? So I, I need my past to help me and I need a lineage ah, because I'm a woman of pride. I, and I'm a woman of connection.

Rubin: These are all women you met in the process of doing the book.

Broner: Yes.

Robertson: Ah, I know that you also spend time researching and trying to salvage or to bring to our attention again these women writers of the past.

Because I, um, you, you obviously feel it's a very important thing to do.

Broner: I do. I think ah, one of the great things to come out of the movement, the womens movement and I'm sure that ah, Stan agrees with me here is the rediscovery of, of the \_\_\_\_\_, the emphasis \_\_\_\_\_ meeting all these women. And ah, I just, I, I discovered ah, I hadn't discovered her, I've discovered George Washington. I've discovered Martha Washington. But, ah, I was reading in the files ah, the works of ah, labor journalist and other women and I discovered ah, among ah, works of organizers some beautiful literature and, and I found a story in 1907 Atlantic Monthly by Mary Heaton Vorce and it was such an exquisite piece of writing and I sent it to Ms. I said here is a lost woman. Ah, find her instantly and, you know it took about a year. You know how Ms. works. She was found. So I, I feel a messy antic about I want to reprint the work of Matilda Robins. I'm sure you do not say her name every ten minutes. She had a perception of the world, she had a perception of ah, oh, what makes a woman organizer. I'm awfully interested in, in agitators being a somewhat agitated person. I'm interested in the fact that ah, I've discovered that women on a pedestal really that, that their natural stance is on the soap box. And so, ah, I want to find out who of my mothers came as agitators, stood on soap boxes, and, and spoke above. Ah, ah, ~~are~~ the people spoke to their dreams and ah, so I learned from these things. I learned from the courage of women. I have always learned from the courage of men. I you know, I'm married to an artist. I am the daughter of a writer. Ah, these men who have sustained vision and who have ah, gentleness, courtliness, and sweetness in them and do not have to stand on my back to be taller. But, ah, no one, we think back ah, through our mother, mothers whose name you know was, is not her maiden name. My grandmother, what was her maiden name. My great-grandmother's name is lost. The naming of our mothers, finding their names. Margaret Fullers is listed in the dictionary as Margaret ah, ah, Asoley. She is not listed under her name. She was <sup>probably</sup> not married to a Count Asoley.

most research shows she was not. In fact ah, you know the, the ah, feminist press book on, on Margaret Fuller pretty well shows that she was never married to that man. Why, why are we listed under ah, names of ah, other people, so.

Rubin: There's another section on searching for fathers in there too. But she doesn't come up with an awful lot. Um, would you say something about the style. I'd like to turn to the style of your work. Cause it's so free and, and it's so ah, vigorous and a lot of humor. I mean what, we've been talking and we've been touching the really the serious thrust, the ethical purpose in your work. Ah but I don't think we're getting an adequate sense of how, how funny it is to read at times. Would you like to read a ah, a passage ah,

Boner: You want to find me a funny passage, I'll read it.

Rubin: Of course you read, you did read the ah, the Ten Commandments ah, in a sense of Ten Curses of women from \_\_\_\_\_ Or I'll give you a choice, you can read a section from 'Searching for Father' which is uproar- isly funny.

Broner: Oh, all right, but I can do this. It's a ten \_\_\_\_\_ and, and why, why laughter. Why ah, who, did you ever hear of one pitch, coming out as a shriek, a hollow of despair, a shriek of horror in sustaining that. Also it's unnatural and it's also no fun. Ah, well I think of the great giggle and the way it's in Mary Elsie's work. I mean after fright it's a knock-out. Right? It is this not true. Last year is, is ah, that golden thread in the fabric that nothing would go into without laughter. O.K. Ah, this is ah, an assured ah, ah, ah, method and, methodology and I hope everybody out there in the next century that sees this video tape will take notes on Ten Ways to Lose Daughters, and this is a \_\_\_\_\_. The first way is talk too much. Listen to me says Beatrix. She wants ears uncovered, eyes attentive, mouth closed, she wants no squirming, no plucking at clothes, no twising of fingers. Beatrix speaks without patronation inserting \_\_\_\_\_, notation, documentation, She bolsters her arguments, she stuffs in data, she fills out with fact. Leana is

weeping. "I've said nothing to offend you" says Beatrix. "Shut up," says Leana. To compare, when Leana was at puberty, when she started the forty years of walking through her menstrual desert, her skin erupted. "I always had good skin," said Beatrix. "Shut up," says Leana. Three. Be helpful. In the ninth grade Leana was up all night writing a report. It was dawn. The first class would be in two hours. "Let me help you," says Beatrix. "No," said Leana. "I read a book, I can help you write a report," "Shut up," says Leana. Four. Have hysterical perspective. The girls in her class are invited to a pajama party. Leana is not. Her friends have made the honor roll. Leana has not. They have wool holiday clothes. Not Leana. They all have fathers. Leana has none. "It's only of importance at this stage in your life," says Beatrix in a kindly voice. "Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!" says Leana. Five. Be silent. \_\_\_\_\_, exhortation, exclamation, deviation. Beatrix squint to an offended silence. She decided not to return accusations with refutation. Beatrix answered ire and rage and fury, with paragraphs of silence. Pages of quiet. Days would go by, and the only sounds in the house of Palmer would be in the kitchen or the bathroom. One day Beatrix went into Leana's bathroom. Leana was sitting on the cover toilet crying into a thick towel. "Leana," said Beatrix in a kindly voice. "Shut up," says Leana. Have goals for your daughter. Six. Leana graduated Cum Laude from Junior High. Beatrix kissed the mouth she had allowed to her lipstick. She kissed each eye lid she had allowed to her eye shadow. She kissed the right wrist for which she had bought a watch. "From High School," says Beatrix, you'll be Magna Summa, Super, \_\_\_\_\_." "Shut up," says Leana. Seven. Be organized. Leana is going on a trip with her class. "Did you take a face cloth, a hand towel, a portable tooth brush, with a small tube of toothpaste, arid \_\_\_\_\_, shampoo, nail clipper, nail file, Cutex oily polish remover, Jr. size Kotex, paean sanitary belt, address book, note book, shapened pencil?" Leana is going for a four day week-end. "Shut up," says Leana. Eight. Teach politeness. Did you shake hands, did you ask about ask about their

kids, did you write thank-you notes, did you offer to carry their packages, did you say I'm sorry, did you apologize, did you excuse yourself, did you say pardon me, did you say would you repeat that please? "Shut up," says Leana. Nine. Teach caution. Did you double date, did you carry bus fare, did you keep your pants on, did you stay away from the park and dark side streets, did you let him know what kind of a girl you are, did you make sure he met your mother. Leana is silent. "I'm speaking," says Beatrix. "Shut up," says Leana. Ten. Be energetic. Vary your vitamins. This is for your cold, here's for night blindness, this is for the white spots in your finger nail. Do you use, do you have lunch money, did you get your research from the library, how much time do you have for homework tonight, are you prepared Fridays test in algebra, have you worked on group project for History? Did you get to the cleaners, did you practice your piano? Leana is silent. "Did you hear me \_\_\_\_\_ Beatrix?" "Never again," says Leana. And Leana goes away.

Rubin: That's more than funny but ah, it's funny to read also.

Robertson: It's very funny to read. Ah, and I also know something we talked about. That you, you take great risks I feel in your writing. But you bring them off. I'm, I'm struck with this one how, well you do away with everything except really what's essential there. Ah, you have a middle section which, where you deal with, ah figures from the past and then you bring it up to the present again. I mean it's, it's risky in terms of structure, yet I think it works very well with "A Weave of Women" you also, you move out into an entirely different um, pattern. Um, I see the continuation but it's always ah, you're very willing to take risk and I think that um, well, I'm inclined to think more men writers are take-risk than women. So I, I find your work exciting for that, that reason too, that risk taking which ah, you know, I feel you always, always bring on.

Broner: Well thank-you. I, I think it's like the athlete who knows how to run the mile. Knows how to run it over hurdles. Knows how to do all kinds

of things and says, "I can do that. That's no fun." I have to do one I can't do. That's the fun of writing.

Rubin: How do you work? What's your working, you know, method?

Broner: Nobody should work the way I work. My working method, well, I work interruptively for a long time because I lead an interruptive life. Now ~~like Mary~~ Elsie and like I'm sure like many women <sup>that</sup> you ~~were~~ questioned. Ah, when I have a luxury and, and we were talking about this earlier. Mary Elsie said I would write every day. I would write every day and every night. Now when I ~~was~~ was at, at McDonalds, the two of us are, are McDonald ~~mates~~ mates, well I could write twelve eighteen hours a day. I mean I would get tired, but I can, I can work, I don't, I wrote 'Journal Nocturnal' ah, I think I did that in seven weeks. I didn't sleep and I ended up in the hospital with exhaustion. But, wow, I can run with it. And I think it has to do with the fact that I'm so inter-act~~ed~~ So part of the \_\_\_\_\_ terribly interrupted and I'm now trying to set up a new pattern where I teach only one semester a year and I write ah, the rest, the other part of the time. And ~~then of course~~ I have to run around and figure out how to make money.

Rubin: Do you have a particular place, one location in your life that the writing takes place in?

Broner: (laugh) No actually it's not true. Ah, I, I live a part of the year in Detroit, and a part in New York, and I have studios in both places. I'm happiest when I go off to a colony and I don't hear about dental bills, ah, they're going to shut off the telephone, which they do very regularly, ah, the plumbing isn't working, I don't hear, I don't want to hear about the life around me. I can't hear about broken hearts. I just have to hear my character speaking, so, ah, I can write uninterruptively on distant and with more difficulty when I'm in a familiar context. And it's certainly nobody's fault. It's the, ah, I live the kind of life that Tillie Olsen lives. Um, and, and, we were speaking on the West Coast and she said, "I always intune to the babies cry." Well Tillies

in her sixties. Her grandchildren are crying now. Her great grand children. I too hear the baby cry and my children are grown up.

Robertson: You, you didn't do too much writing when you children were small.

Broner: Well, ah, I sustained. I did ah, '66 I did "Summers A Foreign Land" I would do two stories a year, that kind of thing. I tried to sustain. I would take. I would, I ah, I did schooling for my masters. Not too much. I was not Picasso, you know. Putting ah, his model on the chair and painting her. I couldn't do that. There was really nobody there to you know, feed me in the mornings, set up. I mean I made the choice to live a complex life, and ah, how to, you know. Nobody there performed a terrible role of life, which nobody should perform. Not a husband or wife. To smooth the world for you.

Rubin: And then they say why I want a wife. The students usually appreciate it \_\_\_\_\_ of the first, the first time. Um, tell me this. You do have, you did complete a PhD in there somewhere. Where, where did that come in and was it as horrible an experience as oh, Cynthia Ossick or others would, who peat women who write about graduate, and have written about some graduate situations.

Broner: No. I chose my own. I, ah, ah, I think because I, I'm so busy I didn't have time. I went to, and when I got my masters I was nursing my baby through most of that time and I, I decided I wanted to get it in Creative Writing. And, ah, the department I, I lived near did not have such a program and so I insisted they start it and they did. I got the first Masters in Creative Writing. The PhD I did ah, in an experimental college and I set up my own program. And I did it so that I could live with dignity. I'm, I'm too tired not to have dignity. And I think that is the basis of an awful lot of my work. And I don't know, maybe of my life. I, I'm very conscious of returning dignity to the individual. I could not, I could not be under the lash of someones tongue. I, I don't mind reading and doing assignments and sitting and



learning from the great woman or male master. I think that's glorious. I couldn't be given trivia and I couldn't be graded in, in the you know like a slab of meat or something. This is blue ribbon. So I set it up on my own terms. And ah, ah, that way I was able to do it.

Robertson: I know that not only have you spent time raising children, and getting a PhD and so forth, but that you are very involved in political causes too. And that um, you ah, this takes a certain amount of time, but that also your work is political. So you are at-least there able to ah, use, use the work for that purpose too.

Broner: Yes. And how to keep the lives separate. Right I'm ah, I'm even talking for I spent this week writing two letters to the ah, ah, to the Times Book Review because two wonderful books have been ah, terribly slammed, ah, unjustly slammed and writers were chosen for adversary stance to ah, slam books. One of which took eight years in preparation and is the most carefully documented book. The other took, it was a huge act of courage and. . .

Rubin: You're going to tell us the titles.

Broner: All right. Well, one is ah, Blanche ah, Reese and Cooks ah, documenting Eisenhour. And the other is um, is Andrea Dorkins book on pornography. Brave, bold, ah, works. And they were slammed in the Times, So ah, this week I, we have been spending all these days composing the right letters. You can't write a novel even though your purposes are political. As if you were writing letters to the Times Book Review. You have to separate. You know and often people I love and, and, and ah, care about and, and admit fall down as ah, fiction writers because they don't know how their people should not talk\_\_\_\_\_. How, and where its humor. And, and why should anybody care about my characters, and their political stance. Unless I build these really terrific people and you want to be connected to their lives and you say take me with you wherever you go into the world, or what ever will. So, ah, you, you, you operate out of politics in the sense that I am of the body

politic. And, and ah, especially now in the 80's of this, a time where we must be stronger than ever. \_\_\_\_\_ our wines. I have a son \_\_\_\_\_ ones \_\_\_\_\_. I have to start singing it because they all have to gather against the forces of evil and darkness that are falling over the land. Ah, mmm, and how do I make art out of that? Oh, am I very shrewd at this voice that's coming forth. It has the pure tones of a trumpet and is not ah, is not ah, read like some ancient newspaper headline.

Rubin: Well do you, how do you do that? Is a. . .

Broner: By ah, a, a technique. Ah, maybe an organic technique, an interruptive technique, ah, a, a, a non, a technique which does not say ah, "Here are the daily headlines," but which perhaps says, "These newspaper articles . . ." which were written in \_\_\_\_\_ until 1932 and I, I unfortunately having completed the trilogy I'm just at the beginning of it. Ah, I see within those newspaper headlines and into those articles something like morded runes. That's r-u-n-e. Fact has been revealed. They all reveal them to me in all these articles the fact that all of these women are being put in jail for striking. Nobody ever told me how many women are put in jail. And look what's down there, my cousin Frank. There he is being put in jail 1933. What a surprise. Nobody ever told me that Frank was put in jail. Ah, so there are magical things out of newspaper head, articles but it isn't ah, ah, taking a cause which will instantly pass \_\_\_\_\_. Ah, we have long been part of the daily work force. We have long ah, been part of the battle for dignity. Ah, here we are, and here are the songs we sing, and we will now enlarge that beyond ah, the daily. I make it ah, you know, something ah, ah, something of our, of, of course, something of, of a large voice. A, a choir of, of song.

Robertson: It seems, I know that you are working on a play of "Weave of Women" and it does seem to me that it lends itself very well because so much of it is, is spoken. I mean it, when you read that book you really hear voices speaking. So, um, how, well I've never written a play so I'm, I'm somewhat

curious. How do you um, you know, use what you have there even though it seems to be a natural floor play. And you know, make that into a . . .

Broner: Oh it's so hard. I've also done a film based on this. And the film seems to me to have nothing to do with the book. I keep wondering why we're using the book. We're killing off good characters, we're separating happily married people. Ah, so the selection is so, is maybe more difficult than starting a new ah . . . In the play I'm working with ah, Lisa Leapman who is a director. Ah, ah, I suddenly realized that my people are all there in the pages and that there is an awful lot of stuff I haven't told ah, the reader. And ah, they're on the stage, what are they doing, how many are on the the stage, where are the others who aren't on the stage? I never thought about that. Ah, umm, what is their relationship this one to that one. Well they were never at the same time to have that relationship. I didn't deal with that. It's a subtext. That's very hard. The film is even harder because there's what's called film logic. It's a new expression. But Vera, um, ah, who is working with me um ah, on this ah, Hammerish was working with me on, on the film, ah, says "You have no film logic." And that's a terrible insult. ~~Mainly~~ that more than a couple of people can not be on the screen at the same time. You can, and I have fifteen characters so we rapidly shot at least eight of them. Ah, and they can say fairly simple things. They can not go into great philosophical complex things. So that's much harder for me, but I'm, I'm suffering with that. That is ah, the funness says that you're learning something and no fun in the fact that you're destroying something you've done.

Rubin: Why did you form your own company? Some of the reasons are fairly obvious.

Broner: Who else is interested in women in the desert. Also I want to learn everything. I want to learn how to write the screenplay. I want to learn what the next step is which ~~is~~ I hear is raising money. And maybe I don't want to learn that. And I want to learn about ah, some of the women are ah, are

producers and, and ah, film people so I want to learn about that. If you want to be in it from the beginning I think you have to be in it from the beginning. Otherwise ah, on the other hand you know it may not ever happen. There are many people that turn that we live with. At least one at McDowell who writes scripts all the time and work has never been put on. So this could happen. But I'll of learned something. I want that. I'll learn not to make films. But film is where it's at, you have to do films, you have to do.

Robertson: Yeah, but I was curious, well in a way because when I read "Weave" you know I could see this. I mean you know, hear and see. It seems to me a sort of natural again for \_\_\_\_\_

Broner: Yeah that's my home.

Rubin: You're also a teacher, I mean you've been teaching for years at the . . .

Broner: At least . About eighteen.;

Rubin: Eighteen years at Wayne State. And ah, you're teaching here. What do you see in young ah, women writers? I mean you just came from a workshop like at Indiana. I know you said you had fifteen I think women out of sixteen students. What do you see happening?

Broner: Wonderful stuff. Ooh, let women do something and they do it so well. Right? Give women a PhD and there they are, all the major students getting their PhD's and writing the terrific books. I remember at a ah, a womens caucus meeting. Ah, ah, the women were asked ah, by ah Florence Hou, "How many of you are ah, ah, have published books?" I'd say that ninety percent of the ah, audience raised her or their collective hands. Ah, and our women are writing out of experiences that have not been written out of. Right? What was it like for women ah, after World War II and during? Nobody wrote about that, right? We've got Norman Maler and the great war, Nobody cared what happened except now that beautiful documentary "Rosie the Riveter" the new momens documentary. Um, but nobody wrote about that, I'm very interested in that life. I'm going

to explore that next. Ah, how did women sustain those terrible fifties? A lot of us did not. That was crazy time. Who were our goddesses, I mean Marilyn Monroe. What do you do if your black-haired and fast talking and your goddess is supposed to be ah, buxomy, a hesitant dumb blonde. What do you do? Does that you have failed the American dream? Women are writing out of ah, their reality. What happens if your an old one, how do you write out of that reality. What happens about writing a, what if you have burst a child who is ah, ah, who suffers damage? How responsible are you? You forever raise that child. How, those are realities you have to write all of. So brave.

Rubin: Do you see... I'm sorry.

Broner: Yes.

Rubin: Do you see that women are any ah, any freer ah, about writing, ah, coming to the idea of writing and then maybe ah, you were when you first ah, began. I mean is it . . .

Broner: I wrote as a man in the beginning Stan. My, My first play ah, yeah certainly and my first ah place ah were male voices. I have a nice musical called "Higginson". I mean you know you do when you do a good thing, but it's about a man ah, and journal nocturnal is ah, you know about a woman's love for two men, and I suppose about the Viet Nam War. And "Summers of Foreign Land" the grand-mother is the ah, heroine but ah, she gives her power to her grandson. I wrote differently huh?

Robertson: What made the shift?

Broner: The sixties and the seventies made the shift. And find the other women who had dreams. There is such a thing as collective dream ah, and I don't believe that Young has understood it. But we are. The collective dream is the collective experience. When somebody says something you say I have dreamt that dream. Will somebody feel something. You said, you say I was in that scene. That's what happened. So maybe I had courage then to dream my dream and my women then went off to do their hard searches but I'm hoping now, I'm working on something so hard for me but I'm hoping that it's, they're still searching.

Rubin: Well I think that, that last business we could go on into another whole tape and explore easily enough. We're near the end of our time here, I wonder if you would ah, read something from the end of her mothers.

Broner: Ah, gladly.

Rubin: Would you ah, would you say something about the context ah, if you would.

Broner: Ah, this is a battle, the terrible battle that mothers and daughters really ultimately have which is that terrible grappling of those two forces. The force of the rebel and the force of the one who is there. Ah and the mother and daughter and her mothers and ah, ah, ah they go into the water. They first they swim and then the daughter attacks the mother and the mother starts fighting the daughter and a terrible scene happens in which maybe the mother tries to drown her past. There will be a bite underwater, the mouth will turn on the mothers arm and bite it until the hand lets go of the hair. The daughter will slowly ascend to the surface floating upward while the mother, ~~the~~ mother will rub the teeth marks in her arm. Slowly, slowly the daughter will walk the water back to shore, back to the efficiency apartment that housed a night of accusation. The daughter will pick up her mothers sun hat and put it on her wet hair. The mother will be left bereft. They had drowned each other first in tears and then had almost drowned each other. The daughter will leave wearing the mothers favorite towel dress and the mothers over priced white-green sun hat. The daughters thumbs will work the road. The oldies, the men will pass her by until a Fort Lauderdale probably bound long haired blonde boy will stop. The mother will watch from behind ah, the Australian pines, from behind the neighbors trees being consumed by Spanish moss. Where to the boy will ask. Wherever the daughter will say. Last shot. Window down, daughter staring straight ahead to the bridge connecting Dolphin key to ~~all~~ the other keys the daughters mouth will be widely smiling. The mother ends the daughter returns and says "no more assassinations." Her green hat comes out of the car. Her green and blue towel dress comes walking towards her and her mother says, "Birth me mothers, carry me in the \_\_\_\_\_ of your

belly and your tears, let us sit on each others laps. Daughters and mothers we have hired our own hall, we hold hands, our engagement rings do not engage, our wedding bands do not disband us, the musicians are women. The one ascending the podium is a woman. And it has to do with women not being afraid, especially of one another. And certainly not of life.

Rubin: We've been talking with E.M. Broner and Mary Elsie Robertson. Thank-you both.

Broner: Thank-you. Great fun.